

## Repetition in conversation: toward a poetics of talk

Repeating then is in every one, in every one their being and their feeling and their way of realizing everything and every one comes out of them in repeating.  
Gertrude Stein, *The gradual making of "The Making of Americans"*  
*Lectures in America*, p. 214<sup>1</sup>

Apparently there has been no other subject during my entire scholarly life that has captured me as persistently as have the questions of parallelism.  
Roman Jakobson, *Dialogues* by Roman Jakobson and  
Krystyna Pomorska, p. 100

### Theoretical implications of repetition

According to Hymes (1981), the patterning of repetitions and contrasts is no less than a definition of structure itself. Hymes discusses the inadequacy of an early translation of a Chippewa (Ojibway) poem which changes what he calls its "structure": "its points of constancy and variation, repetition and contrast," as well as its literal content (41). Hymes explains:

The term "structure" is used here because of my belief that the true structure of the original poem is essential to knowledge of it, both ethnological and aesthetic. *By structure, I mean here particularly the form of repetition and variation, of constants and contrasts, in verbal organization.* Such structure is manifest in linguistic form. It does not exhaust the structuring of poems . . . But such structure is the matrix of the meaning and effect of the poem. (42, italics in original)

Becker (1984b) examines reduplication and repetition as variants of a repetitive strategy at different levels in an episode from a wayang (Javanese shadow play), in which a boy escaping from a demon breaks a taboo by upsetting a steamer of rice. Javanese grammatical constraints preclude the use of pronouns (there is no "it" in Javanese) or of ellipsis (in Becker's terms, "zeroing") in sub-

sequent reference to inanimate topics. Instead, various forms of *dang* "to steam" are repeated, resulting in a dense discourse texture which, according to Becker, is characteristically Javanese.

Becker sees such discourse strategies as constituting the grammar of a language: not abstract patterns but actual bits of text which are remembered, more or less, and then retrieved to be reshaped to new contexts. And so, by a process of repetition, "The actual a-priori of any language event – the real deep structure – is an accumulation of remembered prior texts"; thus, "our real language competence is access, via memory, to this accumulation of prior text" (435).

Becker's account of linguistic competence is similar in spirit to that of Bolinger (1961:381), who observed:

At present we have no way of telling the extent to which a sentence like *I went home* is a result of invention, and the extent to which it is a result of repetition, countless speakers before us having already said it and transmitted it to us in toto. Is grammar something where speakers "produce" (i.e. originate) constructions, or where they "reach for" them, from a pre-established inventory . . . ?

Thus Hymes, Becker and Bolinger all suggest that repetition is at the heart not only of how a particular discourse is created, but how discourse itself is created.

### Prepatterning

Analysis of repetition thus sheds light on our conception of language production, or, as Becker would say, "languageing." In short, it suggests that language is less freely generated, more prepattered, than most current linguistic theory acknowledges. This is not, however, to say that speakers are automatons, cranking out language by rote. Rather, prepatterning (or idiomaticity, or formulaicity) is a resource for creativity. It is the play between fixity and novelty that makes possible the creation of meaning. Because of these implications for an understanding of the nature of language, I discuss the ways language can be seen as prepattered.

### Prepatterning in language

Bolinger (1976:3) observes:

Many scholars – for example, Bugarski 1968, Chafe 1968, and especially

Makkai 1972 – have pointed out that idioms are where reductionist theories of language break down. But what we are now in a position to recognize is that idiomaticity is a vastly more pervasive phenomenon than we ever imagined, and vastly harder to separate from the pure freedom of syntax, if indeed any such fiery zone as pure syntax exists.

There has been increasing attention paid recently to idiomaticity, or pre patterning, in both the narrow and the broad senses that Bolinger describes. In the narrow sense, scholars are recognizing the ubiquity of prepatterned expressions *per se*. These have been variously named; Fillmore (1982) notes the terms “formulaic expressions, phraseological units, idiomatic expressions, set expressions.” Other terms that have been used include “conversational routine,” “routine formulae,” “linguistic routines” and “routinized speech” (Coulmas 1981); “prepatterned speech” and “prefabs” (Bolinger 1976); “formulas, set expressions, collocations” (Matisoff 1979); and “lexicalized sentence stems” (Pawley and Syder 1983). Considerable attention has focused on the role of fixed or formulaic expressions in first and second language acquisition (for example, Corsaro 1979, Wong Fillmore 1979).

In order to move toward the broader sense of pre patterning, I will consider the range of pre patterning by which one may say that language in discourse is not either prepatterned or novel but more or less prepatterned.

#### *A scale of fixity*

Maximally prepatterned are instances of what Zimmer (1958) calls situational formulas: fixed form expressions that are always uttered in certain situations, the omission of which in those situations is perceived as a violation of appropriate behavior. Many languages, such as Arabic (Ferguson 1976), Turkish (Zimmer 1958, Tannen and Öztekin 1981), and modern Greek (Tannen and Öztekin 1981) contain numerous such situational formulas, many of which come in pairs.

For example, in Greek, one who is leaving for a trip will certainly be told the formula, “Kalo taxidhi” (“Good trip”). This is not unlike the American expression, “Have a good trip.” But a departing American might also be told, “Have a nice trip,” or a “great” one (obviously prepatterned but not as rigidly so) or something

reflecting a different paradigm, like “I hope you enjoy your trip.” Moreover, a Greek who is told “Kalo taxidhi” is likely to respond, “Kali andamosi” (“Good reunion”), making symmetrical the institutionalized expression of feeling: One wishes the other a good trip; the other expresses anticipation of meeting again upon return.

A similar routine in Greek with a similarly less routinized and less reciprocal counterpart in English is “Kalos orises” (“[it is] Well [that] you came”), parallel to the English “Welcome home.” But whereas the English “Welcome home” has no ritualized rejoinder, the invariable response of a Greek to “Kalos orises” is “Kalos se [sas] vrika” (“[it is] Well [that] I found you” [sing. or pl.]). Thus an arrival event is marked in modern Greek by symmetrical routinized expressions of the sentiment, “I am happy to see you again.”

As these examples and the need for this explanation testify, rigid situational formulas are less common in American English than in some other languages and cultures. Such expressions are always uttered in exactly the same way and are associated with – indeed, expected in – certain situations. Their omission would be noticed and disapproved. For speakers who have become accustomed to using such formulas in their everyday interactions, not being able to use them (which happens when such a speaker moves to a country where they are not used) results in an uncomfortable feeling of being linguistically hamstrung, unable to say what one feels is appropriate or even necessary to say. (See Tannen 1980b for further discussion of this cross-cultural phenomenon.)

Highly fixed in form but less so in association with particular contexts are proverbs and sayings such as “It takes one to know one,” which all native speakers of English would recognize and some would utter, if at all, in this form, although their occurrence could not be predicted, and their omission would not be remarked. There are cultural and individual differences with respect to how frequently such collocations are used and how they are evaluated.

A type of expression that is highly fixed in form though less predictable in situational association is proverbs. (See Norrick 1985 for an overview of this genre.) A good sense of the frequency with which proverbs can be expected and used in conversation in some cultures can be gained by reading the novels of the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe. For example, in *Things fall apart* (1958: 5–6), proverbs play a crucial role when a speaker, visiting a neigh-

bor, is ready to get to the point of asking for the return of borrowed money:

Having spoken plainly so far, Okoye said the next half dozen sentences in proverbs. Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten.

This excerpt illustrates the high regard in which proverbs, as fixed formulas, are held in this culture, as in many others. Americans, in contrast, are inclined to regard relatively fixed expressions with suspicion and are likely to speak with scorn of clichés, assuming that sincerity is associated with novelty of expression and fixity with insincerity.

Although many proverbs and sayings are known to English speakers, they are less likely to introduce them nonironically in everyday speech. Undertaking a study of proverbs in English, Norrick (1985: 6) ended up using the Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs for his corpus, because he

worked through the entire *A Corpus of English Conversation* (Svartvik and Quirk 1980) looking for proverbs and found only one true example and one marginal one in its 43,165 lines and 891 pages ... A perusal of the 1028 lines of transcribed conversation in Crystal and Davy (1975) for the sake of comparison turned up no examples whatsoever.

Although proverbs may not be routinely uttered in English conversation, idioms and other prepatterned expressions are pervasive in American speech, although their form in utterance is often only highly not absolutely fixed.

For English speakers, at least, it is common to use fixed expressions with some items in their canonical form altered, with no apparent loss of communicative effectiveness. This in itself is evidence that meaning is not being derived from the expressions directly, by a process of deconstruction according to definitions and rules, but rather is being arrived at in a leap of association, in keeping with Bolinger's observation that prefabs "have the magical property of persisting even when we knock some of them apart and put them together in unpredictable ways."

For example, I heard a politician on the radio asserting that the investigation he was spearheading would not stop "until every stone is unturned." There is no reason to doubt that hearers knew what he meant, by reference to the expression "leave no stone

untuned," and no reason to believe that many hearers noticed that what he actually said, if grammatically decomposed, amounted to a promise that he would turn over no stones in his investigation. Another example is the metamorphosis of the expression "I couldn't care less" to "I could care less," with preservation rather than reversal of meaning.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to slightly altering formulas, it is common for speakers to fuse formulas – that is, utter a phrase that contains parts of two different though semantically and/or phonologically related set expressions. For example, some years ago, I told a number of friends and colleagues, on different occasions, that I was "up against the wire" in completing a project.<sup>3</sup> It took a linguist who was studying prepatterned expressions, James Matisoff, to notice (or at least to remark, by whipping out his little notebook) that I had fused two different formulas: "up against the wall" and "down to the wire" (or perhaps "in under the wire").

Since this experience, and thanks to it (and to Matisoff), I have observed innumerable fused formulas. Only a few chosen from many I have heard (or unwittingly uttered), and the originals which I believe they fused, are as follows:

It's no sweat off our backs

- It's no sweat
- no skin off one's nose
- [the shirt off one's back?]

You can make that decision on the snap of the moment

- on the spur of the moment
- a snap decision

at the drop of a pin

- at the drop of a hat
- hear a pin drop

something along those veins

- along those lines
- in that vein

How would you like to eat humble crow?

- eat crow
- eat humble pie

He was off the deep

- off the wall
- off the deep end

If you have any changes just pipe in

- pipe up
- chime in

My point here is emphatically not that these speakers made mistakes (although, strictly speaking, they did), but that the altered forms of the set expressions communicated meaning as well as the canonical forms would have. In other words, the language is mistake-proof, to this extent. Meaning is gleaned by association with the familiar sayings, not by structural decomposition.

It is possible, if not likely, for the altered form to be enhanced rather than handicapped, enriched by association with more than one word or formula. For example, "eat humble crow" adds the lexicalized humiliation of "humble" from "humble pie" to the implied humiliation of "eat crow." "Pipe in" combines the enthusiasm of "pipe up" with the participation of "chime in." In another example, a speaker put her hand on her chest and said, "I felt so chest-fallen."<sup>4</sup> One could well see this as a form of linguistic creativity rather than an error or misfire in the reaching for the word "crest-fallen." Thus fixity in expression can be a source of rather than an impediment to creativity.

Fixity of form can characterize chunks of smaller as well as larger size. English includes innumerable expressions and collocations such as "salt and pepper" or "thick and thin". These are shorter collocations whose form is fixed and whose meaning may be tied to that form, so that the expression "pepper and salt" is not likely to occur, and the expression "thin and thick" is not likely to be understood, except by reference to the original formula.

Cases of fixed expressions and collocations are the clearest examples of pre patterning. All discourse, however, is more or less pre patterned, in the sense that Friedrich (1986:23) notes, citing Leech (1969): "Almost all conversation is, at the surface, literally formulaic in the sense of conjoining and interlocking prefabricated words, phrases, and other units." As the sources cited by Bolinger attest, prefabrications also exist at the level of phonology and morphology.

Wittgenstein and Heidegger have shown that all meaning is derived from words by means of associations. According to Heidegger (1962:191), "The ready-to-hand is always understood in terms of a totality of involvements," and "Any assertion requires a forehaving" (199).<sup>5</sup> In Wittgenstein's (1958:15) words, "Only someone who already knows how to do something with it can significantly ask a name." In other words, semantics too is a matter

prior text, in Becker's terms. Another way to express this, following C. J. Fillmore (1976, 1985), is that all semantics is frame semantics: meaning can be gleaned only by reference to a set of culturally familiar scenarios (scripts or frames).

Pawley (1986:116), in discussing his concept of "lexicalization," notes that "it is important to separate those form-meaning pairings that have institutional status in this culture from those that do not, as well as to denote particular kinds and degrees of institutionalization." In a similar spirit, Hopper (1988a) identifies two types of grammar that he calls the "a priori grammar attitude" and the "emergence of grammar attitude." These two philosophical approaches to grammar are distinguished, in part, by their differential treatment of pre patterning. The a priori grammar attitude is "indifferent to prior texts," not distinguishing between repetitive utterances such as idioms and proverbs, on the one hand, and "bizarre fictional utterances" on the other (121). In the emergent grammar view (the one Hopper supports), the fact that some sentences are frequently said and others not is crucial, not incidental. Finally, fixed expressions play a significant role in the construction grammar of Fillmore and Kay (Kay 1984, Fillmore, Kay and O'Connor 1988).

Bakhtin (1981:276) describes one sense in which meaning cannot be the sole work of an individual:

Indeed, any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist – or, on the contrary, by the "light" of a line of words that have already been spoken about it. It is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents . . .

The living utterance . . . cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads . . . ; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. After all, the utterance arises out of this dialogue as a continuation of it and as a rejoinder to it – it does not approach the object from the sidelines.

Moving to larger units of text, the organization of discourse follows recognizable patterns, as discussed in chapter 2 under the involvement strategy, repetition of longer discourse sequences.

Another type of pre patterning, perhaps the most disquieting to some, is what to say. People feel, when they speak, that they are

expressing personal opinions, experiences, and feelings in their own way. But there is wide cultural and subcultural diversity in what seems self-evidently appropriate to say, indeed, to think, feel, or opine. There is an enormous literature to draw upon in support of this argument. All the scholars cited for work showing differing discourse strategies include observations about what can be said. Some further sources include Tyler (1978), Polanyi (1985), Schieffelin (1979), and all the work of Becker.

Mills ([1940] 1967) observes that individuals decide what is logical and reasonable based on experience of what others give and accept as logical and reasonable motives. And these "vocabularies of motives" differ from culture to culture. Referring to personal experience, everyone notices, upon going to a foreign country or talking to someone of different cultural background, that things are said and asked which take one by surprise, seeming unexpected or even uninterpretable.<sup>6</sup>

The unexpected, like a starred sentence in syntax, is noticed. Speakers rarely notice the extent to which their own utterances are routinized, repetitious of what they have heard. For example, during the 1984 American presidential election, I heard from several individuals, as the expression of their personal opinions, that Mondale was boring. Never before or since has this seemed an appropriate and logical observation to make about a presidential candidate, a basis on which to judge his qualifications for office. Yet it seemed so in 1984, repeated back and forth in newspaper opinions, private opinions, and newspaper reports of private opinions in the form of ubiquitous polls. As Becker (ms.: 4) notes, much of "apparently free conversation is a replay of remembered texts – from T.V. news, radio talk, the New York Times . . ."

#### *Dimensions of fixity*

Given this sense in which all language is a repetition of previous language, and all expressions are relatively fixed in form, one cannot help but notice that some instances of language are more fixed than others. This may be conceived as a number of continua reflecting these dimensions. There is, first, a continuum of relative fixity in form, another of relative fixity with respect to context, and a third with respect to time.

The first two dimensions, fixity vs. novelty in form and by association with context, have already been illustrated with reference to rigid situational formulas. The dimension of relative longevity or wide-spreadness of prepatterning across time is represented, at one pole, by instant, ephemeral language which is picked up and repeated verbatim in a given conversation and then forgotten. Many examples of this are presented in this chapter. A question is repeated word for word and then answered; a listener repeats the end of a speaker's utterance by way of showing listenership, and so on. Inasmuch as the second speaker repeated the utterance of another, the second speaker found the utterance ready-made and used it as found. For that speaker in that context, the utterance was prepatterned, formulaic, if fleetingly so.

Again as illustrated by many of the examples in this chapter, some phrases are picked up and repeated in extended play of more than a single repetition, repeated by more than one speaker in a multi-party conversation. Moving along the continuum of fixity in time (in contrast to fixity in form and situation), we find expressions which are re-used throughout an extended interchange, but only that one. For example, during her oral examination boards, a graduate student coined the term "vanilla linguistics" to distinguish it from the hyphenated disciplines such as socio-, psycho- and applied linguistics. Once she had done this, the phrase was picked up and used, repeated by the examiners and the student throughout that oral exam. However, it was not, so far as I know, ever used again by any of those speakers. The life of the expression was fixed, or formulaic, in, but did not outlive, that interaction.<sup>7</sup>

Had the student or the examiners used this term in future encounters with each other, that term might have become formulaic for them – a kind of "private language" such as individuals and groups of individuals develop, so that collocations have for them associations and ramifications accumulated in past interactions. It is the embellishment of such a private language that gives a recognizable character to communication among long-time associates, and is one of the reasons that it is sad when such extended interaction (for example, a relationship) ends: a language has died; one is left with ways of meaning that no one one speaks to can understand.

If, hypothetically, the phrase "vanilla linguistics" had been

picked up by the faculty members on that examination board and used by them in professional interactions such as teaching, public lectures, or publications, or had it been subsequently repeated by the student to other students and repeatedly used by them, the phrase could have become a prepatterned expression for a larger group. Thus terms, phrases, and expressions diffuse through the language of small or large groups and become part of the language for a short or long time. Anyone returning to a home country after residence abroad notices phrases in common use that gained currency during their absence. The introduction of new terms and phrases can sometimes be perceived even when one has not been away. I recall the first time I heard someone refer to another's behavior as "off the wall": I had to ask what that meant. The phrase eventually came to sound very "natural" to me; for a time, I believe, I used it a lot; now, I believe, it has a circumscribed place in my repertoire.

In summary, then, repetition is at the heart of language: in Hymes's terms, language structure, in Bolinger's, language production, in Becker's, all languaging. Considered in this light, it raises fundamental questions about the nature of language, and the degree to which language is freely "generated" or repeated from language previously experienced.

### Repetition in discourse

Friedrich (1986:154) remarks on the "intensely poetic" nature of the child's learning experience, "involving sound play, complex figures of speech, and various experiments." If repetition is an essentially poetic aspect of language (as others have argued and I will argue it is), then it is not surprising that, as Keenan (1977:125) notes, "One of the most commonplace observations in the psycholinguistic literature is that many young children often repeat utterances addressed to them," and that studies of children's discourse are the richest source of research on repetition. (The work of Bennett-Kastor [for example, 1978, 1986] is devoted to the study of repetition in first language acquisition.) Moreover, a glance at the child discourse literature reveals that nearly every study makes some reference to children's use of repetition.<sup>8</sup>

Grammatical parallelism – the whole network of equivalence

and contrast relations – was an abiding concern of Jakobson. Waugh and Monville-Burston (in preparation) point out that much of Jakobson's intellectual energy in the 1960s and 1970s was devoted to analyzing these relations in poems. Best known perhaps is his discussion of "Grammatical parallelism and its Russian facet," showing grammatical parallelism to be the "basic mode of concatenating successive verses" (1966:405) in Russian folk poetry. Levin (1973:30) proposes that poetry is characterized by "coupling": putting "into combination, on the syntagmatic axis, elements which, on the basis of their natural equivalences, constitute equivalence classes or paradigms." Kiparsky (1973) examines both syntactic and phonological parallelism in poetry.

Johnstone (1987a), briefly surveying research on repetition, notes that repetition is especially frequent in highly formal or ritualized discourse and in speech by and to children. It is a way, she suggests, of creating categories and of giving meaning to new forms in terms of old. Research on ritual language has tended to be carried out by anthropologists and to focus on non-English languages. In contrast, research on or noting repetition in children's language has frequently concentrated on English.

Few studies have focused on repetition in conversation or other non-formal texts. (Exceptions are Schiffrin 1982, Norrick 1987, and of course Tannen 1987a,b, the articles on which parts of this chapter are based.) Goodwin and Goodwin (1987) observe repetition in conversation as "format tying," and use this observation to critique a speech-act approach to discourse. They remark that reducing conversation to underlying actions, intentions, or moves is like studying what a musician does but ignoring the music played. They point out that the coherence of a participant's move to a preceding one may lie in the "particularities of its wording."

That "particularities of wording" play a key role in creating coherence in conversation is a premise of this study to be illustrated at length here.

### Functions of repetition in conversation

Why is there repetition in conversation? Why do we waste our breath saying the same thing over and over? (Why, for example, did I write the preceding sentence, which paraphrases the one

before?) The varied purposes simultaneously served by repetition can be subsumed under the categories of production, comprehension, connection, and interaction. The congruence of these functions of discourse provides a fourth and over-arching function in the establishment of coherence and interpersonal involvement.

### *Production*

Repetition enables a speaker to produce language in a more efficient, less energy-draining way. It facilitates the production of more language, more fluently. For individuals and cultures that value verbosity and wish to avoid silences in casual conversation (for example, those I have characterized as having "high-involvement styles"), repetition is a resource for producing ample talk, both by providing material for talk and by enabling talk through automaticity. (Evidence that repetitions can be produced automatically is presented in a later section of this chapter.)

Repetition allows a speaker to set up a paradigm and slot in new information – where the frame for the new information stands ready, rather than having to be newly formulated. An example is seen in a narrative elsewhere analyzed at length (Tannen 1982), in which a woman talked about a man who worked in her office (see Appendix II for transcription conventions):

And he knows Spanish,  
and he knows French,  
and he knows English,  
and he knows German,  
and HE is a Gentleman.

The establishment of the pattern allowed the speaker to utter whole new sentences while adding only the names of languages as new information.

Repetition, finally, enables a speaker to produce fluent speech while formulating what to say next. I have used the term "linking repetition" for a phenomenon found in narratives told about a film (the much-analyzed "pear stories" [Chafe 1980]), by which some speakers repeated clauses at episode boundaries. An example presented in that study (Tannen 1979:167) was taken from a narrative told about the film in Greek. I reproduce that example here,

with the lines immediately following the repetition added to demonstrate the role of the repetition as a transition.

- 1 kai ta paidhakia synechisane to dhromo.
- 2 ... synechisane: ... to dhromo,
- 3 Kai to: n:
- 4 ... kai afta ... e:m kai pigainane:
- 5 pros tin fora pou 'tane to dhendro,
- 1 and the little children continued (going down) the road.
- 2 ... (they) continue:d ... (going down) the road,
- 3 and the: mmm
- 4 ... and they/these ... u:m and (they) were goi:ng
- 5 toward the direction where the tree was,

The speaker repeats in line 2 the final clause of the episode (line 1) in which three children are walking down the road eating pears, as she devises a transition to the next episode, in which they will come upon the tree from which (unbeknownst to them) the pears had been stolen.<sup>9</sup>

To the extent, then, that repetitions and variations are automatic, they enable speakers to carry on conversation with relatively less effort, to find all or part of the utterance ready-made, so they can proceed with verbalization before deciding exactly what to say next.

### *Comprehension*

The comprehension benefit of repetition mirrors that of production. Repetition and variations facilitate comprehension by providing semantically less dense discourse. If some of the words are repetitious, comparatively less new information is communicated than if all words uttered carried new information. This redundancy in spoken discourse allows a hearer to receive information at roughly the rate the speaker is producing it. That is, just as the speaker benefits from some relatively dead space while thinking of the next thing to say, the hearer benefits from the same dead space and from the redundancy while absorbing what is said. This contrasts with the situation that obtains when a written document is read aloud, and it may account for the difficulty of trying to comprehend such discourse – for example, the frequent inability of listeners at scholarly conferences to follow fully (or at all) most papers read aloud. The hearer, deprived of redundancy in such

cases, must pay attention to every word, taking in information at a rate much faster than that at which the author compiled it.

### *Connection*

Halliday and Hasan (1976) include repetition in their taxonomy of cohesive devices: it serves a referential and tying function. Repetition of sentences, phrases, and words shows how new utterances are linked to earlier discourse, and how ideas presented in the discourse are related to each other. But this is only the most apparent and straightforward way in which repetition allows a speaker to shape the material.

In a more pervasive and subtle way, repetition evidences a speaker's attitude, showing how it contributes to the meaning of the *discourse*. In terms of theme and rheme (Halliday 1967) or of topic and comment, repetition is a way of contributing to the rheme or comment. As Labov (1972) points out in introducing and defining "evaluation," repetition is evaluative: It contributes to the point. Here falls the function of repetition which is commonly referred to as emphasis, as well as a range of other evaluations of a proposition, or relationships among propositions.

For a brief illustration, consider again the excerpt about the man who knows languages:

- 1 And he knows Spanish,
- 2 and he knows French,
- 3 and he knows English,
- 4 and he knows German,
- 5 and HE is a GENTleman.

Repetition of "and he" in the final line ("and HE is a GENTleman.") ties the last line to the first four, indicating that the person referred to is the same throughout. Repetition of "and he knows" in lines 1-4 also serves a tying function, indicating that all the languages named are known by the same person. Beyond this simple tying function, however, the repetition of the phrases establishes a list-like rhythm, giving the impression that the languages which this person knows constitute a long list, longer even than the one given. Furthermore, and crucially, the evaluative effect of the list is to communicate that the speaker finds the length of the list

impressive – and so should the listener. Moreover, the impact of the last line, "and HE is a GENTleman," is greater by virtue of its suddenly varying the frame. It carries over and reinforces the sense of admiration in the repetition of the rhythmic pattern which stresses "he."

Paradoxically, repeating the frame foregrounds and intensifies the part repeated, and also foregrounds and intensifies the part that is different. To quote Jakobson (Jakobson and Pomorska 1983: 103), "By focusing on parallelisms and similarities in pairs of lines, one is led to pay more attention to every similarity and every difference." In a passage which is especially interesting because it indicates that her fascination with repetition was inspired by her observation of conversation, Gertrude Stein (1935:213, cited in Law 1985: 26) also notes that repetition sets both similarities and differences into relief:

I began to get enormously interested in hearing how everybody said the same thing over and over again with infinite variations but over and over again until finally if you listened with great intensity you could hear it rise and fall and tell all that there was inside them, not so much by the actual words they said or the thoughts they had but the movement of their thoughts and words endlessly the same and endlessly different.

### *Interaction*

The functions of repetition discussed under the headings of production, comprehension, and connection all refer to the creation of meaning in conversation. But repetition also functions on the interactional level of talk: accomplishing social goals, or simply managing the business of conversation. Some functions observed in transcripts I have studied (which are not mutually exclusive, and may overlap with previously discussed functions) include: getting or keeping the floor, showing listenership, providing back-channel response, stalling, gearing up to answer or speak, humor and play, savoring and showing appreciation of a good line or a good joke, persuasion (what Koch 1983a calls "presentation as proof"), linking one speaker's ideas to another's, ratifying another's contributions (including another's ratification), and including in an interaction a person who did not hear a previous utterance.<sup>10</sup> In other words, repetition not only ties parts of discourse to other



parts, but it bonds participants to the discourse and to each other, linking individual speakers in a conversation and in relationships.

### *Coherence as interpersonal involvement*

By facilitating production, comprehension, connection, and interaction in these and other ways, repetition serves an over-arching purpose of creating interpersonal involvement. Repeating the words, phrases, or sentences of other speakers (a) accomplishes a conversation, (b) shows one's response to another's utterance, (c) shows acceptance of others' utterances, their participation, and them, and (d) gives evidence of one's own participation. It provides a resource to keep talk going, where talk itself is a show of involvement, of willingness to interact, to serve positive face. All of this sends a metamessage of involvement. This may be the highest-level function of repetition – in the sense in which Gregory Bateson (1972) adapts Bertrand Russell's notion of logical types to describe the metamessage level of interaction: the level at which messages about relationships are communicated.

In a closely related way, repetition also serves the purpose served by all conventionalized discourse strategies at every level of language: giving talk a character of familiarity, making the discourse sound right. This is a verbal analogue to the pleasure associated with familiar physical surroundings: the comfort of home, of a favorite chair. It is the trust in a speaker one knows, or one who seems – by virtue of appearance, dress, kinesics, and ways of speaking – like one to be trusted. The pattern of repeated and varied sounds, words, phrases, sentences, and longer discourse sequences gives the impression, indeed the reality, of a shared universe of discourse.

But how, linguistically, is interpersonal involvement accomplished? In terms of the musical aspect of language, repeating a word, phrase, or longer syntactic unit – exactly or with variation – results in a rhythmic pattern that creates ensemble. In terms of mutual participation in sensemaking, each time a word or phrase is repeated, its meaning is altered. The audience reinterprets the meaning of the word or phrase in light of the accretion, juxtaposition, or expansion. In the words of Jefferson (1972:303), “a

repeat” is “an object that has as its product-item a prior occurrence of the same thing, which performs some operation upon that product-item.” In other words, seeing the same item a second time, listeners re-interpret its meaning. An extreme representation of listeners supplying meaning in repetitions is in Jerzy Kosinski's novel *Being there*: A simple-minded gardener is thought brilliant by those whose words he repeats. The deep meaning they glean from his utterances is entirely the result of their own work.

### Repetition and variation in conversation

#### *Conventional wisdom: the negative view*

“History repeats itself,” a radio announcer quipped. “That's one of the things wrong with history.” This witticism reflects conventional wisdom by which repetition is considered undesirable in conversation. “You're repeating yourself” can only be heard as a criticism. One cannot say, “Wait a minute, I haven't repeated myself yet,” as one can say, “Wait a minute, I haven't finished what I started to say.”

Evidence of negative associations with repetition abounds. The stereotypical popular image of repetition in conversation is represented by Woody Allen (1982:363) in the screenplay of *Stardust memories*:

*And Jones and Smith, the two studio executives who are always seen together, Smith always yessing Jones, repeating what he says, appear on the screen next. . . .*

JONES And what about the cancer foundation . . .  
 SMITH And what about the cancer foundation . . .  
 JONES . . . and the leukemia victims . . .  
 SMITH . . . and those leukemia victims . . .  
 JONES . . . and the political prisoners all over the world?  
 SMITH . . . and the political prisoners . . .  
 JONES What about the Jews?  
 SMITH The Jews!

The italicized description of the action, provided by the publisher, suggests a negative Tweedledee/Tweedledum interpretation of the repetition in the dialogue. Moreover, the repetition in the dialogue seems intended to belie the verbalized concern for the victims.

Repetition here is synonymous with "yessing": buttering someone up by hypocritically displaying continual automatic agreement.

A reviewer (Prescott 1983:82) criticizes an author by saying, "Her numbing repetition of perhaps a dozen significant sentences quickly becomes irritating." The poet W. H. Auden ([1956] 1986: 3) observed that "the notion of repetition is associated in people's minds with all that is most boring and lifeless – punching time clocks, road drills, etc." He lamented that this makes "an obstacle" of "the rhythmical character of poetry" because "rhythm involves repetition." Auden's observation of the necessity of repetition for poetry highlights the contrast that repetition has been taken seriously and highly valued in literary texts (Law 1985 notes a number of studies of repetition in literature), in contrast to its devaluation in conventional wisdom applied to conversation.

This chapter demonstrates, with reference to examples from conversational transcripts, that repetition is pervasive, functional, and often automatic in ordinary conversation.

#### *Forms of repetition*

Forms of repetition and variation in conversation can be identified according to several criteria. First, one may distinguish self-repetition and allo-repetition (repetition of others). Second, instances of repetition may be placed along a scale of fixity in form, ranging from exact repetition (the same words uttered in the same rhythmic pattern) to paraphrase (similar ideas in different words). Midway on the scale, and most common, is repetition with variation, such as questions transformed into statements, statements changed into questions, repetition with a single word or phrase changed, and repetition with change of person or tense. I also include patterned rhythm, in which completely different words are uttered in the same syntactic and rhythmic paradigm as a preceding utterance. There is also a temporal scale ranging from immediate to delayed repetition, where "delayed" can refer to delay within a discourse or delay across days, weeks, months, and years. Formulaic language (or fixed expressions) is language repeated by multiple speakers over time.

All these boundaries are fuzzy. Although some expressions are readily recognizable as formulaic (for example, "A stitch in time

saves nine"), many others have a familiar ring but are difficult to categorize with certainty as formulaic. Similarly, in identifying repetitions in a discourse, some cases are clearcut (such as most of those I present here), but in others, one must make what is ultimately an arbitrary decision about how far away in the transcript two occurrences may be in order for the second to be counted as a repetition of the first. Always, moreover, there is at least a theoretical possibility that both instances of the same string, or any instances of any string, are repetitions of a string which the speaker previously heard or uttered.

It would be hubris (and hopeless) to attempt to illustrate every form and function of repetition. I will try simply to indicate the pervasiveness of repetition in conversation by exemplifying many of its forms and functions, to show evidence that repetition can be automatic, and to discuss how it contributes to interpersonal involvement.

#### *Repetition across discourses and time*

My main focus in this chapter is syntactic repetition in casual conversation. To indicate, however, that repetition occurs across discourses and across time as well as within a discourse, I begin with an example of a narrative which seems to be structured around a remembered kernel sentence.

Elsewhere (Tannen 1978) I analyze a conversational story told by a woman in a small group as part of a story round that I sparked by asking if anyone had had any interesting experiences on the subway. In telling of the time she fainted on the New York subway, this speaker uttered a single sentence, with variation, three times. Near the beginning she said it twice in quick succession:

... a:nd ... I remember saying to myself ... [chuckling]  
"There is a person over there  
that's falling to the ground."  
 ... And that person was me.  
 ... And I couldn't ... put together the fact that  
there was someone fainting  
and that someone was me.

After the speaker tells the story and the group discusses it briefly, the speaker reiterates the sentence by way of closing off that story and moving on to another:

A:nd uh: ... it was funny  
 because in my head I said  
 ... my awareness was such .. that I said to myself  
 ... "Gee well there's a person over there,  
falling down."  
 ... And that person was me.  
 [Listener: It's weird ... mm]  
 Okay that was ... that experience.  
 ... And another experience

This sentence, in its three forms, encapsulates what was interesting about having fainted on the subway, or at least what the speaker is making the point of her telling: that she had an out-of-body experience, by which she saw herself as if from the outside. The sentences share a syntagmatic frame which includes slots that are filled with slightly different items. See Table 1 for a representation of the three sentences in this framework.

Table 1.

There is	a person over there	that's falling to the ground	and that person	was me.
There was someone		fainting	and that someone	was me.
There's	a person over there	falling down	and that person	was me.

Insofar as this speaker repeated the sentence, slightly varied, twice after its first utterance, she could be said to have found the second and third utterances relatively ready-made in her own prior speech. I am convinced, although I cannot prove it on the basis of this example alone, that she had told this story before, and would tell it again, and that when she did so, she would use a variation of the same sentence because it encapsulated for her what was memorable and reportable about this experience. In this sense, at the time she told this story, she was repeating the sentence from her own prior discourse at earlier times.

#### *The pervasiveness of repetition in conversation*

At the beginning of each semester, I ask students in my classes to record spontaneous conversations in which they participate; they then choose segments to transcribe and analyze throughout the semester. Each term, the assignment everyone finds easiest is the

one that requires them to identify lexical and syntactic repetitions in their transcripts. For example, the following segment came from a recorded conversation among four undergraduate housemates at home:<sup>11</sup>

- (1) 1 MARGE Can I have one of these Tabs?  
 2 Do you want to split it?  
 3 Do you want to split a Tab?  
 4 KATE Do you want to split MY Tab? [laughter]  
 5 VIVIAN No.  
 6 MARGE Kate, do you want to split my Tab!?  
 7 KATE No, I don't want to split your Tab.

Of these seven lines, five are repetitions and variations of the paradigm established by a combination of Marge's question in line 2 ("Do you want to split it?") with the last word of line 1 ("Can I have one of these Tabs?"). Forms of repetition in this example include self-repetition:

- 2 MARGE Do you want to split it?  
 3 Do you want to split a Tab?

allo-repetition:

- 3 MARGE Do you want to split a Tab?  
 4 KATE Do you want to split MY Tab? [laughter]

and repetition with slight variation, as seen in the two previous pairs. The functions of these repetitions include humor, seen in lines 3 and 4, where "a Tab" is reinterpreted as "MY Tab" (note the accompanying laughter).

This example is not unusual. In another segment of the same conversation, Vivian told about an amusing event involving her and Marge, who occupied different bedrooms in the house. Vivian had been lying in bed when she heard "this- pounding upstairs, upon the ceiling in our room." Vivian checked with Marge, who said she didn't hear it; they returned to their respective rooms. Back in her room, however, Vivian continued to hear the pounding on her ceiling, so:

- (2) 1 VIVIAN So I stood on my bed →  
 2 MARGE She pounded on the ceiling, →  
 3 VIVIAN and I pounded on the ceiling, →  
 4 MARGE she was pounding...  
 5 VIVIAN and I hear Marge

- 6 and I hear Marge dash out of her room,  
 7 come downstairs and open the door,  
 8 and I was like "No Marge..."  
 9 MARGE [ She said "Marge, it's me."  
 I'm like, "What is..." ]  
 10 VIVIAN I was pounding on my ceiling.  
 11 MARGE Bizarre!

This narrative, like the Tab interchange, is structured around a kernel phrase, "pounding on the ceiling." The irony and point of the story lie in the repetition: When Vivian uses the phrase "pounding on the ceiling" to describe her own retaliatory action, she dramatizes that she created a noise similar to that created by the original "pounding on the ceiling," making it more plausible that Marge mistook Vivian's own "pounding" to be the externally-produced pounding she had previously not heard. In this way, the repetition of the phrase represents iconically the similarity of the two sounds.<sup>12</sup> As in the previous example, this kernel phrase is made up of two prior contiguous phrases from which the paradigm is drawn: Vivian had begun the story by saying "there was this pounding upstairs, upon the ceiling in our room."

The next example is also typical of transcripts prepared, year after year, by students in my classes. In the dyadic conversation from which the excerpt is taken, Frank complains that he has nothing to do because he is unemployed. His friend Terry takes the opportunity to encourage him to be more contemplative: She suggests he take advantage of his free time "to daydream." To illustrate what she has in mind, she recommends that he stand on a bridge and watch the water go under it.<sup>13</sup> He counters that he will finish the book he is reading. This frustrates Terry:

- (3) TERRY THAT'S NOT DAYDREAMING! ... darn it!  
 [laughter]  
 FRANK Well, daydreaming is something that comes natural!  
You don't don't PLAN daydreaming.  
 TERRY You don't even  
 you're not even hearing what I'm SAYING! What?  
 FRANK You can't PLAN daydreaming ...  
 "I'm going to go daydream for a couple hours guys, so"  
 TERRY Yes you CAN plan it!  
You can plan daydreaming.

Thus speakers weave the words of others into the fabric of their

own discourse, the thread of which is, in turn, picked up and re-woven into the pattern. Repetitions and variations make individual utterances into a unified discourse, even as they are used for evaluation: to contribute to the point of the discourse.

### Examples of functions of repetition

Not all transcripts show a high percentage of repeated words but many do, and all show some. In this section I exemplify a range of functions served by repetition of words, phrases, and clauses in conversation: as participatory listenership, ratifying listenership, humor, savoring, stalling, expanding, participating, evaluating through patterned rhythm, and bounding episodes. Examples come from a Thanksgiving dinner table conversation in which I participated. (See Appendix I for information on this and other sources of examples.)

#### *Repetition as participatory listenership*

Examples (1)–(3) show repetition of a kernel sentence in a story or conversational segment. In these uses, each time the utterance is repeated, the theme of the story or interchange is developed, slightly changed in meaning as well as form. Another extremely common type of repetition, in a sense the most puzzling but also the most basic, is the exact or slightly varied repetition of a previous speaker's utterance. Person is varied if required by the change in speaker, but no information is added, and no perceptible contribution is made to the development of a story, theme, or idea. (4) and (5) come from a discussion of the Whorfian Hypothesis.

- (4) 1 DEBORAH You know who else talks about that?  
 2 Did you ever read R. D. Laing?  
 3 The Divided Self?  
 4 CHAD Yeah. But I don't ???/.  
 5 DEBORAH He talks about that too.  
 6 CHAD He talks about it too.

Chad's repetition in line 6 ("He talks about it too."), echoing my utterance in line 5 ("He talks about that too.") seems to be simply a way for Chad to participate in the interchange by showing listenership and acceptance of my utterance. (His partially in-

audible line 4 ["Yeah. But I don't /??/."] is probably a statement that he has read but does not remember the book. If so, his repetition could also be a claim to credit for having read it, and perhaps for now recalling it.)

The next example comes from the same discussion:

- (5) 1 DEBORAH Like he says that  
 2 he says that Americans... →  
 3 CHAD<sup>L</sup> Yeah  
 4 or Westerners tend to uh: ...  
 5 think of the body and the soul  
 6 as two different things, →  
 7 CHAD<sup>L</sup> Right.  
 8 because there's no word  
 9 that expresses body and soul together.  
 10 CHAD <sup>L</sup> Body and soul together.  
 11 Right.

Again, Chad repeated in line 10 words in line 9, "body and soul together," as a show of listenership and perhaps shared expertise.

At various times during the dinner conversation, each participant's career furnished a topic of talk. The preceding topic, the Whorfian Hypothesis, grew out of a combination of the work of one participant, David, as an American Sign Language interpreter, and mine as a linguist. The following segment of conversation occurred when participants were discussing violence in children's cartoons, relevant to Chad's job at an animation studio. Sally and I (not coincidentally, I suspect, the two women) claimed that, as children, we had been disturbed by violence in cartoons; three of the four men taking part in the conversation claimed they had not:

- (6) 1 STEVE I never saw anything wrong with those things.  
 2 I thought they were funny.  
 3 CHAD [ Yeah.  
 4 DEBORAH I hated them.  
 5 CHAD I agree. [i.e. with Steve]  
 6 PETER What. The cartoons?  
 7 STEVE I never took them seriously.  
 8 I never [ thought anyone was  
 9 DEBORAH [ I couldn't stand it.  
 [One page of transcript intervenes.]  
 10 STEVE I never ... took that seriously  
 11 PETER [ I never could take it seriously.

In lines 7 and 10, separated by a page of transcript, Steve repeats almost the same phrase, "I never took them/that seriously." By restating his contribution, Steve continues to participate in the conversation, even though he has nothing new to add.

In line 11, Peter repeats what Steve said in lines 7 and 10, with slight variation ("I never could take it seriously."). Although line 11 adds no new information to the conversation, it nonetheless contributes something crucial: Peter's participation. Moreover, it is not only what Peter says that shows that he agrees with Steve, but also the way he says it. By repeating not only Steve's idea, but also his words and syntactic pattern, Peter's contribution is a ratification of Steve's. At the same time, the three instances of a similar statement help to constitute the discourse and give it its texture.

Such immediate repetition of others' utterances is extremely frequent in the transcript. Indeed, ratifying repetitions often result in triplets. When Steve is serving wine, Sally declines, and her refusal is immediately repeated by David and Steve, speaking almost in unison:

- (7) SALLY I don't drink wine.  
 DAVID She [ doesn't drink wine  
 STEVE [ Sally doesn't drink wine.

These immediate allo-repetitions are shows of participation and familiarity. By transforming Sally's statement of her drinking habits into a third-person statement, David shows familiarity with Sally. By shadowing (speaking along with another speaker, with only split-second delay) the same observations, Steve both ratifies David's participation and displays his familiarity with Sally too. (Steve knows Sally better; he lived with her for six years.)

Another triplet occurred in the Whorfian Hypothesis discussion. I commented that differences in ways of talking may be less cognitive than cultural. Chad and David both repeated my statement to show listenership:

- (8) 1 DEBORAH like you all see the same thing  
 2 but people in one culture  
 3 might notice and talk about one aspect  
 4 while people in another culture  
 5 might notice and talk about another one.  
 6 DAVID Yeah and which would have ...  
 7 nothing to do with language.

- 8 DEBORAH It's expressed in language.  
 9 CHAD It's expressed in language.  
 10 DAVID It's expressed in language.

There is a striking parallelism in my proposition in lines 2–5. However, I am focusing here on the triplet in lines 8–10: Chad's and David's nearly simultaneous repetition of my phrase (line 8, "It's expressed in language"), showing understanding of my idea and also ratification and acceptance of my wording.

### *Ratifying listenership*

In (9), Chad was telling about a promotional whistle-stop train tour he had participated in. He described a scene in which the train pulled into a station, and pandemonium resulted as a crowd rushed the train to approach the character being promoted: a man dressed as a large mouse.

- (9) 1 CHAD they all want to touch this . . . silly little mouse  
 2 STEVE At five o'clock in the MORNING on the TRAIN station.  
 3 CHAD Yeah.  
 4 DAVID In New Mexico.  
 5 CHAD In New Mexico.  
 6 With ice on the . . . ICE hanging down from things . . .

The main speaker, Chad, ratifies Steve's contribution (line 2: "At five o'clock in the MORNING on the TRAIN station.") by saying (line 3) "Yeah." But he ratifies David's contribution "In New Mexico" (line 4) by repeating it (line 5), incorporating it into his narrative.<sup>14</sup>

In another example, Chad remarked on his observation of the way a deaf friend of David manipulates space when he signs. Chad responded to my request for clarification by incorporating my word into his discourse. (Note too how the repetition of "room" grounds his discourse and gives substance to its main point.)

- (10) CHAD Y'know, and he'd set up a room,  
 and he'd describe the room,  
 and people in the room  
 and where they were placed,  
 DEBORAH spatially?  
 CHAD and spatially,

Rather than answering my question "yes" or "no," Chad continues speaking, implicitly answering affirmatively by incorporating my word ("spatially") into his discourse.<sup>15</sup>

### *Humor*

Humor is a common function of repetition with slight variation. Peter used repetition as a resource for humor when I commented on how well-behaved his dog Rover was. Steve simply agreed, but Peter converted my statement into an agrammatical wry one:

- (11) 1 DEBORAH Rover is being so good.  
 2 STEVE I know.  
 3 PETER He's being hungry.

When Peter echoes my line 1, "Rover is being so good," substituting "hungry" for "good," the resulting line 3, "He's being hungry," is humorous because he used the same grammatical frame to convert a common construction into an odd one.

A triplet that uses a prior syntactic frame to generate a humorous locution arose following my request for permission to tape record the conversation:

- (12) 1 PETER Just to see if we say anything interesting?  
 2 DEBORAH No. Just to see how you say nothing interesting.  
 3 PETER Oh. Well I- I hardly ever say nothing interesting.

In line 2, I used the wording of Peter's question, "say anything interesting," to create the reversal, "say nothing interesting." Peter made further use of the oddness of this locution in line 3, heightening the humor with a double negative, "I hardly ever say nothing interesting."<sup>16</sup>

In a final example of humorous repetition, the guests were sitting down to dinner as Steve, the host, was moving between the dining room and the adjoining kitchen. In the following excerpt, Steve repeated his own words because he was not heard the first time. (He began speaking when he was in the kitchen.) Then I picked up his phrase and repeated it in an exaggerated chanting manner, playing on the fact that the phrase "white before red" reminded me, rhythmically, of "i before e" in the children's spelling mnemonic "i before e except after c." I did not finish the paradigm because David

did so for me, introducing yet another joke by substituting a salacious word, "bed," in the final slot:

- (13) STEVE The only trouble about red and white wine  
 DEBORAH No, I'm not going to be doing any work /??/  
 STEVE The only trouble about red and white wine is  
 you should have white before red.  
 DEBORAH White before red except after  
 DAVID [ after bed.

The humor of David's building on my humor by inserting "bed" in my chanting paradigm is enhanced (and occasioned) by its rhyme, that is, repetition of the vowel sound in "red."

### Savoring

Not only can humor be created by repeating, but its appreciation can be displayed by repeating. For example, in the discussion of why Sally and I were disturbed by cartoon violence, Steve suggested it was because we "took them literally." Then David followed up:

- (14) 1 DAVID That because you have a-  
 /arcane/ view of reality. [laughter]  
 2 DEBORAH Cause we're sensitive. [laughing]  
 [laughter]  
 3 SALLY Cause we're ladies.  
 [laughter]  
 4 STEVE Ladies . . . Ladies. [laughing]

I built on the paradigm established by David (line 1, "That's because you have a- /arcane/ view of reality") by slotting in a mockingly self-congratulatory adjective (line 2, "Cause we're sensitive"). Sally followed up by repeating the same paradigm, slotting in a word that is ironic because of its association with women of another era (line 3, "Cause we're ladies"). The word "ladies," uttered with Sally's British accent and applied to us, tickled Steve, who repeated it twice while chuckling and laughing (line 4). He seemed to be repeating her word in order to savor it, thereby also showing his appreciation of her irony.<sup>17</sup>

### Stalling

Repeating a preceding utterance with slight variation is used in many other ways as well. One such way is to repeat a question,

transforming second to first person. This allows the responding speaker to fill the response slot without giving a substantive response. At one point in the conversation, David was talking about American Sign Language. Peter asked him a question, and David responded by echoing the question with rising intonation:

- (15) PETER But how do you learn a new sign.  
 DAVID . . . How do I learn a new sign?

During playback, I learned that David had been uncomfortable with the speed of Peter's speaking turns. This, combined with the pause preceding his response ("How do I learn a new sign?"), led me to conclude that David repeated the question to slow down the conversation – an additional, related function of the repetition.

### Expanding

Here I began a dyadic interchange with Peter by asking a question:

- (16) 1 DEBORAH Do you read?  
 2 PETER Do I read?  
 3 DEBORAH Do you read things just for fun?  
 4 PETER Yeah.  
 5 Right now I'm reading  
 6 Norma Jean the Termite Queen.

Peter transforms my second person question (line 1, "Do you read?") into the first person (line 2, "Do I read?") as a stalling repetition. I repeated my initial question with elaboration (line 3, "Do you read things just for fun?"). Peter answered (line 4, "Yeah."), then grounded an expansion in the repetition with transformation of the question ("I'm reading" + name of book). Thus the reformulation of the question is the first step in the process of expansion; the question is then used as a scaffold on which to construct on-going talk.

### Repetition as participation

(17) occurred in the context of talk about the composer Schumann. (Sally and Steve are professional musicians.) Sally had said that Schumann destroyed his fingers for piano-playing with a "contraption" that he designed to stretch them. This led me to recall a newspaper article about a case of mutilation involving a finger:

- (17) 1 DEBORAH I read something in the newspaper,  
 2 I won't tell you.  
 3 DAVID What contraption?  
 4 STEVE I don't want to hear about it.  
 5 DEBORAH You don't want to hear about it.  
 6 SALLY Tell it. Tell it.  
 7 DAVID We want to hear about it.  
 8 SALLY /?/  
 9 DAVID Steve can go in the other room.  
 10 STEVE I don't want to hear about it.

Sally's self-repetition in line 6 ("Tell it. Tell it.") displays her eagerness to hear the (presumably gruesome) story. Steve repeats in line 10 exactly what he said in line 4 ("I don't want to hear about it"). In line 5, I ratified what Steve said in line 4 by transforming his first person statement into the second person ("You don't want to hear about it."). David uses the same syntactic frame in line 7 to distinguish himself and the others from Steve ("We want to hear about it."). The result is a lot of talk resulting from a few words and ideas, linked together and distinguished by repetition.

The following example shows how repetition makes a fabric of conversation. Here Steve and his brother Peter recall the quonset huts in which they lived as children. (Quonset huts were odd-looking temporary structures built by the United States government to house returning veterans and their families following the Second World War.)

- (18) 1 STEVE Cause they were built near the swamp.  
 2 We used to go ... hunting frogs in the swamps,  
 3 DEBORAH Where was it.  
 4 Where were yours?  
 5 STEVE In the Bronx.  
 6 PETER In the Bronx.  
 7 In the East Bronx?  
 8 DEBORAH How long did you live in it?  
 9 STEVE Near the swamps?  
 10 .... Now there's a big cooperative building.  
 11 PETER Three years.  
 12 DEBORAH THREE YEARS?

Steve is preoccupied with his recollection that the quonset huts were near the swamps where he remembers playing as a child, and he repeats this three times:

- 1 STEVE Cause they were built near the swamp.  
 2 We used to go ... hunting frogs in the in the swamps,  
 9 STEVE Near the swamps?

In lines 6 and 7, Peter utters "In the Bronx," shadowing Steve's line 5, and also offering information that was as much his as Steve's, since they are brothers:

- 5 STEVE In the Bronx.  
 6 PETER In the Bronx.  
 7 In the East Bronx?

Peter's utterance in line 7 ("In the East Bronx?") is both a repetition of Steve's words in line 5 and an immediate self-repetition with expansion, adding "east" and introducing rising intonation. (The intonation seems to orient the answer to me, the questioner, to imply, "Do you know where the East Bronx is?"). Steve then echoes Peter's intonation (though not his words) when he utters line 9 with rising intonation, "Near the swamps?" Finally, Peter answers my question in line 8 "How long did you live in it?" with line 11 "Three years," and in line 12 I respond by repeating Peter's answer with emphasis ("THREE YEARS?").<sup>18</sup>

#### *Evaluation through patterned rhythm*

A type of repetition that does not involve repeating words at all is patterned rhythm. In a segment immediately preceding the lines cited in (9) describing pandemonium in a railroad station, Chad said:

- (19) 1 CHAD Because everyone ... was ... they were so INSANE.  
 2 They'd come in and run in ...  
 3 and "I want to touch him."  
 4 Well, when you have six thousand, five thousand,  
 5 six thousand ten thousand people come in,  
 6 they all want to touch this ... silly little mouse

Why does Chad say that the people "come in and run in"? The second verb rephrases, with slight intensification, the idea of the first. (Koch 1984 examines such instant self-paraphrases as lexical couplets.) But it is not the case that the repetition with variation adds nothing: On the contrary, it creates the vivid impression of



many people in great movement, through its intensifying, list-like intonation.

Another instance of list-like intonation occurs when Chad says lines 4 and 5 ("six thousand, five thousand, six thousand ten thousand people come in"). In addition to the repetition of "come in" from line 2, there are four items in the list which describe how many people were involved. Such a list might be expected to follow an order of increasing number. Instead, the order six, five, six, ten seems to be random; what is crucial is the rhythm established by the list. Furthermore, the violation of expected sequence contributes to the impression of confusion and disorder.

Chad again achieves a listing effect in the following comment, spoken in the discussion about cartoons. He defends violence in cartoons by explaining that the cartoon producer wanted his cartoons to include a variety of scenes:

- (20) 1 CHAD you have to run the gamut of everything.  
 2 /You get/ scary parts, good parts, this things,  
 3 and everything else.

Rather than giving a list of the specific parts that a cartoon should have, Chad provides a relatively contentless list. Of the four kinds of parts he named, only one is specific: "scary parts." "Good parts" is not specific; all parts of a work should be good. "This things" is a kind of filler (also a speech error), and "everything else" is a filler which sums up. Yet the effect of Chad's comment is clear: Cartoons should include a variety of types of scenes. The meaning of the statement lies not in the meaning of the words, but in the patterned rhythm: the listing intonation.

The intonational pattern of a speaker's utterance also provides a resource for the participation and play of others. This was seen in (13), where David fit the word "bed" into the rhythm of my mock chant. Throughout the dinner table conversation, Steve, the host, engaged in self-mockery by simultaneously displaying and parodying hosting behavior – in Goffman's (1974) terms, "guying" so as to perform the behavior and distance himself from it at the same time. (The model for his parody, according to Steve, was his grandmother.) Picking up on Steve's pattern, I urged Peter to stop carving the turkey and start eating by saying, "Sit, sit." David immediately played on this repetitive pattern by saying, "No, carve, carve."

The reduplication of "Sit, sit" signifies intensity ("Sit immediately," or "I insist that you sit"). By contrast, the reduplication in "Carve, carve" signifies repeated aspect: "Keep carving," or "Carve away." Thus David used a repetition of my rhythmic pattern to echo but also to transform the meaning of the pattern: By repeating, he used it as a resource for his own creativity.

Repetition also shows repetitive aspect in an explanation by Chad of a certain method of learning. In a discussion of learning theories, he described the behavior of a learner by saying, "and you miss and you miss and you miss and you miss and you miss." The repetition communicates iconically, "You repeatedly miss."

A final example of listing intonation, and also an exact repetition for repeated aspect, comes from my study of modern Greek conversational stories told by women about being molested (see Appendix I for the background to this corpus of stories). The speaker is telling a group of women about an experience in which a man threw her down and tried to rape her. She dramatizes what she said to him:

- (21) 1 Ton evriza, "Dhen dreprese, palianthrope?"  
 2 Toupa, toupa, toupa ekei . . .  
 3 "Satyre, yero, aidhestate, saliarì,"  
 4 Toupa, toupa, toupa.  
 1 I cursed him, "Aren't you ashamed, scoundrel?"  
 2 I-told-him, I-told-him, I-told-him there . . .  
 3 "Satyr, (dirty) old man, repulsive (creature), slobberer,"  
 4 I-told-him, I-told-him, I-told-him.

In line 3, the four epithets with which the speaker addresses her attacker seem to represent a longer list of names that she called him. Furthermore, the two sets of triple "toupa" (/tupa/) have the rhythmic effect of machine-gun fire. (The staccato effect of the plosive stops in /t/ and /p/ is hardly communicated by the English paraphrase, "I-told-him".) It gives the impression that she kept yelling at the man, emitting a stream of abuse.

#### *Bounding episodes*

Episodes within a larger conversation are often bounded by repetitions at the beginning, which operate as a kind of theme-setting, and at the end, forming a kind of coda. This is not surprising, since

openings and closings are often the most ritualized parts of any discourse. In (22), a short duet between Peter and me, repetition both launches and terminates an episode of a discussion of how, upon first getting divorced, one wants to date many people (Peter and I were both divorced, he very recently and I long since); but then:

- (22) 1 DEBORAH Then you get bored.  
 2 PETER We:ll, I think I got bored.  
 [Deborah laughs]  
 3 Well I- I mean basically what I feel is  
 4 what I really LIKE, ... is people.  
 5 And getting to know them really well.  
 6 And you just CAN'T get to know  
 7 ... TEN people REALLY WELL.  
 8 You can't do it.  
 9 DEBORAH Yeah right.  
 10 You have to- there's no-  
 11 Yeah there's no time.  
 12 PETER There's not time.  
 13 DEBORAH Yeah ... it's true.

Lines 1–2 set the theme and launch the episode when Peter transforms my statement from line 1 (“Then you get bored”) into line 2 (“We:ll, I think I got bored.”) His comeback is amusing (note my laughter) partly because of its rhythm: He draws out “well” and then utters “I think I got bored” in a quick, sardonic manner. The humor derives from the fact that it is a repetition, the quickness of his utterance conveying, iconically, that the boredom I predicted he would eventually experience has already, quickly, overtaken him.

In lines 3–8, Peter explains his statement in line 2. His argument is then structured by a series of self-repetitions, as each utterance picks up a word or phrase from a previous one. This is best illustrated by reproducing the transcript with repeated words circled and linked:

- 3 Well I- I mean basically what I feel is  
 4 what I really like ... is people  
 5 And getting to know them really well.  
 6 And you just CAN'T get to know  
 7 ... TEN people REALLY WELL.  
 8 You can't do it.
- 

Though repetition is pervasive in this middle section of the episode, it is not as monolithic as the repetition in which I join Peter to provide the episode's closing boundary. In lines 9–13, Peter and I wove each other's words together into a coda comparable to that of a musical composition, through the picking up and repeating of “Yeah,” “there's no(t),” and “time.”

The preceding discussion demonstrates some of the functions of repetition in conversation. The functions illustrated are not exhaustive, but they give a sense of the kind of work repeating does.

### The range of repetition in a segment of conversation

Thus far I have demonstrated different types and functions of repetition by reference to a large number of short conversational excerpts. Furthermore I have concentrated on the repetition of phrases and clauses, including the repetition of rhythmic patterns thereby created. To see how a variety of levels of repetition work together to create involvement, in the next section I show a range of types of repetition in a single short segment from the Thanksgiving conversation.

First I present the segment, a short interchange on the topic of eating, as I had originally transcribed it, and invite readers to examine it for instances of repetition:

- (23) CHAD I go out a lot.  
 DEBORAH I go out and eat.  
 PETER You go out? The trouble with ME is if I don't prepare and eat well, I eat a LOT. ... Because it's not satisfying. And so if I'm just eating like cheese and crackers, I'll just STUFF myself on cheese and crackers. But if I fix myself something nice, I don't have to eat that much.  
 DEBORAH Oh yeah?  
 PETER I've noticed that, yeah.  
 DEBORAH Hmm ... Well then it works, then it's a good idea.  
 PETER It's a good idea in terms of eating, it's not a good idea in terms of time.

To facilitate identification of repetition, I later laid the segment out in lines and moved bits of the lines around. I present the same segment in that form below:

- 1 CHAD I go out a lot.  
 2 DEBORAH I go out and eat.  
 3 PETER You go out?  
 4 The trouble with ME is  
 5 if I don't prepare  
 6 and eat well,  
 7 I eat a LOT. ...  
 8 Because it's not satisfying.  
 9 And so if I'm just eating like cheese and crackers,  
 10 I'll just STUFF myself on cheese and crackers.  
 11 But if I fix myself something nice,  
 12 I don't have to eat that much.  
 13 DEBORAH Oh yeah?  
 14 PETER I've noticed that, yeah.  
 15 DEBORAH Hmmmm...  
 16 Well then it works,  
 17 then it's a good idea.  
 18 PETER It's a good idea in terms of eating,  
 19 it's not a good idea in terms of time.

#### Verse structure

The fertile field of ethnopoeitics has identified "poetic" structure in American Indian narrative (Tedlock 1972) and, more recently, conversation (Woodbury 1985). Hymes (1981), working in this tradition, calls attention to verse structure created by patterns of repetition and variation, which he sees as having been neglected for the more readily salient line structure. In this segment, I initially saw only the patterns of lines: phrases and clauses bounded by intonational contours and verbal particles which Chafe (1986) shows characterize all spoken discourse. Hymes (p.c.) pointed out that the segment has a verse structure as well. The segment can be seen as having three verses, separated by line spaces in the transcript, which are strikingly similar in structure to the pattern seen in (22), also a duet between Peter and me. Lines 1-3 of the current example constitute an opening, and lines 15-19 a closing or coda. As in (22), these bounding sections are characterized by the most striking repetition. The center verse constitutes the meat of the interchange, like the filling in a sandwich, made up of an if/then proposition that Peter creates and elaborates (i.e. If I don't take the time to prepare good food, I eat a lot; if I do prepare good food, I eat less).

#### Lexical repetition

Perhaps the first thing one notices about this segment is the repetition of the word "eat." The best way to represent visually the cohesive function of these (and other) repetitions is to highlight them on the transcript itself. Therefore I present the segment again, with the highlighting of the repetition under discussion superimposed on it:

- 1 CHAD I go out a lot.  
 2 DEBORAH I go out and **eat**.  
 3 PETER You go out?  
 4 The trouble with ME is  
 5 if I don't prepare  
 6 and **eat** well,  
 7 I **eat** a LOT. ...  
 8 Because it's not satisfying.  
 9 And so if I'm just **eating** like cheese and crackers,  
 10 I'll just STUFF myself on cheese and crackers.  
 11 But if I fix myself something nice,  
 12 I don't have to **eat** that much.  
 13 DEBORAH Oh yeah?  
 14 PETER I've noticed that, yeah.  
 15 DEBORAH Hmmmm...  
 16 Well then it works,  
 17 then it's a good idea.  
 18 PETER It's a good idea in terms of **eating**,  
 19 it's not a good idea in terms of time.

A number of other repetitions are quickly perceived when the transcript is studied briefly. First is the repetition of the two-word verb "go out" found in the triplet uttered by all three speakers in the opening verse:

- 1 CHAD I go out a lot.  
 2 DEBORAH I go out and eat.  
 3 PETER You go out?

In addition to setting the topic of talk, eating, these lines establish

a sense of rapport among the three speakers by their echoes of each other's use of the phrase "go out."

In the middle verse, a solo by Peter, there is a highly noticeable repetition of the phrase "cheese and crackers" as well as of the words "just," "myself," and "yeah":

9 And so if I'm just eating like cheese and crackers,  
 10 I'll just STUFF myself on cheese and crackers.  
 11 But if I fix myself something nice,  
 12 I don't have to eat that much.  
 13 DEBORAH Oh yeah?  
 14 PETER I've noticed that, yeah.

When Peter utters "cheese and crackers" for the second time (line 10), he does so more quickly than the first, and his intonation remains steady and low across the phrase. The effect of this intonation is to mark the self-reference to his earlier utterance of the same phrase.

The meanings of the two instances of "just" are somewhat different. In the first instance, line 9 "And so if I'm just eating like cheese and crackers," "just" is a mitigator, meaning "only": "if I'm eating only cheese and crackers." But in the second instance, line 10, "I'll just STUFF myself on cheese and crackers," it is an intensifier: "I'll absolutely stuff myself with cheese and crackers." This difference in the meanings of the repeated word "just" underlines the significance of its repetition. In other words, he didn't just (!) repeat the word because he meant the same thing. It also illustrates again that repetition is a resource by which the same word or phrase can be used in a different way.

When Peter says line 14, "I've noticed that, yeah," his "yeah" repeats mine in the preceding line, ratifying my listener response to his talk and giving a sense of coda to that verse of the segment. Like the first three lines, the last four are highly repetitive:

15 DEBORAH Hmm...  
 16 Well then it works,  
 17 then it's a good idea.  
 18 PETER It's a good idea in terms of eating,  
 19 it's not a good idea in terms of time.

The words and phrases "then," "it's a good idea," and "in terms

of," which make up the bulk of this part of the discourse, are all repeated. The repetition of these words serves to highlight the words that are not repeated: "eating" and "time," the key points of contrast. They are highlighted by their newness in contrast to the sameness of the repeated words.

Another example of repetition involves items somewhat farther from each other which nonetheless seem to cohere through their rhyming:

1 CHAD I go out a lot.  
 2 DEBORAH I go out and eat.  
 3 PETER You go out?  
 4 The trouble with ME is  
 5 if I don't prepare  
 6 and eat well,  
 7 I eat a LOT...  
 8 Because it's not satisfying.  
 9 And so if I'm just eating like cheese and crackers,  
 10 I'll just STUFF myself on cheese and crackers.  
 11 But if I fix myself something nice,  
 12 I don't have to eat that much.  
 13 DEBORAH Oh yeah?  
 14 PETER I've noticed that, yeah.  
 15 DEBORAH Hmm...  
 16 Well then it works,  
 17 then it's a good idea.  
 18 PETER It's a good idea in terms of eating,  
 19 it's not a good idea in terms of time.

I have drawn the connection between lines 8 and 19 as a broken rather than a solid line because it strikes me that the argument to be made for the repetition of "it's not" is a bit weaker than that to be made for the repetition of "a lot." This is both because the lines in which "it's not" appears are further apart, and also because "it's not" is a structure occasioned by grammatical conventions for negation in English. Nonetheless, there are other grammatically correct ways to effect negation, such as "it isn't." The choice of "it's not" rather than other alternatives echoes the earlier use of "a lot."

Another kind of patterning which is also closely linked to the grammar of the language is that of pronouns and discourse markers:

- 1 CHAD I go out a lot.  
 2 DEBORAH I go out and eat.  
 3 PETER You go out?  
 4 The trouble with ME is  
 5 if I don't prepare  
 6 and eat well,  
 7 I eat a LOT...  
 8 Because it's not satisfying.  
 9 And so if I'm just eating like cheese and crackers,  
 10 I'll just STUFF myself on cheese and crackers.  
 11 But if I fix myself something nice,  
 12 I don't have to eat that much.  
 13 DEBORAH Oh yeah?  
 14 PETER I've noticed that, yeah.  
 15 DEBORAH Hmmm...  
 16 Well then it works,  
 17 then it's a good idea.  
 18 PETER It's a good idea in terms of eating,  
 19 it's not a good idea in terms of time.

Although these function words are likely or even required to occur frequently in any English discourse, nonetheless their frequent occurrence plays a part in giving the discourse its characteristic shape and sound. In this sense, their repetition plays a significant role in establishing the shared universe of discourse created by conversational interaction in that language. As Becker (1984b: 435) demonstrates for Javanese textbuilding strategies, "This kind of non-rational homology is one of the things that binds a culture." Such conventionalized figures both grow out of and contribute to the textual and noetic aesthetic of a language and culture. Perceiving and using them is part of what makes an individual a member of the culture.

A particularly intriguing repetition in this segment occurs when Peter says line 7 "I eat a LOT." This utterance is a blend of the ends of Chad's and my utterances in lines 1-2:

- 1 CHAD I go out a lot.  
 2 DEBORAH I go out and eat.  
 7 PETER I eat a LOT.

In this way, the idea that Peter expresses is a response to what Chad and I said, at the same time that the form of his response – its repetition – is a ratification of our preceding contributions. On-

going discourse is thus woven of the threads of prior talk. When fishing for words, speakers cast a net in the immediately surrounding waters of conversation.

I now return briefly to a repetition mentioned earlier, found in lines 10 and 11:

- 10 I'll just STUFF myself on cheese and crackers  
 11 But if I fix myself something nice,

Here the choice of "fix myself" seems to be occasioned by the pattern of the preceding "stuff myself." This becomes even more compelling when the choice of "fix myself" is considered in contrast to the use of "prepare" in lines 5-6: "If I don't prepare and eat well." The unmarked case, one might surmise, would have been for Peter to repeat the same word he used to introduce the idea: "prepare."

#### Phonological repetition

An example of repetition of sounds in this segment is the repetition of initial /t/ in line 19:

- 19 it's not a good idea in terms of time.

Repetition of medial vowels was seen in the "lot/not" pattern discussed above. It is also seen in the repetition of the vowels in "just," "stuff," and "much":

- 9 And so if I'm just eating like cheese and crackers,  
 10 I'll just STUFF myself on cheese and crackers.  
 11 But if I fix myself something nice,  
 12 I don't have to eat that much.

One wonders whether the vowel sound /ʌ/ in "trouble" (line 4, "The trouble with ME is") should also be included in this constellation. In order to know how much attention to pay to such patterns of sound, it might help to know if it is statistically significant or random for vowel sounds to recur in such close proximity. In the absence of such evidence, however, it can nonetheless be observed that repetition of sounds contributes to the musical effect of the discourse. One need only listen to a language with recurrent vowel or consonant sounds not used in one's own language, to experience the impressions they make – for example, for Americans, the recurrent nasals in Portuguese, pharyngeals in Arabic, or velar fricatives in Hebrew.

*Repetition as rapport*

The end of the segment under analysis provides an example of how the form of the discourse can serve to create rapport and ratify an interlocutor's contribution. In lines 18 and 19, Peter disagrees with my comment that taking time to prepare food is a good idea, but he does so by casting his disagreement in the paradigm of my utterance:

- 15 DEBORAH Hmmm . . .  
 16 Well then it works,  
 17 then it's a good idea.  
 18 PETER It's a good idea in terms of eating,  
 19 it's not a good idea in terms of time.

Thus the form of the discourse, repetition, sends a metamessage of rapport by ratifying my contribution, even as its message disagrees with what I said.

**Individual and cultural differences**

I believe it is by means of such metamessages of rapport that apparently contentious conversational styles may be based on highly affiliative motives, as found in what I call the high-involvement style of the New York Jewish speakers in my original study of the Thanksgiving conversation (Tannen 1984), of whom Peter is one, and the Philadelphia Jewish speakers among whom Schiffrin (1984) observed "Jewish argument as sociability." I believe it is not coincidental that this style is characterized by much repetition, as Schiffrin's examples demonstrate (though her own interests in the examples lie elsewhere). It is found as well in the repetition of formulas to create rapport while disagreeing in the highly ritualized modern Greek verbal art of "mantinades" as described by Herzfeld (1985).

This raises the question of the extent to which frequency of repetition is culturally variable. My research documents the pervasiveness of repetition for conversation in modern Greek and in several varieties of American English. Conversations recorded by my students indicate that all conversations exhibit some, but some exhibit a lot. The conversation of adolescents is particularly rich in repetition, not only among Americans but also, according to Nordberg (1985), among Swedes. I expect, however, that degree and type of repetition differ with cultural and individual style.

Since repetition of sentences and ideas is a means of keeping talk going in interaction, the relative frequency of this type of repetition should be correlated with the cultural value placed on the presence of talk in interaction. This is supported by the relative infrequency of repetition as well as formulaic expressions as reported by Scollon (p.c.) among Athabaskan Indians, who place relative positive value on silence in interaction (Scollon 1985). In striking contrast are the talk-valuing cultures of East European Jewish-Americans mentioned above, and of Black Americans (Erickson 1984), among those who have been observed to use a lot of syntactic repetition.

Becker 1984b suggests that the repeating strategies which he describes in a wayang drama are characteristic of a Javanese aesthetic of density. Moreover, he observes repeating strategies in other Southeast Asian cultures, including characteristic pathologies: A common way of displaying madness in Java is echolalia (p.c.). Another practice that Becker (1984c:109) describes fits this pattern as well. When East Javanese audiences enjoy a lecture, they repeat phrases which they appreciate to their neighbors (a practice reminiscent of what I have described in American conversation as "savoring repetition"). At least one American guest lecturer was unnerved by the buzz of voices in the audience, mistaking the show of appreciation for lack of attention. This misunderstanding results from divergent, culturally patterned strategies of repetition.

The most extensive analysis of repetition as a culturally and linguistically favored strategy is found in the work of Johnstone on modern Arabic prose (Koch 1983a,b, Johnstone 1987b). Johnstone (1987a) argues that the grammatical structure of Arabic makes repetition strategies especially available to Arabic speakers.

Although no scholar, so far as I know, has focused exclusively or intensively on repeating strategies in Black American rhetorical style, analyses of Black American discourse indicate that it makes use of self- and allo-repetition in characteristic ways. Erickson (1984) finds in a conversation among Black American adolescents the allo-repetition of call/response that typifies audience participation in Black worship (a response pattern described by Heath 1983 as well).<sup>19</sup> Self-repetition is also found in Black English conversation. For example, Hansell and Ajitotutu (1982:92) note, in discourse among a white researcher, a black assistant, and two black teenagers recorded by John Gumperz, one of the teenagers adopts

a "public address" style similar to that used by black preachers and politicians." Although the authors are concerned with other aspects of this discourse, the transcript shows that it includes both exact repetition ("Now you know I'm right about it/you know I'm right about it") and parallelism built on the construction "X is a dog":<sup>20</sup>

- (24) Now they make it look like Wallace is a dog  
and Nixon is the next dog  
and Humphrey is  
well . . . [laughter] you know  
a little bit higher than the other two dogs . . .  
[laughter] but he's still a dog. (91)

Cultural patterns do not prescribe the form that a speaker's discourse will take but provide a range from which individuals choose strategies that they habitually use in expressing their individual styles. In examples from the Thanksgiving dinner conversation, preliminary impressions suggest that Steve often repeated his own words, as in (6) "I never took that seriously" and (17) "I don't want to hear about it". Peter frequently shadowed others' utterances, as seen also in (6) "I never could take it seriously" and (18) "In the Bronx", and will be seen in (34). Chad frequently used relatively contentless listing intonation, as in (19), "come in and run in" and (20), "scary parts, good parts, this things, and everything else". And I frequently immediately paraphrase myself, as in (23), "Then it works, then it's a good idea." Documenting individual and cultural repeating strategies, like other aspects of individual and cultural styles, remains a relatively unexplored and promising area of research.

### Other genres

It is a premise of this study that literary (in the sense of artfully developed) genres elaborate and manipulate strategies that are spontaneous in conversation. Having demonstrated that repetition is pervasive and functional in conversation, I now turn briefly to examples of nonconversational discourse types to show that they use repetition strategies such as those observed in conversation. As mentioned at the outset, Johnstone (1987) notes that formal or ritualized discourse is often particularly rich in repetition. In this section I give brief examples of three formal discourse types: public speaking, oratory, and drama, to show that they make artful use of the same repetitive strategies that I have shown in conversation.

### Public speaking

The following excerpt is from an address given by John Fanselow, an unusually gifted public speaker, at the 1983 Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics. In his "paper" (which was actually an extemporaneously composed but nonetheless polished and fluent talk), Fanselow was explaining what he calls "the tape recording syndrome": the pattern of behavior by which teachers who are ostensibly attempting to record their classes for analysis and self-evaluation keep turning up without having made the recording, blaming their failure on one or another tape recorder malfunction.<sup>21</sup>

- (25) The point is, I think,  
(I've done this in many countries incidentally  
even Japan, where, you know, electronics is no problem.)  
Same syndrome.  
Same syndrome.  
Both with American teachers,  
and teachers from other lands.  
I think we're fearful of looking.  
I think we're fearful of looking.  
I think teachers are fearful of looking,  
and we're fearful of looking.

The repetition that characterizes this excerpt is set in relief by contrast with the same comment as it appears in Fanselow's (1983: 171) written version of his paper:

- (26) One reason I think many teachers fail to tape for a long time is that they are fearful of listening to themselves. And, I think that a central reason why we who prepare teachers avoid evaluations is that we, like those we prepare, are fearful of listening and looking as well. The tape recording syndrome is widespread.

There is parallelism in the written version, too, but it is less rigid. Furthermore, the "fearful of looking" construction appears twice in the written version, compared to four times in the spoken one.

Contrasting the printed version makes clear some of the functions of repetition in the spoken version. The point that "The tape recording syndrome is widespread," which is lexicalized in the written version (i.e. conveyed by external evaluation), is conveyed in the spoken version by internal evaluation accomplished by repetition:

Same syndrome.  
Same syndrome.

The repetition of the phrase "same syndrome" implies that the syndrome is widespread; repetition, in other words, is working to communicate repeated aspect. Similarly, the exact repetition:

I think we're fearful of looking.  
I think we're fearful of looking.

gives the impression that many people are "fearful of looking."

The observation that teacher trainers are "like those we prepare" in being fearful is also lexicalized in the written version but implied in the spoken version by parallelism:

I think TEACHERS are fearful of looking,  
and WE 're fearful of looking.

Placing "teachers" and "we" in the same paradigmatic slot in the same syntactic string, implies that the two groups are in the same semantic class and foregrounds their similarity. In this instance, emphatic stress is placed on "teachers" and "we" to bring this contrast into focus.

### Oratory

Oratory is a kind of public oral poetry. In her analysis of oral poetry, Finnegan (1977:90) stresses the importance of repetition to a definition of poetry:

The most marked feature of poetry is surely repetition. Forms and genres are recognised because they are repeated. The collocations of line or stanza or refrain are based on their repeated recurrence; metre, rhythm or stylistic features like alliteration or parallelism are also based on repeated patterns of sound, syntax or meaning. In its widest sense, repetition is part of all poetry. This is the general background against which the prosodic and other features of oral poetry must be seen.

The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. was a master of poetic oratory. Consider, for example, the most famous of his speeches, delivered at a march on Washington on August 23, 1963, which is known by one of its recurring phrases.<sup>22</sup>

King's speech begins eloquently but prosaically compared to the rhythmic and rhetorical crescendo that it builds to. The rhetorical

crescendo begins, toward the end, with a series of repeated phrases of the type that Davis (1985) describes as "the narrative formulaic unit" of the "performed African-American sermon."<sup>23</sup> The first such formulaic unit is the one that has come to be regarded as the "title" of the address: "I Have a Dream":

- (27) I say to you today, my friends,  
even though we face  
the difficulties of today and tomorrow,  
I still have a dream.  
It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.  
I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up  
and live out the true meaning of its creed:  
"We hold these truths to be self-evident  
that all men are created equal."  
I have a dream that one day  
on the red hills of Georgia  
the sons of former slaves  
and the sons of former slave-owners  
will be able to sit down together  
at the table of brotherhood.

The phrase "I have a dream" is repeated six more times, introducing four more expansions that described hoped-for equality in image-rich and sound-rich language.

Especially interesting are pairs of parallel constructions embedded within the repetitions of the formula:

- (28) I have a dream  
that my four little children  
will one day live in a nation  
where they will not be judged  
by the color of their skin  
but by the content of their character.  
I have a dream today.

The substitution of character for skin color as the basis by which people will be judged is made effective by the parallel syntactic constructions and similarity in initial consonants: the /k/ sound of "color," "content," and "character."

The last section of this speech reverberates with another quotation and repetition. King recites the words of the American patriotic song that ends, "From every mountain-side, let freedom ring." The last line of this song then becomes another repeated formula:



- (29) And if America is to be a great nation,  
this must become true.  
So let freedom ring  
from the prodigious hill tops of New Hampshire.  
Let freedom ring  
from the mighty mountains of New York.  
Let freedom ring  
from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania.  
Let freedom ring  
from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado.  
Let freedom ring  
from the curvaceous slopes of California.  
But not only that.  
Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia.  
Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee.  
Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi.  
"From every mountainside,  
let freedom ring."

King repeats and elaborates on the lines from the song. The repetition of "Let freedom ring," tolling like a bell, is interspersed with parallel references to mountains and hills by a variety of names in a range of states.

The repetitions of "Let freedom ring" are separated into two groups. Each syntactic string in the first group of five is characterized by the pattern:

from the X (adjective) Y (noun naming a hill or mountain) of Z (state name).

Individual strings are made more coherent by sound repetitions:

from the prodigious hill tops of New Hampshire.  
from the mighty mountains of New York.  
from the curvaceous slopes of California.

Having swept across the United States from New England (New Hampshire), across the Northeast (Pennsylvania), the West (Colorado), to the Western coast (California), King moves, with the phrase "but more than that," to the second group of three parallel constructions and to the Southern part of the United States (Georgia, Tennessee, and Mississippi), where he concentrated his nonviolent organizing efforts toward desegregation and voting rights. King thus encompassed the entire country with a list that names a few of its states.

The speech ends with a triple repetition of a third clause, this one repeated from what he identifies as "the old Negro spiritual":

- (30) Free at last!  
Free at last!  
Thank God almighty,  
we are free at last!

The speeches of the Reverend Jesse Jackson make use of similar linguistic strategies: repetition of sounds, words, and clauses, echoing of well-known quotations and phrases (including those of King), surprising juxtapositions and reversals, and parallel constructions. The concluding chapter of this book contains a close analysis of these and other involvement strategies in Jackson's 1988 speech to the Democratic National Convention. For the present, I note simply that repetition works both to communicate ideas and to move audiences in oratorical discourse.

#### *Literary discourse: drama*

In comparing the dinner table conversation with the play written about it, Glen Merzer's *Taking comfort* (see Appendix I for explanation), I examined instances of sound and word repetition in 10,000 word segments of each. Repetition of word-initial sounds is twice as frequent in the play, whereas word or phrase repetition is twice as frequent in the conversation. This is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. *Repetition in 10,000-word segments of conversation and drama*

	Conversation	Drama
Sound	48	91
Word or longer	575	229

To illustrate, I present a short segment from the play, rearranged in intonation units. The speaker is a woman named Nancy who is about to see Larry, her former lover, after a long separation.

- (31) 1 When I talk to myself,  
2 I talk to Larry.  
3 We have terrific fights in my head

- 4 that he always wins.  
 5 Now he'll be speaking for himself.  
 6 I wonder if he'll do as well.

The repetition in lines 1 and 2 sets up a syntagmatic paradigm to highlight the relationship between "myself" and "Larry" – the identity that Nancy feels between herself and the man she lived with and loved for many years. But in line 5 ("Now he'll be speaking for himself."), the verb "talk" changes to "speak." Line 5 invokes the common expression "speak for oneself." This enhances the significance of varying the verb.

This type of variation seems to be felt as necessary when discourse is written, to avoid the impression of monotony. (A similar finding is reported by Chafe 1985.) When repetition of words is found in drama, it seems to be deliberate, intended to play up and play on the repetition of exact words which characterizes conversation. Pinter is a master of this. Consider, for example, this segment from his play, *The birthday party*:<sup>24</sup>

- (32) STANLEY Meg. Do you know what?  
 MEG What?  
 STANLEY Have you heard the latest?  
 MEG No.  
 STANLEY I'll bet you have.  
 MEG I haven't.  
 STANLEY Shall I tell you?  
 MEG What latest?  
 STANLEY You haven't heard it?  
 MEG No.  
 STANLEY (advancing). They're coming today.  
 MEG Who?  
 STANLEY They're coming in a van.  
 MEG Who?  
 STANLEY And do you know what they've got in that van?  
 MEG What?  
 STANLEY They've got a wheelbarrow in that van.  
 MEG (breathlessly). They haven't.  
 STANLEY Oh yes they have.  
 MEG You're a liar.  
 STANLEY (advancing upon her). A big wheelbarrow. And when the van stops they wheel it out, and they wheel it up the garden path, and then they knock at the front door.  
 MEG They don't.

- STANLEY They're looking for someone.  
 MEG They're not.  
 STANLEY They're looking for someone. A certain person.  
 MEG (hoarsely). No, they're not!  
 STANLEY Shall I tell you who they're looking for?  
 MEG No!  
 STANLEY You don't want me to tell you?  
 MEG You're a liar!  
 (pp. 23–4)

By repeating words and phrases, Pinter plays on the effect of repetition in ordinary conversation, highlighting its absurdity and using it to create a sense of ominousness and threat.

### The automaticity of repetition

The discussion and analysis so far have been intended to demonstrate that repetition is a fundamental, pervasive, and infinitely useful linguistic strategy. At the outset I also claimed that it can be automatic. I would like now to support that claim and then explain why I believe it is important.

Neurolinguistic research demonstrates the automaticity of certain kinds of language production. Whitaker (1982) describes aphasic patients who suffered complete destruction of the language-producing areas of the brain and consequently lost their spontaneous language-producing capacity. Nevertheless, they retained the ability to repeat exactly; to shadow (i.e. repeat with a split-second delay); and to repeat with simple transformations, such as changes in tense, person, and sentence type. They were able to do this because this type of language production is performed in a different part of the brain: a part devoted to automatic functioning. Whitaker's examples of automatic language production by brain-damaged aphasic patients are strikingly similar to repetitions and variations found in samples of ordinary conversation. Obviously, there is a crucial difference between the use of repeating strategies by aphasics and nonaphasics in that the former are limited to such automatic language production, whereas the latter use repetition in addition to and in conjunction with deliberate language production. Nonetheless, the research on aphasics provides evidence of the automaticity of these repeating strategies. (Research on language comprehension demonstrates that prepatterned speech is also

processed more efficiently by the brain. See, for example, Gibbs 1980, 1986; Gibbs and Gonzales 1985; Van Lancker 1987.)

Whitaker's (1982) survey of neurolinguistic research shows that repeating, varying, and shadowing prior utterances can be automatic language capacities. I have presented examples of these phenomena in conversation; it remains to show evidence of their automaticity. Is it coincidental that these types of language production can be automatic and are pervasive in conversation, or are they pervasive because they can be automatic? Bolinger (1961:381) observes: "How much actual invention . . . really occurs in speech we shall know only when we have the means to discover how much originality there is in utterance." If it can be shown that repetition in conversation is evidence of automaticity, rather than of "originality" in utterance, then this study may contribute in a modest way to answering Bolinger's question.

### Shadowing

The type of repetition in conversation that is most demonstrably automatic is shadowing: repeating what is being heard with a split-second delay. A number of segments previously cited include this phenomenon, for instance from (6):

- 10 STEVE I never . . . took that seriously  
 11 PETER I never could take it seriously.

Peter began to utter line 11 a split-second after Steve began line 10 and spoke along with him. In other words, Peter shadowed Steve. He also did so in (17):

- 5 STEVE In the Bronx.  
 6 PETER In the Bronx.

Shadowing occurs frequently in the transcripts studied. For example, Chad shadowed Steve, the host, when Steve offered the guests a choice of port or brandy after dinner. (Talk about the dinner, its food and rituals, interspersed the conversation.)

- (33) 1 DAVID I don't know what . . . uh . . . port tastes like.  
 2 STEVE Port is very sweet. Port is very rich. →  
 3 CHAD Port is very sweet. Very rich. →  
 4 STEVE Syrupy red wine.  
 5 CHAD And brandy's very alcoholic.

Chad's line 3 ("Port is very sweet. Very rich,") repeats, with slight variation (deletion of the second "Port is"), Steve's self-repetition (with variation) in line 2 ("Port is very sweet. Port is very rich.") Chad began saying line 3 before Steve began the second part of line 2, in which he says that port is "very rich"; yet Chad repeated that part of Steve's utterance as well. This indicates that Chad was shadowing Steve: repeating what he heard, as he heard it, with a split-second delay.

(34) is a segment of talk which I have previously analyzed in detail (Tannen 1983b, 1984) to demonstrate that overlapping talk can be cooperative and rapport-building rather than interruptive. I cite the segment here to demonstrate that the overlap and consequent metamessage of rapport are accomplished, in large part, by repetition, and furthermore that at least some of that repetition is automatic.

In this segment, Steve is identifying a building in New York City that was significant to him in his childhood:

- (34) 1 STEVE Remember where WINŚ used to be?  
 2 DEBORAH No.  
 3 STEVE [Then they built a big huge skyscraper there?  
 4 DEBORAH No. Where was that.  
 5 STEVE Right where Central Park West met Broadway.  
 6 That building shaped like that. [shows with hands]  
 7 PETER [Did I give you too much? [serving turkey]  
 8 DEBORAH [By Columbus Circuit? . . . That-  
 Columbus Circle? [Right on Columbus  
 9 STEVE Circle.  
 10 Here's Columbus Circle,  
 11 here's Central Park West,  
 12 DEBORAH Now it's the Huntington Hartford Museum.  
 13 PETER [That's the Huntington Hartford, right?  
 14 STEVE Nuhnuhno.  
 15 Here's Central Park West,  
 16 DEBORAH [Yeah.  
 17 STEVE here's Broadway.  
 18 We're going North, this way?  
 19 DEBORAH [uhuh  
 20 STEVE And here's this building here.  
 21 The Huntington Hartford is [on the South side.  
 22 DEBORAH [On the other- across.

- 23 Yeah, rightrightrightright.  
 24 [And now that's a new building with a:]  
 25 STEVE [And there was ... ] and [there was  
 26 uh- STORES here,  
 27 and the upper- second floor was WINS.  
 28 DEBORAH [ oh:  
 29 STEVE And we listened to:]  
 30 DEBORAH [Now it's a round place  
 31 with a: movie theater.  
 32 STEVE Now- there's a round- No.  
 33 The next . . next block is  
 34 but . . . but . . THIS is a huge skyscraper →  
 35 DEBORAH [ oh  
 36 STEVE right there.  
 37 DEBORAH [ Oh yeah

This segment exhibits numerous instances of self- and allo-repetition.<sup>25</sup> I will focus only on two that provide evidence for automaticity.

First consider lines 12 and 13:

- 12 DEBORAH Now it's the Huntington Hartford Museum.  
 13 PETER [ That's the Huntington Hartford, right?

In line 13, Peter said roughly the same thing that I said in line 12, even though Peter began to say line 13 before I had gotten very far into line 12. One might surmise that Peter said the same thing because he simply happened to think of the same thing to say, a split second after I thought of it. When one considers, however, that Steve's response in line 14 "nuhnuhno" (a triple "no") indicates that Peter and I were both wrong, it seems unlikely that we both happened to make exactly the same mistake about the building Steve had in mind.

The evidence for the automaticity of Peter's shadowing is even stronger when supplemented by playback. When I replayed this segment for Peter, he commented that he did not really know the areas that were being discussed because he had not lived in New York City as an adult, as Steve and I had. It is clear, then, that he decided to say something before he knew just what he would say, trusting that he would find what to say, ready-made, in what I said. This strategy would have worked perfectly if I had been right: It

would have appeared that we both knew the location Steve had in mind. Even as things turned out, the strategy worked well. Everyone present had the impression that Peter was a full participant in the interaction; no one noticed anything odd, or suspected that Peter did not know what was being talked about. It was the dual strategy of repetition and overlap, i.e. shadowing, given the appropriateness of its use among these speakers, that made it possible for Peter to participate successfully. Significantly, the three conversants who were not speakers of a high-involvement style could not take part, even though Sally had lived in New York for years and Chad had just returned from a visit there. (Indeed, this segment began as an interchange with Chad about his trip to New York.) I am suggesting that it is the automaticity of such strategies that enables speakers to take part, relatively effortlessly, in conversations with just those others with whom they share conversational style.

Further evidence of the automaticity of repetition is found in lines 30-1 and 32:

- 30-1 DEBORAH Now it's a round place with a movie theatre.  
 32 STEVE Now- there's a round- No.  
 33 The next . . next block is

In 30-1, I offered a description of the place that Steve was trying to identify. In line 32 Steve began to repeat what I had said as ratification of my listenership ("Now- there's a round-"). But as he spoke he realized that what I (and consequently he) had said did not match the image he had in his mind. He then cut short his repetition ("No") and explained that the building I (we) were naming is on "the next block." This is evidence that the repetition in 32 did not grow out of his mental image of the setting he was describing, but rather was an automatic repetition of my prior words, subject to subsequent checking as he spoke.

These examples provide evidence for the automaticity of allo-repetition. The automaticity of self-repetition is evidenced in the way the same words are subsequently spoken. (35) consists of a number of lines taken from a segment in which Chad voiced the opinion that sign language seems more iconic than spoken language. (This is a frequent observation by non-signers that irritates speakers and proponents of ASL.) In countering this view, David, a sign language interpreter, described a hypothetical situation in

which "a speaking person is talking about what happened," and he explained that the speaker gets "an image of what happened." After a brief description of a hypothetical image, David continued:

- (35) 1 DAVID When you speak  
 2 you use words to ... to recreate that image  
 3 in the other person's mind.  
 4 CHAD Right.  
 5 DAVID And in sign language,  
 6 you use SIGNS to recreate the image.

In line 2, the intonation on "recreate that image" rises and falls. In the repetition of the same phrase in line 6, David's pitch rises on "signs" but remains monotonically low and constant throughout "to recreate the image." This intonation signals given information and the impression that the phrase in its second occurrence is uttered automatically. Its meaning does not have to be worked out anew on subsequent reference, but is carried over ready-made.

A similar example was seen in (5):

- 4 DEBORAH or Westerners tend to uh: ...  
 5 think of the bódy and the sóul  
 6 as two different things,  
 7 CHAD Right.  
 8 DEBORAH because there's no word  
 9 that expresses body and soul together.  
 10 CHAD Body and soul together.  
 Right.

When I uttered "body and soul together" in line 9, I ran the words together, with monotonic intonation, in contrast to the word by word articulation of the words "body" and "soul" in lines 5 and 6 ("the bódy and the sóul as two different things").

Finally, in (23), the phrase "cheese and crackers" was uttered very differently in its first and second appearances:

- 9 And so if I'm just eáting like cheése and cráckers.  
 10 I'll just STUFF myself on cheese and crackers.

In line 9 the phrase had standard statement intonation, with pitch low on "cheese" and higher on "crackers." In contrast, when the phrase was repeated in line 10, it was spoken much more quickly, with steady low pitch, indicating that the phrase was now "given" and therefore could be rushed through. Moreover, in both these

examples, the effect of the way the second occurrences were spoken was to make them sound automatized the second time. In the words of Pawley (1986), the entire phrase became lexicalized, that is, it behaved like a word, an indivisible unit.

### The drive to imitate

In a recent essay about "Tics," Oliver Sacks (1987) gives an account of Gilles de la Tourette's syndrome, "a syndrome of multiple convulsive tics." In Sacks's description, this syndrome can take the form of the drive to imitate and repeat gone haywire. By representing an extreme form of the drive, however, it provides evidence for the existence of such a drive.

Sacks quotes extensively from a 1907 account by a ticqueur called O.:

I have always been conscious of a predilection for *imitation*. A curious gesture or bizarre attitude affected by anyone was the immediate signal for an attempt on my part at its reproduction, and is still. Similarly with words or phrases, pronunciations or intonation, I was quick to mimic any peculiarity.

When I was thirteen years old I remember seeing a man with a droll grimace of eyes and mouth, and from that moment I gave myself no respite until I could imitate it accurately. (38)

O.'s drive to imitate was not confined to imitation of others; it was an expression of a general urge to repeat, including the drive to imitate himself:

One day as I was moving my head I felt a "crack" in my neck, and forthwith concluded that I had dislocated something. It was my concern, thereafter, to twist my head in a thousand different ways, and with ever-increasing violence, until at length the rediscovery of the sensation afforded me a genuine sense of satisfaction, speedily clouded by the fear of having done myself some harm. (38)

Thus the ticqueur's characteristic compulsive motions can be understood as the urge to re-experience a particular sensation.

Elsewhere, Sacks (1986: 117-18) gives an account of a contemporary Touretter whom he chanced to observe on a New York City street displaying the same pattern of behavior, intensified, now seen from the outside:

My eye was caught by a grey-haired woman in her sixties, who was apparently the centre of a most amazing disturbance, though what was happening, what was so disturbing, was not at first clear to me. . . .

As I drew closer I saw what was happening. *She was imitating the passers-by* – if “imitation” is not too pallid, too passive, a word. Should we say, rather, that she was caricaturing everyone she passed? Within a second, a split-second, she “had” them all.

Sacks ([1973] 1983) also describes a similar compulsion to repeat words and actions in patients suffering from post-encephalitic Parkinsonism (a disease that slows them down or freezes them, as previously noted) when they are “speeded up” by the drug L-DOPA.

Why do humans experience a drive to imitate – a drive that is intensified and sent haywire by the bizarre neurological maladies described by Sacks?<sup>26</sup> Freud observed, in a line that Kawin (1972: 1) uses as the epigraph to a book on repetition in literature and film, “Repetition, the re-experiencing of something identical, is clearly in itself a source of pleasure.” In a related observation, Norrick (1985:22), citing Mieder (1978), notes that “newspaper headlines are often modelled on proverbs and proverbial phrases in order to attract attention and arouse emotional interest.” This is obviously true, and yet surprising. Wouldn’t common sense suggest that what is prepatterned, fixed, and repetitious should be boring rather than attention-getting, bland rather than emotional? Why is emotion associated with fixity? Perhaps partly because of the pleasure associated with the familiar, the repetitious.

What purpose could be served by the drive to imitate and repeat? None other, I think, than the fundamental human purpose of learning. Becker (1984a:138) proposes a

kind of grammar, based on a different perspective on language, one involving time and memory; or, in terms of contextual relations, a set of prior texts that one accumulates throughout one’s lifetime, from simple social exchanges to long, semimemorized recitations. One learns these texts in action, by repetitions and corrections, starting with the simplest utterances of a baby. One learns to reshape these texts to new context, by imitation and by trial and error. . . . The different ways one shapes a prior text to a new environment make up the grammar of a language. Grammar is context-shaping (Bateson 1979:17) and context shaping is a skill we acquire over a lifetime.

That imitation and repetition are ways of learning is supported by the extensive findings of imitation and repetition in children’s talk.

The drive to imitate is crucial in artistic creativity as well. Sacks (1987: 41) cites Nietzsche’s ([1888] 1968:428) argument that artists experience:

The *compulsion to imitate*: an extreme irritability through which a given example becomes contagious – a state is divined on the basis of signs, and immediately enacted – An image, rising up within, immediately turns into a movement of the limbs . . .

Indeed, when I described to writer friends Sacks’s account of Touretters’ compulsions to imitate observed behavior, they were overcome with an awkward guilt and self-consciousness: They (like me) recognized the impulse in themselves. Actors also find art in an impulse to imitate, if Albert Finney is typical: “‘As a lad, I always liked watching how people walked and acted,’ he recalls. ‘I used to imitate people’” (Dreifus 1987:56).

In observing that the pre patterning that characterizes idioms is not restricted to utterly fixed expressions, Bolinger (1976:7) asks, “may there not be a degree of unfreedom in every syntactic combination that is not random?” The word “unfreedom” suggests one reason that many may resist the view of language as imitative and repetitious, that is, relatively more prepatterned and less novel than previously thought. Sacks (1987:39) describes an aspect of the experience of Tourette’s as an “existential conflict between automatism and autonomy (or, as Luria put it, between an ‘It’ and an ‘I’).” In this framework, seeing language as relatively imitative or prepatterned rather than freely generated seems to push us toward automatism rather than autonomy – make each of us more “it” and less “I.” But a view of language as relatively prepatterned does not have to be seen this way. Rather, we may see it as making of us more interactional “I’s.”

We are dealing with a delicate balance between the individual and the social, the fixed and the free, the ordered and the chaotic: polarities that are of central concern to Friedrich (1986). According to Friedrich, the individual imagination manipulates, interprets, rearranges, and synthesizes – based on familiar, recognizable elements. The elements can be manipulated, interpreted, rearranged, and synthesized precisely because they are familiar and fixed. In the numerous examples presented in this chapter, speakers repeated

parts of prior talk not as mindless mimics but to create new meanings.

Paradoxically, it is the *individual* imagination that makes possible the *shared* understanding of language. Linguistic prepatterning is a means by which speakers create worlds that listeners can recreate in their own imaginations, recognizing the outlines of the prepatterning. Through prepatterning, the individual speaks through the group, and the group speaks through the individual.

The examples I have given suggest that much repetition in conversation is automatic. Just as canonical formulaic expressions have been shown to be processed by automatic brain function, I suggest that speakers repeat, rephrase, and echo (or shadow) others' words in conversation without stopping to think, but rather as an automatic and spontaneous way of participating in conversation. Another book by Oliver Sacks (1984) dramatizes the paradoxical necessity of automaticity for freedom. Following a severe accidental injury, Sacks's leg was surgically repaired. But despite his surgeon's insistence that he was completely healed, he had no proprioception (that is, self-perception) of his leg: He had no sense of its being a part of him, of its even being there, or of ever having been there. Consequently, he walked as if he had no knee.

Sacks's knee did not "return," spiritually, conceptually, and pragmatically, until he was tricked into using it automatically. Caught off guard by being shoved into a pool, he automatically began to swim. When he stepped out of the pool, he walked normally for the first time following his accident. What he had not been able to accomplish with all his conscious efforts had occurred without effort, by automaticity and spontaneity. Sacks eloquently emphasizes the necessity of automatic, spontaneous use for one to sense one's body as part of one's self. The more spontaneous and automatic one's behavior, the more strongly one feels a sense of self. In other words, automaticity is essential to a sense of "I" rather than antithetical to it.

### Conclusion

The view of repetition I am proposing echoes Jakobson's view of parallelism in poetry (1966:428-9):

any word or clause when entering into a poem built on pervasive parallelism is, under the constraint of this system, immediately incorporated into the tenacious array of cohesive grammatical forms and semantic values. The metaphoric image of "orphan lines" is a contrivance of a detached onlooker to whom the verbal art of continuous correspondences remains aesthetically alien. Orphan lines in poetry of pervasive parallels are a contradiction in terms, since whatever the status of a line, all its structure and functions are indissolubly interlaced with the near and distant verbal environment, and the task of linguistic analysis is to disclose the levels of this coaction. When seen from the inside of the parallelistic system, the supposed orphanhood, like any other componential status, turns into a network of multifarious compelling affinities.

If one accepts that at least some (and probably all) of conversation is also a system of pervasive parallelism – though not necessarily rigid in the same way as poetry – then Jakobson's observations apply as well to conversation. Utterances do not occur in isolation. They echo each other in a "tenacious array of cohesive grammatical forms and semantic values," and intertwine in a "network of multifarious compelling affinities." One cannot therefore understand the full meaning of any conversational utterance without considering its relation to other utterances – both synchronically, in its discourse environment, and diachronically, in prior text.

I have presented examples of repetition in ordinary conversation to illustrate its pervasiveness, and some of its forms and functions. I have suggested that repetition in conversation can be relatively automatic, and that its automaticity contributes to its functions in production, comprehension, connection, and interaction. These dimensions operate simultaneously to create coherence in discourse and interpersonal involvement in interaction. Repetition is a resource by which conversationalists together create a discourse, a relationship, and a world. It is the central linguistic meaning-making strategy, a limitless resource for individual creativity and interpersonal involvement.