

DESCRIPTION IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES I:

TALK-IN-INTERACTION¹

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I

Let me begin by noting that the title "Description in the Social Sciences" can be taken to point us to at least two distinct, but not unrelated, foci of attention.

One of these is quite a traditional set of topics: the problems of social scientific description. Under this rubric is collected a variety of by now familiar concerns. There is the concern with the possibility of objectivity. There is the concern with the bearing of context and contextuality on the possibility and form of description. There is the problem of indigenous vs. exogenous terms of description (or in the terms of one recent anthropological discourse (Harris, 1968), the "etic" vs. the "emic"). Underlying these and other issues is the root observation, in the classical sociological

¹ Prepared for a conference on "Description in the Social Sciences," Cerisy-la-Salle, France, September, 1986. The conference was organized to bring together French scholars working in ways related to the semiotics and pragmatics of Greimas and American scholars working along potentially related lines -- sociolinguistics, varieties of ethnography, ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, etc., and the text very likely bears the imprint of the occasion for which it was prepared. My thanks to co-organizer Bennetta Jules-Rosette for inviting me to participate, and to Sandro Duranti, Charles Goodwin and Bambi Schieffelin for comments and suggestions in aid of clarity and closure. The closure, however, may well be temporary, as I take this publication outlet to be designed as a medium for work in progress.

canon most self-consciously addressed by Max Weber,² concerning the indefinite extendability of descriptions of social objects of inquiry -- that is, that the set of ways of describing any setting, any actor, any action, etc. is indefinitely expandable. Literal or exhaustive descriptions are not, then, available solutions to the problems of social inquiry. And the correctness of any particular characterization is not by itself an adequate warrant for its invocation. Various versions of social science have varying solutions to these problems. But it is this set of issues which is commonly intended when mention of "description in the social sciences" is understood to refer to a feature of the work of social science.³

But "description," or better, "describing," is also one of the practices which social science may aim to describe. To borrow Harold Garfinkel's usage (1967:76-115) with reversed emphasis, "describing" is not only a feature, it is also a topic of social science inquiry. "Description in the Social Sciences" may, along these lines, be taken to focus our attention on "describing" as an activity in which persons engage in the course of ordinary conduct, and which is therefore an apt target of enquiry for those social sciences which aim to give an account of the practices of ordinary activity.

Obviously, these two senses of our title cannot for long be rigidly segregated. It is improbable that the problem of description as a practice of social science is not rooted in the practices of vernacular describing. And a social science account of the practices of describing in ordinary discourse will itself inescapably implicate problems of social science description.

² See, among others, Weber (1949). Weber's was, of course, part of a larger preoccupation with such issues in German social science, including figures such as Dilthey and Rickert before him, and Alfred Schutz after him. A version of the problem is formulated by Talcott Parsons (1937) as part of his theoretical undertaking. This is but one contribution to an immense body of programmatics, commentary and debate.

³ For some conversation-analytic treatments of these questions, see Sacks, 1963, 1972a and Schegloff, 1987.

One hope which has been entertained in the past is that the practices of social science describing could be informed and constrained by the practices of vernacular describing. This prospect informed my late colleague Harvey Sacks' efforts, most elegantly in his paper "On the Analyzability of Stories by Children" (1972a), in which the dual focus of "describing" which I have mentioned was incisively introduced. Sacks proposed at the outset of that paper that it might be "by reference to an examination of instances of members' descriptions" that progress might be achieved on "how sociologists might solve their own problem of constructing descriptions" (1972a:329).

Sacks used "members' descriptions" as the occasion for constructing what he called "an apparatus" by the use of which one element of those descriptions might be produced -- namely, the identification or description of persons. And he had various illuminating things to say about "recognizable descriptions" as objects of inquiry in their own right. But the bearing of these accounts of members' practices on the sociologists' problems of description was left tacit at best. Sacks identified a class of vernacular practices of reference to persons as involving selection from collections of category terms, and, obviously, this claim about their practices constrained what his description of their practices should be like. But what other bearing should these practices have on one another? Clearly, social science descriptions should be constrained by the members' practices being putatively described. But should they be constrained by members' practices of describing, and if so, how ?

Actually, what Sacks had in mind has been pre-supposed in the preceding discussion. At that time, and perhaps even now, the point still was/is to be made that description in ordinary discourse is to be understood as the result of practices, or methods, procedures, rules, etc. The bearing of this on the sociologists' problem is that sociologists' descriptions should be descriptions of practices, and domains of practices. In that early work, Sacks did not press the claim that social science description should be constrained by vernacular description; but that social science description should be constrained by the procedural character, the "practical" character in that sense, or "practice-d"

character, of vernacular activities.⁴ By picking "description" as the vernacular activity to be examined, this focus of the argument was somewhat obscured, although an opportunity was afforded for making some elegant points about the importance of "possible descriptions" and "doing describing" as autonomously recognizable and describable objects.

The question remains, then: what can be learned about problems of social scientific description from the practices of vernacular description. I hope here to examine one direction in which this question can be pursued, and to do so by examining a different type of practice of vernacular description than has been focussed on in past work, and to examine it in a manner more attentive to sequential organization.

Sacks' work on categorical description of persons (1972a, 1972b), mine on reference to places (Schegloff, 1972), and our joint work on reference to persons (Sacks & Schegloff, 1979) were all fundamentally selectional in emphasis. They described alternative sets and types of descriptive terms, and characterized the practices of describing or identifying or referring to persons or places as involving selection from among these alternative types and sets. Although some of them incorporated reference to aspects of the sequential organization of talk in interaction, and the paper on place formulation (Schegloff, 1972) was explicitly addressed to showing that practices of formulation could be consequential for aspects of sequential organization and vice versa, in none of these accounts was sequential organization a constitutive aspect of the practices of description themselves.⁵

⁴ Sacks had developed an argument on this matter based on the ways in which scientific descriptions work. See the account in a special issue of the journal Human Studies devoted to Sacks' lectures of 1964-65, with an introduction by the present author.

⁵ If assessment or evaluation is treated as a type of description, then sequentially sensitive treatments can be found in work such as that of M. Goodwin (1980) and A. Pomerantz (1978, 1984).

I want here to engage in an exercise in which we examine a bit of vernacular description which does not appear to be formed up as a problem of selection with the description of selection practices as its solution, and which is rather more tightly bound to its sequential context. I will, that is, do a bit of one kind of social science description of one kind of vernacular description. At the end, I will ask how, if at all, what we learn about the vernacular practice of describing should bear on the social sciences' problem of describing.

II

In the episode of conversation to be examined, the five participants have been to the movies together, and have gone to the home of one of the couples -- Heidi and her husband (who does not figure in the excerpt which we will examine), where they sit around with drinks and "munchies." Aside from Heidi and her husband, the other participants are David and his wife Cece, who have recently returned from Nepal, he having arrived two days earlier after a stay of one year, she having returned a month earlier after a stay of eight months. Heidi had also visited Nepal some years earlier. And there is Winnie, a colleague of the other two women in a graduate program. So:

+*Heidi / husband	where / = married to
+*Cece / +David	* = co-grad-students
*Winnie	+ = has been to Nepal

The talk immediately preceding the excerpt which is reproduced below has been concerned with the movie they have seen together -- a "post mortem." A brief lapse in the talk sets in, during which David apparently reaches over and takes a cracker. Then, beginning with the lapse:

(1) "After the Movie"

62 (3.0)
 63 W: Couldn't resist, {huh:.
 64 D: { No.
 65 (0.6)
 66 W: The pull: of food.
 67 (0.4)

68 D: Th' pull of crackers. The lure of crackers.=
 69 W: =D'people sit around eating in Nepal?
 70 (0.2)
 71 D: All the time that's all they d_o
 72 C: {They never drink
 73 without('t) (0.2)
 74 D: Yeah ya never have liquor without (1.0)
 75 fried meat er
 76 W: Fried meat?
 77 H: (hh hh)
 78 D: Uh huh. {Fried
 79 ? : { (loin)
 80 W: {Y'mean j'st gen}eric frie:d meat?
 81 H: {*(hh hh)
 82 D: (Mhm) usually buff.
 83 H: (Oh y') buff
 84 W: {B(h)u:ff? (hh hh) *hh Buff as in "a-low"?=
 85 H: =Buff burgers.
 86 D: Mmyeh, (·) 's in "a-low".
 87 W: ^Really? They eat buffalo? 'ey have that in San
 87a Francisco.=
 88 C: =David ate a lot of buff burgers.
 89 (0.9)
 90 H: I (·) {really got into my (·) first buff burger.
 91 D: {Buff(b-)
 92 (1.2)
 93 H: First and l(h)ast(h)
 94 C: (hm mm mm)
 95 W: They do that in San Francisco (at Winslows). It's like
 96 a big { (wurst factory)
 97 C: {Oh you had vegie- vegie burgers.
 97a D: (yeah)
 98 (1.8)
 99 W: What's a vegie burger.
 100 C: (j) {would be here
 101 D: {('s jus') a lentil burger.=
 102 H: Oh yeah:=
 103 C: =A len{til burger.
 104 D: {That's just whe{n- whenever I a:te at this=
 105 W: {Oh it's probably like a falafel
 106 D: =one western place.
 107 (1.0)
 108 W: {They have a western restaurant?}
 109 H: {()}
 110 D: Yeah there's a [lot]ta () restaurants.
 111 C: [+Lot.]
 112 W: Oh yeah?
 113 (0.2)

In the limited space available, I want to focus attention primarily on the description at lines 74-75. However, because the description was produced a) in a turn at talk, b) which is in a sequence of turns, c) through which a course of action (indeed, several courses of action) was being pursued by the parties interactively, and the description was produced in and for this moment, in and for this sequential position in the interaction, I cannot avoid a brief account of the sequential context. (I caution, however, that this barest of accounts is not meant to provide a full analysis.)

David's taking of a cracker occasions a remark by Winnie, a remark of distinctive form which formulates D's action as a failure (line 63; note that his action of taking something is formulated as "couldn't resist"). This sort of formulation here, as elsewhere (see, for example, Schegloff, 1988:120-123), makes an account relevant, and thus engenders a sequence (lines 63-68) which topicalizes what could otherwise have been an unremarked occurrence.

This sequence is followed by another, initiated by Winnie at line 69. As the prior sequence treated the taking of the food as its source, so does the next one. In asking whether "people sit around eating in Nepal," from out of the present scene, Winnie can be heard as formulating that scene -- the one she is in -- as "sitting around eating." She has offered a description of the scene she is in. She is asking, "do they do in Nepal what we are doing here -- what we do here."

That her interlocutors so understand her is shown by Cece's addition (lines 72-73) to David's response. On the one hand, her response scales down David's; he had claimed "that's all they do;" she restricts the "sit around eating" to "when drinking." But in using "when drinking" as the mode of moderating David's answer, she shows her understanding of Winnie's question as "do they do what we are doing;" for what the present company are doing can also be characterized as sitting and drinking. The reference to "never drinking without..." thus also issues from the current scene, and shows an orientation to that source of Winnie's question. Cece responds in terms of scenes "such as this," which she shows herself to target by the reference to "drinking." In this sequence, then, talk about Nepal, perhaps inevitable in an evening with recent returnees (and especially with one two days "off the boat"), is introduced by reference to the present scene; is it like this?

The initial response is by David. We cannot tell if he was targeted by Winnie's gaze, but the sequence does have his action as its source, and he was the partner in colloquy in the immediately preceding sequence. He is also newly returned from Nepal. The import of his answer appears to be, "yes; it is there like it is here," although in his seeming exaggeration ("that's all they do") is a hint of ways in which it is different there.

With her following utterance, Cece does not just elaborate the description. She moves to be a co-teller with David about Nepal. But topic "ownership" and authoritativeness can be an interactionally delicate matter. There can be prerogatives in this regard, and they can be closely guarded. Note, for example, in the following excerpt (from a different conversation⁶) how this prerogative is oriented to:

(2) Goodwin: Automobile Discussion, 13-14.

At his wife Phyllis' prompting, Mike has been telling a story to Curt and Gary about a fight at the stock car race track the previous evening, in which a character named "DeWald" (the "he" in Phyllis' first utterance below) figured as the villain. Upon the possible completion of the story, the following transpires (transcript simplified by omission of some interjections from unrelated events in the setting):

01 Curt: We:ll you w-
 02 Phyllis: {Mike said 'e usetuh:}:: race go {carts en=
 03 Mike: {He use-
 04 Phyllis: ='e got barred f'm the go-cart track
 05 be,cuz he ra:n little} kids (h)off the=
 06 Mike: {over in Tiffen.
 07 Phyllis: =tr(h)a,ck.
 08 Curt: {hhhhh.
 09 Mike: {That's a-} that's a fact.=
 10 Phyllis: ={'hhh
 11 Mike: ={'n-
 12 Mike: DeWald is a {big burly ((silent)) basterd=
 13 Curt: {Jeezuz.
 14 Phyllis: {·hhhh hhehhhhhhhehheh,

⁶ The excerpt is from a videotape collected by Charles and Marjorie Goodwin, transcribed by them and Gail Jefferson. The talk preceding the fragment in the text is discussed extensively in Goodwin, 1986.

15 Mike: =jihknow,
 16 Curt: ={Mmhm,
 17 Phyllis: hh,hheh
 18 Mike: [En that's a fact he got barred from runnin go
 19 carts over in Tiffen because he usetuh run the
 20 little kids off the track.

Note several points here:

- 1) Phyllis attributes the tellable to Mike (line 02), but tells it anyway, even though he is present;
- 2) Mike makes various moves during the telling which display his claim of prior and independent knowledge -- an incipient co-telling echo with "He use(tuh)" (line 03), an additional fact placed precisely in the course of part of Phyllis' telling ("over in Tiffen" line 06);
- 3) At the end of her telling, he provides a confirmation (line 09, "That's a fact"), followed by a retelling of the whole tellable as his own (lines 18-20);
- 4) Take special note here of the format, namely: [confirmation token + retelling], and note that its production involves re-doing (at line 18) the token ("that's a fact") earlier done at line 09;⁷
- 5) Mike's re-telling is nearly identical with the first telling. With all the confirmation and convergence on the details of the telling, Mike's tack here reclaims and re-asserts authoritative rights to the "tellable."⁸

⁷ In an "Exercise" developed during a seminar at UCLA in Spring, 1978, Gail Jefferson explored a range of variations of the format [Utterance + Token], the base form of which she proposed to be [Repeat + (Acknowledgement) Token]. She argued that "...such a format does three sorts of things. (1) It provides that there is equivalence between this utterance and prior utterance, (2) it attributes authorship to prior speaker, and (3) it marks accord as between this and prior speaker." The fragments treated in the text of the present paper suggest that the reverse order format is employed for different outcomes.

⁸ Charles Goodwin suggests (in personal communication) that Mike's re-telling may be designed to get a hearing for the matter being told about (which has been identified by Phyllis as his "tellable") as serious rather than laughable. (Note the laugh tokens insinuated into the end of Phyllis' telling in lines 05 -- "(h)off" -- and 07 -- "tr(h)ack," displaying the stance she is

Returning now to fragment (1), David appears to be the "local" authority on Nepal by virtue of the length of his stay there, and the occasioned commentator about Nepal by virtue of the recency of his return. This initial inquiry about Nepal (at line 69) is produced as prompted by an action of his and is thereby apparently directed to him; and it is he who answers first. In "supplementing" his response -- actually correcting it or scaling it down, Cece claims and enacts a co-telling stance in the talk about Nepal.⁹ She does this with a bit of description, which, as noted, frames the description in a more restricted way, "They never drink without('t)." This provides the immediate sequential context for the utterance of David's upon which analysis will be focussed.

62 (3.0)
 63 W: Couldn't resi:st, {huh:..
 64 D: { No.
 65 (0.6)
 66 W: The pull: of food.
 67 (0.4)
 68 D: Th' pull of crackers. The lure of crackers.=
 69 W: =D'people sit around eating in Nepal?
 70 (0.2)
 71 D: All the time that's all they d_o
 72 C: {They never drink
 73 without('t) (0.2)
 74 D: Yeah ya never have liquor without (1.0)
 75 fried meat er

Note that David's utterance (at 74-75) has a format similar to that of Mike's in fragment (2), namely: [agreement token + retelling]. But in this case, the "retelling" is built to be systematically different in its descriptive terminology, even while seemingly remaining identical in propositional content. With this utterance, I want to propose, David's apparent agreement is used to reject Cece's move to be co-teller. How does

taking toward what she is telling, and constituting an invitation (Jefferson, 1979) to Curt, the telling's recipient, to co-align with this stance, which he does at line 08.)

⁹ For some recent work on "co-telling" see Mandelbaum (1987) and Lerner (1987: Chapter 6).

this work? Note the following features of David's utterance.

1) After the agreement token ("yeah"), David's utterance is shaped to have the same grammatical structure as does Cece's preceding turn. This is a parallel construction of the form: [Subject + never + verb phrase + without]. By structuring the next turn in this parallel fashion, the "agreement + resaying" format previously noted is invoked. Further, the mutual relevance of these two utterances is underscored, over and above the relevance given by their sequential adjacency. Within this heightened mutual relevance, the changes introduced into the utterance by David (specified and discussed in the following paragraphs) take on special significance.¹⁰ (Recall that in data fragment (2), Mike's resaying employed a virtually identical repeat of Phyllis' prior saying). These changes constitute a modification by David of the description given by Cece. It may be noted in advance that these changes leave the propositional content, in the logical sense, apparently unchanged. Yet a change in the descriptive language has real import and consequences.

2) The first change involves a replacement of "they" by "ya" (or "you") as the "subject" of the sentence. Strictly speaking, both "they" and "ya" are anaphoric references to "people" or "people...in Nepal" in line 69, carrying over into the answer turns the subject of the question turn.

But note that Cece's "they" (line 72) treats its referents as "others," as "other than we," as known about from the outside. David's "ya" (line 74) shifts ground in a crucial way. Although this sort of "you" is commonly referred to as "the impersonal 'you'," here it

¹⁰ See the discussion by Goodwin and Goodwin (1987) of "format tying" as a device for the construction of oppositional moves in arguing. In the present data (their positional adjacency aside), it is the overall grammatical format which links the two utterances, within which more is varied than is retained. Further, what is varied is not done in a markedly contrastive fashion, and is done in the guise of agreement rather than arguing. The "opposition" here is at a different level.

really is used as a "personal (and knowledgeable) 'I'".¹¹ That is: this "ya" alludes to David's own participation in the practices he describes; it makes of him an insider, one experienced in, and knowledgeable about, the practices so described.¹² The position from which the

¹¹ Compare the claim of Norbert Elias (in an unpublished manuscript of 1966), quoted by Rod Watson (1987:262):

However one uses it, "I" means "I" not "You"... just as "You" means "You" not "I" and "He,"...

My thanks to Watson's paper for bringing the claim to my attention and to Rod Watson for making a copy of Elias' paper available.

¹² The following instances may enhance appreciation of this usage.

Just before the following fragment, Evelyn has been describing/ complaining about her husband's getting lost in a car trip earlier that day.

(Berkeley III:73-77)

Evelyn: Well he: d'n know where the hell he was. We were somewhere in the pa:rk. I don' know where the hell 'e was.
 Sidney: Pt! W'z it {raining} then?=
 Evelyn: { () }
 Evelyn: =Pourin'.
 ---> Sidney: Oh, then ya can't see where yer goin'.

And in the following fragment (discussed in Mandelbaum, 1987), Vivian and Shane have just finished telling a story to Nancy and Mike about making a wrong turn into a one way street. (Simplified transcript.)

Nancy: heh It's a scary fee:ling.=r//eally
 Vivian: Yeah:yi:s () 'd wre:ck.
 Shane: {Yeah: It certainly i:(h)s.
 ---> Nancy: Y'see all these: (') ca:rs comin::-?
 (0.9)
 Nancy: toward you with their headlight }=
 Vivian: {We:ll thank God}=
 = {there weren't that ma:ny. }
 Mike: = {Member that guy: we saw:.. }

ways of the Nepalese are being described is thus sharply different from that in Cece's account.

Note, by the way, that Cece's usage was simply adopted from David's prior usage at line 71. There, in the first pronoun reference to "people," he uses "...that's all they do." In that respect, he puts himself with Winnie (whose question he is answering), vis-a-vis "people...in Nepal." But when Cece claims to talk authoritatively from the same position,¹³ David shifts his usage, and speaks as a relative insider. (Although Winnie is much less knowledgeable than Cece, he does not discriminate himself from her; but she has made no claim.)

A last observation on this shift relative to Cece's turn: "ya" combines with "never" differently than "they" does, so that even though "never" seems to be an element common to both utterances, a shift has occurred. Whereas "they never do X" is a form of vernacular empirical report, "ya never do X" has the form of a vernacular norm or maxim, or a piece of vernacular wisdom. This difference is a direct consequence of the outsider vs. insider sense of the two pronouns.

3) Where Cece characterizes the behavior in question by the term "drink," David shifts to "have liquor." This is a peculiar term, quite infelicitous and unidiomatic in vernacular English, and something which attracts attention to the issue: what is being done by using such a term at all, let alone using it as an overt replacement for the term "drink" used in the prior turn, for the same referent, in an identically formatted sentence?

And Mike and Nancy go on to tell a similar story, Mike having understood Nancy's "y'see" observation as introducing the relevance of her, and their, experience.

¹³ Note in her turn at lines 72-73 ("They never drink without ('t)") the declarative voice, with no uncertainty marking, her absolute quantifier "never" which inversely mirrors his prior "all the time", etc.

With "drink," a conventional term for a conventional activity, Cece invites recipients to understand the activity engaged in by Nepalese as the same activity engaged in by "us" ("Americans like us") when we engage in the activity we call "drinking." David's term "behavioralizes" the description,¹⁴ distances it, and invites recipients to understand that when "people...in Nepal" engage in that activity, they are not doing what we are doing when we are engaged in the activity we call "drinking." Presumably, there is some Nepalese term which carries with it the right halo of meaning and allusion, but his interlocutors here are not likely to appreciate it. So David marks the point, and his contrasting grasp of Nepalese life as compared with Cece's, by employing a term which resists efforts to apply the ordinary texture of cultural understandings to the practice being referred to.

In short, David's description "exoticizes" the reference, makes of the "them" (to whom he has nonetheless claimed access via his "ya") something different from us, thus thoroughly shifting ground from the initial position, in which he had seemed to say to Winnie "yes, they do what we do." In recharacterizing the matter being described as exotic and different, the need for special knowledge and experience is projected -- special qualifications his "ya" has hinted he has. A kind of vernacular ethnography has been broached, for which he is prepared and Cece has shown herself not to be. And Cece's credentials to be a co-teller about Nepal are thereby undercut.

- 69 W: =D'people sit around eating in Nepal?
 70 (0.2)
 71 D: All the time that's all they do
 72 C: [They never drink
 73 without('t) (0.2)
 74 D: Yeah ya never have liquor without (1.0)
 75 fried meat er
 76 W: Fried meat?
 77 H: (hh hh)
 78 D: Uh huh. { Fried
 79 ? : {(loin)
 80 W: [Y'mean j'st generic frie:d meat?
 81 H: {*(hh hh)

¹⁴ Garfinkel, op. cit., p.45 uses this term for a somewhat different descriptive practice.

82 D: (Mhm) usually buff.
 83 H: (Oh y') {buff
 84 W: {B(h)u:ff? (hh hh) *hh Buff as in "a-low"=?
 85 H: =Buff burgers.
 86 D: Mmyeh, (·) 's in "a-low".
 87 W: ^Really? They eat buffalo?/ 'ey have that in San
 87a Francisco.=

4) David continues in the same vein. In referring to what "people...in Nepal" eat while they "have liquor," he chooses the term "fried meat," designed, just as "have liquor" was, for its proto-scientific adequacy by being culturally non-idiomatic. Americans do not ordinarily refer to fried "meat" but to some kind of meat -- as in "fried pork," etc. (Or they refer to "some kind of (fried) meat" for the generic term.) Here again the description is ethnographic in character, and it is taken up accordingly. Winnie now asks "fried meat?" (line 76) and then "just generic fried meat"? (line 80). And David has the "exotic" payoff he has been alluding to; and he responds with an exotic meat -- "buffalo."

But he continues to draw this out, or have it drawn out of him, by a dialogic process. Just as he did not say "buffalo" to begin with at line 75, but put it in puzzle form with "fried meat," so he here gives its nickname "buff," leaving it for Winnie to make the exotic object explicit herself in a separate utterance -- "buff? as in a-low?" (line 84). He uses an insider's term to an outsider, forcing her to press for clarification, again underscoring the esoteric/exoteric issue.¹⁵

When her explication is confirmed, Winnie shows (at line 87) her full appreciation of the exoticness which David has been underscoring -- first with "Really?", then with "they eat buffalo?", and most tellingly with "They have that in San Francisco." Why most tellingly? First, because in her effort to domesticate it, she shows herself to treat it as otherwise undomesticated. Secondly, because the best she can do at domesticating it is to claim that they have it in her state, but not in her city or neighborhood, which are the relevant locales for eating. (One does not say about hamburgers, or asparagus, or even fresh mussels, "they have them in San Francisco," even though they do.)

15 Suggested by Jennifer Mandelbaum.

5) Note finally that when David's casting of matters Nepalese as exotic and in need of special nomenclature is thus ratified by Winnie, Cece talks again -- the first time since her comment about "drinking" moved to co-tell about Nepal and was subverted and rejected. Rejected as a teller about Nepal, she had withheld further participation. When she talks again, she shifts relative and relevant expertise and re-enters the talk as a teller about what all spouses are experts on -- the behavior of their spouse -- "David ate a lot of buff burgers" (line 88). (But note as well that David understands this to be an attack on his claim of insider-ness to Nepal; he later dismisses a corrected version of Cece's account at 104-6, as "just when I ate at this one western place.")

There is much more to be said, not only about other utterances in this sequence, but about other facets of the utterances I have touched on. But they cannot be taken up here.

III

In the preceding discussion, I have been concerned with description at several levels. On one level, I was concerned to provide a partial description of a speaker's turn at talk, how it was constructed, what the speaker was doing by it, and how the speaker procedurally achieved that doing in the construction of the talk. The turn in question was David's at lines 74-75, and one action he was proposed to be doing was rejecting Cece's move in the preceding turn to be co-teller about Nepal. Indeed, it is in the account of how it does rejection that that it does rejection is warranted -- both of which can be captured by the phrase "how it is a rejection of co-telling." It is this joining of a description of what some talk is doing with an account of how it is doing it -- the method or device by which that practice is a practice for achieving that outcome -- which (if successful/correct) makes the description an analysis.¹⁶

And this has involved us in a concern with description at another level, for it is by the form of description

¹⁶ The tack taken here goes back at least to Sacks' analysis of the utterance "We were in an automobile discussion" as an invitation; Spring, 1966: Lectures 4-6.

which composes David's utterance that its method of rejecting Cece's co-telling may be specified. Addressing this aspect of the episode involves offering an account of a vernacular practice of describing.

One way of doing vernacular description can be characterized as "re-doing another's description." This is clearly a different sort of procedure or practice than those of "selecting among alternatives" which has predominated in most earlier work in this area. In the "selection format," already recurrent descriptors (such as category terms) or descriptor types (such as "recognitional vs. "non-recognitional" references to persons) are available for use and selection. But in the episode examined here, "ya" and "they" are not canonical alternates for "people...in Nepal", nor is "ya" available as a conventional linguistic token for generic plural anaphoric reference. Nor are "drink" and "have liquor" standing alternate descriptors for that activity. David's terms are invoked, improvised, "impressed" into service for this occasion of use to contrast with Cece's prior turn within the parallel format.¹⁷

This descriptive diction is deployed within a distinctive format for a turn's construction -- [agreement token + resaying], with the "resaying" component itself retaining the grammatical structure of the first saying as an underlying framework for potential

¹⁷ In this regard, the present "re-doing of another's description" is different from that described by Jefferson (1987) as "embedded correction."

At least two orders of "sequentiality" can be implicated in the practices of description. One is the succession of descriptions of same or related objects of description. In this sense, earlier work on description has incorporated attention to sequentiality. Sacks (1972b), for example, formulates a "convergence" problem between successive categorizers of some population; Jefferson (1987) is concerned precisely with successive but different references to some referent; etc. The other order of sequentiality concerns the embeddedness of descriptions in turns-in-a-series, in orderly sequences of action, in overall sequential structures of occasions of interaction, and the like, to which their formulation is unlikely to be indifferent. It is at this intersection of description with sequential organization(s) that inquiry is relatively untested, and it is to this intersection that the present analysis has aimed to contribute.

comparison of the elements of the prior turn's description and the following turn's description. This observation adds another element to the description of David's turn and the method by which he achieves the turn's outcome.

The "resaying" component of this format was described by its relationship to the first saying, as retelling the same way or with changes, and the "same vs. different" feature was applied both to the grammatical form of the utterance and to its word selection, in this case its descriptive terms. This type of examination was brought to bear on the utterance at lines 74-75 as well as on another from another conversation, in which the format is realized differently.

The redescription here invokes the dimension of the esoteric/exoteric, with a consequent bearing on shared or differentiated access and authority. It is related to licenses to talk about mentionables, "ownership" of topics, and orientation to relative prerogatives to tell. Indeed, it is the primary vehicle by which the proposed action -- of rejecting Cece's co-telling -- is accomplished here.

What we have then is the invocation of a counter-description of some object in terms which cast it as in some respect "exotic" -- that is, inaccessible to the ordinary experience and understanding of others engaged in the discourse, and distinctively accessible to the re-describer by virtue of that person's knowledge or experience.

It is the resonance of this stance with the tenor of some professional social science accounts -- commonly but not exclusively anthropological -- that invites an effort to connect the outcome of the preceding analysis to the principled issues of description with which this essay began. Those issues are, of course, immense and complex, and we can here but begin a tentative exploration. What bearing, if any, can be derived from a) the descriptive undertaking in the preceding section of this paper, and from b) the vernacular practice of description which was part of its subject matter, for our efforts to come to terms with the problem(s) of description?

IV

There are two issues.

First are the consequences of the indefinite extendability of descriptions. For Weber, this was the place, or one place, where the values of the investigator enter into the determination and shaping of inquiry. In the terms of a different stance toward social science, this introduction of the investigator's "values" is the inescapable ideological component in any social science inquiry. From yet another point of view, this is but one aspect of the generic under-determination of theory by empirical data, and marks as strategic the role of presuppositions in the logic of social inquiry (Alexander, 1982). Whether called "values," "ideology," or "presupposition," what is at issue here is an element of apparent arbitrariness in inquiry into the social and cultural -- arbitrary in not being grounded in, and solely in, properties of the object world which is the target of inquiry.¹⁸ If there are indefinitely many aspects available to description, then it is not the object itself which is grounding what actually enters into its description, but something about the inquirer and/or the context of inquiry -- something other than description alone which is being done. And since the inquirer and context can vary, the stability of description appears threatened.

In the context of ordinary conversation, there is a cognate version of this "problem," though to be sure its import is quite different in that quite different "context." In most ordinary talk-in-interaction it is virtually impossible for conversationalists to accomplish "mere description." Descriptions are inspected by co-participants to see what their speaker is doing by talking in that way, by describing in that way. Describing is a vehicle for acting. (This seems to be a direct vernacular translation of the ideological analysis of social science accounts; they are forms of, typically political, action.) In the conversational fragment on which the preceding analysis has focussed, describing

¹⁸ I leave intact here the possibility of the "independence" of an "object" world of phenomena being investigated and a "subject" world of the investigator. From some perspectives, this in itself marks the present discussion as a form of "mundane discourse" (Pollner, 1987).

something "as exotic," by using descriptive terms which forbade conventionalized understanding, in the sequential context we have examined, was a way of doing rejection of co-telling, and was so understood by the participants.

But this contrast between "domestic" and "exotic" versions is no more limited to vernacular practices of description in conversational contexts than the issue of "pure" vs. "action implicative" description is limited to the meta-methodological ones. Within the domain of scholarly/scientific accounts of conduct there are commonly alternative descriptive options, some of which embody the commonalities of conduct across group and cultural boundaries and "domesticate" the differences, others of which explicate or underscore the discriminations between the conduct and practices of different groups or contexts and mark each as potentially "exotic" relative to the others. The latter usage may be couched in a fashion that makes the object of description out to be at least partially inaccessible to those who "have not been there," which makes it false when described by terms applicable to others, as is the case with David's version of the practices of the Nepalese. This is a common theme in social scientific descriptions -- especially anthropological and linguistic ones.

As noted earlier, David's deployment of this descriptive practice in the particular conversational context in which he employed it seemed to be doing a rejection of the previous speaker as a proper describer in that context. What is "describing as exotic," as esoteric, as different from all else, doing as a strategy of description in social scientific accounts? Does it also reject as inadmissible the claim of others to describe conduct of some set of persons as convergent with the conduct of others? Reject it as based on inadequate license and authority? (As for example when efforts to characterize generic practices or organizations of talking are contested by anthropologists and linguists who insist on the differentiae specifica of some people or context, knowable only by direct field experience).

Are choices between "domestic" or "exotic," common or unique, descriptive stances linked to actions which the description is doing in social scientific discourse, or political stances which are thereby being taken up? Or is "mere description" possible in social scientific discourse, to return to the classical query broached

earlier? Perhaps the account of what went on between David and Cece and Winnie can offer some evidence on this question.

There is a line of response to the problem of multiple description which offers an alternative to the type of solution which finds the inexorable presence of value, presupposition or ideology. When the data are drawn from the materials of human interaction, and display the orientations to relevance which inform the conduct of the participants themselves, then the problems of the indefinite extendability of description can be resolved not by reference to values, ideology or presupposition, each brought by the investigator and thus potentially arbitrary from the point of view of the object, but by reference to the relevancies to which the participants themselves show themselves to be oriented. At least this domain of inquiry within the social/human sciences may then appear to have a principled and non-arbitrary solution to the problem, that is, one grounded in features indigenous to, and constitutive of, the domain being examined.

But this stance is not merely one of remote principle. It has a bearing on actual candidate accounts of particular fragments of data. The crucial warrant that needs to be established for these descriptions is that they address aspects of the talk and other conduct which catch what is relevant for the participants. It is a tacit claim for each element of my account that this is the case. Where space and my current grasp of the data have made it possible, I have tried to indicate evidence in the material which has been examined that this is the case.

The possible alternative, then, to the arbitrariness noted earlier is to ground descriptions in the orientations of the participants. Social science descriptions which submit to this discipline can, perhaps, be "mere descriptions," for the selection made among the indefinitely many aspects available to description will reflect not so much the orientations of the inquirer or the context of inquiry as those of the participants in the events being described, that is, selection principles indigenous to the events being described.

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