

of centralizing dialogue efforts in the face of emerging regional peace talks, the Government changed its policy and consented to talk with the insurgents without obliging a cease-fire—the sensitive issue that had for a decade thwarted agreement on a talking platform. The de facto negotiations begun at the Venezuelan embassy in Bogotá now entered a new phase in which defining spaces for talk and warring, as well as dialogue content, became the focus of metadiscursive practices.

2.5. “Grounding” Dialogue

For the first time in history the Colombian state, embodied in the administration of President Gaviria, settled for unconditioned talks with insurgent groups (Angeleri 1996: 118). Representatives of the Coordinadora and of the Executive office agreed to meet in order to discuss the negotiation framework. Selecting the site of this “preparatory” meeting, however, gave rise to intense negotiations after the guerrilla, objectifying its power and accumulated leverage, proposed two sites that were virtually impossible for Gaviria to accept: The FARC headquarters in La Uribe, then in the hands of the Colombian army, and the Venezuelan embassy in Bogotá. Political costs aside, these were condensed sites of social fracture, spatial icons of social transgression and violence that the Presidency could not afford to legitimize convening there with the rebels. The contextual antecedents and the heavily charged atmosphere magnified the symbolic significance of spatializing preliminary conversations, considering that symbolization is a process that transcends the expressive realm to become an affective and determining material performance reflexively transforming person and social relations (Feldman 1991: 165). The significance of choosing the site was also directly linked to the propagandistic value and potential to magnify power effects different sites had for the contending parties, so that (literally) “grounding” discourse became an additional attempt to wield power. Reckoning these, as well as security and logistic considerations (including facilities for the journalists), the government and the CGSB eventually agreed to meet in the small Colombian frontier town of Cravo Norte.²⁰ On May 6th, 1991, the mountain commanders formally announced their acceptance in the following terms (Arango 1992: 26-28):

1. The Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar agrees to meet immediately with government delegates in the municipality of Cravo Norte, Arauca District.
2. It is conveying pertinent counsel to its three (3) commissioners in the city of Caracas, so that charged with negotiating functions, establish contact with ambasadress Nohemí Sanín de Rubio, and with the Venezuelan government in order to carry out the necessary tasks and represent the Coordinadora Guerrillera at this important meeting.
3. We acknowledge the government’s willingness to ‘immediately transport to any of these sites [?] the guerrilla delegates with the required security measures, to guarantee security at the chosen meeting place, and transport the guerrilla delegates, once the meeting ends, to an agreed site with the required security measures’, taking note that, with the previous consent of the Venezuelan government, our three (3) commissioners ought to be taken back

²⁰ One is tempted to interpret the chosen meeting grounds, a municipality bordering with Venezuela (and thus in a sense neither entirely Colombian nor Venezuelan), as a spatial metaphor of the encounter itself. A region that being at the geopolitical limits of countries with reciprocal chronic border, military and immigration problems, is itself an icon of the opposite forces about to intersect on its grounds.

- to the city of Caracas.
4. It has been the purpose of the Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar to carry out dialogues facing the country; it would be pertinent that a National Constituent Assembly commission presented itself, as well as representatives of the different mass media.
 5. It is important that a high frequency radio transmitter be made available at the meeting, so as to allow consultations and thus ensure the best results.
 6. We initiate this new phase of conversations with great optimism, convinced of being able among all, to find the best and shortest solution paths to the great crisis affecting the country.

Several discourse devices forged specific pragmatic effects in the preceding text. Lexical choices, verb inflection and framing infused it with an imperious, unemotional tone that conveyed, anew, a sense of tight authority and hierarchy, as for example, in the verbal phrases: “agrees to meet immediately”, “it is conveying pertinent counsel”, “ought to be taken back”, “it would be pertinent that . . . presented itself . . .”. Similarly, the framing given to the request for a radio transmitter, i.e., “to allow consultations”, signaled that the Coordinadora’s representatives had limited autonomy and decision-making power. Akin to other examples we have already seen, however, the ambiguity created by the absence of the expected prepositional phrase following “consultations” (with whom after all?) softened the rhetorical impact by masking agency. Once more, speech “horizontalized” the exercise of vertical rule within an organization catering to the disenfranchised masses. Moving on to other sections of the declaration, note how the lexical choices in last sentence (“optimism”, “togetherness”) introduced a dash of empathy, just the minimum needed to widen audience appeal but preserve the overall low affective gradient of the text. Salient in the construction of that appeal (and in promoting self-effacement) was, again, the use of referential ambiguity, for beyond the rebels themselves, Who are those “all” called upon to save the country? If these texts we have been analyzing are at all indicative, the strategic construction and management of ambiguity emerges as another prime discourse device in critical conflict talk, being specially suited to accomplishing at least two pragmatic goals: 1) concealing agency, and 2) simultaneously evoking and effacing effects of power. Not unrelated to the latter result the discourse structure and function of paragraph four. There we can perceive how a penchant for probity (i.e., willingness to talk “facing the country”) tempered a commanding voice and disguised the request for media exposure and participation at the National Constituent Assembly—a cherished goal of the Coordinadora. Lastly, recognizing that at Cravo Norte began “a new phase of conversations” we believe guerrilla’s and analysts’ interpretations approach each other, pointing to the embassy episode as the onset of the Caracas Peace Dialogues. As we have endeavored to show, that peaceful entrée inaugurated a metadiscursive performance that recreated intertextual links between opponents’ discourses, just as it succeed in redefining group identities and modifying State policies.

2.6. *Cravo Norte: Face-to-face at last*

Finally, on May 15th, 1991, two weeks after the embassy entry, the parties faced each other at Cravo Norte. A meeting expected to last a few hours turned into a grueling three day event that nonetheless reached consensus over the institutionalization of peace conversations. As befitted the occasion, the participants issued their first joint declaration

officializing their political and performative agreement. The terms of that deal follow (Arango 1992: 28-30):

The representatives of the national government, and of the Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar, gathered at Cravo Norte, Arauca, in the school José Antonio Galán, after three days of negotiations, in the presence of the commissions appointed by the National Constituent Assembly and the House of Representatives and other observers,

Agree:

First.- To hold direct conversations, initially in Caracas, with representatives at the highest decision-making levels, heading towards finding a negotiated solution to the armed political struggle, beginning June 1st of this year. It is understood that after the Caracas talks, and once the circumstances and conditions allow the transfer of the negotiations, these will continue in a Colombian city that will be chosen by the parties as part of the agenda the high commissioners establish or concur upon.

Second.- The Colombian government will pursue the pertinent tasks before the government of the sister republic of Venezuela, in order to ask it be authorized that the city of Caracas be the stage of the dialogue.

Third.- Should the authorization to carry on conversations in Caracas be obtained from the Venezuelan government, the Colombian government binds itself to guaranteeing all matters concerning the security and transfer of the Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar's commissioners to the site chosen to carry on conversations.

Fourth.- The Colombian government ratifies its commitment to return to the country in the same conditions as their departure, the members of the Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar, the results of the conversations having no effect over the said commitment.

Fifth.- The parties agree that beginning the forthcoming Monday 20th of May, and in order to expedite the required arrangements to carry out the meeting abroad, they will open a direct channel of communication between themselves.

Sixth.- The representatives of the national government and of Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar, express their gratitude for the valuable collaboration tendered by the government of the sister republic of Venezuela at this stage of the process. Similarly we thank the Araucanian people, the district authorities and the municipal authorities of Cravo Norte, for the many demonstrations of support that enabled conversations to be carried on under the best conditions.

On behalf of the national government:

Andrés González Díaz,
Interior Viceminister;
Carlos Eduardo Jaramillo
Peace Council;

On behalf of the Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar:

Lucía González,
Daniel Aldana Mutis,
Miguel Suárez Piragua.

As far as formal discourse features, pragmatic goals, and rhetorical devices went, this text reiterated those already seen. For instance, it relied heavily on passive forms and indirect impersonal reference: “it is understood. . .”, “it be authorized. . .”, “should the authorization . . . be obtained . . .”. Likewise, it echoed a real guerrilla concern over security measures, which although understandable, also evoked danger and heroism, thereby contributing to the image building and self-situating processes woven throughout the exchanges considered. As we will immediately see, the forging and management of public identities continued with care and forethought on the institutionalized talking stage Caracas provided.

2.7. The Caracas Peace Dialogues: Limits and possibilities of ritualized discourse

Following closely the agreements reached at Cravo Norte, the Caracas Peace Dialogues formally began June 3rd, 1991, at the campus of the Universidad “Simón Bolívar”.²¹ Representing the Colombian government at the opening ceremony were Humberto La Calle, Interior Minister, Andrés González, Interior Viceminister, and Jesús Antonio Bejarano, peace adviser. On behalf of the CGSB attended top ranking chiefs, including FARC’s members Alfonso Cano, Iván Márquez, Pablo Catatumbo, Andrés París, Guillermo Zuluoaga, Miguel Suárez and Daniel Aldana; EPL’s members Diego Ruiz and Asdrúbal Jiménez; and UC-ELN’s members Francisco Galán and Lucía González. To the press’ relish and everyone’s surprise, some of them arrived in Caracas accompanied by their wives and attended the opening ceremony dressed in coat and tie—recasting themselves as ordinary “citizens interested in talking about peace”, knowing quite well their presence was far from “ordinary”. Whereas the Colombian ministers were in Caracas fulfilling their everyday duties representing government, the top underground commanders, exposing themselves to the public limelight (and not precisely as subversives), were indeed conducting a historical performance. Shedding their military identities and impersonating statesmanship, they dramatized before a world audience their communion with ideals of social tolerance, democracy and “civil(ized)” life. In sum, as if they had read Poirier’s (1971: 86) words—“it’s performance that matters—pacing, economies, juxtapositions, aggregations of tone, the whole conduct of the shaping presence”, the Coordinadora’s commanders authenticated on the Caracas stage one facet of the polyvalent identity they were forging in and through discourse since the embassy entrée.

After three days of negotiating the issues to be discussed in Caracas, the parties jointly announced a tentative agenda. The wording of that release alone—so ill-contrived—betrayed the difficulties experienced in drafting it, partially stemming from the reduced decision making power conferred upon the guerrilla representatives, obliged to carry on nightly radio consultations with the mountain commanders. The whole set up, text included, did not augur a bright future, as it unfortunately turned out to be the case. We reproduce below the second half of the text, enough to expose how lexical choices and grammatical design combined to create referential and propositional ambiguity, conceal agency, and disguise commitment—each and all of them discourse strategies indexing the substantive divide separating the interlocutors. Salient in that respect were the profusion of passive, impersonal verb forms (ten alone in paragraph IV below) and the iteration of chained nominals (“conception of the peace process”, “continuation of deliberations”, “approaches to their handling”, “precisions about their content and scope . . .”). Calling attention to the role linguistic details play in shaping discourse strategy, however, underscores just one aspect of overall metadiscursive practice, for the tighter intertextual links become the higher the saliency of contextual dimensions in discourse production and reception. As our examples increasingly show, “the roots of intertextual practices run just as deeply into social, cultural, ideological, and political-economic facets of social life as they do into the minutiae of linguistic structure and use” (Briggs and Bauman 1992:160).

²¹ Unfortunately, space limitations do not allow us to dwell on this coincidence (?) in spatial, institutional and participant denomination. Beyond that, a study of the multifarious appropriations of the name of the foremost South American independence hero could easily fill several volumes.

The negotiating agenda announced in Caracas on June 6th, 1991 (Gobierno Nacional de Colombia y Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar 1991) read partially as follows:

...

IV. After presenting, the government as well as the guerrilla, its conception of the peace process and the fundamental elements that comprise it, it has been agreed to announce a set of themes that configure a preliminary agenda allowing the continuation of deliberations in Caracas, as well as placing the peace process within a general perspective to be developed in the future. It is understood that in regard to the themes announced below approaches to their handling and precisions about their content and scope ought to be defined in the conversations to be undertaken in the coming days.

V. The themes agreed to be discussed, some of which imply bilateral commitments, listed for examination according to priority, are the following:

1. Study the possibility of reaching between the government and the Coordinadora a formula for a cease-fire and ending hostilities.
2. Relationships among this process, the National Constituent Assembly, the public corporations, the political organizations and the social sectors.
3. Measures against “paramilitary” and private justice groups. Effective steps against [their?] impunity. Notions regarding the so-called national security doctrine.
4. Human rights. Ethnic minorities rights.
5. The State, democracy and political propitiousness.²²
6. Elements that will contribute to develop national sovereignty, such as management of natural resources and international treaties’ features related to this process, and to foreign economic policy.
7. Elements towards democratization of social and economic policy.
8. Outline of a process that will allow evolving toward a phase in which agreements and practical steps be materialized in order to concretize the definite vanquish of Colombia’s armed conflict and guarantee the exercise of political activity without the use of weapons, within the framework of the country’s civil and democratic life, once the necessary prerequisites for this purpose are satisfied.
9. Inspectorship of the peace process.
10. Methodology, procedures and regulation of negotiations and agreements.

VI. The government and the Coordinadora call upon the mass media and public opinion advisers so that with their usual pondering judge the contents of this declaration, as well as the themes that have been included, with the sole purpose of discussing afterwards their scope, approach and possibilities.

On behalf of the National Government

Jesús Antonio Bejarano A.

Presidential Adviser

Andrés González D.

Interior Viceminister

Carlos Eduardo Jaramillo C.

Advisership’s Counselor

On behalf of the Coordinadora Guerrillera

Simón Bolívar

Alfonso Cano (Farc)

Iván Márquez (Farc)

Pablo Catatumbo (Farc)

²² That is, exploring favorable conditions for participation in the National Constituent Assembly and political life following demobilization.

| | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| Humberto Vergara P. Advisership's Counselor | Humberto Zuluoga (Farc) ²³ |
| Tomás Concha S. Advisership's Counselor | Daniel Aldana (Farc) |
| Reynaldo Gary P. Commission's Adviser | Miguel Suárez (Farc) |
| | Andrés París (Farc) |
| | Francisco Galán (Eln) |
| | Lucía González (Eln) |
| | Diego Ruiz (Epl) |
| | Asdrúbal Jiménez (Epl). |

Around this preliminary agenda conversations unfolded with difficulty over a span of five months. During this period the parties concluded two rounds of negotiations 69 days apart, with two phases each, before recessing November 10th, 1991. However, to the extent that reaching consensus over substantive issues appeared unrealizable, considerations over incorporating an impartial observer along with the rules and procedures for discourse—the last two and seemingly least important points in the agenda—became the focus of the dialogues themselves. This joint strategic step avoided a premature break by transforming the nature of the talks, making them increasingly performative and ritualized. In the absence of any other type of agreement, negotiating how to negotiate became a consensual and effective metadiscursive strategy—a move which preserved the performative effects of the dialogues and potentialized the prospects of negotiating substantive issues in the future. Indeed, the Coordinadora and the Gaviria administration eventually agreed on two cease-fire formulas, neither of which was implemented due to the escalation of war back home. These results exposed the fact that the Caracas Peace Dialogues did not, and could not, encompass the complex range of discourses Colombian citizen were articulating in the process of enacting contemporary society. Doubts as to the representativeness of each interlocutor eventually outweighed the gains increased discourse performativity brought. Guerrilla delegates at the negotiating table were labeled “softies” by the “tough” militants fighting back home, while the military and other conservative sectors of society increasingly pressured President Gaviria to demand demobilization. Drawing on Feldman (1991: 5) we might say that the ultimate failure of the talks point to “the growing autonomy of violence as a self-legitimizing sphere of social discourse and transaction” as well as “to the inability of any sphere of social practice to totalize society. Violence itself both reflects and accelerates the experience of society as an incomplete project, as something to be made.” True enough.

3. Postscript

Conversations could not reopen as scheduled on February 10th, 1992, due to a failed coup d'état in Venezuela the fourth of that month. Ultimately they reconvened March 10th in Tlaxcala, Mexico, following months of intensified hostilities in Colombia. Shortly

²³ Arango (1992: 53) listed him as Guillermo Zuluaga. This same source also included the following list of “Observers present”: Miguel Mota C., Rafael Serrano P., María Cristina Ocampo, Henry Millán, William Ramírez, Oscar Reyes, Jesús Carvajal, Alvaro Vásquez, Hernán Motta, Nelson Berrío.

thereafter, on the 20th of March, conversations came to an abrupt end as governmental representatives retired upon learning the death of ex-Minister Argelino Durán Quintero, then a captive of an EPL front. Without reaching any working arrangement, the CGSB and President Gaviria's administration parted for good in Mexico on May 4th, 1992. As we write these lines, the FARC insistently asks reinitiating peace talks and the mediation of the Venezuelan government, amidst a growing armed conflict involving an estimated 160 active guerrilla fronts which have spread combats to a bare 100 kilometers from Bogotá, and engulfed the Venezuelan border in the violent strife.

As we suggested at the beginning of this essay, The Caracas Peace Dialogues had as much to do with ending armed struggle as with defining a nation yet to be born. But despite the fact they failed on both accounts, the failure was only partial if we consider the Dialogues as a step in the right direction, a process that broke a State tradition and allowed Colombians to sample for the first time in history the positive effects of engaging as equals in talk.

4. Conclusion

In this paper we have focused on major metadiscursive and pragmatic aspects of discourse instances selected from the exchanges leading to the Caracas Peace Dialogues, themselves but an episode in the history of Colombian guerrilla warfare and pacification attempts. As a starting point we argued that the Dialogues effectively began when three members of the Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar, two men and a woman, entered the Venezuelan embassy in Bogotá and tended a peace overture to President César Gaviria Trujillo. Seeing discourse as situated practice, we defined that entry operation as a metadiscursive exercise meant to reshape intertextual links and contextual parameters, in an effort to anchor anew peace negotiations between the guerrilla and the Colombian State. As such, the *entrée* triggered off a context building strategy which not only structured and permeated the entire dialogue process, but which itself indexed political strategy. Naturally, as context building got under way and intertextual links among discourses shifted, power relations were also modified. Monitoring the development of these three interwoven processes in the exchanges ensuing the embassy entry, we identified major underlying discourse components and devices along with associated pragmatic effects. For example, in the type of conflict talk analyzed, the strategic production of referential, contextual and propositional ambiguity appeared a preferred discourse device to conceal agency and to simultaneously evoke and efface effects of power. In turn, the manipulation of linguistic resources such as agentless passives, impersonal reference or verb inflection, along with semantic framing, lexical choice and grammatical design, all contributed to the forging of ambiguity. Other pragmatic goals salient in the exchanges described were the strategic construction, juxtaposition and deployment of public identities and language ideologies, as well as contrasting thematizations of hierarchy and authority. Finally, the history of the Caracas Dialogues suggests that in situations characterized by armed conflict between militarily evened but deeply antagonistic ideological opponents, speech performativity may play a crucial role in tailoring a common discourse strategy. Under such circumstances, performing talk may have a comparable symbolic impact and provide similar social dividends as performing *in* talk. To sum up, the pragmatic presuppositions, indexical

connections, interactions between formal linguistic structures and referential content, as well as the wider links among institutional structures and sociohistorical processes which shaped the Caracas Peace Dialogues, together witness the fact that at least in this type of historically significant discourse event, context was not primarily an interpretative frame adopted by interlocutors (cf. Heritage 1984: 242; in Goodwin and Duranti 1992: 29), but way beyond that, a strategy for maneuvering the course of discourse.

References

- Angeleri, Sandra (1996) *Violencia política y búsqueda de paz en Colombia. Los diálogos de Caracas* (junio-noviembre de 1991). Unpublished master's thesis. Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, Facultad de Humanidades y Educación, Comisión de Estudios de Postgrado, Area: Historia de América.
- Arango Zuluaga, Carlos (1992) *De Cravo Norte a Tlaxcala: Los diálogos por la paz*. Colombia.
- Auburn, Timothy, Carla Willig & Sue Drake (1995) 'You punched him, didn't you?': Versions of violence in accusatory interviews. *Discourse & Society* 6.3: 353-386. Special issue: Discourse of violence, ed. by Patricia E. O'Connor.
- Betancur, Belisario (1982) ¿Dónde está la verdadera fuente de conflicto en Colombia? *¡Sí se puede!* p. 19. Bogotá.
- Briggs, Charles L. (1992) Linguistic ideologies and the naturalization of power in Warao discourse. *Pragmatics* 2.3: 387-404.
- Briggs, Charles L. (1993) Metadiscursive practices and scholarly authority in folkloristics. *Journal of American Folklore* 106.422: 387-343.
- Briggs, Charles L. & Richard Bauman (1992) Genre, intertextuality, and social power. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 2.2: 131-172.
- Buttny, R. (1993) *Social accountability in communication*. London: Sage.
- Carrigan, Ana (1993) *The palace of justice. A Colombian tragedy*. New York: Four Walls Eight Windows.
- Colombia Hoy Informa* 1(1991) "Vamos juntos hasta donde vayamos." N° 92 (July 1991): 26-31. Bogotá.
- Duranti, Alessandro & Charles Goodwin (1992) Rethinking context: An introduction. In Charles Goodwin and Alessandro Duranti (eds.), *Rethinking context. Language as an interactive phenomenon*. Studies in the social and cultural foundations of language No. 11. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-42.
- Duranti, Alessandro & Charles Goodwin (eds.) (1992) *Rethinking context. Language as an interactive phenomenon*. Studies in the social and cultural foundations of language No. 11. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fairclough, Norman (1989) *Language and power*. Language in social life series. New York: Longman Inc.
- Feldman, Allen (1991) *Formations of violence. The narrative of the body and political terror in Northern Ireland*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Foucault, Michel (1972) *The archaeology of knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Harper and

Row.

Gobierno Nacional de Colombia y Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar. Declaración. Caracas: June 6, 1991.

Grimshaw, Allen D. (1990) Research on conflict talk: Antecedents, resources, findings, directions. In Allen D. Grimshaw (ed.), *Conflict Talk*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 280-324.

Grimshaw, Allen D. (1992) Research on the discourse of international negotiations: A path to understanding international conflict processes? *Sociological Forum* 7.1: 87-119.

Gunson, Phil. (1996) Colombia's law and disorder. *Guardian Weekly*, 3 March, pp. 5.

Heritage, John (1984) *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Mackert, Michael (1993) Interpretation, authorial intention, and representation: reflections on the historiography of linguistics. *Language Sciences* 15.1: 39-52.

Poirier, Richard (1971) *The performing self*. New York: Oxford University Press.

República de Venezuela (1991) Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores. Report of the Venezuelan Embassy in Colombia. File No. 3, 1 through 15-11/91, part IV, Economics and Commerce, pp. 24. Caracas.

Ruíz, Diego (1991a) Interview by Sandra Angeleri, October-November. Transcript in the hands of Sandra Angeleri.

Silverstein, Michael (1992) The uses and utility of ideology: Some reflections. *Pragmatics* 2.3: 311-323.

Thiesmeyer, Lynn (1995) The discourse of official violence: Anti-Japanese North American discourse and the American internment camps. *Discourse & Society* 6.3: 319-352. Special issue: discourse of violence, ed. by Patricia E. O'Connor.

van Dijk, Teun A. (1995) Editorial: The violence of text and talk. *Discourse & Society* 6.3: 307-308. Special issue: Discourse of violence, ed. by Patricia E. O'Connor.

Woolard, Kathryn A. (1992) Language ideology: issues and approaches. *Pragmatics* 2.3: 235-249.

Woolard, Kathryn A. & Bambi B. Schieffelin (1994) Language ideology. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23: 55-82.