

Speech Acts as a Focus of Variation Studies : AAE vs. EAE

Brian José

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Ahmed Fakhri, Ph.D.  
Kirk Hazen, Ph.D.  
Johan Seynnaeve, Ph.D., Chair

Department of Foreign Languages

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## ABSTRACT

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Recent research in linguistics, and specifically within the field of applied linguistics, has been concerned with the different ways that speech acts are realized in different languages. This is so that language learners can learn to adequately conform to those norms in the target language. However, much of this research has assumed that all speakers of the relevant languages, such as American English, for example, are homogeneous, that they all perform the given speech acts in the same ways.

I argue that this is an erroneous assumption: just as there is phonological variation, for example, between dialects of a language, we must consider that there may be dialect variation in this aspect of language as well. I conduct a study that examines the ways that two different speech communities realize the speech act of advising in American English. These are speakers of African American English and of European American English.

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## 1.0. Introduction: speech acts and intercultural communication

The theory of speech acts, very briefly, originated with J.L. Austin's *How to Do Things With Words* (1962). Austin was a philosopher who wanted to develop a theory that would explain why certain utterances – language functions, or *speech acts* – could not be considered true or false, like statements. As such, the study of speech acts typically falls more within the realm of the philosophy of language than within linguistics proper. What Austin argued was that speech acts are utterances that, if pronounced in harmony with certain felicity conditions, have a special *force*. It is having this force instead of having sense and reference that distinguishes speech acts from statements, which, being subject to truth conditions, *are* either true or false.

A given speech act is comprised of three parts: the locutionary content, the illocutionary force, and the perlocutionary effect of the utterance. Richardson (1996: 90) summarizes: “The locution is the utterance itself with a particular denotational meaning. The illocution is what the speaker ... intends to do with the locution.... The perlocution is the effect that the locution has on the hearer.” When speaking of a speech act, we are typically referring to the illocutionary force of the act. In fact, the terms *speech act* and *illocutionary force* have become virtually interchangeable. However the distinction between the illocutionary force and the perlocutionary effect is often difficult to maintain (Levinson 1983).

Speech acts, then, are ways of *doing something* as opposed to simply stating something. “The issuing of the utterance *is* the performing of an action – it is not normally thought of as *just* saying something” (Austin 1962: 6-7; emphasis added). For example, we may apologize, complain, disagree, advise, request, and so forth. So, by pronouncing the words ‘please forgive me’ I would not be stating that you do forgive me, which may or may not be true; I would be performing the act of apologizing.

Intercultural communication, also called cross-cultural communication, very briefly, is the branch of communication studies that is concerned specifically with interaction between members of different cultures. It is believed, somewhat in tune with

those who work within the realm of the sociology of language, that the ways that people communicate (i.e. encode and decode messages) are partially determined by culture and that potentially enormous misunderstandings may occur if one party is not aware of the other culture's overall communication patterns. This is because the person initiating the message will encode it based upon her cultural norms and the person that she is addressing will decode the message based upon his cultural norms. If these cultures do not encode and decode meaning in the same or very similar ways, it is likely that they will not achieve shared meaning and, consequently, communication will not take place.<sup>1</sup> So, intercultural communication theorists stress that those who will be interacting with people from other cultures should be aware of the potential for misunderstandings and should attempt to learn the specifics of the other culture's verbal and nonverbal communication patterns in order to reduce the risk of miscommunication.

Because people need not come from separate corners of the globe to belong to different cultures, the term *subculture* has been developed. Richmond and McCrosky (1995: 284), citing Klopff and Park (1982), define a subculture as a "racial, ethnic, social, regional, or economic group which displays certain behavior patterns differentiating it from the dominant culture." Thus, the cultures of urban Americans, of Southerners, of New York Jews, of African Americans, and of American women, for example, would be just a few subcultures of *The American Culture*. That is, American culture would be *comprised of* these smaller units, or subcultures, without which it would not be American culture. They are differentiated from the dominant, overall culture in that they are not, individually, synonymous with it.

These two fields – speech acts and intercultural communication – are related in that the realm of pragmatics is one of the most susceptible to *mis-intercultural*

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Shared meaning occurs when the person who sends the message and the person who receives it 'agree' on the meaning or the interpretation that is to be assigned to the message. Without shared meaning, the (intended) communication has failed. This does not mean that a message was neither sent nor received; it simply means that because the concerned parties did not send and receive *the same* message, they did not effectively communicate. Thus, they did not communicate.

*communication*. I use the term *mis-intercultural communication* to refer to those instances of miscommunication that are *caused by* cultural differences during instances of intercultural communication. Obviously, miscommunication can occur between any two interlocutors anywhere at anytime; they need not come from different cultures. Intercultural communication occurs anytime interlocutors from different cultures or subcultures interact; it does not necessarily mean that they will fail to communicate. If they do, and if they do *because of* cultural differences, that is mis-intercultural communication.<sup>2</sup>

The belief that pragmatics is one of the main areas of mis-intercultural communication has guided the large majority of studies to be reviewed in this chapter. For example, De Kadt (1998: 256) says “cross-cultural communication assumes that cultural differences will impact substantially on, in particular, the pragmatic aspects of language” and Koike (1989: 281) states that most L1 / L2 studies regarding speech acts and pragmatics “examine the cross-cultural differences between the two languages and the potential for misunderstandings.” Kachru (1992: 379) says that because of cross-cultural speech act research, the universality “of several theoretical notions of pragmatics” are questionable.

The purpose of this chapter is twofold: first, to review the literature and determine where the field of linguistics stands regarding the study of variation in pragmatics and speech acts and second, to establish whether there is a need for further study in this area. Note that this is by no means an exhaustive survey of the relevant literature. The research on pragmatics generally and speech acts specifically is vast. Although this is not an exhaustive review, it can be assumed to review literature that is representative of that

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This is (more) commonly called *intercultural miscommunication*. However, I prefer to call it *mis-intercultural communication* because, in my opinion, the two terms do not convey the same meaning. It seems to me that intercultural miscommunication is first miscommunication and that the intercultural aspect is only an afterthought. That is, the failure to communicate is more important than the intercultural nature of it. Mis-intercultural communication, on the other hand, is intercultural communication that just happened to breakdown.

which is generally available in this area.

The chapter is divided into the following four sections. First, in Section 1.1, I look at studies concerned with speech act realization across different languages. Second, in Section 1.2, I examine articles that study pragmatic differences within a single language. This section is divided into two parts, the first of which deals with studies where the language used is the L1 of one of the concerned groups and an L2 for the other group; the second part of this section deals with studies where the language used is the native language of both of the groups studied. In Section 1.3, I discuss other, miscellaneous studies that are distinct from both of the aforementioned classifications. Specifically, these studies are concerned with some aspect of the discourse features of African American English (AAE). Finally, Section 1.4 contains concluding remarks and outlines the foci of the subsequent chapters.

### **1.1. Studies concerned with speech act realization *across different languages***

These studies are guided by the belief that speech acts are realized differently in different cultures. As such, there should be speech act variation across languages if the cultures in which those languages are spoken are different. So, the authors of these studies aim to question whether speech acts are dictated by universals. They are inspired in part as a reaction to Brown and Levinson's (1987) *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* which contends that there are universal preferences for performing certain speech acts.<sup>3</sup> These preferences are determined by the desire to be polite and to respect the other's *face*. That is, politeness is defined as the respect for face, where face is both the desire to be accepted and included (positive face) and the desire to be independent and autonomous (negative face). Brown and Levinson "claim that face is vulnerable to face-threatening acts (FTAs) such as orders, requests, warnings, reminders

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This was previously published in 1978 as "Universals in Language Usage: Politeness Phenomena" in Goody, Esther. (ed.) *Questions and Politeness: Strategies in Social Interaction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 56-289.

and threats, and thus politeness strategies are used in order to reduce the imposition of FTAs” (Marquez-Reiter 1997: 160).

According to this, those speech acts that threaten face would be impolite while those that respect face would be polite – and universally so. The researchers whose studies are discussed together in this section do not accept that speech acts conform to these, or any other, universal tendencies. In Section 1.0, the position that pragmatic functions are performed differently by different cultures was presented. Kachru (1992: 379-380) goes on to state that “a deeper understanding of individual self vs. familial / group self and positive vs. negative face in different domains in both Western and Eastern cultures is necessary before one could argue about the universality of any proposed universal.” In order to show that speech acts are not universally realized, researches like Wierzbicka (1985), Kachru (1992), Kalisz (1993), Kamisli and Dogancay-Aktuna (1996), Belyaeva (1996), and Marquez-Reiter, (1997) compare given speech acts in a variety of languages to the same speech acts in English. Wierzbicka (1985) compares Polish and Australian English, Kamisli and Dogancay-Aktuna (1996) compare Turkish and American English, Belyaeva (1996) compares Russian and American English, and Marquez-Reiter (1997) compares Uruguayan Spanish and British English.

With the possible exceptions of Kachru (1992) and Kalisz (1993), all of these researchers’ studies are overtly comparative. Kachru’s (1992) study, too, is comparative, but only implicitly so. He limits his focus to Indian English, attempting to expose its pragmatic differences from both American English and British English. He does not do this directly; rather, he relies on his audience’s knowledge of these other varieties of English in order to draw out the differences. He presents Indian English forms and relies upon his readers to recognize the differences based upon what they would expect in British or American English. The other study that is not explicitly comparative is Kalisz’s. His purpose is to point out the weaknesses in Wierzbicka’s (1985) study. As such, his article is necessarily a comparison of Polish and (Australian) English, but he focuses primarily on the Polish data, for that is what he finds questionable in Wierzbicka’s article. As his purpose is specifically to refute Wierzbicka’s data, it is

important to take a brief look at their arguments.

Wierzbicka's (1985) position is that speech act studies have suffered from a severe case of ethnocentrism: they have claimed that what is true for English is true universally, and that that is unfounded. She states that "different cultures find expression in different systems of speech acts, and that different speech acts become entrenched, and, to some extent, codified in different languages" (146). She looks at advice, requests, tag questions, exclamations, opinions, understatement and hyperbole, lexical evidence, and the cultural values of objectivism, cordiality, and courtesy in Polish and Australian English to find support for her position.

Noteworthy, here, is that her method of data collection is apparently self-generation. In order to determine how the relevant speech acts are performed and how they might be interpreted in Polish and in English, she relies on her own judgements. As a result of the forms that she 'collects,' she determines that there are not only significant differences between (Australian) English and Polish speech act forms, but also between Australian and Polish culture. Her methodology is noteworthy because it precludes her from having to account for differing judgements or interpretations, which are precisely what Kalisz offers.

Equally noteworthy is that she sees lexical items as evidence of cultural attitudes. She claims that because the English language has a word for privacy (i.e. the word *privacy*) while the Polish language and "other European languages" (164) do not, that means that the concept of privacy is solely an Anglo-Saxon one about which nobody else cares. In this same vein, she claims that because English doesn't have different formal and informal forms of the second person pronoun, Anglo-Saxons wish to maintain a certain amount of distance between themselves and everybody else; their privacy (above) is so important that they've done away with the most effective way of indicating closeness: an intimate second person pronoun. Of course, these assertions are questionable. For example, her contention that Anglo-Saxon culture is the only European culture where we can find the concept of privacy is absurd; many peoples in modern society, if not all of them in industrialized societies, have diverse ways of staking off their

territory and limiting others' access to it.

Wierzbicka argues that indirectness, which is abundant in English requests, offers, and invitations, just does not work in Polish.<sup>4</sup> She explains that in Polish, indirect requests, offers, and invitations would be seen *not* as requests, offers, and invitations but as genuine questions (i.e. as requests for information). She concludes that Australian and Polish culture are distinct in how the speaker views his or her addressee as well as in how the speaker wishes to present him– or herself. She explains that Australians view their addressees as people from whom they would invite a response (e.g. Could you be quiet?) and they wish to present themselves as tentative and courteous. Poles, on the other hand, view their addressees as non-people who need not be concerned with responding; there will be no discussion as there is no person even present to respond (e.g. (To) Be quiet.). She also claims that they prefer to present themselves as straightforward, confident, and blunt. She summarizes: “In the Polish cultural tradition holding on firmly to one’s beliefs and making no concessions to those of others is a valued and desirable attitude. In the Anglo-Saxon tradition, similar attitudes would be regarded as dogmatic and inflexible, that is to say, they would be viewed with disapproval” (165).

While there are some claims in Wierzbicka’s article of which we should be leery and which we should probably take with the proverbial grain of salt, this does not mean that her study is completely without merit. Kalisz (1993) says that while there are some serious problems, especially with her data and her conclusions, Wierzbicka’s underlying premise is attractive. He criticizes her methodology of ‘data collection’ saying that she “does not seem to carry out any supportive statistical experiments” (110). He, on the other hand, “performed a rather small elicitation test applied to thirty educated native speakers of Polish” (110) and the results indicate that Wierzbicka’s conclusions about the most likely advice forms in Polish are not supported. What is not clear is whether he

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In speech act theory, indirectness refers to a discrepancy between form and meaning. Indirectness, in this context, is frequently used as a synonym for an interrogative: a form that looks like a question but has the illocutionary force of a request, or an offer, etc. More on this in Section 3.1, pages 53-54.

conducted this elicitation test for all of his data or only the advice forms that he offers into evidence.

Kalisz provides examples in Polish for all of those structures that Wierzbicka claims do not exist in Polish: offers, advice, requests, tag questions, and negative exclamations, to name just a few. For example, here is what he says about indirect offers and indirect requests. Wierzbicka claims that indirect offers in Polish would be interpreted not as offers but simply as requests for information. However, according to Kalisz (1993: 108), the interpretation of an indirect offer “*as an offer cannot be excluded*” (emphasis added). So, the Polish equivalent of ‘Would you like a beer?’ may very well be seen as the offer that it is in English. With respect to indirect requests, Wierzbicka similarly maintains that they cannot function as requests in Polish. Kalisz (1993: 110) argues that “it is a very controversial statement.” After supplying the Polish equivalents of ‘Could you get me a glass of water?’ and ‘Why don’t you be quiet?’ as evidence, he explains that “English possesses *a more developed system* of interrogative forms employed to signal requests but the differences are not so drastic as Wierzbicka presents them [to be]” (111; emphasis added). Kalisz, who is intrigued by Wierzbicka’s study despite his objections to some aspects of it, wraps up his critique with some kind words and holistic observations. He says that

Wierzbicka’s (1985) study, which looks at pragmatic phenomena from a sociolinguistic perspective and explores correlations between speech act types and syntactic constructions in two languages, constitutes a model case of a study in contrastive pragmatics. *Language facts, however, do not justify her sweeping conclusions*, both theoretical (i.e., speech act differences among languages) and empirical (i.e., those referring to vast differences between Polish and Anglo-Saxon cultures) (117; emphasis added)

and that

Wierzbicka is not the first person to note that [indirectness is not necessarily universally connected with politeness]. Nevertheless, whenever we have an interrogative form representing a request in Polish ... the reason for its occurrence is very similar to the reason why such forms occur in English. The fact that conventionalization is more common in English may constitute evidence for Wierzbicka’s sociolinguist [sic]

claims; however, it does not follow that given different conventionalizations in different languages, we have to do with different speech acts. In such situations we have simply different realizations of a given speech act in different languages (116).

When, in the first passage, Kalisz argues that Wierzbicka's data does not support her conclusions, he is not necessarily criticizing her conclusions: he believes that while her claims are not supported, they *might be* if only she had data to support them. His final comment – that we are dealing only with different realizations of speech acts, and not different speech acts themselves – is an important one to remember. In this paper, while I may refer to different speech acts in different languages or in different cultures, I do so in the spirit of Kalisz's observation that we are really dealing with different *realizations* and not distinct *acts*. In fact, the different way(s) in which a given speech act is realized from one language or culture to another is the focus of any cross-cultural speech act study. After all, no matter how we do it in any given language, the act of apologizing is still to ask for forgiveness, the act of promising is always to commit oneself, and the act of advising is to make a suggestion that is believed beneficial or advantageous. Finding out *how* those speech acts are realized in another language or culture is the goal of such studies.

## **1.2. Studies concerned with pragmatic differences *within a common language*.**

The studies that are concerned with pragmatic differences within a common language, like the previous studies, are grounded in the belief that speech acts vary because of cultural differences. However, they differ from the studies in the preceding section in one important respect. The previous researchers abandon the question after they ask it: they argue that speech acts vary from culture to culture and that it is precisely in the domain of pragmatics where mis-intercultural communication is most likely to occur, but they do not say *how* intercultural communication – either failed or successful – is supposed to take place between speakers of languages that are not mutually intelligible. Obviously, mis-intercultural communication is a risk only when speakers of distinct

linguistic systems come into contact with each other *and* have the opportunity to converse. To do this, they must use a common language. It seems almost simplistic to point this out, but in none of the studies in the previous section have speakers of the relevant languages – other than the researchers themselves – been in a situation where they possibly could have mis-interculturally communicated. Consequently, those studies are purely academic, in the sense that they are without practical application. And this is how the present studies differ from them.

The present studies do address the issue of opportunity for intercultural communication: they are concerned with speakers of different cultural backgrounds conversing with each other in a common language. There are two scenarios for this situation. In the first scenario, that common language is the native language (the L1) of only one of the two parties; for the other party it is either a second or a foreign language (an L2). In this case, we are dealing with different cultures. This would be the case, for example, if a French woman and a Dutch woman were conversing in French. This type of study is reviewed in Section 1.2.1.<sup>5</sup> Or, in the other scenario, the common language is the native language of both parties. In this case, we are dealing not with different cultures, but with different *subcultures*. For example, if New York Jewish Americans were conversing with other American English speakers, they would all be conversing in (varieties of) their native language: English. Studies of this type are reviewed in Section 1.2.2.

### **1.2.1. Pragmatic differences within a common language: L1 vs. L2**

For the most part, researchers who have looked at speech act differences in a language that is an L1 for only some of the interactants are second language acquisition

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Of course, it is entirely possible that these two may converse in a language that is an L2 for *each* of them: if, for example, these French and Dutch women were speaking in a third language, like English. However, this type of configuration has apparently not been studied.

specialists who have an interest in intercultural communication issues. As Wolfson (1989: 36) puts it, “most language teaching specialists agree that the aim of second language instruction should be to facilitate learners’ acquisition of communicative competence.” Koike (1989: 279) defines communicative competence as “the speaker’s knowledge and use of rules of appropriateness and politeness which dictate the way the speaker will understand and formulate speech acts.” So, second language acquisition researchers like Boxer (1993), King (1990), and Koike (1989), have investigated the ways that speech acts are performed in a variety of target languages in the hopes of enhancing the communicative, pragmatic, or sociolinguistic competence of their students. Of course, native speakers apply these rules almost instinctively. It is non-native speakers who need to learn the L2 rules.

The basic assumption is that if the rules of social interaction in the L1 and L2 differ, then the non-native speaker’s production and interpretation of speech acts in the target language may not adequately correspond to established expectations of directness, politeness, and so forth that native speakers have. Consequently, language learners may be too direct or indirect, too explicit or not explicit enough *based upon the norms in their home cultures*. This could effect interaction between native and non-native speakers. For example, Boxer (1993) found during her work on indirect complaints (ICs) that language learners may lose the opportunity to *use* the target language in interaction with native speakers if they lack pragmatic competence in the target language. An IC is a complaint that is not directed at the person to whom it is addressed, nor can the person to whom it is addressed have any power to correct the situation. Thus, the addressee’s face is not threatened as it would necessarily be in a direct complaint. A direct complaint, being inherently face-threatening, is not conducive to extended discourse, while an IC is. Not only are ICs conducive to extended discourse, but in (American) English they are sometimes used to establish rapport as in the following simple hypothetical scenario:

A: ‘Look how I am suffering.’

B: ‘Oh, I know; isn’t it terrible? Let’s talk about it.’

Boxer found that Japanese students of English are often not familiar with this

functional use of ICs in (American) English and that, consequently, they often alienate their English-speaking conversation partners by reacting ‘inappropriately.’ The language teacher, by being aware of this kind of cultural difference, can help students avoid alienating or offending their interlocutors.

King’s (1990) perspective is somewhat different. King, unlike Boxer and Koike, is not concerned with L1 and L2 pragmatic rules clashing. Her goal is simply to advocate bringing authentic materials into the foreign language classroom.<sup>6</sup> In encountering authentic materials, the foreign language student risks encountering the occasional speech act – e.g. “*Buy a house...*” (66) – which King sees as a good opportunity to teach the culture of the target language. So, even though her purpose is different, she does share the belief that pragmatics, and specifically speech acts, if not a mirror of culture, are at least a product of it.

De Kadt (1998) adopts yet another approach to L1 / L2 speech act studies. She studied interactions between black and white South Africans and concluded that they cannot be explained adequately in terms of intercultural communication alone. She asserts that miscommunication, even if it is intercultural, is not necessarily *mis-intercultural* communication as I have defined it here; it may be based on more than just cultural differences. She asks if it is “possible to explain such instances of intercultural interaction adequately in terms of cultural difference alone” (250). It should be noted that she is using miscommunication in a special sense: communication may actually take place in instances of miscommunication. She says that the reason for the communication may actually be satisfied, but “to a limited degree only, and at a considerable cost. What is not achieved is the appropriate mutual evaluation of the two participants in each interaction; and the cost of success is likely to be the confirmation and perpetuation of typical stereotypes about the ethnic other” (252).

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Authentic materials are texts, both written and spoken, that were produced not for language learners but for native speakers. This includes language samples taken from magazine and newspaper advertisements, comic strips, radio and television broadcasts, and movies, to name just a few types.

She studied a very small group of women interacting in mixed-racial pairs in English in post-apartheid South Africa. English was the native language of the white women and a second language for the black (Zulu) women. There was also a control group of Zulu women interacting in their native language. The speech act with which she was specifically concerned was complaints. She found that in this particular context, there were three areas of difference between these cultural groups that needed to be taken into account in order to explain the miscommunication, as she defines it: (1) the linguistic inequality of the participants due to different levels of proficiency in the language used: L1 English vs. L2 English; (2) cultural influence about how one should make a complaint; and (3) social inequality caused by remnant questions of power schemes left over from apartheid. Regarding the cultural influence, de Kadt found that the white women tended to approach complaining from the perspective that less is better: complain the least possible; just hint at it; indirectness is good. The black women tended to approach the problem from the perspective that in order to show respect for the addressee, it is necessary to be direct with her, in order to communicate to her that she is seen as an adult and not an immature child. But closer inspection indicated that the situation was much more complex than a simple white indirectness vs. black directness opposition, which de Kadt explains is why the other factors of linguistic and social equality must be considered as well. Yes, intercultural communication is an important consideration, but, in this context, if we were to consider cultural differences alone, then we would essentially fail to capture the complex nature of race relations in South Africa.

So, while the specific aspects of culture that are important in explaining mis-intercultural communication may vary from situation to situation, the different cultures must have the opportunity to come together and interact in a common language. Those opportunities for interaction can be as rare as when using authentic materials in the foreign language classroom (King) or as common as groups that speak two different languages coming into contact on a daily basis (de Kadt) or somewhere in between (Boxer, Koike). Or, those cultures could be constitutive parts of a larger culture that share a common language, albeit likely with some variation. This is where I turn now: to

those examples of American subcultures interacting in (varieties of) American English.

### 1.2.2. Discourse differences within a common language: D1 vs. D2

Sometimes when people from different cultural backgrounds interact, they do so devoid of any question of inequality caused by differing levels of proficiency in the common language: the language used is everybody's native language. Or, more precisely, the language *varieties* used are mutually intelligible to all concerned parties. We can assume that everybody has comparable linguistic competence in his or her native language or dialect, so equality of linguistic competence is not an issue. This is not to say, of course, that this is the same as apparent linguistic equality, for we know all too well that the variety used by one subculture may be perceived as unequal, substandard, or deficient in relation to the 'standard' or dominant language variety. Nor is this to say that because everybody is interacting in (a variety of) their native language that there is no opportunity for mis-intercultural communication. The underlying premise in Hirschman's (1994) and Tannen's (1981a, 1981b) studies is that discourse can be significantly influenced by subculture.<sup>7</sup>

Hirschman's study investigates differences in conversational patterns between men and women. Thus, it is similar to any other 'traditional,' sociolinguistic variation study in that it investigates linguistic differences between speech communities, where, in this case, the speech communities are defined along gender lines. It differs from traditional sociolinguistic variation studies in that it looks at discourse features instead of syntactic, phonological, or other formal variants. Hirschman set out to quantify differences in the ways that men and women interact, focusing specifically on strategies used to control or direct the conversation.

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Hirschman's study was originally presented as a paper at the annual LSA meeting in 1973, and was then subsequently lost for approximately 20 years. It was finally published in 1994 after it was fortuitously 'rediscovered.' Hirschman, herself, was not aware that it had become such an important and oft-cited work in gender-variation studies (428-429).

Tannen's studies investigate interaction between subcultures that are defined along ethnic lines. She states (1981b) that misunderstandings are common between subcultures and that what appears to be a single culture, in reality, may not be. For Tannen (1981a), misunderstandings, or mis-intercultural communication, are frequently caused by differences in conversational *style*, which she defines as "all the ways speakers encode meaning in language and convey how they intend their talk to be understood." This includes pitch, loudness, intonation, speed, turn-taking mechanisms, and so forth. For her, conversational style is a major component of ethnicity, which may explain the breakdown of "conversational control mechanisms" (Tannen 1981b: 222) in conversation between participants of different ethnic backgrounds. For example, she found that New York Jews use specific strategies when engaged in conversation. Some of these aim to show interest in the speaker and what (s)he is saying. Just some of these specific strategies are: preferring personal topics, shifting topics abruptly, telling stories in rounds, using a fast rate of speech, and using "cooperative overlap and participatory listenership," (Tannen 1981a: 137) meaning that the addressee does not just sit idly by while the other speaks; (s)he responds even if the other is still talking. When these strategies are used with other members of the same subculture or ethnic group – with interactants who are accustomed to and who expect such behaviors – the flow of the conversation is actually enhanced; they expect these behaviors and know what to make of them. They are interpreted as appropriate for the situation. However, when these strategies are used with someone from a different subculture – with an interactant who does not expect such behaviors – the flow of the conversation is hindered precisely because the other does not expect them and is taken aback by them. Attitudes and stereotypes about the ethnic other may be forged based upon these simple cultural differences regarding what is expected when talking with others.

These studies, while somewhat distinct, are also very similar to the other studies that I have discussed to this point. The point of departure of Tannen's and Hirschman's studies is essentially the same as that for our other researchers: they all believe, at least to a certain extent, that language is, or at least *some aspects of* language and language use

are, determined by culture and can be studied as evidence of cultural norms. Tannen and Hirschman differ from the others only in their perception of *culture*. They argue for subcultural differences within a single language whereas the others speak only of cultural differences between languages. Consequently, of the articles reviewed here thus far, only Tannen's and Hirschman's entertain the possibility of pragmatic or stylistic variation within the English language. Everybody else assumes, to a certain extent, that English is monolithic in these respects. While they do tend to specify which national variety of English they are considering (American, British, Indian, etc.), which indicates that they are aware of some regional variation of the English language, they seem to assume no variation in the pragmatics of these vast regional varieties, such as in American English, for example.

There are a couple of possible reasons for this. First, they may believe that the American culture and the Australian culture, etc. are homogenous: there are no distinct subcultures within the larger, dominant culture. Thus, there is no reason to expect that subcultures would impact the rules of language usage. While this may – or may not – be relatively accurate for the small island country of England and the sparsely populated country of Australia, it is very unlikely to be an accurate description of the United States, given its history of conquest and immigration, or of India, where the caste system has established essentially total stratification of the society. And even if England and Australia were indeed relatively homogenous, wouldn't we still expect to find differences à la Hirschman – differences in the language usage patterns of men and women? So, it seems that this is a less-than-convincing reason. Second, they may believe that any existing subcultural influence is not strong enough to override the influence of the dominant culture. Tannen's and Hirschman's articles argue against this point. Tannen and Hirschman clearly believe that the subcultures that they examine are distinct enough to exhibit pragmatic variation. The articles that I examine in the next section provide more support for this position. However, the authors of those articles adopt a somewhat different perspective from and have a different purpose than the authors of the articles in the preceding sections.

### 1.3. Pragmatic and discourse studies specifically concerned with AAE

These studies are specifically concerned with African American English (AAE), but not in the tradition of most sociolinguistic studies that tend to focus on formal variants in, for example, syntax or phonology. The formal variants of AAE have been so extensively studied and commented upon by a wide range of sociolinguists that it is not possible to review anywhere near all of the work done in this area; nor is this my purpose. I intend merely to highlight a few articles that are concerned with the pragmatics or discourse features of AAE.<sup>8</sup> They are, on one hand, Edwards (1989) and Diop (1996), and on the other hand, Richardson (1996).

In the first wave of these studies, Edwards and Diop seek to establish a link between AAE and African discourse patterns.<sup>9</sup> Diop attempts to establish this link directly to Africa while Edwards does so indirectly via an African heritage, with Guyana in South America. The idea is that if there are similarities between the speech practices of black Americans and Guyanese blacks, then this is most likely traceable to a common African influence which has been retained in each of these unrelated cultures.

Before looking at Edwards' indirect approach, I outline Diop's arguments. Diop tries to establish a link between AAE and African speech events by looking at *rapping*,

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Perhaps the first, and certainly one of the most influential studies of discourse in African American (Vernacular) English, but which I do not review here, is Labov's (1972a) "Rules for Ritual Insults," in which he studies the speech event of *sounding*. Sounding – a.k.a., playing the dozens, capping, signifying – is a language game, a contest of verbal prowess, common among (especially male) African American adolescents in which the participants insult each other, each other's families, and, especially, each other's mothers.

Another, similar and noteworthy study, which I do not review here either, is Kochman's (1972) "Toward an Ethnography of Black American Speech Behavior."

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On this point Edwards and Diop bear similarities to Morgan (1998) and Smitherman (1977), who also contend that there is a direct cultural and linguistic connection between African Americans and Africans.

*signifying*, and (*playing*) *the dozens* in AAE. Rapping is simply “boastful talk” (Diop 1996: 146); *signifying*, much less clearly defined, is taken to be simply a language game involving verbal insults; *playing the dozens*, then, is a specific kind of *signifying*, which is explained to be a language game in which “verbal insults [are] directed not to the opponent but to his/her mother” (Diop 1996: 147). He asserts that these have their point of origin in the language games of the Wolof and Fulani ethnic group cultures in West Africa. For Diop, this means that AAE is more closely associated with West African culture – the point of origin of the slaves that were brought to this country in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century – than it is with Anglo-Saxon American culture. He says “that three hundred years of separation have not succeeded in destroying the basic Africanness of African-American cultures and ... languages” (151), but the simple fact of the matter is that he has just not established the connection that he desires. He does show that these speech practices in African American culture and in West African culture are similar, but he has not shown that the similarities are anything more than coincidental. Perhaps Edwards’ indirect method will prove to be more effective at establishing this kinship.

Edwards compares three related speech events – called *suurin*, *koocharin*, and *grannin* – used by black speakers in Guyana and similar speech events used by blacks in the United States. All three of these Guyanese speech events use *insincerity* to attempt “to get the auditor(s) to do something of benefit to the speaker” (Edwards 1989: 225). They either seek to manipulate via flattery or to persuade via (empty) threats – i.e. bluffs – and consequential intimidation. He says that members of black communities outside of Africa – both African Americans and Guyanese / Carribean blacks – are constantly on the look-out for somebody who may try to manipulate or fool them with such *insincerity* and that they place special value on the verbal skills that would allow one to manipulate or fool another in this way. Further, he says that African American speech culture is distinct from the mainstream American speech culture in that the former, as well as black Guyanese speech culture, is hearer-based, while the latter is speaker-based. It is the hearer’s responsibility to interpret and decide how to react. The speaker need not claim any intent to *play*; the hearer has to decide how to respond.

Like Diop, Edwards has established similarities between speech genres in various African-originated peoples at various locations throughout the world and differences between speech genres of those same African-originated peoples from the mainstream cultures in which they are found. He also points out that their level of conventionality and saliency in these diverse African-originated cultures is too striking to be simply coincidental. He states that these practices

resemble speech genres found in many speech cultures with significant black populations. Undoubtedly, all speech cultures have verbal means of courting, cajoling, and frightening [which are approximate equivalents of *suurin*, *koocharin*, and *grannin*, respectively], but not all speech cultures have conventionalized these behaviors and made them salient and socially significant aspects of their vernacular culture as black communities have (228).

In the second, and final, wave of these studies, Richardson considers speech acts in AAE.<sup>10</sup> However, her approach to speech acts is drastically different from any of the

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Richardson (1996) explicitly refers to the language variety in her study not as African American English, but as African American *Vernacular* English (AAVE). However, regardless of which definition of ‘vernacular’ we use, this is most likely an inaccurate label in this case. On the one hand, the term ‘vernacular’ is used to refer to the most casual, natural, and systematic form of the language that any individual will use, for example, in interaction with family and friends when (s)he is not monitoring his or her speech (Labov 1970). I call this the individual vernacular. On the other hand, ‘vernacular’ is used to describe a systematic, non-standard (and very often stigmatized) language variety used by a larger, often marginalized, speech community (Labov 1972b). I refer to this as the collective vernacular. For example, Labov (1972b: xiii) describes AAVE (then referred to as BEV – the black English vernacular) as “that relatively uniform grammar found in its most consistent form in the speech of black youth from 8 to 19 years old who participate fully in the street culture of the inner cities.”

This is not where Richardson’s language data comes from. Her study involves language samples taken from papers written by African American students for a college composition class. As such, it is most definitely highly-monitored language, and not representative of the individual vernacular. Also, as her subjects are college students, it is much more likely that they are *lames* (Labov; 1972b) than members of the vernacular culture. Labov (1972b: 287) describes lames as follows: “At first glance, lames appear to be members of the [vernacular] community; they are much more accessible to the outsider than members are; and the limitations of their knowledge are not immediately evident. But the result ... may be an inaccurate or misleading account of the vernacular

other speech act researchers that we have encountered. She approaches AAE speech acts from the viewpoint of a college composition class. She is concerned with the possible misinterpretation on the part of composition graders of the indirect speech acts used by African Americans in writing assignments. She asks whether composition teachers are equipped to correctly interpret the rhetorical-cultural uses of indirect speech acts that they may encounter in the writing samples of their African American students. For Richardson (1996: 93), as is the case for so many of the researchers that we have encountered, “culture is reflected in the use of language.” The specific culture-revealing speech act in which Richardson is interested is that of *signifying*.

Precisely what Richardson means by ‘signifying’ is not perfectly clear, but she does not use it in the same way as Diop or Labov. She seems, in essence, to be using ‘signifying’ simply as a synonym for indirectness. She offers Smitherman’s (1977) definition, which, for her, is the traditional definition, but she does not apply it. Smitherman (1977: 118-119) defines signifying as “the verbal art of insult in which a speaker humorously puts down, talks about, needles – that is, signifies on – the listener. Sometimes signifyin (also siggin) is done to make a point, sometimes it’s just for fun.” Richardson (1996: 91) goes on to state that “in [her] study, a passage which replicates an event in which the traditional AAVE concept of signifying occurred will be referred to as signifying. Secondly, signifying refers to AAVE discourse structures which demonstrate

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culture.” This is because “whenever there is a contrast between SE [Standard English] and BEV, the language of the Lames is shifted dramatically towards SE. In many cases, this leads to a close alignment between the Lames and white nonstandard vernaculars” (Labov 1972b: 271).

Diop (1996) and Edwards (1989) much more likely examine AAVE than Richardson does, but they do not refer to it as such. Because of this uncertainty as to whether or not we are actually dealing with African American *Vernacular* English, I treat all of these – as well as the present study – as studies of a common language variety called simply African American English (AAE). Unfortunately, this is a very vague and also potentially misleading term: Labov (1972b: xiii) explains that the term AAE (then BE, or Black English) “might best be used for the whole range of language forms used by black people in the United States: a very large range indeed, extending from the Creole grammar of Gullah ... to the most formal and accomplished literary style.”

use of indirection to make points. These are referred to as signifying structures or signifying situations.” So, she somewhat confusingly opts for a dual concept of ‘signifying’ – it is both ritual insult and simple indirectness used to make any point. This is unfortunate, for while indirectness is indeed a characteristic of signifying (Smitherman 1977), not all indirectness can be classified as signifying. Further, in none of the students’ passages, or at least in none of the three that made it into the study, are there any instances of signifying as ritual insult.

In Richardson’s study, nine European American, seven African American, and one Asian writing instructor were asked to interpret the locutionary content, the illocutionary intent, and the desired perlocutionary effect in three passages with signifying structures or situations written by African American students. In order for the instructors to fully comprehend the meaning of the indirect speech acts, they had to understand the *perlocutionary* effect that the student authors intended to produce in their audience. This is surprising because, for Austin (1962), it is primarily the *illocutionary* force, and not the perlocutionary effect, of speech acts that is important.

Richardson (1996: 99) concludes “that the African American instructors, as a whole, and the Asian instructor had higher levels of interpretive ability in comparison to the European American instructors.” For the African American and European American instructors this conclusion is unjustified: the African American writing instructors did not have any more success correctly interpreting the indirectness in the African American students’ writing samples than European American instructors did.<sup>11</sup> Even if we concern

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<sup>11</sup>

A chi-square analysis (mine) of the African American and the European American instructors’ interpretations of the locutionary content, the illocutionary intent, and the perlocutionary intent of the signifying structures / situations in the three student passages, combined, shows that  $X^2 = 0.98$ . The Asian instructor’s interpretations are not considered here.

Although I do not have any statistical information to confirm my suspicions, I suspect that this may be unfounded for the Asian instructor as well, for in only one case out of a possible six did (s)he correctly grasp *either* the students’ illocutionary intent *or* the desired perlocutionary effect of the indirectness. (There were three passages each involving a locutionary, an illocutionary, and a perlocutionary interpretation; three

ourselves only with the instructors' success at interpreting the students' illocutionary and perlocutionary intent, which may be much more elusive than the mere locutionary content, *especially* for members of other groups, the African American instructors were still no more successful than the European American instructors.<sup>12</sup> Based upon what we have seen elsewhere, it is the members of other cultures and subcultures that we would expect to run the most risk of suffering from mis-intercultural communication, but Richardson's data does not support this.

#### 1.4. Conclusion

After having reviewed articles that are assumed to be representative of that which is available in the area of pragmatics, although not exclusively in the area of speech act variation, we have seen that the relevant studies are, almost universally, inspired by intercultural communication and the sociology of language. The sociology of language holds that language data can serve as evidence in cultural studies because language is shaped by culture. Intercultural communication is concerned with the ways that members of different cultures or subcultures interact and the potential miscommunication between these parties because of cultural differences.

The studies reviewed fall into three main categories. In the first category are those studies that look at speech act differences between different languages, remembering that when we mention speech act differences, what we really mean is that the *realizations* of particular speech acts differ. These studies challenge notions of universality in speech acts, and specifically politeness as developed by Brown and Levinson (1987). The

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illocutionary plus three perlocutionary equals six total opportunities.)

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Another chi-square analysis (also mine) of the African American and European American instructors' interpretations of the students' illocutionary and perlocutionary intent of the signifying structures / situations – but not their locutionary content – resulted in  $X^2=1.00$ . Again, the instructor interpretations of all three of the student passages were combined. Again the Asian instructor's interpretations were not considered.

second category, for the most part, consists of those studies that seek a practical application for the studies in the first category. For pragmatic or speech act differences to produce mis-intercultural communication, the members of the respective cultures must have the opportunity to interact in a common language. This may occur when members of distinct cultures interact or when members of subcultures interact. Finally, the third category contains those studies that are the natural continuation of the studies that consider different subcultures in interaction. These studies are concerned with speech acts and speech events in a particular subculture in the United States: that of African Americans. Here, the purpose may be either to establish a connection to African cultures or to establish a rupture from the majority, historically Anglo-Saxon, American culture.

What we should note as striking, based upon the information in this chapter, is the following. Assuming that we already know a little bit about traditional language variation studies (in the United States), we notice that they tend to focus on the formal aspects of the language – typically syntactic and phonological variants. In the present articles, we find evidence which indicates that we should be able to study variation of the pragmatics and discourse patterns of a language ... *if* the speech communities that we would study are distinct enough to have developed or retained distinct rule systems of social interaction. Based upon the studies by Hirschman and Tannen, who helped to lay the groundwork for variation studies that look at non-formal variants, and the studies by Edwards, Diop, and Richardson, who focus specifically on AAE, it would seem completely plausible to combine these two and conduct variation studies that look at non-formal variants between AAE and other dialects of American English, or between any two varieties of any given language, provided, again, that the cultural differences between them are significant.<sup>13</sup>

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While it is not my purpose here to argue that African American culture is a distinct subculture of the American culture, support can be found in Diop and Kochman, among others (see further references in Chapter 3, Section 3.2.2.1). Diop (1996: 145) states that “one finds that anthropologists have more readily admitted the difference between African-American culture and white-American culture [than linguists have], thus allowing the possibility of conceiving a relationship between African-American culture

Surprisingly, it appears that nobody has ever looked at speech acts in AAE (or any other variety of American English, for that matter) as an area of focus for variation studies. This is a gap in the field that should be addressed. Richardson's study is the closest that we have come to this, and her study is severely limited in this respect as it looks *not* at the variation in speech acts between AAE and another variety of American English, but at whether the perlocutionary force of those speech acts is adequately understood when they occur in college compositions. As such, Richardson's study may look more at speech act processing than variation of speech act production – but, nonetheless, with a hint of implicit variation. Were there no variation, then we would assume no lapses in comprehension for any of the subjects. Yet, there are lapses; even the African American evaluators in Richardson's study had difficulty fully comprehending the speech acts produced by the African American student authors. This is unexpected because it is an instance of mis-*intracultural* communication.

My position is that there is no reason why we cannot focus speech acts in variation studies. Studies like those reviewed in this chapter – studies that were born out of disdain for the ethnocentric slant of earlier work in speech acts – have begun to make progress in looking at pragmatic variation, but they have made only limited progress. This is because they assume that the cultures under investigation are homogeneous.<sup>14</sup> If we look for dialect variation, do their findings hold?

In order to argue my position, I conduct a study conducted along the same lines as

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with 'substrate' African cultures." Kochman (1981: 8) observes that "the chief reason cultural differences are ignored is that blacks and whites *assume* they are operating according to identical speech and cultural conventions.... This assumption ... speaks to the general public failure to recognize that black norms and conventions in these areas differ from those of whites" (emphasis added).

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A notable exception is found in an article by Wolfson and Manes (1981: 408; endnote 3). They acknowledge that "it may well be that the analysis presented here holds for all varieties of American English. However, since the data upon which it is based were collected by and among speakers of the standard dialect in and around Charlottesville, Virginia and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, we wish to be cautious in making claims for the validity of this analysis for all American English speakers."

those reviewed here but with the following important difference: this study, which focuses on the speech act of advising, examines data collected not from speakers of two separate languages, as is typically the case, but from two distinct subcultures, or speech communities, of American English speakers. These subcultures are African Americans and European Americans.

The purpose of this thesis, then, is to begin to fill this gap in both standard variation studies and in cross-cultural speech act studies. The subsequent chapters in this thesis address the following issues: comments on methodologies that are often used to study speech acts as well as a description and justification of the methodology to be used here (Chapter 2); anticipated findings of the study and actual results yielded (Chapter 3); weaknesses and limitations of this particular study, directions for further research on this topic, and concluding remarks (Chapter 4). Finally, the questionnaires used to elicit written role-play data are presented in Appendix A, a table indicating the number of subjects, a table indicating the average number of head acts they provided, a table showing the results by situation, and a table showing the results by advisee are presented in Appendix B.

## 2.0. Data collection in formal linguistics and sociolinguistics

The field of linguistics is a vast one, the breadth of which is mirrored by the diversity of data collection methodologies that the various fields of linguistics employ. For example, in formal linguistics, data collection traditionally involves tapping native speaker intuitions. This is when the linguist asks a native speaker of the relevant language or dialect, who could possibly even be the linguist him- or herself, to determine whether a given form or sentence is grammatical. While this method of data collection is acceptable in that branch of linguistics, it is generally seen as inappropriate for a field such as sociolinguistics. Sociolinguists typically interview and record members of the targeted speech community to obtain samples of their language. This may involve a certain amount of direct probes, where the interviewer asks questions about the language variety, but this does not yield the most desirable linguistic data. Labov (1970: 19) explains that “as long as we are asking questions and receiving answers, the speaker is using a relatively ‘careful’ or ‘consultative’ style, and that he possesses a more ‘casual’ or intimate style with which he argues with his friends or quarrels with his family.” It is this casual, natural, unmonitored, unchecked language that is the sociolinguist’s primary concern. Thus, the researcher is faced with a paradox, the *observer’s paradox*: “we must observe how people speak when they are not being observed” (Labov 1972b : xvii). The accomplished sociolinguist uses various techniques to solve the observer’s paradox, or, more precisely to “approximate a solution [to it], since it can never be entirely solved in principle” (Labov 1972b : xviii).

Linguists conducting cross-cultural speech act studies, too, have employed a variety of methods to collect data. In this chapter I focus on issues surrounding the collection of speech act data: what some of the most commonly-used methods are and what their advantages and disadvantages are. I conclude the chapter by describing how I collect the data for the present study.

## 2.1. How'd you do that?

Cross-cultural speech act studies have employed a variety of methodologies to collect speech act data. Sometimes, even a single study will employ a variety of methodologies. In fact, it has been argued (Cohen 1996; Rose and Ono 1994; Wolfram 1986) that the only way to thoroughly investigate *any* speech behavior is via a multi-method approach. Rose and Ono (1995: 207) argue that “we should not expect a single data source to provide all of the necessary or desired insights into speech act usage. Probably each data type will provide different information.” The various methods that have been employed to collect speech act data fall into two broad categories: those that, in harmony with the overall goal of sociolinguistics, aim to observe and collect naturally-occurring language and those that, in harmony with Labov’s proposed solution to the observer’s paradox, aim to elicit *approximations of* naturally-occurring language.

### 2.1.1. Naturalistic data

There are researchers who are of the opinion that the *only* valid object of study is naturally-occurring, or naturalistic, language: language that was not produced specifically for the purpose of being studied. This is, without question, the most desirable type of data (Wolfson and Manes 1981; Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper 1989a; Cohen 1996; Hinkel 1997). Unfortunately, it is often also the most difficult type of data to observe and collect (Olshtain and Cohen 1983; Cohen 1996). Nonetheless, this philosophy’s faithful adherents have made and continue to make admirable efforts to access data of this type. In order to observe naturally-occurring data, investigators rely on a variety of strategies. One of these strategies is to essentially spy on people engaged in conversation and to record as much as possible of what they say either in the form of field notes or on video or audio tape, *ideally* without them being aware that they are being observed. Belyaeva (1996), Boxer (1993), Hirschman (1994), and Tannen (1981a) are just some of the researchers who have done this. However, the subjects are not always ignorant of being

observed: in Hirschman's research, the subjects were even brought together for the express purpose of having their conversations recorded, but they were not aware that it was their language that was the focus of the study. Hirschman (1994: 430) and her assistants told their subjects "that [they (the researchers)] were conducting a study of lifestyle alternatives. They [the subjects] were paired off, and each pair was given a question to discuss for 10 minutes in a room with a tape recorder. At the end of the 10 minutes, the two pairs were interrupted, partners were rotated, and a new question was provided."

Another strategy that has been used to observe language that was not produced for the express purpose of being studied is to make an inventory of speech acts that occur in scripted conversations in literature and film. Kachru (1991: 300-301; 1992: 380) justifies this approach by asserting that "conversations in literary works have to 'ring true' to be convincing" and that "such data are certainly *as* 'authentic' as those elicited by questionnaire or role-play-type instruments" (emphasis added).<sup>15</sup> Just a couple of the researchers who have used this methodology include Belyaeva (1996) and Kachru (1991, 1992). If we include in this category examination of what is typically referred to in the field of second language acquisition as authentic materials then we must also add King (1990) to the list.

### **2.1.2. Simulated naturalistic data**

In spite of the desirability of naturalistic language data, not all researchers use it as the focus of their studies. There are inherent obstacles to gaining access to, observing, and recording this type of data. Consequently, what some researchers do, instead, is attempt to approximate naturalistic language. A frequently-used tool to achieve this approximation is the Discourse Completion Test (DCT). Another is the oral role-play.

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These questionnaire and role-play-type instruments are tools that are frequently used in speech act studies. I discuss them in Section 2.1.2.1. and Section 2.1.2.2.

### 2.1.2.1. The DCT: a constrained production instrument

The Discourse Completion Test, also called a Discourse Completion *Task*, is precisely what its name implies: a test or task in which the subject writes down a sentence, question, or phrase to complete a conversation. Hinkel (1997: 2), citing Kasper and Dahl (1991), classifies DCTs as “highly constrained instruments ... that ... elicit production data.” The DCT was originally developed by Blum-Kulka (1982) to investigate speech acts in L2 Hebrew (Wolfson 1989; Blum-Kulka, Kasper, and House 1989a; Rose and Ono 1995). A year later, she relied again on her ‘invention’ to conduct a cross-cultural study of requests in L1 and L2 Hebrew and in L1 (Canadian) English. In that study, the person completing the DCT was presented with an incomplete dialogue and a setting in which it was taking place. At some point near the end of the dialogue, there was a blank line for the subject to fill in the missing rejoinder, thus completing the discourse with the desired speech act. The following examples are taken from Blum-Kulka (1983: 53):

- D1. *At the restaurant*  
Dan: What would you like to eat?  
Ruth: I don’t know, let’s have a look at the menu.  
Dan (to the waiter): Waiter \_\_\_\_\_ ?
- D6. *Mother and son*  
Peter: Mum, where is the hairbrush?  
Mother: In the bathroom, of course. Peter, your hair is down to your knees.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Peter: I don’t want a haircut!

Noteworthy is that both of these items, simply via the punctuation, *necessarily* call for a question on the part of the informant assuming the roles of Dan and Mother. While this is not the case in all of the DCT items, we must expect that it would be highly unlikely to encounter anything other than an indirect request here. Also, assuming that the DCT items in Blum-Kulka’s appendix are ‘drawn to scale,’ the amount of available space – or lack thereof – for the response is striking, especially in the case of D1 where there is even less space allotted than in D6. As a result of similar observations, other

researchers would modify the DCT in later studies to suit their research needs. Rintell and Mitchell (1989), Kamisli and Dogancay-Aktuna (1996), and Hinkel (1997), for example, all opted, for a variety of reasons, to use an open-ended model. The following items were used by Kamisli and Dogancay-Aktuna (1996:202):

You are a corporate executive. Your assistant submits a proposal for reassignment of secretarial duties in your division. Your assistant describes the benefits of this new plan, but you believe it will not work.

You:

You work in a corporation. Your boss presents you with a plan for reorganization of the department that you are convinced will not work. Your boss says: "Isn't this a great plan?"

You:

Likewise, Rintell and Mitchell (1989: 251) modified the scenarios used in their DCT from the original format to an open-ended format, as follows:

Original question:

Jack missed a class the day before, and would like to borrow Judith's notes.

Jack: \_\_\_\_\_

Judith: Sure, but let me have them back before class next week.

Revised question:

Jack, a student, was sick and missed one of the classes of the course he is enrolled in. He would like to borrow another student's notes. The other student's name is Judith. Imagine you are Jack. What do you say to get Judith to lend her notes for the class you missed?

So, a DCT need no longer strictly follow Blum-Kulka's original closed-format model described above. Actually, the label 'Discourse Completion Test' has come to refer to more or less *any* written questionnaire-type elicitation tool where the subject supplies the speech act(s) under investigation. One notable exception, which I address in Section 2.2.2., is the Multiple Choice Questionnaire, or MCQ.

DCTs have been used extensively in speech act studies. Among those studies reviewed in Chapter One where the researchers use a DCT to collect *at least part of* their data are Belyaeva (1996), Kamisli and Dogancay-Aktuna (1996), Koike (1989), and

Marquez-Reiter (1997). Of these, Kamisli and Dogancay-Aktuna (1996) and Marquez-Reiter (1997) collected their data *exclusively* through DCTs. Also, all of Koike's (1989) *production* data came from DCTs.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, sometimes only a portion of the collected data comes from DCT responses. Although Belyaeva (1996: 14) collected more tokens of advice from DCT responses, she says that her *main* data was “drawn from speech situations heard and noted in natural conversation ... and from modern Russian and American prose and films.”

Kalisz (1993) also used an elicitation test to collect data for his study, but he does not specify whether or not it was a DCT, per se. Likewise, Richardson (1996) and Tannen (1981b) used questionnaires in their studies, although the questionnaires that they used are very likely not DCTs, for they probe subjects' *interpretations* of given language forms instead of their own language *production*.

DCTs have also been used to collect at least some of the data in an extensive list of other, similar studies, including, but by no means limited to Beebe (1985); Beebe and Cummings (1985); Beebe and Takahashi (1989); Blum-Kulka (1982, 1983); Hinkel (1997); Kasper and Dahl (1991); Olshtain and Cohen (1983); Rintell and Mitchell (1989); Rose (1994); Rose and Ono (1995); and Wolfson, Marmor, and Jones (1989). There are many others who have also deemed it worthwhile to collect data in this manner. Rose and Ono (1995: 194) indicate that Weizman (1993), Takahashi and Beebe (1993), and Olshtain and Weinbach (1993) “relied *exclusively* on DCT data” (emphasis added). Judging from the large number of studies that have benefitted from their use, and some exclusively so, DCTs have clearly been judged to be a useful tool for approximating actual speech acts.

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<sup>16</sup>

She also tested L2 *comprehension* of speech acts.

### **2.1.2.2. Oral role-plays**

Oral role plays are the same as open-ended DCTs, except that the subject provides his or her response orally; (s)he does not indicate what (s)he *would* say but actually *says* it. That is, (s)he is asked to play a role as if (s)he were actually in the situation at that moment. Also as with DCTs, (s)he may be assuming the identity of some fictional character or reacting as him- or herself. Oral role-plays, although much less common than DCTs, have been used from time to time. De Kadt (1998: 251), for example, used the following oral role-play scenario in her study: “You two are students who share accommodation, and one of you is constantly leaving the kitchen in a mess. You take up the issue with her.” The subjects (all female) were left to decide who would play the role of the offender and who would take the issue up with her. Therefore, in this particular role-play, the subjects maintain their own identities, but imagine themselves in a hypothetical situation. Rintell and Mitchell (1989) also used oral role-plays, but their purpose was to investigate the impact that methodology may have on the elicitation of speech act data. I discuss their study in Section 2.2.1.

## **2.2. Do DCTs yield *natural-enough* data?**

Although DCTs in a variety of forms have been widely used in cross-cultural speech act studies, they are far from unanimously accepted as a valid data collection tool. There are advantages and disadvantages to using them. The spirit of this debate is summarized by Holmes and by Rintell and Mitchell. Holmes (1991: 124) asks whether written elicited data “can ... provide reliable information on the specific linguistic forms used to express particular speech act strategies” and Rintell and Mitchell (1989: 250) observe that “it is hard to tell how representative what subjects write on such a discourse completion test is of what they actually say in spontaneous conversation.” If DCTs are so common, it may be because, as Wolfson (1989: 70) explains it, researchers deem “the values to be gained by this method [to be] ... greater than the disadvantages.”

### 2.2.1. Support for DCTs

By their very design, DCTs probe, more or less directly, speaker intuitions. However, relying on speaker intuitions is not a new method of linguistic inquiry, nor is it a method exclusively employed by researchers investigating speech acts. Wolfram, Kochman, and Labov have all relied on or condoned tapping speaker intuitions *to a certain extent*. Labov (1972a: 292) says that “sounding practices are open to intuitive inspection. It is possible to ask a good sounder, ‘What would you say if somebody said to you . . . ’ and he will be glad to construct an answer.”<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Kochman (1972) benefits from speaker intuitions in his description of black American street behavior. He says “the following description and analysis is developed from information supplied mainly by blacks living within the inner city of Chicago. Their knowledge of the ... terms [rapping, shucking, jiving, running it down, gripping, copping a plea, signifying, and sounding], their ability to recognize and categorize the language behavior of others, ... and on occasion *to give examples themselves*, established them as reliable informants” (Kochman 1972: 242; emphasis added). He even took advantage of open-ended DCT-style questions, although it is unclear whether they were administered orally or in writing. That is, he described a variety of situations to some seventh-graders and asked them what they would say, as in:

*Situation:* You’re at the beach and they’ve got posted signs all over the beach and floating on the water and you go past the swimming mark and the sign says ‘Don’t go past the mark!’ How do you talk your way out of this to the lifeguard? (249)

and

*Situation:* What if you were in a store and were stealing something and the manager caught you? (249).

Wolfram (1986: 17) also advocates “some relaxation of categorical opposition to direct linguistic probes” which, in his opinion, can be used “as a *supplemental* ... data collection

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<sup>17</sup>

A brief explanation of *sounding* can be found in footnote 8, page 17.

technique” (emphasis added). He says

given the significance of these obstacles [to the direct elicitation of vernacular structures], there are social dialectologists who would rule against the admission of anything but naturalistic or quasi-naturalistic data as the basis for linguistic description. At the same time, however, we have seen that *there is both a practical and theoretical basis for desiring data which taps more directly the intuitions of native speakers*. In the following sections, I will take the position that it is possible, notwithstanding the inherent obstacles, to get some important data for analysis by conducting more direct probes of vernacular linguistic structures (12; emphasis added).

Although each of these researchers refers to the study of vernacular forms, and Wolfram explicitly so, their comments are equally applicable to the collection of data from speakers of more standard varieties. In addition to comments such as these advocating the use of direct probes, within reasonable limits, there are researchers who have spoken out specifically in favor of using DCTs for this in speech act studies. Wolfson, Marmor, and Jones (1989: 184) and Wolfson (1989: 72) summarize Beebe’s (1985) findings of some of the advantages of using DCTs. Those findings are that DCTs

are [an] effective means of:

- (1) gathering a large amount of data quickly;
- (2) creating an initial classification of semantic formulas and strategies that will occur in natural speech;
- (3) studying the stereotypical perceived requirements for a socially appropriate (though not always polite) response;
- (4) gaining insight into social and psychological factors that are likely to affect speech and performance; and
- (5) ascertaining the canonical shape of refusals, apologies, partings, etc. in the minds of the speakers of that language...

In addition to Beebe, other researchers including Beebe and Takahashi (1989); Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989a); Holmes (1991); Olshtain and Cohen (1983); Rintell and Mitchell (1989); Wolfson (1989); Wolfson, Marmor, and Jones (1989) have also echoed similar sentiments regarding the advantages of collecting data via DCTs. These sentiments typically revolve more around the speed and facility of data collection and the comparability of the data from one population to the next than around how representative the data is to actual, real-world language use.

While they do not address the issue of how representative DCT data is to real-world language use, Rintell and Mitchell (1989) take a step in that direction. They wanted to know if “the modality of data collection ... affect[s] the subject’s response” (260), so they compared written role-play data (i.e. DCT data) to oral role-play data. They consider the language produced by subjects in oral role-plays “to be a good indication of their ‘natural’ way of speaking” even if “we do not know to what extent their responses are representative of what the subject would say if he or she encountered the situation in real life” (Rintell and Mitchell 1989: 251). They found that the length of responses given during oral role-plays and on DCTs were comparable for native English speakers but not for nonnative speakers of English. They did not find any “characterizable difference in the linguistic form of the head act” (Rintell and Mitchell 1989: 257) for either native or nonnative speakers. That is, the use of the imperative, ‘could you,’ ‘would you,’ etc. is comparable in both their written and oral data. So, the elicitation method did not impact either the length of response (for native speakers) or the strategies employed. They conclude that any differences between the oral data and the written data are a result *not* of the methodology used, but of the level of linguistic competence of the subjects. So, where competent speakers are concerned, it does not matter whether oral or written role-play data is collected.

The authors do note one exception to this: in a written format, subjects can permit themselves to be more direct in some situations because they cannot be held accountable for what they say. They explain that

here is where we may be finding that methodology has affected the subjects’ manner of responding. It may be the case that, although direct, less-polite language seems appropriate for these situations [where the requester asks, not for a favor, but that an obligation be fulfilled], in a face-to-face encounter with another person ... some subjects are less comfortable using such direct language” (269).

Unfortunately, Rintell and Mitchell cannot conclude, based upon their comparisons, that DCT data is representative of natural language. They imply, however, that it is, although probably *less so* than oral data. Although they cannot logically draw any conclusions about the comparability of DCT data to actual language use, other

researchers can. Cohen (1996: 394) says that Bodman and Eisenstein (1988) found that (written) open-ended DCTs, (oral) role-plays, and tape-recorded naturally occurring conversations “produced similar results in terms of the words and expressions used. The written questionnaires were found to be *representative* but limited with regard to the quantity and range of responses” (emphasis added). Similarly, Beebe and Takahashi (1989: 201) explain that “Beebe and Cummings (1985) have demonstrated [that] for refusals, subjects’ intuitions about what they would say correspond closely to what other subjects actually did say in the same situation. They correspond in terms of the stereotypical form of the speech act they give – that is, the semantic formulas which they find it necessary to use.” So, although Rintell and Mitchell’s data does not permit them to conclude that DCT data (or oral role-play data) is representative of actual language use, other researchers’ data does allow us to draw this conclusion.

### **2.2.2. Opposition to DCTs**

In spite of the position outlined in the preceding section, the majority opinion is that DCTs do not yield reliable data, where reliable data is data that is representative of what speakers would actually say in a comparable real-life situation. Some researchers have found that the forms reported on DCTs are significantly different from forms observed in naturally-occurring speech. Rose and Ono (1995) explain that one such significant difference is that DCTs, by their lack of explicit instructions stipulating that the subject may opt out, may force a response where a person may not even say *anything* in a real-world situation. While some DCTs *do* explicitly state that the subject may opt out, Rose and Ono (1995: 205) claim that “most studies do not include this option, perhaps for fear of not eliciting the desired data.”

However, even with instructions presenting the possibility to opt out, subjects might *still* respond to a DCT situation while they may not in a similar real-life situation. This is arguably because it is infinitely easier to ‘speak up’ when we know that we cannot be held accountable for what we say. This also means that subjects can permit themselves to be much more direct, straightforward, and blunt than in those real-life

situations where they *would* actually say something. In the end, they may only be reporting what they would *like to say* in a given situation ... if only they could get away with it. According to Holmes (1991: 124), “respondents are more likely to be brief and direct in a hypothetical situation where they must write the answers and cannot rely on factors such as facial expression or intonation to make their meaning clear. In naturally occurring data [where we are ultimately responsible for what we say], hints turn up twice as often.” According to Hinkel (1997: 17), “Aston (1995) notes [that] the completers of DCTs are not faced with the social and psychological constraints of real-life interaction... They can be free to be overbearing and intrusive without consequence [sic] that is entailed in actual interaction, and do not need to be concerned about the social and pragmatic acceptability of their responses.”

Another possible reason that some believe that DCTs do not yield reliable data is that we are often simply unaware of our actual language production. Labov (1970: 23) explains, for example, that “few teachers are able to perceive that they themselves use the same nonstandard forms in their most casual speech [as their students do]; as we will see, almost everyone hears himself as using the norm which guides his speech production in most formal styles” *even if, or when, this is not the case*. Wolfson has been one of the most vocal researchers in arguing that we have poor intuitions about the ways that we speak (Wolfson and Manes 1980; Wolfson 1989; Wolfson, Marmor, and Jones 1989). With Marmor and Jones (1989: 181), she states that “when native speakers are asked to report what they or others would say in a given situation, their responses are often very different from the speech behavior which is actually observed” and that “sociolinguistic research has repeatedly demonstrated the inadequacy of native speaker intuitions.”

Wolfson (1989) and Wolfson, Marmor, and Jones (1989), once again citing Beebe (1985), summarize some specific ways in which reported, or elicited, speech acts may differ from naturally-occurring, or real-world, speech acts. They indicate that Beebe (1985) found that DCTs may elicit data that differs from natural speech in the following ways, to name just a few: with respect to (1) the actual words used, (2) the range of syntactic formulas and semantic strategies used, (3) the length of the utterance or the number of turns it takes to perform a given act, and (4) the amount of repetition and

elaboration that may occur.

Moreover, DCTs may tap into a formal style of language use. Wolfram contends that if any of our informants are nonstandard dialect speakers, we may have to take dialect shift into account. He says “given the socialization process related to metalinguistic probing, it is hardly surprising that vernacular speakers, when questioned directly about the forms of their language, will so frequently shift toward the standard” (Wolfram 1986: 9). Dialect shift occurs when speakers of a non-standard dialect use phonological, morphological, syntactic or other forms that are more representative of the standard dialect than their own. While Wolfram refers to spoken language, this is no less of a potentially real problem where DCTs are being used. Dialect shift, as it relates to DCT studies, would be a subject using a more formal *style* of language than what (s)he would normally use in relaxed conversation. Rintell and Mitchell (1989: 250) state that “subjects may perceive writing as a more formal activity than speaking, and thus choose to write more formal language on the questionnaire [than they may use in an interpersonal context].”

Because of these questions about the reliability of elicited data, Rose and Ono (1995) and Hinkel (1997), like Rintell and Mitchell (1989), investigated the impact of methodology on the reporting of speech acts. Rose and Ono and Hinkel, unlike Rintell and Mitchell who compared DCT data to oral role-play data, compared DCT data to multiple choice questionnaire (MCQ) data. An MCQ is precisely what its name implies: a questionnaire where a context and situation are described, followed by several possible responses, of which the subject is to pick the one that most closely resembles what (s)he believes (s)he would say if faced with that particular situation in that particular context.

Rose and Ono’s study was inspired by Rose’s (1994) study. Rose and Ono (1995: 206) explain that Rose had argued, based upon differences in the data collected by using an MCQ and a DCT, “that the MCQ data may be more representative [than DCT data] of actual language use.” However, it is impossible to conclude that *either* MCQ data *or* DCT data is more representative of actual language use than the other *when neither one of them has been compared to actual language use*. The only conclusions that can be drawn from

comparing A and B is that A and B are either similar to or different from each other; and *not* that A is similar to or different from C, or that B is similar to or different from C.

Recognizing Rose's unjustifiable conclusion, Rose and Ono (1995: 206-207) state, to their credit, that "simply assuming that the MCQ responses were more representative of face-to-face interaction and thus invalidated the DCT data would be begging the question." However, they unfortunately continue to make this assumption even though they know that it is unfounded. They "found significant differences between DCT and MCQ responses of the same type that Rose (1994) had found" (206). That is, they found a higher rate of opting out by subjects who completed an MCQ than by those who completed a DCT. Of course, this is not at all surprising since opting out was *not* presented as an option in their DCT, but it *was* an option in each of their MCQ items. While we would *expect* that there be a higher frequency of opting out when it is an explicit choice made available than when it is not, Rose and Ono conclude from this *not* that they were attempting to compare incomparable data, but that the type of elicitation tool has a significant impact upon the data collected. And while they do not say so, the implication throughout is that it is the DCT data which is unreliable – in spite of their realization that we cannot know "which questionnaire, if either, better represents face-to-face interaction" (Rose and Ono 1995: 207). That is, they continue to beg the question.

Hinkel (1997) also compared data collected from a DCT and from an MCQ. She found that native (American) English speakers' DCT responses of advice forms "were significantly different from, and more direct than," (16) their multiple choice responses. Unlike Rose or Rose and Ono, Hinkel's DCT *did* include specific instructions concerning the possibility to opt out. Nonetheless, as in Rose's and Rose and Ono's studies, this option was not frequently exercised. This seems to confirm Rose and Ono's results while maintaining more comparability between the elicitation tools. However, in spite of this increased consistency between them, DCTs and MCQs may still not be comparable: Hinkel (1997: 17) explains that "MC[Q] selections may ... involve different cognitive and experiential processes than the production of written responses." That is, DCTs yield *production* data while MCQs may measure *perceptions* of the most appropriate response, given a list of possibilities. So, naturally, if an elicitation test of some sort is going to be

used, care must be exercised in choosing the most appropriate one for what the subjects are being asked to do.

### **2.3. Is data collection even worth the trouble?**

Finally, it must be stated for the record that although a variety of approaches to collecting speech act data are available, some researchers either do not feel it necessary to collect data at all or do not deem it worthwhile to explain how they go about collecting data. Of those studies reviewed in Chapter One, the researchers who fall into this category are Diop, Edwards, and Wierzbicka. They each present examples to support their positions, so they must have obtained data from somewhere. If they did not collect *either* naturalistic *or* simulated naturalistic language data from their surrounding communities – and we cannot know, for they do not tell us – we have to suspect that they served as their own informants. This is generally regarded with disapproval in all but formal linguistics. Wolfram (1986: 4) argues that “the problem of data elicitation may have been trivialized by a generation of linguists content to describe their own dialect through isolated idiolectal introspection, but it remains significant for those who choose to give a valid account of language behavior as representative of a speech community.”

Clearly, data collection methodology is very important, to say the least. And while we have not reached agreement on precisely how speech act data should be collected, or what constitutes acceptable data, all researchers recognize the importance of having reliable data upon which they can support their claims, regardless of whether they generated it themselves, elicited approximations of real-world language, or observed naturalistic language. At this time, I discuss how I collect the data for the present study.

### **2.4. In search of acceptable and comparable data**

Given the importance of reliable language data in the various branches of linguistics, it is not surprising that methodology of linguistic investigation has been an issue of primary concern for quite some time. Labov (1972b: xviii) points out that, specifically

with respect to studies of African American Vernacular English, “given the current state of black-white relations in the United States, the reader should certainly want to know how any report ... was prepared.” Of course, this is not to say that methodology is an important consideration *only* in studies where race relations are relevant. Also, just as we need “comparable data” (Wolfram 1987: 42-43) from Dialect X at two distinct points in time, in either real or apparent time, to make any justifiable claims of diachronic variation within that dialect, we must have comparable data from Language X and Language Y (or Dialect X and Dialect Y) to talk about synchronic variation between these languages or language varieties.<sup>18</sup> As this need for comparable data relates to speech act variation studies, such as those discussed here, this means that the methodology used to elicit speech acts in one language (or dialect) should be the same in all of the languages (or dialects) under investigation.

This is exactly the type of consistency that naturally-occurring speech cannot provide: Beebe and Takahashi (1989: 215) state that “natural data give us many examples that are *not at all comparable* in terms of speakers, hearers, and social situations...” (emphasis added). Also, Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989a: 13) explain that “in CCSARP [the *Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project*] we were interested in getting a large sample, in seven countries, of two specific speech acts used *in the same contexts*” (emphasis added). So, in order to achieve the desired comparability of data, the CCSARP researchers employed a DCT.<sup>19</sup>

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Real time data is data that is collected at two (or more) distinct points in time, such as, for example, at twenty-year intervals. So data may have been collected in 1980 and again in 2000. Apparent time data is data that is collected at a single point in time. The time-depth is achieved by collecting data from speakers of different ages, such as, for example, from thirty-year-old members of the community and from ten-year-old members of the community. The language of the ten-year-olds is assumed to be representative of the language that the thirty-year-olds had twenty years ago.

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Cohen (1996: 387) describes the CCSARP as “one of the most comprehensive empirical studies of speech act behavior, for both its breadth and its depth ... which compared speech act behavior of native speakers of a number of different languages with the behavior of learners of those languages.”

### 2.4.1. DCT design and data collection

In spite of the unquestionable desirability of naturally-occurring language data, this study, like so many others, relies on data elicited by means of a DCT. Many factors were taken into account in determining the methodology to be used, but, ultimately, the decision came down to the need for comparable data that could be collected rapidly. It would have been impractical to attempt to collect sufficient ethnographic data from members of each of the targeted speech communities in a reasonable amount of time. Even if this were a possibility, there is reason to believe that the data from the two speech communities would not have been comparable. Using some sort of a questionnaire solves this problem. After all, one of the most frequently-cited advantages to using DCTs is the amount of data that can be collected in a relatively short time (Beebe 1985; Beebe and Takahashi 1989; Holmes 1991; Rintell and Mitchell 1989; Wolfson 1989; Wolfson, Marmor, and Jones 1989). Collecting data via a DCT, however, cannot be accomplished any more rapidly than collecting data via an MCQ. In fact, because of the simplicity of coding and tabulating the data, it would almost definitely take *less* time if an MCQ were used. So why did I choose a DCT over an MCQ for this study?

I decided to collect my data with a DCT and not an MCQ for the simple reason that I, as an investigator, am not comfortable with MCQs – *particularly* when a potentially-significant portion of the subjects completing them may be speakers of nonstandard dialects. I suspect – if only intuitively – that either they result in even more dialect shift than other questionnaire-type elicitation tools or they yield a higher frequency of opting out than other questionnaire-type tools *because they are too constrained*. If a subject – who is asked which of four possibilities best represents what she would say in a given situation – encounters answers that are written in a dialect other than her own, what are her choices? She can either choose the answer that *most accurately represents* what she thinks she would say – even though it may not be *anything at all* like what she thinks she would say – or she can opt out. Likewise, if those choices are written in standard English and the subject speaks a nonstandard dialect, she, too, can either choose a (more or less accurate) approximation or opt out. Given that the subjects completing the MCQs may not like the

choices made available to them, it is not very surprising that Rose and Ono (1995) and Hinkel (1997) found a higher frequency of subjects opting out when completing MCQs than when completing DCTs.

It is for this same reason that I use an open-ended DCT instead of a closed-format DCT. I suspect that such a format would have a similar effect as what I hypothesize for MCQs: that it may result in stronger dialect shift by forcing the subject into a response that is not even a close approximation of what he *thinks* he would say. If some of 'his words' are already provided for him, and in standard English, how likely is he to respond with language of a less formal style, let alone of another *dialect*?

By providing the subjects only with a situation and not any words that they supposedly uttered, this will *hopefully* minimize any dialect shift or style shifting that may result from using a written elicitation tool. Of course, there is no guarantee of this, and dialect shift and the use of formal style are very real possibilities for *all* subjects, especially given the written format of the elicitation test.

The scenarios that I include in my DCT are modeled after and inspired by those that Hinkel used, taking into account an observation by Wolfson, Marmor, and Jones (1989), who say that there may be implicit, unplanned variables hidden in DCT situations. Referring specifically to the CCSARP, they say:

[I]t is important to understand that conditions may have been established unintentionally in the questionnaire items even though they never were a part of the design.... [I]t should be noted that, in the case of the American data at least, there is a gender bias in the roles of the participants in the situations used to elicit apologies. In all of the situations used to represent a plus distance relationship between the participants, it is always a male who is to offer the apology. And in all of the situations used for a minus distance relationship, it is always a female except for one ambiguous case.... Research on language and gender done over the past 15 years has shown that the gender of interlocutors [sic] affects their linguistic behavior. It seems then that additional situations are needed in which the sex of the dialogue participants are reversed (193).

So, in the hopes of eliminating this type of accidental results, I do manipulate the sex of the advisees in the situations. This serves only to neutralize the effects of any implicit gender bias in the situations. The gender of the advisees does not figure into the

analysis. In order to facilitate the manipulation of the sex of the advisees, without having to include additional situations, multiple versions of the DCT were used.

In my DCT there are six situations, five of which are taken and modified from Hinkel's situations. There are four 'characters' being advised; each of the four 'characters' appears six times: once in each of the six scenarios. So, there is a total of four versions of each of six scenarios, or 24 different 'sub-scenarios.' Characters were chosen that it was assumed would actually be – or could easily be imagined to be – people in the subjects' lives: (1) your parents, (2) your boss, (3) your boyfriend / girlfriend, and (4) a friend of one of your friends (with whom you are only casually acquainted). So, for example, in the first version of the questionnaire, Situation 1 involves 'your parents;' in the next version, that same situation involves 'your boss;' in the third version, it involves 'your boyfriend / girlfriend;' and in the final version, Situation 1 involves 'a friend of a friend.' Each questionnaire involves all four characters at least once and two of the characters appear a second time. That is, the first version of the questionnaire, for example, involves: (1) your parents, (2) your boss, (3) your boss, (4) your boyfriend / girlfriend, (5) a friend of a friend, and (6) your parents. Each of the four characters is included and two of them — your parents and your boss — each appear twice in this version of the DCT. Likewise, the second version involves: (1) your boss, (2) your boyfriend / girlfriend, (3) your boyfriend / girlfriend, (4) a friend of a friend, (5) your parents, and (6) your boss. Additionally, and this is where the gender of the advisee comes into effect, in 3 of the 6 situations involving 'your boss,' your boss is presented as female; in the other 3 situations, your boss is presented as male. The same is true for 'your friend's friend.' In those versions of the DCT where either 'your boss' or 'your friend's friend' appears in two situations, the character's gender is, naturally, consistent. Also, of the 8 'sub-scenarios' involving advice about a car, 2 of the characters are male, 2 are female, and the other 4 are indeterminate – either dual (parents: assumed male *and* female) or not specified (boyfriend *or* girlfriend, their choice).

These four versions of the DCT were distributed in various undergraduate foreign language classes at West Virginia University. The subjects were told as little as possible about the focus of the study, so as not to unnecessarily draw *extra* attention to the

language that they would use to respond. All subjects were informed that their participation was completely voluntary, that they would not be penalized in any way if they chose not to participate, and that they could respond to as many or as few of the questions as they wanted to. They were also informed that their responses were entirely anonymous. The instructions for the DCT contained explicit directions that they could opt out if they didn't think they would say anything in a given situation. A demographic survey was also included, asking their nationality, approximate age, city and state of residence (city and country for the international students), and their ethnicity, among other things. Most of these items were included to serve as distractors designed to minimize the presence of the ethnicity question, which is of primary concern here.

Of the total questionnaires distributed, 131 were used in the study.<sup>20</sup> Of those, only 15 – or 11.5 percent – were completed by African American respondents. Of the 131 questionnaires, 23 were copies of the first version, 41 copies of the second version, 33 copies of the third version, and the remaining 34 were copies of the fourth version. Completed by African American respondents were 5 copies of the first version, 4 copies of the second version, 3 copies of the third version, and 3 copies of the fourth version.

#### **2.4.2. Data coding**

After developing and distributing the DCT, but before analyzing the data, I had to code the subjects' responses. Coding is an important step in analyzing data: how data is coded ultimately determines the information that we can extrapolate from it. So, data that is coded on the sole criteria of whether a given speech act is direct or indirect cannot tell us anything except whether a given speech community typically prefers directness or indirectness in performing that speech act. While information of that nature can be valuable, data coded as such is useless if we want to know, for example, whether *a*

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<sup>20</sup>

DCTs that were not used in the study include those that were completed by non-native speakers of American English or by native speakers who were neither African American nor European American. Also, if a subject did not provide a response for every DCT situation, none of his or her responses were considered.

*particular form* of indirectness is used more often than others. So, although the goal of this study is not to provide an exhaustive analysis of the act of advising in either the African American speech community or the European American speech community, a rather comprehensive coding system – one that would not *unnecessarily* limit the data – was desired. In the end, the data was coded according to the system used by Belyaeva (1996), with some modifications. Additionally, the CCSARP Coding Manual (Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper 1989b: 275) was instrumental in various related respects, such as pointing out that “one should disregard those parts of the sentence which are not essential for realizing the request. Two such nonessential parts [are] ... *Alerters* and *Supportive Moves*.” So, in coding the data, every effort was made to focus exclusively on those parts that were essential to giving advice. Disregarding these other parts of the data, however, did not come without consequences.

One consequence of disregarding any supportive moves is that, in many cases, I may have elevated to the status of head acts that which other researchers would consider merely supportive moves. “A Head Act is the minimal unit which can realize” a speech act (Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper 1989b: 275). Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989b: 276) explain that “supportive moves, *when occurring on their own*, can be raised to the status of ... Head Acts” (emphasis added). In spite of this recommendation, I code as head acts supportive moves that *could* occur independently *even when* they do not. There are two reasons for this. First, it seems blatantly inconsistent to me to code a statement as a head act on one occasion but to ignore the same or a similar statement as a supportive move on another occasion. Second, the presence of one head act does not preclude the presence of another: it is even acknowledged in the CCSARP that multiple head acts *are* a distinct possibility. They say: “we may find, at the same level of explicitness, more than one minimal unit realizing the ... goal” (Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper 1989b: 276).

So, according to the CCSARP coding system, a statement such as ‘that is on sale at the store next door’ would be considered a head act because it occurs independently.<sup>21</sup>

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Throughout this chapter and the next, I use single quotation marks to quote responses

However, a similar statement such as ‘I know a place where you can get that cheaper’ would only be considered a supportive move because it occurs with an overt head act: the imperative ‘let’s go there and get it.’ So, instead of following the CCSARP recommendations on this point, I code these statements – ‘that is on sale ... next door’ and ‘I know a place where you can get that cheaper’ – as a request strategy *in each case*.

Another consequence of ignoring supportive moves is that any efforts to ‘soften’ the advice through mitigators are ignored. Examples of mitigators are politeness markers (please, do you think), understaters (a bit, a little), hedges (somehow, kind of), subjectivizers (I’m afraid, I wonder/think/believe/suppose), downtoners (possibly, perhaps), cojolers (you know), and appealers (will you?, okay?, aren’t we?) (Blum-Kulka, House, Kasper 1989b: 283-285). This, however, is not a significant consequence, because a mitigated direct approach, for instance, would be coded as a direct approach whether or not the mitigator were taken into account. However, ignoring mitigators *does* force us to overlook some potentially interesting details.

In her coding scheme, Belyaeva (1996: 15) outlines “several basic semantic classes of forms which are used to express advice,” where ignoring supportive moves, such as mitigators, does not have any substantial impact. Those semantic classes are: performatives, imperatives, need statements, obligation statements, suggestions, evaluations, hypothetical statements, opinions, and questions. Of course, we must also allow for the possibility of a subject opting out.

The ten semantic classes, above, can be grouped together based upon directness, indirectness, and avoidance. Thus, if we seek information about directness and indirectness, we can easily obtain it from these categories, and we have the added advantage of also being able to consider the individual strategies used. According to Belyaeva’s classifications, the direct strategies are

- (1) explicit performatives (e.g. ‘I recommend you try something else’)
- (2) imperatives (both affirmative and negative; e.g. ‘take y’all ass to bed’ or ‘don’t buy that here’)

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given by or comments made by the participants of this study. I italicize paraphrases of their responses / comments.

- (3) need and obligation statements<sup>22</sup> (e.g. ‘you guys need to find another place’)
- (4) suggestions (e.g. ‘you shouldn’t buy that here’) and
- (5) evaluations (e.g. ‘you would be much better off going somewhere else’).

The indirect strategies include

- (1) hypothetical statements (e.g. ‘I wouldn’t eat that if I were you’)
- (2) opinions<sup>23</sup> (e.g. ‘I think that you should get some rest’) and
- (3) questions (e.g. ‘why don’t you take the rest of the day off?’).<sup>24</sup>

Of course, opting out, being the absence of a response – either direct or indirect – is an avoidance strategy.

The first step in coding the data, once the relevant coding categories were established, was to eliminate any responses that were in the form of reported speech. Some examples of this type of frequent response are ‘I would say don’t take it there and explain why,’ ‘I would advise her to rent a car for her safety,’ and ‘I would probably say to put it in the bank.’ These responses were eliminated because in order to code them, I would have had to guess what form the subject’s response would take and, consequently, which categories to code them into. While we may suspect that a response such as ‘I would say don’t take it there ...’ represents an eventual imperative (i.e. *I would say: “don’t take it there”*), we just cannot be sure that this is what the subject intended. So, instead of taking the chance of incorrectly coding a large portion of the data, I decided,

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<sup>22</sup>

Note that although these are distinct categories in Belyaeva’s approach, I conflate need and obligation statements into a single category.

<sup>23</sup>

What are coded as opinions are statements that include comments such as ‘I think,’ ‘I feel,’ ‘in my opinion,’ etc. Although they are not treated as such here, these comments are what some researchers would consider mitigators. So, it may indeed be that mitigators are not completely (or consistently) ignored in this analysis. If I were to treat these comments as mitigators, and consequently to ignore them, the vast majority of strategies coded as opinions – an indirect strategy – would be coded instead as suggestions – a direct strategy: most, if not all, of the statements of opinion are of the form *I (don’t) think you should do X*.

<sup>24</sup>

While the categories (other than opting out) are Belyaeva’s, all of the preceding examples illustrating them are taken from the data provided by the subjects in my study.

once again, to follow the CCSARP guidelines: “when coding questionnaire data, discard sequences which reveal a misunderstanding of the task” (Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper 1989b: 275).<sup>25</sup> Here, a subject’s response in reported form indicates that (s)he did not understand that (s)he was supposed to respond as if (s)he was addressing the advisee.

When coding the data, it became immediately apparent that the coding categories being used here were insufficient to account for all of the data, even with the addition of opting out as a strategy. Based upon the DCT responses collected, another direct strategy, another indirect strategy, and yet another avoidance strategy needed to be added to the taxonomy of forms. First, the direct strategy frequently employed by the subjects of this study but that could not be accommodated by Belyaeva’s categories was a simple noun phrase (e.g. ‘clothes,’ ‘video games’), encountered (exclusively) as a response to the situation where the character solicited advice from the subject regarding how to spend \$50 in raffle winnings.

Next, the indirect strategy frequently encountered in the data but that could not be incorporated into Belyaeva’s list of categories was the subject simply providing the addressee with information. It is this strategy which, as discussed above, is frequently found accompanying a head act, but which, for the sake of consistency, is coded as a head act itself, regardless of whether it occurs alone or with another head act. It seems that the idea behind this strategy, when it occurs independently, is to render as obvious the most advisable course of action for the addressee (e.g. ‘Every time I’ve gotten my car fixed there, I have problems with it soon after,’ *the implication being: so you’d have to be crazy to take your car there*). When this strategy occurs with another head act, it seems to serve as a way of claiming the authority needed in order to give advice to someone else (e.g. *You should buy that item at this other store ... and you can put stock in my advice because I know what I’m talking about: I’ve seen the evidence myself*). It is surprising that Belyaeva’s coding system does not account for this type of advice for she observes that “when asked for advice, Americans consider it most appropriate ‘to provide people with enough information so that they can reach their own conclusion’, ‘give an example

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There were more than 100 such responses provided by the 131 respondents in this study.

from your own experience’, ‘outline alternatives’, ‘express opinion, provide something that might help the other to make the final decision’” (1996: 22).

Finally, the other avoidance strategy needed was N.A. / Non-Advice Comment(s). Responses of this type are not considered opting out because there is a distinct difference between these avoidance strategies and opting out. Here, either the subjects indicated that a particular situation *would not* arise – in which case it cannot be assumed that they would opt out if, for some reason, the situation eventually did come up – or their responses could not be classified as advice, according to Belyaeva’s (1996: 14) definition of advice, which is also adopted here: “an attempt of the speaker (ADVISOR) to influence the hearer (ADVISEE) to act in [a] way beneficial for the advisee.”

As an example of ‘N.A.’, one subject responded to the situation where her parents are about to embark upon a long drive in an unreliable car by stating that ‘this situation would not occur;’ another subject, responding to the situation where her parents are falling asleep while working, stated that ‘they wouldn’t be working if they were tired.’ However, *the vast majority* of these responses are Non-Advice Comments. For example, in response to the situation where his boyfriend or girlfriend was falling asleep while working, one subject responded ‘you look kinda tired;’ another subject responded simply with ‘sounds like fun’ when her boss (presented as female) was about to take an unreliable car for a long trip. These responses, although they cannot be considered tokens of advice as defined by Belyaeva, and as defined here, are certainly valid responses: just as in real-life situations, it is a very real possibility that subjects may provide responses that are not representative of what we are investigating.<sup>26</sup>

Given an adequate coding system, each DCT response was classified into as many of the 12 established advice categories as was appropriate, but a response was only coded into as many categories as was allowed by the number of head acts (as they are defined in

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These non-topical responses appear to me to be what I call *initiators*. That is, while they do not correspond to the definition of advice, these comments, if part of an actual exchange between two individuals, may have been used to initiate a conversation in which the subject may eventually have given advice to the advisee. If this is the case, this would provide further evidence that DCTs are inadequate at eliciting language that is representative of what we may observe in interpersonal contexts.

this analysis) that it contained. So, a response was *not* coded into more than one category if it consisted of only one head act, but a response that was comprised of two distinct head acts is considered to have yielded two tokens of advice, *each of which* was counted. Consequently, there is no limit to the number of advice strategies that a subject could provide in response to any given situation. For example, the response ‘I had a difficult time with the people that work there; maybe you should take the car somewhere else’ is coded as *both* informing *and* a suggestion. Note, once again, that the hedge ‘maybe’ is disregarded. Although the majority of the responses consisted of a single head act, there were occasions where a response consisted of two head acts, and there was even one instance where the response contained three head acts.<sup>27</sup> There were never more than three head acts in a single response. Table 2 in Appendix B shows the average number of head acts per subject per DCT situation.

Once I coded all of the responses, I calculated the rate of occurrence of each strategy – in terms of the percent of all strategies used by a speech community. So, if a given situation yielded 200 tokens of advice for a single speech community, a strategy used 25 of those 200 times would have occurred 12.5 percent of the time; a strategy that was used 40 of those 200 times would have occurred 20 percent of the time. The African American data and the European American data are tabulated independently, so the total of all African American strategies reported in any given analysis adds up to approximately 100 percent (due to rounding) and the total of all European American strategies used in the same table also adds up to approximately 100 percent (again, due to rounding). Thus, the frequencies at which each speech community uses a given strategy can be easily compared.

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Here, the subject was responding to situation four (advisee taking car to a bad repair shop). The advisee was the subject’s parents. The three advice forms were (1) an imperative, (2) information, and (3) an evaluation: ‘don’t take the car there; I’ve already been there and it was sucky. You would be much better off going somewhere else.’

### **3.0. Results**

In this chapter, I analyze the data collected from the 131 subjects who participated in this study. The chapter is divided into two primary sections: in Section 3.1., I discuss the anticipated results and in Section 3.2., the actual results. Section 3.2. is further subdivided into sections where I examine all of the data as if it were collected from a single speech community and where I examine the data as if it were produced by smaller, independent speech communities. Finally, I make some concluding remarks in a third and final section prior to embarking upon Chapter 4, where I consider the limitations of this study and outline possible directions for further research in this area. I begin this chapter by commenting briefly on what I *expected* the results to show. It should be noted that what I expected from this study is not necessarily what I would expect of another study investigating a different speech act because different speech acts involve different face threats.

#### **3.1. Anticipated results**

I anticipated two separate and conflicting results. On one hand, I expected to find a higher frequency of indirectness, or possibly even of avoidance, on the part of the African American respondents than on the part of the European American respondents. On the other hand, I anticipated observing more directness from the African American subjects than from the European American subjects, and specifically in the form of statements of need and obligation.

I expected to observe African American indirectness because of two separate notions of 'face.' First, if we accept Brown and Levinson's (1987) notions of positive and negative face, which I discuss briefly in Chapter 1, then the act of giving advice threatens the advisee's negative face in that it compromises his or her autonomy, his or her decision-making authority. The imposition is even more acute when the advice is *not* solicited. Second, in her discussion of discourse and verbal genres in African American culture, Morgan (1998) discusses another kind of face: social face. While she does not

provide a definition of social face, it appears to be the ‘face’ that we are talking about when we use the expression ‘to save face.’ That is, it seems to be the attitude, the persona, or *the face* that we portray to the outside world, determining, ultimately, how we are perceived, and that, on occasion, may we may need to save in order to protect our public image. She asserts that for African Americans “social standing and cultural membership are constructed according to how a speaker interacts when among members of the dominant culture, and within all social strata of the African-American community” (252) i.e. *just about anytime* a speaker interacts with *just about anyone*. While social face is not necessarily limited to *coolness*, Morgan explains that in the African American subculture, coolness is very important. She states further that “in a cultural sense, a cool face is the ability to act on symbolic incidents and subtle varieties of cultural practice with eloquence, skill, wit, patience, and precise timing” (253).

Given that advice threatens the advisee’s negative face, and given the particular importance of a cool social face in the African American subculture, I expected to see an alarming amount of indirect advice, or possibly even avoidance, on the part of the African American subjects – if, in providing their responses, they imagined themselves to be interacting with members of their own ethnic group, where a cool social face is highly valued. By being indirect, they would thus be able to reduce the imposition to the advisee’s negative face and to show respect for his or her social face at the same time. As for avoidance, if they perceive their addressees to have the “ability to act ... with ... skill, wit, patience, and precise timing” (Morgan 1998: 253), African Americans may judge that their (potential) advisees not even need any advice: if (s)he has these skills, (s)he should be fully capable of determining on his or her own how “to act in [a] way beneficial for” (Belyaeva 1996: 14) him- or herself.

Morgan also discusses indirectness at length, which, for her, is typical of African as well as African American discourse. However, the indirectness to which she refers is *not* the same indirectness to which we typically refer when discussing speech acts. In speech act theory indirectness typically refers simply to a discrepancy between form and meaning. In this sense, indirectness is often synonymous with an interrogative. For example, although it is a request, the phrase ‘Do you have the time?’ *looks or sounds like*

a question. As such, there is a discrepancy between form and meaning; the form is a question, but the meaning is a request. In Morgan's use of the term, indirectness refers to assigning "contradictory or multiple meanings beyond traditional English interpretations" (Morgan 1998: 255) to "social encounters, interactions, words, or phrases" (Morgan 1998: 255). As such, indirectness, in this sense, is a sort of argot that allows Person A to communicate a particular meaning to Person B without Person C, also present, being aware of it.<sup>28</sup> This definition of indirectness, although distinct from the 'traditional' meaning, is not entirely inconsistent with it. For Person C not to comprehend the hidden meaning of Person A's message, there must be some discrepancy between the form and the intended meaning. In the end, we might suspect African Americans to use 'traditional' indirectness more readily because of their familiarity with this other type of indirectness.

My conflicting expectation of more direct advice forms on the part of African Americans stemmed from my own prior, sporadic, and non-systematic 'observations.' I expected more directness from African Americans than from European Americans because I had noticed them using what appeared to be a preponderance of need and obligation statements – such as *you gotta X*, *you need to Y*, and *you better (just) Z*.

The difficulty in reconciling these two differing expectations resided in the simple fact that they could not both be accurate: African Americans cannot be, at the same time, both more direct and more indirect than European Americans. Having to hypothesize that one or the other of these two expectations would most likely represent the distribution of actual responses, I was inclined to believe that the arguments for indirectness were more solid than the argument for directness: my reason for expecting directness were confined to my personal observations, which were random and infrequent at best. I was not convinced that they were reliable and they definitely were not scientific. The apparent

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Morgan's definition of 'indirectness' is very likely what Richardson (1996) *intended* her definition of 'signifying' to be. Although Richardson was not explicit in extracting this meaning out of the definition that she offered (Smitherman's), possibly from having taken it out of context, there are strong similarities between Smitherman and Morgan on this point.

strengths of the indirectness arguments and the apparent weaknesses of the directness arguments lead me, in the end, to expect a higher rate of indirectness – or, eventually, of avoidance – by African Americans than by European Americans.

### **3.2. Actual results**

As this study looks for pragmatic variation between speech communities, I present the results in Section 3.2. by comparing the frequency of responses provided by African Americans to the frequency of responses provided by European Americans. An exception to this is the case of the overall numbers, in which the African American and European American responses are combined. This represents what we usually see – and *all* that we usually see – in studies of this type: the preferred strategies of (all of) the native speakers of Language X, in this case American English speakers. This data is needed in order to determine whether looking at the responses of distinct speech communities reveals anything that assuming a single, homogeneous speech community does not reveal. So, in Section 3.2.1., I consider all of the subjects to be members of the same speech community: simply American English speakers. In Section 3.2.2., I consider them to be members of separate speech communities: African American English speakers and European American English speakers.

#### **3.2.1. The entire sample**

In this study I look *past* the general results that are so often exclusively presented in studies that investigate speech act variation between Language X and Language Y – results that implicitly treat the speakers of these languages as a single, homogeneous speech community – and, in the process, I argue that it is possible to focus on speech acts in variation studies. But, in spite of this purpose, I must nonetheless present the results as we are accustomed to seeing them. That is, we should know what the results of this particular study say about American English (AE) speakers' advice strategies, while treating AE speakers as a single, homogeneous speech community.

These overall numbers (cf. Table 1, Column 3 <sup>29</sup>) indicate that, at least in the six situations used in this study, Americans prefer to give indirect advice. This type of advice, given in 42 percent of the cases, is followed by direct advice and avoidance, in 35 and 23 percent of the cases, respectively. This indicates, among other things, that Americans are comfortable giving advice approximately 75 percent of the time: we only decline or fail to give advice in one out of four instances.

Looking at the individual advice strategies, it is apparent that simply providing information is by far the preferred strategy – used in 27 percent of the cases. This is more than one-fourth of all responses and well over half of all of the indirect advice forms reported. In fact, advising by information is used more than twice as much as all of the other indirect strategies combined. The second most frequent strategy is a direct one: using an imperative. Note that this includes both affirmative and negative imperative verbs, so no distinction is made here between giving advice about what the advisee is to do and what (s)he is not to do. This strategy accounts for almost half of the direct advice forms and approximately one-sixth of all advice forms. The third most frequently-used strategy is to opt out. This was the subjects' response in one-eighth of the situations and it represents slightly more than half of all of the avoidance strategies. So, although Americans will give advice 75 percent of the time, they are still more likely to opt out than to use any given strategy other than information or an imperative. Together these three strategies – informing, using an imperative, and opting out – account for almost 60 percent of all of the advice forms provided by the subjects.

The general preference revealed here for indirect advice in American English, as a whole, is consistent with other researchers' findings: Belyaeva's (1996: 18) "data reveal that Americans prefer indirect, mitigated, non-committal ways of advising" and Hinkel's (1997: 13) study showed that AE speakers "produced hedged and softened advice more frequently than direct [advice]." Unfortunately, due to differences in methodologies, it is

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In the table, the numbers in parentheses after the percentages represent the number of head acts of that type that were provided by that particular speech community. So, in column 3, all of the subjects, combined, provided a total of 6 tokens of advice by means of an explicit performative, 141 by means of an imperative, and so forth.

difficult to make anything other than very general comparisons between those studies and the present study: my study and Hinkel's, but not Belyaeva's, are related in the DCT situations used, and my study and Belyaeva's, but not Hinkel's, are related in the coding systems used.

### **3.2.2. Ethnicity**

Shifting the focus from treating the informants as members of a single, cohesive speech community to treating them as members of distinct speech communities, we have to limit ourselves. There are far too many criteria that could be used to define a speech community in order to be able to consider them all in a single study. And while it may very well be that advising strategies are more subject to regional, class, or other factors than they are to ethnic ones, I confine my comparisons to and look for potential differences between only the African American and the European American responses. However, in order to avoid treating either the African American subjects or the European American subjects as completely homogeneous groups, which would violate the spirit of this study, I also examine the data based upon the gender of the subjects. This is *not* to say that I compare the male subjects' responses with the female subjects' responses. As I have already stated, I only compare the responses provided by African American subjects and those provided by European American subjects. So, when taking gender into account, the African American men's responses are compared to the European American men's responses and the African American women's responses are compared to the European American women's responses. While the advising strategies used by women and those used by men may very well exhibit variation, such a focus is beyond the scope of this study. Table 3 in Appendix B summarizes the number of African American and European American subjects, showing how many of the subjects from each ethnic group were male and how many were female.

<b>Table 1 – Frequency of Advice Strategies in American English</b>											
Directness	Strategy	All American English Speakers		All African Americans	All European Americans		African American Females Only	European American Females Only		African American Males Only	European American Males Only
Direct	Explicit Performatives	0.7% (6)		—	0.8% (6)		—	0.8% (3)		—	0.9% (3)
	Imperatives	17.3% (141)		22.2% (22)	16.6% (119)		24.0% (18)	15.8% (63)		16.7% (4)	17.5% (56)
	Need / Obligation Stmtnt	0.4% (3)		1.0% (1)	0.3% (2)		1.3% (1)	0.5% (2)		—	—
	Suggestions	10.9% (89)		13.1% (13)	10.6% (76)		14.7% (11)	12.1% (48)		8.3% (2)	8.8% (28)
	Evaluations	1.2% (10)		2.0% (2)	1.1% (8)		2.7% (2)	1.3% (5)		—	0.9% (3)
	[ NP ]	4.3% (35)		2.0% (2)	4.6% (33)		2.7% (2)	3.8% (15)		—	5.6% (18)
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>34.8%</b>		<b>40.3%</b>	<b>34.0%</b>		<b>45.4%</b>	<b>34.3%</b>		<b>25.0%</b>	<b>33.7%</b>
Indirect	Hypothetical Statements	3.9% (32)		6.1% (6)	3.6% (26)		8.0% (6)	2.5% (10)		—	5.0% (16)
	Opinions	2.9% (24)		2.0% (2)	3.1% (22)		2.7% (2)	2.0% (8)		—	4.4% (14)
	Questions	7.7% (63)		4.0% (4)	8.2% (59)		4.0% (3)	10.1% (40)		4.2% (1)	5.9% (19)
	Information	27.4% (224)		25.3% (25)	27.7% (199)		26.6% (20)	25.9% (103)		20.8% (5)	30.0% (96)
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>41.9%</b>		<b>37.4%</b>	<b>42.6%</b>		<b>41.3%</b>	<b>40.5%</b>		<b>25.0%</b>	<b>45.3%</b>
Avoidance	Opt Out	12.7% (104)		12.1% (12)	12.8% (92)		8.0% (6)	14.8% (59)		25.0% (6)	10.3% (33)
	NA / Non Advice	10.5% (86)		10.1% (10)	10.6% (76)		5.3% (4)	10.6% (42)		25.0% (6)	10.6% (34)
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>23.2%</b>		<b>22.2%</b>	<b>23.4%</b>		<b>13.3%</b>	<b>25.4%</b>		<b>50.0%</b>	<b>20.9%</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>99.9%</b>		<b>99.9%</b>	<b>100%</b>		<b>100%</b>	<b>100.2%</b>		<b>100%</b>	<b>99.9%</b>

### 3.2.2.1. All African Americans vs. all European Americans

If we accept that the strategies used for realizing speech acts are culturally-determined and if we accept that American culture is comprised of several subcultures, the obvious conclusion is that we should not expect all native speakers of American English to realize speech acts in the same ways. We should find dialect variation in this aspect of the language. Of course, I am assuming, but do not argue, that African Americans and European Americans belong to distinct subcultures. For discussion of the cultural independence of African Americans and European Americans, see Abrahams (1976), Diop (1996), Kochman (1981), Morgan (1998), and Smitherman (1977). While none of these researchers' primary concern is the cultural differences between black America and white America, they all do address this issue, at various degrees of explicitness.<sup>30</sup>

Looking at the data based upon ethnicity (cf. Table 1, Columns 5-6), some similarities between the advice strategies reported by African Americans and by European Americans are revealed. For example, the most frequently-used strategy for each speech community is informing, which they each use in approximately one out of four situations. Likewise, the second most common strategy for both ethnic groups is imperative verbs. For the African Americans, this strategy is almost as common as providing information; for the European Americans, it is used much less. Also, the rates at which most strategies are used are comparable in each of the speech communities. The avoidance strategies are used at nearly identical rates, and the other strategies are, for the most part, within five points of each other. The sole exception to this is in the use of imperatives, where there is a difference of slightly more than five points in the rate at which the African Americans and the European Americans use them.

In spite of these similarities, there is one notable difference between the advice forms reported by the African American and European American subjects. The European American data further confirms the argument that Americans prefer to give

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For a couple of explicit, yet brief, comments on this point, see footnote 13, page 23.

tentative, hedged, or indirect advice. For this group, the indirect advice forms are the most frequently used, at 43 percent. This is, however, not the case for the African Americans. By using indirect advice forms less frequently than direct forms, the African American subjects demonstrated a slight preference for *directness* in giving advice. This data indicates that our assertions about American English speakers' preferences in giving advice may need further qualification.

Although the differences between these two speech communities' advice strategies are not significant ( $X^2 > 0.05$ ), they are nonetheless interesting.<sup>31</sup> The African American preference for directness revealed here is in direct conflict with the assertion that AE speakers tend to prefer indirect advice over direct advice, as argued by Belyaeva (1996) and Hinkel (1997) and as implied by the overall results of even the present study. Perhaps this conflict should have been expected: Belyaeva (1996: 23) explicitly states that these "American strategic preferences [for indirectness] reflect *Anglo-American* cultural values" (emphasis added). Equating Anglo-American values with American values is risky when a significant part – or significant parts – of the overall population is not or are not *Anglo*.

### 3.2.2.2. Ethnicity and gender

After having considered the data to have come from one single and two separate speech communities, it is possible to further restrict the definition of a speech community. In this section, I add the criterion of gender to the criterion of ethnicity. However, the question here, as previously indicated, is *not* whether there are any differences between how men and women give advice – which is definitely a valid question – but whether there are any differences between how African Americans and European Americans give advice *if* we consider, on one hand, only men and, on the other hand, only women.

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That is, the *overall* differences between the African American and the European American data are not significant. As Tables 4 and 5 in Appendix B indicate, these differences *are* significant in at least five out of six of the situations and with at least one out of four of the advisees.

Beginning with the women (cf. Table 1, Columns 8-9), we notice, once again, similarities in some areas. For example, they each use the following strategies only rarely, if at all: explicit performatives, need and obligation statements, evaluations, [NP]s, and opinions. Also, the two most frequent strategies are the same for both groups. These are information and imperatives. The rates at which they advised via information are similar for both of these groups, but the African American women used imperatives much more than the European American women. For the African American women, imperatives account for 24 percent of all of their responses; for the European American women, only 16 percent. This is a difference of eight points — the most substantial observed thus far.

In addition to imperatives, the African American women use hypothetical statements considerably more than the European American women. The European American women use questions, opt out, and make non-advice comments (including indicating that a given scenario would not arise) more frequently. There is a cumulative effect of these differences in the avoidance strategies. The European American women fail to give advice substantially more often than the African American women. As the European American women's rate of avoidance is comparable to the rate of avoidance by, one, the entire sample, two, all of the African Americans, and, three, all of the European Americans, it can be assumed that the European American women are avoiding giving advice at 'normal' rates. Therefore, it is likely that the African American women are giving advice *less* than 'normal.'

These differences between the African American and the European American women, like the differences between the African Americans and the European Americans, as a whole, — although interesting — are not significant ( $X^2 > 0.05$ ).

When considering only the data supplied by the African American and European American men (cf. Table 1, Columns 11-12), what immediately stands out is the limited range of responses used by the African Americans. Of the twelve advice strategies, they completely avoid using half of them: explicit performatives, need and obligation statements, evaluations, [NP]s, hypothetical statements, or opinions.

Like the European American women, like the European Americans as a whole, like the African American women, like the African Americans as a whole, and like the entire sample, the European American men used information and imperatives as

their most common and second most common strategies, respectively. The African American men also used these two very popular strategies at relatively high rates; however, they are not the top two strategies for this group. In fact, the African American men are the only speech community in this study who did not have information and imperatives as their top two strategies. Regarding these two strategies, both groups use imperatives at very similar rates, but there is considerable difference — almost ten points — in their rates of informing.

Even more striking than this sizable difference in the use of information by these two groups is in their use of the avoidance strategies. The African American men use the two avoidance strategies at rates of 25 percent each, putting them in a tie for the ‘favorite’ strategy of this group. These strategies are the third and fourth favorite strategies for the European American men — at approximately 10 percent each. This results in a difference of nearly 30 points in the avoidance strategies between the African American and the European American men!

The European American men follow the same basic trends in giving advice as the European American women, the European Americans as a whole, and the entire sample. That is, they most frequently give indirect advice, followed by direct advice, and, finally, they avoid giving advice least of all. The African American men, on the other hand, avoid giving advice at astonishing rates, and when they do, they use a very restricted range of strategies. Consequently, there are considerable differences in the rates of opting out, making non-advice comments (including indicating that a particular situation was not relevant), informing, making hypothetical statements, and advising via [NP]s between these two speech communities. And in this case, these differences are indeed significant ( $X^2 < 0.01$ ).

### **3.3. Conclusions**

I began this chapter by discussing the expected results of this study. I had reasons to expect both more directness and more indirectness on the part of the African American subjects than the European American subjects. As these two conflicting expectations could not be reconciled, I proceeded to explain why I put more faith in the expectation of indirectness than the expectation of directness. The

analysis was approached from a variety of perspectives. First was the entire sample, where I considered the data to have been supplied simply by American English speakers. This was done only so I could look for differences between smaller, more precise speech communities and the overall, dominant speech community. The preliminary, overall results of this study confirm what other researcher's studies found – notably Belyaeva's (1996) and Hinkel's (1997) – namely that American English speakers tend to be indirect when giving advice. Next, I presented the results for the smaller, more precisely-defined speech communities. I did this by comparing the data supplied by the African American subjects to the data supplied by the European American subjects, considering, first, only the ethnicity of the subjects, and second, both their ethnicity and gender.

The reason that I compared data from speakers of one variety of American English to data from speakers of another variety of American English is because studies of this nature typically describe the speech behavior of American English speakers, among others, as if they were a homogeneous speech community. Clearly they are not. I wanted to know whether we find the same trends if we do not assume this homogeneous speech community? I suspected that we would not, and indeed, we do not. However, in most cases, the differences observed between the two speech communities are minimal. For instance, in *most* cases, the most frequent strategy was simply to provide the advisee with information that (s)he could use to determine the most desirable course of action on his or her own.

When comparing the data from the overall, dominant speech community to the data from smaller, more precise speech communities, there were not any substantial differences between the overall data and the European American data, but there *were* between the overall data and the African American data. When comparing the data from African American English (AAE) speakers to the data from European American English (EAE) speakers, there were noteworthy, if not always significant, differences.

For the European Americans, the data does indeed indicate that they prefer indirectness in giving advice. In every instance, the European American subjects most frequently gave indirect advice. *However*, the data also indicates that African Americans did not: *in no instance* do we find the African American subjects preferring indirect advice. The data provided by this speech community — as a whole

— points to an overall preference for *directness* in giving advice. The African American women share this preference for directness, but the African American men do not. For the African American men, avoidance is most common — in 50 percent of their responses. On those occasions when they did give advice, the African American men did not employ a wide variety of strategies. In this study they used only four: information, imperatives, suggestions, and questions.

My expectation of more indirectness or of more opting out on the part of the African American subjects as a whole (than on the part of the European American subjects) was not confirmed. It is only for the men that my original hypothesis was supported, and only to a certain extent. While the data does not show that they are more indirect, it does show that they employed avoidance strategies significantly more than the European American men. This was a part of my hypotheses. I did not, however, anticipate that this would be the case only for the African American *men*. In fact, although the following observation would involve an analysis beyond the scope of this study, there may be differences between the African American men and the African American women regarding avoidance that are indicative of a gender division in the African American community regarding the giving of advice. The men do not often give advice and the women do not often *avoid* giving it. The African American men were the most likely to avoid giving advice and avoidance was their most common strategy. The African American women, on the other hand, were the *least likely* to avoid giving advice and avoidance was their least common strategy.

I had also hypothesized that I would observe more directness from the African American subjects than from the European American subjects. I subsequently discarded this expectation for two reasons: it conflicted with my first hypothesis and my reasons for expecting African American directness were weak. Surprisingly, it is this hypothesis that is supported by a comparison of the African American data with the European American data and by a comparison of the African American women's responses with the European American women's responses. For these two perspectives of analysis, we do indeed observe more directness from the African American subjects than from the European American subjects. However, this directness did not come in the form of statements of need and obligation, which were actually *very rare*.

The African American women and the African American men do not conform to the overall trend of indirect advice in American English. The preference for indirect advice in American English, as a homogeneous collection of speakers, can best be explained by majority rule. The European American subjects outnumbered the African American subjects in this study by nearly eight to one. Consequently, it would be virtually impossible for the overall trends to reflect anything but the European American trends. If we had a more balanced group of subjects representing the various speech communities of American English speakers, then we may begin to see the overall patterns shifting towards more directness, or avoidance, or whatever approaches those 'other,' non-dominant (and likely non-standard-speaking) communities may prefer. Likewise, if the African American data, as a whole, is more consistent with the data from the African American women than it is with the data from the African American men, it is most likely because the women outnumbered the men by a ratio of two to one.

Even without approximately equal numbers of subjects from each of the speech communities, we can still see differences between the African Americans' and the European Americans' preferences for giving advice. To summarize, the African Americans and the African American women gave more direct advice than the European Americans and the European American women, respectively; the African American men avoided giving advice more than the European American men. While my specific hypothesis of more African American indirectness is not supported, the reason that I conducted this study is: we need to realize not only that a given speech act may not be realized the same way in one language as it is in another, but we should also be aware that how a particular speech act is realized in a given language *variety* may not conform to the way that that same speech act is realized *in another variety of the same language*. Consequently, we should exercise caution in making blanket assertions about how speech acts are realized in a given language. The patterns of speech behavior revealed by our data may in fact be a consequence of the particular speech community or speech communities that we are observing.

#### **4.0. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link**

My purpose here was to argue that speech acts can be the focus of variation studies. I did this by conducting a study like so many others, but that focused on two speech communities, or subcultures, of American English speakers instead of on speakers of two distinct languages. Although researchers conducting cross-cultural speech act studies argue for increased awareness of pragmatic variation from one culture to another, they typically assume no variation from one subculture to another. This is a major weakness of those studies which the present study only begins to address. I do not mean to imply, however, that this study is without weaknesses of its own. The purpose of this final chapter is to address some of the limitations of this study, which can be grouped into two main categories: those that are related to the subjects and those that are related to the methodology. I begin by addressing the weaknesses that are related to the informants.

#### **4.1. A first weak link**

Two limitations are tied to the participants of this study: the first is who they are and the second is how many of them there are. The first limitation related to the participants is that they are all college students. Under no circumstances can college students be considered representative of society as a whole. For this reason, Wolfson (1989) advocates observing language in non-university settings, unless, of course, the researcher's goal is to treat the university as a speech community in its own right. As this is *not* my goal, not having any non-college-student subjects limits my study in this respect. Wolfson refers to the observation of spontaneous speech data, not to elicited data, but her position is just as applicable to a study that uses a DCT. Just because the subjects are responding to a written questionnaire and not engaging in natural conversation does not make them any more representative of society.

The second limitation, and probably one of the most important limitations of this study, is the extremely small number of African American subjects who participated: only 15 of the 131 subjects, or approximately 11.5 percent, are African

Americans. While data from more African American subjects would certainly be desirable, other studies have also used only a few speakers of a given language as subjects. For example, Rintell and Mitchell (1989) collected written data from only 23 native and 29 non-native speakers of English; Beebe and Takahashi (1989) collected written data from only 30 subjects, 15 of whom were English speakers and 15 of whom were Japanese speakers; and Kamisli and Dogancay-Aktuna (1996) collected data from only 14 American subjects, in addition to 80 Turkish subjects. So, this small number of African American subjects, however, is really only a weakness in relation to the much larger number of European American subjects who participated in the study, and not in and of itself. The effect of having such a small number of African American subjects participate in this study is accentuated by the multiple versions of the DCT that I used. I address this point in the next section.

#### **4.2. Another weak link**

There are several methodological weaknesses of this study. They can be classified as either weaknesses in the design of the study or weaknesses in the implementation of the study. The first limitation of the study's design is, as was alluded to in the preceding section, the use of several different versions of the DCT. This, like the number of African American subjects who participated in the study, is not necessarily a weakness in and of itself, but as it relates to that small number of African American subjects. On average, fewer than four African American subjects responded to each version of the DCT. As such, the trends in the African American data may be questionable. With more subjects, this would not be a concern: the use of multiple DCTs did not seem to have any noticeable negative effects on the data collected from the more numerous European American subjects. Even though they responded to the same versions of the DCT as the African Americans, they were numerous enough to yield adequate data. In fact, the number of European American subjects in this study – 116 – is larger than the *total* number of subjects in some other studies. On average, 29 European Americans responded to each version of the DCT.

Regardless of how many subjects participate in a study, using multiple DCTs necessarily results in fewer respondents per questionnaire. Since all of the subjects

need not respond to the same situations, this allows for more diversity in the scenarios that elicit the speech acts. However, the results are not as solid as they would be based upon the larger pool of all of the respondents. All things being equal, the patterns revealed by a study involving 90 subjects are stronger than the patterns revealed by a study involving 30 subjects. Along this same line, we can put more faith in the trends of 90 subjects responding to the same situations than we can in the trends of three different groups of 30 subjects each responding to a different set of situations. So, if multiple versions of a DCT are to be used, it should be assured that sufficient data will be collected for each version of it in order for the results to be reliable. This was not the case regarding the African Americans in this study.

The second design limitation involves the characters used in the DCTs. As was noted in Chapter 2, I attempted to select advisees on the basis of realistic plausibility – characters were selected that were assumed to be, or potentially be, actual people in the subjects' lives. What I did not realize at the design stage of the study was that striving for character plausibility while attempting to put each character in every situation – the reason for using multiple versions of the DCT – resulted in some unlikely scenarios. For example, how often do the average college student's parents go on long road trips, let alone in an unreliable car? How often do college students' employers or parents ask them for advice about how to spend money? In the end, the quest for realism may have backfired, actually resulting in some *unrealistic* scenarios.

Finally, the third design weakness concerns the selection of situations included in the DCT. There are distinct differences between giving advice when it is solicited and when it is not. Belyaeva (1996: 20) indicates that "Americans draw a sharp demarcation line between solicited and unsolicited advice." As I mention in Section 3.1, the threat to the advisee's (negative) face is even more acute when the advice is unsolicited than when it is. Unfortunately, in this study, I conflate five situations involving unsolicited advice and one situation involving solicited advice, thereby completely ignoring the difference between these two types of advice.

The other type of methodological limitations are weaknesses of implementation, or weaknesses that concern how the data was handled after it was collected. There are two of these. First, this study aims to compare advice in AAE

and EAE. In order to determine whether a given advice form should be coded as an AAE or an EAE response, I had to make a huge, and possibly faulty, assumption. I assume that the African American subjects speak AAE and that the European American subjects speak EAE. I completely neglect the possibility that there could be African American subjects who are speakers of some variety other than AAE or that there could be European American subjects who are speakers of a variety other than EAE. Labov (1972b: 287) condemns linguists who “work with captive populations – classes of students who are tested as a whole *without regard to their group membership or participation in the culture being studied*” (emphasis added). This is exactly what I am doing here by making this assumption; I am assuming group membership where it simply may not exist.

Second, not only do I assume that my subjects can be easily, and accurately, classified as AAE or EAE speakers by nothing but their race, but I also treat these varieties as (relatively) homogeneous. At various points in the analysis of the data, I do recognize the possibility that these varieties may exhibit variation themselves, but I admittedly limit my focus and only to potential variation based upon gender. This is a weakness that cannot be overlooked: I limit myself to the factors of ethnicity and gender without knowing whether they are even the most important factors. Where the subject lives, his or her socio-economic class, or any number of other variables could be more important than race or gender in determining how (s)he gives advice, but I completely avoid this issue. The subject’s age, as well, may exert very strong influence on his or her advising strategies, but there is not likely to be much variation in the ages of these subjects, as they are all college students. Even my perspective on the factors that I do consider is limited: I do not consider the potential differences between the responses provided by the European American males and European American females, for example.

#### **4.3. Wanted: a stronger chain**

In this chapter, I have discussed the numerous limitations of this study. They involve both the subjects and the methodology used. The weaknesses regarding the study’s subjects are that there were simply too few African American informants and

all of the subjects were college students, a population that cannot be considered representative of the (speech) community at large. The methodological weaknesses are of two types: limitations of the study's design and limitations of the study's implementation. The design weaknesses include using too many versions of the DCT (for the small number of African American subjects), inadvertently including unrealistic scenarios in the various versions of the DCT, and mixing solicited and unsolicited advice. The implementation weaknesses include assuming that (all) African Americans are AAE speakers and that (all) European Americans are EAE speakers and treating these varieties as relatively homogeneous.

Given these diverse limitations, it would be worthwhile to conduct further studies that attempt to minimize the weaknesses. Naturally, this would involve conducting studies that have a sufficient number of subjects, studies that use more than just (college) students as their subjects, and studies that do not simply assume the subjects' membership in the relevant cultures. Also, without meaning to imply that there is something 'wrong' with using DCTs in speech act studies — solving the debate of whether using elicited data is or is not desirable is not a major concern of mine — it would definitely be advantageous to conduct similar studies using any of the other data collection techniques discussed in Chapter 2 – MCQs, oral role-plays, analyses of scripted dialogues in literature and film, or, of course, observation of naturally-occurring speech. Also, there is no reason why we, as linguists, should limit ourselves to looking at advice forms. Other researchers have investigated apologies, complaints, compliments, disagreement, invitations, and requests, among many other speech acts. It would be worthwhile to look for dialect differences in the realization of any of these speech acts. These studies could continue to focus on African American English and European American English speakers or they could focus on other speech communities. There is, of course, no reason why we should limit our investigations to the English language, let alone American English.

Finally, we could adopt a completely different perspective in our investigation of speech act variation across subcultures. There are numerous approaches that we can take to discourse. One that seems particularly relevant, since I discuss this to a certain extent in Chapter One, is intercultural communication. I have not approached the differences between the giving of advice in AAE and in EAE from an intercultural

communications perspective, but there is no reason why this could not be done.

Personally, I am particularly interested in the applicability of de Kadt's (1998) intercultural communication model involving oral role-plays, where she looks at inter-racial interactions and the potential for mis-intercultural communication in post-Apartheid South Africa, to the intercultural interactions between African Americans and European Americans. She says that "the perception of people in terms of skin colour, of race, with its attendant social and economic consequences" (255) is still very much of a reality in South Africa, that the black-white distinction "continues to exert an often unnoticed influence on perceptions of society and of others" (255), and that "attempts to create a normalized society in South Africa presuppose coming to terms with the racial past and any invidious perpetuation, not simply silencing it" (255). She could just as easily have been describing the situation in the United States if she substituted 'segregation' for 'apartheid.' Chick (1996: 341-342) voices similar sentiments, which also could be easily attributed to the United States:

turning to the consequences of ... intercultural miscommunication, I argue that it has serious consequences for members of subordinate groups in South Africa, whose access to jobs, social welfare, educational opportunities, and so on, depends vitally on successful communication with power holders. I suggest that the widespread mis-evaluation of the abilities of members of subordinate groups that occurs in gatekeeping encounters contributes directly to discrimination and the reinforcement of the inequity of the socioeconomic and political system. I suggest, further, that repeated miscommunication generates and reinforces negative cultural stereotypes that constitute further barriers to intercultural communication and contribute to the forces which maintain the social barriers and inequities that made it difficult for people to learn one another's conventions in the first place.

Based upon these observations by de Kadt and Chick, the similarities between post-apartheid South Africa and post-segregation America become, if they were not already, painfully obvious. Specifically, Chick's comments on gate-keeping encounters in South Africa are analogous to Spears' (1987) comments on institutional racism in the United States. He defines institutional racism as "racism which permeates the very structure and daily workings of all societal institutions, so much so that individuals do not have to be racist for racism to affect the lives of minorities" (53).

There are, of course, important differences between South Africa and the United States. One of these is that for the most part, blacks and whites in South Africa are speakers of independent languages whereas blacks and whites in the United States are speakers of mutually-intelligible varieties of the same language. But given the strong similarities between these two countries, specifically in the area of race relations, I would be interested in seeing the results of an intercultural — or, more precisely, an inter-subcultural — study of speech acts between African Americans and European Americans.

The validity of such a study is further defended by Wolfson (1989: 160) who argues that “with respect to the microanalysis of face-to-face interaction between members of different ethnic groups living in the same society, the implications for the teaching of sociocultural rules are equally inescapable.” These implications are perhaps best summed up by Labov (1970). He argues that a lack of knowledge of the pragmatic rules of standard English may even be contributing to the school failure of some vernacular speakers. He notes that

in this area [referring to the rules for the use of language] we can observe many differences between nonstandard and standard speakers. The nonstandard speaker is undoubtedly handicapped in many ways by his lack of control over mitigating forms which are more highly developed in middle class and school language. These forms are used to avoid conflict between individuals who meet in some kind of face-to-face encounter. The child may not know the mitigating ways of disagreeing with the teacher which make such disagreement acceptable in the school situation. It is not uncommon for Negro children to simply accuse the teacher of lying where middle class white children might say, ‘there’s another way of looking at it.’ Faced with the statement ‘You a lie!’ most teachers find it necessary to react forcefully. After one or two such confrontations, most students learn to say nothing. But some students continue to object without learning the means of doing so without conflict. In the school records of boys we have studied, we find many cases where they have been reprimanded, even demoted, for their failure to use mitigating forms of politeness (51).

Of course, Labov is not suggesting that we impose the pragmatic rules of the standard language on the nonstandard speakers. A certain amount of compromise on the part of each of the participants is probably necessary. He suggests that there are ways that teachers can make commands and requests while minimizing the threat to

their students' face and that there are ways that students can respond that are less threatening to their teacher's face. He does not suggest

that all of these indirect, mitigating forms be taught in school. ... But differences in the knowledges [sic] of such [pragmatic] rules must be studied to isolate the areas of conflict which proceed from ignorance on both sides. It is not entirely clear that all of the adjustment must be on the part of the nonstandard language and the vernacular culture (56).

Clearly we must begin to study knowledge of these rules by studying the rules themselves. Although this study does not do much to address Labov's concerns — I am not concerned here with studying the rules of advising, per se — it does take a much-needed and long overdue step in the right direction. In order to study pragmatic rules and the rules of interaction in specific subcultures, we must first remember or realize (as the case may be) that all varieties of American English — or any other language — do not follow the same pragmatic rules any more than all languages do.

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Appendix A — Four versions of the DCT used in the study

A. The demographic questionnaire. (Not to scale.)

1. **Age:** 18-20 21-25 26-35 36-50 51-65 over 65
2. **Year in College** (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, ...): Undergraduate \_\_\_\_\_ Graduate \_\_\_\_\_
3. **Gender:** Female Male
4. **Approximate Socioeconomic Class:** Upper Class  
Upper-middle Class  
Middle Class  
Lower-middle Class  
Working Class  
Lower Class
5. **Hometown:** City: \_\_\_\_\_  
State (if USA): \_\_\_\_\_  
Country (if not USA): \_\_\_\_\_
6. **Nationality:** \_\_\_\_\_
7. **Racial Group** (*if American*):  
(Note: If you are multi-racial, pick the category that you *most closely* identify with.)  
African-American  
American Indian or Alaskan Native  
Asian or Pacific Islander  
Hispanic  
White, Non-Hispanic
8. **Native Language** (*if not English*): \_\_\_\_\_

B. The DCT. (Not to scale.)

1. The instructions

PLEASE INDICATE EXACTLY WHAT YOU THINK YOU WOULD SAY IF YOU WERE IN EACH OF THE FOLLOWING SITUATIONS. TRY TO INDICATE THE *EXACT WORDS* THAT YOU WOULD USE, REGARDLESS OF WHAT THEY MIGHT BE. DO NOT BE CONCERNED WITH SPELLING, GRAMMAR, ETC.

IF YOU DO NOT THINK THAT YOU WOULD SAY ANYTHING IN A GIVEN SITUATION, PLEASE STATE WHY NOT AND INDICATE WHAT YOU THINK YOU WOULD DO, IF ANYTHING.

PLEASE WRITE NEATLY.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION.

2. The situations<sup>32</sup>

a. Version 1

- SITUATION 1. Your parents are planning to go on a road trip with some friends in an unreliable car. What do you say to them?
- SITUATION 2. You see your boss in a store. He is about to purchase something that you have seen in another store for less. What do you say?
- SITUATION 3. At work, your boss announces that he just won \$50 in a raffle and asks you what to spend it on. What do you tell him?
- SITUATION 4. Your boyfriend / girlfriend is planning to take his / her car to a repair shop where you have had bad experiences in the past. What do you say?
- SITUATION 5. You see a friend of one of your friends in a restaurant. You and she are only casual acquaintances. She is about to order a sandwich that you don't think is very good in this restaurant. What do you say?
- SITUATION 6. You go home and find your parents working. They look really tired. In fact, they keep dozing off. What do you say?

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The labels "Situation 1," "Situation 2," etc. were not included in the DCT. They are included here for the sake of convenience. Although they were not necessarily presented in this order on the second and third versions, Situation 1 involves the advisee going on a road trip in an unreliable car; Situation 2 involves the advisee purchasing an item that is cheaper elsewhere; Situation 3 involves solicited advice about how to spend fifty dollars in raffle winnings; Situation 4 involves the advisee taking his / her / their car to a bad repair shop; Situation 5 involves the advisee ordering a bad sandwich in a restaurant; and Situation 6 involves the advisee working while falling asleep.

b. Version 2

- SITUATION 1. Your boss is planning to take an unreliable car for a lengthy road trip. What do you say to her?
- SITUATION 6. At work, your boss is working and she looks really tired. She keeps dozing off. What do you say?
- SITUATION 2. You and your boyfriend / girlfriend are in a store. (S)he is about to purchase something that you have seen in another store for less. What do you say?
- SITUATION 4. A friend of one of your friends is planning to take his car to a repair shop where you have had bad experiences in the past. You and he are only casual acquaintances. What do you say?
- SITUATION 5. You're in a restaurant with your parents. They are about to order a sandwich that you don't think is very good in this restaurant. What do you say?
- SITUATION 3. Your boyfriend / girlfriend tells you that (s)he just won \$50 in a raffle and asks you what to spend it on. What do you tell him / her?

c. Version 3

- SITUATION 6. You go to drop something off for your boyfriend / girlfriend where (s)he works. (S)he looks very tired and (s)he keeps dozing off. What do you say?
- SITUATION 1. Your boyfriend / girlfriend is planning to take an unreliable car for a lengthy road trip. What do you say to him / her?
- SITUATION 2. You see a friend of one of your friends in a store. You and she are only casual acquaintances. She is about to purchase something that you have seen in another store for less. What do you say?
- SITUATION 4. Your parents are planning to take their car to a repair shop where you have had bad experiences in the past. What do you say?
- SITUATION 5. You see your boss in a restaurant. He is about to order a sandwich that you don't think is very good in this restaurant. What do you say?
- SITUATION 3. Your friend's friend (from situation 3, above) tells you that she just won \$50 in a raffle and asks you what to spend it on. What do you tell her?

d. Version 4

- SITUATION 1. A friend of one of your friends is planning to take an unreliable car for a lengthy road trip. You and he are only casual acquaintances. What do you say to him?
- SITUATION 2. You're in a store with your parents. They are about to purchase something that you have seen in another store for less. What do you say?
- SITUATION 3. Your parents tell you that they just won \$50 in a raffle and ask you what to spend it on. What do you tell them?
- SITUATION 4. Your boss is planning to take her car to a repair shop where you have had bad experiences in the past. What do you say?
- SITUATION 5. You're in a restaurant with your boyfriend / girlfriend. (S)he is about to order a sandwich that you don't think is very good in this restaurant. What do you say?
- SITUATION 6. You run into your friend's friend (from situation 1, above) where he works. He looks very tired and keeps dozing off. What do you say?

Appendix B — Other tables<sup>33</sup>

I. Table 2: Average Number of Responses (Head Acts) Given per Subject per DCT Situation

<u>Overall</u>	1.04
<u>Ethnicity</u>	
African Americans	1.10
European Americans	1.03
<u>Gender</u>	
Males	
African American	0.80
European American	1.07
Females	
African American	1.25
European American	1.01

II. Table 3: Number of Subjects

<u>African Americans</u>	15
Males	5
Females	10
<u>European Americans</u>	116
Males	50
Females	66
<u>Total</u>	131

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There are two different chi-square analyses represented in Table 4 and Table 5. The first one was performed on the individual strategies; here those strategies that *neither* speech community used were removed from the table so as to avoid an error message in the calculation of the chitest. The second analysis was performed on the overall trends, that is on the subtotals (directness, indirectness, and avoidance). In most of the situations, both of these result in the same determination of statistical significance, but with only a minority of the advisees is this the case.

The same two chi-square analyses were performed on the data in Table 1 as well. In all three of those cases the results of the analyses confirmed the statistical significance of the other.

III.

Table 4: Results by DCT Situation													
Directness	Strategy	Situation 1		Situation 2		Situation 3		Situation 4		Situation 5		Situation 6	
		African Americans	European Americans										
Direct	Performati	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1.4% (2)	—	3.2% (4)	—	—
	Imperative	25.0% (4)	15.7%(18)	10.5% (2)	11.5%(15)	20.0% (2)	42.0%(42)	33.3% (7)	15.7%(23)	20.0% (4)	7.3% (9)	23.1% (3)	11.8%(12)
	Need / Obl	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.7% (1)	—	—	7.7% (1)	1.0% (1)
	Suggestio	18.8% (3)	15.7%(18)	5.3% (1)	6.9% (9)	10.0% (1)	10.0%(10)	9.5% (2)	14.3%(21)	10.0% (2)	2.4% (3)	30.8% (4)	14.7%(15)
	Evaluation	6.3% (1)	5.2% (6)	5.3% (1)	—	—	—	—	1.4% (2)	—	—	—	—
	[ NP ]	—	—	—	—	20.0% (2)	33.0%(33)	—	—	—	—	—	—
	Subtotal		50.1%	36.6%	21.1%	18.4%	50.0%	85.0%	42.8%	33.5%	30.0%	12.9%	61.6%
Indirect	Hypotheti	6.3% (1)	4.3% (5)	5.3% (1)	—	10.0% (1)	5.0% (5)	9.5% (2)	9.5% (14)	5.0% (1)	1.6% (2)	—	—
	Opinions	12.5% (2)	10.4%(12)	—	—	—	2.0% (2)	—	1.4% (2)	—	4.0% (5)	—	1.0% (1)
	Questions	6.3% (1)	22.6%(26)	5.3% (1)	6.2% (8)	—	4.0% (4)	—	2.0% (3)	—	1.6% (2)	15.4 (2)	15.7%(16)
	Informatio	—	4.3% (5)	57.9%(11)	59.2%(77)	—	1.0% (1)	42.9% (9)	49.0%(72)	25.0% (5)	35.5%(44)	—	—
	Subtotal		25.1%	41.6%	68.5%	65.4%	10.0%	12.0%	52.4%	61.9%	30.0%	42.7%	15.4%
Avoidance	Opt Out	6.3% (1)	6.1% (7)	10.5% (2)	14.6%(19)	20.0% (2)	—	—	4.1% (6)	35.0% (7)	41.9%(52)	—	7.8% (8)
	NA / NA	18.8% (3)	15.7%(18)	—	1.5%	20.0% (2)	3.0% (3)	4.8% (1)	0.7% (1)	5.0% (1)	2.4% (3)	23.1% (3)	48.0%(49)
Subtotal		25.1%	21.8%	10.5%	16.1%	40.0%	3.0%	4.8%	4.8%	40.0%	44.3%	23.1%	55.8%
Total		100.3%	100%	100.1%	99.9%	100%	100%	100%	100.2%	100%	99.9%	100.1%	100%
X <sup>2</sup> #1		X <sup>2</sup> < 0.05		X <sup>2</sup> > 0.05		X <sup>2</sup> < 0.01		X <sup>2</sup> < 0.05		X <sup>2</sup> < 0.01		X <sup>2</sup> < 0.01	
X <sup>2</sup> #2		X <sup>2</sup> < 0.05		X <sup>2</sup> > 0.05		X <sup>2</sup> < 0.01		X <sup>2</sup> > 0.05		X <sup>2</sup> < 0.01		X <sup>2</sup> < 0.01	

IV.

Table 5: Results by Advisee									
Directness	Strategy	Parents		Boss		Boyfriend / Girlfriend		Acquaintance	
		African Americans	European Americans	African Americans	European Americans	African Americans	European Americans	African Americans	European Americans
Direct	Performatives	—	—	—	2.4% (4)	—	—	—	1.1% (2)
	Imperatives	44.4% (12)	25.1% (44)	8.0% (2)	8.8% (15)	23.1% (6)	18.5% (36)	9.5% (20)	13.5% (24)
	Need / Obligat	—	0.6% (1)	—	0.6% (1)	3.9% (1)	—	—	—
	Suggestions	11.1% (3)	8.0% (14)	20.0% (5)	13.5% (23)	7.7% (2)	11.3% (22)	14.3% (3)	9.6% (17)
	Evaluations	—	2.3% (4)	4.0% (1)	0.6% (1)	—	1.0% (2)	4.8% (1)	0.6% (1)
	[ NP ]	—	4.6% (8)	—	1.2% (2)	7.7% (2)	6.2% (12)	—	6.2% (11)
Subtotal		55.5%	40.6%	32.0%	27.1%	42.4%	37.0%	28.6%	31.0%
Indirect	Hypothetical	—	1.7% (3)	12.0% (3)	4.8% (8)	7.7% (2)	2.1% (4)	4.8% (1)	6.2% (11)
	Opinions	—	4.6% (8)	4.0% (1)	4.1% (7)	3.9% (1)	1.5% (3)	—	2.3% (4)
	Questions	3.7% (1)	8.6% (15)	—	7.7% (13)	7.7% (2)	12.3% (24)	4.8% (1)	3.9% (7)
	Information	29.6% (8)	36.0% (63)	16.0% (4)	21.8% (37)	23.1% (6)	29.2% (57)	33.3% (7)	23.6% (42)
Subtotal		33.3%	50.9%	32.0%	38.4%	42.4%	45.1%	42.9%	36.0%
Avoidance	Opt Out	—	4.6% (8)	24.0% (6)	22.9% (39)	7.7% (2)	4.6% (9)	19.1% (4)	20.2% (36)
	NA / NA	11.1% (3)	4.0% (7)	12.0% (3)	11.8% (20)	7.7% (2)	13.3% (26)	9.5% (2)	12.9% (23)
Subtotal		11.1%	8.6%	36.0%	34.7%	15.4%	17.9%	28.6%	33.1%
Total		99.9%	100.1%	100%	100.2%	100.2%	100%	100.1%	100.1%
X <sup>2</sup> #1		X <sup>2</sup> < 0.01		X <sup>2</sup> < 0.05		X <sup>2</sup> < 0.05		X <sup>2</sup> > 0.05	
X <sup>2</sup> #2		X <sup>2</sup> < 0.05		X <sup>2</sup> > 0.05		X <sup>2</sup> > 0.05		X <sup>2</sup> > 0.05	