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“Speaking with Names”: Language and Landscape among the Western Apache

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What we call the landscape is generally considered to be something “out there.” But, while some aspects of the landscape are clearly external to both our bodies and our minds, what each of us actually experiences is selected, shaped, and colored by what we know.

Barrie Greenbie, *Spaces*

An unfamiliar landscape, like an unfamiliar language, is always a little daunting, and when the two are encountered together—as they are, commonly enough, in those out-of-the-way communities where ethnographers have a tendency to crop up—the combination may be downright unsettling. From the outset, of course, neither landscape nor language can be ignored. On the contrary, the shapes and colors and contours of the land, together with the shifting sounds and cadences of native discourse, thrust themselves upon the newcomer with a force so vivid and direct as to be virtually inescapable. Yet for all of their sensory immediacy (and there are occasions, as any ethnographer will attest, when the sheer constancy of it grows to formidable proportions) landscape and discourse seem resolutely out of reach. Although close at hand and tangible in the extreme, each in its own way appears remote and inaccessible, anonymous and indistinct, and somehow, implausibly, a shade less than fully believable. And neither one, as if determined to accentuate these conflicting impressions, may seem the least bit interested in having them resolved. Emphatically “there” but conspicuously lacking in accustomed forms of order and arrangement, landscape and discourse confound the stranger’s efforts to invest them with significance, and this uncommon predicament, which produces nothing if not uncertainty, can be keenly disconcerting.

Surrounded by foreign geographical objects and intractable acts of speech, even the most practiced ethnographers become diffident and cautious. For the meanings of objects and acts alike can only be guessed at, and once the guesses have been recognized for the arbitrary constructions they almost always are, one senses acutely that one’s own experience of things and events “out there” cannot be used as a reliable guide to the experience of native people (Conklin 1962; Frake

1962). In other words, one must acknowledge that local understandings of external realities are ineluctably fashioned from local cultural materials, and that, knowing little or nothing of the latter, one's ability to make appropriate sense of "what is" and "what occurs" in one's environment is bound to be deficient (Goodenough 1964). For better or worse, the ethnographer sees, landscape and speech acts do not interpret their own significance. Initially at least, and typically for many months to come, this is a task that only members of the indigenous community are adequately equipped to accomplish; and accomplish it they do, day in and day out, with enviably little difficulty. For where native men and women are concerned the external world *is* as it appears to them to be—naturally, unproblematically, and more or less consistently—and rarely do they have reason to consider that the coherence it displays is an intricate product of their own collective manufacture (Schutz 1967). Cultures run deep, as the saying goes, and natives everywhere take their "natives' point of view" very much for granted.

In this way (or something roughly like it) the ethnographer comes to appreciate that features of the local landscape, no less than utterances exchanged in forms of daily discourse, acquire value and significance by virtue of the ideational systems with which they are apprehended and construed. Symbolically constituted, socially transmitted, and individually applied, such systems operate to place flexible constraints on how the physical environment can (and should) be known, how its occupants can (and should) be found to act, and how the doings of both can (and should) be discerned to affect each other (Sahlins 1976). Accordingly, each system delineates a distinctive way of being-in-the-world (Ricoeur 1979), an informal logic for engaging the world and thinking about the engagement (Geertz 1973), an array of conceptual frameworks for organizing experience and rendering it intelligible (Goffman 1974). In any community, the meanings assigned to geographical features and acts of speech will be influenced by the subjective determinations of the people who assign them, and these determinations, needless to say, will exhibit variation. But the character of the meanings—their steadier themes, their recurrent tonalities, and, above all, their conventionalized modes of expression—will bear the stamp of a common cast of mind. Constructions of reality that reflect conceptions of reality itself, the meanings of landscapes and acts of speech are personalized manifestations of a shared perspective on the human condition (Schutz 1967).

Mulling over these apparent truths, the ethnographer is likely to notice that members of the local community involve themselves with their geographical landscape in at least three distinct ways. First, they may simply observe the landscape, attending for reasons of their own to aspects of its appearance and to sundry goings-on within it. Second, they may utilize the landscape, engaging in a broad range of physical activities that, depending on their duration and extent, may leave portions of the landscape visibly modified. Third, native people may communicate about the landscape, formulating descriptions and other representations of it that they share in the course of social gatherings. On many occasions, community members can be observed to alternate freely among these different modes of involvement (they may also, of course, combine them), but it is obvious that

events in the latter mode—communicative acts of topographic representation—will be most revealing of the conceptual instruments with which native people interpret their natural surroundings. And although such representations may be fashioned from a variety of semiotic materials (gestural, pictorial, musical, and others), it is equally plain that few will be more instructive in this regard than those that are wrought with words.

Ordinary talk, the ethnographer sees, provides a readily available window onto the structure and significance of other peoples’ worlds, and so (slowly at first, by fits and starts, and never without protracted bouts of guessing) he or she begins to learn to listen. And also to freshly see. For as native concepts and beliefs find external purchase on specific features of the local topography, the entire landscape seems to acquire a crisp new dimension that moves it more surely into view. What earlier appeared as a circular sweep of undifferentiated natural architecture now starts to emerge as a precise arrangement of named sites and localities, each of which is distinguished by a set of physical attributes and cultural associations that marks it as unique. In native discourse, the local landscape falls neatly and repeatedly into *places*—and places, as Franz Boas (1934) emphasized some years ago, are social constructions *par excellence*.

It is excessive to claim, as George Trager (1968:537) has done, that “the way man talks about the physical universe is his only way of knowing anything about it.” Nonetheless, most ethnographers would agree that Trager’s claim contains a substantial amount of truth, and some have suggested that this can be seen with particular clarity where language and landscapes are concerned (Berndt 1976; Conklin 1957; Evans-Pritchard 1949; Malinowski 1920; Sapir 1912). For whenever the members of a community speak about their landscape—whenever they name it, or classify it, or evaluate it, or move to tell stories about it—they unthinkingly represent it in ways that are compatible with shared understandings of how, in the fullest sense, they know themselves to occupy it. Which is simply to note that in conversational encounters, trivial and otherwise, individuals exchange accounts and observations of the landscape that consistently presuppose (and therefore depend for both their credibility and appropriateness upon) mutually held ideas of what the landscape actually is, why its constituent places are important, and how it may intrude on the practical affairs of its inhabitants. Thus, if frequently by implication and allusion only, bits and pieces of a common worldview are given situated relevance and made temporarily accessible. In talk about the landscape, as Martin Heidegger (1977:323) so aptly put it, cultural conceptions of “dwelling together” are naively placed on oblique display.

At the same time, however, and often just as obliquely, persons who engage in this sort of talk will also exchange messages about aspects of the social encounter in which they are jointly involved, including their framings of the encounter itself (i.e., “what is going on here”) and their morally guided assessments of the comportment of fellow participants. Consequently, the possibility arises that as speakers communicate about the landscape and the kinds of dealings they have with it, they may also communicate about themselves as social actors and the kinds of dealings they are having with one another. Stated more precisely,

statements pertaining to the landscape may be employed strategically to convey indexical messages about the organization of face-to-face relationships and the normative footings on which these relationships are currently being negotiated. Indirectly perhaps, but tellingly all the same, participants in verbal encounters thus put their landscapes to work—interactional work—and how they choose to go about it may shed interesting light on matters other than geography (Basso 1984). For example, when a character in a short story by Paul Gallico (1954:69) says to his chronically unfaithful lover, “Go make a nest on Forty-Second Street,” it is altogether clear that he is drawing upon the cultural meaning of a place to communicate something important about their disturbed and precarious relationship.

From the standpoint of the ethnographer, then, situated talk of geographical landscapes is more than a valuable resource for exploring local conceptions of the material universe. In addition, and surely just as basic, this sort of talk may be useful for interpreting forms of social action that regularly occur within it. For landscapes are always available to their seasoned inhabitants in other than material terms. Landscapes are available in symbolic terms as well, and so, chiefly through the manifold agencies of speech, they can be “detached” from their fixed spatial moorings and transformed into instruments of thought and vehicles of purposive behavior. Thus transformed, landscapes and the places that fill them become tools for the imagination, expressive means for accomplishing verbal deeds, and also, of course, eminently portable possessions to which individuals can maintain deep and abiding attachments, regardless of where they travel. In these ways, as N. Scott Momaday (1974) has observed, men and women learn to *appropriate* their landscapes, to think and act “with” them as well as about and upon them, and to weave them with spoken words into the very foundations of social life.¹ And in these ways, too, as every ethnographer eventually comes to appreciate, geographical landscapes are never culturally vacant. Filled to brimming with past and present significance, the trick is to try to fathom (and here, really, is where the ethnographic challenge lies) what it is that a particular landscape may be called upon to “say,” and what, through the saying, it may be called upon to “do.”

But where to begin and how to proceed? How, in any community, to identify the conceptual frameworks and verbal practices with which members appropriate their local geography? One promising approach, I want to suggest, is to attend to native placenames and the full variety of communicative functions served by acts of naming in different social contexts. It may be noted in this regard that placenames, or toponyms, comprise a distinct semantic domain in the lexicons of all known languages, and that the formal properties of placename systems, together with their spatial correlates and etymological histories, have long been objects of anthropological inquiry.² But the common activity of placenaming—the actual use of toponyms in concrete instances of everyday speech—has attracted little attention from linguists or ethnographers.³ Less often still has placenaming been investigated as a universal means—and, it could well turn out, a universally primary means—for appropriating physical environments.

The reasons for this innocuous piece of scholarly neglect are undoubtedly several, but the main one arises from a widespread view of language in which proper names are assumed to have meaning solely in their capacity to refer and, as agents of reference, to enter into simple and complex predictions (Lyons 1977; Russell 1940). Many of the limitations imposed by this narrow conception of meaning have been exposed and criticized in recent years, most ably by linguistic anthropologists and philosophers of language who have shown that reference, though unquestionably a vital linguistic function, is but one of many that spoken utterances can be made to perform (Donnellan 1972; Hymes 1974; Searle 1958, 1969; Silverstein 1976; Strawson 1959; Tyler 1978). But despite these salutary developments, and unhappily for students who seek to understand linguistic meaning as an emergent property of verbal interaction, the idea persists in many quarters that proper names, including toponyms, serve as referential vehicles whose only purpose is to denote, or “pick out,” objects in the world.⁴

If a certain myopia attaches to this position, there is irony as well, for placenames are arguably among the most highly charged and richly evocative of all linguistic symbols.⁵ Because of their inseparable connection to specific localities, placenames may be used to summon forth an enormous range of mental and emotional associations—associations of time and space, of history and events, of persons and social activities, of oneself and stages in one’s life. And in their capacity to evoke, in their compact power to muster and consolidate so much of what a landscape may be taken to represent in both personal and cultural terms, placenames acquire a functional value that easily matches their utility as instruments of reference. Most notably, as T. S. Eliot (1932) and Seamus Heaney (1980) have remarked, placenames provide materials for resonating ellipsis, for speaking and writing in potent shorthand, for communicating much while saying very little. Poets and songwriters have long understood that economy of expression may enhance the quality and force of aesthetic discourse, and that placenames stand ready to be exploited for this purpose. Linguists and anthropologists would do well to understand that in many communities similar considerations may influence common forms of spoken interaction, and that, in this arena too, placenames may occupy a privileged position. For these and other reasons, an ethnographic approach to the activity of placenaming seems well worth pursuing. The present essay, which now takes a sharp ethnographic turn, is offered as an illustration of where such an approach may lead, and why, beyond the illumination of specific cases, it may also shed light on matters of general interest.

II

Of old names, old places.

—Edmond Rostand, *Cyrano de Bergerac*

The Western Apache residents of Cibecue, an isolated settlement located near the center of the Fort Apache Indian Reservation in east-central Arizona, are not adverse to talking about each other, and some of them—like Lola Machuse—

seem to enjoy it immensely.⁶ “I’m intress in evybody!” Lola will exclaim in her distinctive variety of English, and everyone in Cibecue knows she speaks the truth. Just over fifty years old, she is a handsome woman with large brown eyes, a sharply defined nose, and splendidly shaped hands that are hardly ever still. The mother of seven children, she divides her time between caring for the needs of her family, collecting plants for use in herbal medicines, participating in ritual activities, and . . . well, gossiping. Which is, within certain limits, just as it should be. Middle-aged Apache women are expected to keep themselves informed at all times of what is going on in their communities, and those who have led exemplary lives, such as Lola Machuse, are also expected to comment on their findings. And comment Lola does—intelligently, incisively, usually sympathetically, and always with an unquenchable enthusiasm for nuance and detail that can be as amusing as it is sometimes overwhelming. Western Apache communities, like small communities everywhere, operate largely by word of mouth, and people from Cibecue have suggested more than once that Lola Machuse is practically a community unto herself.

It is a hot afternoon in the middle of July and Lola Machuse is working at home. Seated in the shade of a large brush-covered ramada, she is mending clothes in the company of her husband, Robert, two Apache women named Emily and Louise, and another visitor, myself, who has come by to settle a small debt and get a drink of water.⁷ The heat of the afternoon is heavy and oppressive, and there is little to do but gaze at the landscape that stretches out before us: a narrow valley, bisected by a shallow stream lined with cottonwood trees, which rises abruptly to embrace a broken series of red sandstone bluffs, and, beyond the bluffs, a flat expanse of grassy plain ending in the distance at the base of a low range of mountains. Fearsome in the blazing sun, the country around Cibecue lies motionless and inert, thinly shrouded in patches of light bluish haze. Nothing stirs except for Clifford, the Machuse’s ancient yellow dog, who shifts his position in the dust, groans fitfully, and snaps at the passing of a fly. Silence.

The silence is broken by Louise, who reaches into her oversized purse for a can of Pepsi-Cola, jerks it open with a loud snap, and begins to speak in the Cibecue dialect of Western Apache. She speaks softly, haltingly, and with long pauses to accentuate the seriousness of what she is saying. Late last night, she reports, sickness assailed her younger brother. Painful cramps gnawed at his stomach. Numbness crept up his legs and into his thighs. He vomitted three times in rapid succession. He looked extremely pale. In the morning, just before dawn, he was driven to the hospital at Whiteriver. The people who had gathered at his camp were worried and frightened and talked about what happened. One of them, Louise’s cousin, recalled that several months ago, when her brother was working on a cattle roundup near a place named *tsibiyi’itin* (“trail extends into a grove of stick-like trees”), he had inadvertently stepped on a snakeskin that lay wedged in a crevice between some rocks. Another member of the roundup crew, who witnessed the incident, cautioned the young man that contact with snakes is always dangerous and urged him to immediately seek the services of a “snake medicine person” (*th’iish diiyin*). But Louise’s younger brother had only smiled, remarking tersely that he was not alarmed and that no harm would befall him.

Louise, who is plainly worried and upset by these events, pauses and sips from her drink. After a minute or so, having regained her composure, she begins to speak again. But Lola Machuse quietly interrupts her. Emily and Robert will speak as well. What follows is a record of their discourse, together with English translations of the utterances.⁸

Louise: *shidizhé* . . . (“My younger brother . . .”)

Lola: *tsé hadigaiyé yú’ ágodzaa*. (“It happened at line of white rocks extends upward and out, at this very place!”)

[Pause: 30–45 seconds]

Emily: *ha’aa. túzhí’ yahigaiyé yú’ ágodzaa*. (“Yes. It happened at whiteness spreads out descending to water, at this very place!”)

[Pause: 30–45 seconds]

Lola: *da’aníí. k’is deeschii’ naaditiné yú’ ágodzaa*. (“Truly. It happened a trail extends across a long red ridge with alder trees, at this very place!”)

Louise: [laughs softly]

Robert: *gozhōq doleet* (“Pleasantness and goodness will be forthcoming.”)

Lola: *gozhōq doleet* (“Pleasantness and goodness will be forthcoming.”)

Louise: *shidizhé bini’eshid ne góshé?* (“My younger brother is foolish, isn’t he, dog?”)

Following this brief exchange, talk ceases under the brush-covered ramada, and everyone retreats into the privacy of their own thoughts. Louise drinks again from her can of Pepsi-Cola and passes it on to Emily. Lola Machuse returns to her sewing, while Robert studies a horse in a nearby corral. Only Clifford, who has launched a feverish attack on an itch below his ear, seems unaffected by what has been said. Silence once again.

But what *has* been said? To what set of personal and social ends? And why in such a clipped and cryptic fashion? If these questions create problems for us (and that they do, I think, can be assumed), it is because we are dealing with a spate of conversation whose organization eludes us, a strip of Western Apache verbal doings whose animating aims and purposes seem obscure. But why? The problem is not that the literal meanings of utterances comprising the conversation are in any way difficult to grasp. On the contrary, anyone with a passing knowledge of Western Apache grammar could attest that each of the utterances, taken as a sentence type, is well-formed in all respects, and that each presents one or more simple claims whose positive truth-value no Apache would presume to dispute. It is not, then, on the surface of the utterances—or, as some linguists might prefer to say, at the level of their propositional content—where our interpretive difficulties lie.

What is puzzling about this snippet of Western Apache talk is that we are unable to account for the ways in which its constituent utterances are related to each other. Put more exactly, we lack the knowledge required to establish se-

quential relations among the utterances, the unstated premises and assumptions that order the utterances, just as they occur, into a piece of meaningful discourse. It is by no means evident, for example, how Lola Machuse's statement ("It happened at line of white rocks extends upward and out, at this very place!") should be related to Louise's narrative about her ailing brother. Neither is it clear how Emily's assertion ("Yes. It happened at whiteness spreads out descending to water, at this very place!") should be interpreted as a response to the narrative or to Lola's statement. What are we to make of Lola's response to Emily ("Truly. It happened at trail extends across a long red ridge with alder trees, at this very place!"), and why should it be, as things are coming to a close, that Louise sees fit to address the Machuse's dog? Our puzzlement persists throughout, causing us to experience the text of the conversation as fragmented and disjointed, as oddly unmotivated, as failing to come together as a whole. In short, we are unable to place a construction on the text that invests it with *coherence*, and so, in the end, we cannot know with any certainty what the conversation itself may have been about. Lola Machuse and her companions have surely accomplished something with their talk. But what?

The episode at Cibecue exemplifies a venerable practice with which Western Apache speakers exploit the evocative power of placenames to comment on the moral conduct of persons who are absent from the scene. Called "speaking with names" (*yatti'bee'izhi*), this verbal routine also allows those who engage in it to register claims about their own moral worth, aspects of their social relationships with other people on hand, and a particular way of attending to the local landscape that is avowed to produce a beneficial form of heightened self-awareness. And as if this were not enough, much of what gets said and done is attributed to unseen "ancestors" (*nohwizá'yé*) who are prompted by the voices of conversational participants to communicate in a collective voice that no one actually hears. All in all, "speaking with names" is a rather subtle and subterranean affair.

To reach an understanding of this practice and the sources of its coherence for Western Apache people, I shall assume that spoken discourse is a cooperative activity in which individuals seek, within the bounds of negotiated social proprieties, to accomplish a range of purposes. I shall also assume that participants in many kinds of discourse use language to explore with each other the significance of past and potential events, drawing from these examinations certain consequences for their past and future actions. Finally, I shall assume that speakers pursue such objectives by producing utterances that are intended to perform several speech acts simultaneously, and that hearers, making dexterous use of relevant bodies of cultural knowledge, react and respond to them at different levels of abstraction. Spoken discourse, then, is more than a chain of situated utterances. Rather, as Labov and Fanshel (1977:26–28) have shown, discourse consists in a developing matrix of utterances and actions, bound together by a web of shared understandings pertinent to both, which serves as an expanding context for interpreting the meanings of utterances and actions alike. More a matter of linguistic function than linguistic form, coherence in discourse is achieved when participants put their utterances to interlocking forms of mutually recognizable work

(Becker 1982; Labov and Fanshel 1977:65–81; Pike 1978). More a matter of implicit doings than explicit sayings, coherence is what participants hear (though generally they fail to notice hearing it) when their work is going well.

At Lola Machuse’s somnolent camp, where the work of discourse went off without a hitch, coherence was never in question. Neither was the smooth implementation of a Western Apache technique for appropriating the natural landscape, a distinctive cultural framework for interpreting the landscape and turning it by means of speech to specific social ends. Never in question, that is, to anyone but myself—a superfluous, slightly stupefied, and keenly perplexed outsider. What the devil did Lola Machuse and those other Apaches imagine themselves to be up to as they sat around swapping placenames? How were they making sense, and what sort of sense were they making? What manner of thinking informed their utterances and the actions their utterances performed? What, in short, was the culture of their discourse?

III

In order to understand what another person is saying, you must assume it is true and try to imagine what it could be true of.

—George Miller, *The Imagination of Reality*

If the discourse at Lola Machuse’s camp is to be usefully understood, if we are to grasp its coherence and appreciate the structure of its interactional design, steps must be taken to enter the conceptual world of the Western Apache people who produced it. Needless to say, we cannot recover their experience of their discourse as it actually occurred, what the phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty (1969:89) called the “inner experience of language-spoken-now.” But we can explore, perforce retrospectively and therefore in reconstructive terms, what participants in the encounter took their discourse to be about, why they saw fit to contribute to it as they did, and how they interpreted the utterances and actions that comprised it. In addition, and certainly just as important, we can explore the culturally based assumptions and beliefs that made these interpretations possible, the “linguistic ideology” with which people from Cibecue rationalize for themselves and explain to others what spoken words are capable of doing when used in certain ways.⁹ In short, we can construct an ethnographic account of the speech event itself, an interpretation of Apache interpretations that relates the event to the body of thought that made its occurrence meaningful and to the particular social circumstances that made its meaning unique.

All such undertakings profit from the guidance of experienced native instructors, and no one living at Cibecue is more capable or willing in this regard than Lola Machuse herself. So let us begin, as in fact I did shortly after the episode at her camp took place, by considering her own account of what transpired as the women drank their Pepsi and Clifford snapped at flies.

We gave that woman [i.e., Louise] pictures to work on in her mind. We didn’t speak too much to her. We didn’t hold her down. That way she could travel in her mind.

She could add on to them [i.e., the pictures] easily. We gave her clear pictures with placenames. So her mind went to those places, standing in front of them as our ancestors did long ago. That way she could see what happened there long ago. She could hear stories in her mind, perhaps hear our ancestors speaking. She could reknow the wisdom of our ancestors. We call it speaking with names. Placenames are all we need for that, speaking with names. We just fix them up. That woman was too sad. She was worried too much about her younger brother. So we tried to make her feel better. We tried to make her think good thoughts. That woman's younger brother acted stupidly. He was stupid and careless. He failed to show respect. No good! We said nothing critical about him to her. We talked around it. Those placenames are strong! After a while, I gave her a funny story. She didn't get mad. She was feeling better. She laughed. Then she had enough, I guess. She spoke to the dog about her younger brother, criticizing him, so we knew we had helped her out.¹⁰

Lola Machuse recorded this statement two days after the speech event at her camp took place, and four days later, having discussed her account with all parties involved, I determined to treat it as a guide for subsequent research. Everyone to whom I presented Lola's account agreed that it was encompassing and astute; it touched, they said, on everything that was essential for getting a proper sense of what "speaking with names" might be used to accomplish. But they also agreed that it was rather too highly condensed, a bare bones sort of interpretation (certainly adequate for persons already familiar with the practice, but understandably opaque to a neophyte such as myself) which could profit from explication and fleshing out. Never one to be outdone, Lola Machuse agreed instantly with the agreeers, saying she was well aware of the problem, thank you very much, and had understood all along that further instruction would be necessary. Sometimes talk is complicated, she admonished, and one must move slowly to get to the bottom of it. So with all of us scrambling to agree with Lola, and with Lola herself firmly in charge, the fleshing out process began. Our work took longer than I expected, but now, with much of it done, Lola Machuse's original account seems better to me than ever; it provides, as one of my older Apache consultants told me it would, a "straight path to knowing." And so I have used Lola's interpretation here, partitioned into convenient segments, as a model, a path of a different kind, for organizing and presenting my own.

We gave that woman pictures to work on in her mind. We didn't speak too much to her. We didn't hold her down. That way she could travel in her mind. She could add on to them easily.

Western Apache conceptions of language and thought are cast in pervasively visual terms. Every occasion of "speaking" (*yatti*) provides tangible evidence of "thinking" (*natsikees*), and thinking, which Apaches describe as an intermittent and variably intense activity, occurs in the form of "pictures" (*be'elzaahí*) that persons "see" (*yo'íi*) in their "minds" (*biini*). Prompted by a desire to "display thinking" (*nił'íi natsikees*), speaking involves the use of language to "depict" (*e'ele'*) and "carry" (*yo'áát*) these mental images to the members of an audience, such that they, on "hearing" (*yidits'ag*) and "holding" (*yotá'*) the speaker's words, can "view" (*yínel'íi*) facsimiles of the images in their own

minds. Thinking, as the Apache conceive of it, consists in picturing to oneself and attending privately to the pictures. Speaking consists in depicting one's pictures for other people, who are thus invited to picture these depictions and respond to them with depictions of pictures of their own. Discourse, or “conversation” (*‘ilch’i’ yádaach’ilti*), consists in a running exchange of depicted pictures and pictured depictions, a reciprocal representation and visualization of the ongoing thoughts of participating speakers.

But matters are not really so neat and tidy. According to consultants from Cibecue, the depictions offered by Western Apache speakers are invariably incomplete. Even the most gifted and proficient speakers contrive to leave things out, and small children, who have not yet learned to indulge in such contrivances, leave out many things. Consequently, Apache hearers must always “add on” (*‘ínágodá’ aah*) to depictions made available to them in conversation, augmenting and supplementing these spoken images with images they fashion for themselves. This process—the picturing, or viewing, of other people's verbal depictions—is commonly likened by Apaches to adding stones to a partially finished wall (or laying bricks upon the foundation of a house) because it is understood to involve a “piling up” (*tik’iyit’ih*) of new materials onto like materials already in place. It is also said to resemble the rounding up of livestock: the “bringing together” (*dalaházhí’ch’indíít*) of cattle or horses from widely scattered locations to a central place where other animals have been previously gathered. These metaphors all point to the same general idea, which is that depictions provided by Apache speakers are treated by Apache hearers as bases on which to build, as projects to complete, as invitations to exercise the imagination.

The Western Apache regard spoken conversation as a form of “voluntary cooperation” (*tich’i’ ’odaach’idii*) in which all participants, having presumably come together in the spirit of good will, are entitled to displays of “respect” (*yiit’ish*). Accordingly, whenever people speak in cordial and affable tones, considerations of “kindness and politeness” (*bił goch’oba’*) come centrally into play. Such considerations may influence Apache speech in a multitude of ways, but none is more basic than the courtesy speakers display by refraining from “speaking too much” (*taago yatli’*). Although the effects of this injunction are most clearly evident in the spare verbal style employed by experienced Apache storytellers, people from Cibecue insist that all forms of narration stand to benefit from its application. And the reasons, they explain, are simple enough.

A person who speaks too much—someone who describes too busily, who supplies too many details, who repeats and qualifies too many times—presumes without warrant on the right of hearers to build freely and creatively on the speaker's own depictions. With too many words, such a speaker acts to “smother” (*biká’ nyintkaad*) his or her audience by seeming to say, arrogantly and coercively, “I demand that you see everything that happened, how it happened, and why it happened, *exactly* as I do.” In other words, persons who speak too much insult the imaginative capabilities of other people, “blocking their thinking,” as one of my consultants put it in English, and “holding down their minds.” So Western Apache narrators consistently take a very different tack, implying by the

economical manner of their speech, "I will depict just enough for you to see what happened, how it happened, and perhaps why it happened. Add on to these depictions however you see fit." Apache hearers consider this properly modest, properly polite, and just the way it should be. An effective narrator, people from Cibecue report, never speaks too much. An effective narrator, they say, takes steps to "open up thinking," thereby encouraging his or her listeners to "travel in their minds."¹¹

We gave her clear pictures with placenames. So her mind went to those places, standing in front of them as our ancestors did long ago. That way she could see what happened there long ago. She could hear stories in her mind, perhaps hear our ancestors speaking. She could reknow the wisdom of our ancestors.

Nothing is considered more basic to the effective telling of a Western Apache "story" or "narrative" (*nagodi'é*) than identifying the geographical locations at which events in the story unfold. For unless Apache listeners are able to picture a physical setting for narrated events (unless, as one of my consultants said, "your mind can travel to the place and really see it"), the events themselves will be difficult to imagine. This is because events in the narrative will seem to "happen nowhere" (*dohwaa'ágodzaa da*), and such an idea, Apaches assert, is both preposterous and disquieting. Placeless events are an impossibility; everything that happens must happen somewhere. The location of an event is an integral aspect of the event itself, and therefore identifying the event's location is essential to properly depicting—and effectively picturing—the event's occurrence. For these reasons, people from Cibecue explain, placeless stories simply do not get told. Instead, to borrow a useful phrase from the linguist Harry Hoijer (1973), all Western Apache narratives are "spatially anchored" to points upon the land with precise depictions of specific locations. And what these depictions are accomplished with—what the primary spatial anchors of Apache narratives almost always turn out to be—are "placenames" (*ni'bízhi*; literally, "land names").

The great majority of Western Apache placenames currently in use are believed to have been created long ago by the "ancestors" (*nohwizá'yé*) of the Apache people. The ancestors, who had to travel constantly in search of food, covered vast amounts of territory and needed to be able to remember and discuss many different locations.¹² This was facilitated by the invention of hundreds of descriptive placenames that were intended to depict their referents in close and exact detail.¹³ In this important undertaking, as in many others, the ancestors were successful. Today, as undoubtedly for centuries before, Apaches observe with evident satisfaction that the mental pictures evoked by placenames are "accurate" (*da'áiyee*) and "correct" (*dábik'eh*). Again and again, people from Cibecue report, ancestral placenames bring graphically to mind the locations they depict.¹⁴

Some appreciation of the descriptive precision of Western Apache placenames can be gained by matching names with photographs of their referents. By way of illustration, consider the three names listed below, which have been seg-

mented into their gross morphological constituents and whose referents are shown in Figures 1–3.

1. *t’iis bit’áh tú’ olíí*: *t’iis* (“cottonwood tree”) + *bit’áh* (“below it”; “underneath it”) + *tú* (“water”) + *o-* (“inward”) + *líí* (“it flows”).
Gloss: “Water flows inward underneath a cottonwood tree.”
2. *tsé’igai dah sidil*: *tsé* (“rock”; “stone”) + *ígai* (“white”) + *dah* (“above ground level”) + *sidil* (“three or more form a compact cluster”).
Gloss: “White rocks lie above in a compact cluster.”
3. *tsé biká’ tú yahilíí*: *tsé* (“rock”; “stone”) + *biká’* (“on top of it”; a flattish object) + *tú* (“water”) + *ya-* (“downward”) + *-hi-* (“linear succession of regularly repeated movements”) + *-líí* (“it flows”).
Gloss: “Water flows down on top of a regular succession of flat rocks.”

As shown by the photographs, Western Apache placenames provide more than precise depictions of the sites to which the names may be used to refer. In addition, placenames implicitly identify positions for viewing these locations: optimal vantage points, so to speak, from which the sites can be observed, clearly and unmistakably, just as their names depict them. To picture a site from its name, then, requires that one imagine it as if standing or sitting at a particular spot, and it is to these privileged positions, Apaches say, that the images evoked by placenames cause them to travel in their minds.

Wherever the optimal vantage point for a named site may be located—east of the site or west, above it or below, near it or at some distance away—the van-



Figure 1
t’iis bit’áh tú’ olíí (“Water flows inward underneath a cottonwood tree”).



Figure 2
Tsé tígai dah sidil (“White rocks lie above in a compact cluster”).

tage point is described as being “in front of” (*bádnýú*) the site; and it is here, centuries ago, that ancestors of the Western Apache are believed to have stood when they gave the site its name. Accordingly, consultants from Cibecue explain that in positioning people’s minds to look “forward” (*bidááh*) into space, a placename also positions their minds to look “backward” (*t’aqzhi*) into time. For as persons imagine themselves standing in front of a named site, they may imagine that they are standing in their “ancestors’ tracks” (*nohwizá’yé biké’é*), and from this psychological perspective, which is sometimes described as an intense form of “daydreaming” (*bit’onaagodah*), traditional accounts of ancestral events associated with the site are said to be recalled with singular clarity and force. In other words, by evoking detailed pictures of places, together with specific vantage points from which to picture picturing them, placenames acquire a capacity to evoke stories and images of the people who knew the places first. When placenames are used by Apache speakers in certain ways, mental pictures of the ancestors come instantly and vividly alive.

The capacity of Western Apache placenames to situate people’s minds in historical time and space is clearly apparent when names are used to anchor traditional narratives—“myths” (*godiyihgo nagoldi’é*), “sagas” (*ntt’éeego nagoldi’*), and “historical tales” (*ágodzuahí nagoldi’é*)—which present depictions of “ancestral life” (*nohwizá’yé zhinego*) and, in so doing, illustrate aspects of “ancestral wisdom” (*nohwizá’yé bi kigoyá’ít*).¹⁵ But the evocative power of placenames is most dramatically displayed when a name is used to substitute for



Figure 3

Tsé biká' tú yahilí' (“Water flows down on top of a regular succession of flat rocks”).

the narrative it anchors, “standing up alone” (*’o’ áá*), as Apaches say, to symbolize the narrative as well as the wisdom it contains. On such occasions, consultants from Cibecue report, a single placename may accomplish the communicative work of an entire saga or historical tale; and sometimes, depending on the immediate social circumstances, it may accomplish even more. For when placenames are employed in this isolated and autonomous fashion—when, in other words, Apache people practice “speaking with names”—their actions are interpreted as a recommendation to recall ancestral wisdom and apply it directly to matters of pressing personal concern. And in emotionally charged contexts like these, my consultants maintain, “ancestral voices” (*nohwizá’yé bizhíi*) may seem to speak directly to the individuals involved.¹⁶

We call it speaking with names. Placenames are all we need for that, speaking with names. We just fix them up. That woman was too sad. She was worried too much about her younger brother. We tried to make her feel better. We tried to make her think good thoughts.

“Speaking with names” is considered appropriate under certain conditions only, and these conditions, which Apaches describe as socially “taut” (*ndoh*) and “heavy” (*ndaaz*), tend to occur infrequently. Consequently, as people from Cibecue are quick to point out, placenames are usually put to other communicative ends. Most of the time, in the recurrent situations supplied by everyday life, placenames are called upon to perform simple verbal chores: to indicate where

one is going, for example, or to announce where one has been; to make plans for a forthcoming hunt, or to pinpoint the latest happenings gleaned from local gossip. When placenames are used for ordinary purposes such as these, Apache speakers typically produce the names in shortened or contracted forms. Thus, the name *t' iis bit'ah tú' olíí'* ('water flows inward underneath a cottonwood tree') is commonly heard as *t' iis tl' áh 'olíí'* or *t' iis tú 'olíí'*, the name *tsé biká' tú yahilíí'* ('water flows down on top of a regular succession of flat rocks') as *tsé ká' yahilíí'* or *tsé tú yahilíí'*, and so forth. In marked contrast to these abbreviated renderings, placenames intended to evoke mental pictures of the past are invariably spoken in full and are embellished, or "fixed up" (*náyidlé*), with an optional suffix that imparts an emphatic force roughly equivalent to English "right here!" or "at this very place!" Accordingly, the placename *t' iis bit'ah tú' olíí'* is produced in traditional narratives as *t' iis bit'ah tú' olíné*, the name *tsé biká' tú yahilíí'* as *tsé biká' tú yahilíné*, etc. Although the optional suffix may be employed for purposes other than helping to summon ancestral images and voices, my consultants agree that this is one of its primary functions. And at no time is that function more readily apparent as when Apache men and women, bent upon "speaking with names," dispense with narratives completely and use placenames, fully encliticized, in the expression *X 'ágodzaa yú* ('It happened at X, at this very place!').¹⁷

This expression is normally reserved for social situations in which speaking of absent parties to persons closely connected to them must be accomplished with delicacy and tact. More specifically, the expression is used when ancestral wisdom seems applicable to difficulties arising from serious errors in someone else's judgment, but when voicing one's thoughts on the matter—or, as one of my consultants said, "making wisdom too plain"—might be taken as evidence of moral conceit, critical disapproval, and a lack of sympathetic understanding. Instead, and ever so deftly, "speaking with names" enables those who engage in it to acknowledge a regrettable circumstance without explicitly judging it, to exhibit solicitude without openly proclaiming it, and to offer advice without appearing to do so.

But "speaking with names" accomplishes more than this. A traditional Apache narrative encapsulated in its own spatial anchor, the expression *X 'ágodzaa yú* is also a call to memory and imagination. Simultaneously, it is a call to persons burdened by worry and despair to take remedial action on behalf of themselves. "Travel in your mind," the expression urges those to whom it is addressed. "Travel in your mind to a point from which to view the place whose name has just been spoken. Imagine standing there, as if in the tracks of your ancestors, and recall stories of events that occurred at that place long ago. Picture these events in your mind and appreciate, as if the ancestors themselves were speaking, the wisdom the stories contain. Bring this wisdom to bear on your own disturbing situation. Allow the past to inform your understanding of the present. You will feel better if you do."

And Western Apache people report that sometimes they do feel better. Having pictured distant places and dwelled on distant events, their worries may become less plaguing and acute: less "sharp" (*ts'ík'ii*), less "rigid" (*ntl'iz*), less

“noisy” (*gónch’add*) in their minds. Feelings of anxiety and emotional turbulence may give way to welcome sensations of “smoothness” (*dilkqoh*), of “softness” (*dédi’ilé*), of growing inner “quiet” (*doo hwaá goñch’aad da*). And when this actually happens—when ancestral wisdom works to give beneficial perspective and fresh recognition that trying times can be dealt with successfully and eventually overcome—persons thus heartened may announce that relationships characterized by “pleasantness and goodness” (*gozhoo*) have been restored between themselves and their surroundings. A psychological balance has been re-established, an optimistic outlook borne of strengthened confidence and rejuvenated hope, and people may also announce that a “sickness” (*nezgai*) has been “healed” (*nábilziih*). “Bad thinking” (*ncho’go natsikees*) has been replaced by “good thinking” (*nzhoo’go natsikees*), and at least for a while the exigencies of life can be met with replenished equanimity.

IV

No matter what else human beings may be communicating about, or may think they are communicating about, they are always communicating about themselves, about one another, and about the immediate context of communication.

—Robert Pittinger, Charles Hockett, John Danahy, *The First Five Minutes*

The foregoing account of aspects of Western Apache placename ideology supplies the basic conceptual framework with which to interpret the conversational encounter at Lola Machuse’s camp in Cibecue. But because the account has been formulated as Apache people themselves insist upon doing—that is, in abstract normative terms—it fails to elucidate what the practice of “speaking with names” served to accomplish on that particular occasion. In other words, we have yet to identify the social actions that participants in the encounter used their utterances to perform, and thus, necessarily, we have yet to grasp the coherence of their talk. So let us be about it. Having fashioned an account of the cultural logic on which “speaking with names” is understood to operate, attention may now be directed to a functional interpretation of how, and with what sorts of interpersonal consequences, this mode of discourse was actually put to work. Once again, Lola Machuse.

That women’s younger brother acted stupidly. He was stupid and careless. He failed to show respect. No good! We said nothing critical about him to her. We talked around it.

The social gathering at Lola Machuse’s camp was uncomfortable for everyone involved, but especially for Louise. Troubled by her brother’s sudden illness, she was troubled even more by his apparent lack of common sense. Having come into contact with the snakeskin near the roundup camp, he should have gone directly to a ritual specialist for assistance in dealing with his contaminated state. That he failed to do so was disturbing enough, but that he treated the incident in such a cavalier fashion was more disturbing still. Plainly, he was guilty of a grave

lapse in judgment, and now, as surely he could have anticipated, he was suffering the painful consequences. Why had the young man acted so irresponsibly? In addition to being upset, Louise was bewildered and perplexed.

Louise's chronicle of her brother's misfortune created an opportunity for all on hand to comment on his conduct. But because her account portrayed him in a distinctly unfavorable light, it also presented him as a target for easy criticism. If criticism were to be forthcoming, it could only serve to embarrass Louise, for she would have no alternative but to try to defend her brother's actions—and this would be awkward and difficult at best. Yet refusing to defend him could be taken to mean that she was prepared to condemn him entirely, and condemning one's relatives, especially in the presence of nonrelatives, is a conspicuous violation of kinship loyalties that Western Apaches rarely see fit to excuse.¹⁸

For these reasons, Louise's candid statement placed her companions in a delicate dilemma. On the one hand, no one could assert that Louise's brother had not acted wrongly without casting serious doubt on his or her own good judgment. On the other hand, no one could openly censure the young man without adding to Louise's discomfort, thereby displaying a lack of consideration for her aggravated feelings and a lack of concern for the circumstances that had produced them. How, then, to respond? How to speak the truth—or something that could be heard as not denying the truth—without exacerbating an already sensitive situation?

Those placenames really helped us out! We gave her pictures with placenames. That way she started feeling better. Those placenames are strong!

After finishing her account, Louise paused, took a long drink from her Pepsi-Cola, and started to speak again of her beleaguered brother. But Lola Machuse intervened at this point, saying softly but firmly, “*‘tsé hadigaiyé yú ’ágodzaa’*” (“It happened at line of white rocks extends upward and out, at this very place!”). Lola's utterance was intended to evoke a historical tale for Louise to picture in her mind, but it was also designed to change the topic of talk and set the conversation on a new and different course. Instead of Louise's brother, whom Lola was showing she had no desire to criticize, attention was shifted to Louise herself and her troubled reactions to her brother's unfortunate predicament. Instead of disapproval, Lola Machuse was exhibiting sympathy and concern.

As later told by herself, the historical tale that Lola Machuse wished to evoke is the following.¹⁹

It happened at line of white rocks extends upward and out.

Long ago, a girl lived alone with her maternal grandmother. Her grandmother sent her out regularly to collect firewood. She went to a place above her camp. She could get there quickly by climbing up through a rocky canyon. Many snakes lived there. So her grandmother told her always to go another way.

The girl went to collect firewood. The day was hot. Then the girl became thirsty. Then she thought, “This wood is heavy. I don't want to carry it too far.” Then she started to walk down the rocky canyon. There were loose rocks where she walked. Then she slipped and fell down. The firewood she was carrying scattered everywhere! Then she

started to pick it up. A snake bit her hand! Then she got scared. “My grandmother knew this would happen to me,” she thought.

Then the girl returned to where she was living with her grandmother. Her arm and hand became badly swollen. Then they worked over her [i.e., performed a curing ceremony]. Later, the girl went to her grandmother. “My life is still my own,” she said. Then her grandmother talked to her again. Now she knew how to live right.

It happened at line of white rocks extends upward and out.

As Lola Machuse had reason to suspect, Louise knew this story well. She had heard it many times and on several occasions had performed it for her own children. Consequently, Louise reported later, her mind traveled instantly to a spot from which to view the place named *tsé hadigai* (“line of white rocks extends upward and out”), and images of the girl carrying firewood—and, most vividly of all, of the girl’s scrambling attempts to retrieve it after she lost her footing—appeared just as quickly. As a lengthy silence descended on the Machuse camp at Cibecue, Louise’s thoughts moved along these lines.

A bad thing happened at that place. Very bad! I saw that girl. She was impulsive. She forgot to be careful. She ceased showing respect. She was like my younger brother. She ceased thinking properly, so something bad happened to her. She became very scared but recovered from it. She almost died but held onto her own life.

Lola Machuse’s evocative comment had a calming effect on everyone sitting beneath the ramada at her home. Her statement relieved Louise of any need to publicly defend her brother’s conduct, and, at the same time, charted a conversational path that others could easily follow. Acknowledging the felicity of that path, and taking steps to pursue it, Emily produced a similar statement of her own—“*Ha’aa. Tűzhí’ yahigaiyé yú ’ágodaa.*” (“Yes. It happened at whiteness spreads out descending to water, at this very place!”)—and once again Louise was urged to travel in her mind and picture a historical tale.

Emily’s version of this tale, which she said has been slightly abridged, is as follows.

It happened at whiteness spreads out descending to water.

Long ago, a boy went to hunt deer. He rode on horseback. Pretty soon he saw one [a deer], standing on the side of a canyon. Then he went closer and shot it. He killed it. Then the deer rolled all the way down to the bottom of the canyon.

Then the boy went down there. It was a buck, fat and muscular. Then he butchered it. The meat was heavy, so he had to carry it up in pieces. He had a hard time reaching the top of the canyon with each piece.

Now it was getting dark. One hindquarter was still laying at the bottom of the canyon. “I have enough meat already,” he thought. So he left the hindquarter where it was lying. He left it there.

Then he packed his horse and started to ride home. Then the boy got dizzy and nearly fell off his horse. Then his nose twitched uncontrollably, like Deer’s nose does. Then pain shot up behind his eyes. Then he became scared.

Now he went back to the canyon. It was dark when he got there. He walked down to where the hindquarter was lying—but it was gone! Then he returned to his horse. He rode fast to where he was living with his relatives.

The boy was sick for a long time. The people prayed for him on four separate occasions. He got better slowly.

Some time after that, when the boy had grown to manhood, he always had bad luck in hunting. No deer would present themselves to him. He said to his children: “Look at me now. I failed to be careful when I was a boy and now I have a hard time getting meat for you to eat.”

It happened at whiteness spreads out descending to water.

The actions performed by Emily’s utterance were readily apparent to Louise. Emily, like Lola Machuse before her, was attempting to distract Louise with constructive thoughts and comfort her with expressions of support. But Louise was not intimately familiar with the story of the boy and the deer, and though her mind went swiftly to a point near *túzhí’ yahigai* (“whiteness spreads out descending to water”), she had difficulty picturing all the events in the story. She did, however, have one vivid image—of the pain-ridden boy struggling to stay astride his horse—and this was sufficient to remind her of her brother. In addition, Louise said later, she could hear the boy, now an adult, as he spoke to his children about his fateful mistake.

It was like I could hear some old man talking. He was talking to his children. “I was impatient, so I left behind good meat from that deer. Then I became very sick and very scared. I failed to show respect.” Even so, that boy lived on and grew up and had children. He learned to think right, so he talked to his children about it. Maybe my brother will learn to improve his thinking like that.

The historical tale evoked by Emily is similar in several respects to the tale evoked by Lola Machuse, and, at this point in the proceedings, Louise probably sensed that a definite pattern was starting to form. In both of the stories, young people are depicted as irresponsible and disrespectful, but for reasons having solely to do with their innocence and naïveté. In both stories, they suffer life-threatening consequences—serious illness and intense fright—from which they learn to avoid carelessness and impatience in the future. Finally, and most important of all, they regain their health and continue living, presumably for many years. Thus the unstated message for Louise, which is also a prominent aspect of Western Apache ancestral wisdom, was a distinctly positive one; in effect, “Take heart. These things will happen. Young people make foolish and dangerous mistakes, but they usually profit from them and the mistakes are seldom fatal. Be optimistic. There is reason to believe your brother will recover.”

After a while, I gave her a funny story. She didn't get mad. She was feeling better. She laughed. Then she had enough, I guess. She talked to that dog about her younger brother, criticizing him, so we knew we had helped her out.

Following another lengthy silence inside the brush-covered ramada, Lola Machuse acted to affirm and consolidate the tacit messages communicated thus far with a placename intended to evoke a third historical tale with similarities to the previous two. But with this utterance—“*Da’aníí. K’is deeschií’ naaditiné yú ’ágodzaa.*” (“Truly. It happened at trail extends across a long red ridge with alder trees, at this very place!”)—Lola took a moderate social risk. Although it deals with serious matters, the story Lola was thinking of presents a humorous aspect, and one of her purposes in evoking it was to lighten Louise’s spirits (and everyone else’s) by striking a note of reserved good cheer. The risk Lola ran was that her action would be perceived as intemperate, perhaps even playful, and thus inappropriate to the solemnity of Louise’s circumstances.

This is the historical tale, as narrated by herself, that Lola Machuse had in mind.

It happened at trail extends across a long red ridge with alder trees.

A boy and a girl were newly married. He didn’t know that he should stay away from her when her grandmother came to visit, [i.e., when she was having her menstrual period]. Then he tried to bother her. “Don’t! I’m no good for that,” she said. He was impatient. Then he tried to bother her again. Then she gave in.

Then the boy got sick, they say. It was hard for him to sit down. Then his penis became badly swollen. Pissing was painful for him, too. He walked around clutching his crotch. He was deeply embarrassed in front of his wife and her relatives. Then he got scared. “I wonder if I will be this way forever,” he thought.

Then someone talked to him, saying “Don’t bother your wife when her grandmother comes to visit. Stay away from her.” Then that person gave the boy some medicine, saying “Drink this. It will make you well. Then you can stop being embarrassed. Then you can stop walking around clutching your crotch!” That is all.

It happened at trail extends across a long red ridge with alder trees.

Fortunately, Lola Machuse’s lighthearted gamble did not misfire. Louise’s mind traveled to a vantage point from which to picture *k’is deeschií’ naaditiné* (“trail extends across a long red ridge with alder trees”), viewed the crestfallen lad with his hand where it should never be seen in public, and returned from the journey with Louise mildly amused. Afterwards, Louise made these comments.

Everyone knows that story. My mind went there. It’s funny to see that boy in the story holding onto himself. He should have left his wife alone. He was impulsive. He didn’t think right. Then he got scared. Then he was made well again with medicine. . . . I’ve heard that story often, but it’s always funny to see that boy holding onto himself, so shy and embarrassed.

At the Machuse camp in Cibecue, Louise expressed her amusement by laughing softly. This was an auspicious sign! Though sorely worried still, Louise had been moved to levity and everyone could tell that her spirits had briefly improved. Here was evidence that the unspoken messages conveyed by Lola Machuse and Emily—messages of sympathy, consolation, and encouragement—had

been beneficially received. Here was an indication that ancestral wisdom was providing Louise with a measure of comfort and hope. Seizing the moment, Robert Machuse acted to make elements of these messages explicit, compressing their dominant thrust into one succinct statement. "*Gozhoq doleet*" ("Pleasantness and goodness will be forthcoming"), said Robert with quiet conviction. And moments later, endorsing his sentiments and adding conviction of her own, Lola Machuse repeated the same phrase: "*Gozhoq doleet*" ("Pleasantness and goodness will be forthcoming").

Touched by this friendly display of goodwill, and well aware that some sort of acknowledgment of it would soon be in order, Louise responded by taking a deft and self-effacing step. In the form of a mock question addressed to Clifford, the Machuses' dog, she gently criticized her own brother: "*Shidizhé bini' éshid ne góshé?*" ("My younger brother is foolish, isn't he, dog?"). This utterance accomplished several actions simultaneously. First, by drawing attention away from herself, Louise gave notice that further evocations of traditional narratives could be politely dispensed with; in effect, "You have all done enough." Also, by directing her question to one who could not answer it, Louise indicated that additional discussion of her brother and his difficulties would serve no useful purpose; in effect, "Let the matter rest. There is nothing more to say." Finally, and most adroitly of all, by voicing the thought that had been on everyone's mind from the beginning—that Louise's brother had indeed acted foolishly—she contrived to thank them for their tact in not having voiced it; in effect, "This is the discrediting truth about my relative. I know it and I know that you know it. You were polite and thoughtful to refrain from expressing it."

As could have been predicted, Clifford did not respond to Louise's bogus query. Neither did anyone else. The speech event was over. A few minutes later, Louise and Emily rose to their feet, complained to each other about a sudden plentitude of flies, and set off together in search of a cold can of Pepsi-Cola. Lola Machuse resumed her sewing and Robert Machuse went to water his horse. The day was beginning to cool, and the landscape beyond Cibecue, its rugged contours softened now by patches of lengthening shadow, looked somewhat more hospitable than before.

V

A society to exist at all must be incessantly reenacted; its basic communications must be repeatedly resaid.

—Edward Shils, *Tradition*

The possibilities of human language are variously conceived and variously understood. Every culture, whether literate or not, includes beliefs about how language works and what it is capable of accomplishing. Similarly, every culture contains beliefs about the kinds of social contexts in which these capabilities may be realized most effectively. That such beliefs are present in contemporary Western Apache culture should now be obvious, and that they may operate in direct

and telling ways to influence patterns of verbal interaction should likewise be apparent. Moreover, it should now be possible to appreciate how aspects of Western Apache linguistic ideology contribute to perceptions of coherence in one form of Apache discourse, and also why, when contextual conditions are right, that same ideology may invest the briefest of utterances with ample meaning and substantial expressive force.

The episode at Lola Machuse’s camp suggests that while coherence in Western Apache discourse can be usefully described as a product of interlocking utterances and actions, the expressive force of Apache discourse—what people from Cibecue call its “strength” (*nalwod*)—may be viewed as a product of multiple interlockings at different levels of abstraction. Put more exactly, it is my impression that those utterances that perform the broadest range of mutually compatible actions at once are those that Apaches experience as having the greatest communicative impact. In other words, the expressive force of an Apache utterance seems to be roughly proportionate to the number of separate but complementary functions it accomplishes simultaneously, or, as Alton Becker (1982) has intimated, to the number of distinguishable subject matters it successfully communicates “about.”

The Western Apache practice of “speaking with names” manifests just this sort of functional range and versatility. Thus, as we have seen, an utterance such as *tsé hadigaiyé yú’ ágodzaa* (“It happened at line of white rocks extends upward and out, at this very place!”) may be understood to accomplish all of the following actions: (1) produce a mental image of a particular geographical location; (2) evoke prior texts, such as historical tales and sagas; (3) affirm the value and validity of traditional moral precepts (i.e., ancestral wisdom); (4) display tactful and courteous attention to aspects of both positive and negative face; (5) convey sentiments of charitable concern and personal support; (6) offer practical advice for dealing with disturbing personal circumstances (i.e., apply ancestral wisdom); (7) transform distressing thoughts caused by excessive worry into more agreeable ones marked by optimism and hopefulness; (8) heal wounded spirits.

This is a substantial amount for any spoken utterance to be capable of accomplishing, and what provides for the capability—what the forceful activity of “speaking with names” always communicates most basically “about”—is the cultural importance of named locations within the Western Apache landscape. Named places have long been symbols of mythic significance for the Apache people, and placenames—symbols that designate these symbols—supply Apache speakers with a ready means for appropriating that significance and turning it with brisk efficiency to specialized social ends. By virtue of their role as spatial anchors in traditional Apache narratives, placenames can be made to represent the narratives themselves, summarizing them, as it were, and condensing into compact form their essential moral truths. As a result, narratives and truths alike can be swiftly “activated,” foregrounded, and brought into focused awareness through the use of placenames alone. And so it happens, on those occasions when Apache people see fit to speak with placenames, that a vital part of their tribal heritage seems to speak to them as well. For on such occasions, as we have seen, partici-

pants may be moved and instructed by voices other than their own. In addition, persons to whom placenames are addressed may be affected by the voice of their ancestors, a voice that communicates in compelling silence with an inherent weight described by Mikhail Bakhtin as the “authoritative word”:

The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused on it. The authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. Its authority was already acknowledged in the past. It is a prior discourse. . . . It is given (it sounds) in lofty spheres, not those of familiar contact. Its language is a special (as it were, hieratic) language. [Bakhtin 1981:342]

When Western Apache placenames are called upon to serve as vehicles of ancestral authority, the wisdom thus imparted is not so loftily given as to inhibit its utilization in the mundane spheres of everyday life. On the contrary, as the episode at the Machuse camp illustrates clearly, such knowledge exists to be applied, to be thought about and acted upon, to be incorporated (the more so the better, Lola Machuse would have us understand) into the smallest corners of personal and social experience. And insofar as this kind of incorporation occurs—insofar as places and placenames provide Apache people with symbolic reference points for the moral imagination and its practical bearing on the actualities of their lives—the landscape in which the people dwell can be said to dwell in them. For the constructions Apaches impose upon their landscape have been fashioned from the same cultural materials as constructions they impose upon themselves as members of society. Both give expression to the same set of values, standards, and ideals; both are manifestations of the same distinctive charter for being-in-the-world. Inhabitants of their landscape, the Western Apache are thus inhabited *by* it as well, and, in the timeless depth of that abiding reciprocity, the people and their landscape are virtually as one.²⁰

This reciprocal relationship—a relationship in which individuals invest themselves in the landscape while incorporating its meanings into their own most fundamental experience—is the ultimate source of the rich sententious potential and functional versatility of Western Apache placenames. For when placenames are used in the manner exemplified by Lola Machuse and her friends, the landscape is appropriated in pointedly social terms and the authoritative word of Apache tribal tradition is brought squarely to bear on matters of importunate social concern. Concomitantly, persons in distress are reminded of what they already know but sometimes forget—that ancestral wisdom is a powerful ally in times of adversity, and that reflecting upon it, as countless generations of Apaches have learned, can produce expanded awareness, feelings of relief, and a fortified ability to cope. And because helping people to cope is regarded by Apaches as a gesture of compassion, the use of placenames for this purpose serves as well to communicate solicitude, reassurance, and personal solidarity. The primary reason that “speaking with names” can accomplish so much—the reason its expressive force is sometimes felt to be so “strong” (*nalwod*)—is that it facilitates reverberating

acts of kindness and caring. And the effects of kindness and caring, especially when spirits are in need of healing, can be very strong indeed.

As must now be apparent, the ethnographic account presented in this essay has been shaped by a “pragmatic” view of spoken communication that rests on the premise that languages consist in shared economies of grammatical resources with which language users act to get things done.²¹ The resources of a language, together with the varieties of action facilitated by their use, acquire meaning and force from the sociocultural contexts in which they are embedded, and therefore, as every linguist knows, the discourse of any speech community will exhibit a fundamental character—a genius, a spirit, an underlying personality—which is very much its own. Over a period of years, I have become convinced that one of the distinctive characteristics of Western Apache discourse is a predilection for performing a maximum of socially relevant actions with a minimum of linguistic means. Accordingly, I have been drawn to investigate instances of talk, like the one involving Lola and Robert Machuse, in which a few spoken words are made to accomplish large amounts of communicative work.²² For it is just on such occasions, I believe, that elements of Apache culture and society fuse most completely with elements of grammar and the situated aims of individuals, such that very short utterances, like polished crystals refracting light, can be seen to contain them all. On these occasions, the Western Apache language is exploited to something near its full expressive potential, and even Apaches themselves, struck momentarily by the power of their discourse, may come away impressed.

Such powerful moments may not be commonplace in Western Apache speech communities, but they are certainly common enough—and when they occur, as on that hot and dusty day at Cibecue, robust worlds of meaning come vibrantly alive. Conveying these worlds, capturing with words both the richness of their content and the fullness of their spirit, requires an exacting effort at linguistic and cultural translation that can never be wholly successful. The problem, of course, is that verbally mediated realities are so densely textured and incorrigibly dynamic, and that one’s own locutions for representing them—for drawing the reader, as James Fernandez (1983:327) has urged, into “the very center of the complex flow of communicative experience and activity”—fail to do justice to the numerous subtleties involved. Unavoidably, delicate proportions are altered and disturbed, intricate momentums halted and betrayed; and however much one explicates there is always more (or so one is tempted to suppose) that might usefully be done. Despite these persisting uncertainties, however, enough can be learned and understood—and, I would hope, effectively conveyed as well—so that we, like the Apaches of Cibecue, may come away from certain kinds of speech events instructed and impressed. And sometimes roundly moved. Following its more accentuated moments, moments shaped by graciousness and the resonating echoes of a fully present past, the minimalist genius of Western Apache discourse leaves us silent in its wake—traveling in our minds, listening for the ancestors, and studying the landscape with a new and different eye. On the pictorial wings of placenames imaginations soar.

Notes

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¹Compatible views on environmental appropriation are expressed in Deloria (1975) and Silko (1986).

²A brief discussion of the history of placename research in American anthropology may be found in Basso (1983).

³Schegloff (1972) demonstrates nicely why placenaming, together with other conversational methods of "formulating place," warrants close investigation by students of language concerned with the organization of everyday talk.

⁴Silverstein (1976, 1979) argues that a preoccupation with the "semantico-referential" function of language has provided the basis for a uniquely biased Western linguistic ideology in which other functions, especially indexical ones, are accorded secondary importance. In this regard, the views expressed in Tyler (1978, 1984) are also highly instructive.

⁵See, for example, recent ethnographic studies by Feld (1982), Rosaldo (1980), and Schieffelin (1979), all of which attest to the symbolic importance of placenames in non-Western cultural contexts. Other reports, similarly illustrative, include Berndt (1976), Cruikshank (1983), Munn (1973), and Takaki (1984).

⁶A short ethnography of the Western Apache community at Cibecue, completed in 1968 and now increasingly out of date, is presented in Basso (1970).

⁷"Emily" and "Louise" are pseudonyms; Lola Machuse, Robert Machuse, and Clifford are not.

⁸This verbal exchange was not recorded on tape. I am satisfied, however, as are the Apache persons who participated in the exchange, that the text given here is essentially accurate. What is missing, of course, is information pertaining to prosodic phenomena, but none of the participants could recall anything in this regard that they considered out of the ordinary. Lola Machuse offered the following generalization: “When we talk like that [i.e., “speaking with names”] we just talk soft and slow, so that people know to listen real good.”

⁹I follow here Silverstein’s (1979:195) definition of linguistic ideologies as “any sets of beliefs about language as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use.” For an informative discussion of some of the perceptual and cognitive limits that may be inherent in linguistic ideologies, see Silverstein (1981).

¹⁰This statement by Lola Machuse was delivered in Western Apache; it was translated into English by Lola Machuse, Robert Machuse, Nashley Tessay, and myself.

¹¹Refraining from speaking too much has pleasing aesthetic consequences that Apache people from Cibecue value and appreciate. It produces a lean narrative style, concise and somewhat stark, which is notably free of cursory embellishments—a kind of narrative minimalism in which less is held to be more. But it is a narrative style with definite moral underpinnings. Refraining from speaking too much results in effective depictions, and this, Apaches say, is all to the good. But economical speech also shows respect for the ample picturing abilities of other people, and this is better still.

¹²For a description of Western Apache territory in prereservation times [i.e., prior to 1872], together with a discussion of Apache seasonal movements, see Goodwin (1942).

¹³Several hundred placenames in current use among Apache people at Cibecue, accompanied by morphological analyses and semantic glosses in English, are presented in Basso et al. (n.d.); a more detailed investigation of morphological processes, focused primarily on the pictorial attributes of Apache placenames, is found in Basso et al. (n.d.).

¹⁴The pictorial character of Western Apache placenames is frequently remarked upon when Apache people are asked to compare their own placenames with familiar placenames in English. On such occasions, English names—such as Globe, Show Low, McNary, Phoenix, and other—are regularly found deficient for “not showing what those places look like” or for “not letting you see those places in your mind.” Alternatively, Western Apache placenames—such as *gizh yaa’itin* (“trail leads down through a gap between two hills”), *ch’itdiyē cho sikaad* (“cluster of big walnut trees stands bushing out”), and *tú-zhí’yaahichii* (“redness spreads out extending down to water”)—are consistently praised for “making you see those places like they really are” or for “putting those places in your mind so you can see them after you go away.” One Apache from Cibecue put the difference succinctly: “The white man’s names [are] no good. They don’t give pictures to your mind.” And a local wit said this: “Apaches don’t need Polaroids. We’ve got good names!”

¹⁵The distinguishing features of these three traditional narrative genres as articulated by Western Apache people themselves are discussed in Basso (1984).

¹⁶Western Apaches readily acknowledge that “speaking with names” is possible only among persons who share knowledge of the same traditional narratives; otherwise, placenames would evoke stories for hearers that are different from those intended by speakers. But this, it seems, is rarely a problem among older people. Most adults living in Cibecue

maintain that they are familiar with the same corpus of narratives, and while any narrative is understood to have several versions (and different storytellers different ways of performing them), there is little confusion as to where events in the narrative are believed to have taken place. Consequently, the placename (or names) that anchor a narrative can function reliably to evoke comparable images of ancestral events and corresponding appreciations of ancestral wisdom. Younger Apache people, I was told, are ignorant of both placenames and traditional narratives in increasing numbers, so that for some of them "speaking with names" has become difficult or impossible. Although the instance of "speaking with names" discussed in the present essay features women conversing with women, I have been assured by consultants from Cibecue that the use of this verbal practice has never been, and is not today, restricted to female interlocutors. Apache men, I was informed, employ the practice when speaking to men, and persons of opposite sex may employ it when speaking to each other.

¹⁷Sapir's description of Algonkian words as "tiny imagist poems" applies nicely to Western Apache placenames, and there is little doubt in my mind that the practice of "speaking with names" exhibits poetic qualities. I have not pursued this line of thought in this essay because I remain uncertain as to what Apache conceptions of "poetic speech" might be. That such conceptions exist is certain, as evidenced by my consultants' observations that most forms of talk can be more or less "beautiful" (*dińzhońé*). But I was also informed that judgments concerning beauty in speech cannot be made in the abstract, suggesting that features of social context may inform such judgments as much as (and perhaps, in some cases, even more than) attributes of grammatical form and phonetic shape. For useful discussions of the poetic dimensions of speech in relation to discourse generally and to a recasting of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis in particular, see Friedrich (1986) and Sherzer (1987).

¹⁸Louise, who is distantly related to Emily, is not related to Lola Machuse or Robert Machuse.

¹⁹The texts of the three historical tales presented in this essay were originally recorded in Western Apache; they were subsequently translated into English by Lola Machuse, Robert Machuse, Nashley Tessay, Morley Cromwell, Nick Thompson, Imogene Quay, and myself.

²⁰A brief but informative discussion of the moral contours of Native American landscapes is found in Deloria (1975).

²¹This view of language and its suitability for an ethnographic approach to the study of discourse has been most fully articulated by Hymes (e.g., 1974). For extended applications of this approach, together with useful theoretical discussion, see Sherzer (1983) and Bauman (1984). Hymes's more recent work (e.g., 1981), is also illustrative in this regard, as are treatments by Bauman (1986), Feld (1982), and Friedrich (1986). Tyler (1978) presents a sweeping philosophical critique of formalism in modern linguistic theory, and, on grounds somewhat different than Hymes, argues persuasively for a more sensitive and sensible approach to the study of language use in its cultural and social contexts.

²²Some other manifestations of the predilection for "mini-maxing" in Western Apache discourse are described and discussed in Basso (1969, 1976, 1984).

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