Communication between Cultures: Navajo Discourse Strategies in Interethnic Interactions

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Introduction

Differences in the discourse strategies of members of dissimilar cultures who speak the same language often go undetected as such, and yet can have highly negative effects on intercultural speech events. These effects can result in a myriad of undesirable outcomes, including disrespect, distrust, and enmity towards others. John J. Gumperz (1978) argues that intercultural miscommunications are "due to differences in the perception and interpretation of conventional verbal and nonverbal signals" (13). Thus, it is only through an awareness of these signals and their meanings that such miscommunications can be avoided. For this reason, it is increasingly relevant that researchers investigate the communicative norms of communities outside their own.

Upon embarking on a study of Navajo language maintenance, I discovered that there is a paucity of literature addressing the rules and strategies of communication among members of the Navajo speech community. Because research in the area of Navajo communicative norms is quite limited and because there is a need for this type of information, this study attempts to analyze and document some differences in the discourse strategies of the dominant Anglo/European community and those of the Navajo community when speaking English.

Three research questions are addressed by the study: 1) Are the discourse strategies of the Navajo sample consistent with findings in the literature? 2) Does level of fluency in Navajo influence discourse strategies of Navajo students speaking English? and 3) Will the corpus for this study suggest Navajo discourse strategies not previously addressed in the literature? The study analyzes interview data of 12 Navajo university students for a variety of discourse strategies: silence, length of pauses, interruptions, backchanneling, and turn-taking. Findings are compared to previous findings in the literature on Native American and Navajo discourse strategies, and any new findings are documented. The discussion is organized into several sections which contain a brief literature review, an explanation of the methodology employed, and the findings of the study, and

concludes with a restatement of the main points as well as a discussion of some limitations of the study and suggestions for future research. The study is situated within the field of interactional sociolinguistics, in which a qualitative approach to the gathering and analysis of portions of discourse is used, each speech event being treated as an interaction between participants.

The literature on interactional sociolinguistics has not, to my knowledge, addressed the issue of Native American- or Navajo- Anglo interethnic communication. However, this framework has been utilized extensively for interaction between members of different ethnicities, and is often used for discussions of discourse strategies such as backchanneling, which as a listener-produced strategy must be examined in terms of participant interaction (see LoCastro 1987). Gumperz advocates what he terms an "interactive approach to communication, which sees communicating as the outcome of exchanges involving more than one active participant" (1981:324), Therefore, discourse must be examined in terms of the joint production of a speech event, in which both speakers and listeners are actively engaged. Gumperz then proceeds to redefine the term "communicative competence" (defined originally by Hymes (1970)) as "the knowledge of linguistic and related communicative conventions that speakers must have to initiate and sustain conversational involvement" (325). With this definition, Gumperz stresses the importance of linguistic factors above the levels of syntax and morphology, and extra-linguistic factors related to socialization. In a later work focusing solely on discourse strategies, Gumperz frames his approach with the supposition that "a general theory of discourse strategies must ... begin by specifying the linguistic and socio-cultural knowledge that needs to be shared if conversational involvement is to be maintained..." (1982:3), However, one cannot assume that speakers share this necessary information. According to Deborah Schiffrin (1994), interactional sociolinguistics is grounded in the basic assumption that "the meaning of structure, and the use of language is socially and culturally relative" (98). Schiffrin quotes Gumperz (1982) as saying, "What we perceive and retain in our mind is a function of our culturally determined predisposition to perceive and assimilate" (99), Therefore, persons of differing cultural backgrounds will have different ways of communicating, A theory of interactional sociolinguistics, notes Gumperz (1978), must assume that communicative rules and norms are not shared by participants, even if they live in the same society and speak the same language, because communicative competence, he argues, is in part determined by ethnicity, In this study, ethnicity is the unifying variable; therefore, literature focusing on the Native American community as a whole will be examined, as well as that focusing specifically on the Navajo community.

Although the literature on Native American discourse strategies is quite limited, there are a few studies which mention, as a part of their discussion, various

communicative norms of the communities which were examined, The following discussion attempts to provide an overview of these norms by strategy, focusing only on the strategies examined in the study: silence, pauses, interruptions, turn-taking, and backchanneling in informal discourse.

Literature review

Silence among Native American tribes is one of the most often documented aspect of communicative norms, According to Keith Basso (1972), Western Apache Indians of east-central Arizona refrain from speaking in certain social contexts in which the participants are unsure of their expected role or status, Basso notes that activities such as meeting strangers, courting, coming home after a long absence, "getting cussed out", and being in the presence of one who has lost a loved one are all situations that require a larger degree of silence than might be expected in the Anglo speech community, Gary Plank (1994) claims that this is true in the case of Navajos as well. He states, "Silence appears to be a cultural norm" (7), In the case of meeting strangers, Basso states that unknown persons who "are quick to launch into conversation" are thought to be either in need of something (and thus circumspect) or drunk. Social relationships, for the Apache, are not to be entered into lightly; they require "caution, careful judgment, and plenty of time" (73). Michael Foster (1988) provides further evidence for the importance of silence when meeting strangers in his discussion of the Iroquois, He argues that because the Iroquois think of conversation as a way to bond with one another rather than the simple exchange of social amenities, traditional Iroquois will be reticent by Anglo standards until a "fairly high degree of rapport or solidarity" has been established between the participants (30), If strangers talk, it will be of the weather or other superficial topics, rather than of any matter of substance,

Regna Darnell (1985, 1988) attributes the importance of silence among the Cree to the idea of individual autonomy, which is greatly respected, "Silence", she states, "is a mechanism of self-defense, protecting autonomy of person" (1985:71). The importance of autonomy among Native American peoples has been noted by numerous scholars, Philips (1972) discusses autonomy in regards to learning styles of Warm Springs Indian children (of Sahaptin and Chinookan descent); French (1978) notes the strong belief in autonomy among the Cherokee; Rushforth (1988) stresses "the importance which Dene attach to individual autonomy" in his article on Bear Lake Athapaskans (113); Scollon and Scollon (1981) discuss the same in regards to Northern Athapaskans; and Deyhle (1989) mentions a similar tendency among the Navajo, Mary Black-Rogers, who studied the Ojibwa, describes the reasoning behind this respect for individual decision making as one aspect of the respect shown to every living thing, She argues that because every person has the potential to have power, and because that power might be used against another,

members of the Ojibwa community are sure to avoid offending anyone, She states that “behaviour, then, is strongly geared toward non-interference with another’s autonomy, i.e. toward avoiding actions that could be interpreted as attempts to control others” (1988:45), Another issue relating to the power of the individual is discussed by Plank, who quotes one Navajo educator as noting that many Navajos once believed: “freely giv[ing] out our knowledge to strangers” is dangerous, because “[t]hey might gain all of your knowledge and that person will lose his or her power” (11). Darnell echoes this thought when she states, “interaction is potentially dangerous to the autonomy of the individual” (1988:71); therefore, silence is deemed appropriate in many situations,

Closely related to this is the great importance that Native Americans seem to place on the listener, Darnell states that one of the highly valued interactional skills in Cree society is that of listening, because listening equals an acceptance of the “right of others to speak because of their personal autonomy” (1988:71), Darnell also states that wisdom, based on age in many Native American cultures, is the prerequisite for talk in many cases, and one who is young or has little knowledge of a topic is often expected to be silent when in the presence of older, more knowledgeable community members, Philips (1972) also notes that Indian children learn much through silent watching and listening. She mentions that the Indian child is taught not to speak if he or she has nothing relevant to say.

Pausing is also related to the Native Americans’ conception of silence as normal and necessary in interaction, Philips (1985) notes that Warm Springs students often pause for a longer period of time after being asked a question than Anglo teachers are accustomed to, According to Philips, this is due to the fact that Indians allow for a longer pause between utterances than Anglos do, Darnell states that Cree speakers pause longer than Anglos both within and between turns, She argues that the rationale behind longer pauses is one of respect for the speaker, Any utterance that is worth saying should be carefully considered by the listener before he or she responds. Furthermore, Darnell states, “In fact, the role of listener is more highly valued than that of speaker -- the listener is learning something from the words of another” (1985:67), According to Scollon and Scollon, Northern Athabaskans also pause slightly longer than Anglos between sentences, estimating that Anglos pause for approximately one second or less, and that Northern Athabaskans pause for approximately one and a half seconds, Furthermore, Scollon and Scollon explain that “the length of pause that the Athabaskan takes while expecting to continue is just about the length of pause the English speaker takes in exchanging turns” (1981:25), The outcome of this situation is that often the English speaker will wait for a response and, not receiving one within his or her allotted time frame, will continue to speak before the Athabaskan has had a chance to speak.

In addition, because the Anglo speaker is not familiar with the Athabaskan

norm of longer pauses between sentences, Scollon and Scollon (1981) note that he or she often will not realize that an Athabaskan speaker has not finished his or her utterance, unintentionally interrupting the Athabaskan, As has been discussed above, speaking before another has completed his or her utterance violates the rule of consideration afforded the utterance of the speaker and is considered rude and disrespectful,

Another interrelated topic is turn-taking, Scollon and Scollon (1981) argue that because pauses are misinterpreted in interethnic communication between Anglos and Athabaskans, Anglos often end up holding the floor much more often than Athabaskans, In addition, the concept of a speaker turn is not equivalent to the equal exchange model understood by most Anglos, Darnell (1985) argues that the ideal form of speech among the Cree is the monologue of an elder, When an elder speaks, one is expected to listen and learn, not participate in conversation, The highest status is conferred on the elder because of his or her vast amount of experience in the world, and Darnell states that interactional control among the Cree is based on status: the person of higher status controls the speech event, Scollon and Scollon agree that the monologue of an older speaker is the preferred form of speech among Athabaskans, According to the authors, this is an indication of the idea that a monologue-type response is a normal turn, because Athabaskans "expect that a speaker will take as long as necessary to develop an idea" (1981:26), On the other hand, Anglos expect a dialogue format, which can lead to interruptions on the part of the Anglo, who feels as though he or she hasn't received the floor often enough, This expectation also leads to the Anglo speaker's misinterpretation that the Athabaskan has completed an utterance, when actually he or she has more to say.

The literature on backchanneling in informal conversations among Native Americans, unfortunately, seems nonexistent, except for a mention by Darnell that Cree listeners will often respond to what a speaker says with the utterance "ehe", which means "yes" in the sense of "I have heard your words", but does not signal agreement (1988:71), The frequency and timing of this backchanneling is unknown.

The information presented in this literature review is somewhat limited because it addresses a wide range of Native American cultures, and discourse strategy universality among Native Americans has not been proven, or even assumed, Indeed, the approach of interactional sociolinguistics described above makes the inverse assumption, Nonetheless, the data for this study are compared in section IV to the information provided in the above section to examine the possibility of shared discourse strategies among Native American cultures and to corroborate or refute what little has been said regarding Navajo discourse strategies.

Data Collection

The methodological framework used to gather the data for this study was

ethnographic in nature, The primary objective of the study for which the data were originally gathered was to give voice to members of the Navajo Nation on the issue of Navajo language maintenance; therefore, informal oral interviews were conducted with the consultants, and often conversations would continue long after the tape recorder was shut off, Before beginning the data collection stage of the study, the researcher attempted to familiarize herself with the Navajo language and culture by taking a Navajo language class, having conversations with members of the Navajo community, and perusing any literature that might provide insight into the Navajo culture and way of life.

The consultants were recruited from four classes at Arizona State University (ASU) and Northern Arizona University (NAU). The first group of consultants came from a beginning Navajo course taught at ASU. Although the course is geared towards non-speakers, there were some students who are quite fluent in Navajo. The second and third groups of consultants came from ASU's First-Year Composition English course designed for Native American students and a course called Native Images, an upper-level writing course for Native American students, respectively. The fourth group of consultants came from a beginning level Navajo language class taught at NAU, Again, some of the consultants in this class spoke Navajo fluently before entering the classroom.

The recruiting process involved an introduction of myself and the study, an oral reading of a written script required by the Human Subjects Review Board, and a brief question-and-answer period. A signup sheet was then passed around so that the consultants could be contacted to set up appointments, Each potential consultant was called to set up a meeting, during which the student would either fill out a questionnaire, participate in an interview, or (optimally) do both, Meetings were generally held on the Arizona State University campus, although a few decided it would be more convenient for them to meet elsewhere. Alternate appointment sites ranged from the consultants' homes to the park to outside their classrooms,

When the students arrived, they were asked to read and sign a consent form which outlined the basic premise of the study. After the questionnaire was completed, or if the consultant wished not to fill out the questionnaire, the consultant and I moved to a more private spot to do the interview. A small lapel microphone was then attached to the consultant, and the interview began. The interviews lasted anywhere from 10 minutes to three hours, the average interview probably lasting an hour in length.

Data were gathered over a four-month period, and follow-up meetings designed to eliminate any erroneous interpretation of the data were held during another month-long period three months later, Because traditional Navajo society has certain cultural practices regarding the giving or teaching of information (Parsons Yazzie, personal conversation), the data were gathered in the winter time,

which for the Navajo runs approximately from November through March. I felt that the responses from traditional Navajos would most likely be more complete during these months.

One final related aspect of data gathering involved a consideration of how the communicative norms of the community differ from those of the dominant society. Charles Briggs states that "[a]nalysis of native metacommunicative routines ... provide[s] the cornerstone for methodological sophistication in interview-based research" (1992:62), He then goes on to state, "Adequate applications of interviewing techniques presuppose a basic understanding of the communicative norms of the society in question. Obtaining this awareness should accordingly constitute the first item on researchers' agenda" (94). Therefore, I spent much time reading about Native American/Navajo communication systems and becoming familiar with certain patterns by simply talking with (and more importantly listening to) Navajos. Although certainly it was not possible to become fluent in Navajo communicative norms in the short period of time it took to complete this research, I did gain an awareness of certain issues that could and did affect the research.

Description of Sample

The sample of consultants consisted of 12 Navajo students from Arizona State University (ASU) and Northern Arizona University (NAU). The students were primarily undergraduates, but two were at the graduate level. There were 7 males and 5 females, of ages ranging from 19 to 38 years, For complete demographic information, see Table 1 below.

As can be expected, the consultants were from hometowns all across the Navajo Reservation, All of the students were fluent in English and all were quite familiar with the dominant society of the Anglo/European world, but fluency in Navajo varied tremendously across these students, ranging from no knowledge of the language to native fluency. At the beginning of the study, I did not know any of the consultants,

Instruments

The tools of this study were a questionnaire I developed and a mini tape recorder with a lapel microphone used for the oral interviews. The questionnaire was composed of three sections: background information, language proficiency, and attitude questions (see Appendix B). In section one, the first eight questions asked for demographic information such as age, sex, hometown, current place of residence, and information about time spent living on the reservation, if any.

Table 1
Consultant Demographics

Consultant #	M/F	Age	Hometown (AZ)	Time on Res	Fluency/Nav	Ed. level
1	F	38	Kinlichee,	18	a	H
2	F	19	Ft. Defiance	4	a	H+
3	F	24	Chinle	22	c	H+
4	M	20	Indian Wells	18	c	H+
5	F	19	Gallup, NM	19	d	H+
6	M	22	Tuba City	12	c	C+
7	M	21	Tsaile	21	a	H+
8	M	21	Salina Spring	17	d	H+
9	M	28	Window Rock	15	d	C+
10	F	19	Window Rock	19	e	H+
11*	M	(18)			a	H+
12*	M	(22)			a	H+

Key

Symbol	Meaning
( )	estimation of characteristic
a	self-reported speaks Navajo “fluently”
b	self-reported speaks Navajo “pretty well”
c	self-reported speaks Navajo “adequately (can get along in it)”
d	self-reported speaks Navajo “a little”
e	self-reported speaks Navajo “not at all”
H+	some undergraduate courses
C+	some graduate courses

*preferred not to fill out a questionnaire, thus certain information was not acquired

Section two of the questionnaire asked respondents to rate themselves on their levels of fluency in both English and Navajo. The format was one of statements such as: “I speak Navajo:”, followed by a five-point fully labeled scale beginning with “fluently” and ending with “not at all”. Section three was composed of twenty-one (21) questions, some of which were divided into sub-questions (i.e. 7a. & 7b.). These questions asked respondents their opinions about issues relating to language maintenance, and were not relevant to the objectives of the present study.

The interview schedule consisted of three standard questions: “Do you think the Navajo language is dying out?”; “What do you think are some reasons Navajo children aren’t learning/speaking Navajo?”; and “What kinds of things can people do to promote the use of the Navajo language?” From these questions, a variety of topics related to the issue of language maintenance were broached, and further questions were formulated depending on the direction the consultant wished to pursue.

Data Analysis

A qualitative analysis method was used for this study. Each interview was examined as a unique interactional speech event; however, frequency counts and percentages of such variables as backchannels, long pauses, and turns taken were also calculated, In addition, fluency level in Navajo was examined for correlation with discourse strategies.

Transcripts of the interviews were coded by strategy: any realization of a strategy was marked, A one- or two-letter code was assigned to each strategy or topic, and each strategy was coded in a different color for ease of tabulation, Turns were also marked and tabulated for frequency and length of time to determine the duration of the longest turn for each interview and the percentage of backchanneling and interruptions per turn. Demographic variables and other data were arranged in tables for easy perusal by the reader.

For the purposes of coding, the terms “turn”, “backchannel”, and “interruption” had to be defined, Although Huls’ definition of the turn as “what someone says between two moments of silence” (1989:122) seems to be the most common one, this definition is inadequate for the purposes of this study. Because members of several Native American speech communities insert long pauses between utterances while still expecting to hold the floor, it seems more logical to define a turn as an utterance or series of utterances made by a participant holding the floor, Once a participant yields the floor, whether via an interruption or the completion of a response, his or her turn has ended,

By the same token, backchannels, limited in this study to verbal cues from the listener designed to encourage the speaker to hold the floor, are not considered turns, even if they do not occur in the form of simultaneous speech, This is in accordance with Duncan (1974), who states, “The auditor back-channel does not constitute a turn or a claim of a turn, It appears, however, to be a way that the auditor may provide the speaker with useful information as the turn progresses” (166),

Backchannels are also not included in the category of interruptions, because for the purposes of this study an interruption was defined as a

simultaneous utterance which resulted in a shift in turn from the speaker to the listener, It is interesting to note that several scholars have speculated that interruptions often correlate directly with the personality trait of dominance (e.g. Roger 1989), This issue will be addressed further below.

Findings

In this section, the findings of the study are reported in the order of the research questions listed in section one above, Each question is addressed as a separate entity; however, in the conclusion, the key findings are synthesized, providing the reader with a quick overview of the most relevant information gleaned from the study.

1) Are the discourse strategies of the Navajo sample consistent with the findings in the literature?

In the case of silence, the findings in this study do not seem to corroborate the findings in the literature, The Navajo university students did not seem to exhibit reticence in speaking about the topic of Navajo language maintenance to a stranger, The Navajo educator's response in Plank's study regarding the free distribution of knowledge and the subsequent loss of power also did not seem to apply to the Navajo sample in this study. On the contrary, several of the consultants were quite loquacious, and most of the interview sessions continued beyond the requested 30 minutes, Furthermore, after the interviews were completed, many consultants continued to converse with me on various topics, some of which were not related to language maintenance in any way.

It is important to note, however, that the sample is most certainly biased in this case, as only those students who consented to provide an interview were studied, For this reason, the students who might not feel comfortable talking to a stranger did not become participants in the study,

Furthermore, one of the consultants did mention a tendency on the part of Navajos to be what she called "shy": "I guess that's one of the things too about being Navajo, there's this certain quality that you're real shy..." This statement would seem to indicate that silence with strangers is a Navajo communicative norm, If this is the case, how can the absence of reticence among the sample be accounted for?

Perhaps one explanation for the lack of silence can be found in the speech event of the interview, Basso and Plank argue that the primary determinant of silence among the Apache and the Navajo (as perhaps with many cultures) is the uncertainty of status or role of the participant, In the case of an interview, roles are well defined and higher status is assigned the interviewee as the

participant with valuable knowledge to provide, This would also corroborate Darnell's finding that it is appropriate for the person with the most knowledge on a topic to speak, and that the imparting of knowledge from speaker to listener is highly valued among Native Americans.

The discourse element of pausing has received much attention in previous literature on Native American discourse, Several scholars noted that the Native Americans with whom they were familiar produced longer pauses both between and within utterances, Scollon and Scollon (1981) reporting the estimated Anglo pause at one second or less and the estimated Northern Athabaskan pause at one and one half seconds, There is strong evidence for a Navajo discourse feature of long pauses among the data for this study, Pauses of three different durations were coded in the transcriptions: pauses of 2 - 3 seconds, pauses of 3 - 4 seconds, and pauses of more than 4 seconds, The pauses were then divided into two categories, external pauses and internal pauses, External pauses (EP) were defined as those between turns and those at the beginning of a turn immediately following utterances such as "um" or "let me think", which was viewed as an accommodation strategy (discussed further below), Internal pauses (IP) were defined as those within turns, Table 2 below displays the average EP and IP and the longest EP and IP for each consultant, Note that of the pauses coded, 50% of the consultants utilized an average EP of 2 seconds or longer, and 83% of the consultants used IPs of 2 seconds or longer, What is even more striking is that several consultants (42%) utilized EPs of 4 or more seconds in duration and 42% used IPs of 4 seconds or more, Overall, EPs utilized by the Navajo students ranged from 0 to 10 seconds, and IPs from 0 to 9 seconds, In light of this evidence, it seems safe to assume that the use of long pauses both within and between utterances is one feature of Navajo discourse.

If the use of long pauses indicates a high regard for silence, as Darnell hypothesizes, one would expect to find a similar proportion of the sample avoiding the use of interruptions, The rate of interruption was calculated based on the number of interruptions divided by the number of turns taken by the researcher, Calculations show that only two of the consultants had an interruption rate of 0%, Two consultants had interruption rates between 1 and 10%, four between 10 and 20%, two between 20 and 30%, one at 39%, and one at 60%, The average interruption rate for the sample was 18%, Unfortunately, figures for average Anglo interruption rate were not available for comparison, so one can only speculate as to whether a rate of 18% is high or low, Nonetheless, the presence of any overlapping speech besides backchanneling indicates that the Navajo sample in this study overall does not regard interruptions as horribly rude, Although one could argue that the

existence of any 0% interruption rates indicates at least the possibility of an interruption taboo among members of the Navajo speech community, I would be hard pressed to make a generalization about Navajo discourse strategies based on such slight evidence.

TABLE 2
Consultant Pause Duration in Seconds

Consultant	Average EP/IP	Longest EP/IP
1	4 / 2	4 / 2
2	0 / <2	0 / <2
3	3.5 / 2.3	5 / 4
4	0 / 2	0 / 2
5	0 / 2	0 / 2
6	0 / 3.2	0 / 6
7	0 / 3	0 / 5
8	7 / 3.4	10 / 9
9	0 / <2	0 / <2
10	3 / 2	4 / 2
11	2.5 / 2	2.5 / 2
12	3.8 / 3.2	7 / 6

One interesting point to note is that the consultant with the highest percentage of interruptions (#11) also seemed to be very traditional (e.g., his responses were in the form of monologues consisting of a number of traditional Navajo stories, and at one meeting he appeared in very traditional dress for an upcoming ceremony), One explanation for this is that because he considered himself to be the speaker of higher status, he viewed any speech by the interviewer as inappropriate and therefore made efforts to take the floor at every opportunity, This was also evidenced in the monologue-type responses given by this consultant, This corroborates Darnell's observations that one is expected to listen and learn, not participate in conversation, and that the person of higher status controls the interaction among participants,

Unfortunately, in the case of backchanneling, for which there is little or no literature, a comparison of use in discourse among Native Americans cannot be made, Although Darnell mentions the existence of backchanneling among the Cree, she does not go into any detail with regard to its frequency or function within the society, The study only demonstrates that the Navajo sample also utilizes backchanneling, with the exception of one consultant, #11, the same student who

interrupted most frequently, Again, based on the analysis above, the consultant's lack of backchanneling was probably a calculated attempt to take the floor, which in his mind was the appropriate action.

The final discourse strategy to discuss is turn-taking. I noted above that in some Native American societies, the concept of an equal exchange of turns is wholly inappropriate in certain situations, one of which is the transmission of information. There was some evidence of this communicative norm among the sample, as noted above with consultant #11, This consultant presented most of his information in the form of a monologue rather than a dialogue, Of the initial three turns, two contained content that was not related to the topic and all consisted basically of the response, "yeah", The consultant held the floor with his fourth turn for twelve minutes and eleven seconds, In fact, if one counts requests for clarification as backchannels, as Duncan (1974) suggests, I did not take a turn for the remainder of the interview, which lasted over three hours,

Consultant #2 also took long turns, dominating the conversation much like consultant #11, Her turns lasted as long as five minutes, Whether or not holding the floor in this case was a matter of cultural norms is unclear, This consultant seemed to have a very dominant personality, which could explain her tendency to hold the floor, However, Consultant #2's percentage of interruption was not high (18%, which was the average), and since interruption has been shown to directly correlate with dominance, it is reasonable to assume that dominance was not a factor in this case.

2) Does level of fluency in Navajo influence discourse strategies of Navajo students speaking English?

This second question was designed to determine if a higher level of fluency in Navajo would correlate with an increase in the use of certain Navajo discourse strategies such as long pauses or minimal interruptions, The results of the study show that overall, level of fluency in Navajo does not influence discourse strategies of Navajo students speaking English,

3) Will the corpus for this study suggest Navajo discourse strategies not previously addressed in the literature?

Based on the results of the study, which indicate a tendency for Navajo students to use long pauses both between and within turns, it is possible to discern some strategies used by certain students to accommodate both the communicative norms of the dominant society and those of the Navajo society,

One form of accommodation on the part of some consultants relates to external pauses, or pauses between utterances, Because many Native American cultures value a brief period of silence before responding to a person's utterance,

members of those speech communities will use a long pause before answering to indicate respect for and consideration of the speaker and his or her words, However, in interethnic interactions, an Anglo speaker may interpret a long pause as a yielding of the floor and continue his or her turn before the Native American has a chance to respond. To circumvent this occurrence while maintaining the presence of a long pause before the turn begins, some Navajo students in the study were found to use filler words at the beginning of utterances, and then to proceed with the long pause before answering, Examples of fillers of this type can be seen in the following:

> "Um, I'd say ...(N) right now not many people my age know the language..." (C10) (N=4 seconds)
>
> "Um ...(N) I don't see it. ... I don't see it dying out..." (C8) (N=4 seconds)

Another apparent accommodation made by two consultants (#s 8 and 12) is the use of coordinating conjunctions such as "and", "so", and "but" between utterances within a turn to indicate a wish to retain the floor, together with a long pause, For instance, in the following excerpt, the consultant uses the conjunction "and" to mark his intention to continue speaking, and then follows the conjunction with a long pause:

> At home it was like 98% Navajo, only when I was in school talking to a teacher that 2% would come out, And ...(N) it seems like when you start at a younger age, you can pick up more understanding .., better than how I did when I got older. (C12) (N=6)

The pause in this sentence lasted six (6) seconds, six times longer than Scollon and Scollon's average pause duration for Anglos, Had the consultant simply ended the previous sentence without uttering "and" before pausing to think, I would have taken my next turn before he had had time to continue, This is exactly the type of situation that Scollon and Scollon (1981) and Philips (1972) warn readers about in their discussions of cross-cultural miscommunication, Therefore, it appears that, demonstrating his knowledge of the communicative norms of both cultures, the consultant accommodates for the silence-wary Anglo interviewer by clearly signaling his intention to continue, and then abides by his own cultural strategy of utilizing a long pause to take the appropriate amount of time to consider what he will say.

Evidence such as the above indicates that Navajo speakers may accommodate for Anglo speakers in interethnic communication, while retaining their own discourse strategy of utilizing the long pause. This type of accommodation has both instrumental and identity-maintenance functions. In interethnic contexts, "speech maintenance" is a valued act of maintaining one's group identity; and yet, a primary function of the speech act is the successful communication of ideas, Giles, Coupland and Coupland (1991), in their overview of Communication Accommodation Theory, state that accommodation can fulfill both simultaneously: a speaker may converge to the listener in order to facilitate understanding and may at the same time diverge from the listener in order to indicate group reference or individual identity.

Conclusion

I have attempted to address three main areas of concern regarding the discourse strategies of Navajo university students, The first was to review the literature on the topic of Native American and Navajo-specific discourse strategies and compare the findings to those of this study, The data indicate that although there is only one case in which the findings corroborate the literature, the case of long pauses, there do seem to be some universal tendencies among the discourse strategies of Native American cultures, Portions of the data support the argument that autonomy, silence, and knowledge are valued among the Navajo sample,

The second area of concern was to address the correlation, if any, between fluency in Navajo and the use of Navajo-specific discourse strategies, It was determined that there is no correlation between fluency and discourse strategies used in the data.

And finally, based on evidence from this study, it was hypothesized that certain Navajo university students, aware of the differences between certain Anglo communicative norms and those of the Navajo speech community, alter their discourse styles to accommodate the Anglo listener while at the same time abiding by their own cultural norms, helping to create a speech event that is satisfying to both participants: the listener is made to understand and the speaker is allowed to maintain his or her group and individual identity.

The study, although at times speculative due to the lack of adequate literature by which to compare the findings, is a beginning, The limitations of the study are many; for example, the sample in this study is clearly not representative of the Navajo Nation as a whole, and because they consented to participate, the consultants were a biased group in some ways, Furthermore, the discourse analyzed was that of informal interviews which, although are considered discourse and were generally conversational in nature, may have skewed the data in favor of certain strategies (such as the use of monologue-type responses), while at the same time

excluding others, Nonetheless, this study has still accomplished much of what it set out to do, The literature on the topic has been reviewed and compared to the data gathered from the sample, and some interesting accommodation strategies have been suggested.

In the future, scholars from various disciplines should record natural conversations for analysis, It would be interesting to examine Navajo-Navajo speaker conversations among both fluent speakers of Navajo and those fluent only in English, Further studies such as this one should also be conducted to either support or refute the findings here, Studies involving interethnic communication could focus specifically on accommodation strategies used by speakers of different ethnicities or cultural backgrounds, In this way, it may be possible to document not only the differences in discourse strategies between speakers of different ethnicities, but to remedy miscommunication for both researchers and participants in everyday interactions.

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Appendix A

Table 3
Overview of Data

Consultant	Interruptions # / %	# Turns taken/ longest turn in min.sec.	Backchannels #/ / %	Avg. Epause/	Longest Ipause
1/F/a	5 / 16%	32 / 1.11	16 / 50%	4/2	4/2
2/F/a	2 / 18%	11 / 5.05	2 / 18%	0/<2	0/<2
3/F/c	2 / 6%	32 / 1.15	11 / 34%	3.5/2.3	5/4
4/M/c	1 / 6%	16 / 2.34	3 / 19%	0/2	0/2
5/F/d	2 / 13%	16 / 1.45	18 / 113%	0/2	0/2
6/M/c	2 / 14%	14 / 3.55	1 / 7%	0/3.2	0/6
7/M/a	13 / 22%	58 / 0.56	5 / 9%	0/3	0/5
8/M/d	0 / 0%	41 / 1.08	8 / 20%	7/3.4	10/9
9/M/d	7 / 39%	18 / 2.56	2 / 11%	0/<2	0/<2
10F/e	0 / 0%	34 / 1.06	15 / 44%	3/2	4/2
11/M/a	3 / 60%	5 / 12.11	0 / 0%	2.5/2	2.5/2
12/M/a	3 / 20%	15 / 3.29	4 / 27%	3.8/3.2	7/6

Key to additional symbols

Symbol	Meaning
#	number of occurrences in interview data
%	percentage based on number of turns taken
Epause	external pause, includes pauses between turns and those right after “um”, “let me think” or other such strategies used at the beginning of turns, calculated in seconds
Ipause	internal pause, includes all pauses within turns, calculated in seconds

Appendix B

NAVAJO LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE ATTITUDES

Background:
First Name/Pseudonym _____
Age _____
Female/Male (circle one)
Hometown _____
Present place of residence _____
Time spent living on Reservation (if any)
_____

How old were you when you lived on the reservation?
_____

Whom did you stay with on the reservation?
_____

Where do you want to live after you graduate and why?
_____

What kind of job would you like to get after you graduate and why?

_____

Language proficiency: please circle the best response

a) fluently **b)** pretty well **c)** adequately (can get along in it) **d)** a little **e)** not at all

I speak Navajo:	a	b	c	d	e
I read Navajo:	a	b	c	d	e
I understand Navajo:	a	b	c	d	e
I write Navajo:	a	b	c	d	e
I speak English:	a	b	c	d	e
I read English:	a	b	c	d	e
I understand English:	a	b	c	d	e
I write English:	a	b	c	d	e