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The interplay of genres, gender, and language ideology among the Muskogee

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ABSTRACT

Contrary to statements made by previous researchers, Muskogee women are linguistically active in ceremonial public spheres, though through the use of genres that differ significantly from men's. One of the genres performed in these contexts is "gossip," which is described by some Muskogee men as a dangerous genre. This article explores why Muskogee women's and men's linguistic practices differ so strikingly in the ceremonial sphere, and what women achieve through their use of gossip. It is suggested that consideration of Muskogee language and gender ideologies in regard to these issues shows that gendered language use differences are rational and maintain balance between the genders. Insights from both ideologies also indicate that women's gossip is a powerful genre, the use of which is generally positive for Muskogee society. (Muskogee Indians, gender ideology, language ideology, gossip)*

INTRODUCTION

Attending gatherings and ceremonies during my dissertation research with the Muskogee Indians, a Southeastern Native American tribe, made me aware of differences between the linguistic behaviors of Muskogee and Anglo men and women in public space. I began by carefully documenting the behaviors and the settings in which the behaviors occurred, hoping that a relatively clear correlation among event, genre, and gender would emerge. However, it soon became obvious that, in order to come to grips with and explain the variation in linguistic behaviors among Muskogee men and women, I needed to explore and include aspects of Muskogee language and gender ideology. This article exposes how rich a description and explanation of linguistic behaviors can be when ideologies about distinct aspects of social life are included in the analysis.

Muskogee gender ideology provides for gender roles that are complementary, with women in charge of the familial and domestic and men in charge of the extra-familial and commercial. In line with the observations of Rosaldo (1974:19), Ortner 1974, and others, the community's valuation of women's roles within society is lower than that of men's. Concomitant with this, men's speech is fre-

quently described by Muskogee people as being more important and weighty than women's speech because it concerns activities of the wider community and interaction with outsiders. Upon investigation, however, women's speech can be shown to be just as important and powerful, though in different contexts and concerning different topics than men's speech. This power, which becomes most evident when women utilize certain genres in the context of social interactions, including traditional Muskogee ceremonies, is derived from the combination of Muskogee language ideology with gender ideology.

To understand how women's speech is a means of accessing power, I will utilize observations made by researchers who have examined how language ideology is one of several factors that affect access to linguistic forms, styles, and arenas for use (see Schiffman 1996, Hill 1998, Irvine 1998, Bauman & Briggs 2000, Errington 2000, Philips 2000). In this tradition, factors such as power relations, differential access to means of production, social class, and ethnic identity work in tandem with language ideology to promote differential access and use of linguistic forms and styles. Given that a society's gender ideology affects every individual's standing within that society, a focus on the ways in which these two ideologies are used or ignored by speakers can inform discussions about both gender and language.

Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1992:473) identify the "modes of participation available to individuals" as the primary locus where language and gender come together. However, as Kulick 1998 shows, particular genres and linguistic structures can become associated with a gender and may be positively or negatively valued because of this association. In Kulick's (1998) work, it becomes clear that Taiap, the vernacular language of Gapun, a village in Papua New Guinea, has become associated with an argumentative genre (*kroses*) utilized primarily by women and with other social features inhibiting development and progress. Women's *kroses* run counter to Gapun cultural and linguistic ideology regarding the necessity of discreet management of disputes and anger, and they are thought to expose anger in a dangerous manner. Kulick (1998:99–100) suggests, quite convincingly, that the negative connotation arising from this association is contributing to the loss of the Taiap language among villagers.

Gapun language ideology, particularly that governing what Taiap represents and how it is valued, has thus been strongly affected by Gapun gender ideology. Kulick (1998:94) notes that men do perform *kroses* at times, but that these generally involve women either as recipients or causal agents, so the connection of *kroses* with women is not directly challenged when men perform them. Throughout Kulick's (1998) work, the lesser status of women is shown to be a factor influencing how villagers evaluate Taiap.

Kulick 1998 takes Rosaldo's (1974) and Ortner's (1974) claims about the power and social standing of women as a given, without investigating whether women's *kroses* challenge this. In contrast, I will show that Muskogee women's speech acts as a means for them to achieve and display social power and status.

This is discerned by noting that Muskogee language ideology positions language as a vehicle for affecting the world through usages that may be performed by either males or females. At the same time, Muskogee gender ideology, while privileging male activities and concerns, recognizes that women have greater power and knowledge than men in regard to some aspects of social life. It is by using a genre that relates to these facets of both ideologies that Muskogee women appear to find and assert their power in the midst of an event that men are acknowledged to control.

The Muskogee genres to be discussed in this paper are *este oponicvkat eskaketos* '(plural speakers) talking about people', *cencokopericeyēs* 'we were visiting', *nakonakocen ponayes* '(single speaker) telling stories', *etepelicaket* '(reciprocal) teasing, joking', and *naket stomēcēt ometvtat enkerretan komen emonayetoks* 'giving advice about something'.[1] The first genre, 'talking about people', is also glossed as 'gossip' and is performed almost exclusively by women. 'Visiting' and 'telling stories' may be performed by either men or women equally, though these terms are most often used to describe social interaction among men in public spaces. 'Joking' is performed most often by men in public spaces and may be directed toward either men or women. 'Giving advice' may be performed by either gender, though this term is most often used to describe men or women talking about serious topics, including those having to do with social conduct and/or family matters, and usually in private settings.

For both genders, these genres are what Goffman (1974:201–46) terms "subordinated activities" in the public events discussed in this article.[2] The primary focus of the event is a ceremonial dance, with the main action dedicated to this ritual. A portion of the main ritual is a form of talk performed solely by men in particular styles associated only with the performance of these rituals (for a discussion of these oratorical styles see Bell 1984:171–72, 297–310; Bell 1985; Innes 1997). At these events, the ritual talk is considered to be most important because it is through this speech that tradition and history are relayed, social ties between ceremonial groups are acknowledged, and social mores important to the successful completion of the ceremony are iterated.

Ritual talk actually makes up very little of the speech performed at these ceremonial events, however. Special speakers broadcast speeches at various points throughout the ceremony, and some of these may be quite long (7–10 minutes), but the majority of the ceremony is spent dancing and socializing without ceremonial speech taking place. It is during these periods that the side talk to be analyzed in this article is conducted, with the use of the various genres occurring throughout the duration of the ceremony. Thus, these genres make up the majority of the speech that occurs at the events considered here, and they can be observed among all groups in attendance.

The means through which the Muskogee distinguish 'gossip', 'visiting', and 'telling stories' from one another are of interest because these genres are performed in the same kinds of settings and cover similar topics, but are used dif-

ferentially depending on speakers' and audience members' gender. It is interesting that such distinctions in genre assignment exist and that the genres are assessed differently by Muskogee men and women. Past research (Bell 1990) has offered an explanation for the genre separation and reasons for men's evaluations of the 'gossip' genre, but this work incorporates only one reading of Muskogee gender ideology and little language ideology. In this current work, which is informed by both language and gender ideology, a more balanced view of language use in the Muskogee community is presented, and the view of Muskogee women's talk as "a symbolic expression of distance from power, or lack of interest in power" (Lakoff 1990:206) is challenged.

THE MUSKOGEE COMMUNITY

The Muskogee originally inhabited the river valleys of Alabama, Georgia, and Florida until they were removed to Indian Territory (now Oklahoma) in the early 1830s. After Removal, the Muskogee reestablished or maintained many of their pre-Removal social systems, including a matrilineal clan system, a representative form of government, and an agricultural economy. Swanton (1928a:276–334, 1928b:614–21), Opler (1952:167, 172–75), and Innes 2004a note that men filled public political and religious roles in Muskogee society after Removal. Men also acted as traders with outsiders when excess agricultural goods were to be bartered or sold. (See Braund 1993 for pre-Removal evidence of men's movement into such trading roles.) Women were influential in the private sphere, maintaining family cohesion and contributing to decisions about food production (Swanton 1928a:384–88).

As noted by Bell (1984, 1990:335–40) and Innes (1991:44–57), a similar division of influence and labor exists in Muskogee society today, with men occupying most public governmental and religious roles and women occupying roles influencing familial and community relationships. Bell 1990 asserts that women's roles in Muskogee society are defined through their opposition to men's roles. Muskogee women's means and modes of production, positions of power, and agency, including how they are evaluated as speakers, are established and evaluated only in comparison with men's performances in comparable but separate activities (Bell 1990).

Given that they occupy roles governing behavior and interaction of entities larger than the family, control of modes and means of production is an important focus for Muskogee men. In her work on gender roles and the concomitant ways of speaking about them, Bell 1990 identifies Muskogee men with culture and Muskogee women with nature. Men and their actions thus define what falls into the realm of controlled or enculturated aspects of life, while Muskogee women's activities, including their talk, symbolize an unregulated, uncontrolled force (nature) that can actually work against society (Bell 1984:76–88, 1990). This leads Bell to say that "[w]omen do not speak in most public and ritual contexts, espe-

cially at stomp grounds. . . . Women freely assent to withhold their speech in these public contexts as a sign that they are not dangerous" (1990:338). In contrast, men do speak in these contexts, and it is their speech that controls the event.

Bell's analysis of men's and women's speech habits in the structuring and control of society is only partially accurate. It is true that men tend to focus on public issues and take the leading roles in the public sphere. Following Rosaldo (1974:23) and Sanday (1974:190), the public sphere is where activities that concern units larger than individual families are performed. Women, who tend to deal with private, family issues, play secondary roles in the public sphere. In the private sphere, however, where activities dealing with individual family or limited numbers of relationships take place, women control much of the action. These spheres are not mutually exclusive for the Muskogee: The topics generally dealt with by one gender may be dealt with by the other in both arenas, public and private. In order to understand the ways in which Muskogee speakers mediate the public/private boundaries, it is necessary to understand Muskogee language ideology.

LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY

There are many facets of nature that are considered to be unregulated and uncontrolled in Muskogee society (see Swanton 1928b for details). Muskogee people utilize tangible items, including medicine, fetishes, and other magical implements, to assist them in controlling these forces (Swanton 1928b, Howard & Lena 1984). One of the most forceful and powerful means of combating disorder and lack of control is language. Innes 2004b describes how language, specifically language used by medicine men, is equated with control and action. To speak in Mvskoke, the language of the Muskogee, is to cause things to happen in a controlled, predictable way.[3] The means through which a Mvskoke statement or formula is voiced affects its potency. As among several other Southeastern groups, the most potent form of vocalization is a song or a chant, though speech performed in a calm voice also is deemed powerful.

Muskogee medicine men, like those of other Southeastern peoples, infuse plants in water, chant over the infusion, and then blow into the mixture with a hollow cane when making medicine for ritual or healing ceremonies (Mooney 1891, 1932; Speck 1911:211–35; Howard & Lena 1984). Without the application of the linguistic component, the medicines are dangerous because of their uncontrolled nature. If a medicine is not treated with language, it is not possible to predict what effect the medicine will have on people who take it. The natural force contained by the plant will not have a direction or guide to follow as its power is unleashed.

Once the correct chant has been applied to the medicine, the nature of the medicine is controlled, and one can predict what effect it will have on the patient

and "ground" members (see explanation below). The linguistic component moves the plant-water mixture into the category of "medicine" by instilling it with efficacy. Invigorating the medicine with the chant or song directs the power of the medicine, just as a man leads another along a path. The speech, song, or chant thus acts on the medicine in a specific way, causing it to become something it would not otherwise be and to do something it might not otherwise do.

Traditional stories, especially those involving healing or the retention of health, also show that language is a means of controlling and/or activating powers and items. In a story describing how Turtle's shell came to have its present shape and pattern, an elder woman, LA, recounted that Turtle was crushed by women grinding corn with the traditional mortar and pestle (*keco* and *kecvpi*).[4] He managed to survive the beating, but found that his shell was so badly cracked that he was unable to move easily. Just as he was about to give up and die, he learned a song that he sang four times. After singing this song, which translates roughly to 'rock rub together, rock sits there (whole),' he found that his shell had been restored, though the areas that had been cracked were still noticeable. Turtle was healed by singing the song, by utilizing words denoting a process similar to that which healed his shell. The words that Turtle sang restored the order of his shell and caused his shell to repair itself. The song, in effect, was the curative action. Similar references to speech having active qualities are found in some of the Muskogee stories gathered by W. O. Tuggle (1973:165–67, 287–89, 319–20), and in several stories in a collection compiled by Earnest Gouge, a Muskogee informant who worked with Swanton (Martin, Mauldin & McGirt 2004).

Women's talk is affected by the Muskogee ideology that considers language as a form of action. According to Bell (1990:337–38), one of the means through which Muskogee women can wreak havoc with societal structure and order is through their gossip. Bell's analysis[5] brings her to the following conclusions about women's talk:

> A potent aspect of women's gossip is that it brings about a context where men must battle – kill and arrest "growth." Menstruation and gossip are equivalent signifiers of women's endogenous capacity to "flow." This "flow" challenges men to "kill" and thereby shape – define – situations into appropriate Creek social form. (1990:338)[6]

This evaluation of Muskogee women's gossip rests on gossip's uncontrolled and therefore dangerous nature. However, the Muskogee men and women I have spoken with about women's talk and their position in society do not envision women or their actions to lie outside the arena of Muskogee culture. Nor do they find women's gossip to be as dangerous as portrayed in Bell's (1990) article, though most acknowledge that they become a little anxious when women spend a great deal of time "gossiping."

Men, too, take part in talk regarding topics in the private sphere: personal relationships, childrearing, and interpersonal conduct. Some of this talk takes

place in private – in one's home or the home of one's listener, involving few other participants (fewer than four) – but some of it takes place in public arenas. In the public realm, men's talk about such matters is often glossed as 'visiting' or 'telling stories', neither of which has ever been assessed as a potentially dangerous activity by any of the Muskogee speakers whom I have asked about these matters. Still, both men and women acknowledge that this kind of talk happens more rarely among men, in both public and private spheres, than does women's talk about such "private" issues. Once we take Muskogee gender and language ideology into consideration, we can approach reasons for this difference in frequency and for the varying views on the power of gendered talk about private issues, as well as a rationale for placing such talk in separate genres.

SETTING

Data on the genres to be discussed here were collected during the course of my dissertation research from 1990 to 1997. During this period, I attended social and religious ceremonies involving the traditional Muskogee stomp ground population. This population retains a ceremonial cycle of ritual performances (dances, ball games, taking medicine) that is shared by several peoples removed to Oklahoma from the Eastern Woodland and Southeastern regions (Fogelson 1962; Roark-Calnek 1977; Jackson 2000, 2003). Individual stomp grounds – social units made up of members who participate in the ceremonies, have a matrilineal connection to the ground, or both – host the dances and ball games that are the public manifestation of the ritual performance. The women's and men's speech genres analyzed in this article are performed by members of these "grounds."

The ceremonial cycle is made up of four night-long dances (stomp dances) performed during the summer months. Many, but not all, of the stomp grounds also host social dances during the winter months which only last until midnight or 1 A.M. At these dances, members of individual grounds arrange their seats around a central dance area so as to maintain a cohesive group. Depending on the size of the dance area, there may be 5 to 10 feet between different grounds' seating arrangements, though at the winter dances there often is less than this amount of separation between groups.

The primary foci of all visitors at these dances are first, to dance and show fellowship with the hosting ground, and second, to socialize with old friends. The foci of the host ground members are first, to carry out the ceremonial dance in an appropriate manner (if this is a summertime dance), second, to socialize with old friends, and third, to reap some money to support the ground's summer activities (if this is a wintertime dance). Talking with others, members both of different grounds and of one's own ground, is a large part of the activity at these dances.

It is at such dances that the various genres of speech are readily apparent. Men and women spend a good deal of time talking with others, about many of

the same topics and in very much the same way. The 'gossip' genre associated with women happens when women from both the same and different grounds interact at these events, though it is more often performed among women from the same ground. Men's 'telling stories' and 'joking' also often occur at these dances and are performed among one's own ground members and with members from other grounds. 'Visiting' is carried out by both men and women at these events and is most frequently applied to talk with members of other grounds, though it may be conducted with members of one's own ground. These genres are repeatedly performed throughout the night, though an overlap between them and ritual talk is thought to be inappropriate. The items that appear to differentiate which genre is occurring in the talk of both men and women at such events are discussed below.

WOMEN'S TALK

We will begin with women's talk, which, whether it takes place in public or private settings, is frequently about social relationships and critiquing behavior. In the many cases of women's talk that I witnessed or in which I took part, Muskogee women talked about social relationships, threats to the Muskogee way of life, and maintenance of Muskogee culture and tradition. Women also talked about other topics, such as the price of goods, the demands placed on them at work, and recreational activities that they enjoyed, but the topic of social relationships was discussed most frequently.

The genres through which women talk about social relationships in public include 'gossip', 'visiting', and, more rarely, 'telling stories'. Of these, 'gossip' is an activity almost solely performed by women. 'Visiting' is performed equally by men and women, and both genders touch on social relations while they 'visit'. Reasons for glossing women's talk about social relationships as 'gossip' rather than 'visiting', and the outcomes of doing so, are explored below. 'Telling stories' is an activity pursued much more frequently by men than by women, because it is a means of broaching personal subjects or viewpoints obliquely.

Women's talk at public events

Muskogee women allied through participation in the same ceremonial or social group typically arrange their chairs so that they can sit together at dances and meetings. Generally, these groups number between four and ten women and span 5 to 15 feet of linear space in the setting – usually one row of women sitting side by side, with an occasional second row of women sitting just behind the first. Although women in these groups do not often present themselves as speakers to the crowd as a whole, they speak among themselves in a normal tone of voice, loud enough to be heard by the women sitting within 5 to 10 feet of the speaker. Conversations, even those about relationships involving people situated near the conversation, are carried on with normal volume. Thus, it is possible for those sitting near the conversation, including relatives of the individuals in a rela-

tionship being discussed, to become involved in the discussion and ensuing evaluation.

When a member of the group has information to share with a select group of individuals, she taps the addressee on the shoulder, arm, or leg, or makes sustained gaze contact to alert the listener. This act also alerts the rest of the group that the ensuing communication is not for public consumption – though the information communicated in this manner may be aired later in the evening by someone reporting what an undisclosed source has said. When such a movement occurs among members of the group, those not invited to participate in the conversation continue talking among themselves about the initial topic or raise a new topic for consideration. The women sitting closest to the individuals involved in the focused conversation usually take part in the group conversation or remain silent but turned away from the focused discussants. Despite these movements of turning away and directing their focus toward other speakers, those closest to the focused discussants generally overhear what is being discussed and may bring up the information at a later time with the introduction, "I heard that . . ." This introduction both announces that the speaker has some confidence in the information she is presenting and also acts to retain the anonymity of the original informant. Thus, it is always somewhat unclear whether the speaker gained her information from someone outside the group or overheard a focused conversation.

'Gossip'

As mentioned above, topics commonly discussed in Muskogee women's talk carried out in public settings range across a wide spectrum. Changes in or maintenance of ritual practice, the effects on individuals and their families of policy decisions made at the level of Muskogee (Creek) Nation or local governmental agencies, the strength or weakness of community alliances, and the appropriateness of relationships with non-Indians are topics that often arise in women's talk in public arenas. Discussion on each of these topics allows women to critique and assess individuals' behaviors, community solidarity, ethnic and tribal maintenance, and retention of traditional practices and values. The women, then, cover those issues that are central to women's roles as caretakers and guardians of the private sphere. This does not differ greatly from Western notions of topical choice for gossip (see Jones 1980, Johnson & Aries 1983, Coates 1988).

The number of women taking part in talk about such private topics is much larger than one tends to find taking part in Anglo-American gossip (Jones 1980, Johnson & Aries 1983, Bergmann 1993). Public arenas provide access to many voices and allow dissemination of a range of viewpoints on the topic under discussion. While the discussion occasionally becomes heated and communication ceases, women generally tend to hear each other out even when they disagree with the other discussants. In general, when a woman raises a point or brings up a contentious issue, she is listened to and a response to her view is usually offered.

Gossip sessions carried out in public can become similar to debates, with divergent viewpoints offered and rebuttals returned. As MT, an elderly Muskogee woman, explained following a discussion regarding a relationship involving a full-blood Muskogee woman and a non-Indian man:

> We have to talk about all kinds of things with this. Sometimes non-Indians can take better care of a family than a Creek man can, but sometimes they stop their women and kids from going to dances and speaking the language. There are good sides and bad sides to this kind of thing, and we want to think as much about it as we can so we can help them make the right decision.

As MT points out, Muskogee women believe they have the prerogative to talk about relationships involving people they know, including those to whom they are not actually related, and that this discussion will assist all involved – even those who are the subjects of the discussion.[7] In order to help the decision makers reach the best decision, it is necessary for Muskogee women to debate several points of view, which leads to a better-informed consensus in the end.

Airing of different viewpoints also occurs when such talk is conducted in a public space because of the presence of a larger audience. A large audience creates a buffer in the public sphere. Even if a woman knows her views are quite divergent from those of some of her friends involved in the discussion, she can feel fairly confident that there will be someone in the larger audience who shares her view to some extent. When those who hold similar but less extreme views raise their points in the discussion, they form a bridge between widely dissenting views, allowing the discussion to continue as both sides come to understand the rationale behind the differing views. In a smaller group, especially one of friends whose views are already known, a dissenting voice may cause one to lose support and can lead to long-term disagreements when there are no other participants to offer the bridging dialogue.

'Visiting'

When women talk about their own behavior or offer a recitation of their or their family's activities, their talk is often glossed as 'visiting'. This kind of talk provides women with a means of learning about one another's health, activities, and predicaments, and it may involve some discussion of these items in relation to other members of the speaker's family. This kind of talk takes place as women are greeting each other and providing information about events and activities that have taken place since the participants last met.

As with 'gossip', the information offered during this kind of talk is available to the women sitting within 5 to 10 feet of the speaker, and those who do not appear to be directly addressed may respond to portions of the conversation if they desire. Women who are 'visiting' can signal that they want to converse with particular members of the group by maintaining gaze with an individual, dyad, or small group, bending over, crouching, or sitting next to the addressee, and

speaking at a lower volume to this individual. When this occurs, other women talk among themselves and do not overtly attend to the conversation.

'Visiting' with women from other ground groups often provides information or topics for discussion with members of one's own ground group. This is not to imply that offering information gathered from 'visiting' with other women always leads to 'gossip', however. In many cases, those who have been 'visiting' are known to others in the relater's group, and the information being shared is offered simply to relay news about the original speaker's experiences. In some cases, though, information shared by the original speaker leads to 'gossip' – evaluations of the experience, activity, or outlook presented.

'Telling stories'

Occasionally, women 'tell stories' to one another. This genre is performed through the recitation of a story or tale, generally relating in some way to a topic or comment raised earlier in the discussion. Stories may be taken from the narrator's own life experiences, from the experiences of others, or from a corpus of traditional narratives (for examples of traditional narratives see Tuggle 1973; Swanton 1929:2–117; and Martin et al. 2004). The story has a moral or insight relevant to the topic that was under discussion when the story was initiated, though the connection between the moral content and topical reference is often slightly obscure. Stories provide women with a means of making comments and raising moral concerns without being entirely responsible for the message, since it can be ascribed to a character or widespread folk belief rather than to the narrator. In this respect, women's 'telling stories' is identical to men's performance of this genre, discussed below.

Women do not tend to tell stories as a means of commenting on behaviors or attitudes as frequently as men do. Women use stories, instead, as a means of indicating their rationale for their beliefs and opinions. This occurs when a woman is asked to justify her comments about a given topic – which does not happen very often, since requesting or demanding such justification has the appearance of an open challenge and can be considered hostile. When a woman responds to a request to justify her stance and relates a story, the validity of her story is never challenged, though listeners may then relate stories with different outcomes or moral content. Thus, the use of stories in women's talk allows the viewpoints and opinions of anonymous or fictional characters to be raised, without necessitating any woman's ownership of the views and opinions.

This lack of ownership of the message is, perhaps, one reason why women do not utilize 'telling stories' as frequently as men do. In each of the other genres, women demonstrate their views directly and are quite clear about their positions on the issues under discussion. A narrator does not completely remove herself from the message of the story, for she does select which story – with a known moral content – she will tell. However, the phrasing of the message and the result of following a particular course of action are elements that can, and often

are, credited to previous narrators or characters in the story. Thus, although a narrator's views are evident covertly through her choice of story, the overt message emanates from the characters or earlier tellers. This differs radically from the other genres of talk, in which women exhibit much greater interest in stating their own views and opinions.

MEN'S TALK

During the same events, men too 'visit', 'tell stories', and 'joke'. Each of these genres indicates men's interest in and knowledge of social relationships to some degree, but none results in the kind of discussion of these relationships found in women's 'gossip'. Instead, each of the men's genres allows for acknowledgment of the norms and ideology surrounding social relationships among the Muskogee, but it does not require men to make overt personal or group assessments of individuals' behaviors.

'Visiting'

'Visiting' is practiced by men much as it is performed by women. Men tend to 'visit' with other men, though some will 'visit' with women – especially if they are related to the female participants. The topics covered in men's 'visiting' also are similar to those covered when women 'visit'. Men discuss the activities and events they have been involved in since the participants last interacted. When an event has great significance or elicits negative emotional responses for an individual, he may display the topic's emotional load through vocal changes (e.g., quivering voice, rising intonation, staccato pace) and nonverbal behaviors (e.g., tearing eyes, clenched fist, clenched jaw muscles, bowed head). These behaviors are rarely displayed, however, since much of men's 'visiting' at public events concerns topics that are not highly emotional or that have a positive emotional content.

Also in common with women's 'visiting', men offer their own views on the events related through this genre. Listeners may respond with "ho" or "yes, that's good/bad," and emphatic nodding or head shaking as backchannel cues signaling acceptance of the speaker's view, similar to the use of backchannel cues noted among women (see Coates 1988, Fishman 1980). Listeners also may provide backchannel cues that simply acknowledge the speaker's view and do not indicate agreement with what the speaker has said, such as "hmm", "yeah," or minimal nods or head shakes, much like backchannel use among groups of Japanese speakers (see Yamada 1997). The way in which men position themselves also mirrors this behavior among 'visiting' women. Men make direct eye contact intermittently with the speaker but generally make sidelong glances at one another as they sit side by side or at a slight angle to one another while conversing.

'Joking'

Men's 'joking' is a means of entering women's conversations, generally picking up on some characteristic of the subject, either the person or the general topic under discussion. Men's additions to women's talk are followed by responses by the women to the male speaker, though these often occur in the form of jokes made by the women. 'Joking' performed between men and women involves an initial joke with only one or two witty exchanges. Men open these exchanges with much greater frequency than do women, though some women occasionally make jokes about a man's behavior or actions.

Women accept men's comments via jokes as additions to the debate, which provides yet another source of information and voice in the discussion (whether 'visiting' or 'gossiping'). In the case of a joking comment from a man, women consider the speaker's intent to be simply making the women aware that they are being heard, and that the men are enjoying the conversation in their midst. As HB, a middle-aged woman, explained:

> When the men joke like that, they're just trying to make us laugh. They're just helping everybody have a good time. If we keep on about someone and we notice something funny they did, the men will make a joke from that, too.

Thus, 'joking' provides feedback to the women, letting them know that a larger audience is attending to their talk and that the talk is not being considered "dangerous" or harmful by at least one male. The primary motivation for 'joking' is evident in HB's second sentence: Joking is a means of keeping the tone light and humorous. People are attending the event to have a good time, and women's 'gossip' and 'visiting' should not detract from this.

Men also joke with one another about issues that have not been raised by women. Interaction at the ground or at ground-related events is supposed to be jovial and good-natured. 'Joking' is a means of providing levity and indicating that the relationship between those who are joking is solid.

This is not to imply that the jokes are completely benign in their content, for men occasionally refer to very serious topics in their jokes. However, because these kinds of jokes are shared only with those with whom one has a very strong, solid relationship, the recipient usually does not become openly angry or uncomfortable. Instead, the men laugh and then immediately turn to 'telling stories' or 'visiting' as a means of support or advising the listeners, including the joke recipient. If the joke recipient exhibits discomfort with the joking, the topic is dropped in this public realm and is discussed only with close friends in private, if at all.

'Telling stories'

'Telling stories' is a means of entertaining listeners and of presenting the speaker's view about the topic last up for discussion. Men 'telling stories' narrate tales from the memorable past that relate to some aspect of the topic of conversation.

Personal stories are similar to the kind of information related when 'visiting', except that the activities related in the stories took place more than a month or more previously (more recent activities are spoken about when 'visiting', unless it has been a longer time since participants last saw each other), and more background information is provided to situate the narrative.

The physical arrangement and use of backchannel cues among men 'telling stories' is very similar to that used while men 'visit'. Speakers sit side by side or at an angle to their audience. Men show agreement with and participation in the story through the backchannel cues described under 'visiting'. Speakers exhibit more frequent direct gaze and increased vocal volume as they near the climax of the story, and audience members respond with more frequent cueing at these points. At the end of a story, audience members respond with laughter, shakes of the head, or interjections (e.g., "ho," "uh-huh," "*mvto*") in accordance with the emotional tone of the story.

The volume of a man's voice while telling a story is the same as that used by women who are 'gossiping'. Men relate their stories so that they may be heard by many of those present and rarely perform them for single individuals in public settings. Stories are told at regular speaking volume and can be heard by those within 5 to 10 feet of the speaker.

The topics covered when men tell stories are quite different from those of 'visiting' (among either men or women) and women's 'gossip'. When men 'tell stories', they are relating a tale, the outcome of which has some relation to a topic raised while 'visiting' or 'joking' with others. Stories may be offered as oblique critiques of behavior or advisory statements, as commentary on the topic, or as a means of changing or maintaining the emotional tone of the conversation.

The emotional tone of a story may continue or deviate from the emotional tone of the preceding conversation. When conversation has turned too serious or discordant, men introduce stories that are humorous or concern rather mundane behaviors and activities. Stories such as these tend to relieve the serious nature of the interaction and restore the participants to a lighter mood, much as HB noted about men's joking behavior. Men also present stories when they believe a serious matter is being made light of, as when joking concerns behavior that may affect the public perception of a particular ground's members. Elder men, in particular, relate stories about the results, mostly negative, of similar behaviors they have witnessed among members of other grounds. Stories of this type cause the men to treat the matter with less levity and to become introspective, though they do not generally cause the conversation to become morose or stop altogether. After a story of this sort is related, the topic is changed and a new item is brought up for conversation.

Men's 'telling stories' is akin to women's 'gossip' in that moral content is contained in all stories, even those that are humorous, and this content usually is related to something said while 'visiting' or 'joking' took place. Thus, 'telling stories' provides men with a means of assessing and evaluating some aspect of

the preceding topic, just as women's 'gossip' does. However, unlike women's 'gossip', the speaker's, target's and listeners' faces are never directly threatened when men tell stories. Even when the apparent motivation for storytelling is to critique the behavior, attitude, or character of someone mentioned in the performance of the 'visiting' or 'joking' genres, the multiple interpretations of and numerous voices reported in most stories provide enough ambiguity that the speaker's motivation and personal assessment are not overtly signaled. The target of a moral story also is not directly signaled – though, as noted by several men asked about this, most understand who is intended as the recipient of the story, in much the same way that Western Apache stories work (Basso 1990:99–137). Listeners' reactions to these stories are interpreted as simply that, a reaction to another man's account, and only risk the listener's face if he responds inappropriately to a story (e.g., laughing at a sad or eerie story).

UNDERSTANDING THE GENRE SEPARATION

In public settings, including stomp dances, Muskogee women are involved in the genres of 'gossip', 'visiting', and 'joking'. Of these, 'gossip' consumes much more of the time and focus of the women at the event. Among women from one ground at an indoor stomp dance in 1997, approximately two-thirds of the time was spent 'gossiping'. In contrast, men devote much more time to 'telling stories' and 'joking' than to 'visiting'. Of these, storytelling is the most time-consuming genre. Men almost never 'gossip' at public events and women spend little time 'telling stories'.

It is necessary to explore both Muskogee language and gender ideology in order to understand the reasons behind the division of genres between genders. Looking at the division through the lens of Muskogee ideology makes it apparent that the separation arises from forces identified by other researchers utilizing either the difference or the dominance paradigm.[8] Indeed, knowledge of Muskogee ideologies shows that this genre separation is a powerful and logical structure in this community. These insights come from an outsider's perspective, though; most Muskogee do not tend to discuss or philosophize about the variation in genre use between the genders.

Language ideology and the genres

Bell (1990:338) states that women's gossip about relationships and moral conduct brings about situations in which men have to battle a perceived enemy in order to reassert appropriate Muskogee social form. However, women's perception of the results of their talk is that communal and personal relationships will fail if the women's talk becomes primarily negative, and action is generally not required from men. They also assert that negative talk occurs when someone perceives an inappropriate Muskogee social form, so women's talk itself is maintaining appropriate social order. I am aware of at least eight romantic relationships, including five well-established ones, that dissolved after women began

making frequent negative remarks about them. In two of these cases, the relationship involved a non-Indian and a Muskogee woman, and in another case, two individuals related by clan.[9] None of these relationships were terminated because of violent or hostile actions perpetrated by male relatives or friends of those around whom the talk centered. Instead, when the relationships ended, the women who had been talking negatively about them cited their talk as one of the causal factors leading to the breakup.

The same idea holds true when individuals are criticized in women's talk for breaking or bending Muskogee mores. Women frequently discuss possible results of breaking social norms, including illness and family misfortune. Since relatives or friends of the transgressor may be within hearing or even involved in the conversation, warnings are often offered. An example of this occurred during a discussion of improper behavior at one of the ceremonial grounds. During this discussion, one woman noted that "if H doesn't watch his step and stop drinking before he comes to the [ceremonial] ground, he's going to get sick." The assumption among the women was that if H did not follow this warning – to be relayed to him by a friend participating in the talk – illness would result from both the spiritual forces that guard the ceremonial grounds AND the fact that women had been talking about his becoming sick.

Maintenance of distinct Muskogee tribal identity, traditional values, and traditional practices is highly valued in Muskogee women's talk. When the subject of discussion is thought to have strayed far from acceptable norms, women weigh the projected outcomes arising from the behavior and then speak for or against the subject's behavior. Women do not always hold steadfastly to tradition; as Innes 2004b notes, some women find moderate alterations of traditional practices either innocuous or positive. No matter the final outcome of the discussion, women spend a great deal of time working through topics that have an effect on Muskogee social structure and the workings of Muskogee society. Their attention to these matters and the amount of (active) talk generated about them is striking because it positions the speakers in the role of guardians of Muskogee social structure within the private sphere.

It is noteworthy that women's talk makes some men anxious. Women's talk is something that men do not control, and within it women exert power by discussing men's behavior. The last thing a man wants is to become the target of women's talk, unless it is of a positive nature, which does occur. If we allow that women's talk is governed by the same "talk is action" ideology that governs men's public and religious talk, then the reason for men's wariness becomes clear. It is not due only to men's inability to control the nature of the talk, but also to the fact that it can affect men's relationships, social standing, health, and welfare.

This outlook differs radically from Western ideas about gossip, which is generally considered to be a linguistic genre utilized almost solely by women (Jones 1980, Johnson & Aries 1983, Bergmann 1993). Despite this deprecating view, gossip has been of interest to feminist scholars because of women's central role

in its production. Indeed, much research on women's talk has found that women utilize this genre precisely because it provides them with agency and voice; it is a means for reifying or challenging gender and social ideology, and arguing against differential access (see Bernikow 1980, Jones 1980, Kramarae 1981, Johnson & Aries 1983, Bergmann 1993). Despite the positive reasons for women's participation in this genre, Johnson & Aries (1983:354) note that "folk wisdom pejoratively places women in the position of having nothing better to do with their time than talk and of having nothing important to talk about."

In that quote, it is obvious that women's talk, in the Western view, is doing nothing in and of itself. Talk takes women away from productive activities and focuses their minds on frivolous topics, implying that they are wasting time and energy that should be expended on more important ends. A similar view has been expressed about Muskogee women's talk by Bell (1990:338–39). However, according to Muskogee ideology, Muskogee women's talk is powerful and useful, and it is another means of shoring up Creek society. Men, then – contrary to Bell's (1990:340–41) assertion – are not the sole bearers of the burden of maintaining appropriate Muskogee social forms, thanks to the power of women's 'gossip'.

The manner in which 'gossip' is carried out – women relating information about a topic, then presenting their own opinions about the topic – makes it possible for a group of women to make specific decisions about the item being discussed. The elder women in the group listen to all of the opinions expressed and work to bring all women into consensus. The decision-making process is guided by these elders but is informed by the opinions of all present. Individual women are clear about their opinions and do not leave much ambiguity for the listeners to consider as the group consensus is formed. In this way, all of those involved, including those guiding the consensus-building process, are able to gauge how many of the cohort are leaning one way or another as the conversation develops. Thus, the options of reactions to the topic and the range of opinions are clear for all to see.

The genres most frequently utilized by men, 'telling stories' and 'joking', while often dealing with the same kinds of topics covered in women's 'gossip', do not lead to talk that acts on the figures in the way women's talk does. Both 'telling stories' and 'joking' allow men to reference the item up for discussion without making an overt, clearly personal evaluation of it. Men can thus indicate to everyone listening, including women, that they are aware of the kinds of topics that women discuss without positioning themselves as holders of any particular opinion on the matter and without expressing a clear group-held opinion.

As performed by Muskogee men, 'joking' raises or connects with a topic discussed either by the men or women in the context of 'visiting', or by the women in the context of 'gossiping'. For example, after the women had been 'gossiping' about an unwed woman's pregnancy, with several comments about the problems unwed mothers have and the lack of foresight shown by the couple, one man

from the same ground cohort said loudly to the group, "Hey, H, I hear you're learning a new trade." "What trade?" and "When did he start that?" were heard from other men in the group, while H looked down. "Yeah, he's learning how to be a baker. He and J have a new cake in the oven," J being the pregnant girlfriend. All of the men, including H, and several of the women laughed. The men then asked H what his plans were for his and J's future with the baby, but there were no statements from the men about the lack of judgment shown by this couple. The women, however, after laughing with the men, went back to talking about the unwed couple who had been the initial topic of their conversation and continued evaluating their behavior as irresponsible.

Jokes, then, are humorous observations about the kinds of topics that get discussed thoroughly by women when 'gossiping'. Jokes, however, do not lead men to take up the topic in great detail, nor do they require the men to come to some decision about the item raised in this way. They appear to do the opposite, in effect, by indicating that men are aware of the topic but are willing to treat it lightly from the outset; in addition, since jokes are delivered by individuals, they do not involve the group. 'Joking' sends a message to the women that, despite the men's knowledge of the topic, they are quite willing to leave the deep discussion and evaluation of it to the women.

'Telling stories' is yet another means for men to indicate their acquaintance with a topic without performing "active" talk. As mentioned earlier, the relationship between stories containing a moral statement that may apply to the conversational theme and the theme itself is generally not explicitly stated. Activities, characters, and locations of moral stories told in public settings never match completely with the conversational topic, although stories brought up in response to a topic will have some oblique relation to it. For instance, when women had been talking about the lack of response by a division of Muskogee (Creek) Nation to an elder's problems, one man told a story about an elder he had known who had problems getting assistance from his sons. In the end, the sons and their families ran into difficulties themselves which could have been avoided had their families worked together for the good of all. This was a parable about the path that the Muskogee tribe is taking, with some (unspecified) difficulties forecast for all unless they begin taking care of one another.

The ambiguity that arises owing to the lack of direct connection between such stories and all features of an earlier conversational topic, along with the fact that men occasionally offer stories in order to pass the time and entertain without thought to connecting with preceding conversation, allows individual men to voice an opinion on a topic without having to state it categorically for the audience. Audience members also are able to avoid airing their opinions clearly, since it is acceptable for men to acknowledge such stories with responses that do not indicate any particular emotional stance. Frequently, one story of this sort will lead to men telling other stories that connect with the first through the same characters, similar activities, or the same overall narrative quality. Thus, while

there are thematic, topical, or qualitative threads connecting stories, a single focus is never clearly identifiable, so the reasons behind the choices of many stories are not always obvious.

Even the teller's evaluation of the actions and attitudes described in his story may be difficult to discern. Multiple voices are often present in a Muskogee story, and, in the case of a story that is not presented in the first person, the narrator's voice may not even enter the story. Men utilize these voices to present information from a number of different viewpoints, so that the narrator's own view is only one of many, if it is presented at all. Stories can be vehicles for relaying information or evaluations without assigning the content to any person present at the telling, which releases all of the men and women from responsibility for them. A man, then, can tell stories with high moral content without incurring the liability of asserting that he believes the moral content is applicable to the persons or actions previously discussed in 'gossip', 'visiting', or 'joking.'

Gender ideology and the genres

Muskogee gender ideology, accurately reported by Bell 1990, supports a differentiation of men's and women's activities. Women are most active in and control the private sphere. Men are active in and control the public sphere. Considering the separation of the genres between the genders through the lens of Muskogee gender ideology suggests that it occurs as a result of a balance of power between the genders in Muskogee society. Jones 1980 has noted that within Western cultures, gossip is a means of maintaining and transmitting information about the values and concerns that women hold, and issues with which they are confronted. While Muskogee women's talk serves these same purposes, it is also a means of retaining and transmitting women's control of the private sphere in a society where talk is considered to be action.

The gender ideology iterated by Muskogee men and women suggests that there is a balance between men's regulation of behaviors and expectations in the public sphere and women's regulation of behaviors and expectations in the private sphere. This ideology closely resembles that found in Colpied, a French village by Reiter (1975:252–73). However, unlike Reiter's (1975:272–73) realization that the ideology espoused by inhabitants of Colpied proved false when one examined the influence of the genders in economic and political roles outside the village, the proposed Muskogee ideology is not inaccurate. Both genders work in tandem to keep the Muskogee world in balance through discursive practice, as well as through economic and political activity.

The active talk produced when women 'gossip' concerns exactly those kinds of topics that are considered to be in the private sphere. Social relationships, identity issues, caregiving activities, women's health, and individuals' health and welfare issues, among others, are appropriate topics for 'gossip'. It is appropriate for women to air their personal views on these topics and for a group of

women to reach a fairly unified conclusion. Information and reactions are spread among a number of women, leading to an increased number of women lending their voices to the language-based cause of creating change in their community. Their genre provides them with the linguistic means of policing the private sphere, guarding against inappropriate, immoral, or inopportune modifications of Muskogee life and customs, which often arise because of the influence of the non-Muskogee world.

These same issues are not appropriate for men to discuss at length, primarily because they concern the private sphere, which is under the control of women. When it is deemed necessary, men become physically active to deal with the kinds of issues raised in women's 'gossip' (e.g., male relatives may protect or provide for a female relative in need of assistance, or men assist families in dire need of basic supplies), but men do not discuss what they think of these situations in groups beforehand. Men discuss these topics with their female and male relatives, but not in large groups in public settings. Thus, men leave discussion and evaluation of conduct in private matters to women. If the behavior affects public institutions or involves people from a number of families, men take these matters up for consideration and come to a decision ratified by the group dealing with the matter. This occurs only when the matter has become important in the public sphere and has crossed over from a purely private affair to one that affects the public good.

'Joking' and 'telling stories' are means whereby Muskogee men can indicate that they are aware of matters occurring in the private sphere, without taking over women's roles in acting these through language. As a group, the women are able to gauge the men's views through the tenor of the stories told and the features around which the jokes revolve. Thus, should women's linguistic action not be successful so that the need arises for men to act physically, women can be fairly certain who among the men will answer their call for activity that either supports or disputes the behavior, actors, or attitudes to which it is directed. Men's use and women's interpretations of these genres keep women's talk as the primary form of action, while men overtly communicate their positions on the subject – with most men tending to support the women's conclusions.

Although women do not perform the genres associated with ritual talk in ceremonial contexts, they clearly perform 'gossip', 'telling stories', 'visiting', and 'joking' while in the public arena. As discussed above, gossip is occasionally evaluated as a dangerous genre, which suggests that the performance of this genre during ceremonial (public) events is a very significant act. It can be read as a rebellious and threatening act, demonstrating women's unwillingness to be controlled by men in an event that men appear to dominate linguistically and actively. Gossip at such events also may be viewed as women's demonstrating their ability to control power discursively, since their language causes things outside men's control to happen in the world. "Good" performance of this genre maintains traditional Muskogee social relations and structure through the act of

women's talk, just as a "good" performance of the ceremony maintains these elements through men's activities. Talk of this type signifies to all aware of Muskogee gender and language ideologies that women command a discursive power that is, for the most part, equivalent to men's, and that is relevant to social relations complementary to those dealt with in the ceremonies directed by men.

Insights when both ideologies are considered

The separation of genres between Muskogee men and women, the ways these genres are performed by women and men at public events, and both genders' reactions to the other's genre usage are quite logical when we look at them with knowledge of the Muskogee community's gender and language ideologies. Women are considered to be the managers of the private sphere, taking steps to maintain appropriate familial and cultural structures. Men are managers of the public sphere, directing and performing those activities and guarding those spaces that affect the wellbeing of corporate groups. With this division of influence in mind, it is no wonder that much of women's talk at public events concerns issues from the private sphere, while men indicate that they have some knowledge of these issues but do not dwell on them because they do not have immediate consequences for the larger public.

The separation also makes sense when we consider that language is action in the Muskogee worldview. Women's 'gossip' lets the women reach a balanced decision, arrived at only after long discussion and the presentation of different points of view. Utilization of this genre consolidates group opinion and causes the women's voices to become as one. This makes their voice a powerful one that is unified and directed to curing a single social ill, much like the curative verse recited by a medicine man over a medicine for a specific ailment. Just as a medicine man must diagnose the ailment and determine the appropriate cure, so must women determine the cause and potential outcome of a problem and craft a response that satisfies the knowledgeable and experienced audience. The far-ranging discussions and consideration given to alternate views position women's conclusions as authoritative pronouncements on the topic, much as the medicine man's curing language is the result of his expertise in treating disease.

Men, not formulating a group response or exploring the issue in great detail, do not present their language in such an active way. No large-scale group voice or outlook results from men's talk, and the issue is not clearly raised as the central topic of conversation, which keeps men's talk about these issues from becoming active language. Men's conclusions and views about such topics never are clearly or repeatedly stated and do not coalesce into a strong, unified stance, which prevents their talk on such issues from demonstrating that it is an effective force emanating from authorities on the matter. By performing the genres that they do, which keeps their language from becoming a force-filled tool of change, men maintain the gendered division of influence over the private and public spheres espoused in Muskogee gender ideology.

Given the ideologies, it also is no wonder that men and women have different assessments of each other's genre use. Bell 1990 notes several times that men find women's 'gossip' a dangerous, potentially harmful form of talk. If we allow that women's talk in this genre is an active form of speech that can affect relationships, individuals' welfare, and social structure, then it should come as no shock that those who generally do not participate in this genre (men) are wary of its use. Men also do not control women's use of this genre and do not openly reprimand women for the views they express through this genre, though they may attempt through 'joking' to cause women to lighten their tone at times, or may present an alternate view of the issue through a story. It is the women's voices and not the men's, however, that accomplish the action through language by using a genre that men may observe but do not direct. Men are affected by this talk/action and may be called on to perform physical action in response to or in support of the talk, but they are the patients, not the agents, in this linguistic formula. As such, men's observations that women's 'gossip' is dangerous reflects their position as the objects of this talk, affected by what women say and how they say it.

In contrast, men view 'visiting', 'joking', and 'telling stories' as relatively secure, positive acts. These are linguistic genres pursued out of a sense of friendship and camaraderie that do not challenge existing social relationships or structures. Indeed, their performance indicates that the speaker's and listeners' social relationships are solid and healthy. 'Joking' and 'telling stories' can indicate that the speaker perceives a small problem with some aspect of his or her relationship with the target of the narrative, but they raise the problem obliquely and without directly threatening the face of the target. Using these genres to point out problems indicates that a friendly relationship still exists and that the speaker desires the difficulty to be overcome by those involved in the relationship. This view covers men's assessment of both women's and men's performance of these genres, with no difference in interpretation arising out of the gender identity of those in the speaker's or listeners' positions.

Women, in contrast, have slightly different readings of the use of these genres. For women, 'gossip' is a powerful tool. As described earlier, women believe their use of the genre is a key means of enforcing and maintaining appropriate social behavior and relationships. This does not scare women, for it is they who control this genre and are charged with overseeing the private sphere. Women do express some trepidation about the use of this genre by those in other social groups, since the others' language may be directed toward their own friends and acquaintances. However, just as medicine men and preachers may use medicines and language to battle those who are using their power to achieve opposite goals, groups of women can use their speech to oppose the language/actions of other groups.[10] Women do not tend to portray the language of another group as dangerous or pointedly disruptive unless one of the members learns or imagines that her enemies have directed the other group's decisions. Generally, women con-

sider the speech of other groups to differ from that of their own but not to be overtly hostile, so the talk that arises when differences in groups' opinions are perceived is thought to represent alternate routes that will achieve the same positive outcome.

The other genres are not considered to be practices that utilize active language, so they are generally viewed as being entertaining or informative without effecting change in the lives of those discussed. Women acknowledge that men and other female participants use 'joking' to make women aware that their talk has become so serious or potentially harmful that it is challenging the expectation that interaction at ceremonial and social events will be fun and entertaining. Stories may be used in a similar manner. Presentation of a story can, on one hand, indicate a connection with the topic of 'gossip' and an intent to express the teller's outlook to the group. On the other hand, storytelling can cause a break in the 'gossip', making women aware that others are listening and may be finding the discussion too serious or dangerous. In essence, jokes and entertaining stories remind the women that the linguistic activity they are doing through 'gossip' is located within a larger public event where people are to be welcomed and supported, not harmed or wounded.

Given this usage, it is logical that men utilize the genres of 'telling stories' and 'joking' more often than do women, since they are directly concerned with the conduct of people within the public sphere and have a stake in monitoring the language use of their women in a public event. If a ground's women's linguistic practices appear to be placing others in danger at a dance, it is likely that others will come to view the ground's hospitality and camaraderie as suspect and will not lend their support to the ground's dances and fundraising events. Thus, men's and women's joking and storytelling behavior can be used as a constraint on women's 'gossip' to some extent, though most frequently they are performed to entertain all participants.

CONCLUSION

In Muskogee society, talk is a powerful means of acting within and on the world. Talk is one means by which Muskogee women and men control their world, though most Muskogee men do not appear to grant that they need women's help in this matter. Muskogee women's and men's talk is a locus of power used to demonstrate and maintain control in the areas of life administered by each gender. For women, a symbol of their control of the private sphere resides in their use of talk to manipulate, modify, and fashion social relations. Men active in the stomp dance religion demonstrate their control of the public sphere through talk, particularly through the discourses of medicine men and other ground leaders.[11] Women and men exert control over different realms of Muskogee social life as a result of Muskogee gender ideology and are able to perform the verbal work that they do through the Muskogee language ideology that equates language/speech with action.

Given this, it is no wonder that Muskogee men and women exhibit differential use of speech genres in public events. Rather than being silent participants who withhold their speech so as not to be dangerous, as suggested by Bell (1984:224–25, 1990:338), women perform a speech genre roughly equivalent to Western notions of gossip in public arenas. This genre of speech provides a forum in which many women's voices are heard and assessed, which is appropriate when one considers that Muskogee women are dealing with large and important societal issues in their 'gossip'. Inclusion of multiple viewpoints also is supported by the Muskogee belief that decisions about taking a course of action are to be made after gathering as much knowledge and input as possible. This practice allows Muskogee women's messages to coalesce and become strong in unison, and, as a result of the debating process, the women's conclusion becomes authoritative. Both features support the view that Muskogee women's 'gossip' is active language capable of effecting change.

Men, on the other hand, utilize the genres of 'visiting', 'joking', and 'telling stories', but do not 'gossip', at these same public events. Men are able to indicate to women that they are listening to their conversations, that they are aware of the topics being discussed, and are monitoring the emotional tone of the conversation. The genres used by men allow them to present their views without co-opting the women's talk and do not bring the men's speech up to the level of action that women's talk reaches. Men also are able to cause the women to "lighten up" when they are becoming too serious or forceful in their conversation – extremes that would disrupt the tone of the event itself and challenge the host ground's men's control of the public event. By not partaking in 'gossip' of their own or disrupting women's 'gossip', men maintain Muskogee gender role differentiation.

The discomfort of men and of women considering another group's talk noted in this article and by Bell 1990 is yet another indication of the power wielded by women through their 'gossip'. This implies that, rather than being another example of subordination of the private to the public as has been frequently suggested (Paine 1967, Harding 1975, Haviland 1977, Bernikow 1980, Jones 1980), women's 'gossip' and the utilization of it as a form of power over the private sphere is acknowledged by men and women in Muskogee society. As it is used in the ways described here, women's language is powerful – it is language that does something upon its utterance – and it provides women with a realm of power monitored but unregulated and unmediated by Muskogee men.

That Muskogee women's talk accesses the same power as men's words through the equal application of the Muskogee "language is action" ideology allows us to consider that men's unease at women's talk is an indication of relatively equal linguistic footing among Muskogee genders. In her discussion of the regulation of pornography, MacKinnon (1993:13) notes that "social inequality is substantially created and enforced – that is, DONE – through words and images" (emphasis in original). What we have in Muskogee society is, indeed,

unequal access to power in the public and private spheres, with men talking about (controlling) the public, and women talking about (controlling) the private. That women's talk creates and enforces the reality found in the private sector gives them an area of control to which men do not demonstrate equal access. When women's talk assumes the same active character as men's, they have gained access to a realm of power available to both genders equally, though the power is used to control different spheres. Muskogee women will not allow men to take their speaking power away, and they laugh off or talk about any men who attempt to control women's speech. Men, for their part, joke or tell stories about men who try to control their wives too much or who appear too willing to partake in women's 'gossip'. Thus, both genders maintain access to the powerful language genres they control – men's public oratory styles and genres are not open to women, nor are women's private oratory styles or genres open to men.

Thus, it would appear that Bell's (1990) assertion that Muskogee women symbolize the natural world, and that Muskogee social order is attained solely through the work of men, is incorrect. Muskogee women, through the power of their talk, create and maintain the Muskogee social order within the private sphere. Men may create forms of Muskogee social order for outsiders to see, but it is the women who control the social order insiders live in and maintain through proper behavior. When Muskogee women begin to critique another's actions, they are building the fences to keep disorder out and work to mend the fabric of social life. The separate genres used by the genders at public events shows that both genders cooperate in such a way that each has access to powerful linguistic usages.

Examination of the differential use of the genres by men and women also points out that the Mvskoke term for each of these genres is a metapragmatic "shifter" in that it evokes both the linguistic and the social features characterizing its performance (Silverstein 1977:146–51). Muskogee people are able to describe many of the linguistic and social features surrounding appropriate performance of each of the genres, and they are able to expound on what the uses of these genres signify. However, it is only when the genres are explored within the context of Muskogee gender and language ideologies that we begin to see how the discursive separation fits within larger social constructs. Thus, as Silverstein (1977:151) asserts, combining insights from both the emic and etic perspectives is necessary to understand fully how both genders utilize the genres successfully within Muskogee culture.

NOTES

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[1] The language of the Muskogee is written in the orthography adopted by the Muskogee (Creek) Nation in the 1890s. In this writing system, /e/ is a high front vowel, /ē/ is a long high front vowel, /i/ is a mid-high front vowel, /a/ is a long low front vowel, /v/ is a mid-central vowel, and /o/ is a

mid-high back vowel. For the most part, Muskogee consonants have values equivalent to the identical International Phonetic Alphabet symbols. The exceptions to this rule are /c/ and /r/, which are equivalent to /č/ and /ɬ/, respectively. Additionally, syllable-initial voiceless consonants are voiced when following and preceding a voiced sound.

[2] "Subordinated activities" are those that lie outside the main focus of the event and are frequently "disattended" or overlooked by participants. Many of the subordinated activities Goffman (1974:201) discusses are those that are "treated as something apart" when treated at all. Muskogee women's talk certainly falls in this category during ceremonial and social dances, since it never takes the role of main focus, even for those women who devote the largest amount of time to its production.

[3] In order to reduce confusion between the name for the language (Mvskoke) and the name of the Muskogee people, the language name is spelled in the Mvskoke orthography.

[4] This story is very similar to the story "How the Terrapin's Back Came To Be in Checks" in Tuggle's collection (1973:295).

[5] The genders of Bell's informants are not identified in her article. The negative evaluation of women's talk suggests that the evaluators of this talk are males, or women talking about the effects of OTHER Muskogee women's talk. I have not found any Muskogee women who denigrate their own talk, even when it is described as 'gossip.'

[6] The Muskogee are also known as the Creek. Early English traders recognized certain of the Muskogee as the Creek because of the location of their habitations along Ochesee Creek (see Sturtevant 1971:98; Wright 1986:2–3; Moore 1988:170–71).

[7] None of the participants in this discussion was related, either directly or through clan-ties, to the woman who was the subject of this discussion.

[8] Coates (1988:65–72) presents a good overview of both approaches and clearly describes how the two affect the analysis of gendered language use. Lakoff 1975 is the premier example of work based on the dominance approach. Maltz & Borker 1982, Johnstone 1993, and Tannen 1994 are good examples of work informed by the difference approach.

[9] The clan structure has continued to diminish in importance in many areas of Muskogee society, as Spoehr 1947 noted. However, Muskogee women are still vigilant about relationships involving partners with the same clan identity because this is widely thought to be an incestuous liaison.

[10] Medicine men and preachers are called upon to battle *stekennē* 'witches', who are often identified as the forces causing difficulty or illness for a person, family, or corporate group (Swanton 1928b:632–36; Schultz 1999). The witch affects his or her victim through the use of charmed items and medicines doctored with chants calling on dark forces, and spells. Witches, then, also use language in an active manner to effect negative outcomes for the victim. A witch's power is negated by the application of medicines and treatments empowered by the positive language of a medicine man or preacher.

[11] Control of specialized discourse styles is an important facet of men's roles at the stomp grounds. Men holding the position of *mekko* 'chief', *oponayv* 'speaker', or *empohvtkv* 'stick man' must command the discursive practices and/or styles associated with these roles. Chiefs are to speak to the assembled crowds only through their speakers, though they may speak directly to small groups or individuals when moving among the crowd. Speakers utilize a distinctive style when making speeches on behalf of the chief to ground members and visitors. For descriptions of this style see Bell 1985 and Innes, Alexander & Tilkens (2004, CD2). Stick men determine the order of song leaders during the dances and have a style for use when announcing the next leader. Men also command specialized discourse styles and genres at Muskogee churches. For descriptions of preaching, praying, and other distinctive styles performed at church gatherings, see Schultz 1999.

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