

WENSHU LEE

California State University,
Chico Chico, California U.S.A.

and

WANGEN LEE

TXC Corporation Ping Cheng, Taiwan

“Rhetoric is always with us.”¹

“If you want to know real history, read novels”²

Abstract: *Constrained by power, workers have trouble speaking up. To hear them, researchers need to go beyond “polite data,” and step into the shadows, an elsewhere where workers feel safe and “impolite data” might surface. This essay reports three preliminary research findings of an eight-month ethnography in Taiwan conducted by a bicultural research team and their “Deep Throat” informant, Mark. One finding is related to boss talk in public, and the other two about male worker talk in the shadows, including masculine buddy talk and a Chinese form of covert communication called suku (訴苦), translated as “confiding bitterness.” These three findings are about an important ethnographic theme: Corporate truth telling. Together they complicate our understanding of culture, power and communication: Members of the power elite might be discredited for their cultural and discursive “accents;” and workers seeped in silence in the presence of the boss might engage in critical discourse full of cuss words and military metaphors against seemingly rational corporate decisions yet plagued by hidden rules and unfairness. “Impolite data” manifested deep yet hidden cultural phenomena in the face of corporate irrationality. Directions for future research might include the context and timing by which individuals go into or step out of shadows, the nature of shadow time for a boss, women’s ways of speaking, and hidden rules embedded in organizations. Ethnographic research into the shadows, if carefully conducted, with an eye to protecting the participants, enables workers to share deep meanings in a safe zone, a nourishing space for communication in relation to human survival and self-actualization.*

Keywords: *Culture, power, impolite data, covert communication, synecdochic event, hidden rules.*

TO HEAR THE VOICES ELSEWHERE: IMPOLITE DATA & TAKING ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH INTO THE SHADOWS

1. The origin

Around the time of global economic tsunami, in the autumn of 2008, companies in Taiwan, much like firms worldwide, were bracing for the worst, from the tumbling of

business orders and stock prices, disintegration of leading financial firms such as the Lehman Brothers, to massive cost-cutting and layoffs. The impact of the economic tsunami was keenly felt in one's daily life. Our "voices elsewhere" project originated in such a context. It grew out of the informal conversations between a small group of friends who held global ties. At various social gatherings in Taipei Taiwan or through internet chats connecting global metropolises, certain topics became thematic. One thematic topic touched on the mood at work – such as uncertainty, anxiety, fear and despair.³ Another centered on the erosion in one's material life brought about by corporate crisis management strategies – such as "vacation without salary" (or unpaid work furloughs) and the elimination of "year end bonus" ritually given before the Chinese Lunar New Year. In addition to mood at work and material life erosion, a third thematic topic was about the imperfection and complexity of exit management, or the plan to layoff workers, which we will elaborate further.

Apart from the doom and gloom talk, the layered enactment of Taiwanese exit management rules became increasingly apparent. The official discourse honored exit rules framed by a rational and formalized calculus, i.e., using a firm's projected cost and benefit analysis to establish a quota for different divisions to identify workers for layoff, relying on objective criteria such as seniority and performance evaluation. Workers who were underperformers and/or holding a shorter tenure at work would be more likely to be placed on the layoff list. Another set of rules that remained culturally "hidden" emerged in friends' longer and more candid talk into the night.⁴

What were these hidden corporate rules? The first was identified as the kin of the imperium rule, pronounced as *huang qin guo qi* (皇親國戚) in Mandarin Chinese. It dictates that workers who are connected to the boss or a powerful executive are off limits for layoff, even though they might be of junior standing and/or underperformers. Following this "hidden rule," the best friend of the boss or the father of the boss's daughter's fiancé, for example, is off limits. Another hidden rule was the "50 plus" rule. It holds that workers close to or having reached the age of 50 are fair targets for layoff. This has to do with older people's threat to the corporate bottom line due to their stagnant/diminished performance and/or the potential cost of retirement, if a worker has accumulated 25 years of employment or reached the age of 55. Thus, exit management was, on the surface, guided by public rules that are rational and impartial. However, beneath the surface, management decisions seemed unfair and fickle, when a set of hidden rules trumped public rules. A closer scrutiny pointed to a tacit reality in the Taiwanese workplace: "Outside people" (*wai ren*) and "own people" (*zi ji ren*) received differential treatment.

Friends at various rounds of pretty intense conversations were troubled by such widely practiced hidden rules in the workplace. For one thing, these rules were downright unfair, discriminatory, and, in some cases, inhumane. The most invidious aspect of such rules lay in their clandestine status. They could neither be openly talked about nor formally objected to. Plagued by workplace paradoxes that grew out of the contradiction between public and covert rules and compelled by a moral conscience, some took upon themselves to enact

uncommon “intervention” strategies, such as covert moves to stave off the 50-plus rule. Others gave severance packages in amounts that surpassed what had been set aside by approved exit policies. Namely, the corporate “necessary evil”⁵ compelled them to execute covert acts not in the plain view of the boss, so that they could do the “right” thing without jeopardizing their own job security. Still, friends and their colleagues experienced psychic pain when they had to endure, as by-standers rather than change agents, the injustice inflicted on co-workers or subordinates.

Candid talk emerged among those who had developed long-term friendship outside of their current workplace, such as growing up in the same community, serving in the military together, studying under the same dissertation advisor, or working at a prior firm together. Trust was high and immediate risk at work was nil. Put differently, unreserved heart-to-heart conversations about power and politics in the workplace surfaced spontaneously in “safe zones” during times of trouble.

2. Beyond polite data

Aware of such troubling yet powerful conversations, the two of us, authors of this paper, felt compelled to tease out the rich implications. Digging deeper into the notes taken at the initial gatherings and multiple subsequent follow-up interviews, we noted that “safe zone communication” *in* the workplace among workers and *about* the workplace between an interviewer and an interviewee could not have occurred easily, if conversation participants had “weak ties.” We asked ourselves how much of the scholarship in management and organizational studies came out of, what we called, “polite data,” business practitioners shared thinly with researchers perceived by them as outsiders. Polite data tend to leave out “data in the shadows,” the stuff that’s small, real and dirty, the stuff that cannot see the light of the day. Scholarly knowledge having polite data as its foundation conforms to cultural norms and power structure at a firm. Going beyond polite data, we ask three critical research questions:

1. How can we bring into light the organizational data roaming about in the shadows?
2. How can we embrace data in the shadows thickly?
3. How can we write thickly in the doing and reporting of a research project spanning different linguistic and cultural communities?

To answer the first question, we decided that the direction of our research was not to “bring into light,” but for us as researchers to *go into the shadows*, and to listen with care whatever people entrusted with us. That is, we wanted to make sure that the ties between the researchers and the researched were strong and safe enough⁶ to allow entry, to earn the research project sufficiently credible embeddedness.⁷

To answer our second question, we turned to ethnography. We understood that doing research in “real-life organizations” face a lot of “complexities.”⁸ However we felt encouraged that “Culture... can be approached in various ways, such as by analyzing cultural products (e.g., folk tales or ethnographic archives or by doing ethnographic field work).”⁹ To be specific, we appreciated the ethnographic work on ecological embeddedness done by Gail Whiteman.¹⁰ Our own thick embeddedness,¹¹ furthermore, made our research team well situated to do an ethnography of Taiwanese/Chinese business organizations using Mandarin and Taiwanese, and to write research reports in American English in an academic venue. We were also able to redefine the traditional role of an informant. We no longer sought out a “native informant” about an alien world whose language and culture we knew little about, if not beyond a few years of language training in academic classroom. Our informant was not merely a “native” but an ethnographer, in a logical sense a “Deep Throat.” We were committed to critical reflexivity on the politics and ethics of our work and our informant as a co-researcher. Our Deep Throat could not take us physically into an organizational context, so we invited him/her to do the observation as an embedded participant and to share with us his/her ethnographic notes and documents.

To answer the third critical question, the one that addressed the issue of audience with two translation mandates (from Chinese to English, and from the industrial to the academic), we drew upon the work in critical translation studies and critical intercultural communication. We chose to do “translation” as a dynamic process, that is, to get across to English speaking readers the deep *rhetorical effects* created by Chinese/Taiwanese organizational actors. Our choice requires a detour into a brief theoretical coverage of this literature. Hatim, for example, talks about “dynamic equivalence”:¹²

Intervention on the part of the translator, however, can take more drastic forms, in which case the translator would resort to more ‘dynamic’ forms of equivalence. Through dynamic equivalence...we can thus cater for a rich variety of contextual values and effects which utterances carry within texts and which formal equivalence and literal translation, each in its own specific way, would simply fail to convey. These effects would be not so much form-bound as content bound. That is, we opt for varying degrees of dynamic equivalence when, for whatever reason, form is not significantly involved in conveying a particular meaning, and when a formal rendering can only lead to meaningless literalism.

This principle of translation argues against “meaningless literalism.” It is guided by pragmatism and further supported by an established line of research in critical intercultural communication.¹³ It focuses on deep codes involving idiom,¹⁴ humor,¹⁵ proverbs,¹⁶ and gendered naming practice,¹⁷ along with whiteness and colorism¹⁸ used in American and Chinese cultures.

Rather than mere textuality that “throws us back into an authorless and audienceless world,”¹⁹ rhetoricity, with its emphasis on discursive effect or impact, more formally accentuates the relationality between author and audience. Coupling “inter” with rhetoricity,

henceforth the coined concept of interrhetoricity, enables us to consider clusters of words linguistically and relationally²⁰ that may be chosen to accomplish an intended rhetorical effect. Following this framework, to go beyond meaningless literalism and to translate meaningfully is to bring about “inter-rhetorical relevance” between two groups of audience who share little, if any at all, communication and culture.²¹

Integrating our three critical decisions: to research into the shadows, to conduct thick ethnography, and to write thickly guided by dynamic equivalence and inter-rhetoricity, our next step was to take the proposal to friends (and/or people they recommended through snow ball sampling) and to assess if they met the following parameter:

1. *Deep knowledge in situ*: At a minimum at a firm for five years.
2. *First level ethnographic observation*: Competence and availability to create a “thick lifeworld archive” of their workplace for an extended period of time.
3. *Meta-level ethnographic interviews*: Competence and availability to join conversations with the research team to discuss aspects of the organizational phenomena that emerged from their long-term ethnographic observation.
4. *Source confidentiality for deep throat*: Guaranteed that the team will keep their identity completely confidential by following the journalistic practice of “deep background”²² and will give opportunities for them to modify in time any inadvertent identification of them in print, should our work make into the public domain.
5. *Ethical commitment in joint representation*: Guaranteed that the team will share research output for feedback and revision before public dissemination.²³
6. *Voluntary participation*: Entry and exit at any point of the project with no questions asked.

Our project is a preliminary exploration of “elsewhere,” a shadowy space we call a safe zone, where rarely studied communication in the workplace occurs. We focus on the kind of communication thickly coded into everyday Chinese idioms, such as “confiding bitterness” (suku), “scolding via cuss words” (ma san zi jing), and “talking sense into someone” (quan). To unpack the meanings in the safe zone thickly, we contrast it with talk in the “polite zone,” where one may observe the “inscrutable” Chinese workers.

In this essay, we focus on the ethnographic project with Mark,²⁴ our first successful long term research participant, on his company North Tech, a pseudonym we created for the purpose of this article. Having met all of the six criteria, and after agreeing to join our research project, Mark took daily notes of his quotidian at North Tech and was interviewed regularly by the research team. He would be free to decide on the topic, length and style of each ethnographic entry. During his 8-month participation, Mark wrote daily notes in Chinese for 23 weeks excluding holidays and weekends. For him, these notes felt “naked” (chi luo luo de), encompassing his unfiltered thoughts and emotions. His archive contains 111 entries. Their length ranges from 1,015 to 3,670 words, totaling 362 typed pages or 242,346 words.

The research team read each submitted entry daily. We took systematic notes of organizational cultures at North Tech as well as issues/themes that emerged. When we felt that a theme or issue became prominent/resonating Mark was invited to join ethnographic interviews to share his sense making process, and to answer questions identified by the research team. All ethnographic interviews between Mark and the research team were recorded digitally. Except for one session, owing to technical difficulties, we recorded 20 ethnographic interviews, ranging from 63 minutes to 152 minutes. The total time recorded was 34 hours and 19 minutes. We listened back to the recorded conversations repeatedly, enabling us to take additional research notes.

3. Preliminary ethnographic findings

Critical translation and intercultural communication studies guide us to pay attention to “not only what the original has to say but also, when appropriate, how it is said.”²⁵ Our deep ethnography into the shadows revealed cultural nuances, sensitizing us to communicators’ inter-rhetorical propensity “between what we actually choose to say and what we could potentially say but we don’t . . .”²⁶ Due to space limitation, in the next sections, we will share with the reader three preliminary findings on one of the most important themes that surfaced in Mark’s ethnographic archive and our meta-ethnographic interviews with him: Corporate truth telling. We will discuss *what* was communicated and *how* it was done in two contexts: polite/public zone vs. safe/shadowy zone.

3.1 Boss Talk & Worker Silences in the Public Zone

Mark wrote extensively about issues connected to his boss, whom we pseudonymed as Ross.²⁷ Boss Ross founded the firm, North Tech, a publicly traded company in the Taiwan Stock Exchange. How does Boss Ross talk? Growing up speaking Taiwanese in a rural community, his Mandarin and the little English he can muster sound “strange” because of a heavy Taiwanese/rural accent. In contrast, Morris Chang of Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, a widely admired leader in Taiwanese electronics industry, is a Mainlander speaking fluent Mandarin Chinese and American English. Chang’s media presence commands respect not only from Taiwanese/Chinese people, but also the global communities. Theoretically, Morris Chang’s style would be labeled as the “lemma” or the cultural and linguistic norm²⁸ and Boss Ross’ style would be marked as the “other,” therefore read as culturally inferior.²⁹

What hampers Ross further are the volume and pace of his speaking. Ross is uniformly thunderous and fast-paced, like sudden hail landing on one’s car. In the ear of a by-stander, Ross shouts rather than speaks. In addition, there is little rhetorical sophistication either in his speech content or structure. Mark and the research team often found it challenging

to take ethnographic notes on Ross' talk. He does not use sign posts (e.g., first, second) or a clearly recognizable organizational pattern (e.g., a chronological order). His ideas jump about and he digresses regularly. Ross does use fancier terms from classical Chinese and in English, only to end up misquoting a phrase or making a wrong word choice, not unlike the widely publicized blunders by Dan Quayle or George W. Bush in American media. Ross speaks Mandarin but lapses into Taiwanese and English. His tone changes unpredictably from the solemn, earnest, pedantic, and child-like, to bombast, down-home, and the ceremonial. The truth of the matter is: The communicative rococo performed by Boss Ross challenges his top-executive audience to keep a straight face when listening. To make matters worse, the audience is also obliged to produce thunderous clapping at the end of Ross' talk.

At a series of business meetings devoted to the costly mistakes surfaced at work, some of which led to lofty fines assessed by their bread-and-butter industrial buyers, Boss Ross announced that he wanted to combat a culture of concealment. His comments about the mistakes were loud and long-winded. Asked by Ross to answer the question: Why is the truth telling culture absent at North Tech? Members in the audience were brief, hesitant, polite, non-emotional, extremely cautious and almost inaudible. When Ross asked why people concealed trouble from him, why people did not tell the truth, someone in the audience murmured, "for the fear of *ma* (scolding)." Another said that concealment was important to protect industrial secrets. Curtiss, an executive at North Tech, offered another reason against truth telling: the fear of ridicule.

In Mandarin, "*ma*" or scolding refers to reprimands from parents/teachers to a child/student. Power differences become palpable, when "*ma*" is used rather than words like criticism or suggestions, normally used between adults (See Appendix A³⁰ - hereafter A). The inter-rhetorical effect Boss Ross created was "harsh patronizing," like from a father to his children, rather than "measured criticism" from an adult-to-adult relationship.

To rid concealment, Boss Ross made a pledge: Truth telling would no longer lead to scolding at North Tech. Instead of speaking solemnly, a style more appropriate for pledge making, Boss Ross communicated like a street vendor thundering away in an effort to solicit business from passers-by in street corners.

Ross' "voices" were colorful, yet tinged with power and subtle reminders of his own inferiority. In front of Boss Ross, in a polite zone, the employees' silences;³¹ were obsequiously stoic. And according to Mark, no one would welcome a pledge framed in ways that cast the workers as whining children rather than respected professionals. And few, if any, would respect a pledge of organizational change that was shouted out by a petty street vendor. What a boss and his workers said and how they said it complicated our view of managerial power and workplace subjugation. The penumbra of what was said as well as not said led us into the shadows of an organizational "elsewhere," where boss and his eyes and ears could not reach.

3.2 Masculine Buddy Talk in the Shadows

Here in what we call the elsewhere or shadows, we found employees performing quite a different communication style, one that we label as “masculine buddy talk.” In its own way, it was as colorful as Boss Ross’ talk. Workers’ talk was peppered with military metaphors and cuss words. It’s not polite at all. And it was animated with a rich repertoire of tones and emotions, ranging from hushed voices in addressing sensitive topics, sighing with lamentation, dramatic anger and loud laughter, to long silences. Masculine buddy talk contrasts sharply with the “obsequiously stoic” style performed when the boss was around. Two clearly identifiable forms of discourse -- military metaphors and cuss words -- documented ethnographically characterized corporate male talk in the shadows. Let us elaborate on them.

Military metaphors. Adult males, in Taiwan, become corporate employees after the completion of compulsory military service from one to two years with the government. In the workplace, corporate males often use military expressions freely with people they trust. In Mark’s ethnographic archive, a superior is often called “an officer” (*zhang guan*) rather than his formal title (e.g., manager, vice president). Top executives are called “generals.” “The troop” is used to refer to one’s work unit, such as R&D or sales. For example, one employee may say, “Once headed by an incompetent director, the new division would become a crippled *troop*.” To lose out in competition is to “lose a battle” or “to lose the entire legion Work performance, if criticized severely by clients or supervisors, is “killed in action.” Such colloquial communication signals a form of male bonding that lubricates business transactions, making them more fun and trusting and less painful and guarded. The dynamic equivalence of military terms used at North Tech resembles contemporary sports expressions used by male workers in North American firms.

Cuss words. The second characteristic of masculine buddy talk is the frequent use of cuss words. One group of cuss words has to do with “egg” (*dan*) which refers to someone, often a male, who is inept and bafflingly stupid. Its dynamic equivalent would be a “doofus” or “nincompoop.” In the oral ethnographic data, we found the use of “turtle egg” and “stupid egg” to refer to ridiculous acts performed by peers as well as supervisors.

Another trope, “fart” (*pi*), meaning acts that are far-fetched or non-sensible, also occupies a significant discursive space. For example, “The excuse used by Mal is farting a dog’s fart (bullshit),” or “Jim says nothing but fart words (nonsense).”

Similar to “fart” is the expression “bird” (*niao*). A rookie or greenhorn is called an “inferior bird” who would do “bird things,” which means bungling.

Underperforming, illogical and/or brown-nosing people are called “garbage” (*le se*), such as “Who wants to work with this piece of garbage?” Its dynamic equivalent would be “s...t,” “pain in the ass,” or “asshole” in American slang.

“His mother’s” (*ta ma de*, abbreviated from “f... his mother’s X”) is also used frequently, as a conversational filler or an exclamation refrain when guys become agitated and are

about to say something truthful but perceived as socially inappropriate or negative. For example, “[F...] *his mother’s*, I may slam the door and quit.” This is equivalent to say “F... you, take this job and shove it.” Finally, “to f... someone up” (*gan*) is frequently used to mean “to scold someone *really* harshly” (See Appendix A). An example from Mark’s ethnographic notes: “Ross asked me to step out of the office so that he could have a private conversation with John. Ross then shut the door and, not even within two steps of my walking away from them, I heard him shouting at John. He *f...ed John up* royally [scolding John really harshly].”

Below is a synecdochic event³² we selected from Mark’s ethnographic archive. This key event we chose to zoom in for the purpose of this article is synecdochic because, based on our rich ethnographic immersion, it organically substitutes North Tech and provides a resonating microcosm for the study of corporate culture and the trouble with speaking up.

It was a private conversation behind closed doors³³ between Mark and Stephen about Luke. Luke held close ties with Boss Ross but was widely perceived as an underperformer at North Tech. Luke was Mark’s peer but Stephen’s supervisor. Ethnographically this talk between two male workers, Mark and Stephen, well exemplifies what we mean by “masculine buddy talk” (see Appendix B - hereafter B).

Luke frequently neglected to do his job as an executive. As the head of a different division from Luke’s, Mark “rescued” Luke regularly so that things would not fall apart. Lines 1-4 serve to illustrate this point. Especially the use of “fart” (B: 3), a cuss word, indicated that Mark spoke with little self-censorship and he intensely disapproved of Luke. Mark’s outrage was caused by Luke’s choice to complain about rather than to appreciate Mark’s help (B: 5-7). This led to Mark’s “sniping” tone, criticizing Luke’s lack of logic (B: 8). With disapproval and annoyance came frustration. Lines 9-15 shed light on Mark’s complex emotional journey. Long pauses and sighing led to Mark’s naming of pain. It’s a rare instance of sharing one’s vulnerability because men rarely talk about hurt in the workplace.

Mark’s talk became cathartic, recollecting in private his prior outburst against Luke in public. He enunciated cuss words, “to f... Luke up” (B: 21, 24, 29 & 32), four times in a jolly spirit. Mark laughed out loud on three occasions (B: 21, 28-29, 33-35), with the last round of laughter prolonged uninhibitedly (B: 33-35). “I *waah pipipapa* just f...ing him up” (line 29) showed that Mark vocalized the sound of dashing like a Kamikaze plane (*waah*) and the sound of slapping (*pipipapa*),³⁴ before he entered into the heart of the action, to cuss a peer out openly. His cussing out was tantamount to slapping, attacking “the enemy” like a suicide plane. So animated was Mark that he used English performatively, imitating a female assistant’s mitigating words, shouting “Calm down! Calm down!” (B: 28). Through word choices and nonverbal cues, Mark cussed away with great joy. And there was a lot of drama through soundgraphs and story-telling.

A follow-up ethnographic interview with Mark thickened the context of this “outburst episode” -- it was at a meeting where Boss Ross was absent, while all of Luke’s subordinates

were present, including Stephen. Luke was reading from the power point that Mark had prepared for him as a favor. Luke's presentation did not go well. In the end, Luke publicly, in a sarcastic tone, blamed Mark for his own [Luke's] unimpressive presentation. Feeling used and abused, Mark protested, "You *should not* have said this in front of everyone else," and dove into the "f...ing Luke up" outburst communication shared above.

When Mark talked to Stephen about this heroic insurgence, Mark was mindful of his own aberration. That is, he normally would not have done this (B: 24 & 31). Therefore he repeated an alibi for his action three times, "I could not stand it anymore, you know?" (B: 25, 30 & 34). Mark was aware of the inappropriateness of his behavior, a transgression which he called as "losing manners" (B: 31). That is, different behavior ought to be performed in different contexts in order to be socially appropriate. Mark felt uncertain, vulnerable, perhaps a little ashamed, so he asked Stephen if Stephen was surprised at all by the aberration (B: 35).

At first hesitant (B: 36), Stephen suggested that Mark was over-reacting. In other words, Stephen rendered a somewhat negative judgment although it was said in a hushed tone of voice. Stephen's complex move indicated agreement with Mark's self-assessment of "losing manners." They both supported that there ought to be rules to guide proper behaviors at North Tech. Yet he showed Mark support by chuckling gently, "You overreacted huh huh..." (B: 37). Most of Stephen's support, getting Mark off the hook and affirming his alibi, was performed nonverbally (B: 39).

Masculine talk here is coarse without inhibition. The frequency and accentuation of cuss words were breath-taking. It can be great fun and highly dramatic, with a performative flair to it. Yet, the bravado does not last 24-7. When one wonders if one's act is perceived as transgression in the workplace, the masculine style becomes a balancing act and followed by a sense and style of vulnerability, softer and thus perceived as more "feminine."

4. Confiding Bitterness in the Shadows

Another form of interaction in the shadows, in a "safe zone," coded in Mandarin Chinese is called *suku* (訴苦), which we translate as confiding bitterness. We will use two synecdochic excerpts as an arch, one from an early part of the private talk between Mark and Stephen (Appendix C - hereafter C) and another from the tail end of their talk (See Appendix D - hereafter D), to illustrate confiding bitterness (*suku*) as a corporate interpersonal communication that deserves research attention. We share detailed conversational data to illustrate the complex "becoming" between two male workers who trust each other.

A *suku* interaction is clearly marked by boundaries. It is typically done behind closed doors, but when a *physical boundary* does not hold, in this case by a third party knocking on the door (C: 15), *suku* partners "know" to maintain their exclusiveness through a *discursive boundary* in the form of silence (C: 16). In reviewing the excerpt, we noticed that,

as Stephen's tone became louder and more animated in finishing up a story about Boss Ross (C: 14), he stopped the talk in mid-sentence and a mutual silence lasted for 3 seconds, until the coast was clear.

The "bitterness" at hand concerned a disagreement in perspective about corporate personnel: how to assess performance, and what division of labor is fair. In short, it was about management style and action or inaction against incompetence. What Boss Ross favored, in Stephen's words, were those who "could follow his orders" (C: 99) and "hug the thighs" (C: 112). "Thigh hugging" (*bao da tui*) here is a risqué idiom referring to people who ingratiate. It is like brown-nosing in American slang. In contrast, Boss Ross ran down Stephen and Mark because they were "bookish" (*shu sheng xing*) (style of the scholar) (D: 54).

How was the disagreement over style between boss and subordinates handled? Stephen told Boss Ross his version of "truth" on two occasions, one when he told about Rockie's incompetence (C: 13) and another when he talked about Rockie's failure to create learning opportunities (C: 58). We mark Stephen's truth telling here as a Chinese form of "advice giving," (called "*jian*") by the subordinate to the superior. It is an overt and unsolicited form of upward communication in an effort to change current practice. Stephen prefaced his "*jian*" with deference, by qualifying his "advice," by asking for permission to "go beyond my job duty" (C: 9-11) and by acknowledging the inappropriateness of commenting on "my elder at the university" (C: 53-54).

After taking the risk to "*jian*," Stephen was rebuffed by Boss Ross. First through buck-passing: Boss Ross placed blame not on Rockie but on his predecessor, Jerry, for the "residual poison" Jerry had left behind for Rockie to clean up (C: 19-21). Second, it was through a rhetorical question: Boss Ross corrected Stephen's view by questioning, "Why do you still think you are here to learn?" (C: 60-61).

It was obvious that Stephen became increasingly angry. Stephen confided in Mark the emotions growing from the earlier exchange with Boss Ross. He felt upset, frustrated, and confused. He questioned the bad personnel decisions at North Tech, "Why in our organization we have to accept this disaster willingly" (C: 30-31); questioned ingratiation, "why should I hug the thighs?" (C: 131); and questioned Boss Ross, "Have I selected the right boss?" (C: 140). As his critical consciousness bloomed, Stephen realized that his truthful viewpoint had little chance to prevail with Boss Ross and at North Tech.

Finally, Stephen made his break-through, "So so ... I have gained a different view of the profession, quite honestly speaking" (C: 114-6). He referred to Boss Ross' management style and North Tech's political structure as "autocracy" rather than "democracy American style." He rejected Ross' anti-learning and tribal perspective, and reaffirmed the value of hard work, competence and learning.

While we are on the topic of "learning," we note two other occasions when "books," the trope for learning, were brought up by Stephen to bolster his position. The first had to do with modern management books which Stephen used, as authoritative sources,

to affirm corporate competence and accountability (C: 26). The second had to do with ancient Chinese wisdom, “I have been reading classical Chinese books especially I think [I discovered that] loyal officials all died a really tragic death” (C: 103-104). In other words, loyalty does not pay off. And given the culture favored by Boss Ross, Stephen confessed, “My degree of loyalty to the company has diminished, I have to say this” (C: 142-144).

The nonverbal acts performed by Mark to support Stephen’s awakening process also deserve attention. Mark used a gentle tone of voice to invite Stephen to resume his truth telling story, after the intrusion of door knocking (C: 17). He showed his rejection of Boss Ross’ buck-passing, by talking over but affirming Stephen in a forceful voice (C: 22-23). Mark breathed a heavy sigh in the background to echo Stephen’s frustration with the view held by Boss Ross (C: 39-40). And Mark embraced Stephen’s “loyal people die badly” thesis through hearty and extended laughter (C: 105).

We note two other acts performed by Mark, during the *suku* session: acting out and advice giving. The first enacts a discourse that expresses anger in a highly dramatic style. Mark despised thigh hugging. He used a rhetorical device, parallelism (C: 118-123), to build up a crescendo, culminating in a loud conclusion, punctuating key positional words, “Your and my view are the same. So we **do not hug** the thighs, right?” (C: 135-36). Mark also cussed daringly, “That is the reason why when you told me about the Rockie decision, before it was formally announced by boss, I, [f...] his mother’s, I emitted such a big fire” (C: 41-44). The expression was too crude to say in full, even in the shadows.

In addition to a dramatic performance, another act has to do with advise giving in two Chinese forms: admonition (*gao jie*) (D: 1-12) and mitigation or talking someone into good sense (*quan*) (D: 14-17). The value, Mark admonished Stephen, is to embrace substance, i.e., one’s character and action, which classical Chinese sages admonished the young to abide by. Advice may also be mitigating, aiming at self-adjustment modifying oneself in order to accommodate a hopelessly crushing situation. Mark, being of higher rank, older and more experienced, was in a position to “mentor” Stephen. At one point, Stephen called Mark, an “officer” (C: 24). It’s a military metaphor we discussed in the earlier section. Mark offered his advice, in a soft tone of voice, at one point moving into a monologue murmuring to himself: “. . . and one does not need much bitterness [*ku ha ha de*]. That is one needs to be happier, you understand it, otherwise life will be indeed tragic” (D: 14-17).

Toward the end of the *suku* conversation, Stephen, persuaded by Mark to be “happier,” brought up a joyous point, in part to cheer Mark up, to reciprocate his mentoring. Boss Ross promoted Rockie rather than Stephen. After this news was made public, Stephen reported that many people approached him and showed support, “You have done a good job. Why is it given to someone else [Rockie rather than Stephen]?” (D: 26-27). Marveling at this unsolicited affirmation and feeling vindicated, Stephen was at a loss for words, at which moment, Mark talked over him, providing him with an artfully condensed expression in classical Chinese, “*jian yi bu ping*,” which means, “People felt enraged by the lack of justice because they have witnessed moral principles being violated” (D: 29-31), to which

Stephen responded affirmatively, “Right right right right right” (D: 32). In the background, cheering Stephen on, Mark clapped thunderously. All this provided a needed closure in a scintillating way, for two men, two friends who were well on their way to heal their bitterness.

5. Discussion

When trust was high and risk at work was low, people opened up. Accordingly, we decided to go beyond polite data and to “hear voices elsewhere,” taking our research into the shadows, conducting thick ethnography and translating dynamically and inter rhetorically.

Our analysis recalls a view of culture advanced by Granovetter, who holds that “. . . culture is not a once-for-all influence but an ongoing process, continuously constructed and reconstructed during interaction. It not only shapes its members but also is shaped by them, in part for their own strategic reasons.”³⁵ When we considered social ties as between Mark and Boss Ross and between Mark and Stephen, we did not give short shrift to “specific content, history, or structural location” of relations. We placed concrete discourse *in situ*, focusing on “individualized content beyond that given by the named roles”³⁶ such as boss, managers, or friends. Dynamic translation and inter-rhetorical relevance enabled us to materialize a less reductionistic view of power and culture.

The concept of “shadows as safe zone” in corporate cultures deserves further thought. It is a space like “safe harbors”³⁷ or “kitchen” as safe spaces³⁸ for American slaves then³⁹ and black American women now. In our study, safety is synonymous with confidence and trust. No harm will come from this interaction, this relationship. In ethnographic research, trust plays out at two levels: between researcher and the researched, and in the field among participants. We designed our project to maximize trust in both areas. Going into the shadows, we moved beyond “polite data” collected by researchers treated as outsiders. That is to say, we refined the role of a native informant from a professional informer to an ethnographic Deep Throat, as a co-researcher. We, as researchers, recognized and embraced cultural embeddedness and relational ethics listed in our six research parameters. The “impolite data” entrusted with us were indeed rich, enabling us to offer three research findings.

The first finding advances a more complicated take on boss talk. In our study, it was mixed with power and subjugation. Boss Ross had institutional power, yet his speaking location could not conceal his origins at the bottom of a cultural hierarchy. It revealed itself through his rural accent. Bridging this gap between power and accent, between success and origin, Boss Ross often ended up doing a farcical job in public address. He was into the excess. He pledged, like a street vendor, to end scolding and to welcome truth telling. Yet while doing so, he acted out the persona of a whining child and treating his employees as children rather than competent adults and professionals. They talked only when they were

talked to. When they broke silence, they were brief and extremely cautious, in the complex style of an obsequious stoic. Workers' "voice" remained silenced in speaking.

The second research finding concerns a complex body of "masculine talk" shared by male workers in the shadows. Immune from surveillance, what they said was quite colorful rather than grey, reticent, and stoic. Their talk was characterized by military metaphors and cuss words. We call this masculine buddy talk. Nuanced nonverbal cues were deployed. These ranged from laughter, paralinguistic soundgraphs, to varying the volume and pace of speaking. Yet recalling moments of vulnerability, perhaps shame, for example, as with Mark's "loss of manners," they also displayed softer and more feminine forms of expression. In short, workers, while a lot more colorful and impolite, were not purely masculine all the time in the shadows.

The third research finding concerns *suku*, confiding bitterness, a complex process of becoming. *Suku* deserves special attention because of its specific cultural forms. *Suku*-ers jointly create their safe zone in the shadows via exclusive boundaries, physical and discursive. In our study, the bitterness was about disagreement over personnel decisions (i.e., promotion) and corporate values (i.e., thigh hugging or ingratiation vs. competence), yet it is embedded in power differences between a boss and employees. An employee in disagreement is afforded a risky option of advice-giving to power, "*jian*," often prefaced with deferential qualifications. Strategies to rebuff *jian*, such as buck-passing and rhetorical questions, may discourage *jian*-ers from trying again. In disagreement and having been rebuffed, an employee might feel intensely negative emotions. If supported by a trusted mentor verbally and nonverbally, whose advice through admonition or mitigation, might strengthen one's valued position and suggest adaptation. This person might become "silent" as a stoic in the polite zone, but bloom critically in a safe zone, learning to name reality differently, to question and reject a perspective held by the power elite, and ultimately to question one's boss. When the boss is deaf to criticism and change, one's loyalty might fade and one might plan to exit the corporation. Yet, unsolicited affirmation and mutual support in the shadows, might help one endure the bitterness. Although revolution was not counseled here, *suku* as a widely adopted cultural performance might be an incubator for transformation at levels far beyond one's self in isolation.

6. Implications & future directions

Our findings are informed by the theory of strategic ambiguity advanced by Eric Eisenberg,⁴⁰ a prominent scholar in American organizational communication. Ambiguity in corporate discourse is not always inefficient, and clarity is never without problems. We have illustrated, in our "Voices Elsewhere & Impolite Data" project, that an ambiguous or little noticed expression, verbal or nonverbal, in the eye of an outsider might be quite clear and meaningful to the insiders. Ambiguity can be productive in accomplishing multiple

goals in a specific context, such as Stephen's polite criticism of Mark's overreaction and simultaneous reaffirmation of Mark with a chuckle. Ambiguity finds its fertile incubator in human orality: (1) through the choice between words or silence; (2) through verbal communication in the selection between cuss words and formal expressions, and in English or Mandarin, modern Chinese or classical Chinese; and (3) through nonverbal communication, from tone of voice to pace of speaking, from over-talking to onomatopoeic "waah pipipapa," and from sighing to laughing.

Not without its own limits,⁴¹ *suku* as a cultural and communicative phenomenon can be productive in our view. Because "relationships are valuable as ends in themselves,"⁴² and a space for *suku* allows managers, workers and researchers in organization "... to make context more conducive to collegueship, emotional support, and joint work – to more help and less harm."⁴³ This point is supported by research into affect or interpersonal liking "as a moderator of competence in task-related ties."⁴⁴ Affect gains importance in informal work relationships because "liked but less competent people were more likely to be sought out for task interaction than were people who were competent but disliked ... those who are most competent at the task are not necessarily the most sought out for task interaction."⁴⁵ Fostering a "safe zone" in the corporate shadows, as shown in our study, through common values and mentoring, may counter corporate forces that hold back "a significant reservoir of task-oriented knowledge from being tapped in organizations."⁴⁶

Neither, uniform nor singular voices and silences are themselves plural.⁴⁷ Their relationships are dialectical.⁴⁸ In this study, we chose not to restrict the construct of voice to "verbal behavior that is improvement-oriented and directed to a specific target who holds power inside the organization in question."⁴⁹ Speaking is not the same as speaking up, and not speaking is not the same as silence. Because a worker's ecology of communication is multi-realmed, speaking with those above her/him in power in an institutional hierarchy constitutes *one of the contexts*, certainly not *the only context*, in which workplace communication takes place. One may have trouble speaking up in front of the boss and co-workers at a weekly strategy meeting, yet one may bring problems and their silenced voices elsewhere, employing different styles of communication in a shadowy zone where one feels safe enough not to self-censor. Their public communication, if so codified, may become ambiguous and layered with multiple meanings, ones that the outsiders may construe as "silences" and the insiders code variously as "silent voices" or "voiced silences."⁵⁰

Our research is at its embryonic stage, yet it is generative. As we progress further working with Mark and other Deep Throat informants, we wonder about a few general areas of development. First, we begin to understand that what's crucial is less about what is spoken and who is silenced, than about the germinating moments of appearing and vanishing, moving into and out of light and darkness, the context and timing individual actors in an organization feel compelled to speak up, to increase the volume, to stutter, to slow down, sigh, laugh, tell a story, imitate an action paralinguistically, mitigate an

outburst, and resume silence. Second, a boss does not stay in the limelight 24-7. There is a shadow time, for bosses, too. What characteristics do bosses display in their “elsewhere?” Whom can they trust, if at all, and what would they say?

Finally, our data in this study were based on the communication among male workers. We now wonder about women’s ways of doing *suku*. Do they use cuss words? What do women workers do to move into and out of shadows? What’s their shadow time like? What about boss talk performed by a woman? Intrigued by the hidden corporate rules (e.g., 50-plus rule) in Taiwan, we also wonder what they are in different cultures, and their impact on organizational change and managerial decision-making, such as exit management.⁵¹ And, we continue to be intrigued by the Chinese wisdom phrase: “If you want to know real history, read novels.”

Notes

1. J. V. Maanen, “Style as theory,” *Organization Science* 6, 1 (1995): 134.
2. Chinese wisdom phrase.
3. P. M. Muchinsky, “Organizational Communication: Relationships to Organizational Climate and Job Satisfaction,” *Academy of Management Journal* 20, 4 (1977); K. H. Roberts, and C. A. O’Reilly, “Failures in upward communication in organizations: Three possible culprits,” *Academy of Management Journal* 17, 2 (1974); S. Rosen, and A. Tesser, “On reluctance to communicate undesirable information: The MUM effect,” *Sociometry* 33, 3 (1970)
4. S. Wu, *Unspoken rules: The game of advance and retreat in the history of China*, Chinese Edition (Taipei: Jou Jing Publishing, 2002).
5. J. D. Margolis, and A. Molinsky, “Navigating the bind of necessary evils: Psychological engagement and the production of interpersonally sensitive behavior.” *Academy of Management Journal* 51, 5 (2008).
6. M. Granovetter, “Economic action and social structure: The problem of embeddedness,” *American Journal of Sociology* 91, 3 (1985).
7. J. E. Dutton, and J. M. Dukerich, “The relational foundation of research: An underappreciated dimension of interesting research,” *Academy of Management Journal* 49, 1 (2006).
8. C. C. Chen et al., “How can cooperation be fostered? The cultural effects of individualism-collectivism,” *Academy of Management Review* 23, 2 (1998): 298.
9. Chen et al., “How can cooperation be fostered?”, 299.
10. G. Whiteman, “Why are we talking inside?: Reflecting on traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and management research,” *Journal of Management Inquiry* 13, 3 (2004); G. Whiteman, “‘First you have to get outside’: Reflecting on the ecological location of qualitative research,” *Organization & Environment* 23, 2 (2010); G. Whiteman and W. H. Cooper, “Ecological embeddedness,” *Academy of Management Journal* 43, 6 (2000).
11. This is because both us were born and raised in Taipei, Taiwan, and we possess relevant academic training and research experiences. Specifically, our first author received her doctorate in communication studies in the U.S., and second author his doctorate in business management

- in Taiwan. The first author works as an administrator/professor and has lived in the U.S. for 30 years, and the second author serves as a high-level executive in the electronics industry, living in Taiwan with a few years of sojourn in the U.S. to obtain his master's degree. Both researchers speak and write Mandarin Chinese as their native language, are fluent in English as a foreign language, and are bicultural, with the first author much more immersed in American cultures and the second author Taiwanese/Chinese cultures.
12. B. Hatim, "The translation of style: Linguistic markedness and textual evaluativeness," *Journal of Applied Linguistics* 1, 3 (2004): 237.
 13. M. J. Collier et al., "Dialogue on the edges: Ferment in communication and culture," in *Transforming Communication About Culture: Critical New Directions*, ed. M. J. Collier (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002); W. Lee et al., "A sociohistorical approach to intercultural communication," *The Howard Journal of Communications* 6, 4 (1995).
 14. W. Lee, "On not missing the boat: A processual method for inter/cultural understanding of idioms and lifeworld," *The Journal of Applied Communication Research* 22, 2 (1994).
 15. W. Lee, "Communication about humor as procedural competence in intercultural encounters," in *Intercultural communication: A reader*, ed. L. A. Samovar and R. E. Porter (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1993).
 16. W. Lee, "In search of my mother's tongue: From proverbs to contextualized sensibility" in *Among US: Essays on identity, belonging, and intercultural competence*, ed. M. W. Lustig and J. Koester (New York: Longman, 2000).
 17. W. Lee, "In the names of Chinese women," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 84, 3 (1998).
 18. W. Lee, "One whiteness veils three uglinesses: From border-crossing to a womanist interrogation of gendered colorism," in *Whiteness: The communication of social identity*, ed. T. K. Nakayama and J. N. Martin (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999).
 19. W. Lee, "In the names of Chinese women," 297.
 20. "Inter-rhetoricity" as a theoretical construct may be applied to verbal communication (such as word choice), nonverbal communication (such as facial expressions, tone of voice), and sequence (such as taking a seat in a movie theatre) in order to understand/assess the effect of discourse in context.
 21. A brief example: To understand why a rhetorical effect of "offense" is created in an American context in which an individual, Jason, uses "kicked the bucket" to refer to the death of a well respected elder, Elmer, in the community in front of his grieving family, is to understand that Jason fails to choose appropriate alternates available to reasonable people in the culture, such as "passed away" or "deceased." To get across the "offense" dynamically, a translator needs to locate alternates, and illustrate that, among them, one expression is inappropriately chosen over the other/s. Interrhetorically translating the dynamic equivalent from English to Chinese, a translator might write: Jason comments on Elmer's passing as "pigtail turned upside down" ("kicked the bucket") rather than "died as an immortal" ("deceased").
 21. B. Woodward, *The secret man: The story of Watergate's deep throat* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2005), 66.
 22. C. Ellis, C. "Telling secrets, revealing lives: Relational ethics in research with intimate others." *Qualitative Inquiry* 13, 1 (2007).

23. We gave him the pseudonym “Mark,” because we wanted to remind the reader of his dynamic equivalence: Deep Throat, Mark Felt (C. Bernstein, and B. Woodward, *All the President’s men* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974); J.D. O’Connor, “I’m the Guy They Called Deep Throat,” *Vanity Fair*, July 2005, <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2005/07/deepthroat200507>), whose disclosure led to the resignation of American President Richard Nixon in 1974 in the midst of the Watergate scandal.
25. Hatim, 233.
24. Hatim, 234.
25. We named Mark’s boss “Ross” after Ross Perot, the twice presidential candidate in 1992 and 1996 in the United States, because Boss Ross’s communication style is perceived as idiosyncratic, much like Ross Perot by mainstream Americans.
26. Lemma, a linguistic term (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2010), refers to a word in its original form, such as “go” (rather than its past tense “went”) and “flower” (rather than its plural form “flowers”). Defined as such, lemma is used as a metaphor to mean a *normative state* so naturalized that members of a culture may fail to notice its existence. Any form that deviates from the lemma state becomes “marked” (I. Mazurkewich, “Syntactic markedness and language acquisition,” *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 7, 1 (1985)) for its distinctiveness.
27. Business organizations, in Taiwan, are embedded in a political-communicative hierarchy. A shift from a KMT dominated semi-military state (1949 - 1988) to a two-party democracy (KMT and DPP) sandwiched between China and the U.S. makes Mandarin Chinese the language of the cultural elite, leaving Taiwanese a Chinese “dialect” of rural and lower class standing. English, the third language commonly used in Taiwan, carries with it a superior status associated with global viability and metropolitan hipness. In this context of linguistic hierarchy, public figures who speak Mandarin with a heavy Taiwanese accent and/or who fail to speak basic English become, for the socio-cultural elite, a butt of ridicule. Mindful of the hegemonic link between power and discourse, we find differential prestige bestowed on languages/ dialects problematic. What is reported here about three languages, Mandarin, Taiwanese and English, reflects one of the common views in the Taiwanese society rather than what’s endorsed by the researchers.
28. We will list a few idioms that are “alternates” for reprimand (See Appendix A). They differ in terms of two factors: the degree of a subordinate’s offense that triggers scolding and the relational connotation, from informal to formal. Three out of the ten alternates are cuss words (marked by asterisks), which connote hyper masculinity.
29. F. J. Milliken et al. “An exploratory study of employee silence: Issues that employees don’t communicate upward and why,” *Journal of Management Studies* 40, 6 (2003); E.W. Morrison and F.J. Milliken, “Organizational Silence: A Barrier to Change and Development in a Pluralistic World,” *Academy of Management Review* 25, 4 (2000).
30. Synecdoche is one of the four master tropes identified by theorists such as Giambattista Vico and Kenneth Burke. An expertly treatment of this complex rhetorical device may be found in *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition* (T.J. Enos, *Encyclopedia of rhetoric and composition: Communication from ancient times to the information age* (New York & London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1996), 712-713), which defines synecdoche as “a figure of substitution taking two inverse forms: substituting the part for the whole, or the whole for the part” (Enos,

- Encyclopedia of rhetoric*, 712). For an application of synecdoche to management studies on employment relations and local pay, see P.M. Hamilton, "The salience of synecdoche: The part and the whole of employment relations" *Journal of Management Studies* 40, 7 (2003).
31. Having conversations behind closed doors was itself a privilege. Because the photos taken at North Tech indicated that non-executives were placed in waist-high cubicles in a large open space. There was no coffee/tea break room. To engage in private talk, workers, for example, used cell phones by "hiding" in the stair way or riding up and down in an elevator.
 32. This form of nonverbal communication is called "paralinguistic soundgraphs" (F. Poyatos *Nonverbal communication across disciplines: Paralanguage, kinesics, silence, personal and environmental Interaction* (Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2002, 155). Being onomatopoeic therefore difficult to capture or reproduce, only a few of such spontaneous expressions are registered in standard dictionaries, such as "achoo" for sneezing and "ouch" for pain.
 33. M. Granovetter, "Economic action and social structure: The problem of embeddedness." *American Journal of Sociology* 91, 3 (1985): 486.
 34. Granovetter, 486.
 35. C. J. G. Gersick, J. M. Bartunek, and J.E. Dutton, "Learning from academia: The importance of relationships in professional life, *Academy of Management Journal*, 43, 6 (2000): 1037.
 36. O. I. Davis, "In the kitchen: Transforming the academy through safe spaces of resistance." *Western Journal of Communication* 63, 3 (1999).
 37. As an "elsewhere" deeply rooted in the American south that institutionalized chattel slavery, kitchen was black, dirty and noisy, segregated from the master's white, polished and civilized dining room. Yet a subjugated space, both racially and gender-wise, "kitchen" could be transformative, affording black women and children creativity and, more importantly, a human community.
 38. E. M. Eisenberg, "Ambiguity as strategy in organizational communication," *Communication Monographs* 51, 3 (1984).
 39. The ramification of safe zone relationships may include the formation of factionalized cliques, which necessitate pro-active procedures to foster collective change (D. Vera and M. Crossan, "Strategic leadership and organizational learning," *Academy of Management Review*, 29, 2 (2004). Effective procedural suggestions might include attempts to "develop clear, measurable and weighted goals," "develop wide participation in goal setting," and "specify, evaluate, and communicate underlying assumptions" (C.M. Jones, *Patterns of Social Policy: An Introduction to Comparative Analysis* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1985), 35-36). Limited also by space, we are yet to elaborate on the possibility that safe zone communication, if insufficiently transformative, could become indulgent and thus potentially counterproductive.
 42. Gersick, Bartunek, and Dutton, 1042.
 40. Gersick, Bartunek, and Dutton, 1042.
 41. T. Casciaro and M.S. Lobo, "When competence is irrelevant: The role of interpersonal affect in task-related ties," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 53, 4 (2008): 677.
 42. Casciaro and Lobo, 679.
 43. Casciaro and Lobo, 656.

44. M. M. Bakhtin, *The dialogical imagination: Four essays*, trans. M. Holquist and C. Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981); M.M. Bakhtin, *Speech genres and other late essays*, trans. V. W. McGee, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986); Bies and Shapiro, 1988; Bowen and Blackmon, 2003; Hirschman, 1970).
48. R. L. Scott, "Dialectical tensions of speaking and silence," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 79, 1 (1993).
45. J. R. Detert and E. R. Burris, "Leadership behavior and employee voice: Is the door really open?" *Academy of Management Journal* 50 (2007): 870.
46. Eisenberg, "Ambiguity as strategy; E.M. Eisenberg and M.G. Witten, "Reconsidering openness in organizational communication," *Academy of Management Review* 12, 3 (1987); S.L. Kline, B. Simunich, and H. Weber, "Understanding the effects of nonstraightforward communication in organizational discourse: The case of equivocal messages and corporate identity," *Communication Research* 35, 6 (2008); Lee, "Communication about humor."
47. Wu, *Unspoken Rules*.

Bibliography

- Bakhtin, M. M. *The dialogical imagination: Four essays*. Translated by M. Holquist and C. Emerson. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- Bakhtin, M. M. *Speech genres and other late essays*. Translated by V. W. McGee. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986.
- Bernstein, C., and Woodward, B. *All the President's men*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974.
- Bies, R. J., and Shapiro, D. L. "Voice and justification: their influence on procedural fairness judgments." *Academy of Management Journal* 31, 3 (1988): 676-685.
- Bowen, F., and Blackmon, K. "Spirals of Silence: The Dynamic Effects of Diversity on Organizational Voice." *Journal of Management Studies* 40, 6 (2003): 1393-1417.
- Casciaro, T., and Lobo, M. S. "When competence is irrelevant: The role of interpersonal affect in task-related ties." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 53, 4 (2008): 655-684.
- Chen, C. C., Chen, X.-P., and Meindl, J. R. "How can cooperation be fostered? The cultural effects of individualism-collectivism." *Academy of Management Review* 23, 2 (1998): 285-304.
- Collier, M. J., Hegde, R., Lee, W., Nakayama, T. K., and Yep, G. A. "Dialogue on the edges: Ferment in communication and culture." In *Transforming Communication About Culture: Critical New Directions*. Edited by M. J. Collier, 219-280. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002.
- Conquergood, D. "Health theatre in a Hmong refugee camp: Performance, communication & culture." *TDR* 32, 3 (1988): 174-208.
- Conquergood, D. "Rethinking ethnography: Toward a critical cultural politics." *Communication Monographs* 58, 2 (1991): 179-194.
- Conquergood, D. "Ethnography, rhetoric, and performance." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 78, 1 (1992): 80-97.
- Davis, O. I. "In the kitchen: Transforming the academy through safe spaces of resistance." *Western Journal of Communication* 63, 3 (1999): 364-381.

- Detert, J. R., and Burris, E. R. 2007. "Leadership behavior and employee voice: Is the door really open?" *Academy of Management Journal* 50 (2007): 869-884.
- Dutton, J. E., and Dukerich, J. M. "The relational foundation of research: An underappreciated dimension of interesting research." *Academy of Management Journal* 49, 1 (2006): 21-26.
- Eisenberg, E. M. "Ambiguity as strategy in organizational communication." *Communication Monographs* 51, 3 (1984): 227-242.
- Eisenberg, E. M., and Witten, M. G. "Reconsidering openness in organizational communication." *Academy of Management Review* 12, 3 (1987): 418-426.
- Ellis, C. "Telling secrets, revealing lives: Relational ethics in research with intimate others." *Qualitative Inquiry* 13, 1 (2007): 3-29.
- Enos, T. J. *Encyclopedia of rhetoric and composition: Communication from ancient times to the information age*. New York & London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1996.
- Gersick, C. J. G., Bartunek, J. M., and Dutton, J. E. "Learning from academia: The importance of relationships in professional life." *Academy of Management Journal*, 43, 6 (2000): 1026-1044.
- Granovetter, M. "Economic action and social structure: The problem of embeddedness." *American Journal of Sociology* 91, 3 (1985): 481-510.
- Jones, C. M., *Patterns of Social Policy: An Introduction to Comparative Analysis* (London: Tavistock Publications), 1985.
- Hamilton, P. M. "The salience of synecdoche: The part and the whole of employment relations." *Journal of Management Studies* 40, 7 (2003): 1569-1585.
- Hatim, B. "The translation of style: Linguistic markedness and textual evaluativeness." *Journal of Applied Linguistics* 1, 3 (2004): 229-246.
- Hirschman, A. O. *Exit, voice, and loyalty: Responses to decline in firms, organizations, and states*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1970.
- Kline, S. L., Simunich, B., and Weber, H. "Understanding the effects of nonstraightforward communication in organizational discourse: The case of equivocal messages and corporate identity." *Communication Research* 35, 6 (2008): 770-791.
- Lee, F. "Being polite and keeping MUM: how bad news is communicated in organizational hierarchies." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 23, 14 (1993): 1124-1149.
- Lee, W. "Communication about humor as procedural competence in intercultural encounters." In *Intercultural communication: A reader*. Edited by L. A. Samovar and R. E. Porter, 373-382. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1993.
- Lee, W. "On not missing the boat: A processual method for inter/cultural understanding of idioms and lifeworld." *The Journal of Applied Communication Research* 22, 2 (1994): 141-161.
- Lee, W. "In the names of Chinese women." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 84, 3 (1998): 283-302.
- Lee, W. "One whiteness veils three uglinesses: From border-crossing to a womanist interrogation of gendered colorism." In *Whiteness: The communication of social identity*. Edited by T. K. Nakayama, and J. N. Martin, 279-298. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999.
- Lee, W. "In search of my mother's tongue: From proverbs to contextualized sensibility." In *Among US: Essays on identity, belonging, and intercultural competence*. Edited by M. W. Lustig, and J. Koester, 48-56. New York: Longman, 2000.
- Lee, W., Chung, J., Wang, J., and Hertel, E. "A sociohistorical approach to intercultural communication." *The Howard Journal of Communications* 6, 4 (1995): 262-291.

- Maanen, J. V. "Style as theory." *Organization Science* 6, 1 (1995): 133-143.
- Margolis, J. D., and Molinsky, A. "Navigating the bind of necessary evils: Psychological engagement and the production of interpersonally sensitive behavior." *Academy of Management Journal* 51, 5 (2008): 847-872.
- Mazurkewich, I. "Syntactic markedness and language acquisition." *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 7, 1 (1985): 15-35.
- Milliken, F. J., Morrison, E. W., and Hewlin, P. F. "An exploratory study of employee silence: Issues that employees don't communicate upward and why." *Journal of Management Studies* 40, 6 (2003): 1453-1476.
- Morrison, E. W., and Milliken, F.J. "Organizational Silence: A Barrier to Change and Development in a Pluralistic World." *Academy of Management Review* 25, 4 (2000): 706-725.
- Muchinsky, P. M. "Organizational Communication: Relationships to Organizational Climate and Job Satisfaction." *Academy of Management Journal* 20, 4 (1977): 592-607.
- O'Connor, J. D. "I'm the Guy They Called Deep Throat." *Vanity Fair*: [http:// www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2005/07/deepthroat200507](http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2005/07/deepthroat200507).
- Poyatos, F. *Nonverbal communication across disciplines: Paralanguage, kinesics, silence, personal and environmental Interaction*. Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2002.
- Roberts, K. H., and O'Reilly, C. A. "Failures in upward communication in organizations: Three possible culprits." *Academy of Management Journal* 17, 2 (1974): 205-215.
- Rosen, S., and Tesser, A. "On reluctance to communicate undesirable information: The MUM effect." *Sociometry* 33, 3 (1970): 253-263.
- Scott, R. L. "Dialectical tensions of speaking and silence." *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 79, 1 (1993):1-18.
- Vera, D., and Crossan, M. "Strategic leadership and organizational learning." *Academy of Management Review* 29, 2 (2004): 222-240.
- Whiteman, G. and Cooper, W. H. "Ecological embeddedness." *Academy of Management Journal* 43, 6 (2000): 1265-1282.
- Whiteman, G. "Why are we talking inside?: Reflecting on traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and management research." *Journal of Management Inquiry* 13, 3 (2004): 261-277.
- Whiteman, G. "'First you have to get outside': Reflecting on the ecological location of qualitative research." *Organization & Environment* 23, 2 (2010): 119-131.
- Woodward, B. *The secret man: The story of Watergate's deep throat*. New York: Simon & Shuster, 2005.
- Wu, S. *Unspoken rules: The game of advance and retreat in the history of China* (Chinese Edition). Taipei: Jou Jing Publishing, 2002.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Mandarin Chinese Alternates for “Scolding” in Taiwanese Culture

Mandarin	Literal Translation	Degree of Offense	Relational Connotation
被批評	criticized	moderate to severe	formal
被責罵	scolded	severe	formal
被海幹*	fucked up ocean size	mega severe	informal and macho
被大幹*	fucked up big time	very severe	informal and macho
被幹*	fucked up	severe	informal and macho
被刮鬍子	beard shaven	moderate	informal and macho
被罵	scolded	moderate to severe	informal
被K	kicked	moderate	informal
被修理	fixed	minor to moderate	informal
被唸	nagged	minor to moderate	informal

APPENDIX B

An Exemplar of Masculine Buddy Talk in the Workplace

Mark (33 seconds)

1. I asked Luke to write the paper (medium volume, medium paced)
2. and to get the application ready
3. He didn't even write one fart word.
4. What else could I do about this?
5. Then he waited till the last day and said
6. We did not respect him.
7. We only asked him to rubber stamp things.
8. What kind of logic is this? <pause> (loud, sniping)
9. Nonsense happens around him too often (loud and irritated)
10. I don't even want to ...
11. <paused for three seconds and sighed softly>
12. don't want to deal with him. (frustrated, lower tone)
13. <paused for 2 seconds>
14. dealing is really painful (Joseph sighed in the background)
15. dealing with him is really painful (frustrated, hushed voice, emotional)
16. Last time what was the... (picking up speed, louder, into story telling mode, joyous)
17. you ought to know about the other project X
18. It was like what I just said
19. I don't know hu...that day I right there (tone change, more playful)
20. On stage he was at the podium (really fast paced, joyous)
21. And I was in the audience fucking him up (laughing and loud)
22. Were you there that day? (playful)

Stephen (1 second)

23. I was there. I was there. (soft tone, fast paced)

Mark (17 seconds)

24. I almost never fucked him up in the public, right? (loud and fast)
 25. I could not stand it any more, you know? (really loud)
 26. Joanni sitting behind me (story telling mode, fast loud joyous)
 27. repeatedly saying to me like (story telling mode, fast loud joyous)
 28. "Calm down! Calm down!" (laughing, loud, fast paced, in English)
 29. I waah pipipapa just fucking him up. (dramatic slapping sound, tone joyous)
 30. I had no choice. I could not stand it. (decreasing in volume and speed)
 31. I was never like this...lost manners that day (medium voice, like murmuring)
 32. I repeatedly fucked him up a few times (getting louder and faster)
 33. Huh ha ha ha ha ha ha (loud and laughing for extended time)
 34. I could not stand it (laughing still)
 35. Did you guys feel very surprised? (tail end of laughter, resuming soft tone)

Stephen (6 seconds)

36. Yes...yes I felt that... (hesitant and soft voice)
 37. You overreacted heh heh (soft voice and chuckling)

Mark (3 seconds)

38. It was not...because (soft and gentle voice, slow paced)
 39. I had to endure him for too long

Stephen (1 second)

40. Hm... (barely audible)

APPENDIX C**Confiding Bitterness Excerpt 1**

(Talk lasted for about 5 minutes, occurring in the early part of the private conversation between Mark and Stephen at North Tech)

Stephen (29 seconds) (Mandarin with pleasant Taiwanese accent)

1. I felt a bit upset upset at how to say it (gentle tone, even paced)
 2. How could people uphold constantly
 3. such a view of personnel
 4. since these guys knew this person in this role
 5. could not possibly play a good game
 6. then I told the boss <pause> ok, boss if now
 7. you have decided on the job assignment
 8. and Rockie is chosen
 9. Then I told the boss if he would allow me
 10. to go beyond my job duty and say one thing
 11. I told him that if I may go beyond my job duty
 12. and tell him one thing
 13. Rockie's technical competence is not strong

- 14. but boss surprised me by saying (pace picked up, faster)
- 15. <Someone knocks on the door>
- 16. <pause for three seconds> (silence)

Mark (1 second) (perfect Mandarin)

- 17. And what happened (gentle, soft and prodding)
(sound of door closing)

Stephen (6 seconds)

- 18. And Boss responded to me saying (gentle tone, even paced)
- 19. His being weak could not be blamed on him
- 20. because it was the residual poison
- 21. his predecessor had left behind and I <Mark talking over Stephen>

Mark (2 seconds)

- 22. It should not have been argued this way (forceful & loud)
- 23. It had been more than 2 years <Stephen continued on>

Stephen (37 seconds)

- 24. My heart... my heart felt...right officer (louder and faster paced, accentuation)
- 25. I just felt very upset upset because upset
- 26. my heart says didn't management books teach
- 27. once you are hired and given time to manage your troop
- 28. then you do not manage but lead to the result of
- 29. residual poison which should not have been with you
- 30. Why in our organization we have to
- 31. accept this disaster willingly that
- 32. people nowadays do not have competence
- 33. Then I did not even...because people under you (pace picked up even more, assertive)
- 34. could not see that rescue is performed
- 35. but people above you feel that you have tried
- 36. to rescue for so long even though you failed
- 37. you have already done your best
- 38. I just wonder why <pause> (troubled and agitated but still gentle)
- 39. viewpoints are so far apart <audible inhaling by Mark in background>
- 40. so I felt really frustrated <heavy exhaling by Mark, a heavy sigh>
- 41. <Stephen paused for 1 second>
- 42. in the past when I worked under Rockie (troubled and agitated but still gentle)
- 43. I felt <pause> in leading people
- 44. leading the troop in this area
- 45. he did devote his mind fully

Mark (1 second)

- 46. Yah...

Stephen (3 seconds)

- 47. So at that time I felt exceedingly frustrated (tone gentle but agitated, fast paced)
- 48. I to the boss that day we talked
- 49. So I said

Mark (2 seconds)

50. Did you talk to him straight? (gentle but louder than Stephen)
 51. You did not

Stephen (17 seconds)

52. Yes I told Boss that from Rockie (loud & a bit defensive)
 53. Since he was my elder at the university (gentle tone resumed)
 54. It's inappropriate for me to say this
 55. But since I joined the firm until now
 56. In all areas I do things
 57. relying on my own observation
 58. Rockie never taught me anything
 59. Boss then corrected me saying
 60. Why do you still think
 61. You are here to learn
 62. But I really feel that I have put
 63. diligent efforts to do things
 64. and I truly want to learn

Mark (1 second)

65. You have good reason to think this way (gentle & supportive tone)

Stephen (20 seconds)

66. But Boss thought that (gentle)
 67. Why was I still in the stage of learning
 68. *Anyway* I told boss that (“Anyway” said in English, loud)
 69. I could not learn anything from Rockie
 70. Management and supervision none of these
 71. I could not learn any of these
 72. To place judgment and the logic
 73. I could not learn these either
 74. I could only guess on my own
 75. To see if certain ways of judging
 76. Officers have officers' vision
 77. But even if I want to learn I can't (faster, lighter tone)
 78. <pause for 3 seconds>

Mark (1 second)

79. Hm...

Stephen (62 seconds)

80. Right, in my view
 81. We would instruct people working under us
 82. Today you are gonna to buy an item
 83. at a few hundred thousand dollars
 84. What's the purpose of this purchase?
 85. You may want to rely on what you can invest
 86. Rely on add-on cost, rely on future planning

87. To assess how to make the decision (”decision” in English)
 88. Because our people are still growing
 89. If we have the same view then we can
 90. But I have never learned these things (louder and agitated)
 91. Sometimes I felt very *confused* (“confused” in English)
 92. From now on what I have gained
 93. Sometimes I was very angry very angry
 94. Angry because I think that
 95. it was quite easy for the boss to pick Rockie
 96. this is because the boss is too busy, so busy that
 97. he needs to find someone to check in
 98. He might not be sure of this person’s function
 99. *Anyway* this person chosen could follow his order (anyway and follow are in English)
 100. This is what I think so at that time
 101. I felt really frustrated
 102. <pause> furthermore of late
 103. I have been reading classical Chinese books especially
 104. I think loyal officials all died a really tragic death

Mark (2 seconds)

105. Ha ha ha ha ha. (laughing, loud & continuous)

Stephen (1 second)

106. It is really like this (fast paced, excited)

Mark (4 seconds)

107. <Mark continued chuckling>

Mark (12 seconds)

108. Stephen the other day I the reason why (gentle, lucid speaking)
 109. the reason why my emotion was stronger
 110. than yours was because what you just said
 111. was what I had wanted to say on that day.
 112. Rockie knows how to hug the thighs
 113. and then (thigh hugging=brown nosing)

Stephen (3 seconds)

114. So so..I have gained (agitated, fast but gentle)
 115. a different view of the profession
 116. quite honestly speaking

Mark (11 seconds)

117. Then you should figure out (stronger, louder, increasingly angry tone)
 118. Why Rockie knows how to hug the thighs.
 119. <pause for 1 second>
 120. And then why can’t you do thigh hugging? (speaking accelerated, louder)
 121. Why can’t I do thigh hugging?
 122. Let us talk about one more person
 123. Why can’t big sister Maggie do thigh hugging?
 124. <pause for 1 second>

Stephen (6 seconds)

125. In fact I I I I do not know why (agitated, stuttering but still quite gentle)
126. I never thought about
127. A better way to put it
128. I never thought about
129. why one should not hug thighs
130. My position is that
131. why should I hug the thighs? (words accentuated)

Mark (1 second)

132. That's a great topic! (Mark talked over Stephen, loud)

Stephen (2 second)

133. I do things well (agitated but more assertive)
134. Why should I hug the thighs?

Mark (15:39)

135. Yours and my view are the same (loud, assertive, a bit angry)
136. So we **do not** hug the thighs, right? (words accentuated)

Stephen (6 seconds)

137. Ya...to the contrary (agitated, assertive, accelerated)
138. today if the boss likes thigh hugging
139. It befalls us to feel the *challenge* ("challenge" in English)
140. Have I selected the right boss?

Mark (1 second)

141. What you said is right on (loud and assertive)

Stephen (3 seconds)

142. My degree of loyalty to the company (agitated, assertive, accelerated)
143. has diminished
144. I have to say this

Mark (38 seconds)

145. What you just said was right on (fast & assertive)
146. What you just said was right on
147. So frankly speaking for these things (gentle and a bit relaxed)
148. I hinted at them with the boss
149. I hinted at them with the boss
150. In the past for Roger's case
151. I showed him my cards
152. I won't go into details
153. I showed boss my cards (louder & accelerated)
154. Boss didn't think I helped Roger enough
155. And I said I had **helped** him
156. **helped** so much that my **heart** felt
157. so I stopped helping
158. And he asked me
159. why I was willing to help Rockie at all

160. I said at least Rockie would not interfere with my work
 161. What Rockie did was
 162. to push the boat in the direction of the currents
 163. He did not want to be responsible for anything
 164. And if you were willing
 165. to cover his duty then you cover it
 166. then it was ok with Rockie
 167. His responsibility <pause> (lower tone, not as agitated)
 168. becomes less
 169. His pressure becomes less
 170. <pause>
-

Appendix D

Confiding Bitterness Excerpt 2

(Talk lasted for roughly a minute a half; occurring in the end of the private conversation between Mark and Stephen at North Tech)

Mark (25 seconds)

1. If one day you manage to change (lower tone, teasing)
2. Knowing how to ingratiate and brown nose
3. The crowd will talk about you this way
4. You ought to decide what kind of person
5. you want to become
6. I am not against you doing a bit more politics (loud suddenly)
7. But your own character and style
8. And what you manage to do
9. I have told you this
10. What kind of person you think you are
11. And how people gauge you
12. You need to make it happen yourself
13. <pause for 2 seconds>
14. one does not need much bitterness [ku ha ha de]. (lower volume, soft)
15. That is one needs to be happier,
16. you understand it
17. otherwise life will be indeed tragic. (soft and murmuring)
18. <pause>

Stephen (18 seconds)

19. Actually I think, let me share with officer a bit (soft tone)
20. After last week my heart was quite joyous (more spirited tone)
21. Happy for a few days
22. I was quite happy in a few areas
23. Because a lot of people asked me
24. Why is it? (story telling)
25. <pause>
26. You have done a good job,
27. Why is it given to someone else?
28. That is I think it is a bit like (searching for words)

Mark (1 second)

- 29. People felt enraged by the lack of justice
- 30. because they have witnessed
- 31. moral principles being violated (jian yi bu ping) <Mark talking over Stephen>

Stephen (6 seconds)

- 32. Right right right right right (fast & happy tone)
- 33. It did not feel too bad <Mark clapping in the background>
- 34. In the company
- 35. There are many people
- 36. Who would help on their own
- 37. So I think at least
- 38. There's some

Mark (5 seconds)

- 39. This is exactly due to your reputation (loud and affirmative)
- 40. That is the reason why when you told me (louder & accelerated)
- 41. About the Rockie decision
- 42. Before it was formally announced by boss
- 43. I [Fuck] his mother's
- 44. I emitted such a big fire

Stephen (15 seconds)

- 45. <chuckling softly>
- 46. You were right just to say that (fast and gentle)
- 47. <a long sigh>
- 48. In this world when things are divided evenly
- 49. Or when the boss divides things evenly
- 50. with no discrimination
- 51. <pause>
- 52. It's like when boss told me
- 53. In my face two or three times
- 54. John is too bookish and this that (imitating boss speaking)
- 55. But I think John has put in honest efforts

Mark (1 second)

- 56. You were right (affirmative)

Stephen (7 seconds)

- 57. He favors those kind of people like James (gentle but firm)
- 58. who can scold people scold them into the bones (accelerated)
- 59. that kind he likes that kind
- 60. that kind of management style

