

Chapter 1

1. The functions of language

- The analysis of discourse is, necessarily, the analysis of language in use.
- The discourse analyst is committed to what the language is used for.
- In order to describe the major functions of language, two terms are adopted: The function which language serves in the expression of 'content' is transactional, and the one involved in expressing social relations and personal attitudes is interactional.
- The distinction, 'interactional', 'transinteractional', stands in general correspondence to the functional dichotomies - 'representative / expressive', found in Bühler (1934), 'referential / emotive' (Jakobson, 1960), 'ideational / personal' (Halliday, 1973) and 'descriptive & social-expressive' Lyons (1977).

1.1 The transactional view

- Linguists and linguistic philosophers make the general assumption that the most important function is the communication of information. Thus, Lyons (1977: 32) observes that the notion of communication is readily used 'of feelings, moods and attitudes' but suggests that he will be primarily interested in 'the intentional transmission of factual, or propositional, information'.
- Similarly, Bennett (1976: 5) remarks 'it seems likely that communication is primarily a matter of a speaker's seeking either to inform a hearer of something or to enjoin some action upon him'.
- The language which is used to convey 'factual or, propositional information' is ***primarily transactional language***.

- In primarily transactional language, we assume that what the speaker (or writer) has primarily in mind is the efficient transference of information. Language used in such a situation is primarily 'message oriented'.
- It is important that the recipient gets the informative detail correct. Thus, if a policeman gives directions to a traveler, a doctor tells a nurse how to administer medicine to a patient, in each case it matters that the speaker should make what he says (or-writes) clear.

1.2 The interactional view

- Whereas linguists, philosophers of language and psycho-linguists have, in general, paid particular attention to the use of language for the transmission of 'factual or propositional information', sociologists and sociolinguists have been particularly concerned with the use of language to establish and maintain social relationships.
- *Conversational analysts* have been particularly concerned with the use of language to negotiate role-relations, peer-solidarity, the exchange of turns in a conversation, the saving of face of both speaker and hearer (cf. Labov, 1972a; Brown and Levinson, 1978; Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974; Lakoff, 1973).
- It is clearly the case that a great deal of everyday human interaction is characterized by the primarily interpersonal rather than the primarily transactional use of language.

let's consider the following examples:

- When two strangers are standing shivering at a bus-stop in an icy wind and one turns to the other and says 'My goodness, it's cold', it is difficult to suppose that the primary intention of the speaker is to convey information. It seems much more reasonable to suggest that the speaker is indicating a readiness to be friendly and to talk.
- A great deal of ordinary everyday conversation appears to consist of one individual commenting on something which is present to both him and his listener.
- A woman on a bus describing the way a mutual friend has been behaving, getting out of bed too soon after an operation, concludes her turn in the conversation by saying:

Aye, she's an awfy woman. (awfy = Sc awful).

This might be taken as an informative summary. Her neighbor then says reflectively (having been supportively uttering *aye, aye* throughout the first speaker's turn) :

Aye, she's an awfy woman.

- Pirsig (1976 : 3 **13**) remarks of such a conversation: 'the conversation's pace intrigues me. It isn't intended to go anywhere, just fill the time of day . . . on and on and on with no point or purpose other than to fill the time, like the rocking of a chair.'

- Brown & Levinson point out the importance for social relationships of establishing common ground and agreeing on points of view, and illustrate the lengths to which speakers in different cultures will go to maintain an appearance of 'agreement, and they remark 'agreement may also be stressed by; repeating part or all of what the preceding speaker has said' (1978)
- Written language is, in general, used for primarily transactional purposes, it is possible to find written genres whose purpose is not primarily to inform but to maintain social relationships - 'thank you' letters, love letters, games of consequences, etc.

2. Spoken and written language

2.1 Manner of production

- spoken and written language make somewhat different demands on language producers. The speaker has available to him/her the full range of 'voice quality' effects (as well as facial expression, postural and gestural systems).

e.g:

the speaker who says 'I'd really like to', leaning forward, smiling, with a 'warm, breathy' voice quality, is much more likely to be interpreted as meaning what he says, than another speaker uttering the same words, leaning away, brow puckered, with a 'sneering, nasal' voice quality.

- These **paralinguistic cues are denied to the writer.**

2. Spoken and written language

- Not only is the speaker controlling the production of communicative systems which are different from those controlled by the writer, s/he is also processing that production under circumstances which are considerably more demanding.
- The speaker must monitor what it is that S/he has just said, and determine whether it matches her/his intentions, while s/he is uttering her/his current phrase and monitoring that, and simultaneously planning his next utterance and fitting that into the overall pattern of what S/he wants to say and monitoring, moreover, not only her/his own performance but its reception by her/his hearer.

2. Spoken and written language

- The writer, on the contrary, may look over what s/he has already written, pause between each word with no fear of her/his interlocutor interrupting her/him, take her/his time in choosing a particular word, even looking it up in the dictionary if necessary, check her/his progress with her/his notes, reorder what s/he has written, and even change her/his mind about what s/he wants to say.
- Whereas the speaker is under considerable pressure to keep on talking during the period allotted to **him**, the writer is characteristically under no such pressure. Whereas the speaker knows that any words which pass his lips will be heard by his interlocutor and, if they are not what he intends, he will have to undertake active, public 'repair', the writer can cross out and rewrite in the privacy of his study.

- The speaker can observe their interlocutor and, if they wish to, modify what they are saying to make it more accessible or acceptable to their hearer. The writer has no access to immediate feedback and simply has to imagine the reader's reaction.

- Whereas in a spoken interaction the speaker has the advantage of being able to monitor their listener's minute-by-minute reaction to what they say, they also suffer from the disadvantage of exposing their own feelings ('leaking'; Ekman & Friesen, 1969) and of having to speak clearly and concisely and make immediate response to whichever way their interlocutor reacts.

2.2 The representation of discourse: texts

2.2.1 Written texts

- in the study of literature, 'text' is a printed record.
- A 'text' may be differently presented in different editions, with different typeface, on different sizes of paper, in one or two columns, and we still assume, from one edition to the next, that the different presentations all represent the same 'text'.

Consider the following extract of dialogue from *Pride and Prejudice*:

'Mr. Bennet, how can you abuse your own children in such away? You take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion on my poor nerves.'"You mistake me, my dear. I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these twenty years at least.'

- It is clear that more than simply reproducing the words in their correct order is required. It is necessary to replicate punctuation conventions, as well as the lineation which indicates the change of speaker.
- An adequate representation of a text must assign speeches to the correct characters, sentences to the correct paragraphs, and paragraphs to the correct chapters. The author's organization and staging of his work must be preserved.
- The notion of 'text' reaches beyond the reproduction of printed material in some further printed form.

e.g:

Queen Victoria's use of underlining in her handwritten journal is represented by her publishers in the printed version with an italic type-face to represent the emphasis she wishes to indicate when writing of Lord Melbourne:

he gave me *such* a kind, and I may say, *fatherly* look
(Thursday, 28 June 1838)

- Where the writer is deliberately exploiting the resources of the written medium, it seems reasonable to suggest that that manipulation constitutes part of the text. the individual reproducing the text in a printed version has to make a considerable effort of interpretation to assign a value to some of the less legible words.

2.2.2 Spoken texts

- a tape-recording of a communicative act will preserve the 'text'. The tape-recording may also preserve a good deal that may be extraneous to the text- coughing, chairs creaking, buses going past, the scratch of a match lighting a cigarette. We shall insist-that these events do not constitute part of the text.
- In general, the discourse analyst works with a tape recording of an event, from which S/he then makes a written transcript annotated according to his interests on a particular occasion.
- In general, analysts represent speech using normal orthographic conventions. Most speakers constantly simplify words phonetically in the stream of speech.

- Problems with representing the segmental record of the words spoken pale into insignificance compared with the problems of representing the super segmental records (details of intonation and rhythm)
- We have no standard conventions for representing the paralinguistic features of the utterance which are summarized as 'voice quality', yet the effect of an utterance being said kindly and sympathetically is clearly very different from the effect if it is said brutally and harshly.
- Similarly it is usually possible to determine from a speaker's voice his or her sex, approximate age and educational status, as well as some aspects of state of health and personality.

- It is not customary to find any detail relating to these indexical features of the speaker in transcriptions by discourse analysts. In general, too, rhythmic and temporal features of speech are ignored in transcriptions.
- It seems reasonable to suggest, though, that these variables, together with pause and intonation, perform the functions in speech that punctuation, capitalization, italicization, paragraphing etc. perform in written language. If they constitute part of the textual record in written language, they should be included as part of the textual record in spoken language.

- The response of most analysts to this complex problem is to present their transcriptions of the spoken text using the conventions of the written language. Thus Cicourel (1973) reproduce utterances recorded in a classroom in the following way:

1 . Ci: Like this?

2.T: **Okay**, yeah, all right, now . . .

3. Ri: **Now** what are we going to do?

In 1 and 3, we have to assume that the ? indicates that the utterance function as a question whether it is formally marked by, for stance, rising intonation in the case of 1.

- What must be clear in a transcript of this kind is that a great deal of interpretation by the analyst has gone on before the reader encounters this 'data'. If the analyst chooses to italicise a word in his transcription to indicate, for example, the speaker's high pitch and increased loudness, s/he has performed an interpretation on the acoustic signal, an interpretation which, s/he has decided, is in effect equivalent to a writer's underlining of a word to indicate emphasis.
- There is a sense, then, in which the analyst is creating the text which others will read. In this creation of the written version of the spoken text s/he makes appeal to conventional modes of interpretation which, s/he believes, are shared by other speakers of the language.

- we assume what Schutz has called 'the reciprocity of perspective', whereby we take it for granted that readers of a text or listeners to a text share the same experience (Schutz, 1953).
- It seems fair to suggest that discourse analysis of spoken language is particularly prone to over-analysis. **A** text frequently has a much wider variety of interpretations imposed upon it by analysts studying it at their leisure, than would ever have been possible for the participants in the communicative interaction which gives rise to the 'text'.

2.3 The relationship between speech and writing

- written language and spoken language serve, in general, quite different functions in society.
- Goody suggests that written language has two main functions:
 - The first is the storage function which permits communication over time and space, and the second is that which 'shifts language from the oral to the visual domain' and permits words and sentences to be examined out of their original contexts, 'where they appear in a very different and highly "abstract" context' (1977: 78).

- It seems reasonable to suggest that, whereas in daily life in a literate culture, we use **speech** largely for the establishment and maintenance of human relationships (primarily interactional use), we use **written language** largely for the working out of and transference of information (primarily transactional use).
- However, there are occasions when speech is used for the detailed transmission of factual information. It is noteworthy, then, that the recipient often writes down the details that s/he is told. So a doctor writes down his patient's symptoms, an architect writes down his client's requirements.

- When the recipient is not expected to write down the details, it is often the case that the speaker repeats them sometimes several times over..
- There is a general expectation that people will not remember detailed facts correctly if they are only exposed to them in the spoken mode, especially if they are required to remember them over an extended period of time. This aspect of communication is obviously what written language is supremely good at.
- The major differences between speech and writing derive from the fact that one is essentially transitory and the other is designed to be permanent.

2.4 Differences in form between written and spoken language

- Clearly there are dialectal differences, accent differences, as well as register differences depending on variables like the topic of discussion and the roles of the participants.
- the distinction between the speech of those whose language is highly influenced by long and constant immersion in written language forms, and the speech of those whose language is relatively uninfluenced by written forms of language.
- For the majority of the population, even of a 'literate' country, spoken language will have very much less in common with the written language..

- **How do written languages differ from spoken ones?**
- we discussed some of the differences in the manner of production of speech and writing, differences which often contribute significantly to characteristic forms in written language as against characteristic forms in speech.
- The overall effect is to produce speech which is less richly organized than written language, containing less densely packed information, but containing more interactive markers and planning 'fillers'.
- The standard descriptive grammars of English (e.g. Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik, 1972) typically describe features of the written language, or that form of the spoken language which is highly influenced-by written language.

Features of Spoken Language

- **Some (by no means all) features which characterize spoken language:**

(a) the syntax of spoken language is typically much less structured than that of written language.

i. spoken language contains many incomplete sentences, often simply sequences of phrases

ii. spoken language typically contains rather little subordination

iii. in conversational speech, where sentential syntax can be observed, active declarative forms are normally found.

- In over 50 hours of recorded conversational speech, Brown, Currie and Kenworthy (1980) found very few examples of passives, it-clefts or wh-clefts. Crystal (1980) also presents some of the problems encountered in attempting to analyze spontaneous speech in terms of categories like *sentence* and *clause*.

- *it's quite nice the Grassmarket since + it's always had the antique shops but they're looking +they're sort of + em +become a bit nicer +*

- As a brief example, notice how this speaker pauses and begins each new 'sentence' before formally completing the previous one

(b) in **written language** an extensive set of metalingual markers exists to mark relationships between clauses (*that* complementisers, *when / while* temporal markers, so-called 'logical connectors' like *besides, moreover, however, in spite of*, etc.), in **spoken language** the largely paratactically organized chunks are related by *and, but, then* and, more rarely, *if*. The speaker is typically less explicit than the writer: *I'm so tired (because) I had to walk all the way home.*

(c) In written language, rather heavily premodified noun phrases (like that one) are quite common - it is rare in spoken language to find more than two premodifying adjectives and there is a strong tendency to structure the short chunks of speech so that only one predicate is attached to a given referent at a time (simple case-frame or one-place predicate) as in:

it's a biggish cat + tabby + with torn ears, or in : old man McArthur + he was a wee chap + oh very small + and eh a beard + and he was pretty stooped.

- The packaging of information related to a particular referent can, in the written language, be very concentrated, as in the following news item:

A man who turned into a human torch ten days ago after snoozing in his locked car while smoking his pipe has died in hospital.

(Evening News (Edinburgh), 22 April

1982

(d) Whereas written language sentences are generally structured in subject-predicate form, in spoken language it is quite common to find what Givón (1979:13) calls topic comment structure, as in *the cats + did you let them out*.

(e) In informal speech, the occurrence of passive constructions is relatively infrequent. That use of the passive in written language which allows non-attribution of agency is typically absent from conversational speech. Instead, active constructions with indeterminate group agents are noticeable, as in:

Oh everything they do in Edinburgh + they do it far too slowly

(f) in chat about the immediate environment, the speaker may rely on (e.g.) gaze direction to supply a referent: *(looking at the rain) frightful isn't it*.

(g) the speaker may replace or refine expressions as he goes along: *this man + this chap she was going out with got, do, thing, nice, stuff, place and things like that*

(h) the speaker typically uses a good deal of rather generalized vocabulary: *a lot of*

(i) the speaker frequently repeats the same syntactic form several times over, as *are available + I look at electric cables what + are they properly earthed + are they properly covered* this fairground inspector does: *I look at fire extinguishers + I look at fire exits + I look at what gangways*

(j) the speaker may produce a large number of prefabricated 'fillers': *well, e m , I think, you know, if you see what I mean, of course, and so on.*

(See example 1 and 2, ch 1 page 18)

3. Sentence and utterance

- It might seem reasonable to propose that the features of spoken language outlined in the preceding section should be considered as features of utterances, and those features typical of written language as characteristic of sentences. In this convenient distinction, we can say, in a fairly non-technical way, that utterances are spoken and sentences are written.

The Grammarian vs. the Discourse Analyst

- Grammarian will concentrate on a particular body of data and attempt to produce an exhaustive but economical set of rules which will account for all and only the acceptable sentences in his data.
- The Grammarian will not normally seek to account for the mental processes involved in any language-user's production of those sentences, nor to describe the physical or social contexts in which those sentences occur. On each of these issues, concerning 'data', 'rules', 'processes' and 'contexts', the discourse analyst will take a different view.

The Grammarian vs. the Discourse Analyst

3.1 On 'data'

- The grammarian's 'data' is inevitably the single sentence, or a set of single sentences illustrating a particular feature of the language being studied. It is also typically the case that the grammarian will have constructed the sentence or sentences s/he uses as examples.
- In contrast, the analysis of discourse, as undertaken and exemplified in this book, is typically based on the linguistic output of someone other than the analyst.

The Grammarian vs. the Discourse Analyst

- More typically, the discourse analyst's 'data' is taken from written texts or tape-recordings. It is rarely in the form of a single sentence. This type of linguistic material is sometimes described as 'performance data' and may contain features such as hesitations, slips, and non-standard forms which a linguist like Chomsky (1965) believed that should not have to be accounted for in the grammar of a language.

3.2 Rules versus regularities

- **A** corollary to the restricted data approach found in much of Chomskyan linguistics is the importance placed on writing rules of grammar which are fixed and true 100% of the time. Just as the grammarian's 'data' cannot contain any variable phenomena, so the grammar must have categorial rules, and not 'rules' which are true only some of the time.

- In this sense, the 'rules' of grammar appear to be treated in the same way as 'laws' in the physical sciences. This restricts the applicability of such rules since it renders them unavailable to any linguist interested in diachronic change or synchronic variation in a language.
- S/he may wish to discuss, not 'rules' but regularities, simply because his data constantly exemplifies noncategorical phenomena. The regularities which the analyst describes are based on the frequency with which a particular linguistic feature occurs under certain conditions in his discourse data.

- The discourse analyst, like the experimental psychologist, is mainly interested in the level of frequency which reaches significance in perceptual terms. Thus, a regularity in discourse is a linguistic feature which occurs in a definable environment with a significant frequency.
- The discourse analyst will typically adopt the traditional methodology of descriptive linguistics. He will attempt to describe the linguistic forms which occur in his/her data, relative to the environments in which they occur. In this sense, discourse analysis is, like descriptive linguistics, a way of studying language.

3.3 Product versus process

- The regularities which the discourse analyst describes will normally be expressed in dynamic, not static, terms. Since the data investigated is the result of 'ordinary language behaviour', it is likely to contain evidence of the 'behaviour' element.
- assume that the data we investigate is the result of active processes. The sentence-grammarian does not in general take account of this, since his/her data is not connected to behaviour. His/her data consists of a set of objects called 'the well-formed sentences of a language', which can exist independently of any individual speaker of that language.

- We shall characterise such a view as the sentence-as-object view, and note that such sentence-objects have no producers and no receivers. Moreover, they need not be considered in terms of function, as evidenced in this statement by Chomsky (1968: 62):
- If we hope to understand human language and the psychological capacities on which it rests, we must first ask what it is, not how or for what purposes it is used.
- A less extreme, but certainly related, view of natural language sentences can also be found elsewhere in the literature which relates to discourse analysis. In this view, there are producers and receivers of sentences, or extended texts, but the analysis concentrates solely on the product, that is, the words-on-the-page. Much of the analytic work undertaken in 'Textlinguistics' is of this type.

- Typical of such an approach is the 'cohesion' view of the relationships between sentences in a printed text (e.g. the approach in Halliday & Hasan, 1976). In this view, cohesive ties exist between elements in connected sentences of a text in such a way that one word or phrase is linked to other words or phrases. Thus, an anaphoric element such as a pronoun is treated as a word which substitutes for, or refers back to, another word or words.
- The analysis of the 'product', i.e. the printed text itself, does not involve any consideration of how the product is produced or how it is received. We shall describe such an approach as deriving from a **text-as product** view.

- In contrast to these two broadly defined approaches, the view taken in this book is best characterised as a **discourse-as-process** view.
- The distinction between treating discourse as 'product' or 'process' has already been made by Widdowson (1979b: 71).
- We shall consider words, phrases and sentences which appear in the textual record of a discourse to be evidence of an attempt by a producer (speaker / writer) to communicate his message to a recipient (hearer / reader).

- We shall be particularly interested in discussing how a recipient might come to comprehend the producer's intended message on a particular occasion, and how the requirements of the particular recipient(s), in definable circumstances, influence the organisation of the producer's discourse.

- This is clearly an approach which takes the communicative function of language as its primary area of investigation and consequently seeks to describe linguistic form, not as a static object, but as a dynamic means of expressing intended meaning. There are several arguments against the static concept of language to be found in both the 'sentence-as-object' and 'text-as-product' approaches.

- In the course of describing how a sentence-as-object approach, based exclusively on syntactic descriptions, fails to account for a variety of sentential structures.
- The discourse analyst, then, is interested in the function or purpose of a piece of linguistic data and also in how that data is processed, both by the producer and by the receiver.
- It also follows that the work of those sociolinguists and ethnographers who attempt to discuss language in terms of user's purposes will also be of interest.

3.4 On 'context'

- We have constantly referred to the 'environment', 'circumstances' or **context** in which language is used.
- the idea that a linguistic string (a sentence) can be fully analysed without taking 'context' into account has been seriously questioned.
- If the sentence grammarian wishes to make claims about the 'acceptability' of a sentence in determining whether the strings produced by his/her grammar are correct sentences of the language, s/he is implicitly appealing to contextual considerations.

- Naturally, we set about constructing some circumstances (i.e. a 'context') in which the sentence could be acceptably used?
- Any analytic approach in linguistics which involves contextual considerations, necessarily belongs to that area of language study called **pragmatics**.
- 'Doing discourse analysis' certainly involves 'doing syntax and semantics', but it primarily consists of 'doing pragmatics'.
- Morris's definition of pragmatics as 'the relations of signs to interpreters' (1938: 6), the connection becomes quite clear. In discourse analysis, as in pragmatics, we are concerned with what people using language are doing, and accounting for the linguistic features in the discourse as the means employed in what they are doing.

- In summary, the discourse analyst treats his/her data as **the record (text) of a dynamic process** in which language was used as an instrument of communication in a context by a speaker / writer to express meanings and achieve intentions (discourse).
- Working from this data, the analyst seeks to describe regularities in the linguistic realizations used by people to communicate those meanings and intentions.