

PÉTER B. FURKÓ

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY
APPROACH TO DISCOURSE-PRAGMATIC
VARIATION IN ENGLISH

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APPROACH TO DISCOURSE-
PRAGMATIC VARIATION
IN ENGLISH**



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CONTENTS



INTRODUCTION, TARGET AUDIENCE, OUTLINE OF THE BOOK	9
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CHAPTER 1: COHESION, COHERENCE, STYLISTIC EFFECTS OF VARIOUS COHESIVE DEVICES

1.1 A first look at discourse – language above and beyond the sentence	15
1.2 Definitions of discourse and discourse analysis	19
1.3 Cohesion vs. coherence	20
1.4 Reference, referring expression, referential chains	22
1.5 Substitution and ellipsis	26
1.6 Lexical cohesion	28
1.7 Conjunctive cohesion	30
1.8 Summary: major points introduced in the chapter, tips for your own analysis	33

CHAPTER 2: DISCOURSE MARKERS: MEANINGLESS FILLERS OR CRUCIAL ELEMENTS?

2.1 Preliminaries – a first look at discourse markers	35
2.2 Syntactic characteristics of discourse markers (syntactic heterogeneity, weak clause association, optionality)	39
2.3 Semantic-pragmatic characteristics of discourse markers (multifunctionality, context-dependence, procedural meaning, variable scope)	40
2.4 Social-stylistic characteristics of discourse markers (orality, high frequency, stigmatization)	42
2.5 The functional spectrum of discourse markers	44
2.5.1 <i>DMs’ effect on the illocutionary force of utterances</i>	45
2.5.2 <i>DMs’ role in marking speech act sequence / preference organization</i>	45
2.5.3 <i>DMs and conversational mechanisms</i>	45
2.5.4 <i>The interpersonal functions of DMs</i>	45
2.5.5 <i>DMs as framing devices</i>	46
2.5.6 <i>DMs marking delay, lexical search</i>	46
2.6 “Well” – marker of unexpected response	46
2.6.1 <i>“Well” as a hedge</i>	46
2.6.2 <i>“Well” and preference organization</i>	47

CONTENTS

2.6.3 <i>The function of “well” in turn-taking</i>	48
2.6.4 <i>Interpersonal functions of “well”</i>	48
2.6.5 <i>“Well” as a frame</i>	49
2.6.6 <i>“Well” marking lexical search</i>	50
2.7 “Of course” does, of course, mark new information	50
2.8 Summary, teaching implications	54
2.9 Tips for analysis, identifying DMs and their functions in naturally-occurring discourse	55

CHAPTER 3: LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY, LANGUAGE IN ITS SOCIAL CONTEXTS

3.1 The nature of linguistic variation, why standards are held in such high esteem	57
3.1.1 <i>Lexical variation</i>	59
3.1.2 <i>Phonological variation</i>	60
3.1.3 <i>Morphosyntactic variation</i>	61
3.1.4 <i>Discourse-pragmatic variation</i>	61
3.2 Varieties of English, social-situational factors influencing linguistic choices	62
3.2.1 <i>Stylistic variation</i>	63
3.2.1.1 Formal vs. informal style	63
3.2.1.2 Informal vs. slang	65
3.2.1.3 Written vs. oral style	66
3.2.1.4 Register	67
3.2.2 <i>Gender-based patterns of variation, features of women’s language</i>	68
3.2.3 <i>Ethnicity-based variation</i>	70
3.2.4 <i>Regional variation</i>	72
3.3 Revision: attitudes, choices and teaching implications	74
3.4 Tips for analysis	75

CHAPTER 4: CROSS-CULTURAL (MIS)COMMUNICATION I. – CONTEXTUALIZATION, FRAMING AND CONVERSATIONAL STYLES

4.1 Interactional sociolinguistics, contextualization cues, the formulaic nature of language	77
4.2 Speech activities and framing	79
4.3 Characteristics and types of contextualization cues	80
4.3.1 <i>Intonation and prosody (amplitude, rate of speech, intonation, tone of voice)</i>	81
4.3.2 <i>Non-standard features</i>	83
4.3.3 <i>Code-switching</i>	84
4.3.4 <i>Formulaic features</i>	85
4.3.5 <i>Discourse markers</i>	86

CONTENTS

4.4 Sensitivity areas in cross-cultural (mis)communication	88
4.4.1 <i>Overlaps and interruptions, involvement styles</i>	89
4.4.2 <i>Indirectness</i>	91
4.4.3 <i>Sequencing and conversational rituals</i>	92
4.4.4 <i>Topic management, free and non-free goods</i>	93
4.5 Male-female interaction as cross-cultural communication	94
4.6 Mutual stereotyping and complementary schismogenesis: when things really go wrong	95
4.7 Summary, conclusions, teaching implications	97
4.8 Tips for analysis	99

CHAPTER 5: CROSS-CULTURAL (MIS)COMMUNICATION II. – PRAGMATIC FAILURE

5.1 The ubiquity of ambiguity in human language	101
5.1.1 <i>Lexical ambiguity</i>	102
5.1.2 <i>Referential ambiguity</i>	103
5.1.3 <i>Structural ambiguity</i>	104
5.1.4 <i>Ambiguity of force</i>	105
5.2 Resolving some of the ambiguity by making assumptions about the speaker's communicative behaviour: the Cooperative Principle (CP) and its maxims	107
5.3 Types of non-observance and their communicative effect	110
5.3.1 <i>Suspending a maxim</i>	110
5.3.2 <i>Opting out of a maxim</i>	110
5.3.3 <i>Violating a maxim</i>	111
5.3.4 <i>Flouting a maxim, clashes between maxims</i>	112
5.3.5 <i>Infringing a maxim</i>	115
5.4 Cross-cultural pragmatic failure	116
5.4.1 <i>Pragmalinguistic failure type 1 – failure to interpret the explicit content of an utterance in context</i>	117
5.4.2 <i>Pragmalinguistic failure type 2 – failure to assign force to an utterance</i>	118
5.4.3 <i>Sociopragmatic failure</i>	119
5.5 Summary, the nature and causes of pragmatic failure, teaching implications	121
5.6 Tips for analysis	122

CHAPTER 6: THE ANALYSIS OF POLITENESS

6.1 Indirectness as a pragmatic phenomenon	123
6.2 Concepts of politeness	125
6.3 Politeness as observance of principles and maxims	126
6.4 Politeness as face management	128
6.4.1 <i>Bald-on-record FTAs</i>	130
6.4.2 <i>Strategies of positive politeness</i>	130

CONTENTS

6.4.3 Strategies of negative politeness	132
6.4.4 Off-record strategies	132
6.5 Sociopragmatic factors influencing linguistic choices	136
6.6 Summary, teaching implications	138
6.7 Tips for analysis	138

CHAPTER 7: CONVERSATION ANALYSIS (CA)

7.1 The ethnomethodological approach to conversation	140
7.2 A “simplest systematics” of turn-taking	142
7.3 Observations about the structure of conversations	146
7.3.1 <i>The relationship between text and context in CA; criteria for a transaction to count as a natural conversation</i>	146
7.3.2 <i>Adjacency pairs, preference organization</i>	148
7.3.3 <i>Embedded sequences</i>	152
7.3.4 <i>Pre-sequences</i>	153
7.4 Stories, story structure	155
7.5 Summary, teaching implications	159
7.6 Tips for analysis	160

CHAPTER 8: CASE STUDY I. – DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF DRAMATIZED DIALOGUES

8.1 The data	163
8.2 Analysis of the data	169

CHAPTER 9: CASE STUDY II. – THE REPRESENTATION AND TRANSLATION OF IRISH ENGLISH STEREOTYPES IN CONTEMPORARY CINEMATOGRAPHY

9.1. Introduction	174
9.1.1 <i>The concepts of ‘stereotype’ and ‘stereotyping’</i>	175
9.1.2. <i>‘Stereotype’ and ‘stereotyping’ in interactional sociolinguistics and sociopragmatics</i>	176
9.2. Examples of discourse-pragmatic stereotyping	177
9.2.1. <i>Request strategies</i>	177
9.2.2. <i>Compliment responses (CRs)</i>	178
9.2.3 <i>Responses to thanks (RTs)</i>	180
9.2.4 <i>Stereotypes incurred by the use of discourse markers</i>	181
9.3. Quantitative perspectives on IrE stereotypes	184
9.3.1 <i>Keyness analysis and automated semantic tagging of IrE scripted discourse with reference to AmE scripted dialogues</i>	184
9.3.2 <i>Keyness analysis and automated semantic tagging of IrE scripted discourse with reference to BrE scripted dialogues</i>	187
9.4. Conclusions, teaching implications	188

INTRODUCTION, TARGET AUDIENCE, OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

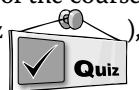


The aim of this book is to introduce readers to a variety of approaches to lexical, morphosyntactic and discourse-pragmatic variation in English and some of the research methods used in the various disciplines. The book is primarily meant as a textbook for MA level courses, at the time of writing, the author had two courses in mind in particular: the RCL course “Theories of Language” and MA course “An Interdisciplinary Approach to the English Language”, both of which are offered at the Institute of English Studies, Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary. The book presupposes a sound knowledge of linguistics, while no specific knowledge of discourse analysis, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, etc. is required. The subject is of vital importance to the teaching of English as a Second Language, and throughout the book emphasis will be made on its relevance to teaching and learning English. The ultimate goal is to develop an awareness of how to select teaching materials that are authentic and natural and how to distinguish them from what is artificial or goes counter to the way naturally-occurring language is used and structured.

In addition to being introduced to the vast field of variation analysis and the methods used in the respective sub-disciplines, you will also be challenged to apply your newly acquired skills and competencies in the form of performing your own discourse analyses. Consequently, each chapter is designed to ensure that you grasp the relevant concepts on the one hand and have the opportunity to apply your knowledge to the analysis of both constructed and naturally-occurring data, on the other.

PRELIMINARIES, FOCUS POINTS

The course material provides an overview of a selection of approaches to variation analysis (the selection of the respective sub-disciplines has been based on their practical value and applicability to language teaching). Each chapter of the course material will include sample analyses, quiz questions (marked as Quiz



react-in-email tasks (marked as ) as well as possible topics for discussion in the respective participants' forums (marked as ).

React-in-email tasks will be of two types: in the first type of tasks you will be provided with samples of naturally-occurring data and will be asked to analyse them using the methods introduced in the chapter. In the second type of tasks you will be asked to take a text from an ELT textbook of your own choice and see if it displays the characteristics of naturally-occurring discourse, i.e. whether or not you would be comfortable using it as authentic teaching material.

A recommended course requirement design is that students are required to choose three type one (e.g. 1A) and three type two (e.g. 1B) tasks from the react-in-email ("submit your answers") assignments given in the chapters. One way of going about it is by selecting three chapters and sending the instructor the three type one + type two tasks that come with those chapters, or, alternatively, students can choose four–six chapters and email their solutions/reactions to a mixture of type one and type two tasks (students are asked to note that some of the tasks have more parts, so they need to remember to submit all parts of such assignments). In the latter case, however, students need to make sure that they send an equal number of type one and type two react-in-email exercises to their instructor. In addition, you will be asked to perform a detailed analysis of a text of your own choice using the analytical tools described in the first seven chapters (it will be your fourth/final assignment). Readers will be provided with a sample analysis in Chapter 8 so that you have an idea of what your own analysis should be like.

In the following, I will provide a brief description of each individual chapter, the aim of which is to make clear the ground to be covered, the chapter's place in the overall structure of the book, as well as the learning objectives and the issues on which students will be required to submit a written response.

Chapter 1: Cohesion, coherence, stylistic effects of various cohesive devices

After a definition of discourse and a brief overview of various approaches to variation analysis and discourse analysis, the first chapter will start on familiar ground. The concepts that will be reviewed are common in language teaching and familiar to all English major students (reference, substitution, conjunction, etc.). The goal of the chapter is to show that structuring individual sentences and structuring larger units of discourse are inseparable and to raise students' awareness of the stylistic effects of contextualised uses of structures and grammatical items. As a result, in this chapter students will hopefully take a first

step toward reconsidering their existing notions of grammar teaching and broadening their scope toward levels of linguistic structure that are at present under-represented in language teaching.

Concepts introduced, key terms, teaching points: *formal vs. functional paradigm, cohesion vs. coherence, cohesive tie, reference (exophoric vs. endophoric, anaphoric vs. cataphoric, personal, temporal, comparative, etc.), substitution and ellipsis (nominal, verbal, etc.), conjunction, lexical cohesion, general nouns, stylistic effects of various structural/cohesive devices.*

Chapter 2: Discourse markers: meaningless fillers or crucial elements?

Discourse markers (e.g. *you know, I mean, well, of course, actually, etc.*) are linguistic elements whose treatment has also been largely neglected in language teaching. Although formerly treated as meaningless fillers, stallers or simply “verbal ticks”, recent research has proved that they play an important role in natural conversation and their function includes marking politeness / managing face, reducing / boosting the force of utterances, marking new developments / units in story structure, etc. They also fulfil a whole range of functions in conversation management such as marking self-correction, explanation, sudden realization, reformulation, false starts, etc.

The aim of this chapter is to introduce some of the phonological, syntactic, semantic as well as sociopragmatic characteristics of DMs and to map the functional spectra of DMs in general and of two sample DMs (*well* and *of course*) in particular. This chapter also provides a bridge between the previous one and Chapter 3: in the former, structural units and grammatical items are in the forefront and style and social meaning are seen as resulting from their frequency of occurrence, whereas in Chapter 3 social and situational factors are seen as ways of determining and predicting the appearance of appropriate language forms. One of the recurring themes of this book is that linguistic features and social context are mutually dependent, consequently, effective teaching will highlight the interplay of the two.

Concepts introduced, key terms, teaching points: *context-dependence, conceptual vs. procedural meaning, sporadic sprinkling hypothesis, weak clause association, attitudes to language, stigmatization, planned vs. unplanned discourse, multifunctionality, variable scope, conversation management, force of an utterance.*

Chapter 3: Linguistic diversity, language in its social contexts

The aim of this chapter is to raise your awareness of the diversity of the English language, or rather, the numerous varieties of Englishes that exist. Variation according to region, age, sex, ethnicity, occupation, linguistic attitude, style, location, time, social class and group membership will be explored. An addi-

tional goal of the chapter is to show how social and situational factors influence linguistic choices and to discuss possible teaching implications.

Concepts introduced, key terms, teaching points: *variety, dialect, sociolect, jargon, slang, register, style, social dimensions: the solidarity – social distance scale, the status scale, the formality scale, referential vs. affective scales.*

Chapter 4: Cross-cultural (mis)communication I. – Contextualization, framing and conversational styles

Building on the previous chapter, Chapter 4 discusses further issues of contextualized language use and raises the issue of cross-cultural communication between native and non-native speakers of English as well as between two native speakers of English who belong to different speech communities.

After introducing Gumperz's framework of interactional sociolinguistics and its key concept of *contextualization cues*, you will be provided with sample analyses of speakers making use of such cues to signal how the conversation/interaction should be framed. Chapter 4 provides a bridge between Chapter 3, which concentrates on stable variation, and Chapter 5, which concentrates on the more dynamic aspects of conversation, just as interactional sociolinguistics is considered by many to represent an overlap between sociolinguistics and pragmatics.

The teaching implications are that – since teaching ESL students about every single variety of English is next to impossible – the key is to raise their awareness of the possible sources of miscommunication and to provide them with strategies of remedying such misunderstandings.

Concepts introduced, key terms, teaching points: *contextualization cue, interactional sociolinguistics, framing, metamessage, code-switching, speech community, high-involvement style, high-considerateness style.*

Chapter 5: Cross-cultural (mis)communication II. – Pragmatic failure

This chapter highlights some of the dynamic, pragmatic aspects of communication and of how meaning is constructed by the participants in communication. While previous chapters focused primarily on encoding and decoding messages, Chapter 5 concentrates on implicating and inferencing as separate cognitive as well as communicative processes.

The chapter presents pragmatics (especially Gricean pragmatics and its later developments) as an approach to variation analysis with special reference to its teaching implications.

The concept of cross-cultural pragmatic failure and its subtypes (pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failure) are discussed. In addition, you will be provided with sample texts that illustrate how the process of inferencing can go wrong (the force of the utterance can be misinterpreted, miscalculated, deemed stronger or weaker than intended, etc.).

Since a great number of cases of cross-cultural pragmatic failure are teaching-induced (cf. e.g. Thomas: 1995), it is especially important that teachers help students to avoid some of the pitfalls that are inherent in learning ESL in a classroom (as opposed to acquiring it in a natural environment).

Concepts introduced, key terms, teaching points: *the Cooperative Principle and its maxims, types of non-observance: flouting, violating, opting out, suspending, infringing maxims, clash of maxims, cross-cultural pragmatic failure, types of pragmatic failure.*

Chapter 6: The analysis of politeness

This chapter builds on the concepts introduced in the previous one and takes a closer look at indirectness as a strategy frequently employed by native speakers of both English and Hungarian. The chapter focuses on conventionalized indirectness, since, unlike conversational indirectness, it is easier to bring to students' awareness in ESL classrooms. After introducing the two most influential theories of politeness (politeness viewed as the observance of pragmatic principles and politeness as face management), a range of strategies are discussed to illustrate how native speakers (henceforth NSs) of English use them based on sociopragmatic factors such as power / status differences, size of the imposition, rights and obligations, etc.

Concepts introduced, key terms, teaching points: *the Politeness Principle and its maxims, face management, positive face, negative face, positive politeness, negative politeness, Face Threatening Acts, size of imposition, types of power (reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, expert power, referential power), positive and negative politeness strategies, bald-on-record, off-record strategies.*

Chapter 7: Conversation Analysis (CA)

This chapter takes conversational mechanisms and aspects of *interactional competence* under scrutiny. The framework for analysis is Conversation Analysis (represented by e.g. Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson), an approach to discourse that considers the sequential progression of talk and the way participants in a conversation construct systematic solutions to recurrent organizational problems of talk. The presentation and application of this framework provides an appropriate conclusion to the book, since conversation and the teaching of conversational strategies is central to teaching ESL on the one hand, on the other, a central theorem of Conversation Analysis (henceforth CA) is one of the recurrent themes of the book: language both creates and is created by social context.

Concepts introduced, key terms, teaching points: *conversational turn, turn-taking, floor management, Transition Relevance Place, false starts, feedback, silences and overlaps, utterance incompleters, adjacency pairs, first-pair parts,*

second-pair parts, preference organization, inserted sequences, pre-sequences, story structure.

Chapter 8: Case study I. – Discourse analysis of dramatized dialogues

The final two chapters build on the theoretical frameworks introduced in the course of the book and provide you with an example you can use when performing your own text analyses. The aim of Chapter 8 is to propagate the use of films, i.e. dramatized dialogues in ESL classrooms, as the data under scrutiny illustrate that movies provide contextually appropriate input for language learners as well as a nice change from the monotony and artificiality of the dialogues commonly found in EFL textbooks.

Chapter 9: Case study II. – The representation and translation of Irish English stereotypes in contemporary cinematography

The final chapter looks at Irish English (IrE) stereotypes at the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic level. The chapter argues that basic stereotypes about IrE pragmalinguistic norms and communicative style – for example, implicitness, evasiveness, downtoning and conventional pessimism – correspond to salient and distinctive elements of Irish sociocultural norms. However, with respect to the specific discourse-pragmatic realizations of Irish sociocultural norms one can observe a stark contrast between discourse-pragmatic stereotypes – i.e. the features that are perceived to characterize Irish conversational style – and the actual linguistic realizations of a variety of speech acts, as well as the functional spectrum and distribution of even the most salient discourse-pragmatic variants.

Chapter 1
COHESION, COHERENCE, STYLISTIC EFFECTS
OF VARIOUS COHESIVE DEVICES

The goals of this chapter are to:

- introduce the formalist-functionalist dichotomy as a point of departure for our journey through different approaches to discourse analysis (henceforth DA);
- define discourse and discourse analysis with reference to four sets of dimensions;
- differentiate between cohesion and coherence;
- revise cohesive relationships such as reference, substitution, ellipsis, lexical cohesion and conjunction and analyse the stylistic effect of their different uses.

1.1 A FIRST LOOK AT DISCOURSE – LANGUAGE ABOVE
AND BEYOND THE SENTENCE



What are YOUR views on language? Ask yourself which statements best describe your intuitions about the origin, nature, acquisition, etc. of language and count how many times you chose answer A and how many times you went for answer B.

1) Language is

- A) a genetically transmitted human capacity whose origin and inception are independent of humans' need to communicate.
- B) a primarily social phenomenon which arose as a result of communicative needs and adaptations.

2) Grammar is

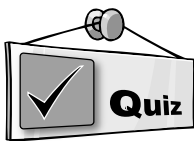
- A) a mental phenomenon, universal features of which are present at birth.
- B) emergent, in other words, it develops as the system of signs gets more and more complex.

- 3) Children learn their first language with such ease because
- A) they are genetically predisposed to do so.
 - B) they are strongly motivated to communicate with their parents and their peers.
- 4) Adults usually do not become native speakers of a second language because
- A) they are not genetically predisposed to do so.
 - B) they are not motivated enough to become members of the community associated with the target language.
- 5) Language is
- A) an autonomous system of signs.
 - B) shaped by society.
- 6) Languages around the world show structural similarities because of
- A) the common genetic linguistic inheritance of the human species.
 - B) the universality of the uses to which language is put in human society.
- 7) When you read a novel or a text of any sort for the first time,
- A) all of the sentences are novel to you, however, your knowledge of grammatical rules enables you to decode it.
 - B) most of what you read consists of combinations of words that are formulaic and you are likely to have heard/seen them before.
- 8) Native speakers of a given language
- A) understand each other most of the time since they share the code needed to communicate.
 - B) often misunderstand each other even if they share a common code due to differences in the varieties they speak.
- 9) The written version of a given language is
- A) superior to the way it is spoken since spoken language is full of imperfections, grammatical mistakes, performance errors, etc.
 - B) an artificially elaborate version of a code used for communication, its communicative function is similar to teaching your dog to fetch the newspaper.
- 10) The actual, situated use of a language
- A) merely implements, perhaps limits the pre-existing code.
 - B) constantly shapes and changes the code.

The terms “above” and “beyond” in the title of this section might suggest that we are embarking on a space voyage or venturing into territory where no one has ventured before, and for a long time linguists did consider moving beyond the sentence as much of a challenge as walking on the surface of Mars. For most of its lifetime linguistics perceived the sentence as the limit of the language system and focused on the forms of language (phonemes, morphemes, words, phrases, etc.). How language was *used* in actual *context*, however, was outside the realm of analysis. It was by examining units larger than the sentence that linguists went “above” the sentence and it is by examining social-contextual factors that influence the way language is used that discourse analysts go “beyond” the sentence. Going *above* the sentence can be achieved for the most part by making use of the same tools of analysis linguists use to analyse smaller units such as words or phrases, and, as a consequence, one does not need to discard the assumptions of the *formalist paradigm* underlying and justifying the use of those tools. Going *beyond* the sentence, on the other hand, leads most researchers to question earlier assumptions about language as an autonomous system that can exist in a social vacuum and to reconsider the concepts of an “ideal native speaker”, a “homogeneous speech community”, “linguistic competence”, etc., all of which points in the direction of advocating a more *functionalist paradigm*. The two paradigms thus provide different assumptions about the nature of language, the goals of linguistic theory, the methods for studying language, as well as the question of what constitutes data for analysis. *Table 1* below summarizes and contrasts the two sets of assumptions. Some of the ideas might be familiar from the **Focus point** at the beginning of this section, where, as you might have already guessed, statements marked “A” were formalist, whereas statements “B” were basically functionalist.

Formalist Paradigm	Functionalist Paradigm
Focuses on structure of language (a code) as a grammar.	Focuses on structure of speech (as acts, events) as ways of speaking.
Analyses language structure before any (optional) analysis of language use. Assumes that language use derives from language structure.	Analysis of use is prior to the analysis of code; organization of use causes additional features and relations; code and use are in integral relation.
Assumes that the most important function of language is referential, i.e. the use of language is to describe the world through propositions.	Assumes that language has a range of functions, including referential, stylistic and social functions.
Assumes that linguistic elements and structures are analytically arbitrary, ignores the culture of those using the language.	Studies linguistic elements and structures within their contexts of use. Assumes that they are ethnographically appropriate and motivated.
Assumes functional (adaptive) equivalence of languages; considers all languages essentially (potentially) equal.	Assumes functional (adaptive) differentiation of languages, varieties, styles; these being existentially (actually) not necessarily equivalent.
Assumes that language is a single homogeneous code within a homogeneous community, each speaker replicates a uniform structure.	Assumes that language comprises a repertoire of speech styles within a diverse community: each speaker adds to an organized matrix of diversity.
Fundamental concepts, such as speech community, fluent speaker, functions of speech and of languages, are taken for granted or arbitrarily postulated.	Fundamental concepts are taken as problematic and to be investigated.

Table 1. Comparison of formalist and functionalist approaches to discourse, based on Schiffrin 1994: 21.



Study the table above as well as the **Focus point** at the beginning of the section for 15 minutes (or as long as you need to memorize the major points). When you are done, decide if the following statements are true or false.

- 1) All languages are equal according to the functionalist paradigm.
- 2) Formalists usually consider the speech community as a group of speakers who share the same code.
- 3) Functionalists concentrate on the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign.

- 4) In the formalist paradigm the analysis of the code precedes the analysis of its use.
- 5) Functionalists consider the speech community a heterogeneous group of people using different varieties of a given language.
- 6) Functionalists take the concepts of “speech community”, “native speaker” and “the functions of speech” for granted.

1.2 DEFINITIONS OF DISCOURSE AND DISCOURSE ANALYSIS



A scholar's basic assumptions about the nature of language and research methodology, naturally, affect the way he or she defines discourse itself. Now that you have a clear idea of the formalist–functionalist dichotomy, try to decide which of the definitions below take a formalist or a functionalist stance.

- 1) [linguistic] descriptions characterize discourse at several levels or dimensions of analysis and in terms of many different units, categories, schematic patterns, or relations. (Van Dijk 1985: 4)
- 2) Discourse refers to language in use, as a process which is socially situated. (Candlin 1997: ix)
- 3) Discourse is the next level in the hierarchy of morphemes, clauses and sentences. (Harris: 1951: vii)
- 4) [...] with the sentence we leave the domain of language as a system of signs and enter into another universe, that of language as an instrument of communication, whose expression is discourse. (Benveniste 1971: 110)
- 5) [...] the analysis of discourse is, necessarily, the analysis of language in use. As such, it cannot be restricted to the study of linguistic forms independent of the purposes or functions which these forms are designed to serve in human affairs. (Brown and Yule 1983: 1)
- 6) Discourse is language above the sentence or above the clause. (Stubbs 1983: 1)

As you can see from the definitions above, the term “discourse” is usually used as a mass noun. Discourse analysts typically speak of discourse rather than discourses, the way we speak of other things for which we often use mass nouns, such as music (“some music” or “three pieces of music” rather than “three musics”) or information (“the flow of information”, “a great deal of information” rather than “thousands of informations”).

There is, however, a different use of “discourse”: some scholars (especially those who engage in *critical discourse* analysis) use it in a related but somewhat different sense, as a count noun. “Discourses” in this sense can be listed and

referred to in the plural and they are defined as “conventional ways of talking that both create and are created by conventional ways of thinking” (Johnstone 2008: 3). In this sense we can talk about “feminist discourse”, “the discourse of the Bush administration”, “racist discourses”, etc. As the examples imply, “discourses” constitute ideologies (sets of interrelated ideas) and serve to circulate power in society. In other words, “discourses” in this sense involve patterns of belief and habitual action as well as patterns of language.

So far we have seen two sets of dimensions along which the complex field of discourse analysis can be carved up, two types of commitment that determine an individual scholar’s approach as well as his/her methodology: dimensions by purpose (theoretical and critical discourse analysis) as well as dimensions by theory (formal vs. functional approaches). There are two further sets of dimension we need to mention at this point: dimensions by data (written vs. spoken, planned vs. unplanned, naturally-occurring vs. constructed) and dimensions by scope and focus (discourse as product vs. discourse as process). As the book develops, I will be making frequent references to these dimensions as I describe the theoretical premises and analytical tools individual discourse analysts use. If you keep in mind these four sets of dimensions (by purpose/theory/scope/focus), you will find it easier to make your way across the jungle of terminology that borders the different paths we will take to achieve our final goal: which is for you to produce your own discourse analyses.

1.3 COHESION VS. COHERENCE



Put the following sentences in the order that seems to you to be the most coherent. What are the linguistic features that help you decide? What are the non-linguistic considerations that help you decide?

- 1) All of these changes helped transform shopping from serious requirement to psychological recreation.
- 2) Instead of visiting several market stalls or small shops, customers could now buy a variety of merchandise under the same roof; instead of feeling expected to buy, they were welcome just to look; and instead of bargaining with several merchants, they paid a fixed price for each item.
- 3) Before the Industrial Revolution, most consumer goods were sold in open-air markets, customers who went into an actual shop were expected to buy something, and shoppers were always expected to bargain for the best possible price.
- 4) Over the centuries, shopping has changed in function as well as in style.

- 5) In the nineteenth century, however, the development of the department store changed the relationship between buyers and sellers.
- 6) In addition, they could return an item to the store and exchange it for a different one or get their money back.¹

Now that we have defined discourse and have (hopefully) decided we are going to analyse it, the first question that immediately crops up is what it is that distinguishes a random set of sentences from a text that has unity, in other words, a text that is coherent and cohesive. Notice that in the previous sentence I smoothly switched from the term “discourse” to “text” and I made reference to “sentences” rather than “utterances”. The terms *discourse* and *text* are sometimes used interchangeably in the literature, and if a distinction is made, *text* refers to written instantiations of language, while *discourse* can refer to either spoken or written data. The difference between *sentence* and *utterance*, on the other hand, has to do with whether or not we are dealing with *contextualized* language use: an utterance is a (usually) spoken, situated instantiation of language uttered by a particular person, at a particular time, under particular (social and situational) circumstances. Consequently, in this section we are going to analyse written texts (dimension by data) and we are going to analyse text as a product rather than investigating the process of creating a text (dimension by scope/focus).

So what is it that makes a text a text as opposed to a haphazard collection of unrelated sentences? What are the considerations that helped you reconstruct the original order of sentences in the **Focus point** above? On the one hand, you might have been guided by *cohesive ties*, relations of meaning between an element and its *antecedent*, i.e. some previous element it depends on for its interpretation. Such cohesive ties include instances of *lexical cohesion* e.g. buyers—customers, *reference* e.g. changes—these changes, *conjunction* e.g. sentence 2—sentence 6: the latter starting with *in addition*, etc.

On the other hand you might have noticed the present perfect tense in sentence 4, a tense that usually introduces new topics (if you turn on BBC World or CNN you will notice that most of the headlines are in the present perfect, and there is a switch to the past/present simple when reporters start discussing the details of particular pieces of news).

Parallel to such *explicit, overtly signalled* relations between sentences you might have been guided by the *rhetorical* structure of the text: there is a logical sequence of arguments and their explications which is not formally marked but, nevertheless, cues the listener toward what to expect next and makes it easier to comprehend the message of the text (in this case to unscramble the text).

¹ Andrea Lunsford – Robert Connors: *The St. Martin's Handbook*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1992, 113.

The difference between *cohesion* and *coherence* is, accordingly, that *cohesion* refers to relations of meaning within the text which are *explicitly* marked, *coherence*, on the other hand, includes explicitly marked as well as *rhetorical, implicational* relations and is, therefore, a broader concept. To put it in other words, all cohesive ties contribute to the coherence of a text, but not all coherence relations are cohesive. To say that a text is coherent is to say that it has internal unity i.e. it has *texture*.

In the remaining part of this chapter we will be looking at types of cohesive relations, and starting with Chapter 2, we will turn our attention to rhetorical and implicational relations within and across texts and pieces of discourse.



Write incoherent texts and share them with other participants in the class. Can you stretch your imagination and interpret incoherent texts as if they were coherent? Why do you think you can or cannot?

1.4 REFERENCE, REFERRING EXPRESSION, REFERENTIAL CHAINS



Read the following extracts and try to account for shifts (or the lack of a shift) from proper names to pronouns and from pronouns to proper names that have the same reference. What is the motivation behind the use/alternation of the two types of referring expressions?

Text 1

Peter Dutton stood in the darkness of the kitchen, gripping the edge of the sink. He wrestled with his temper. His face flushed and his left eyelid flickered. Releasing a hand he tried to calm the eye but the lid agitated beneath his finger tips.

Dutton moaned in incoherent agony. In the next room the television talked at a woman he knew was not watching it...²

Text 2

Kien approached the well. It seemed in good order, the lid fitted snugly and around its base a gutter had been dug, to drain away muddy water during heavy rains. The silence was unnerving.

Kien left the others and on a hunch turned towards the stream and noted the girls' tiny toilet built over the stream, almost totally hidden from the view behind bamboo. The narrow track from well to toilet was gravelled, weed-free.

² Lesley Grant-Adamson: *The Face of Death*, London, Faber and Faber, 1985, 71.

Kien approached not by the path, but circuitously, by stepping quietly into the water and wading upstream.³

Text 3

One morning in early 1947 my mother was stopped at the school gate by the old porter. He handed her a note and told her that Kang had gone. What my mother did not know was that Kang had been tipped off, as some of the Kuomintang intelligence agents were secretly working for the Communists. At the time, my mother did not know much about communists or that Kang was one of them. All she knew was the teacher she most admired had had to flee because he was about to be arrested.

The note was from Kang and consisted of only one word: 'Silence'. My mother saw two possible meanings in this word. It could refer to a line from a poem Kang had written in memory of his girlfriend, 'Silence – in which our strength is gathering', in which case it might be an appeal not to lose heart. But the note could also be a warning against doing something impetuous. My mother had by then established quite a reputation for fearlessness.⁴

Text 4

And Richard was alone.

As he looked down the vista into which they would soon disappear, towards Lad-broke Grove and its circus horses of traffic, Richard saw his son Marco – Marco a long way away, and on the fair side of the street, but with Marco's unmistakably brittle and defeatist stride. There was something terribly wrong with Marco: there was nobody at his side. And yet the child's solitude, his isolation, unlike the father's, was due to an unforgivable error not his own. There was always somebody at Marco's side. In all his seven years there had always been somebody at his side.

A drama, thought Richard. And a diversion: at least this will get me up the god-damned stairs. He realised that he still had the vacuum cleaner: in his arms, across his body, round his neck. Richard was still Laocoon, engulfed in coils and loops. That too he would have to hump, all the way up to 49E. That too.

Father and son started hurrying towards each other. Marco wasn't crying but Richard had never seen him looking so unhappy: the unhappiness that has always made for Marco: the unhappiness that was all his own. Richard knelt like a knight, and held him.

'Who was with you?'

Marco told him: Lizzette.

'And you were lost?'⁵

³ Bao Ninh: *The Sorrow of War*, London, Minerva, 1994, 29.

⁴ Jung Chang: *Wild Swans*, London, Flamingo, 1994, 121–122.

⁵ Martin Amis: *The Information*, London, HarperCollins, 1995, 492.

Reference is the use of pronouns, demonstratives, comparatives and the definite article to indicate the semantic identity (*coreferentiality*) of an item with another. There are two major types of reference, situational (*exophoric*) and textual (*endophoric*), depending on whether or not the antecedent is in the text or in the context. *Exophoric reference* is, therefore, not cohesive, since it refers outside the text, to the *context*, rather than inside the text, to the *co-text*. *Endophoric reference* also has two types, *anaphoric reference*, i.e. reference made to the preceding text and *cataphoric reference*, i.e. reference made to the following text. Hopefully this section so far has been a revision of what you already know about reference, but just to make sure here are some examples to illustrate the various types of reference:

There was a brief note from Susan. **She** just said, ‘I am not coming home this weekend.’ (endophoric, anaphoric, personal reference)

There was a table in the room. There was a book on **the** table. (definite article creating endophoric, anaphoric reference)

Look at **that!** [pointing at a plane] (exophoric reference, demonstrative pronoun)

He took a biscuit. Then he took **another** biscuit. (comparative reference, endophoric, anaphoric)

He has some tea. Then he asked for some **more** tea. (comparative reference, endophoric, anaphoric)

What do you think of **this**? Yesterday I met Susan and she was wearing a wedding ring. (endophoric, cataphoric reference)

At this point you might remind me that I promised you that we would go beyond *form* and look at the *function*, the stylistic effect of various types of reference. Let us start with the examples in the **Focus point**, then. In the extract you could find *referential chains*, i.e. cohesive ties that connect more than two items (in the extracts all the tokens of reference were endophoric and anaphoric). The question is why we have Peter Dutton – He – His – his – he – his – Dutton – he in Text 1, but Kien – Kien – Kien in Text 2? Your common sense tells you that distance (the number of clauses that we find between a given anaphor and its antecedent) should play a role in referential choice (i.e. the choice of an explicit form/proper name over a pronoun and vice versa. In Text 2, however, you find a shorter distance than in Text 1, still you have three explicit forms one after the other.

The explanation of such seemingly unpredictable choices lies in narrative organization. All of the above texts are narratives, and the segmentation of narrative units is a common reason for the use of explicit reference forms such as a noun phrase or a proper name when a pronoun would suffice. Explicit forms are frequently used in narratives to signal world shifts (notice that there is a

new paragraph in each case), for example a shift from narrative action to a character's (inner) speech, from digressions and background comments back to the main storyline, from fast-paced action to heightened tension, etc., etc.

It is important to mention at this point that the function/effect of referential choices (as well as choices in terms of any linguistic feature) is for the most part genre-dependent, that is to say, while in narratives you find the segmentation of narrative units as the main motivation behind such choices, in everyday, colloquial speech referential choices may mark different sorts of contrasts. Compare the two alternatives below where A gets the point across more strongly than B:

A: I always told **John** it's unprofitable. And I remember **John** saying it's extremely profitable.

B: I always told **John** it's unprofitable. And I remember **him** saying it's extremely profitable.



1A part 1

Now it's your turn again! Identify referential choices / types of referential items in the following texts and try to decide what motivates those choices in light of the genre the text belongs to. Create a table with the following headings: referring expression / type of reference / genre of text / effect, function, motivation of the use of referring expressions. Referring expressions can be nominal (nouns, pronouns) and adverbial (e.g. here, now).

- 1) **Timotei** is both mild to your hair and to your scalp – so mild you can wash your hair as often as you like. **Timotei** cleans your hair gently, leaving it soft and shiny, with a fresh smell of summer meadows.
- 2) Nobody seemed to know where **they** came from, but **they** were in the Forest: **Kanga** and **Baby Roo**.
- 3) Hold the **disc** by its labelled end, with the side you wish to use to the left. Now insert the **disc** into the drive slot until **it** clicks home. All this should require no more than gentle pressure: if the drive appears to be resisting the **disc**, stop. Whatever you do, don't force **it**. The other thing to remember is that you can damage your **disc** by inserting **it** before switching the computer on, or for that matter by leaving **it** in while you switch the computer off.
- 4) **Here** is Edward Bear, coming downstairs **now**, bump, bump, bump, on the back of **his** head, behind Christopher Robin. **It** is, as far as **he** knows, the only way of coming downstairs, but sometimes **he** feels that there really is **another** way, if only **he** could stop bumping for a moment and think of **it**. And

then he feels that perhaps **there isn't**. Anyhow, **here he** is at the bottom, and ready to be introduced to **you**. Winnie-the-Pooh. When I first heard **his** name, I said, just as **you** are going to say, 'But I thought **he** was a boy?'

- 5) **This Schedule and Policy** shall be read together as one contract and any word or expression to which a specific meaning has been attached in any part of the said **Schedule and Policy** shall bear such specific meaning wherever the word or expression may appear.

1.5 SUBSTITUTION AND ELLIPSIS



Compare the two versions of the same text in terms of vocabulary, grammar and cohesive devices. Identify the cohesive ties and explain how the two versions differ in style as a result of the differences in the use of cohesive and structural items.

What's it matter? You start a family, work and plan. Suddenly you turn around and there's nothing there. Probably never was. What's a family, anyway? Just-just kids with your blood in 'em. There's no reason why they should like you. You go on expecting it, of course, but it's silly, really. Like expecting 'em to know what they mean to you when they're babies. They're not supposed to know perhaps. It's not natural really, when you come to think of it. You can't expect anybody to know what they mean to somebody else – it's not the way of things. There's just nothing. Bloody nothing.

What does it matter? You start a family, you work, you plan. Suddenly you turn around. There's nothing there. Probably there never was anything there. What's a family? It is just kids with your blood in them. There's no reason why they should like you. You go on expecting them to like you, of course, but it's silly. It is like expecting them to know what they mean to you when they're babies. They're not supposed to know what they mean to you when they are babies perhaps. It's not natural. You can't expect anybody to know what they mean to somebody else – it's not the way of things. There's just nothing. Bloody nothing. (Peter Shaffer: Five Finger Exercise)

The difference between reference and substitution/ellipsis is that the former is a semantic relationship. The cohesive tie associated with reference is between meanings, whereas in the case of substitution/ellipsis the relationship is between syntactic constituents, i.e. words, phrases and clauses. As a consequence, the

items that are substituted/left out are easily recoverable in all cases of substitution and ellipsis, in the case of reference, however, putting the antecedent in the place of the pronoun, demonstrative, etc. is often impossible or does not yield a text which is propositionally equal to the original (consider the examples in the previous sections).

Substitution and ellipsis can be discussed under the same heading since, despite some differences between the two processes, ellipsis is, basically, substitution by zero. It follows from the fact that the substituted item is completely recoverable that the substituting item has the same grammatical function as the one it substitutes. In addition, the type of substitution and ellipsis we are dealing with is named after the constituent that is being substituted, so that we have three types of substitution and three types of ellipsis:

- 1) Nominal: My axe is blunt. I must get a sharper one. (substitution) / Would you like to hear another verse. I know twelve more. (ellipsis)
- 2) Verbal: You think Joan already knows? – I think everybody does. (substitution) / Joan brought some carnations. Catherine some sweet peas. (ellipsis)
- 3) Clausal: Has Barbara left? – I think so. (substitution) / Who was going to plant a row of poplars in the park? – The Duke was. (ellipsis)

As you can observe in the text provided under the **Focus point**, the choice between using substitution/ellipsis or repeating the noun, verb or clause that could be substituted has important consequences in terms of style as well as the speaker's/writer's interpersonal orientation towards the addressee.

As far as style is concerned, some of you might have noticed that version B of the text sounds rather forced and artificial, this is not the way one would express themselves in everyday, colloquial situations. As for interpersonal orientation, in most cases, in fact, the choice between substitution and repetition sends a message of either *solidarity-oriented, friendly* behaviour or *status-oriented, respect* (or respect-seeking) behaviour towards the addressee. Consider the following two exchanges:

You got a cig?
Yes, I have got a cigarette.

You got a cig?
I do, yeah, here you are.

We will be discussing solidarity-oriented (~positive politeness) and respect behaviour (~negative politeness) in more detail in Chapter 6.



Consider the drill most teachers often use in ELT classrooms. What effect do you think the student's responses would have in a real communicative situation? Does this mean there is no place of drills in communicative language teaching?

TEACHER: Have you ever been to France?

STUDENT: No, I have never been to France.

TEACHER: Have you ever been to Austria?

STUDENT: No, I have never been to Austria.

TEACHER: Have you ever been to Britain?

STUDENT: No, I have never been to Britain.

TEACHER: Have you ever been to Norway?

STUDENT: No, I have never been to Norway.

TEACHER: Have you ever been to Italy?

STUDENT: No, I have never been to Italy.

Etc., etc.

1.6 LEXICAL COHESION

Lexical cohesion is similar to reference in that both are types of semantic relationship. The cohesive ties associated with lexical cohesion as well as reference are between meanings rather than structures. In the case of reference, however, the cohesive tie connects a pronoun and its antecedent, while in the case of lexical cohesion the tie connects two vocabulary items. Lexical cohesion can be categorized according to the *meaning relations* that exist between the two vocabulary items involved, these are the same as the ones used in dictionaries and thesauri to describe *stable* semantic relationships, i.e. synonymy, antonymy, hypernymy, hyponymy, co-hyponymy, etc. In addition, there is a type of lexical cohesion which is realized by *general nouns*, a class of linguistic items that are, in fact, on the borderline between grammatical and lexical categories, such as *people, creature, idea, fact*.

There are two types of lexical cohesion, in the first type called *reiteration* the two (or more) vocabulary items are *coreferential* as well as semantically related, in the second type, called *collocation*, the two items are semantically related but are not coreferential (in fact some researchers doubt if the latter type is in fact an example of cohesion, there is no doubt, however, that it creates a tie between lexical items that reinforces the *texture*, unity of the text).

The examples below illustrate the use of each type of lexical cohesion in turn.

There's a **boy** climbing that tree.

The **boy's** going to fall if he doesn't take care. (repetition)

The **lad's** going to fall if he doesn't take care. (synonym)

The **child's** going to fall if he doesn't take care. (hypernym)

The **idiot's** going to fall if he doesn't take care. (general noun)

Climbing a tree is a great childhood pastime. (collocation)

(In the case of collocation, coreference is not required. *Climbing a tree* and *climbing that tree* are not *coreferential*, neither are *boy* and *childhood*, but they are both semantically related to a previous item in the text and both help to develop the topic being introduced in the first sentence.)



1A part 2

Find the examples of lexical cohesion in the text below and decide if they are examples of reiteration or collocation, then identify the semantic relation between the items that form a tie. What is the stylistic effect of each type of lexical cohesion?

After an hour of watching the walls, he threw two changes of clothes in the BMW, placed Hearsay in the front seat and left town. He drove south on Interstate 55, out of Memphis, into Mississippi. The road was deserted, but he kept an eye on the rearview mirror. The dog whimpered precisely every sixty minutes, and Mitch would stop on the shoulder if possible, just over a hill. He would find a cluster of trees where he could hide and watch the traffic while Hearsay did his business. He noticed nothing. After five stops, he was sure he was not being followed. They evidently took off Christmas Day.

In six hours he was in Mobile, and two hours later he crossed the bay at Pensacola and headed for the Emerald Coast of Florida. Highway 98 ran through the coastal towns of Navarre, Fort Walton Beach, Destin and Sandestin. It encountered clusters of condominiums and motels, miles of shopping centers, then strings of run-down amusement parks and low rent T-shirt shops, most of which had been locked and neglected since Labor Day. Then it went for miles with no congestion, no sprawl, just an awesome view of the snowy-white beaches and brilliant emerald waters of the Gulf. East of Sandestin, the highway narrowed and left the coast, and for an hour he drove alone on the two-lane with nothing to look at

but the woods and an occasional self-serve gas station or quick-shop convenience store.

At dusk, he passed a high rise, and a sign said Panama City Beach was eight miles ahead. The highway found the coast again at a point where it forked and offered a choice between the bypass to the north and the scenic route straight ahead on what was called the Miracle Strip. He chose the scenic route next to the beach, the strip that ran for fifteen miles by the water and was lined on both sides with condos, cheap motels, trailer parks, vacation cottages, fast-food joints and T-shirt shops. This was Panama City Beach.

Most of the ten zillion condos were empty, but there were a few cars parked about and he assumed that some families vacationed on the beach for Christmas. A hot-weather Christmas. At least they're together, he said to himself. The dog barked, and they stopped by a pier where men from Pennsylvania and Ohio and Canada fished and watched the dark waters.

They cruised the Miracle Strip by themselves. Hearsay stood on the door and took in the sights, barking at the occasional flashing neon of a cinder-block motel advertising its openness and cheap rates. Christmas on the Miracle Strip closed everything but a handful of diehard coffee shops and motels.

(extract from *The Firm* by John Grisham)

1.7 CONJUNCTIVE COHESION



Use the most appropriate conjunctions in the slots. Sometimes you can use a range of alternative conjunctives.

- 1) Tourism brings much needed money to developing countries. _____, it provides employment for the local population.
- 2) Tourists should respect the local environment. _____ they should respect the local customs.
- 3) In order to travel, you need a passport. _____, you might need a visa, immunisation jabs and written permission to visit certain areas.
- 4) All power corrupts. _____, absolute power corrupts absolutely.
- 5) You shouldn't smoke, drink, take drugs or eat unhealthy food. _____, you should live a more healthy lifestyle.
- 6) The ozone layer is becoming depleted, the air in the cities is becoming too dirty to breathe and our seas and rivers are no longer safe to swim in. _____ pollution is slowly destroying the planet.
- 7) Your grades have been very poor all year. _____ you need to work really hard if you want to pass your exams next month.

Yet another type of cohesive relation across sentences is provided by words and phrases that draw attention to the relationship between one sentence and another, called *conjunctions*. They may signify that more information is being added to what has already been said (*and, in addition, what's more*, etc.), or elaborate, exemplify, summarize it (e.g. *in other words, for instance, to sum up*, respectively). A group of conjunctions contrast new information with old information or provide another side to an argument (e.g. *on the other hand* and *conversely*, respectively). The list could go on as a function of the number of meaning relations between sentences. Once again, the presence or absence of *conjunctions* contributes to style, what is more, some conjunctions can sound very pompous when used inappropriately. Therefore it is important to let language learners know both *how* and *when* to use them. If any of the solutions provided after the **Focus point** surprised you do not worry: the acquisition of conjunctions is usually an ongoing process even in the lives of proficient speakers (and teachers) of English. There is a list of over forty conjunctions in Halliday and Hasan 1983: 133; and even that is not exhaustive. Classification poses another problem, as can be seen from the table below:

Additive	Simple: Additive: <i>and, and also</i> Negative: <i>nor, and . . . not</i> Alternative: <i>or, or else</i>	Complex, emphatic: Additive: <i>furthermore, in addition, besides</i> Alternative: <i>alternatively</i> After-thought: <i>incidentally, by the way</i>	Apposition: Expository: <i>that is, I mean, in other words</i> Exemplificatory: <i>for instance, thus</i>	Comparison: Similar: <i>likewise, similarly, in the same way</i> Dissimilar: <i>on the other hand, by contrast</i>
Adversative	Adversative 'proper': Simple: <i>yet, though, only, but</i> Emphatic: <i>however, nevertheless, despite this</i>	Contrastive: Avowal: <i>in fact, actually, as a matter of fact</i> Contrastive (external): Simple: <i>but, and</i> Emphatic: <i>however, on the other hand, at the same time</i>	Correction: Of meaning: <i>instead, rather, on the contrary</i> Of wording: <i>at least, rather, I mean</i>	Dismissal: Closed: <i>in any case, in either case, whichever way it is</i> Open-ended: <i>in any case, anyhow, at any rate, however it is</i>

Causal	Causal, general: Simple: <i>so, then, hence, therefore</i> Emphatic: <i>consequently, because of this</i> Causal, specific: Reason: <i>for this reason, On account of this</i> Result: <i>as a result, in consequence</i> Purpose: <i>for this purpose, with this in mind</i>	Reversed causal: Simple: <i>for, because</i> Causal, specific: Reason: <i>it follows, on this basis</i> Result: <i>arising out of this</i> Purpose: <i>to this end</i>	Conditional (also external): Simple <i>then</i> Emphatic <i>in that case, in such an event, that being so</i> Generalized: <i>under the circumstances</i> Reversed polarity <i>otherwise, under other circumstances</i>	Respective: Direct: <i>in this respect, in this regard, with reference to this</i> Reversed polarity: <i>otherwise, in other respects, aside from this</i>
Temporal	Temporal, simple (external only): Sequential: <i>then, next, after that</i> Simultaneous: <i>just then, at the same time</i> Preceding: <i>previously, before that</i> Conclusive: <i>finally, at last</i> Correlative forms: Sequential: <i>first. . . then</i> Conclusive: <i>at first... in the end</i>	Complex (external only): Immediate: <i>at once, there-upon</i> Interrupted: <i>soon, after a time</i> Repetitive: <i>next time, on another occasion</i> Specific: <i>next day, an hour later</i> Durative: <i>meanwhile</i> Terminal: <i>until then</i> Punctiliar: <i>at this moment</i>	Internal temporal: Sequential <i>then, next, secondly</i> Conclusive <i>finally, in conclusion</i> Correlative forms: Sequential <i>first.... next</i> Conclusive <i>finally</i>	'Here and now': Past <i>up to now. hitherto</i> Present <i>at this point, here</i> Future <i>from now on, henceforward</i> Summary: <i>Summarizing to sum up, in short, briefly</i> Resumptive <i>to resume, to return to the point</i>

Table 2. Halliday and Hasan: summary of conjunctive relations



Study the table above for 15 minutes (or as long as it takes you to memorize the most important categories). Look at the text below and find conjunctions linking sentences to one another. Using the categorisation you have just become familiar with, can you say what type of conjunctive relation is being signalled in each case?

***Wind power. Wave power. Solar power. Tidal power.*⁶**

Whilst their use will increase they are unlikely to be able to provide large amounts of economic electricity. Generally, the cost of harnessing their power is huge.

However, there is a more practical, reliable and economical way of ensuring electricity for the future.

And that is through nuclear energy.

It's not a new idea, of course. We've been using nuclear electricity for the last 30 years.

In fact, it now accounts for around 20% of Britain's electricity production. And it's one of the cheapest and safest ways to produce electricity we know for the future.

What's more, world supplies of uranium are estimated to last for hundreds of years, which will give us more than enough time to develop alternatives if we need to.

So, while some people might not care about their children's future. We do.

1.8 SUMMARY: MAJOR POINTS INTRODUCED IN THE CHAPTER, TIPS FOR YOUR OWN ANALYSIS

In this chapter we defined discourse analysis as the analysis of language *above* and *beyond* sentences and defined cohesive devices as a set of *explicit* ties that connect linguistic items across sentences. While the focus of this chapter was the set of items that contribute to *cohesion* and are partly responsible for creating *texture*, we took the first step toward going *beyond* formal considerations and explained some of the motivations behind the use of each cohesive device in turn. We mentioned *stylistic effect*, *interpersonal orientation*, *information management* and *narrative organization* as contextual (and co-textual) factors

⁶ Advertisement for The British Nuclear Forum, *The Guardian*, 7 October 1988, 17, quoted in McCarthy 1991:49.

affecting the choice of linguistic features. In the following chapters we will gradually move our focus towards such contextual factors and further explore their interplay with the use of particular linguistic features.

The most important practical point of the chapter with a view to your fourth, final assignment (your own text analysis) is the following:

Producing language in general and creating a text in particular is a process of making choices. If uncertain about the stylistic effect, communicative value, etc. of particular linguistic devices (cf. especially **Focus points** 1.4 and 1.5), try substituting them with other features and see how the message of the text (referential, stylistic as well as social) changes.



Select a supposedly authentic text in an ELT textbook of your choice (its length should be of approximately 400 words). Identify some examples of each type of cohesive tie discussed in Chapter 1 of the book. Does the text sound natural from the perspective of the use of cohesive ties? Why? Why not? How would you improve the text / would you say that the text is not naturally-occurring and / or suitable for teaching purposes?



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Chapter 2

DISCOURSE MARKERS: MEANINGLESS FILLERS OR CRUCIAL ELEMENTS?

The goals of this chapter are to:

- introduce and define discourse markers (henceforth DMs) as crucial elements in the organization and processing of talk as an ongoing process;
- characterize DMs in terms of their syntactic, semantic/pragmatic and social-stylistic properties;
- look at the functional spectrum of DMs in general;
- explore the use and functions of two sample DMs;
- describe the teaching implications that follow from the general properties of DMs.

2.1 PRELIMINARIES – A FIRST LOOK AT DISCOURSE MARKERS



Below are short dialogues which would sound unusual in naturally-occurring informal talk. How would you make the conversations sound less artificial?

Example 1

A: Are you a football fan?

B: I like it, I wouldn't say I was a fan.

Example 2

A: I'll take care of these.

B: That's everything.

A: See you next week.

B: That was a very useful meeting.

Example 3

A: It was last Monday. I was coming home from work. I saw this ragged old man approaching me. I stopped him.

B: Jim Dibble!

A: Let me tell you what happened first.

Example 4

A: He's looking exhausted.

B: Yes, he is.

A: He has an awful lot of responsibility, so it's hardly surprising.

Example 5

A: What do you mean "she's cold"?

B: She's not friendly, very distant. Last week I gave her a jolly smile and she ... scowled at me.

A: What do you expect? I've seen the way you smile at people, it puts them off.



Example 1

A: Are you a football fan?

B: **Well**, I like it; I wouldn't say I was a fan, **you know**.

Example 2

A: I'll take care of these.

B: **Right**, that's everything.

A: **Fine**, so see you next week.

B: **Good**. That was a very useful meeting.

Example 3

A: It was last Monday I was coming home from work. I saw this ragged old man approaching me. **Anyway**, I stopped him...

B: Jim Dibble!

A: **Hang on!** Let me tell you what happened first.

Example 4

A: He's looking exhausted.

B: Yes, he is.

A: **Mind you**, he has an awful lot of responsibility, **I mean** it's hardly surprising he looks tired.

Example 5

A: What do you mean 'cold'?

B: **Well**, she's not friendly, very distant, **so to speak**. **I mean**, last week I gave her a jolly smile and she... **like**... scowled at me.

A: **Well**, what do you expect? **Look**, I've seen the way you smile at people, it **sort of** puts them off.

As you can see in the examples above, there is a group of linguistic items such as *well*, *sort of*, *you know*, *I mean*, etc. that do not change the basic meaning of the speaker's utterances but are essential for the organization and structuring of discourse, as well as for the processes of *pragmatic inferences*, i.e. the hearer's efforts to find out what is not explicitly stated but is implied by a given utterance. In the previous statement I used the term "utterance", which by now should cue you that we will be dealing with *contextualized* language use (and thus take a *functional* approach to DA). In addition, we are going to analyse *naturally-occurring*, primarily *spoken* discourse (dimension by data) and we are going to analyse discourse as *process* rather than product (dimension by scope/focus).

For a long time, discourse markers were considered pesky little words and phrases that are absolutely useless, interchangeable and can be inserted at any point of your conversation. However, this set of assumptions (called the *sporadic sprinkling hypothesis*) can easily be refuted. Consider the following versions of the same pair of utterances:

- (1) Original: ... me and the Edinburgh girl got together after dinner late in the evening and decided they'd really got us along to make it look right, *you know* they had after all had candidates from other universities.

Alternative: ... me and the Edinburgh girl got together after dinner *you know* late in the evening and decided they'd really got us along to make it look right, they had after all had candidates from other universities.

- (2) Original: ... but I don't think it's feasible *I mean* I know this is the first time I've done it, and I'm not in a main line paper, but I'm sure it'll take me all my time to do it in three weeks.

Alternative: ... but I don't think it's feasible I know *I mean* this is the first time I've done it, and I'm not in a main line paper, but I'm sure it'll take me all my time to do it in three weeks.

In (1) Original, *you know* comments on what is meant by "look right", whereas in (1) Alternative it comments on what "after dinner" means (in other words they differ in what they take within their *scope*, see section 2.3). In (2) Original, *I mean* comments on why the speaker says "I don't think it's feasible" without overwriting the statement, but in (2) Alternative, *I mean* comments on "I know", making it appear as a false start. Since it matters where these DMs fall, their locations cannot be random.

As for the second type of argument in favour of the usefulness / motivated distribution of DMs (the fact that they are not interchangeable) consider the following:

(3) Original: ... and I was the only person there that was sort of remotely *you know* competent to speak.

Alternative: ... and I was the only person there that was sort of remotely *I mean* competent to speak.

(4) Original: ... the interview was – it was all right *I mean* I handled it like competent undergraduate – I didn't handle it like a graduate who knew where she was going cos I didn't.

Alternative: ... the interview was – it was all right *you know* I handled it like a competent undergraduate – I didn't handle it like a graduate who knew where she was going cos I didn't.

In (3) Original, *you know* comments on what the speaker was “remotely able to do”, but in (3) Alternative, *I mean* in *you know*'s place suggests a false start / self-correction, for example to cancel “sort of remotely” to yield “and I was the only person there that was competent to speak.” In (4) Original, *I mean* marks an adjustment, suggesting in this case that perhaps “all right” is not an appropriate phrase to use under the circumstances. In (4) Alternative, however, *you know* in *I mean*'s place foreshadows some sort of elaboration of the initial statement, without any qualification on how “all right” the interview was. Once again, it can be concluded that if the two DMs cannot be substituted for one another, then they must have distinct functions and cannot have a random distribution.

Schiffrin (1987) defines DMs as “sequentially dependent elements that bracket units of talk”. The above line of argument shows that DMs are, first of all, *sequentially dependent*, i.e. where they appear in discourse determines their function, secondly, they *bracket units of talk*, in other words, DMs take discourse units of varying sizes within their scope and modify their (interpersonal and discourse) function.



Look at the **Suggested answers** to the **Focus point** again. Change the position and/or the individual DM that is used in a given utterance. Can you describe how it changes the interpretation of the utterance?



Find Hungarian counterparts of some of the DMs mentioned so far. Discuss with your peers if you can find pairs of English and Hungarian DMs that are translational equivalents and both of which are widely used. (here is a hint – *well*, for example, is frequently translated into Hungarian as *nos*.

However, you are not likely to have heard *nos* in a naturally-occurring conversation, only in dubbed episodes of *You Rang M'Lord?*)

2.2 SYNTACTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF DISCOURSE MARKERS (SYNTACTIC HETEROGENEITY, WEAK CLAUSE ASSOCIATION, OPTIONALITY)

Now that we have defined DMs and seen some examples for their use and function, let us consider their syntactic, semantic/pragmatic and stylistic properties. The aim of the following sections is to convince you that DMs are best seen as a *functional* rather than a syntactic class of linguistic items.

You can observe from the examples in section 2.1 that DMs originate from a variety of syntactic categories, such as coordinating and subordinating conjunctions (e.g. *and*, *but*, *because*), interjections (e.g. *oh*, *ah*, *huh*), verbs (e.g. *say*, *look*, *see*), adverbs (e.g. *well*), adjectives (e.g. *fine*, *right*), clauses (e.g. *you see*, *I mean*, *you know*), etc.

However, once speakers start using these elements as DMs, they lose their syntactic status as categories of the above types and are no longer *syntactically integrated* (this is a property referred to in the literature as DMs' *weak clause association*). When an utterance is transcribed into written form, this property is indicated by the fact that there is a comma after (and, where applicable, before) DMs. In actual speech DMs are marked by "comma intonation", which means they form a separate tone unit.

Since DMs are not structurally integrated, from a purely syntactic point of view they are *optional*. As a result, you can leave a DM out of a sentence (or rather, a transcribed utterance) without making it nonsensical / ungrammatical or without changing its *propositional meaning* (the truth or falsity of a sentence with respect to the real world).



Using the syntactic criteria of *weak clause association* and *optionality*, decide if the following occurrences of *now* are adverbs or DMs. Commas are intentionally left out.

Example 1

DORIS: I have a couple of quick questions about the income tax. The first one is my husband is retired and on social security and in '81 he ... few odd jobs for a friend uh around the property and uh he was reimbursed for that to the tune of about \$640.

Now where would he where would we put that on the form?

Example 2

Now in AI our approach is to look at a knowledge base as a set of symbolic items that represent something.

Example 3

HARRY: Fred whatta you have to say about this IRA problem?

FRED: OK. You see *now* unfortunately Harry as we alluded to earlier when there is a distribution from an IRA that is taxable ... discussion of caller's beneficiary status...

Now the five thousand that you're alluding to uh of the---

Example 4

FRED: Yeah I think we'll look that up and possibly uh after one of your breaks Harry.

HARRY: OK we'll take one *now*. Just hang on Bill and we'll be right back with you.

Example 5

Now now that we have all been welcomed here it's time to get on with the business of the conference.

Example 6

HARRY: You know I see more coupons *now* than I've ever seen before and I'll bet you have too.

Example 7

EVELYN: I see. So in other words I will have to pay the full amount of the uh of the tax *now* what about Pennsylvania state tax? Can you give me any information on that?

2.3 SEMANTIC-PRAGMATIC CHARACTERISTICS OF DISCOURSE MARKERS (MULTIFUNCTIONALITY, CONTEXT-DEPENDENCE, PROCEDURAL MEANING, VARIABLE SCOPE)

Since DMs stand outside syntactic structure and are a syntactically heterogeneous class of linguistic items, their defining properties have to be found elsewhere.

The most salient properties DMs display are their extreme context-dependence and multifunctionality. I am using the word "extreme", because all linguistic items are context-dependent and polysemous / multifunctional. Consider the word *cat*, for example. Taken out of context the word can refer to a four-legged feline, a male, usually cool person or to the "cat-of-nine-tails", a disciplining device, to mention but a few examples. Used in an actual utterance, however, you rarely find reference to a "cat" ambiguous; semantic cues such as collocation help you decide if the speaker is referring to an animal, human or object. In addition, when you hear the word "cat" out of context, you can still

conjure up the *concept* of a cat in your mind and provide a description of what a cat is.

However, this is not the case with DMs. On the one hand, they lack *conceptual meaning*, i.e. if you ask a native speaker to tell you what *well, I mean* or *of course* mean, they will be at a loss. They will probably give you examples or talk about a given DM's function rather than meaning. This is because DMs have *procedural meaning* and *contextual function*.

What is more, in most of the cases you do not find a single function DMs fulfil in a particular utterance, instead, they fulfil a variety of functions simultaneously. In order to map the functional spectrum of DMs as linguistic items as well as contextualised occurrences of a given DM, you have to look for contextual cues that are different from the ones that determine the sense and reference of a lexical item. These contextual and co-textual cues are speech act sequence, turn-taking mechanisms, interpersonal orientation, narrative structure, etc. These considerations, therefore, are textual and sociopragmatic rather than semantic in nature, hence the reference to *multifunctionality* rather than *polysemy*.

The multifunctionality of DMs is further illustrated by the fact that they play a role in discourse structure as well as performing a plethora of pragmatic functions including changing the *illocutionary force* of an utterance and serving as politeness devices. In addition, they can also be salient as conversational openers, turn-taking devices, hesitational devices, backchannels, markers of topic shift, receipt of information, etc., etc. (these functions will be discussed in more detail in sections 2.5 through 2.9).

The fourth property that characterizes DMs – variable scope – was briefly mentioned earlier. Here are two additional examples:

1)

A: I know how close you are to your mom. How old is she?

B: *Well*, she probably doesn't want me to say... (*well* has a scope over the whole utterance)

2) You're not going to have quality if you can't sleep and you itch and you bitch and you weep and you cry and you bloat and you can't remember anything and you don't have a, *well*, sex drive. (*well* has a scope over a single phrase)

Once again, it has to be noted that *variable scope* is a property other linguistic items also display. Conjunctions as a word-class, for example, can also have variable scope, as is illustrated by the following examples:

3a) Ed *and* Doris loved each other.

3b) Ed worked at the barber's, *and* Doris worked in a department store.

In 3a) *and* has scope over two NPs, in 3b) it has scope over two clauses. There is, however, a difference between the variable scope of *and* and the variable scope DMs display, in that the scope of the conjunction *and* can always be determined in *grammatical terms*. It could be defined as ranging over two constituents of the same type adjacent to *and*, which, in turn, make up a constituent of again the same type. The scope of DMs, in contrast, cannot be determined in grammatical terms, but in terms of speaker intentions and discourse content.



Look at the **Suggested answers to Focus point 2.1** once again. Take note of the discourse units that particular DMs “bracket”, i.e. take within their scope in the respective utterances.

2.4 SOCIAL-STYLISTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF DISCOURSE MARKERS (ORALITY, HIGH FREQUENCY, STIGMATIZATION)

When talking about social and stylistic characteristics, we have to be absolutely clear about the linguistic items we should exclude and the ones we should include in the functional class of discourse markers. The reason why it is important is that there is a large body of literature on discourse coherence in general and DMs in particular where the authors distinguish between *oral* and *written* discourse markers. For example, many scholars refer to *however*, *nevertheless*, *for example* and *in addition* as DMs that are primarily used in written texts. My problem with their classification is that, first of all, such items have *conceptual meaning*, secondly, this meaning is predictable from the meanings of their component parts (i.e. they are *compositional*), thirdly, they make the connection between preceding and forthcoming discourse *explicit* rather than *implicit*. Hopefully, at this point you smack your forehead and say: “Ah, of course, I knew they were familiar from somewhere. I read about them in the previous chapter. They are *conjunctions* not discourse markers!!!!”. And you will be right. Since they make text relations explicit, they are *formal* rather than *functional* devices and as such they contribute to *cohesion* as well as *coherence*. DMs, on the other hand, are not cohesive devices, but are best described in terms of *coherence* and in terms of *implicit rhetorical* connections.

What this adds up to is that DMs are features of *oral*, more technically, *unplanned* discourse, which takes us to *orality* and *high frequency* (*in oral discourse*) as stylistic characteristics DMs display. Also, we have come full circle to the *sporadic sprinkling hypothesis* introduced at the beginning of the chapter as well as the *formal – functional* dichotomy mentioned in Chapter 1. You may remember that formalists believe that written language is superior to

spoken discourse, since the latter is full of imperfections, grammatical mistakes, performance errors, etc. Since DMs are features of oral discourse, they are the very performance errors that are, for no apparent reason, *sporadically sprinkled* over stretches of speech output, making it imperfect and contaminated, at least that is what a formalist would say. Laypeople, on the other hand, *stigmatize* (i.e. frown upon) the use of DMs since it is a well-known sociolinguistic fact that attitudes to linguistic features are, in fact, reflections of attitudes to the *perceived users* of such features. It might not come as a surprise, then, that DMs are perceived to be most frequently used by *youths, women, the unprofessionals*, etc., in other words, *the powerless* in society. Consider the following extracts from a courtroom hearing:

1)

LAWYER: What was the nature of your acquaintance with the late Mrs. E.D.?

WITNESS: **Well**, we were, **uh**, very close friends. **Uh**, she was even **sort of like** a mother to me.

2)

LAWYER: And had the heart not been functioning, in other words, had the heart been stopped, there would have been no blood to have come from that region?

WITNESS: It may leak down depending on the position of the body after death. But the presence of blood in the alveoli indicates that some active respiratory action had to take place.

3)

LAWYER: And you saw, you observed what?

WITNESS: **Well**, after I heard – I can't **really**, I can't definitely state whether the brakes or the lights came first, but I rotated my head slightly to the right, and directly behind Mr Z, and I saw reflections of lights, and **uh**, very, very, very instantaneously after that, I heard a very, very loud explosion – from my standpoint of view it would have been an implosion because everything was forced outward like this, like a grenade thrown into a room. And, **uh**, it was, it was terrifically loud.

(Examples taken from O'Barr & Atkins: 1980.)

While witness 2 sounds professional and confident, witnesses 1 and 3 sound uncertain and hesitant. The jury is more likely to take witness 2 more seriously, even if he is, in fact, lying to the judge.

However, as I mentioned above, stigmatization is based on stereotypes and attitudes to *perceived users*. In actual fact gender, age and class are not the only factors influencing frequency of use. Other social-situational factors include

formality of context, familiarity with context, relationship between conversational participants and speaker roles (presentation vs. reception markers). What is more, DMs have a whole range of functions in addition to the use that is perceived as the most salient function by many, i.e. DMs' use as stallers, delaying tactics. These other functions will be the subject of the following sections.



I was thinking of writing a conclusion to this section when I realized that my conclusions might be entirely different from yours. So, since I do not want to impose my views on the target audience (possibly yourselves are practising language teachers), the issue is open for discussion. Does *stigmatization* mean that we should not put too much emphasis on teaching the use of DMs in the ESL classroom? Discuss some arguments and counterarguments with other participants in the class.



2A

Look at the list of linguistic items below and decide if they can function as discourse markers based on the criteria/characteristics described in sections 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4. Argue in favour of your decision and give examples in each case.

or, so, then, listen, here, why, what I mean is, also, in conclusion, meanwhile, in addition, next, otherwise, similarly, or, OK, listen, on the one hand

2.5 THE FUNCTIONAL SPECTRUM OF DISCOURSE MARKERS

In this section I am going to offer a brief overview of some of the interpersonal and textual functions DMs might fulfil in naturally-occurring conversations. The aim of this section is to offer a first glimpse at the plethora of discourse marking functions we can observe in spoken language. Examples and contextual cues will be provided in sections 2.6 through 2.9 where the functional spectrum of individual DMs will be discussed. As a result, if you do not immediately grasp the technical terms and the classification of functions introduced in this chapter, I suggest that you read sections 2.6 through 2.9 as well, and keep coming back to this section in the course of reading the examples contained in those sections.

2.5.1 DMs' effect on the illocutionary force of utterances

DMs might change or influence the communicative force of an utterance in two ways. If they make the performance of a speech act (statement, offer, compliment, promise, etc.) weaker, we talk about the *hedging* function of DMs. Conversely, DMs might strengthen the force of a particular speech act, in which case we call them *boosters*.

2.5.2 DMs' role in marking speech act sequence / preference organization

In natural conversation *speech acts* (utterances being uttered with a particular communicative function) usually follow each other in pairs or sequences. For instance, offers, invitations, proposals, etc. are usually followed by an acceptance, request for information is followed by the provision of information, etc. Thus there is a preference organization the members of a given speech community are familiar with, which tells them what are the preferred and the dispreferred seconds (or thirds) in a sequence of speech acts. DMs can play a role in marking dispreferred seconds such as insufficient provision of information, unexpected responses, etc., thereby cuing the listener as to the function of the upcoming utterance and making it easier for the listener to process the so-called *second pair part* (preference organization and first / second pair parts will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7).

2.5.3 DMs and conversational mechanisms

DMs also play an important role in conversational mechanisms. They mark speakers' attempts to initiate conversations, help them signal that they would like to take the next turn, hold the floor for an extended period of time, etc. By using DMs, speakers can also provide feedback to their interlocutors or signal an interruption of the present speaker (once again, these issues will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7 of the book).

2.5.4 The interpersonal functions of DMs

DMs might also express interpersonal orientation, more specifically, they can serve as politeness devices. By using DMs, speakers can appear more modest, minimize disagreement with their interlocutors, express different degrees of assertiveness or non-assertiveness, etc. For example, at the beginning of an

utterance that expresses disagreement or refusal it is definitely more polite and less assertive to use the DM *actually* than to say a plain “I don’t agree”, “I can’t go with you”, etc.

2.5.5 DMs as framing devices

As we saw earlier, DMs do not *explicitly* signal meaning relations between two units of discourse, they can, however, make it easier for the listener to process the upcoming discourse unit as a shift away from the flow of previous discourse. Such shifts of focus include the introduction of a new element in story structure, marking reported speech or topic change, framing new or old information, explanations, clarifications, self-corrections, false starts, etc.

2.5.6 DMs marking delay, lexical search

Finally, DMs might simply serve as *stallers*, helping the speaker buy time before s/he is able to come up with the next utterance or bit of discourse. This is the function that has led many researchers as well as laypeople to dispense with DMs as meaningless fillers despite their usefulness in fulfilling a whole range of other functions described above.



As I mentioned in section 2.3, the extreme multifunctionality of DMs is characterised by the fact that a single occurrence of a given DM usually fulfils a range of functions rather than one single function. Can you find pairs of functions across the different types listed above that might naturally co-occur (e.g. in most cases a dispreference signal is simultaneously a marker of politeness, i.e. it is usually polite to cue the listener that the speaker is going to decline an offer, invitation, suggestion, etc.).

2.6 “WELL” – MARKER OF UNEXPECTED RESPONSE

2.6.1 “Well” as a hedge

Because of its context-dependence *well* can at times function as a hedge, and at times as a booster of the illocutionary force of an utterance.

In most of the cases when *well* changes the force of an utterance it acts as a *hedge*. “Well” can even mitigate the force of a *direct command* as in the conversation below:

(1)

A: Her lips are moving way too fast. That's such a dumb commercial.

B: I've never seen this before.

A: **Well**, look at it. (Fuller: 2003)

Used before *exclamations*, however, "well" actually increases the force of disappointment, anger, etc. expressed in the utterance. "Well, I'm damned!" thus sounds more desperate than a resigned "I'm damned".

2.6.2 "Well" and preference organization

The most frequent, "core" function of *well* can be observed in preference organization, more specifically in marking an unexpected response. Consider the following conversations:

(2)

A: How much education do you think a person needs to get a good job?

B: Oh, definitely a bachelor's degree.

A: **Well**, I think even more than that. At least a master's degree.

(3)

A: She can listen and tell you not only the composer but the name of the piece.

B: **Well**, that's no big deal.

(4)

A: Who wants to know?

B: **Well**, I want to know.

(5)

A: Can I borrow your textbook?

B: **Well**, I need it tonight in order to study.

(6)

A: How long has your mother been teaching?

B: **Well**, she hasn't been teaching that long.

(7)

A: What does your daughter-in-law call you?

B: **Well**, that's a sore spot. My older daughter-in-law does call me Mom.

My younger daughter-in-law right now calls me nothing.

(8)

A: Are there any topics that you like in particular about school, or none.

B: **Well**, gym!



Analyse the short conversations above in terms of preference organization. What is unexpected about the utterances introduced by *well*? In other words, what motivates the occurrences of *well* and how would the conversations be different without them? (When you are done, you can find a detailed analysis of some of the above extracts in Schiffrin 1987: 102ff.)

2.6.3 The function of “well” in turn-taking

Speakers take turns in speaking up in conversation. The beginning of a speaker’s new turn may be begun with *well*. This may be especially so in a fast-paced, dynamic conversation where a speaker must compete with others for the floor, i.e. the chance to say something. *Well* allows a person to jump in at an appropriate pause (a *transition relevance place*, cf. Chapter 8), and at the same time buy a few seconds in order to think of what to say.

(9)

A: We all used to go camping in the mountains near Denver.

B: Well, I used to do the same thing, too, when I was young.

2.6.4 Interpersonal functions of “well”

The interpersonal functions of *well* are closely intertwined with its function as a hedge on the one hand, and the role *well* plays in preference organization, on the other. Accordingly, using *well* is a polite way of mitigating the force of a direct command or request as in transaction (1) above, while marking dispreferred seconds such as disagreements and challenges is also one of the many ways *well* is used as a politeness device. In addition to such overlapping functions, *well* can be used as a marker of modesty in utterances where the speaker chooses to take away the edge of self-praise, as in (10) below:

(10)

INTERVIEWER: You write them all? (i.e. the filmscripts)

INTERVIEWEE: **Well**, I had a heavy hand in all of them.

2.6.5 “Well” as a frame

Well as a frame

shifts the topic focus to one of the topics which have already been under discussion or to a new topic;
introduces explanations, clarifications, new developments / elements in story structure etc.;
indicates the beginning of quotations, self-reflections and direct speech, functions as a marker of self-correction.

Below you can find some examples for each framing function. Needless to say, all of the examples are taken from naturally-occurring discourse.

well introducing quotations:

(11)

And I said, **well**, like for how long?

(12)

And I said, **well**, you're the one that put them through.

(13)

And I said, **well**, Miss Hepburn, I've just come back from the Middle East and interviewed people all over, and sometimes I don't see things in black and white, I see things in gray.

well before topic shifts in a dialogue:

(14)

(B talks about his new swimming pool)

A : Do you have the merger papers with you?

B : Yes. So I thought, “Nine feet? Sure, that's deep enough”.

A : **Well**, can we get started on this now?

B : Oh, sure. I'm sorry. The papers are right here.

well before topic shifts in monologic discourse:

(15)

Well, when we come back, everyone, we're going to find out from Tony Kovaelski what has become of the two men that threatened the life of the alleged victim in this case.

well before second thought:

(16)

A: Do you think you get more common sense as you grow older, or ...

B: No, well, no. Uh, if you have it, you have it.

well as self-repair:

(17)

A: Do you ever go down in the winter?

B: No. **Well**, we go down but our house is closed.

well before story abstract:

(18)

A: What happened?

B: **Well**, at one time he was a very fine doctor. And he had two terrible tragedies.
[story follows]

2.6.6 “Well” marking lexical search

Finally, there are occurrences of *well* where it serves no other function but to simply buy time for the speaker in order to gather his or her thoughts or to give a considered opinion. Such occurrences are usually accompanied by a pause after or before *well*, as well as the use of other DMs such as *you know*, *I think*, etc. Consider the following:

(19)

Well... I don't know if I can make it to the party tomorrow.

(20)

It's ... **well** ... not the best way to do it, but go ahead.

2.7 “OF COURSE” DOES, OF COURSE, MARK NEW INFORMATION

This section is an interactive one in that you and I are going to write it as a joint venture. Below you can find naturally-occurring tokens of *of course* in various televised interviews broadcast on CNN. This time it is your turn to try to identify the functions of individual occurrences of DMs and categorize them according to the six types of functions described in section 2.5. Try to group

together some of the extracts that are similar in terms of the function *of course* fulfils in them. Remember, there is no single good answer and you do not have to worry if you get some of the functions wrong since you might need more contextual cues in most of the cases. Once you are done you can find my suggested solutions in Furkó 2007: 105ff.

1)

INTERVIEWER: Do you think any less of him as a godfather?

INTERVIEWEE: **Of course** not.

2)

The second way it reduces the war on terrorism is by inflaming the Islamic world and helping, as Rumsfeld said in his internal memo, helping create more terrorists more rapidly than we can capture or kill them, because of the hatred in the Islamic world generated against the United States by our needless invasion of Iraq. And the third way, **of course**, was [that] it actually took troops and intelligence assets away from the hunt for bin Laden.

3)

INTERVIEWER: Give it any thought, because that was a big rumor ...

INTERVIEWEE: **Of course**.

4)

We expect all three of the major candidates to be with us, that would be Dean, Edwards, and **of course**, Kerry, and we also will have as our experts in studio, former senators Bob Dole and George Mitchell, both of whom led their respective parties in the Senate.

5)

Watching Polly and the babies come out of the window, it sounds strange, it was almost like watching people be born. It was – Polly passed the babies through the windows, and **of course** they just thought that was a lot of fun, to come out the window. And to have granny standing outside the window. That was great. But when Polly – when Polly came out of the window, it was – it was just stark terror on her face. It didn't start off that way, Larry. It started out as a journal. My grandkids were always saying to me, "Nana, tell me about how it was when you were young." And **of course**, when I grew up right after the Great Depression, so there weren't a lot of colorful, exciting stories to tell them. And I think they always felt maybe I was evading my past.

6)

And certainly in the terms of our broadcast, in terms of following Paul's life as he travels and he preaches and he wrestles with these ideas until the time of his death or disappearance – because some people believe he didn't die, **of course**, at the hands of the Romans, but may have disappeared into Spain.

7)

INTERVIEWEE: You know, these are the toughest questions for me to answer, because I can never tell you what my favorite celebrity [sic!]. I've done so many between the specials and "20/20." And you – the interesting thing about celebrity interviews, which you know, too, Larry, is that you're able to get to know them and ask them questions that you could never probably ask in years.

INTERVIEWER: **Of course.**

8)

INTERVIEWER: Do you favor their right to do it?

INTERVIEWEE: **Of course!** Again, we've talked about this, but it wouldn't even be an issue without the religious part of it.

9)

I was born with congenital hearing loss, and I've depended on lip reading all my life. And so when I applied for the makeover, it was in order to get Lasik so that I could see better, to help me with the lip reading. And **of course**, my teeth were deteriorating. I was hoping to have a nicer smile. And the surprise was that they also gave me the new Senso Diva hearing aids by Widex.

10)

I think probably England is the only country where a woman will kiss another woman's hand. And indeed, it is only with the sovereign that you do that. But **of course**, you don't actually kiss her hand, you will kiss your own thumb. You take her hand and then kiss your thumb.

11)

INTERVIEWER: You go around thinking of things like this?

INTERVIEWEE: **Of course.** That's my job.

12)

INTERVIEWEE: It's hard. It's hard. And it was hard with John. And it was hard with Yanni. Because love doesn't stop...

INTERVIEWER: **Of course.**

13)

INTERVIEWER: Boy, what a night. I'll be back live at midnight, 9:00 Pacific with another hour of LARRY KING LIVE, and **of course** a complete show tomorrow night, looking at the Green River serial killer.

14)

Well, you know, saying good night, you know. I was leaving the back stage and he got up and, you know, like anything. And **of course**, I said no. And I was 17 when I first met him, but you know, he just can't believe that, that I would turn down a kiss from Elvis Presley, but I remember my dad telling me on the way up there, he said, "Now, Tanya, remember, he said, that Elvis, he can get any girl he wants, you know." So I thought, well, any girl but me.

15)

Yes, but I don't want people to think that we are only in this for a blood. And to watch the government try to deal with it is a fascinating exercise. Then **of course you** realize that Ecstasy's been around since the early part of the century and has been used before in the 1950s and 1960s by psychotherapists in California as a drug treatment.

16)

A: So I don't know why anybody would think it was a good idea for him to do that, after his failure at the House and why would they want him to be vice-president with that experience?

B: Well, **of course**, there's a long history of that in the United States. Abraham Lincoln was elected to the House once. He retired because he faced certain defeat.

17)

You have to remember, **of course**, Larry, that the people in this country have spent decades under a repressive political regime, and also under a command economy, where they were told what they must do.

18)

You were just there? It's a great piece of Disney. I suggest you go there. But there are other stores, and **of course**, there are the parks.

19)

We'll be on top of the scene with Bob Woodward and Bob Dole, and Wolf Blitzer. And **of course**, candidates as guests, and then a second show as well with more guests.

20)

INTERVIEWEE: I got along with everybody.

INTERVIEWER: Even her husband?

INTERVIEWEE: **Of course**. We loved him.

21)

The jurors right now are being asked a number of questions about their exposure to the media. And some of those questions will have to do with what Mark Geragos had to say about the case, but I distinctly recall Mark Geragos saying nothing more than that there was probable cause to bind this case over for trial. And **of course** the case was bound over for trial. I'd never heard him comment to the effect that he thought Scott Peterson was guilty.

22)

In your mind, I know you've been very critical of Mr. Condit, is he still involved in your opinion? It would just be opinion at this point, **of course**?

23)

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever think that Martha did anything wrong, or did you ever say to yourself that somewhere Martha did something, or are you totally believing in her innocence?

INTERVIEWEE: **Of course** I believe that she's innocent. You know, we're all capable of making mistakes...

24)

You see Condoleezza Rice the national security advisor, Mary Madeline and **of course**, me.

25)

INTERVIEWER: Six to 10:00 she's going to do. I mean, can you see her back in the swing of things? Back in the ...

INTERVIEWEE: **Of course**.

26)

I said Judy, he's gone. And **of course** that was a moment where a whole phase of everything ends. And, I mean, I don't know....

27)

I was home watching a certain show, where Jack Welch, who's a great guy, was being interviewed. And they interrupted the program to say that this had happened. It was, you know, 8:45 or so in the morning, and I was listening to Jack, who I love. I think he's a great guy. And I'm saying, What's this? And they showed a picture of the World Trade Center with this incredible flame pouring out of the side. And you know, you knew it couldn't be a boiler. That's down in the basement. You know, you're saying, What is this? What could possibly be this? And **of course**, as the second plane hit, which I witnessed because the building I was in was very high and looked directly at the World Trade Center, you said, Well, now you know what it is. But what a terrible, terrible period of time that was.

2.8 SUMMARY, TEACHING IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter we defined discourse markers as syntactically optional but functionally loaded elements that characterize spoken, unplanned discourse. Native speakers use DMs consistently and with great precision as frames in the interaction, for example to make it easier for the hearer to understand how the different units of the discourse are related. If a non-native speaker uses DMs incorrectly or does not use them at all, this may lead to misunderstandings or difficulty in getting his or her message across.

However, misunderstanding is only one negative effect of lacking or wrongly used DMs. Other effects include a giveaway of the NNS's foreignness and his or her status as an outsider to the given speech community as well as negative judgments on the NNS's personality and character. Some consequences of the latter are summarized in the following quotation:

If a foreign learner says *five sheeps* or *he goed*, he can be corrected by practically every native speaker. If, on the other hand, he omits a *well*, the likely reaction will be that he is dogmatic, impolite, boring, awkward to talk to, etc, but a native speaker cannot pinpoint an ‘error’. (Svartvik 1980: 171)

Thus, inappropriate use of (or lack of) DMs may have more unfortunate consequences in terms of communication success than elementary grammatical mistakes. Consequently, even if we as ESL teachers do not aim for our students to attain a native-like competence, we still want them to avoid such judgments of their linguistic behaviour or personal character.

Research has also shown that the most important factors influencing the rate and success of the acquisition of DMs include time spent in the target country, exposure to naturally-occurring data and the teacher’s DM use. As we saw earlier, DMs signal textual relationships *implicitly*, rather than *explicitly* as well as having *procedural* rather than *conceptual* meaning. As a corollary of these two properties, the use of DMs cannot be taught the way other linguistic elements are usually handled in ESL classrooms (e.g. through PPP or TTT).

Consequently, it is important for language teachers to provide an appropriate model as well as an adequate range of naturally-occurring discourse in order to *expose* students to DMs, which are linguistic elements that cannot be conceptually described or *learnt*.

2.9 TIPS FOR ANALYSIS, IDENTIFYING DMs AND THEIR FUNCTIONS IN NATURALLY-OCCURRING DISCOURSE

When you perform your own discourse analysis as the final (fourth) assignment of this book, an obvious approach you will have to take will involve identifying linguistic elements that function as DMs and describing the interpersonal and textual relations they mark or signal in a given utterance. As for the former task, you can use the formal–functional criteria described in sections 2.2 through 2.4. As for the latter, here are some further tips that might help you find out why a particular DM is being used:

- Look for pauses before or after the DM, they usually indicate that the DM under analysis is being used as a filler.
- Look for *DM clusters* (several DMs in close proximity), they are also indicators of *lexical search*, *stalling for time*.
- Identify the speech act of the *host utterance* (the utterance that contains the DM) as well as the previous utterance and decide if the host utterance is a *preferred* or *dispreferred* second pair part.

- See how the communicative force of an utterance changes if you omit the DM under analysis.
- See if the utterance sounds more or less polite if you omit the DM under analysis.
- Look for structural elements of a story in the host utterance (you will learn more about story structure in Chapter 7).
- See if the host utterance includes reported speech, direct quotations or self-reflections.
- Look at the position of the DM in conversational structure. Is it at the beginning / end of a turn, does it mark a *transition relevance place*, *feedback*, etc. (you will learn more about conversational mechanisms in Chapter 7).
- Finally, remember that in most cases DMs fulfil a range of functions and there is no single right solution.



2B

Select 4-5 conversations from an ELT textbook/textbooks of your choice. List all the DMs you find in them together with the functions each one of them fulfils. Do you feel that the use of DMs in ELT textbooks represents an adequate range of their functions in everyday spoken English?



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Chapter 3

LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY, LANGUAGE IN ITS SOCIAL CONTEXTS

The goals of this chapter are to:

- show that varieties that differ from the standard are not linguistically inferior;
- exemplify how English varies on all levels of organization – lexical, phonological, morphosyntactic and discourse-pragmatic;
- describe stylistic, regional, ethnic, gender-based and age-based varieties of English along the lines of these levels of organization;
- demonstrate how individual speakers vary their ways of using language based on social, situational and pragmatic factors and discuss some of the teaching implications.

3.1 THE NATURE OF LINGUISTIC VARIATION, WHY STANDARDS ARE HELD IN SUCH HIGH ESTEEM



Below you can find some naturally-occurring examples of spoken English. Each utterance contains some kind of disputed usage, a linguistic feature that does not conform to Standard British English or Standard American English. Can you spot the problems?

- 1) I am impressed by the knowledge he and his friends show of different universities and courses ... They are tapped into a network of information. It did not used to be like that.
- 2) It would have ended in tragedy, if it hadn't have been for the courage of the victim. (Police officer speaking on television)
- 3) Q: What would you have been had you not been born a sportsman?
A: I may have followed my father into the Services.
- 4) I wonder if he were indeed here yesterday.
- 5) As for we English, we should resist the temptation to make jokes.
- 6) Nearly four times as many girls in Britain suffer from asthma than in the 1970s – but all those who claim to be allergic are not suffering from it.

- 7) Poetry needs less words. (Playwright Alan Bennett, speaking on television about poetry and novels.)
- 8) The carbon dioxide locks in the sun's heat, like glass locks heat into a greenhouse.
- 9) Writing my first rugby match report a feeling of unreality hit me.
- 10) You use a different sort of English in a Times leader than in a conversation in a pub.
- 11) A salesman explained that the manuals included with most computers were hopeless. They either were impossible to understand, full of mistakes, or both.
- 12) None of the bodies so far recovered were wearing lifejackets.
- 13) Sartre had one of the best educations available to a man of his generation.
- 14) The idea seemed far too cruel to actually carry out.

In the previous chapters we focused on linguistic elements (cohesive devices and markers of discourse coherence, respectively) and observed how changes in style and social-pragmatic meaning resulted from their use and frequency of occurrence. In the present chapter there will be a shift of perspective and social and situational factors will be analysed as ways of determining and predicting the appearance of particular linguistic features. As a result, we will still be dealing with *contextualized* language use (and thus take a *functional* approach to DA) and are going to exemplify the major points by using *naturally-occurring, spoken* as well as *written* discourse (dimension by data). On the other hand, since we will be describing *stable* as well as *dynamic* variation, we are going to analyse discourse as *process* and *product* at the same time (dimension by scope/focus).

One of the most striking facts about human language is its variability. There are between 5,000 and 8,000 languages in the world today, and all of them contain at least some varieties. In addition, languages in general are in a constant state of change, from which English is no exception (*variation over time*), as you can tell when you are reading a play by Shakespeare or watching an old Western movie. In this chapter, our focus is on different varieties of English. We will explore stylistic and regional variation as well as variation based on ethnicity, gender and social class. We will also look at patterns of variation on a number of different levels of analysis, including lexical variation, phonological variation, morphosyntactic variation and even pragmatic variation and discourse variation.

Before we start, however, it is time we dissolved a myth about Standard British English or Standard American English. Many people equate the term "language," as in "the English language" with the standard language, i.e. the version of the language *held to be correct* in pedagogical grammar books. Because the standard is associated with education and sophistication, other va-

ieties of the language are often considered to be inferior: perhaps not as grammatically elaborate, or maybe “sloppy” in comparison with the standard. The highlighted forms in the **Focus point**, for example, would be frowned upon by many as examples of *improper usage*.

However, from a purely linguistic (i.e. scientific) point of view, a language is not just the standard version of the language but rather the sum of all the varieties comprising it. In addition, as we will see in the course of this chapter, all varieties of language are equally complex, regularly patterned, and capable of serving as vehicles for the expression of any message their speakers might wish to communicate. In fact, the type of message that is being expressed might be conveyed more efficiently by a *vernacular* variety than the standard (cf. e.g. solidarity-oriented discourse). In short, there is nothing inherently better or superior about *Standard English* or *Received Pronunciation* as compared to other dialects and accents such as *African American Vernacular English* or *Cockney*. The only difference is in the (often financial) status of the *speakers*. Thus, to stretch things a little bit, saying that Standard English is more beautiful or sophisticated than, for example, Cockney, amounts to saying that Vincent van Gogh could not paint as nicely as Rubens because he was poor.

Having introduced the concept of variation, and having argued that all varieties are equal, let us now turn to the levels of linguistic patterns on which we can describe and analyse different varieties and their social functions.

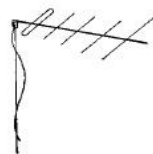
3.1.1 Lexical variation



Test your vocabulary

What are (a) the American and (b) the British words for the following things?

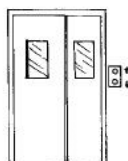
1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



10



Perhaps the most noticeable differences between varieties are the different lexical items that are used. For example, as you probably guessed, a *lift* in Brit-

ish English is called an *elevator* in American English, a *lorry* is called a *truck*, and a *nappy* is called a *diaper*, etc. And such lexical variation is found not only across different countries or continents that share the same language but also within continents or countries. For example, in the US what a carbonated non-alcoholic beverage is called (e.g. *soda*, *pop*, *coke*, *cola*) varies across regions.

In addition to different lexical items being used to refer to the same entities, we also find that a single term can be used to refer to different things in different varieties. For example, in parts of the Mid-Atlantic and southern US, the term *mosquito hawk* is used to refer to the *dragonfly*, while in other parts of the country (and even a few places in Virginia, in the Mid-Atlantic), *mosquito hawk* refers to the *crane fly*, a large mosquito-like insect that eats mosquitos.

As you probably know from personal experience, meaning differences between varieties of English can be more than quaint curiosities, since they are often a source of confusion or embarrassment. For example, a speaker of Australian English who asks for a *trolley* in an American grocery store is likely to receive blank stares instead of a shopping cart, while a resident of North or South Carolina who travels to Britain and innocently begins talking about how much he enjoys *shagging* (a type of dancing in his dialect region), has made a social *faux pas*, since he has just used a British slang term for sexual intercourse.

The use of different lexical items to refer to the same entity or, conversely, the same word or term referring to different entities, illustrates nicely that different varieties describe the world through language in an equally efficient way. As for the social function of the use of a markedly *dialectal* word, it is important to note that the use of certain lexical items can be markers of regional, social, etc. identity and thus signals of belonging to a particular speech community. As a result it is, at times, safer for a NNS or a NS who is an “outsider” to use the neutral variant rather than risk sounding “too eager” or being a “fake”.

3.1.2 Phonological variation

In this section you will be given a bit of an ear training so that you get an idea of the arbitrary nature of phonological variation in English. Your task is to go to the webpage whose link you can find below and take notes of the sounds (called *phonological variants*) that are pronounced in markedly different ways by speakers in various regions of the US. Are there any sounds / accents that you particularly like for some reason? You can share your personal preferences with me via email.

The site you will be using is an interactive map of American dialects at <https://laughingsquid.com/interactive-map-of-north-american-english-dialects/>

3.1.3 Morphosyntactic variation

Varieties can also be differentiated from one another in morphosyntactic terms, i.e. how words are put together into sentences. For example, speakers of American English tend to use the form *gotten* as the past participle of *get*, as in “She has gotten used to it”, whereas British speakers tend to use *got*, as in “She has got used to it”. In addition, there are other differences involving *have* and *got*, as for example in American English “Do you have a match?” vs. British “Have you got a match?” There are also regional distinctions in morphosyntax *within* the US and Britain. For example, in Scotland and the Northeast of England, speakers can use constructions such as *might could*, or *may can* (so-called *double modals*), in sentences such as “I might could do it”, which means something like “I believe I could do it but am not quite sure.”



Can you guess what these morphosyntactic variants mean?

He never be's sick or anything. (*habitual action in Irish English*)

She was sat there. (*She was sitting there – north of England*)

He does be late for dinner sometimes. (*habitual action in Irish English*)

He will can help us tomorrow. (“*He will be able to help us tomorrow*” – *Scottish English*)

He would a went on his own. (*He would've gone on his own.* – *Irish English*)

Even when I be round there with friends I be scared. (*habitual action in Irish English*)

3.1.4 Discourse-pragmatic variation

Finally, varieties can differ not only in terms of lexical items, phonology and morphosyntax, but also in conventions of language use at a broader level – for example in terms of how direct or indirect one is expected to be in conversation, or whether one should allow pauses between conversational turns, as well as how long those pauses should be. Thus, for example, speakers of Southern varieties of American English often engage in “small talk” before getting down to the business of a conversation, while Northerners tend to get more quickly “to the point.” In addition, different cultural groups in the US may have quite different conventions for turn-taking in conversation. For example, speakers of Native American vernacular dialects of English in the Southwest tend to

allow relatively long pauses between turns, while Jewish Americans in New York City not only tend to not pause between turns, but often even overlap each others' turns as a way of showing conversational involvement (Tannen: 1984). Problems can arise when people who are used to different conventions for language use interact with one another; one person's normal conversational style, based on the conventions of his/her region or social group, might be misinterpreted as rude or excessively hesitant by someone who is used to quite different conventions (we will explore such sources of miscommunication in the next chapter). As with differences in pronunciation, sentence structure, and lexical items, it is important to recognize that pragmatic differences among dialects are just that – differences, and not deficiencies of some sort.

3.2 VARIETIES OF ENGLISH, SOCIAL-SITUATIONAL FACTORS INFLUENCING LINGUISTIC CHOICES

Having discussed the levels of linguistic description on which we can observe and analyse variation, let us now turn to the varieties of English that ESL learners are most likely to be exposed to in the course of their language acquisition/learning. As we saw in the previous sections, the distribution of linguistic forms and their variants across geographical regions, social classes, etc. is *arbitrary*. For example, there is no reason why post-vocalic r-deletion should be more frequent (and prestigious) in Britain than in the US, where it is actually stigmatized. Or there is nothing inferior or “sloppy” about the use of double modals, double negatives, etc.

Patterns of use, on the other hand, are highly motivated. In other words, the *choices* speakers make as to which variants to use in particular social situations are far from arbitrary, and, to some extent, can be predicted on the basis of the social-situational factors themselves. Such choices include those between formal and informal, written and spoken styles, the choice of particular registers, sociolects, ethnic styles or gender-preferential features. The factors influencing those choices include, on the one hand, *social* factors that are usually given (i.e. stable) such as age, gender, ethnicity, social class and occupation. On the other hand, there are *situational* (i.e. relatively dynamic) factors such as the setting, the relationship between interlocutors, the goal of the interaction, the speaker's intentions and the medium of communication, to name but a few.

3.2.1 Stylistic variation

3.2.1.1 Formal vs. informal style



I. Find neutral or more formal words for these:

kip, a pal, a chap, cheerio, swot, ta!, brainy

II. Make this conversation more informal by changing some of the words.

JIM: Annie, can you lend me five pounds?

ANNIE: What for?

JIM: Well, I have to go and visit my mother and father, and my bicycle's not working, so I'll have to take a taxi.

ANNIE: Can't you telephone them and say you can't come?

JIM: Well, I could, except I want to go because they always have lots of food, and the refrigerator at our flat is empty, as usual.

ANNIE: Can't you go by Underground?

JIM: Erm...

ANNIE: Anyway, the answer's no.

The choice between formal and informal style demonstrates the way social-situational factors affect the occurrence of particular linguistic features. It is useful at this point to introduce five dimensions/scales sociolinguists (linguists studying language in its social contexts) make reference to when analysing patterns of choice. The first two scales describe the relationship between the participants in a given exchange. The *solidarity – social distance* scale characterizes this relationship along the lines of intimacy / social distance (i.e. high solidarity – low solidarity), while the *status scale* points to the relevance of relative status in making linguistic choices and distinguishes between participants of superior/higher status and those of subordinate/lower status. The *formality scale* describes the setting or type of interaction and thus makes a distinction between formal and informal contexts. The formality/informality of the context does not automatically entail the choice of formal or informal style, respectively, but can override the scales relating to social distance and to the differences in social status between participants. Finally, there are two *functional scales* that describe the purpose or topic of the interaction. The *referential scale* relates to a grade between high information content and low information content, while the *affective scale* makes reference to low affective content and high affective content.

Accordingly, if there is high solidarity (~intimacy), no social distance and no status difference between participants, they are more likely to use informal style. Similarly, the formality of the setting (school, workplace, church, etc. vs. home, sports field, playground, etc.) plays a decisive role in choice of style: a very formal setting such as a law court can elicit formal style regardless of the personal relationship between the speakers (cf. e.g. a situation where the judge is the father of the attorney, but still uses formal style when addressing him). As for the functional scales, speakers may switch to informal style regardless of status differences when starting to gossip about other people's domestic affairs, or, conversely, two friends might switch to formal style when discussing a philosophical problem.

When analysing the linguistic features that characterise the two styles, we can observe that there is a degree of overlap between the distinctions we can make between formal and informal styles on the one hand and between spoken and written styles, on the other. This should come as no surprise since both informal and spoken style are examples of *unplanned*, while formal and written style are modes of *planned discourse* in terms of the amount of attention / processing effort required by the producer of the discourse and the recipient, respectively.

Accordingly, the scarcity of the passive voice and syntactically complex structures, the use of coordination rather than subordination as well as the frequent occurrence of DMs characterize spoken as well as informal style. Similarly, Latinate vocabulary items, complex syntax, lack of contracted forms and the use of conjunctions are all features of written as well as formal style (additional features of spoken and written style are discussed in section 3.2.1.3).

Despite such overlaps, there are at least two reasons why a distinction must be made between formal vs. informal and spoken vs. written style. Firstly, there are written genres that are characterized by informal style (cf. e.g. personal letters, chat-room conversations, etc.) and there are oral genres that are rendered in characteristically formal style (speeches, sermons, etc.).

Secondly, and more importantly, there are phonological features that vary according to the formality / informality of the context, the relationship between participants and the social status / occupation of the speaker. When observing the frequency of these features, one can, naturally, discard the spoken / written distinction as irrelevant, still, they reflect on choices of style in a significant way. What is more, there are important teaching implications concerning the choice of such phonological features as we will see in the concluding section.

Phonological features that vary according to formality as well as social class and educational background include the use of *in'* as in *doin'*, *givin'*, word-initial h-dropping as in 'ouse, 'ome, post-vocalic r-deletion (as we saw earlier, whether it marks formal or informal style is a question of regional distribution as well), diphthongization, monophthongization, consonant cluster reduction, etc. etc.



Decide if the following remarks/utterances are appropriate, too formal or too informal for each situation by making reference to the five scales described above. If the remark/utterance is unsuitable, suggest what the person might say instead.

- 1) [Teenage boy to teenage girl at disco:] D'you fancy an appointment one night next week?
- 2) [Parent to another parent at a school parents meeting:] How many offspring do you have at the school?
- 3) [Dinner-guest to host/hostess:] No thanks, I never consume alcoholic beverages when I'm driving.
- 4) [Student to University Professor:] Will there be lab demonstrations next week?
- 5) [Business letter to a newspaper office:] Dear Sir/Madam, I should like to enquire about the current charges for ads in your paper. My company is considering... etc.

3.2.1.2 Informal vs. slang

It is important, at this point, to make a distinction between informal style and slang. While informal style has features on all levels of language patterning (phonology, morphology, syntax and the lexicon), the term 'slang' is used mainly to talk about lexical items. Moreover, slang words typically carry some sort of non-neutral social meaning and usually have neutral synonyms (cf. e.g. *weird* and *strange* or *kick the bucket* vs. *die*).

In addition, with some notable exceptions, slang words are usually short-lived, slang being the most changeable language variety.

Informal or slang?



Replace the informal/slang words which are underlined in the sentences below with more formal equivalents. Notice that some of the words have a slang meaning which is different from their everyday meaning.

- 1) The newsreader on TV last night seemed to be pissed as he was reading the news.
- 2) He's quite a nice fellow really.
- 3) I've got a terrible belly ache – I think I'd better make an appointment with the quack.
- 4) Her dad was furious when he learnt he had to wear a penguin suit to the wedding.
- 5) Can you lend me some dosh till tomorrow?
- 6) I know there'll be plenty of nosh but do we need to take some booze to the party?
- 7) Have you got wheels or shall we call a taxi?
- 8) I'm dying for a cuppa. I haven't had one since breakfast.

3.2.1.3 Written vs. oral style



Identify the linguistic features that characterize written and spoken style. Note if the statements below are *written* or *spoken*.

This variety typically contains the use of a great deal of generalised vocabulary, e.g. *a lot of, get, nice, stuff*, etc.

In this variety rhetorical organisers of larger stretches of discourse appear, e.g. *firstly, more importantly* and *in conclusion*.

In this variety an extensive set of metalinguistic markers exists to mark relationships between clauses (*that* complementisers, temporal markers, conjunctives such as *besides, moreover, however, in spite of*, etc.)

In this variety active declarative forms are normally found.

This variety typically contains little subordination.

In this variety, heavily premodified noun phrases are quite common.

Users of this variety have a large number of prefabricated linguistic items at their disposal, which help them produce discourse in real time (cf. e.g. *if you know what I mean, the long and the short of it is*, etc.)

This variety contains a great deal of Latinate vocabulary items such as *apparatus, precedence, contraction*, etc.

This variety contains many incomplete sentences, often simply sequences of phrases.

The packaging of information can be very concentrated in this variety.

In this variety there is a preponderance of repair mechanisms, avoidance of relative clauses, nominalizations and participles.

In this variety there is a preference for articles (*the* man) over deictic modifiers (*this* man).

When using this variety, people usually rely on the immediate context to express relationships between ideas instead of making those relationships explicit with formal cohesive devices and topic sentences.



By way of practicing the use of the different features that characterize the two styles, consider the following discourse and translate it into spoken style.

'Twas the nocturnal segment of the diurnal period preceding the Annual Yuletide celebration, and throughout our place of residence, kinetic activity was not in evidence among the possessors of this potential, including that species of domestic rodent known as *Mus musculus*.

Hosiery was meticulously suspended from the forward edge of the wood burning caloric apparatus, pursuant to our anticipatory pleasure regarding an immi-

nent visitation from an eccentric philanthropist among whose folkloric appellations is the honorific title of St. Nicholas.

The prepubescent siblings, comfortably ensconced on their respective accommodations of repose, were experiencing subconscious visual hallucinations of variegated fruit confections moving rhythmically through their craniums...

(If you are interested in reading the whole text go to <https://www.alphadictionary.com/fun/nightbefore.html>.)

3.2.1.4 Register

As illustrated in the previous sections, styles are often analysed along the scales of formality and medium of discourse (*formal* vs. *informal* and *spoken* vs. *written*, respectively). *Registers* on the other hand are distinguished from styles in that they tend to be associated with particular groups of people or sometimes specific situations of use e.g. *journalese*, *baby-talk*, *language of airline pilots*, *the language of newspaper headlines*, *signs*, etc. Thus the term *register* describes the language of groups of people with common *interests* or *jobs* or the language used in *situations* associated with such groups.



3A part 1

I. Paraphrase the following instructions/notices in as many words as indicated in the brackets.

- 1) People who walk on this private land will be taken to court. (4)
- 2) Young people under 18 years old can only come in if they are with an adult. (3)
- 3) There is no way out at the other end of this road for cars. (3)
- 4) You mustn't put up any posters here. (3)
- 5) Please put the things you are going to buy / have bought here. (4)
- 6) Buy a ticket and put it in a place where it can easily be seen. (3)
- 7) Cyclists should get off their bikes here. (3)

II. What do you make of the following? Can you identify linguistic features of this register?

Space Probe Fails
Queen's Gems Riddle
Star Weds
Move to Create More Jobs

Go-ahead for Water Curbs

Bid to Oust PM

Woman Quits after Job Ordeal

3.2.2 Gender-based patterns of variation, features of women's language



Try to guess the gender of the speakers in the following conversations. Underline or mark the linguistic features that serve as cues.

1)

A: Absolutely. But I think that's what a lot of the public doesn't realize. You know, the heckles and the things that we get when there's a lot of us on Britney or Lindsay. You know, and I want to just look at them and be like, what are you doing? Like trying to be in front of the photographers. She called us. Or whatever.

B: That's what I think, too, nobody just goes to kiss and have hair and make-up unless they've called first. By nobody, I mean me. I don't go out of the shower, I go after hair and make-up.

2)

A: Where do you draw the line?

B: Well, I think in any given situation, there is a line. Like in any job there is an ethical boundary that you do not cross. And so ...

A: Whoa, whoa, whoa, what's yours?

B: Well, it just depends on the situation, I would say.

A: Let's say I walk out of my house and I don't have pants on. Take the picture or don't?

3)

A: And you obviously have some thoughts on the paparazzi. Your dad calls them the terrorazzi, or the paparazzi terrorists ...

B: Oh my gosh. He can't stand them. I'm not even going to give his opinion. Because it's going to be a lot harsher than mine is going to be.

4)

A: What's the worst story? Climbing a fence? Knocking out a window?

B: Worst story right now ...

A: Peeing your pants?

B: Worst story ...

A: Your reaction is oh no, one time they were in my ...

B: No, the worst story as an experience with them was actually I was, I'm not very, you know, knowledgeable about the areas of Los Angeles.

5)

A: You did pretty good?

B: Yeah, I did. It was fun. I mean, it was silly. It's kind of an honor, you know. They were really wonderful and sweet and dirty and nasty, and there's a lot of jokes in there that – I'll probably never get another date again after that. But...

A: Were you embarrassed?

6)

A: You're XY. I'm sure.

B: Oh, you're sweet. You're very cute.

7)

A: People will get the joke. It's –

B: Do you think the cover was in poor taste?

A: It wasn't my favorite cover. Hey, there's a lot of mistakes going on here. This is the first time we had a black guy run for president. And, you know, any firsts, there's going to be bumps. You know? People calling me up, we want you to host the first blankety blank award show. I don't do first anything. Think of first everything you had. You messed up your first bike, your first car, your first girlfriend, wife, whatever. Everything first you mess up.

8)

A: Are you making news or reporting the news? Let's find the craziest black quote we can find –

B: OK.

A: And just –

B: What he is trying to say is that a woman who –

A: Who compares – what the hell do I have to do with a moose, XY?

B: He says that any woman who totes guns and strips moose, that's her –

A: Right.

B: Can't care too much about Jews and blacks.

A: XY, what the hell does this have to do – mooses [sic!] or moose. I don't know.

9)

A: It is beautiful too, isn't it?

B: It is beautiful. It is very beautiful.

(Examples gleaned by Helga Koczogh)

As is illustrated in the **Focus point**, certain linguistic features vary according to the gender of the speaker, thus, sometimes you can infer if the speaker is a woman or a man on the basis of particular linguistic choices s/he makes.

It is important to note that these linguistic choices are *gender-preferential*, therefore, if a man uses a typically female form such as an “empty” adjective (e.g. *marvellous*, *fabulous*) or an elaborate euphemism he does not by default come across as effeminate or gay. However, in a man’s speech output, *frequent* occurrence of typically female forms would definitely raise eyebrows or questions about his sexual orientation. The following is a list of linguistic features preferred by (especially American) women:

Phonological features:

Rising intonation on declaratives (It’s really good ./)

Emphatic stress (It was a BRILLIANT performance.)

Morphosyntactic features:

Tag questions (She’s very nice, *isn’t she?*)

“Hypercorrect” grammar (e.g. consistent use of standard verb forms)

Lexical features:

Lexical hedges or fillers (*you know*, *sort of*, *well*, *you see*)

“Empty” adjectives (*divine*, *charming*, *cute*)

Precise colour terms (*magenta*, *aquamarine*)

Intensifiers such as *just* and *so* (I like him *so* much)

Avoidance of strong swear words (*fudge*, *my goodness*)

Discourse-pragmatic features:

“Superpolite” forms, marked politeness strategies (e.g., indirect requests, euphemisms)

Frequent feedback signals (*hm*, *uhum*, *yeah*, *right*)

Women typically interrupt less but get interrupted more often than men

3.2.3 Ethnicity-based variation



I. What variety of English do the following questions pertain to? (Note that all are connected to the same variety.)

- 1) Would you be pleased to be called square?
- 2) What does hair that is in dreadlocks look like?
- 3) When might you feel dead beat?
- 4) If musicians have a jam session, what do they do?

II. The words on the left are more common in Indian English than British English. The words on the right are the equivalent words more frequently used in British English. Match the Indian word with its British English equivalent.

abscond	catch (e.g. by police)
nab	man who annoys girls
bag (i.e. a seat in an election)	plimsolls, sneakers
Eve-teaser	underwear
the common man	flee
fleetfoots	people awaiting trial
undertrials	the general public
wearunders	capture/obtain

Although ethnicity is a given in people’s lives, the use of ethnic features or *ethnic style* is usually a matter of choice. Ethnicity-based patterns of variation have nothing to do with biology: just as a child of Hungarian descent who is raised in the US by English-speaking caregivers will speak English rather than Hungarian, so too a child of African American descent raised in a white family in a white neighbourhood will speak the variety of his foster parents rather than African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Conversely, a white child raised by speakers of AAVE and surrounded by AAVE-speaking friends will speak AAVE rather than a white dialect.

Consequently, similarly to gender-based patterns of variation, ethnicity-based language differences are due to cultural rather than biological factors, some of which include early exposure to particular ethnic varieties, contact with speakers of particular varieties, as well as societal expectations regarding “appropriate” ways of speaking for particular social groups.

The same sociolinguistic scales we used to describe stylistic choices can be used to analyse choices of standard vs. *vernacular* (in this case *ethnic*) features. If a speaker’s repertoire includes Standard American English and an ethnic variety, chances are s/he will choose the latter in informal contexts, when speaking to people who are of equal social status about topics that are affective (socially-oriented) rather than referential (information-oriented) by nature.



3A part 2

Study the linguistic features of AAVE at <https://sites.google.com/site/blackenglishhistory/what-is-black-english/features-of-aave>

Read the conversation below and underline non-standard features you can identify as features of AAVE in Larry's speech.

INTERVIEWER: What happens to you after you die? Do you know?

LARRY: Yeah, I know.

INTERVIEWER: What?

LARRY: After they put you in the ground, your body turns into – ah – bones, an' shit.

INTERVIEWER: What happens to your spirit?

LARRY: Your spirit – soon as you die, your spirit leaves you.

INTERVIEWER: And where does the spirit go?

LARRY: Well, it all depends . . .

INTERVIEWER: On what?

LARRY: You know, like some people say if you're good an' shit, your spirit goin' t'heaven ... 'n' if you bad, your spirit goin' to hell. Well, bullshit! Your spirit goin' to hell anyway, good or bad.

INTERVIEWER: Why?

LARRY: Why? I'll tell you why, 'Cause, you see, doesn' nobody really know that it's a God, y'know, 'cause I mean I have seen black gods, pink gods, white gods, all color gods, and don't nobody know it's really a God. An' when they be sayin' if you good, you goin' t'heaven, tha's bullshit, 'cause you ain't goin' to no heaven, 'cause it ain't no heaven for you to go to.

3.2.4 Regional variation



I. What do you think the following sentences mean? Which variety of English do they represent?

- 1) We decided to have a party as the *oldies* had gone away for the weekend.
- 2) She wants to be a *journo* when she leaves *uni*.
- 3) We got terribly bitten by *mozzies* at yesterday's *barbie*.
- 4) He's planning to do a bit of farming *bizzo* while he's in the States.
- 5) What are you doing this *arvo*?
- 6) Where did you go when you were in *Oz*?

II. What do you think the following sentences mean? Which variety of English do they represent?

- 1) Mary had a *bonny wee lassie* last night. – What happened to Mary yesterday?
- 2) They stay next to the *kirk*. – What noise is likely to wake them on Sunday mornings?
- 3) It's a bit *dreich* today. – Is it good weather for a picnic?
- 4) He's got a new job as *janitor* at the school. – What kind of duties will he have?
- 5) Would you like a *wee dram*? – If you say 'yes', what will you get?
- 6) 'Are you coming, Jim?' 'Aye'. – Is Jim coming or isn't he?
- 7) They have a wonderful view of the *loch* from their window. – What can they see from the window?

At first glance, it might seem simple to divide English into dialects. For example, it seems fairly clear that British English, American English, and Australian English are all separate dialects of English. However, when we consider the various (*intra-national*) dialects of English spoken *within* the US, UK or Australia we are faced with two questions. First of all, how do we determine the *number* of dialects that exist, second, how exactly do we draw the *dividing lines* between them? The answers to these questions are complicated by several factors.

First, there is the issue of how finely we want to divide our dialects. For example, do we want to talk simply about Southern American English vs. Northern varieties, or do we want to talk about regional subdialects within the south, such as those spoken in the Delmarva Peninsula, Virginia Piedmont, North Carolina, etc.?

Second, patterns of regional variation intersect with patterns of variation based on social factors like social class and gender, and some socially and ethnically based dialects may transcend region. For example, despite a degree of regional variation, AAVE seems to be quite uniform across many regions of the US.

Third, as we noted in section 3.1 above, varieties in general and dialects in particular differ from one another on all levels of language patterning, and dividing lines between them can look rather different depending on which types of feature we focus on.

Thus, a phonological atlas of the different *accents* (varieties based on *pronunciation* only) of the US, for example, will look rather different from the criss-crossing *isoglosses* dialectologists use to show the geographical boundaries of the distribution of a particular *lexical* item.

It is also interesting to note that regional variation takes time to develop. British and American English for instance provide much more evidence of regional variation than New Zealand or Australian English. In England, for example, dialectologists can distinguish regional varieties for practically every English county and for many towns.



Look up the website on Linguistic Atlas Projects at <http://www.lap.uga.edu/>. Submit a query for everyday words like *closet*, *bacon* or *pancakes*. Do the search results change your existing notions of teaching basic vocabulary? If yes, how? If not, why not?

3.3 REVISION: ATTITUDES, CHOICES AND TEACHING IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, we have explored the concept and nature of linguistic diversity. We have seen that variation is not random or haphazard but is regularly patterned according to both social and situational factors (the former include region, social class, ethnicity, age, etc. while the latter include setting, participants, aims, etc.). Languages in general and the English language in particular show regular patterns of variation on all levels of linguistic description, from the pronunciation of individual sounds to patterns for conducting entire conversations.

We started out by considering the high esteem in which Standard English is held and stated that despite the fact that the standard usually serves as a yardstick against which all other varieties are measured, non-standard varieties are by no means structurally deficient or inferior. Still, the question crops up again: given the potential negative consequences of using non-standard varieties, why familiarize ESL learners with them? The first reason is that, quite recently, there has been a change in attitude towards vernacular Englishes, so much so that nowadays you might hear many people with plenty of education speak non-standard dialects on public television, and sometimes we can even hear political leaders speak with regional accents in their public speeches on BBC.

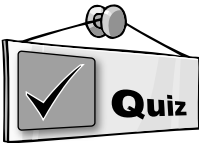
Secondly, people use non-standard dialects for important social reasons. In this respect it is interesting to consider the language attitude tests performed by sociolinguists with the aim of finding out about the way people feel about different varieties and their speakers. In such tests speakers of the standard are usually considered more educated, intelligent and ambitious than speakers of vernaculars, while the latter rate higher on scales of friendliness, reliability, sincerity and are even considered to have a better sense of humour. For many, “speaking vernacularly” carries connotations of coolness or toughness, so that people might even add non-standard features to their speech, particularly in their teenage years, when it is especially important to “fit in” or “be cool.” In addition, most people who use relatively standard varieties in certain settings switch to more vernacular dialects in other situations, or switch within a single setting to achieve a certain effect. We might think of a politician who uses or switches to a regional accent to convey the social message “I’m one of you.”

As for the other themes of this chapter (variation according to style, register and medium of communication), the teaching implications are more straightforward: learning English necessarily entails learning to use it appropriately in a variety of social situations (i.e. acquiring *sociolinguistic competence*). *Sociolinguistic competence* involves knowing how to *use* a given language for different functions in different contexts, as well as *varying* the degree of formality according to social dimensions such as solidarity, status differences and the purpose of the interaction. Thus, in addition to learning linguistic features, students need to become aware of the social norms and conventions that motivate linguistic choices. These norms and conventions vary across cultures as well as speech communities, as we will see in the next chapter.

3.4 TIPS FOR ANALYSIS

There are two ways in which you can analyse your text from the perspective of linguistic choices and the social-situational factors behind them:

- you can take a bottom-up approach and *first* look at the linguistic features you can find in your text and *then* try to identify different layers/varieties of English that are characterized by them;
- you can take a top-down approach and look at the formality of context, social backgrounds of and social relations between participants, the function of the exchange, goals, purposes, etc. and try to predict the linguistic features that are likely to be used, then see if and why your hypotheses were correct or incorrect.



Match the linguistic features (on the left) with varieties of English (on the right) that they characterize.

'arvo' for 'afternoon', 'bizzo' for 'business'	AAVE
'Bid to Oust PM'	Irish English
bloke, bird, nosh	Scottish English
double modals	Informal style
durative 'be'	Written style
empty adjectives	The language of signs
habitual 'be'	Australian English
h-dropping	British slang
heavily premodified NPs	Indian English
nappies (vs. diapers)	Headline English
'Pay and display'	Women's language
trunk (vs. boot)	AmE
'undertrials', 'wearunders'	BrE



- 1) Select 10 units from an ELT textbook of your choice and list all the varieties of English that are present in them together with the linguistic features that characterize each variety.
- 2) Let's say you are putting together a new ELT advanced-level textbook that contains 10 units and each unit consists of 10 different texts and pieces of discourse. Out of the 100 texts what percentage should represent:
 - a) standard AmE / standard BrE
 - b) informal AmE / American slang
 - c) informal BrE / British slang
 - d) journalese/legalese/newstalk
 - e) Canadian/Australian English / Indian English / Scottish English / Irish English / African American Vernacular English / Patois / Jamaican English / Cockney
 - f) Tok Pisin / Spanglish / Puerto Rican English / New York Jewish English

What are the considerations that would influence your decision? (In addition to methodological considerations such as target group, proficiency level, etc.)



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Chapter 4
CROSS-CULTURAL (MIS)COMMUNICATION I. –
CONTEXTUALIZATION, FRAMING
AND CONVERSATIONAL STYLES

The goals of this chapter are to:

- introduce interactional sociolinguistics as a framework of analysis for understanding cross-cultural miscommunication;
- explore the concepts of *framing*, *metamessage* and *contextualization cues*;
- discuss sensitivity areas in cross-cultural communication and their teaching implications.

4.1 INTERACTIONAL SOCIOLINGUISTICS, CONTEXTUALIZATION CUES, THE FORMULAIC NATURE OF LANGUAGE

In the previous chapter we looked at the diversity of the English language, varieties of English and the way linguistic choices are affected by social and situational factors. In other words we looked at how social-situational factors *determine* or *predict* the occurrence of a range of linguistic features (lexical items, phonological, morphosyntactic and discourse-pragmatic features). In the present chapter we are going to take a look at the other side of the same coin: we will be considering how linguistic features *create* social-situational meaning rather than the way they are *created by* them. In the process, there will be a shift of perspective from *macro-sociolinguistics* (issues of linguistic choice that effect large social bodies such as nations) to *micro-sociolinguistics* (issues of communication between individuals or within small groups). The approach will still be *functional*, and we will be analysing mostly *naturally-occurring data* and *discourse as process*.

The approach to discourse analysis I will be describing in this chapter is called *interactional sociolinguistics*. On a practical level, proponents of this approach to DA (John Gumperz and his students, Deborah Tannen, Penelope Brown, Stephen Levinson and Susan Gal to mention but a few names) are interested in cross-cultural communication between speakers of different languages as well as between native speakers of the same language. It is a well-

documented fact that speakers who share the semantics and syntax of a first language but belong to different speech communities frequently misunderstand each other.

On a theoretical level, *interactional sociolinguistics* tries to narrow the gap that exists between what is actually *said* and what is *meant* by an utterance. Consider, as examples, the following contextualized utterances:

(1) [after a missed basketball shot:]

Nice one.

(2) [on a bus after a passenger steps on the foot of another passenger:]

Thanks a lot.

(1) and (2) are examples for sarcasm, i.e. when the speaker means the exact opposite of what s/he says. But how does the hearer arrive at the appropriate interpretation, i.e. the fact that the speaker is expressing discontentment rather than contentment? One possible solution is that the hearer relies on background knowledge about the world, for example, the fact that people do not usually compliment on missed basketball shots or that nobody likes being stepped on. However, there are situations when there are no *contextual cues* that, combined with *background assumptions*, lead the hearer to the right conclusion about the speaker's intention (for example, someone with their back to the basketball court can still interpret (1) as sarcastic). Interactional sociolinguists argue that in such cases listeners are helped by *contextualization cues*, clues that help listeners *interpret* the words spoken, so that participants understand not only what is said but also how the utterance should be taken. In (1) and (2) these contextualization cues are *flat intonation* and exaggerated *stress* on key segments such as “nice” and “lot”. Contextualization cues include choices between *lexical alternates*, *prosodic features*, *paralinguistic features* such as pitch, volume, rate of speech, etc., *kinesic features* (body language) as well as contextually embedded *formulaic features*.

Consequently, another theoretical concern interactional sociolinguists have is the *formulaicity* of natural language. As we saw in Chapter 1, one of the basic distinctions between formal and functional approaches to discourse (and language in general) is that the former concentrate on *rule-governed creativity* i.e. a finite set of rules that enable speakers to produce an infinite number of sentences, whereas scholars using the functional paradigm believe that most of our language output consists of *formulaic, pre-fabricated* chunks that help us produce language in real time i.e. in natural speech, for example. Formulaic features have a special relevance in this chapter, since they, too, can serve as *contextualization cues* and thus can *create* as well as *be created* by context. Before we take a closer look at the different types of contextualization cues,

however, let us consider another basic concept in interactional sociolinguistics: the concept of *framing*.

4.2 SPEECH ACTIVITIES AND FRAMING



What would you call the three different activities the doctor engages in in the following single conversation? What are some of the linguistic and paralinguistic cues?

[Teasing]

DOCTOR: Let me look in your ear. Do you have a monkey in your ear?

CHILD: [laughing] No:::

DOCTOR: No? Let's see... I ... see ... a birdie!

CHILD: [laughing] No:::

DOCTOR: Let's see. Can you open up like this, Jody. Look. [doctor opens her own mouth]

CHILD: Aaaaaaa

DOCTOR: Good. That's good.

CHILD: Aaaaaaaa

[Reporting]

DOCTOR: ... for the palate, she has a high arched palate, but there's no cleft,

[Conversing]

... what we'd want to look for is to see how she ... moves her palate ... Which may be some of the difficulty with breathing that we're talking about.

(Example taken from Tannen: 1993.)

Another way of saying that listeners process utterances on two different levels (what is *said* and what is *meant*) is by positing that in the course of verbal exchanges people simultaneously convey two different types of message, a message conveyed by the words themselves and a *metamessage* that *frames* this message and signals how the utterance is intended. Thus, contextualization cues are *framing devices* that convey a *metamessage* about how the actual words should be taken. In (1) and (2) in the previous section, intonation and exaggerated stress *frame* the message as sarcastic. By the same token, an utterance can be framed as serious, joking, hostile or friendly, etc.

Metamessages can also convey the kind of *speech activity* the speaker is engaged in. In the conversation above, the doctor first frames her utterances as *teasing* (signalled by contextualization cues such as singsong intonation, the choice of a diminutive form, etc.), then as *reporting* and *scientific* (signalled by the choice of specialists' vocabulary, narrower pitch range, etc.), finally, as *conversational* (signalled by wider pitch range, choice of syntactic structures,

etc.). Understanding what the speech activity is might be an important step in interpreting the utterance as intended with a particular goal in mind. I am certain that you could tell me about your own experience of a situation when your doctor (with eyes still averted from your face and still talking in a flat tone) refused to drop the medical jargon after a check-up, and you were not really sure if s/he was talking to you *explaining your symptoms* or *dictating notes* to his/her assistant. Naturally, any misunderstanding was the doctor's fault, since, by using misleading cues, s/he was conveying the wrong *metamessage*.

Metamessages and *framing* might be misunderstood in a more everyday context as well. For example, visitors to the United States who speak the language but are unfamiliar with cultural norms might describe a health problem when asked "How are you?". Consequently, they are surprised and offended when the person who asked this question does not listen to the answer. In this case it is the *formulaic nature* of the utterance that should cue them that the utterance is framed as a greeting rather than an inquiry about their health.

The concept of *framing* also shows that language and culture are inseparable. You cannot communicate or interpret meaning without signalling *metamessages*, and the way metamessages are signalled varies from culture to culture as well as from speech community to speech community.

4.3 CHARACTERISTICS AND TYPES OF CONTEXTUALIZATION CUES

Having introduced the concept of *contextualization cues* (CCs) and having described the way they frame utterances and convey a particular *metamessage*, let us further explore the nature and types of CCs.

It is important to note at this point that although a speaker will readily recognize CCs when they are pointed out, CCs are automatic, i.e. speakers use them without thinking about or focusing on them. In addition, native speakers have no intuitions about their functions or use, so they cannot help learners to find out about a given CC's framing potential. As a result, just as DMs (DMs are, in most cases, CCs), certain CCs can only be acquired through exposure to the target culture's norms and to appropriate models.

In addition, since the use of CCs is conventionalized i.e. associated by long-standing habit with a given intention, members of a community do not take time to process CCs. "Outsiders", on the other hand, if unfamiliar with a given CC's framing function are either bound to misinterpret it or take longer to process the way they affect the metamessage a particular utterance conveys. Even if, after some consideration, you get the metamessage of a new CC right, increased processing time can also be an impediment to efficient communication. For example, the formulaic expression "if you twist my arm" signals joking

behaviour to native speakers of British English. So, for example, if you offer someone a bar of chocolate and they say “Ok, I’ll take one if you twist my arm”, you might actually work out the metamessage he is conveying. However, by the time you realize you should be laughing at this comment, the opportunity to do so might be gone, and, as a result, you might be considered a surly person by your interlocutor.

Before we move on to a description of individual examples of CCs, here is a summary of their formal and content properties that might help you identify them (list partly based on Levinson 2003: 36).

Formal properties:

- 1) CCs are mostly non-segmentable (e.g. prosodic, paralinguistic, or kinesic) features;
- 2) If CCs take the form of lexical items, they cue by lexical alternate (register, style, sociolect, etc.) or minor grammatical class (e.g. particles, DMs);
- 3) Sometimes a whole cluster of different features *cross-channel*, i.e. frame a single metamessage (e.g. a constellation of kinesic, prosodic and lexical features).

Content properties:

- 1) CCs are “out of awareness” background features; they are context-interactive, and cannot therefore be easily directly responded to;
- 2) CCs have non-propositional content, e.g. they serve affective, rhetorical, social or metalinguistic functions;
- 3) CCs play a role in the *interpretation* of the utterance;
- 4) CCs’ content is not encoded, but “cued” – i.e. the same cues can be different in different utterances (~context-dependence of DMs).

4.3.1 Intonation and prosody (amplitude, rate of speech, intonation, tone of voice)



How do you interpret the students’ utterances in the following examples? Do you think they are unwilling to cooperate with the teacher?

Example 1

In an elementary school classroom session the teacher told a student (an African American child) to read. The student responded, “I don’t wanna read”. The teacher got annoyed and said, “All right, then, sit down.”

Example 2

Teacher: James, what does this word say?

J: I don't know.

T: Well, if you don't want to try someone else will. Freddy?

F: Is that a *p* or a *b*?

T: (encouragingly) It's a *p*.

F: Pen.

(Examples taken from Gumperz: 1982.)

A tiny difference in intonation (whether the pitch goes up or down at the end of a word or sentence) can result in very different impressions and, ultimately, in efficient communication or miscommunication.

The interchange transcribed in Example 1 was recorded in an American classroom and subsequently played to a group of informants who were asked to interpret the child's utterance "I don't wanna read". Some of the subjects said that the child was being uncooperative, while others said the child meant, "Push me a little and I'll read. I can do it, but I need to know that you really want me to." This latter group interpreted the child's statement, "I don't wanna read," as indirect i.e. according to them what the child meant was more or different from what he actually said.

A closer look at the data provided by the informants revealed that white informants generally opted for the 'refusal' interpretation, while African American informants generally favoured the 'encourage me' interpretation. Those who chose the second interpretation agreed that it is the child's rising intonation at the end of his sentence that led to their conclusion, and many of them furthermore volunteered the information that if the child had intended to refuse, he would have stressed "want."

Similarly, in Example 2 James (who is also African American) spoke with rising intonation and therefore, conveyed the metamessage 'I need some encouragement.' The teacher missed this cue and thought James was refusing to try. Freddy's question "Is that a *p* or a *b*?" in effect had the same message as James' statement i.e. "I need some encouragement". However, Freddy communicated this in a way the teacher expected and was familiar with, so she actually gave him encouragement.

Rising intonation on declaratives, therefore, is a contextualization cue used by African Americans to signal the metamessage that they need more encouragement. The example illustrates that people who are unfamiliar with the social norms and conventions of the African American speech community (which, by the way, is far from being homogeneous) can miss a whole range of such little, seemingly unimportant "background" cues in intonation and prosody. Just as other types of CCs, cues in prosody and intonation are automatically used and instinctively interpreted by members of a particular speech commu-

nity but only become conspicuous to “outsiders” when they are pointed out, or if “outsiders” spend a considerable time socializing with members of the community that uses a particular cue.

4.3.2 Non-standard features



Why do you think the husband “drops his smile” after the following exchange? What could the student have said to avoid having this effect on the husband?

A graduate student has been sent to interview a black housewife in a low income, inner city neighborhood. The contact has been made over the phone by someone in the office. The student arrives, rings the bell, and is met by the husband, who opens the door, smiles, and steps towards him:

HUSBAND: So y’re gonna check out ma ol lady, hah?

INTERVIEWER: Ah, no. I only came to get some information. They called from the office.

(Husband, dropping his smile, disappears without a word and calls his wife.)

(Example taken from Gumperz 1982: 133.)

The example above contains a whole range of CCs the husband uses to cue the interviewer that he wants to put the conversation on an informal, friendly footing. These CCs include phonological features such as consonant cluster deletion and monophthongization (‘ol’ and ‘ma’, respectively), the tag ‘hah’, and the lexical choice of “check out”, among others (voice quality, timbre of voice, intonation, etc. also come into play). On the one hand, this example illustrates an important characteristic of CCs, namely, *cross-channelling*, i.e. the process whereby a whole range of CCs can all frame a single metamessage. On the other hand, what these CCs have in common is that they are all features of AAVE. It is important to note that it is not the linguistic features *per se* that serve as CCs, but the *choice* of these features in a particular context to convey a particular metamessage. AAVE features do, in general, convey solidarity and serve as in-group markers for members of the African American speech community. In this example, however, the fact that the husband uses these features conveys an additional message of framing the speech activity as a *friendly chat* rather than a *formal interview*. By missing (or ignoring) these cues, and by selecting Standard American English pronunciation as well as syntactic structures, the interviewer also conveys a metamessage, that of keeping his distance and framing the discourse as a *formal interview*. An appropriate response, in accordance with the husband’s expectations, would have been, for example, “Yeah, Am gonna git some info”.

4.3.3 Code-switching



Does the direction of the shift (e.g. Spanish to English vs. English to Spanish) make a difference in the following exchanges? If you can't decide, try translating the non-English utterances into Hungarian.

- 1) [Spanish mother to child:] **Ven acá. Ven acá.** Come here.
[on a different occasion:] Come here. Come here. **Ven acá.**
- 2a) [Father in India calling to his son, who is learning to swim:]
Baju-me jao beta, andar mat ('go to the side, son, not inside'). Keep to the side.
- 2b) [Father calling his son while walking through a train compartment:]
Keep straight! [louder] *Sidha Jao!* ('keep straight')
(Examples taken from Gumperz: 1982.)

Code-switching is the alternation from one language to another within a single utterance or conversational turn produced by one speaker or by two or more speakers within the same conversation. The strategy of using code-switching as a contextualization cue is very similar to using vernacular features as CCs, exemplified in section 4.3.2. In most bilingual speech communities one code (called the 'we code') serves the function of marking in-group membership, informality, solidarity and friendliness, while another code (called the 'they code') usually frames formal situations, status-oriented exchanges, referential content rather than affective content, etc. (cf. sociolinguistic dimensions in section 3.2.1). In particular contexts, switching to and from the 'we' code or vernacular variety can frame metamessages in similar ways, just as switching to and from the 'they' code or standard variety can, too. In example 1 above, on the first occasion the mother starts out by using the 'we' code and switches to the 'they' code to give more emphasis to her message. On the second occasion, a similar emphasis, boost to the force of the message is achieved, but by different means, i.e. by switching from the 'they' to the 'we' code. Switching to the 'they' code frames the message as a warning or threat, a message uttered by authority and social distance, while switching from the 'they' to the 'we' code frames the message as an appeal, a friendly reminder (which, in certain contexts, can be more effective than a warning).

Similarly, in 2a) the father asserts his authority, while in 2b) he makes an appeal of solidarity. Thus it is the direction of the switch as well as the meta-message generally associated with the two codes that frame a message one way or another.

4.3.4 Formulaic features



How familiar are you with American English? Can you explain why the American speaker is misunderstood in the following example?

Example 1

When a house painter arrived at the home of a middle class couple in California, he was taken around the house to survey the job he was about to perform. When he entered a spacious living room area with numerous framed original paintings on the walls, he asked in a friendly way, “Who’s the artist?” The wife, who was British, replied, “The painter’s not too well known. He’s a modern London painter named” The house painter hesitated and then, looking puzzled, said, “I was wondering if someone in the family was an artist”.

(Example taken from Gumperz: 1982.)

The following conversation is between a woman whose first language is Greek and a native speaker of British English. Do you think that misunderstanding would still occur if the exchange took place between two native speakers of English?

Example 2

(Context: Angeliki has just entered Greg’s office for a supervision. On this particular day the weather is very bad.)

GREG: Hello. Come in.

ANGELIKI: Hello.

(Angeliki takes her jacket off and sits down while Greg goes to his desk to fetch some papers.)

GREG: [approaching Angeliki with the papers] How’s it going?

ANGELIKI: [looking blankly out of the window] Oh, it’s horrible these days. One day it’s clear, next day horrible again.

GREG: [turning to look out of the window] Yes, it’s been pretty awful recently, hasn’t it?

ANGELIKI: Yeah. Well, anyway...

(Supervision begins.)

(Example taken from Tzanne 2000: 13.)

Example 1 is part of a casual encounter between strangers who are aware of the differences in their backgrounds because of the differences in their accents. Still, they are unaware of possible interpretive problems they might encounter.

“Who’s the artist?” is a formulaic comment often uttered by Americans being shown around a house. One might just as well say, “Who’s the cook?” when shown around the kitchen, or “Who’s the gardener?” when admiring the beauty of a nice bed of roses. The formula “who’s the” is a conventionalized way

of making a complimentary comment. In addition, it generally initiates a routine in which the addressee indirectly acknowledges the compliment by saying, for example, “It’s just a hobby,” or “I’m just a fan,” or by making some other self-deprecatory remark, in response to which the compliment is reasserted: “But they’re really very good.” The British woman in the above example was not familiar with this formula and its accompanying routine. As a result, she interpreted the house painter’s question as an expression of objective interest in the paintings. The house painter’s puzzled look after her response was an indication that his question had not been understood as intended.

In Example 2 the first source of miscommunication is the utterance “How’s it going”, which is *contextually* ambiguous between a *formulaic expression* that is similar to “How’s things” or “How’re you doing” and a *non-formulaic* interpretation, where, in this particular context, ‘it’ is an exophoric reference to the writing up of Angeliki’s PhD thesis. The former would frame the following exchange as *small talk*, whereas the non-formulaic interpretation would mark the beginning of the session of supervision. Angeliki takes the latter, non-formulaic interpretation, but produces an equally ambiguous utterance where ‘it’ can either refer to the weather or to the writing up of her thesis. At the same time, by staring out the window, she sends a kinesic CC, leading her supervisor to take the ‘weather’ interpretation and leading him to believe that her utterance is framed as *small talk*. This naturally-occurring example illustrates that misinterpreting CCs in general and formulaic expressions in particular can result in miscommunication over long stretches of utterances or, as is the case in this example, can lead to miscommunication that may never be cleared up.

It is important to note at this point that formulaicity is so prevalent in human communication that some scholars say it should be the *default interpretation* of any utterance that is potentially formulaic. This assumption, together with the fact that the British are more likely to start a conversation with a short exchange of small talk, could have cued Angeliki to respond with a similarly formulaic utterance that is in accordance with the starting rituals of the British, for example, “Fine” or “Not bad”.

4.3.5 Discourse markers



Stage 1

Disagree with / contradict the following utterances in a polite way so you don't hurt the (hypothetical) speakers' feelings.

- 1) Today is Wednesday, and we're done. We finished this project early!
- 2) Steve looks like he's good at sport.
- 3) Do you mind if I smoke?
- 4) Where in the United States do you come from?
- 5) Did you enjoy the film last night?
- 6) So, you're going to the local music conservatory?

Stage 2

Look at the suggested answers below. How does the *metamessage* of the utterances change if you leave out 'actually'?

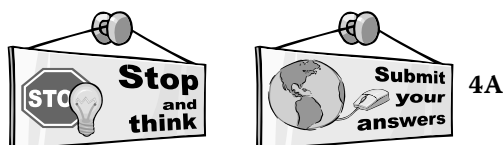


- 1) Actually, the deadline was Friday of last week, not this week.
- 2) Actually, he's not.
- 3) Actually, I'd rather you didn't.
- 4) We're not Americans, actually; we're Canadians.
- 5) Actually, I didn't go to the cinema.
- 6) Actually, there's no music conservatory in this town.

As we saw in Chapter 2, discourse markers can frame their host utterance, for example, as a dispreferred second pair part or a report of an event, they can signal shifts of focus or the beginning of a new structural unit in a narrative, mark topic change or skip-connecting (picking up a previously introduced topic), etc., etc. In all of these functions they act as contextualization cues, since they do not fulfil their functions *explicitly*, in other words they do not contribute to the propositional content / basic *message* of utterances, but to the *metamessage* i.e. they *signal* to listeners how the host utterances should be interpreted.

The examples in the **Focus point** illustrate that very often members of a particular community conventionally use CCs as politeness devices in order to mark, for example, polite disagreement. The absence of the appropriate CC in a particular context strikes them as brusque or downright rude and leads them to believe that the person who fails to cue in an appropriate way is surly, unfriendly or impolite. Thus, the absence or the presence of CCs in general and DMs in particular leads speakers to draw conclusions about their interlocutor's personality, rather than his or her communicative competence or level of proficiency.

4.4 SENSITIVITY AREAS IN CROSS-CULTURAL (MIS)COMMUNICATION



Now that you are familiar with contextualization cues and the concept of framing, consider the following situation and identify a few possible sources of miscommunication between the American and the German students.

An American university student arrives in Germany to begin a study-abroad program. With his deep knowledge of current events and international affairs, he is well prepared for and enthusiastic about the adventure before him. But as he begins to interact with German university students, things start to go wrong. Almost immediately after learning that he is American, many German students launch into vitriolic attacks on American foreign policy or passionate arguments about religion. There is no way that our American student is going to talk about religion with someone he doesn't know. And he is so offended by the attacks on his country and by the belligerent tone used to present them that he usually clams up. If he does try to respond to the accusations, the German students typically try to cut him off or shout him down. The American student comes away from these conversations shaken, increasingly convinced that German students are opinionated, arrogant, and rude. For their part, the German students are frustrated that their attempts to begin a lively interchange have fallen flat. They come away from the same conversations increasingly convinced that American students are uninformed, apathetic, and not very interesting. (Tannen 2006: 344)

As we saw in the previous sections, miscommunication can occur between speakers who belong to different speech communities due to differences in framing metamesages and using contextualization cues. In this section we are going to consider additional differences in terms of *conversational style*. Conversational style, as defined by interactional sociolinguists, has a whole range of different aspects and levels of description, and in this section we are going to focus on just a few of these. First, we are going to consider *overlapping* and *interruptions* (when or whether it is okay to talk at the same time as someone else or to interrupt) as well as *involvement styles* (ways of showing that speakers are interested in the conversation). Next, we will take a glance at *indirectness* (choices about what to say *explicitly* and what to *imply*). The third sub-section will explore *conversational rituals* (expectations about the kind of turn that is appropriate at a given point of the transaction), and, finally, we will be looking at topic management, i.e. what speakers consider worth talking about, how to introduce a new topic, switch between topics, etc. The example given in the

Focus point illustrates differences in these aspects of conversational style, which might result in miscommunication as well as negative stereotyping.

In the following we will be looking at these aspects of conversational style from the perspective of *cross-cultural communication*, i.e. communication between speakers who might share the same code but do not share the norms and conventions of using it in a variety of social contexts. *Conversational style* will also be a topic of discussion in Chapter 7, where we will be taking a closer look at *theoretical* aspects of conversational analysis.

4.4.1 Overlaps and interruptions, involvement styles



Can you guess what goes wrong in the following exchanges and why?

Example 1

Conversation on a first-year graduate course between three female and two male students. A is African American, B is Indian

Topic: integration into the course of various approaches to anthropology possible or not.

A: It's like all parts of the hand. The fingers operate independently, but they have the same--

B: [What I would like to say is ...]

(Example taken from Gumperz: 1982.)

Example 2

Listen to the sound files and read the transcript provided below. Do the frequent overlaps strike you as impolite? Why? Why not?

http://www.cambridge.org/resources/0521612357/3233_Ch10Soundclip1.mp3

http://www.cambridge.org/resources/0521612357/3234_Ch10Soundclip2.mp3

http://www.cambridge.org/resources/0521612357/3235_Ch10%20Transcripts%20to%20soundfiles.pdf

Miscommunication can occur when speakers have different assumptions and expectations about pausing, when to talk, when to stay silent and how to pace their utterances. In Example 1, speaker B interrupts speaker A at a point he considers an appropriate *transition relevance place*, i.e. a point where he can take his turn without disrupting the flow of conversation or offending the previous speaker. A has made her point, and a completion of the simile from B's

perspective is obvious as well as unnecessary (the fingers operate independently but each one is a part of the same hand). However, in a subsequent discussion of this conversation, A made it clear that she felt she was interrupted *before* she could make her point based on the simile she had just introduced. In some cultures it is enough to utter the first part of a sequence and rely on the hearer's background knowledge to supply the rest. For example, most native speakers of British English would not normally supply the parts in brackets in the following idiomatic clichés:

People who live in glass houses... (shouldn't throw stones).

When the cat's away... (the mice can play).

Take care of the pence... (and the pounds will take care of themselves).

No smoke (without fire).

In African American rhetoric, however, there is a formulaic paradigm for summing up an argument or commenting on what someone has just said. For AAs, leaving out any part of that formula is similar to leaving out the second pair part of a greeting as in "Good morning" – [silence].

Another aspect of conversational style that is rooted in interruptions and overlaps is *involvement*. We can differentiate between two kinds of involvement styles, *high-considerateness style* and *high-involvement style*. The former involves avoiding overlaps and honouring the other speaker's need not to be imposed on, while the latter entails embracing overlap as a show of enthusiasm and interest and honouring speakers' need to be connected, to express solidarity.

Both styles can work well among speakers who share assumptions about conversational overlap. High-involvement speakers enjoy talking simultaneously and have no trouble getting or keeping the floor when they want it. This is why speakers in the two conversations in Example 2 did not, in the least, sound impolite. The same is true for conversations among high-considerateness speakers: they take turns and say what they want to say at the point they want to say it.

However, when speakers using different involvement styles interact, their impressions of each other may be the opposite of what each intends. High-involvement speakers might chime in to show their enthusiasm, but high-considerateness speakers tend to think that anyone who begins talking before they are finished is trying to interrupt them. They will probably stop speaking in order to avoid an unpleasant and unacceptable situation where two or more people talk at the same time.

4.4.2 Indirectness



Example

Conversation between a husband (American) and his wife (British)

HUSBAND: Do you know where today's paper is?

WIFE: I'll get it for you.

HUSBAND: That's O.K. Just tell me where it is. I'll get it.

WIFE: No, I'LL get it. (emphasis in the original)

(Example taken from Gumperz: 1982.)

Another important element of conversational style is *indirectness* – conveying meaning without saying it explicitly. Naturally, it is not possible to articulate everything we mean in every utterance, some of the meaning must always be “read between the lines”. Speakers who belong to the same speech community can usually supply missing pieces of information or implied meanings based on past conversations and expectations about what will be said as well as from culturally agreed upon conventions. However, we find great differences *across* speech communities in how much indirectness is expected, when it is expected, and what form it usually takes. For example, we saw that Americans tend to be more indirect than Germans when talking about political views, however, Americans who travel to Britain sometimes find it difficult to interpret what British speakers mean because British people place even greater value on indirectness as a communicative device. The reverse is also true. Since British people often use indirectness as a communicative strategy, they expect others to use it as frequently as they do. As a result, from time to time they interpret utterances that are intended to be direct as indirect, as is illustrated in the example above. The husband simply seeks information as to the whereabouts of the newspaper, while the wife interprets it as an indirect request for her to get the newspaper.

4.4.3 Sequencing and conversational rituals



Example

Telephone conversation between a college instructor and a student. The individuals know each other well since the student, who is black, had previously worked as an office helper in the white instructor's office for several years. The telephone rings:

INSTRUCTOR: Hello.

STUDENT: How's the family?

(pause)

INSTRUCTOR: Fine.

STUDENT: I'll get back to you next month about that thing.

INSTRUCTOR: That's O.K. I can wait.

STUDENT: I'm finished with that paper. It's being typed.

INSTRUCTOR: Come to the office and we'll talk about it.

(Example taken from Gumperz: 1982.)

Conversational rituals are based on two sets of expectations: how speakers expect an interaction to go in its totality, and how they expect utterances to follow in sequence. In every culture as well as in every speech community, there are conventions to perform a variety of speech acts such as apologizing, promising, complimenting, requesting, asking for a favour, etc. etc. (these speech acts and many more will be dealt with in the next two chapters). There are culturally ingrained conventions for performing even the most basic acts such as *engaging* (starting a verbal exchange) and *disengaging* (ending a verbal exchange). Individuals from some particular speech communities engage and disengage in a relatively straightforward way, by jointly producing a single pair of utterances, for example. There are cultures, however, where starting and ending a conversation is a long and, at least to outsiders, tedious process.

Similarly, if one of the speakers has a set purpose as to the outcome or goal of an exchange, this purpose can be arrived at in a relatively direct or in a roundabout way. The instructor in the example is eager to find out about the purpose of the student's call, while the student considers it strange that his cue to talk about personal affairs first is treated in such a peremptory fashion.

4.4.4 Topic management, free and non-free goods



(Context: Inspector Hound has come to Cynthia's house hoping to elicit some information about a mad murderer on the run, who is believed to be hiding in the swamps that surround the house. The present exchange has been preceded by a long discussion in the form of an interrogation, with Hound asking Cynthia questions about the murderer and his whereabouts. The results of this 'question and answer' sequence, however, have been a great disappointment for Hound, as Cynthia had not heard anything about the case, nor seen the murderer.)

HOUND: Well, I'll be getting along, then. (He moves towards the door).

CYNTHIA: I'm terribly sorry.

HOUND: [stiffly] That's perfectly all right.

CYNTHIA: Thank you so much for coming.

HOUND: Not at all. You never know, there might have been a serious matter.

CYNTHIA: Drink?

HOUND: More serious than that, even.

CYNTHIA: [correcting] Drink before you go?

HOUND: No thank you. (Leaves.)

(Tom Stoppard: *The Real Inspector Hound*, quoted in Tzanne: 2000, 31.)

As we saw in section 4.4, there are cross-cultural differences between Americans and Germans with regard to the topics that are appropriate to discuss with someone you have just met. While some topics are freely discussed, i.e. *free goods* in a given culture, others have to be "purchased" at a price, and the currency is usually intimacy or a long-standing relationship. You already know this if you have ever tried asking a Brit about their salary or an American about their political standing.

In addition to the *appropriateness*, there are differences in the *newsworthiness* of particular topics, so that what some speakers might perceive as hot issues outsiders might not even consider worth mentioning.

The third sensitivity area in terms of topic management involves the way new topics are introduced or old ones are abandoned and the manner in which topic shifts are signalled or cued. The source of misunderstanding in the example above is that Cynthia, by offering the Inspector a drink, introduces a new topic, while Inspector Hound interprets her utterance with reference to the old topic, i.e. the "serious matter".

4.5 MALE-FEMALE INTERACTION AS CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION



Read the following extract from “You just don’t understand”, a book by Deborah Tannen. What are your reactions to the husband’s utterance as a woman / man? (I am sorry about the provocative nature of this exercise, I will be simply making a linguistic point here.)

Eve had a lump removed from her breast. Shortly after the operation, talking to her sister, she said that she found it upsetting to have been cut into, and that looking at the stitches was distressing because they left a seam that had changed the contour of her breast. Her sister said, “I know. When I had my operation I felt the same way.” Eve made the same observation to her friend Karen, who said, “I know. It’s like your body has been violated.” But when she told her husband, Mark, how she felt, he said, “You can have plastic surgery to cover up the scar and restore the shape of your breast.”

Eve had been comforted by her sister and her friend, but she was not comforted by Mark’s comment. Quite the contrary, it upset her more.

(Example taken from Tannen: 1990.)

Because of differences in conversational style and framing as well as different socialization processes, many scholars consider communication between women and men *cross-cultural* communication. In section 3.2.3 we saw that women use different linguistic features, intonation patterns and politeness strategies. In addition, in cross-gender conversations they get interrupted more and provide more feedback signals to their interlocutors.

The example in the **Focus point** illustrates that women and men also differ in the way they signal metamesages and the kind of metamesages they usually convey. The woman’s complaint about her discomfort after the operation is meant to be an *appeal* for comfort and support, while the husband interprets it as a statement of a *problem* to which he offers a *solution*. In addition, Eve interprets *his* statement as carrying the metmessage that he finds her unappealing, that is why he wants her to have another surgery. Thus, just as in many of the previous examples, the sources of miscommunication are differences in *framing* as well as interpreting other speakers’ metamesages.

4.6 MUTUAL STEREOTYPING AND COMPLEMENTARY SCHISMO-GENESIS: WHEN THINGS REALLY GO WRONG



An American man asks a Japanese woman directly if she'd like to go to lunch. She does not want to, so she declines the invitation by saying, "That's a very nice idea, maybe we could have lunch, one day". Because she has left the door open, he asks again. This time she replies even more indirectly: "That's an idea... lunch is nice..." Befuddled by this ambiguous response, he tries to pin her down: "Are you trying to tell me you never want to have lunch with me, or should I keep asking?" He regards this as the best way to cut through the ambiguity. However, given her conviction that it would be unacceptable to reply directly, her next reply is even more indirect: "Gee, well, I don't know, lunch, you know..." Her talking in circles confuses him even more; he has no idea that it was the directness of his question that drove her to these extreme circumlocutions. For her part, his continuing to pester her after she has made her lack of interest clear reinforces her determination to avoid having lunch with him. She has no idea that her refusals were not clear to him, and that his increasing directness was provoked by her indirectness (Tannen 2006: 365).

In the previous sections we looked at examples of cross-cultural miscommunication between speakers whose first languages differ, between speakers who share a common first language but belong to different speech communities, between members of different ethnic groups as well as between men and women.

When participants in a conversation have different norms for using language, which leads to repeated experiences of miscommunication, they often come away with negative impressions of the other person. When speakers see others as members of identifiable social groups, the result often is *mutual stereotyping*, i.e. conversational partners extending negative impressions to the whole group the other person is ostensibly a member of.

This is why, because of their high-involvement conversational style, natives of New York City are often stereotyped as pushy and aggressive, while, in turn, many New Yorkers regard Americans from other parts of the United States as somewhat dull and uninteresting. Because of differences in framing in general and men's tendency to frame utterances in terms of problems and solutions in particular, men are often considered by women insensitive and uncaring. At the same time, men see women as incompetent and inept as a result of misinterpreting women's *rappport talk* as a show of insecurity.

Different norms and conversational styles can also lead to *complementary schismogenesis*, a process by which two people exhibit more and more extreme

forms of the very behaviour that triggers in the other more and more extreme forms of the opposite behaviour. For example, complementary schismogenesis can happen when someone who is used to standing close to the person s/he is talking to has a conversation with someone who feels more comfortable with a larger space between him/her and the other person. The first person will keep on moving closer while the second will keep on moving away until they have covered the whole length of the room they are in. The situation described in the **Focus point** is a classical example of complementary schismogenesis, where speakers' different conversational styles in general and different assumptions about the use of *indirectness* in particular lead to a never-ending spiral that leaves both parties confused and frustrated.



Identify the sources for cross-cultural miscommunication in the following extracts by making reference to framing and contextualization cues.

Example 1

FRANK: Y'got a watch?

CHARLIE: (looking around for a clock) It's 7:20.

FRANK: I didn't ask you the time. I asked'y'got a watch'.

CHARLIE: Yeah, in my room.

FRANK: Get it.

CHARLIE: Colonel, there's a clock next to your bed.

FRANK: Does it have a second hand?

CHARLIE: Yeah.

FRANK: Time me.

(Example taken from the movie *Scent of a Woman*.)

Example 2

A: Did you see the film called "Great Expectations"?

B: No, is it any good?

A: I was nearly in that.

B: Have you seen "The Sound of Music"?

A: You weren't in that, were you?

B: What? No... No, I was wondering whether you would like to see it.

(Example taken from Tzanne: 2000.)

Example 3

(Conversation between a mother and her two-year old son.)

MOTHER: Where are your boots?

SON: In the closet.

MOTHER: I want you to put them on right now.

(Example taken from Gumperz: 1982.)

Example 4

Conversation between a black undergraduate employed as a research assistant and his supervisor

STUDENT: John, help me with this. I'm putting it all down.

SUPERVISOR: What is it?

STUDENT: I'm almost done. I just need to fix it up a little.

SUPERVISOR: What do you want me to do?

STUDENT: I'm writing down everything just the way you said.

SUPERVISOR: I don't have the time right now.

(Example taken from Gumperz: 1982.)

Example 5

CHRISTINE: I'm not going to the Literature seminar this week.

VICKY: This week is the last week of term.

CHRISTINE: (aggressively) So what? Are you telling me I should go?

VICKY: Sorry, I...

(Example taken from Tzanne 2000: 205.)

4.7 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, TEACHING IMPLICATIONS

Second language teaching and learning has been very much influenced, both directly and indirectly, by Gumperz's and his students' work in interactional sociolinguistics. As a result, it is now well-established that an individual's knowledge of how to communicate, his/her ability to negotiate and cooperate is not simply a matter of producing and recognizing the appropriate linguistic features of the target language. Communicative, or rather, *interactional* competence also involves knowledge of the interactive and conversational strategies through which information (*message* as well as *metamessage*) is transmitted from one speaker to the other.

In this unit we saw that in culturally diverse communicative environments hidden, normally unnoticed differences in conversational style and perspectives on framing may bring about radically conflicting interpretations of what is happening, often leading to serious cross-cultural miscommunication, complementary schismogenesis as well as possible development / reinforcement of negative stereotypes.

An obvious teaching implication of this chapter is that highlighting the ways in which people of different cultural backgrounds *frame* what they say and *interpret* what they hear – i.e. a development of awareness of different conversational styles and framing practices – must be incorporated into the goals, curriculum design, lessons, and everyday practices of ESL classrooms. Awareness of cultural differences in communication, together with knowledge of conversational strategies will not only facilitate students' interaction with

others in everyday life but will also prepare them to meet the demands of the multicultural environments presented by today's rapidly increasing networks of international contacts.



Here is a story with a happy ending. Do you believe that sources of miscommunication in general and contextualisation cues in particular can be pointed out so that future misunderstandings can be avoided? In other words, are you an optimist or a pessimist?

In a staff cafeteria at a major British airport, newly hired Indian and Pakistani women were perceived as surly and uncooperative by their supervisor as well as by the cargo handlers whom they served. Observation revealed that while relatively few words were exchanged, the intonation and manner in which these words were pronounced were interpreted negatively. For example, when a cargo handler who had chosen meat was asked whether he wanted gravy, a British assistant would say 'Gravy?' using rising intonation. The Indian assistants, on the other hand, would say the word using falling intonation: 'Gravy.' We taped relevant sequences, including interchanges like these, and asked the employees to paraphrase what was meant in each case. At first the Indian workers saw no difference. However, the English teacher and the cafeteria supervisor could point out that 'Gravy', said with a falling intonation, is likely to be interpreted as 'This is gravy', i.e. not interpreted as an offer but rather as a statement, which in the context seems redundant and consequently rude. When the Indian women heard this, they began to understand the reactions they had been getting all along which had until then seemed incomprehensible. They then spontaneously recalled intonation patterns which had seemed strange to them when spoken by native English speakers. At the same time, supervisors learned that the Indian women's falling intonation was their normal way of asking questions in that situation, and that no rudeness or indifference was intended. (Tannen: 2006)



4B

What strategies would you teach your students to remedy misunderstandings of the kinds described in this chapter? Are there any differences in the teachability of the different contextualisation cues / framing devices? How can you draw students' attention to the "sensitivity areas" in cross-cultural communication?

4.8 TIPS FOR ANALYSIS

For the most part, the contextualization cues and conversational practices discussed in this chapter are hidden, covert sources of miscommunication. However, they usually come to the forefront when communication breakdown occurs or speakers use *metacommunicative utterances* to remedy miscommunication that has just occurred. When choosing your text, you can look for examples of metacommunication (communication about communication) or simply select a conversation where speakers talk *at* rather than *to* each other (it occurs more frequently than you would think!). Alternatively, you can draw inferences about how particular utterances are framed in terms of formality, function, speech activity and attitude and try to identify the linguistic features (formulaic expressions, non-standard forms, etc.) that are created by *and* create the social context of the interchange.



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Chapter 5
CROSS-CULTURAL (MIS)COMMUNICATION II. –
PRAGMATIC FAILURE

The goals of this chapter are to:

- explore the underdetermination of meaning by linguistic signs with special reference to ambiguity in human language;
- introduce Grice's Cooperative Principle and its maxims that serve as guidelines helping interlocutors resolve some of the ambiguity inherent in communication;
- describe types of non-observance of the maxims and the concept of pragmatic implicature;
- distinguish between pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failure, discuss some examples and teaching implications.

In the previous chapter we saw that there is a gap between what is being *said* and what is *meant* in a particular utterance. Interactional sociolinguists proposed that the gap between message and *metamessage* can be bridged by contextualization cues, i.e. linguistic, paralinguistic, kinesic, etc. signals that cue the listener as to how the utterance should be interpreted. In this chapter we are going to look at another framework of analysis that offers an alternative way of bridging (or at least narrowing) the gap between encoded, explicit meaning (the meaning of the actual words used in an utterance and the way they are combined) and communicative *force*, i.e. the additional, unstated, implicit meaning that is arrived at through inferences based on background knowledge. The approach we will be taking is based on Gricean pragmatics, a theoretical framework that was not originally developed as a tool for Discourse Analysis, and, as a result, used *constructed examples* and little *contextual information* when illustrating theoretical points and inferencing processes.

However, as we will see, an extended model of Gricean pragmatics can be readily applied to analysing naturally-occurring speech as well as cross-cultural miscommunication. Before we explore Grice's theory of the Cooperative Principle and its application to Discourse Analysis, let us take a closer look at the *underdetermination* of meaning by what is actually said.

5.1 THE UBIQUITY OF AMBIGUITY IN HUMAN LANGUAGE

If you look at the hundreds of ways a word or a sentence can be ambiguous you realize it is a miracle humans can communicate at all. As soon as a new word is coined or borrowed from another language people start using it in a variety of contexts in a whole range of extended senses so that you would be hard put to find *any* word that is not *polysemous* i.e. serves as a source of lexical ambiguity in an actual utterance. Words can be ambiguous when written down (cf. *homography*) and when they are spoken (cf. *homophony*), they might have several, semantically related senses (cf. *polysemy*) or semantically unrelated senses (cf. *homonymy*). Then, there is the problem of *referential ambiguity*: speakers can use referring expressions (NPs in general and pronouns in particular) to pick out a whole range of contextual and co-textual entities that these items depend on for their interpretation. In addition, when you combine words to create sentences, the same string of words can have different interpretations according to the ways they are grouped together and according to the different relations between syntactic units and their modifiers or complements (cf. *structural ambiguity*). In addition, as soon as you utter a string of words, the listener can start wondering why you decided to couch your message in that particular way and what your intentions were in uttering those exact words (*ambiguity of force*).

However, a strange thing about communication is that most of the above described sources of ambiguity go unnoticed in actual communication between native speakers who belong to the same speech community. Their *pragmatic competence* enables them to assign sense, reference, syntactic structure as well as force to the string of words they hear in real time, as the conversation develops. It is when you start learning, say, English as a second language that you realize that you cannot transfer words and their extended meanings from your first language (cf. “Ez nem az én asztalom” ~ “It’s not my table”), there are different conventions of using deictics and segmenting sentences, and meaning contrasts are created by tiny differences in stress and sound quality. On top of all that, “these English guys” never seem to say what they mean (“Yes, but...” means “No”) or mean what they say (e.g. do not be fooled by the utterance “We should get together some time”).

In the following we are going to further explore and exemplify types and sources of ambiguity that need to be brought to ESL learners’ awareness.

5.1.1 Lexical ambiguity



Example 1

Mr Cyril Smith, at the time the Liberal MP for Rochdale, was a man recognized throughout the country because he was extraordinarily fat. During a radio programme he claimed to speak as someone who does a great deal of work amongst the immigrant population, then produced the ambiguous utterance:

“I had sixteen of them for lunch at the House of Commons last Tuesday...”

Example 2

They call it a “classless society”. And it is classless. There are no classes for the children turned away for the lack of a qualified teacher. There are no classes for 200,000 children denied nursery places. And there is certainly no class in a government that for the last decade has sold our children and our future short.

Example 3

And forty years later I stand here addressing conference. Yet without state education it’s doubtful I’d be addressing envelopes.

(Examples taken from Thomas: 1995.)

The source of lexical ambiguity can be either ‘polysemy’ or ‘homonymy’. In the case of polysemy, a single word has a series of meanings *related* to each other by metaphor or metonymy. Thus, the different meanings (or, technically speaking, senses) of ‘bright’, for example, such as ‘cheerful and lively’ as in *bright smile*, ‘intelligent’ as in *bright kid*, ‘hopeful’ as in *bright future*, etc. are metaphorical extensions of the original sense ‘full of light’ as in *bright sunshine*. The source domain of the metaphors is physical state, whereas the target domains are emotional state, intellectual state, etc.

Homonyms are, technically speaking, distinct lexical items with identical pronunciation (‘homophones’) and/or spelling (‘homographs’). Each of the homonyms has its own meaning, for example, bank ‘financial institution’ vs. bank as in ‘riverbank’. In this example, homophony and homography co-occur. However, this is not always the case; compare peak [pi:k] ‘summit’ and peek [pi:k] ‘glance’, which are *homophones* but not *homographs*. From a *diachronic* (historical) point of view, homonyms cannot be traced back to a common etymological origin. From a *synchronic* (contemporary) viewpoint, homonyms have no shared, related meanings.

Lexical ambiguity is usually resolved in contextualized occurrences of particular lexical items, thus, in Example 1 the only reason the ambiguity created by ‘to have for lunch’ is brought to the attention of the listeners is because they are familiar with the speaker’s corpulent frame. Listeners who do not share this background knowledge are highly unlikely to substitute the intended meaning “to invite sy over for lunch”, with the alternative interpretation “to consume sy for lunch”.

There is another type of communicative situation where lexical ambiguity is brought to consciousness: there are cases when ambiguity is exploited for rhetorical effect, as is illustrated in Examples 2 and 3. In 2, the intended sense of ‘class’, i.e. *social class*, is replaced by the senses *group of students taught together* and *high quality, excellence* in light of the speaker’s criticism of the government. In Example 3, making reference to lexical ambiguity also serves as an effective rhetorical device.

5.1.2 Referential ambiguity

Example 1

- a) The judge sentenced John to two years in prison because he was strict.
- b) The judge sentenced John to two years in prison because he was dangerous.
- c) The dog bit the postman because he was angry.
- d) The dog bit the postman because he was frightened.

Example 2

ACT: The old man thinks he’s in love with his daughter.

Ros: [Appalled] Good God! We’re out of our depth here.

ACT: No, no, no – he hasn’t got a daughter - the old man thinks he’s in love with *his* daughter.

Ros: The old man is?

ACT: Hamlet, in love with the old man’s daughter, the old man thinks.

Ros: Ha! It’s beginning to make sense! Unrequited passion!

(Tom Stoppard: *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*)

Example 3

A: I love my wife.

B: So do I. (A punches into B’s face in a fit of jealousy)

Referential ambiguity occurs if it is unclear what or who a particular referring expression refers to. There are syntactic factors that delimit *possible* antecedents for a given referring expression, however, it is contextual factors that, for the most part, determine which entities are picked out for reference in a particular utterance.

Just as in the case of lexical ambiguity, ambiguity of reference is usually resolved in context. Thus, your background knowledge helps you decide that ‘he’ in 1a) probably refers to the judge, in 1b) to John, in 1c) to the dog, in 1d) to the postman. However, these are simply the most *likely* interpretations, and a character from the Monty Python Show, for example, could exploit ambiguity of reference in such cases as well.

Examples 3 and 4 are examples of such exploitation of referential ambiguity, which is extremely rare in naturally-occurring discourse (these are, naturally, *constructed* examples).

5.1.3 Structural ambiguity

Example 1

Speaker B is a well-known cricket commentator, Brian Johnston, Speaker A is his wife.

A: Have you seen the dog bowl?

B: No, but I’ve seen it play several good innings.

Example 2

Afterwards, the Bishop walked among the pilgrims eating their picnic lunches.

Example 3

TEACHER: How can you prevent diseases caused by biting insects?

JOSE: Don’t bite any.

Structural ambiguity has two subtypes: *attachment ambiguity* and *scope ambiguity*. Attachment ambiguity refers to the possibility that the same sequence of words may be assigned different syntactic structures. In Example 1, for instance, the sequence ‘dog bowl’ can be analysed as a combination of two nouns, or of a noun and a verb. However, the syntactic category assigned to a particular word does not necessarily have to be different in the two (or more) different interpretations of syntactically ambiguous sentences. In Example 2 the string of words ‘eating their picnic lunches’ can modify either ‘the Bishop’ or ‘the pilgrims’, thus it can *attach to*, in other words, it can be *associated with* different syntactic units.

Scope ambiguity refers to the possibility of a particular syntactic unit having alternative elements within its scope. An example is the sentence “Every man loves a woman”, which has two distinct interpretations: for each man there is a woman he does not share with anyone; or, alternatively, there is a specific woman who is loved by all the men. In the first interpretation, every man ‘has scope over’ a woman, i.e. the sentence is primarily about ‘every man’. With the

second reading, it is the other way round, i.e. the sentence is primarily about ‘a woman’ (cf. also “Everyone in this room speaks two languages”, “A hundred terrorists shot twenty civilians”, etc.)

5.1.4 Ambiguity of force

Example

Tu es Rex Iudaeorum? Dicit illi Iesus: Tu dicis. (Mt. 27: 11)

Pilate questioned him “Are You the King of the Jews?” And He answered him, “It is as you say.” (New American Standard Bible ©1995)

Pilate asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” “Yes, I am,” Jesus answered him. (GOD’S WORD® Translation ©1995)

And Pilate asked him, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answering said unto them, Thou sayest it. (King James Bible)

And Pilate asked him, Are you the King of the Jews? And he answering said to them, You say it. (American King James Version)

„Te vagy a zsidók királya?” „Te mondog” – válaszolta neki Jézus. (Kálvin Kiadó, 1993)

Ambiguity of pragmatic force occurs when the speaker does not make clear precisely which of a range of *illocutionary forces* is intended. Illocutionary force or pragmatic force refers to the utterance being produced with a particular *communicative intent*. For example, ‘Is that your car?’ can be uttered as an expression of admiration or as an order to move the car from an illegal parking space.

An important difference between ambiguity of force and the other types of ambiguity discussed above is that the former does not necessarily have to be resolved in order for effective communication to take place. For example, “I must have left it open”, in response to “How did the chickens get through the gate?” could be situated anywhere on the cline between ‘reluctant admission’ and ‘apology’. In this case, the speaker chooses to be vague about their communicative intent to save face (more on saving face in Chapter 6).

The intended force of an utterance may be deliberately indeterminate where the relative rights and obligations of, or status / role relationships between the participants are unclear and it is in the interests of both participants that the force of the utterance should be *negotiable*. For example, in a situation when a ringing noise is heard, “Is that the phone” might be either a simple question or a request for the hearer to answer the telephone. By leaving the pragmatic force of the utterance ambiguous, the speaker avoids any risk of a confrontation or of an embarrassing refusal, since the hearer is at liberty either to respond to the question by saying: “Yes, it is”, or, alternatively, to interpret the utterance as an indirect request and to comply.

The example in the **Focus point** illustrates that ambiguity of force can be a problem for translators, as well. Without endeavouring to start a theological argumentation, I can safely say that, based on the alternative translations, the force of Jesus' utterance "Tu dicis", literally, "You say so" is ambiguous between "It is as you say", and "It is you who says it". Thus, it can be an affirmation of Pontius Pilate's question, or it can mean "that is merely something you postulate" or "you have said that, not I, but since you say it, must it not be correct?". Another safe guess is that Jesus leaves the force of his utterance indeterminate *on purpose*. Speculating on Jesus' intents and motivations behind this utterance could be an interesting theological issue, but it is not a pragmatic concern, so, unfortunately, we will have to leave it there.



Resolve the ambiguity in the following utterances and identify the type of ambiguity in each case.

- 1) [Bowling Alley:] Please be quiet. We need to hear a pin drop.
- 2) [Outside a second-hand shop:] We exchange anything – bicycles, washing machines, etc. Why not bring your wife along and get a wonderful bargain.
- 3) One of my parents' old friends unexpectedly called on us last night.
- 4) We like Indians without reservations.
- 5) Competent women and men hold all the good jobs at the firm.
- 6) "Is there another man?" – "No, there isn't *another man*." [It turns out there's another woman.]
- 7) [Newspaper headline:] CIA held suspect in secret prison for months.
- 8) Columbia, Tennessee, which calls itself the largest outdoor mule market in the world, held a mule parade yesterday headed by the Governor.
- 9) For sale: antique desk suitable for lady with thick legs and large drawers.
- 10) The insurance was invalid for the invalid.
- 11) We generally found this employee loaded with work to do.
- 12) The buck does funny things when the does are present.
- 13) I'm a wonderful housekeeper. Every time I get divorced, I keep the house. (Zsa Zsa Gabor)
- 14) I most enthusiastically recommend this candidate with no qualifications whatsoever.
- 15) Marriage is a great institution, but I'm not ready for an institution yet. (Mae West)
- 16) My grandmother started walking five miles a day when she was sixty. She's ninety-three today and we don't know where the hell she is. (Ellen Degeneres)
- 17) My grandmother was a very tough woman. She buried three husbands. Two of them were just napping. (Rita Rudner)

- 18) Our bikinis are exciting. They are simply the tops.
- 19) [Sign on an electrician's truck:] Let us remove your shorts.
- 20) Since there is no time like the present, he thought it was time to present the present.
- 21) [The Electric Company:] We would be delighted if you send in your bill. However, if you don't, you will be.
- 22) The farm was used to produce produce.
- 23) There is nothing you can teach a man like him. [He is that knowledgeable vs. that stupid.]
- 24) To help with planting, the farmer taught his sow to sow.
- 25) Wanted. Man to take care of cow that does not smoke or drink.
- 26) When shot at, the dove dove into the bushes.

5.2 RESOLVING SOME OF THE AMBIGUITY BY MAKING ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE SPEAKER'S COMMUNICATIVE BEHAVIOUR: THE COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE (CP) AND ITS MAXIMS



Do you have any problems interpreting the following utterances / exchanges? If yes, why? If not, why not?

Example 1

- A: Can you cook?
B: I know how to put a kettle on.

Example 2

You're a real race-horse.

Example 3

- A: How is your son?
B: He's grown another foot.

Example 4

Sue reported to the Committee that Joan learnt that she had failed the exam in March.

Example 5

An invisible car came out of nowhere, hit my car and disappeared.
(Examples 1 through 4 were taken from Kempson: 2002.)

Now that we have seen the ways words, sentences and utterances can be ambiguous, the question arises: how is it that using language is in general so effortless, when there seems to be no limit to what utterances can convey or what ambiguities they can give rise to?

The first problem area is illustrated in Example 1. Why are such conversations possible? Why, for example, did B not just say “No”? What did B “mean” by choosing an indirect mode of reply? How does A arrive at the interpretation that B has probably never done anything in the kitchen other than putting a kettle on, so the answer is that B cannot cook, or has no interest in cooking, etc.

Secondly, how can the words in Example 2 (‘real race-horse’) refer to an individual, someone apparently not a horse? What could a speaker mean by saying something *blatantly* far from the truth?

Thirdly, why is it that A in Example 3 is most unlikely to respond with horror, suggesting that the foot should be amputated? And, with a much less extreme case, how does the hearer in 4 decide whether the phrase “in March” describes the time of the exam, the time of discovering the results of the exam, or the time at which Sue made her report?

Finally, how do we make sense of semantically meaningless sentences such as Example 5 (or, of the classical “Colourless green ideas sleep furiously”)?

A solution to such problems is offered by Grice who was the pioneer of the *inferential* approach to conversation (Grice 1975). He posits that hearers make a general assumption when interpreting utterances: they assume that the speaker behaves rationally and cooperatively, i.e. communication is a collaborative enterprise where participants do not act in unpredictable ways and have a shared goal. This general assumption (the Cooperative Principle) is further broken down into **four maxims**:

- 1) the maxim of quality: do not say that for which you lack evidence; do not say what you believe to be false;
- 2) the maxim of relation: be relevant;
- 3) the maxim of quantity: make your contribution as informative as is required, but not more so;
- 4) the maxim of manner: be perspicuous (avoid obscurity, avoid ambiguity, be brief, be orderly).

These are not rules that dictate behaviour but, rather, guidelines underpinning collaborative exchange of information. Consequently, cases of *observance* as well as *non-observance* of these maxims are equally relevant to inferential processes, i.e. the interpretation of a particular utterance’s force.

Let us first see proof for the *observance* of these maxims.

The importance of the *maxim of quality* for cooperative interaction in English is proven by the number of expressions speakers use to indicate that what

they are saying may not be totally accurate or well-founded. In the following examples, the phrases in *italics* are notes to the listener regarding the accuracy of the main statement.

Obama is not a Muslim, *as far as I know*.

I reckon Hawaii is as good a place as any to start the conversions to electric automobiles.

I'm not sure if this is right, but it seemed that having my appendix taken out boosted my price.

I may be mistaken, but I think she is cursing!

Such *hedges*, i.e. cautious notes about how the utterance should be taken can also be used to show that the speaker is aware of the *quantity maxim*, as illustrated in the following:

To cut a long story short, he arrived by c-section 7 weeks early weighing 3lb 2 oz.

As you probably know, the Village has elected a new Mayor, Dennis Kay.

I won't bore you with all the details, but here's a flavour of the conversation I had with the lady.

The speaker's fulfilment of the expectation of relevance (from the maxim of relation) can be proven by the existence of discourse markers such as "by the way", "anyway" whose function is to mark potentially unconnected information during a conversation. There are also *metacommunicative* utterances that make explicit reference to expectations of the relevance and appropriateness of what is to follow:

Also, *I don't know if this is important*, but when my console came back, I forgot that my profile was in my Memory Card and erased it.

This may sound like a silly question, but do you feel like your taste buds have died or something? Mine do.

Not to change the subject, but did anyone else think it was weird that the old man with Alzheimer's trapped in his car for several days refused to eat dog biscuits that he had with him?

The awareness of the expectations of *manner* may also lead speakers to produce hedges of the type shown in the following utterances:

I'm not sure how to put this, but I don't want the site to become sterile or boring – *does that make sense?*

I don't know if this is clear or not, but *this is the best way I can explain it*.

All of the above examples of hedges are good indications that the speakers are not only aware of the maxims, but that they want to show that they are trying to observe them. Such forms also convey the speakers' concern about coming across as cooperative conversational partners.

In addition, maxims of the CP guide listeners to the intended interpretations of utterances. In Example 3, A presumes that B's answer is relevant, truthful, informative as well as unequivocal and stipulates from previous experience / background knowledge that people usually have two feet. As a result, s/he arrives at the interpretation that 'foot' refers to a unit of measurement, rather than an extra limb the son has grown.

Similarly, if we presume that the speaker in Example 4 observes the maxim of manner, it is safe to presume that the phrase "in March" describes the time of the exam, rather than the time of discovering the results of the exam or the time at which Sue made her report. If "in March" refers to either of the latter two, the speaker has flouted or violated the maxim of manner, which is also conducive as well as relevant to the interpretation of the utterance, as will be seen in the following sections.

5.3 TYPES OF NON-OBSERVANCE AND THEIR COMMUNICATIVE EFFECT

5.3.1 Suspending a maxim

There are circumstances where speakers may not follow the expectations of the cooperative principle over longer sequences of utterances. In courtrooms and classrooms, witnesses or pupils are often called upon to tell people things which are already well-known to those people (thereby not observing the quantity maxim). In addition to such specialized institutional talk, there are situations when it is not necessary to observe the maxims since there is no expectation on the part of any participant that they will be fulfilled. Such events include weaving folk tales in many rural communities, playing the dozens in African American speech communities and similar, usually ritualized and culture-specific speech activities.

5.3.2 Opting out of a maxim

At any point of the conversation, a speaker may 'opt out' of the expectations created by the maxims by using expressions like 'No comment' or 'My lips are sealed' in response to a question or a request for information. Opting out is, thus, invariably marked by a *metacommunicative* comment which explicitly states the speaker's unwillingness or inability to cooperate. In the latter case,

the reason for opting out usually has to do with legal or ethical considerations. Alternatively, the speaker might avoid making a false impression that giving an untruthful or incomplete answer would entail and, instead, choose to opt out of the CP and explicitly state that no answer is forthcoming and it is not due to his/her unwillingness to cooperate. Examples of such cases could include a priest, counsellor or an investigative journalist refusing to relay information given in confidence, or a police officer refusing to release the name of an accident victim until the victim's relatives have been informed.

More interestingly from a methodological point of view, opting out strategies in particular and metacommunicative utterances in general are highly conventionalized, formulaic expressions and need to be taught in ready-made sequences. In addition, they can also mark problems in the smooth exchange of information or in communication, which also makes it necessary to draw students' attention to them.

5.3.3 Violating a maxim

Example 1

Alice has been refusing to make love to her husband. At first he attributes this to post-natal depression, but then he starts to think she may be having an affair.

'Allie. I've got to ask you this.'

'Ask me then.'

'Will you give me a truthful answer? However much you think it'll hurt me?'

'I promise.'

'Is there another man?'

Alice raised her chin and looked at him squarely.

'No,' she said. 'There isn't another man.'

Example 2

An English athlete, Dianne Modahl, pulled out of her opening race and returned to England. Caroline Searle, press officer for the England team, said:

'She has a family bereavement; her grandmother has died.'

The next day it was announced that Ms Modahl had been sent home following a positive test for drugs.

(Examples taken from Thomas 1995: 73.)

Violations occur when the speaker wants to mislead the listener intentionally and covertly. In Example 1, as it turns out, Alice's assertion that she is not having an affair with another man is true, but not the whole truth (in fact, she is having an affair with a woman). But there is nothing in the formulation of

Alice's utterance which would allow her husband to infer that she is withholding information. Thus she *unostentatiously* violates the maxim of quantity and intentionally misleads her husband into thinking that she is not having an affair with anyone.

Similarly, in Example 2, what Ms Searle says happens to be true, Ms Modahl does have a family bereavement. However, the utterance falsely implies that this is the reason why Ms Modahl left the team, thus, Ms Searle *violates* the maxim of relation by falsely implying a connection between the two events.

5.3.4 Flouting a maxim, clashes between maxims

Example 1

PRINCE CHARLES: Hello, I'm Prince Charles.

TELEPHONE OPERATOR: Yeah, and I'm the Queen of Sheba.

Example 2

A: How are we getting there?

B: Well, *we're* getting there in Dave's car.

Example 3

A: How many languages do you speak?

B: That depends on what you mean by "speak".

Example 4

PHYSICS TEACHER: Let's look now at question 4. John, it's your turn.

STUDENT: Did you see the programme on "The Exploding Universe" last night on TV, sir?

Example 5

She's not the most intelligent student I've ever taught.

Example 6

A: I'm going for a *promenade*.

B: You're what?

A: The dog's listening.

Flouting is the most interesting way of not observing a maxim from a pragmatic-inferential point of view. When the speaker flouts a maxim s/he makes it clear to the hearer that s/he is aware of the Cooperative Principle and the

maxims, so that the hearer is led to consider why the principle or a maxim was broken. In other words, there is no assumption that further communication is impossible as is the case with opting out, neither does the speaker secretly mislead the hearer as with violation. Instead, the speaker *ostentatiously* (openly, blatantly) chooses an indirect way of conveying meaning that is different from, or added to, the expressed meaning. The hearer, on the other hand, is prompted to look for additional meaning by the blatant falsity, verbosity, irrelevance or ambiguity of the utterance (depending on which maxim is being flouted).

Flouting can occur for a variety of reasons: it may be that something in the situation prevents the speaker making a straightforward statement as in Example 6, or considerations of politeness may inhibit the speaker as in E5. Alternatively, the speaker might choose to flout a maxim for rhetorical reasons: in order to boost the force of the utterance or, for example, to express sarcasm as in E1. In sum, by flouting a maxim, the speaker always conveys an *implicature* or a range of implicatures, i.e. additional, implicit meanings that are not directly said but are implied.

In Example 1, therefore, the telephone operator, by uttering a blatant lie, ostentatiously flouts the maxim of quality, which sets in motion a thought process in the hearer along the following lines:

- The telephone operator has stated that he is the Queen of Sheba.
- There is no example in recorded history for a Queen to be male or to work as a telephone operator.
- However, I have no reason to believe that the telephone operator is trying to deceive me in any way, or wants to make me believe he is actually the Queen of Sheba.
- Unless the telephone operator's utterance is entirely pointless, he must be trying to put across some other message.
- This must be obviously related to the explicitly expressed message as well as the previous utterance.
- The most obviously related message is the exact opposite of the one he has expressed in response to my utterance.
- The telephone operator thinks I am as likely to be Prince Charles as he is likely to be the Queen of Sheba.

Obviously, inner thought processes are not as formal (or silly) as the one above, however, these steps illustrate the *inferential route* whereby hearers arrive at the additional meaning (*implicature*) from the *expressed* meaning. Accordingly, there are four factors that these steps are based on, i.e. at least four things are needed for efficient communication to take place:

- 1) understanding the encoded (expressed) meaning;
- 2) assumption / awareness that the speaker is observing the principles of rational, cooperative communicative behaviour (the CP);
- 3) cultural / background information about queens and telephone operators;
- 4) an ability on the part of the hearer to make the right *inferences* based on the evidence provided by linguistic elements and contextual factors.

Similarly, in Example 2, the fact that speaker B *flouts the maxim of quantity*, i.e. does not provide enough information in response to A's question, cues A to look for an additional, unexpressed meaning. By mentioning the means of transport she is taking but blatantly excluding A from her answer, B is implying that A is not coming with them.

Example 3 is an interesting case in point. In naturally-occurring conversations there are situations when a conflict (*clash*) arises between two or more maxims, for example there are situations when it is impossible for the speaker to be relevant without being verbose, or to be truthful without being ambiguous, etc. Example 3 illustrates a clash between the maxims of quantity and quality, as in order to be truthful, the speaker has to flout the maxim of quantity, i.e. has to provide more information than would be required for a straightforward answer.

In Example 4 the student *blatantly flouts the maxim of relation*, thereby prompting the teacher to look for additional, unstated meaning. The most likely implicature of the student's utterance (obviously, more contextual information would be needed to draw the right inferences) is that he does not want to or is unable to answer "question 4".

As mentioned earlier, flouting a maxim can occur because considerations of politeness may stop the speaker from uttering a direct statement, request, etc. The speaker in Example 5, by *flouting the maxim of manner*, cues the listener to look for an additional meaning which is related to, but, in this case, stronger than the one expressed in the utterance. While producing such ambiguous utterances, speakers can remain truthful and relevant, however, as you can see in this example (and will probably face this issue in the course of performing your own analyses), there is usually an overlap between flouting the maxim of quantity and flouting the maxim of manner, since being ambiguous usually entails providing more information than is required for a straightforward response, statement, request, etc.

Finally, Example 6 is another example of flouting the maxim of manner. This time what warrants it is that the situation prevents the speaker from making a straightforward statement. If you have a dog, you are well aware that uttering the word "walk" prompts your pet to jump up and down in search of the leash. This situation can be prevented by uttering an ambiguous, but related statement, as is shown in the example.

5.3.5 Infringing a maxim

Example 1

A: Are you coming to the cinema?

B: Of course!

Example 2

A: Thank you for your help.

B: Never mind.

A speaker infringes a maxim if s/he fails to observe it by mistake, and has *no intention* of generating an implicature, deceiving the hearer or opting out of the conversation. This type of non-observance stems from *imperfect linguistic performance* such as imperfect command of the language (in the case of a child or a foreign learner), or because the speaker's communicative skills are *impaired* in some way (because of nervousness, drunkenness, excitement, etc.).

In Example 1, B wants to express eagerness, excitement about going to the cinema, but instead, he generates the *false* implicature that he considers A's utterance a stupid question. In Example 2, by failing to provide the unambiguous, formulaic second pair part to A's expression of gratitude, B *inadvertently* implies that A should be sorry for what he did.

This type of non-observance is, naturally, the most relevant one to ELT methodology and will be discussed in more detail later on in the chapter.



Listen to an interview with the Reduced Shakespeare Company (<https://www.dropbox.com/s/zcfzvwofb5cxes8/Reduced%20Shakespeare%20Company%20edited.mp3?dl=0>). Consider the following utterances taken from the interview and categorize them according to the maxims that are not

being observed as well as the type of non-observance in each case. What is / are the implicature(s) in cases where *flouting* of a maxim occurs?

- 1) We're still on our honeymoon period... David still picks up my dirty underwear with a smile on his face.
- 2) Every time we go to a Pizza Hut, he pays for his own pizza, that's quite impressive.
- 3) (I bet there's caviar and everything....) – On pizza? Oh, no...
- 4) (We pay ourselves tons of money), last week I came home with, like, a fiver in my pocket.
- 5) I was a brain surgeon, and Adam was an astrophysicist.
- 6) I wanted to drive a train, but I couldn't, so I had to go into acting.

- 7) (It's good to have a train to fall back to.) – You don't wanna fall back on a train, you could kill yourself.
- 8) I used to play water polo, but my horse drowned.
- 9) There's no royalties to pay on Shakespeare, he's dead....
- 10) He died, I think some 50-60 years ago.
- 11) It is possibly recognizably Shakespeare, if, for instance, you recognized it as Shakespeare, but if you didn't, then it would not be recognizably Shakespeare.
- 12) We do have attention deficit disorder, like I don't know what anybody's saying right now, I've lost track.
- 13) If this was America we'd already have got like a five billion dollar settlement.
- 14) That's like a hundred pounds when you convert that into British money.
- 15) I give up, where's my white flag ...
- 16) We begin at the beginning.
- 17) Remind me not to come to see ... where're you playing again? Don't come to the Criterion Theatre...

5.4 CROSS-CULTURAL PRAGMATIC FAILURE

As you might remember from your previous linguistics classes, pragmatics is the study of various factors involved in appropriate *use* and *understanding* of language, such as the speaker's *intentions* and how they are inferred by the hearer, the speaker's and hearer's *background attitudes* and *beliefs*, their understanding of the *context* in which the utterance is made, as well as their *knowledge* of how language can be used for a variety of purposes.

Accordingly, cross-cultural pragmatic failure occurs if participants in communication consider different aspects of the context as *relevant* to the interpretation of utterances, they use language to achieve various goals in different ways, or they do not share the same background (socio-cultural) knowledge, attitudes and beliefs.

These three issues lead to three different types of pragmatic failure:

- failure to interpret the explicit content of an utterance in context (assign sense, reference, syntactic structure, etc.) (pragmalinguistic failure type 1);
- failure to assign *force* to an utterance (pragmalinguistic failure type 2);
- failure to make correct judgements about sociopragmatic factors, e.g. the size of the imposition (e.g. how big of a favour the speaker is asking), social distance, rights and obligations, etc. (sociopragmatic failure).

5.4.1 Pragmalinguistic failure type 1 – failure to interpret the explicit content of an utterance in context

Example 1

A: (to fellow passenger on a long-distance coach): Ask the driver what time we get to Birmingham.
 B: (to driver): Could you tell me when we get to Birmingham, please?
 DRIVER: Don't worry, love, it's a big place – I don't think it's possible to miss it!
 (Example taken from Thomas: 1983.)

Example 2

A: So the report is due today.
 B: Yes, today.
 A: Yesterday? It was due yesterday?

The first type of pragmalinguistic failure is due to an inability to disambiguate the explicit content of utterances in context, which involves assigning sense and reference to lexical items, identifying the syntactic category and structure of individual constituents as well as producing / interpreting words and structures that reflect newness and focusing of information, appropriate connotations, presuppositions, etc.

In sections 5.1.1 through 5.1.4 we looked at some of the ways words and sentences can be ambiguous, and mentioned that ambiguity is usually resolved in context, provided that communicators share mutual background knowledge and assumptions about aspects of the context that are relevant for the interpretation of a given utterance.

There are cases, however, when such contextual assumptions are not shared. In Example 1, for instance, 'when' is ambiguous between 'what time' and 'as soon as'. As a result, B's utterance can either be interpreted as "Could you let me know (give me a shout, etc.) *as soon as* we get to Birmingham" and "Tell me *now* what time we get to B'ham". The driver works on the contextual assumption that drivers do not usually provide details about timetables, however, they frequently call out destinations and stops to passengers, an assumption which, if it was brought to awareness, could prompt B to couch his/her message in different words.

In Example 2, the source of ambiguity is *homophony*, rather than *polysemy*: speaker A (despite cues in intonation and prosody) fails to decide if B's utterance consists of one or two lexical units.

5.4.2 Pragmalinguistic failure type 2 – failure to assign force to an utterance

Example 1

[Foreign tourist to cab driver:] Excuse me, would you mind taking me to the British Museum?

Example 2

A: Is this coffee sugared?

B: I don't think so. Does it taste as if it is?

Example 3

B (a non-native speaker of English) has been staying with A for several weeks. He has a passion for West Side Story and has just played the film's sound track right through for the second time in one evening.

A: Would you like to listen to something else now?

B: No.

Example 4

A (customs officer at the airport): Did you pack your luggage yourself?

B: No, my dog did it for me, apparently he has a black belt in origami.

(Examples 2 and 3 were taken from Thomas: 1995.)

Pragmalinguistic failure can also occur due an inability to assign *force* to an utterance, i.e. inability to produce an utterance with the desired degree / type of additional meaning, or, conversely, to interpret the implicature conveyed by someone else's utterance appropriately.

There are three ways in which one can fail to assign force to an utterance: s/he can

- assign stronger / weaker force than intended;
- fail to identify the intended speech act;
- perceive an utterance as ambivalent while no ambivalence is intended.

In Example 1, A produces an utterance that has a stronger force than intended. By using an unnecessarily elaborate request instead of the pragmalinguistically appropriate "British Museum, please", A either gives away her foreignness (if her accent is marked enough), or unintentionally implies that the driver does not look too eager to do the job s/he is supposed to do.

Example 2 and 3 illustrate failure to identify the primary function, i.e. *the speech act* of the utterance. In the former, speaker A intends her utterance as

a complaint, while B interprets it as a request for information. Similarly, A's utterance in Example 3 is meant as a request for B to stop listening to West Side Story, B, however, conveniently interprets it as a friendly question about his personal preferences. Note in this example the presence of "Would you like to", which is a conventionalized, routinized *indirect speech act* in English. While it is more difficult to prepare ESL students for communicative situations like the one described in Example 2 (we can raise their *metapragmatic* awareness of NSs' more indirect conversational styles, for example), miscommunications such as the one in Example 3 can be avoided by improving students' pragmatic-linguistic competence.

Finally, pragmalinguistic failure can occur in cases when an utterance is interpreted as ambiguous, but no ambiguity is intended by the speaker. Example 4 is a caricature of the check-in procedure at airports where passengers are invariably asked if they have packed their luggage themselves. Naturally, the purpose of this utterance is to make sure there are no items in your luggage that are unaccounted for, e.g. guns, ammunition, explosives, etc. However, if someone has never heard of 9/11 or terrorist threats, they can easily misinterpret the *force* of this utterance as ambiguous between "Were you present when the luggage was packed" and "Were you able to pack the luggage without any help". Other, more realistic examples of this sort of pragmalinguistic failure include considering conventionally indirect utterances (e.g. "If you would take a seat.") ambiguous between, for example, an offer and a hypothetical question.

5.4.3 Sociopragmatic failure

Example 1

A (NS of English): I wonder how many trees there are in Poland. [pause]

B (Polish speaker): I cannot imagine who would want to know that.

(Reynolds 1995: 5)

Example 2

Please sit down, Mrs. Green. You are old.

Example 3

A: Your English is very good.

B: No, no. My English is very poor.

Example 4

[Foreign exchange student to teacher:] Excuse me, sir. Would you mind repeating what you have just said?

Sociopragmatic failure occurs when miscalculations are made about *what* to say to *whom* in a particular *context*, i.e. about factors such as differences in social status, power relationships, the weightiness of an imposition and the rights and obligations of speakers and hearers in a given situation. In addition, failure to select the appropriate topic, failure to observe cultural taboos, as well as failures due to different value judgements can also be categorized as subtypes of sociopragmatic failure. You might remember that in the previous chapter we called some of these phenomena “sensitivity areas” in cross-cultural communication: it should come as no surprise that pragmatics and sociolinguists recognize some of the same sources of miscommunication in their respective theoretical frameworks. In the remainder of this section, therefore, I will focus on sociopragmatic issues that have not been discussed yet.

The most difficult type of sociopragmatic failure ESL teachers have to anticipate occurs when the sociopragmatic principles of communicative cooperation and politeness that operate in native English conversations conflict with other speakers’ sociopragmatic principles as well as moral values. Different cultures attribute different significance to the **four maxims** described in section 5.2, so if L1 cultural norms are transferred to L2 contexts, NNSs might infringe maxims from a NS’s perspective (and vice versa) at every turn they take. Example 1 illustrates how a simple attempt at phatic communication can be interpreted as the non-observance of the maxim of relevance.

Example 2 illustrates how different value judgements behind utterances can lead to sociopragmatic failure. Respecting and taking care of the aged is a great virtue in some cultures (e.g. China), so much so that making reference to someone’s old age is not considered rude. Making a blunt statement about a person’s old age, however, sounds extremely impolite to American ears.

Example 3 demonstrates cross-cultural differences in the principles of linguistic politeness. In speaker B’s culture modesty ranks higher than agreement, in the Anglo-Saxon world, however, if there is a conflict between the two, it usually turns out to be the other way around. An appropriate response would thus be “Thank you, you’re too kind” or “I’m doing my best”.

In Example 4 the student fails to determine the size of the imposition as well as differences in relative power and social status. The address form ‘sir’ as well as the elaborate politeness strategy is completely uncalled for in cultures where solidarity is emphasized and status differences are played down even in a classroom setting. For now, I will not go into details about sociopragmatic factors that affect choices of politeness strategies, since this will be the focus of our next chapter.



Test your knowledge of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic norms in the US. Rate the following statements on a scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 10 (strongly disagree). When you are done, go to www.sciencedirect.com and search for

“When in Rome: Evaluations of L2 pragmalinguistic behaviors” by Eli Hinkel (the full text is available only from computers connected to the campus network).

In the U.S., if I miss a class I need to apologize to the teacher.

In the U.S., when someone says: “Let’s have lunch sometime”, they really want to have lunch with you.

In the U.S., if I am offered something to eat or drink, I should first say “no, thank you”.

In the U.S., when someone gives compliments it is appropriate to respond: “Thank you”.

In the U.S., when you need information, it is more appropriate to say “Tell me ...” than “Could you/Would you tell me ...”.

In the U.S., when someone invites you somewhere, but you don’t want to participate, it’s acceptable to say: “I’d like to come, but I can’t”.

5.5 SUMMARY, THE NATURE AND CAUSES OF PRAGMATIC FAILURE, TEACHING IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter we explored ambiguity in human language in general and pragmatic ambiguity in particular. We discussed some pragmatic principles: guidelines that help speakers communicate efficiently and make assumptions about their interlocutor’s communicative intents and communicative strategies. Finally, we looked at how speakers’ contextual assumptions and pragmatic principles can differ and introduced the concept of pragmatic failure. We also distinguished between pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failure and described some of their subtypes.

As was the case with the inappropriate use of discourse markers and contextualization cues, pragmatic failure is not easily recognizable by NSs as a reflection of the NNS’s level of proficiency. As a result, NSs may judge the NNSs as being impolite or uncooperative and attribute the pragmatic failure to the speaker’s personality. Moreover, pragmatic failure is common not only among students with low proficiency in the target language but also among advanced language learners who otherwise have a good command of English grammar and vocabulary. The most common explanation for pragmatic failure is negative transfer i.e. the influence of L1 pragmatic competence on communicative strategies used when speaking the L2. However, most researchers also underline the negative effects of “classroom English” and teaching induced errors.

As a result, the best methods of developing pragmatic competence and preventing pragmatic failure involve providing a naturalistic learning environment, using authentic texts as teaching materials as well as raising students’ metapragmatic awareness of different conversational strategies and pragmatic principles.

5.6 TIPS FOR ANALYSIS

Grice's maxims are useful for analysing and interpreting conversation, and may reveal intentions of which (either as speakers or listeners) we were not previously aware. Follow these simple steps to reveal "hidden agendas":

- identify utterances where more is being communicated than is being said;
- decide if the speaker is being (on the surface) untruthful, irrelevant, ambiguous or appears to provide more / less information than is required;
- try to work out whether or not speakers are being untruthful, irrelevant, etc. *on the surface* only or if they are being uncooperative *behind the surface* as well, in other words, which type of non-observance can you identify: is it blatant, unostentatious, unintentional, metacommunicative, etc.;
- whenever there is an *intentional* non-observance of the maxims of cooperative verbal behaviour, there is a (range of) implicatures the speaker wants the interlocutors / audience to arrive at; try to infer (on the basis of contextual information and background knowledge) what these implicatures are.



5

Describe strategies of raising students' awareness of the different types of pragmatic failure. Which type of cross-cultural pragmatic failure do you think is easier to avoid / bring to the attention of ESL students, pragmalinguistic or sociopragmatic failure? Why?



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Chapter 6

THE ANALYSIS OF POLITENESS

The goals of this chapter are to:

- revisit the concept of indirectness and discuss some of the reasons why speakers might choose to be indirect;
- differentiate between sociolinguistic and pragmatic approaches to politeness;
- describe two analytical frameworks: Leech's Politeness Principle and Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies and their teaching implications.

6.1 INDIRECTNESS AS A PRAGMATIC PHENOMENON



Notice the differences between the two versions of the following texts. What are the advantages / effects of using indirectness in the two examples?

Example 1a

QUESTION: Is it really feasible that a chimpanzee with a word processor and an infinite amount of time will be able to produce the complete works of Shakespeare?

ANSWER: Quite probably. After all, he's already produced the National Curriculum.

Example 1b

The new National Curriculum is proof that the Minister of Education is just a chimpanzee with a word processor and an infinite amount of time.

Example 2a

(A and B are sisters. A is getting ready for a job interview.)

A: Did you get your velvet jacket back from the cleaners?

B: You're not borrowing it.

A: I don't want to borrow it. I just wondered if you'd got it back.

B: You just wondered!

A: Well, I haven't got anything decent to wear!

(Example taken from Thomas: 1995.)

Example 2b

A: Can I borrow your velvet jacket?

B: You're not borrowing it.

A: But I haven't got anything decent to wear!

In the previous chapter I mentioned that pragmatic ambiguity is different from other types of ambiguity in that, on the one hand, it does not necessarily have to be resolved in order for effective communication to take place. On the other hand, pragmatic ambiguity in general and *indirectness* in particular is, for the most part, intentional, calculated and adds additional *force* to the utterance. In the previous chapter we defined implicature as the additional meaning of an utterance that is implied (i.e. expressed *indirectly*) rather than explicitly said, and looked at inferential routes whereby hearers can arrive from explicit to implicit meaning. In the present chapter we will further explore aspects of indirectness, but instead of looking at inferential processes, we will be focusing on the *underlying motivations* for using indirectness as well as on sociopragmatic factors that determine the degree of indirectness which is appropriate in a particular context. We can distinguish five reasons for / advantages of using indirectness:

- 1) Speakers are frequently faced with a '*clash of goals*' (e.g. a doctor may need to make absolutely clear to a patient the gravity of the illness, but s/he is supposed to do it without appearing inhumane or uncaring).
- 2) Speakers know from experience that an indirect approach is more likely to succeed than a direct approach, therefore, they tend to take the former. In the relevant literature, this phenomenon is called *instrumental rationality* (cf. Example 2).
- 3) By using indirectness, speakers can say one thing and imply another, leaving themselves an 'out' in case their offer, request, etc. is rejected. By using indirectness you can "have your cake and eat it too" (cf. Example 2).
- 4) Speakers may use indirectness simply for the fun of it, or in order to appear more *interesting* (cf. Example 1).
- 5) Conveying a message indirectly is, in most contexts, more *polite* than saying it directly.

Of the five underlying motivations number 5 is by far the most frequent explanation of indirectness: in the majority of cases, speakers employ the strategy of “implying rather than saying” for reasons of politeness.

6.2 CONCEPTS OF POLITENESS



Rate the following utterances on a scale from 1 (least polite / most impolite) to 5 (most polite / least impolite).

- 1) Close the window, will you.
- 2) Would you mind closing the window?
- 3) I was wondering if I might respectfully ask you to close the window.
- 4) Close the window, please.
- 5) How about closing the window?

Even the most cursory glance at the literature on politeness reveals a lack of general consensus regarding its definition and conceptualization, and a great number of unconnected, heterogeneous studies. It is not surprising that there is such striking lack of agreement among researchers, considering the complex nature of politeness. This linguistic phenomenon has many facets: it is manifested on many levels – lexical, syntactic, pragmatic, sociocultural and non-verbal and it also displays significant differences across cultures.

Under the heading of politeness, researchers have discussed five separate sets of phenomena (cf. Thomas 1995: 149):

- 1) Politeness as a real-world *goal*;
- 2) Politeness as *deference*;
- 3) Politeness as the choice of appropriate speech *style*;
- 4) Politeness as a *surface level* phenomenon;
- 5) Politeness as an *illocutionary* phenomenon.

Researchers interested in politeness as a real-world goal usually take a normative view of politeness and define it as the social standards of behaviour in any society. However, in the present chapter, we will be taking a pragmatic approach to politeness, and the interpretation of politeness as a genuine desire to be pleasant to others “has no place within pragmatics” (Thomas, 1995: 150), and we will see why in a moment.

Politeness as the expression of deference and as the appropriate choice of speech styles are sociolinguistic concerns. Deference refers to the respect we show to other people because of their higher status, greater age, etc. Deference and the

selection of appropriate style have to do with *obligatory choices*, i.e. choices between variants that are dictated by sociolinguistic norms (cf. Chapter 3).

Politeness as a surface level phenomenon has to do with researchers' attempts to set up "hierarchies of politeness" between individual linguistic forms speakers can use to perform a particular speech act (e.g. your task in the **Focus point** was to rate forms speakers can use to make a *request*). However, as you might have realized, this is a tricky task, since, on the one hand, you can never determine the "politeness value" of an utterance out of context. Utterances 1) and 4), for example, are more polite between friends, while 2) would sound extremely out of place in familiar, informal contexts. On the other hand, there are utterances such as 3), where the choice of an extremely elaborate politeness form has the opposite effect: it might be considered to be sarcastic and *rude* to use it (this is why we should discourage our students from using forms such as "Would you be so kind as to ...").

When politeness is treated as a *pragmatic* phenomenon (this is the approach we will be taking throughout this chapter), it is interpreted as a series of strategies used by speakers to achieve their communicative goals. Thus, instead of moral issues, obligatory choices and decontextualized utterances, pragmatics are interested in how speakers choose to phrase an utterance in a particular context, what the sociopragmatic factors are that *guide* (rather than determine) these choices, and the strategies that are at a speaker's disposal in a given culture as well as across cultures.

6.3 POLITENESS AS OBSERVANCE OF PRINCIPLES AND MAXIMS



What makes the following utterances / exchanges impolite? If you had to give a name to the maxim of politeness that is violated / flouted in each case, what would it be?

Examples

- 1) Peel these potatoes.
- 2) You can lend me your car.
- 3) We must come and have dinner with you.
- 4) A: Her performance was outstanding!
B: Was it?
- 5) Please accept this large gift as a token of my esteem.
- 6) A: It was an interesting exhibition, wasn't it?
B: No, it was an **un**interesting exhibition.
- 7) A: I'm delighted to hear about your cat.
B: What do you mean? He's just died.
A: Precisely.

(Examples taken from Leech: 1983.)

According to one pragmatic view of politeness, to be polite is to behave in accordance with situation-specific principles regarding appropriate linguistic behaviour. Proponents of this approach regard politeness as a component of *pragmatic competence* (Leech 1983). In this view, there are **conversational maxims** of politeness that operate along with the maxims of the Cooperative Principle (cf. previous chapter) and guide speakers in deciding which linguistic form is preferred over another in any particular context. These maxims are the following:

- 1) Tact maxim (in directives, e.g. requests, instructions, etc. and commissives such as promises, offers, etc.): minimise cost to other [maximise benefit to other];
- 2) Generosity maxim (in directives and commissives): minimise benefit to self [maximise cost to self];
- 3) Approbation maxim (in expressives and assertives e.g. statements, evaluations, etc.): minimise dispraise of other [maximise praise of other];
- 4) Modesty maxim (in expressives and assertives): minimise praise of self [maximise dispraise of self];
- 5) Agreement maxim (in assertives): minimise disagreement between self and other [maximise agreement between self and other];
- 6) Sympathy maxim (in assertives): minimise antipathy between self and other [maximise sympathy between self and other].

Notice that each maxim is accompanied by a sub-maxim (between square brackets), which is of less importance. These support the idea that *negative* politeness (avoidance of discord) is more important than *positive* politeness (seeking concord, cf. next section).

In addition, not all of the maxims are equally important. For instance, tact influences what we say more powerfully than does generosity, while approbation is more important than modesty.

Note also that speakers may adhere to more than one maxim of politeness at the same time. Often one maxim is on the forefront of the utterance, with a second maxim being invoked as a supplementary guideline.

Accordingly, Example 1 in the **Focus point** is impolite because the speaker maximizes cost to the hearer without taking the edge (i.e. directive force) out of the utterance.

Examples 2 and 3 sound odd, because by saying them, the speaker does not observe the maxim of generosity and maximizes benefit to himself / herself. “You must come and have dinner with us” has the same *surface form*, but is appropriate, since it maximizes benefit to other rather than self.

In Examples 4 and 5 the speakers flout the maxims of approbation and modesty, respectively, while number 6 is an example for the non-observance of the maxim of agreement. The presence of this guideline in native English con-

versation can be proven by the frequent occurrence of the *token agreement* “Yes, but...”, i.e. situations when, on the surface, the speaker agrees with the previous utterance, while disagreement is *conventionally implied*.

Finally, speaker A in Example 7 maximizes antipathy and thus flouts the maxim of sympathy.



What criticisms do you think Leech's Politeness Principle (PP) has received since its publication? For example, do you think flouting a maxim of the PP works the same way as flouting a maxim of the CP?

What about other types of non-observance, do you think they pertain to the PP?

Finally, what do you think of the number and type of maxims Leech has come up with? Can you add some additional ones that guide polite exchanges?

6.4 POLITENESS AS FACE MANAGEMENT



I. If you saw a cup of pens on your boss's desk, and you wanted to use one, which of the following utterances would you say?

- 1) Ooh, I want to use one of those!
- 2) So, is it O.K. if I use one of those nice pens?
- 3) I'm sorry to bother you but, I just wanted to ask you if I could use one of those pens.
- 4) Hmm, I sure could use a blue pen right now.

II. What is your usual reaction to “Köszönöm” in Hungarian? Do you usually react by saying “Nincs mit” or “Szívesen”?

The second theory of politeness we will be using as a framework of analysis was proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978 and 1987). The central notion their theory is based on is sociologist Ervin Goffmann's concept of *face*, i.e. “the public self-image that every member of society wants to claim for himself” (1978: 66). *Face* is assumed to be universal and of two types: *negative face*, or the desire to have autonomy of action, and *positive face*, or the desire for closeness with others. One's face is fragile and subject to continued threat during social interaction. Speech acts that inherently threaten the hearer's or the speakers face are called *Face Threatening Acts (FTAs)*. Classical FTAs include requests, suggestions, reminders, warnings, promises, as well as expressions of

envy, admiration, hatred, etc. However, many researchers argue that any single utterance can be face threatening, what is more, merely speaking to someone sets up a demand for engaging in conversation. In other words, as soon as we initiate a conversation, we trespass on our interlocutor's personal space. In addition to saying anything, saying nothing is potentially even more face-threatening.

After establishing that conversational participants' faces are constantly under threat, Brown and Levinson move on to ways people can reduce the possibility of damage to each other's as well as to their own faces. Speakers can adopt a range of strategies to mitigate FTAs, or they can choose to perform the speech act with maximum efficiency. The choice of strategy will be made on the basis of sociopragmatic factors such as the speaker's assessment of the size of the FTA, social distance between participants, power relations, etc. (these factors will be discussed in section 6.5). The four (super)strategies Brown and Levinson introduce are:

- 1) The *bald on-record* strategy is the most direct, maximally efficient way of performing an FTA, it does nothing to minimize threats to conversational participants' face (cf. Example 1).
- 2) The *positive politeness* strategy attends to positive face wants, i.e. people's desire to be liked and approved of. Positive politeness sub-strategies are solidarity-oriented, confirm that the relationship between participants is friendly and express group reciprocity (cf. Example 2).
- 3) The *negative politeness* strategy also recognizes the hearer's face, but it attends to negative face wants, i.e. people's desire to be respected and not to be imposed on. Negative politeness sub-strategies are thus status-oriented and express social distance between conversational partners (cf. Example 3).
- 4) *Off-record* strategies (cf. Example 4) include giving hints and being deliberately ambiguous about the communicative intent behind the utterance. Off-record strategies are the most *indirect* ways of performing an FTA, and as a result, they are, according to Brown and Levinson, the most polite ones.

As is clear from the above, according to Brown and Levinson, politeness is conveyed by degrees of deviating from maximally efficient communication. Politeness is thus roughly equated with *indirectness*.

In the following, we will be exploring each of the above super-strategies and describe some examples of the various sub-strategies as well.

6.4.1 Bald-on-record FTAs



Are there any speech situations when you would use the following plain imperatives?

Give me that!
Turn those on!
Put those away!

Whenever speakers want to perform the FTA with *maximum efficiency* more than they want to satisfy the hearer's face, they will choose the bald-on-record strategy. Speakers normally choose this strategy in cases of great urgency or desperation. For instance, if there is a fire in the building people are likely to warn others by simply shouting "Fire, get out!". An elaborate utterance would actually *decrease* the urgency being communicated (cf. "I was wondering if you have noticed the fire. Can I ask you to please step outside.").

Bald-on-record utterances are also appropriate in familiar contexts between friends and family members even when no urgency is implied (e.g. "You do the dishes, it's your turn!" or "Shut up, I'm trying to read.").

The third type of context when bald-on-record strategies might be appropriate is when the speech act being performed is an offer, sympathetic advice, friendly warning, etc., in other words, it is in the hearer's interest that the speech act should be performed and subsequent action should be taken on the hearer's part (cf. e.g. "Have another sandwich", "Your fly's open" or "Turn your headlights on, there's a police car behind us").

Finally, if none of the above conditions apply, performing an FTA without any mitigation can be a signal of the speaker's superior social status, power, age, etc. (e.g. "Bring me more wine. – Yes, milady.").

6.4.2 Strategies of positive politeness



What are the differences between the following pairs of utterances (assuming they are produced in the same contexts) in terms of linguistic features / communicative strategies and their communicative effects?

- 1) Got any spare cash? ~ Have you got any spare cash?
- 2) Help me with this bag here, will you, luv. ~ Help me with this bag here, will you?
- 3) How about lending me this old heap of junk? ~ Can I borrow your new Cadillac?

- 4) I know you can't bear parties, but this one will really be good – do come! ~ Come to the party, it will be fun.
- 5) Mind if I smoke? ~ Do you mind if I smoke?
- 6) OK if I tackle those cookies now? ~ Can I have one of those cookies?
- 7) You'll lend me your lawnmower for the weekend, I hope. ~ Will you lend me your lawnmower for the weekend?

If performing the FTA with maximum efficiency is not an issue and speakers want to mitigate the force of their utterance, they can choose one of three super-strategies: positive politeness, negative politeness and off-record.

Strategies of positive politeness are based on solidarity and emphasize that the hearer's and speaker's wishes and needs are similar. Speakers use positive politeness utterances to imply intimacy and assert common ground – this can happen even between strangers who perceive themselves, for the purpose of the interaction, as somehow similar.

Brown and Levinson (1978: 108–134) distinguish three types of positive-politeness super-strategies which, correspondingly, involve three broad mechanisms.

The first one is “claiming common ground”. It is one of the most obvious ways of expressing positive politeness (and manipulating the hearer into complying with your request), since addressing people's desire to be liked usually involves expressing familiarity, closeness with them. Linguistic features that can be used with a view to claiming common ground include in-group markers such as ‘luv’, ‘pal’, ‘dude’ etc. (cf. Example 2), contraction and ellipsis (e.g. Examples 1 and 5), as well as the use of vernacular forms, dialectal features, slang terms, etc. Joking / backslapping behaviour, making the FTA sound playful is another communicative strategy frequently used in order to put the addressee at ease and to play down social distance between interlocutors (cf. Examples 3 and 6).

The second group of positive politeness strategies is based on conveying that speaker and hearer are cooperators in the relevant activity. Sub-strategies include asserting knowledge and concern for the hearer's wants and interests (cf. Example 4), point of view manipulations where both speaker and hearer are seemingly involved in an activity (e.g. “let's” referring to an activity that will be performed by the hearer only), as well as conveying optimism about the hearer's compliance with the speaker's wants (cf. Example 7).

Offering verbal “gifts” such as compliments, sympathy, understanding, etc. is the third way of addressing the hearer's positive face needs. A classical example is when the boss first compliments the office worker on his / her previous work before giving them another ten new errands to run.

6.4.3 Strategies of negative politeness



Can you identify linguistic features / communicative strategies that make the following utterances sound polite?

- 1) I don't suppose I could possibly ask you for a cup of flour, could I?
- 2) I just dropped by for a minute to ask you if I could borrow your scales.
- 3) I'd be eternally grateful if you would help me with the report.
- 4) It appears to me that there is a mistake here.
- 5) Passengers will please refrain from flushing toilets on the train.
- 6) Perhaps you'd care to help me.
- 7) Excuse me, sir, but would you mind if I close the window?

Just as strategies of positive politeness show behaviour which emphasizes (or imitates) solidarity and minimizes social distance, negative politeness strategies are aimed at maximizing social distance and making reference to (presumed or existing) status differences. In other words, negative politeness is characterized by *respect*, just as positive politeness is associated with *familiarity* and joking behaviour.

Consequently, sub-strategies include giving deference (cf. e.g. 'sir' in 7), minimizing the imposition (cf. the use of 'just' in 2), admitting the speaker's debt (in 3), expressing pessimism about the hearer's compliance with the speaker's wants (cf. 1 and 6). Similarly to positive politeness strategies, point of view manipulations also occur, but this time they take the form of impersonalizing the speaker or hearer (cf. in 4) and stating the FTA as a general rule (in 5).

6.4.4 Off-record strategies



Can you infer the conversational implicature of the following utterances? (Contextualize them if necessary.)

- 1) This soup's a bit bland.
- 2) I need some more nails to finish up this shack.
- 3) My house isn't very far away.
- 4) Are you going to the market tomorrow?
- 5) There's a market tomorrow, I suppose.
- 6) People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.
- 7) A penny saved is a penny earned.
- 8) Well, if one leaves one's tea on the wobbly table ...

In cases when speakers do not want to commit themselves to the FTA, but at the same time want to communicate their wishes, requests, opinions, etc., they might choose off-record strategies of performing various speech acts. If a speech act is performed off record it is performed in such a way that it is not possible to attribute only one clear communicative intention to it. In other words, by using off-record strategies, speakers leave themselves an 'out': their utterances have a number of possible interpretations (all of them defensible), and it is the hearer's responsibility to choose one.

Off-record strategies include giving hints (examples 1 and 2), giving association clues that are even more indirect than hints (examples 3 through 5), or making general or vague statements (examples 6 and 7) as well as incomplete truisms (example 8).



Study the complete list of Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies, super- and sub-strategies below. When you feel you have learnt the major points, try to identify which strategy (bald-on-record, positive / negative politeness or off-record) and which super-strategy (claim common ground, convey that S and H are cooperators, etc.) is being used in the utterances that follow (some of them might be familiar from the **Focus points**).

Positive politeness

Super-strategy I. Claim common ground

Strategy 1: Notice, attend to H (his interests, wants, needs, goods)

Strategy 2: Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H)

Strategy 3: Intensify interest in H

Strategy 4: Use in-group identity markers, address forms, use of in-group language or dialect, use of jargon or slang, contraction and ellipsis

Strategy 5: Seek agreement (Safe topics, Repetition)

Strategy 6: Avoid disagreement (Token agreement, Pseudo-agreement, White lies, Hedging opinions)

Strategy 7: Presuppose/raise/assert common ground (gossip, point-of-view switches)

Strategy 8: Joke

Super-strategy II. Convey that S and H are cooperators

Strategy 9: Assert or presuppose S's knowledge of and concern for H's wants

Strategy 10: Offer, promise

Strategy 11: Be optimistic

Strategy 12: Include both S and H in the activity

Strategy 13: Give (or ask for) reasons

Strategy 14: Assume or assert reciprocity

Super-strategy III. Fulfil H's want for some X

Strategy 15: Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation)

Negative politeness

Super-strategy I. Be direct

Strategy 1: Be conventionally indirect

Super-strategy II. Don't presume/assume

Strategy 2: Question, hedge

(Hedges on illocutionary force, Hedges encoded in particles, Adverbial-clause hedges, Hedges pertaining to Grice's Maxims, Hedges addressed to politeness strategies, Prosodic and kinesic hedges)

Super-strategy III. Don't coerce H

Strategy 3: Be pessimistic

Strategy 4: Minimize the imposition

Strategy 5: Give deference

Super-strategy IV. Communicate S's want to not impinge on H

Strategy 6: Apologize (Admit the impingement, Indicate reluctance, Give overwhelming reasons, Beg forgiveness)

Strategy 7: Impersonalize S and H

Strategy 8: State the FTA as a general rule

Strategy 9: Nominalize

Super-strategy V. Redress other wants of H

Strategy 10: Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting H

Off record

Super-strategy I. Invite conversational implicatures

Strategy 1: Give hints

Strategy 2: Give association clues

Strategy 3: Presuppose

Strategy 4: Understate

Strategy 5: Overstate

Strategy 6: Use tautologies

Strategy 7: Use contradictions

Strategy 8: Be ironic

Strategy 9: Use metaphors

Strategy 10: Use rhetorical questions

Super-strategy II. Manipulate the maxim of manner

Strategy 11: Be ambiguous

Strategy 12: Be vague

Strategy 13: Over-generalize

Strategy 14: Displace H

Strategy 15: Be incomplete, use ellipsis

- 1) Can you please pass the salt?
- 2) Don't you think it's marvellous!?
- 3) I don't suppose I could possibly ask you for a cup of flour, could I?
- 4) Don't you want some dinner now?
- 5) Got any spare cash?
- 6) I hope this isn't going to bother you too much.
- 7) Help me with this bag here, will you luv / son / pal?
- 8) Here mate, I was keeping that seat for a friend of mine ...
- 9) How about a drink?
- 10) How about lending me this old heap of junk? (H's new Cadillac)
- 11) I could easily do it for you.
- 12) I **just** dropped by for a minute to ask you if...
- 13) I know you can't bear parties, but this one will really be good – do come! (request/offer)
- 14) I need some more nails to finish up this shack. (implicature: Buy me some when you go to town)
- 15) I normally wouldn't ask you this, but...
- 16) I'd be eternally grateful if you would ...
- 17) I'll never be able to repay you if you ...
- 18) I'm terribly embarrassed to have to admit...
- 19) Isn't it a beautiful day!
- 20) It appears to me that...
- 21) It is regretted that...
- 22) It wouldn't be any trouble; I have to go right by there anyway.
- 23) It's cold in here. (implicature: Shut the window)
- 24) I've come to borrow a cup of flour
- 25) I **just** want to ask you if I can borrow a tiny bit of paper.
- 26) Let's get on with dinner, eh? (i.e. you)
- 27) Let's have a cookie, then. (i.e. me)
- 28) Look, I've probably come to the wrong person, but...
- 29) Mind if I smoke?
- 30) OK if I tackle those cookies now?
- 31) Passengers will please refrain from flushing toilets on the train.
- 32) Perhaps you'd care to help me.
- 33) This soup's a bit bland. (i.e. Pass the salt)
- 34) Why don't I help you with that suitcase.
- 35) Wouldn't you like a drink?
- 36) You could perhaps pass the salt.
- 37) You don't have any manila envelopes, do you by any chance?
- 38) You really sort of botched it, didn't you?
- 39) You'll lend me your lawnmower for the weekend, I hope.



6A

Provide additional naturally-occurring examples for 10 of the sub-strategies from televised interviews, movies, etc. Collect 2–3 examples for each sub-strategy of your choice.

6.5 SOCIOPRAGMATIC FACTORS INFLUENCING LINGUISTIC CHOICES



In addition to social distance and size of the imposition, what factors influence choices of indirectness in the following exchanges?

Example 1

[mother to son:] Would you mind helping me with these DVD racks?

[same mother to son on a different occasion:] Let that turkey roast for a while longer.

Example 2

Mike Atherton, captain of the English cricket team, was given out LBW (leg before wicket) on the first ball. He was judged to have ‘shown dissent’ because a television close-up showed him shaking his head as he walked back to the pavilion. He was fined £1,250.

Yesterday’s fine appears to refer less to the sin than the need for Atherton to set an example ... It is the duty of the captain of England to set a good example. (Thomas 1995: 128)

Example 3

[boss to mechanic:] Get those brake pads in by 5 o’clock. That car’s needed first thing in the morning.

[boss to mechanic on a different occasion:] Could you stay a bit later tonight, do you think, and finish this job?

[boss to mechanic on a different occasion:] That job’s taking longer than we expected. I don’t know what we’ll do if it isn’t ready for tomorrow. (Holmes 1992: 293)

As was implicit in the discussion of bald-on-record strategies (cf. section 6.4.1), according to Brown and Levinson the *weightiness* of an FTA can be calculated along the lines of three sociopragmatic parameters: the relative power (P) of the hearer over the speaker, the social distance (D) between speaker and hearer, and the ranking of the imposition (R) involved in doing the FTA. In Brown and Levinson’s model the weightiness of an FTA determines the *degree*

of indirectness the speaker is likely to use, thus, these parameters also predict the degree of politeness that is appropriate in a given context.

However, Brown and Levinson do not specify what they mean by power, neither do they account for the more dynamic parameters of *rights and obligations*, which, as subsequent research proved, might override (P), (D) and (R) in certain situations. Therefore, in this section we will take a closer look at types of power relations, and will also illustrate why rights and obligations need to be included in the list of sociopragmatic factors that affect choices of politeness strategies.

Thomas (1995) distinguishes five types of power when discussing speakers' choices about how indirect they should be:

- 1) reward power: one person can influence another person's career, studies, life choices, etc. in a positive way (e.g. by promoting them);
- 2) coercive power: one person can influence another person's career, studies, life choices, etc. in a negative way (e.g. by punishing them);
- 3) legitimate power: one person has the right to prescribe or request certain things by virtue of role, age or status;
- 4) referent power: one person has power over another because the other admires him/her and wants to be like him/her in some respect;
- 5) expert power: one person has some special knowledge or expertise which the other person needs.

While the first three are relatively obvious, transparent power relations in people's lives, referent power and expert power might need some explanation. Expert power is the most dynamic and changeable power relationship between two individuals: the role of expert power in everyday situations is illustrated by Example 1, where the mother uses conventional indirectness when asking her son to help her with a task *he* is an expert in, while she uses a plain imperative when giving advice related to her own area of expertise.

Example 2 is an illustration of laypeople's awareness of *referent power*: it is well known that if people (especially young people) look up to someone for any number of reasons, they tend to imitate him/her or consider him/her their role model. Naturally, when they meet their role models face-to-face, they are also likely to use more deferential forms, negative politeness as well as off-record strategies. When discussing Example 2, Thomas remarks ironically that she hopes "there is no outbreak of head-shaking among the youth of England" in the wake of the captain's behaviour.

Finally, Example 3 demonstrates the way relative rights and obligations can overrule stable status and power differences between conversational partners. In the first case the boss gives his employee a routine task and produces a plain imperative. However, on different occasions, when he is expecting the me-

chanic to do something out of the ordinary, something the employee is not *obliged* to do, the boss is more likely to use negative politeness strategies, such as conventional indirectness or even hints, i.e. off-record politeness strategies in order to convey his wishes.

6.6 SUMMARY, TEACHING IMPLICATIONS

Research performed with regard to the treatment of politeness issues in ESL textbooks has had two very unfortunate findings:

- 1) most textbooks provide strategies for performing FTAs (e.g. offers, suggestions, requests, etc.) as a mere list of phrases along a directness/politeness continuum with which to express a particular speech act;
- 2) teachers' books consist of plain answers to activities provided in the textbook and there are neither extra activities nor recommendations for teaching politeness issues (cf. e.g. Soler and Jorda: 2008).

In other words, contextual information or *metapragmatic* discussion is missing in most of the activities, speech acts are presented either in isolation or without appropriate contextual information, which is hardly conducive to developing learners' pragmatic competence.

Ideally, however, learners need to be taught when it is appropriate to use a particular form depending on contextual variables i.e. the sociopragmatic factors that guide speakers in their choices of politeness strategies.

6.7 TIPS FOR ANALYSIS

Hopefully, you have carefully considered the examples in the **Focus points / Quiz sections** and have had enough practice by now to be able to apply Leech's and Brown and Levinson's analytical frameworks to your own text analyses. You might also have noticed that reality is a lot more complex than any framework could predict: there are overlaps between strategies, there is a fine line between, for example, giving hints and giving association clues, what is more, a single speech act can attend to both the hearer's and the speaker's face as well as involve strategies of both negative and positive politeness. As a result, I have two final pieces of advice:

- first of all, do not be intimidated by the complexity of politeness issues in naturally-occurring data; remember, there is no single right answer when it comes to identifying speakers' strategies of politeness / indirectness;

- secondly, do not be afraid to criticize the two frameworks in light of your own findings!



6B

Use ESL textbooks to collect 15 examples for the various politeness strategies / sub-strategies described in Brown and Levinson's model. Describe / criticize the examples in terms of how they are contextualized and whether or not students are informed about the sociopragmatic factors that influence the choice of each strategy.



If you have decided to submit react-in-email 6B, compare notes with other participants in the class and discuss your findings.



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Chapter 7

CONVERSATION ANALYSIS (CA)



The goals of this chapter are to:

- introduce the ethnomethodological approach to conversation as a framework of analysis;
- describe turn-taking mechanisms and devices speakers use to achieve transitions, hold the floor, yield the floor, handle overlaps and silences, etc.;
- set up criteria that characterize naturally-occurring conversations and set them apart from other types of discourse;
- describe conversational sequences such as adjacency pairs, insertion sequences, pre-sequences, etc.;
- look at stories from the perspective of conversation analysis and introduce a model for performing narrative analyses;
- consider some aspects of the artificiality of ESL classroom transactions.

7.1 THE ETHNOMETHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO CONVERSATION

The framework for the analysis of conversation that we will be using in the present chapter was first proposed by a group of sociologists, known as ethnomethodologists. Their movement arose in reaction to the *quantitative* techniques that were typical of mainstream American sociology in the 1960s. In contrast, it was argued that “the proper object of sociological study is the set of techniques that the members of a society themselves utilize to interpret and act within their own social worlds” (Levinson 1983: 295), hence the use of the term ethnomethodology, the study of “ethnic” (i.e. participants’ own) methods of production and interpretation of social interaction.

Initially, ethnomethodologists focused on describing the organizational structure of mundane, everyday conversation, which may be defined as the kind of casual, social talk that routinely occurs between friends and acquaintances,

either face-to-face or on the telephone. More specifically, researchers described this organizational structure in terms of sequences, turn-taking and repair practices. Later, ethnomethodologists developed an interest in analysing the structure of talk used to construct institutional contexts (e.g. news discourse, medical and courtroom contexts) and classroom contexts.

CA researchers using this approach are suspicious of premature theorizing: their analyses are *data-driven*, and, as a result, their categories of analysis are those that participants themselves can be shown to utilize in making sense of interaction. CA thus differs from other approaches to discourse analysis in its methodology. Whereas discourse analysis, for the most part, takes the concepts and terms of linguistics and then examines their role in real data, conversation analysis takes real data and then examines the language and demonstrates that conversation is systematically structured.

CA is, therefore, a “bottom-up” approach: it starts with the conversation itself, and draws conclusions about structure on the basis of the data. In addition, CA looks at conversation as a linear, ongoing event that gradually unfolds as the negotiation of cooperation between speakers proceeds, thus viewing conversation as a *process* (dimension by scope and focus, cf. section 1.2). In addition, since ethnomethodologists are primarily interested in the sequential organization of talk, their approach is basically formalist-structuralist (dimension by theory).

The data for analysis consists of tape-recordings and transcripts of *naturally-occurring conversation*. Consequently, heavy reliance is placed on transcriptions and on issues as to how broad or narrow such transcriptions should be, what notational systems should be used, and to what extent the exercise of transcription itself determines theoretical decisions.

For the most part, ethnomethodologists take *context in a narrow sense*: issues such as power and status differences between participants, formality of context, speaker’s use of different sociolects, etc. are not subjects of interest. For CA analysts, text *is* context; they focus on the sequential progression of interaction, and the way that each utterance is shaped by the previous text and shapes the following text. CA sees context as something created in talk, rather than talk as something created by the context. Although some background knowledge context is relevant to text, it is only in as much as it can be seen and understood in text.

The main goal of CA is to prove that (contrary to “official” i.e. Chomskyan linguistics) everyday conversation is far from being irregular or unpredictable. Consequently, our focus of interest in the present chapter will be the exploration of structural patterns underlying ordinary talk. In order to find such patterns we need to, first of all, ferret out the conversational mechanisms that operate behind the seemingly random distribution of turns.

7.2 A “SIMPLEST SYSTEMATICS” OF TURN-TAKING



In their seminal paper titled “A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn-Taking for Conversation” (1974), founders of the ethnomethodological approach to conversation analysis (Harvey Sacks, Emanuel A. Schegloff and Gail Jefferson) make up a list of “grossly apparent facts” one can observe about any naturally-occurring conversation. Before you read the rest of this section, I encourage you to come up with your own list of mundane observations with respect to the following aspects of ordinary, everyday talk:

- turn-taking / speaker change,
- overlaps / repair mechanisms for accidental overlaps,
- transition between conversational turns,
- turn order / allocation of turns,
- length of conversation / speaker turns.

What are the questions that these simple observations pose for a researcher undertaking the scientific study of everyday conversations?



Observations about conversation	Questions posed for the discourse analyst
Speaker-change recurs, or at least occurs.	How do speakers know, and how do they indicate to others, when a new speaker can take the floor? What happens when speaker-change does not occur where people expect it to?
Mostly one party talks at a time.	What happens when more than one person is talking at once? What can such “overlaps” mean to people and accomplish for them?
Overlaps are frequent but brief.	What causes overlaps to be brief, in general? Who stops talking when an overlap occurs?
Transitions are characterized by slight or no gap and slight or no overlap between turns.	How do speakers manage to cooperate to produce smooth transitions? How do they know when a transition is imminent?

Turn order and size are not fixed and they vary.	How do speakers select who will speak next? How do speakers know when a turn has gone on long enough? What do they do when they want to take an unusually long turn (for example, to tell a story)?
Length of conversation is not specified in advance.	How do conversations start and end? What are the “pre-closing” signals, for example, that speakers are ending a conversation?
What parties say is not specified in advance.	How do speakers introduce new topics? How do they move from topic to topic?
Relative distribution of turns is not specified in advance. Turn-allocation techniques are obviously used.	What happens if one speaker speaks more than the other(s)? How do participants know what is the right distribution of turns?
Repair mechanisms exist for dealing with turn-taking errors and violations; e.g., if two parties find themselves talking at the same time, one of them will stop prematurely, thus repairing the trouble.	What are these repair mechanisms?

There are many metaphors used to describe the way people engage in conversations. Some researchers compare conversation to a dance, where the (conversational) partners coordinate their movements smoothly. Others use the metaphor of ‘traffic rules’ (cf. Mey 1993: 216), where the main point of conversational structure is to keep the *flow* of conversation going, to avoid conversational *accidents* and *traffic jams*, in which the participants feel they are stranded in futile verbal exercise. Also, the techniques of good conversation management include some form of ‘road assistance’, by which a conversation that has halted, or has trouble maintaining the proper speed, can be helped along.

However, the most appropriate comparison is not based on dancing (there is no music) nor on traffic flow (since we do not always have “traffic signs”), but on an analogy with the workings of a *market economy* (cf. Yule: 1996).

In this market, there is a commodity called the *floor* which can be defined as an opportunity to speak. Having control of this scarce commodity at any time is called a (conversational) turn. In most situations control is not fixed in advance, thus anyone can attempt to get control. This is called *turn-taking*. Because it is a form of social action, turn-taking operates in accordance with a *local management system* (LMS) i.e. a set of conventions for getting turns, keeping them, or giving them away. This system is needed the most at points in the conversation where there is a possible speaker change i.e. at points called *Transition Relevance Places*, or *TRPs*. What constitutes a TRP varies with the local

management systems and, therefore, will differ across social groups and speech communities. We saw in section 4.4.1 that people who come from different speech communities might have different involvement styles and, as a result, might have difficulty maintaining a smooth conversation. Now we can be more technical and explain that the reason conversation is not smooth between people with high-involvement styles and speakers who use high-considerateness style is that their respective local management systems predict different TRPs. In other words, what constitutes a possible point of speaker change for speakers who use high-involvement style most probably will not be noted as a TRP by speakers with high-considerateness style. In addition, conventions for signalling that the current speaker wants to keep / yield the floor might also differ, resulting in further misunderstandings / glitches in conversations. Thus, the observations made in the **Focus point** (mostly one party talks at a time, overlaps are frequent but brief, transitions are smooth) apply to ideal conversations where turn-taking comes naturally and effortlessly. Consider a counterexample:

MR. STRAIT: What's your major Dave?
 DAVE: English—well I haven't really decided yet.
 (3 seconds)
 MR. STRAIT: So—you want to be a teacher?
 DAVE: No—not really—well not if I can help it.
 (2.5 seconds)
 MR. STRAIT: Wha— //Where do you— go ahead
 DAVE: — I mean it's a—oh sorry //I em—
 (Example taken from Yule: 1996.)

There are situations when two people try to communicate and realize that there is no flow to the conversation i.e. the transitions between speaker turns are not smooth. Naturally, this can be due to non-linguistic factors such as absence of familiarity or a sense of distance between participants. On the other hand, differences in local management systems can also cause glitches in conversation, and, as a result, reinforce existing stereotypes about the other person as well as create new ones. The example above contains many instances of shorter hesitations (marked by dashes) as well as longer silences (marked by their length in brackets). However, there is a fine line between a hesitation and an instance of *attributable silence*, i.e. silence that cues the listener that the current speaker has not only reached a TRP but is ready to yield the floor. A glitch occurs because Mr. Strait thinks Dave has finished his turn and has nothing more to contribute. As a result, the final two lines contain overlaps, marked by a double slash (//) at the beginning of the overlapping talk. The first overlap occurs as both speakers attempt to initiate talk. In accordance with the *local management systems* of both participants, if there is an overlap, one

speaker has to stop to allow the other to have the floor. However, for two speakers who are having difficulty getting into a shared conversational rhythm, even if they share some aspects of their LMSs, the stop-start-overlap-stop pattern may be repeated, as is the case in this example.

In order to avoid situations of the above kind, i.e. speakers inadvertently losing the floor, conversationalists can use various *floor-holding* devices, that is, devices that signal to interlocutors that the current speaker is not ready to yield the turn yet.

TRPs usually occur at the end of syntactic units, thus, the simplest strategy is to employ *utterance incompleters*, items such as ‘but’, ‘and’, ‘however’, whose importance in conversation is that they turn a potentially complete sentence into an incomplete one. Speakers can also protect their turns by filling pauses at critical points with hesitation markers such as ‘um’ or ‘uh’. Another strategy is to use rising intonation when approaching TRPs or to create an unnatural break, for example, in the middle of a sentence that serves as an opportunity for the speaker to take a breath and then continue full speed across the next TRP.

Yet another type of floor-holding device is to indicate that there is a larger structure to one’s turn by beginning with formulaic expressions of the type shown below:

There are three points I’d like to make—first...

There’s more than one way to do this—one example would be ...

Didn’t you know about Melvin?—oh it was last October ...

Did you hear about Cindy’s new car?—she got it in ... (Yule 1996: 75)

The first two expressions are associated with discussions of facts or opinions whereas the last two signal that the current speaker is about to tell a story (more on stories in section 7.4). In all four cases, formulaic, routinized expressions are used to get the regular exchange of turn process *suspended* and allow one speaker to have an extended turn.

Another significant component of local management systems in general and turn-taking mechanisms in particular is the use of *backchannel signals*, sometimes simply referred to as *backchannels* or *feedback*. The function of these signals is to indicate to conversational partners that they are being listened to. Consider the following exchanges:

Caller: If you use your long distance service a lot then you’ll

Mary: uh-uh

Caller: be interested in the discount I’m talking about because

Mary: yeah

Caller: it can only save you money to switch to a cheaper service

Mary: mmm

These types of signals ('uh-uh', 'yeah', 'mmm') reassure the current speaker that the message is being received. Their default interpretation is that the listener is following, and *not objecting to*, what the speaker is saying. Given this expectation, the *absence* of backchannels is typically interpreted as significant, i.e. as a sign that the hearer does not agree with or objects to what is being said.

During telephone conversations, the absence of backchannels may prompt the speaker to ask if the listener is still there. During face-to-face interaction, the absence of backchannels may be interpreted as a way of withholding agreement, leading to an inference of disagreement.

As the above discussion of floor-holding devices and backchannel signals shows, both the presence and the absence of a particular signal is meaningful in local management systems. An important teaching implication of this section is that teachers must raise ESL students' metacommunicative awareness of conversational mechanisms, possible differences between LMSs as well as conversational strategies and linguistic (and paralinguistic) devices that enable or facilitate the smooth flow of conversations. One way of encouraging students to use such devices is by providing them with illustrations of miscommunication and negative attitudes caused by the absence of these signals.

7.3 OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE STRUCTURE OF CONVERSATIONS

7.3.1 The relationship between text and context in CA; criteria for a transaction to count as a natural conversation



In some cases we can identify the context not only from the content of an interaction but from its structure. What possible contexts / genres can you associate with the following structures?

Example 1

Speaker A: Wh-question

Speaker B: Yes / No question

Speaker A: Affirmative / Negative response

To make this task easier, consider the following transaction (the numbers indicate the length of pauses):

A: Where else were they taking it before they started in Western Australia? (2.0)

Mmmm? (0.5)

B: Melbourne? (0.5)

A: No.

Example 2

Speaker A: Yes / No question.

Speaker B: Qualified affirmative / negative response.

Speaker A: Yes / No question.

Speaker B: Qualified affirmative / negative response.

Speaker A: Yes / No question.

Speaker B: Qualified affirmative / negative response.

etc.

To make this task easier, consider the following transaction:

A: You have had sexual intercourse on a previous occasion, haven't you?

B: Yes.

A: On many previous occasions?

B: Not many.

A: Several?

B: Yes.

A: With several men?

B: No.

A: Just one?

B: Two.

A: Two. And you are seventeen and a half?

B: Yes.

As I mentioned in section 7.1, the ethnomethodological approach to conversation analysis takes a data-driven, i.e. "bottom-up" approach: it starts with the conversation itself, and draws conclusions about structure on the basis of the data.

We also saw that in CA text is context; our focus in this chapter is on the sequential progression of interaction, and the way that each utterance is shaped by the previous text and shapes the following text. According to our approach, context is created by the progression of talk, rather than the other way around. As the examples in the **Focus point** illustrate, there are transactions where there is a pre-determined sequence of turns, and, as a result, a predictable structural pattern. In fact, one way to prove that texts in general and structures in particular *create* context is by considering the effect of transferring rigid structural patterns into transactions where they sound out of place:

A: Have you been drinking again?

B: No.

A: Not one glass?

B: Only one.

- A: A big one or a small one?
 B: Just a small one.
 A: A small one, and it's not six o'clock yet?
 B: Are you interrogating me again?

Or:

- A: Where was gunpowder invented?
 B: In China?
 A: Which century?
 B: 11th?
 A: This is a history class, not a quiz show.

However, everyday conversations are not usually characterized by such rigid sequences of turns, neither are turns usually *pre-allocated* in advance. In fact, some of the criteria that define everyday conversations make reference to the very factors that account for pre-allocation of turns and pre-determined transaction structures. Consider Cook's (1989) criteria for a transaction to count as a normal, everyday conversation:

- It is mutually constructed and negotiated between speakers.
- It is informal and unplanned.
- It is not primarily necessitated by a practical task.
- Any unequal power of participants is partially suspended.
- The number of the participants is small.
- Turns are quite short.
- Talk is primarily for the participants not for an outside audience.



Classroom transactions fail as natural conversations on several counts (they are usually task-oriented, there is unequal power distribution between teachers and students, etc.). Is there anything you can do in ESL classrooms to make transactions / communicative tasks more similar to natural conversations? Consider the criteria above and discuss your ideas with the other participants in the class.

7.3.2 Adjacency pairs, preference organization



Provide an appropriate (verbal) response to the following utterances. Can you come up with further examples of utterances that are usually followed by an automatic sequence produced by the next speaker?

What's up?
 How's it goin'?'
 How are things?
 How ya doin'?'
 Could you help me with this?
 Would you like to go for a walk?



Nothin' much.
 Jus' hangin' in there.
 The usual.
 Can't complain.
 Sure.
 That'd be great.

Since conversations are mostly unplanned, mutually constructed and negotiated by speakers and are not characterized by a pre-determined succession of turns as was exemplified in the previous section, the question arises: what *are* the structural patterns we can observe in spontaneous transactions?

Conversation analysts have observed that some turns are more closely related than others and have isolated sequences of turns called *adjacency pairs* which have the following features:

- they are two utterances long;
- the utterances are produced successively by different speakers;
- the utterances are ordered: the first belongs to the class of *first pair parts*, the second to the class of *second pair parts*;
- the utterances are related, not any second pair part can follow any first pair part, but only an appropriate one;
- the first pair part often selects next speaker and always selects next action (cf. Coulthard 1977: 69).

Adjacency pairs can serve as opening or closing sequences, they include pairs such as question-answer, greeting-greeting, offer-acceptance, request-compliance, etc.

Adjacency pairs play an important role in the turn-taking system: first pair parts set up a transition relevance and thus create an expectation that speaker change will occur. Second pair parts, on the other hand, partly due to their routinized, formulaic nature, enable the next speaker to avoid gap as well as

overlap. The following examples illustrate that the absence of a second pair part is not easily tolerated: in most cases its occurrence remains relevant until it is actually produced:

Example 1 (the numbers indicate the length of pauses)

A: Is there something bothering you or not? (1.0) Yes or no? (1.5) Eh?
B: No.

Example 2

CHILD: Have to cut these Mummy (1.3) Won't we Mummy? (1.5) Won't we?
MOTHER: Yes.

First pair parts show a great degree of variation with respect to the options they take as second pair parts, but even in cases when there is great latitude in the selection of second pair parts, there are always ones that are *preferred* and ones that are *dispreferred*. The table below shows some first pair parts and their preferred / dispreferred seconds:

First pair part	Second pair part	
	Preferred	Dispreferred
Assessment	agree	disagree
Invitation	accept	refuse
Offer	accept	decline
Proposal	agree	disagree
Request	comply	refuse to comply

As we saw in Examples 1 and 2 above, silence, i.e. the absence of a second pair part also constitutes a dispreferred second to any of the speech acts listed in the table. Silence / non-response is interpreted as a substitute for a dispreferred second, i.e. it communicates that the next speaker cannot or does not want to produce a preferred second pair part (unless there are indications that s/he is not paying attention to what the first speaker is saying).

Silence as a response is an extreme case; by remaining silent, interlocutors risk making the impression that they do not participate in the conversational structure. However, there are other, more polite ways of producing unexpected responses. Generally speaking, when participants have to produce second pair parts that are dispreferred, they indicate that they are doing something very *marked*. Consider the following exchange (adopted from Yule 1996: 80):

CINDY: So chiropodists do hands I guess.
JULIE: Em—well—out there—they they mostly work on people's feet.

In this example, the first speaker has made a statement that the second speaker disagrees with, and in response to which she is unable to produce a *preferred second pair part*. A *dispreferred second part* is marked with initial hesitations that convey that it is difficult to perform the action that is to follow. There is a delay ('em', plus pause) in getting started and the actual statement which indicates disagreement only comes after the discourse marker "well", an appeal to the views of others ('out there'), and a stumbling repetition ('they they'). Even the statement contains a *hedge* ('mostly') which makes the information less challenging to the claim in the first part. The overall effect is that this speaker is presenting herself as having difficulty and is unwilling to say what is being stated.

Table 3 below summarizes some of the strategies associated with producing a dispreferred second pair part in English.

Strategies	Examples
a) delay/hesitate	pause; er; em; ah
b) DMs as "prefaces"	well; oh
c) express doubt	I'm not sure; I don't know
d) token Yes	that's great; I'd love to
e) apology	I'm sorry; what a pity
f) mention obligation	I must do X; I'm expected in Y
g) appeal for understanding	you see; you know
h) make it non-personal	everybody else; out there
i) give an account	too much work; no time left
j) use mitigators	really; mostly; sort of; kinda
k) hedge the negative	I guess not; not possible

Table 3. How to produce a dispreferred second pair part in English based on Yule: 1996



Do the strategies listed in Table 3 look familiar to you? Categorize them using Brown and Levinson's analytical framework of politeness strategies. What are dispreferred seconds called in their model?

7.3.3 Embedded sequences



Example 1

AGENT: Do you want the early flight?

CLIENT: What time does it arrive?

AGENT: Nine forty-five.

CLIENT: Yeah – that's great.

Example 2

JEAN: Could you mail this letter for me?

FRED: Does it have a stamp on it?

JEAN: Yeah.

FRED: Okay. (Yule 1996: 78)

Example 3

A: Are you coming tonight?

B: Can I bring a guest?

A: Sure.

B: I'll be there.

While adjacency pairs provide the backbone of ordinary, everyday conversations for the most part, conversational analysts have observed that, as speakers are mutually constructing and negotiating their conversation in real time, new structural patterns emerge. On the one hand, there are variations of the first pair part / second pair part pattern, on the other, there are sequential patterns that complement adjacency pairs.

As for the former, it has been noted that there are first pair parts that do not immediately receive their second parts. For example, it often happens that a question–answer sequence is delayed while another question–answer sequence intervenes. The sequence will then take the form of Q1–Q2–A2–A1, where the adjacency pair in the middle (Q2–A2) is called an *insertion sequence* (cf. Example 1 above). Although there appears to be a question (Q2) in response to a question (Q1), the assumption is that (Q1) remains relevant, and once the second part (A2) of the insertion sequence is provided, the second part (A1) of the initial question (Q1) will follow.

As Examples 2 and 3 illustrate, social actions other than asking for / providing information can also be accomplished within this pattern. In Example 2, there is a pair which consists of making a request / accepting the request (Jean's

first / Fred's last utterance), with an insertion sequence of a question–answer pair (Fred's first / Jean's second utterance) which functions as a condition on the acceptance being provided. Similarly, in Example 3 the *macro-sequence* (i.e. the adjacency pair that has another adjacency pair embedded in it) consists of invitation / acceptance of invitation, while the inserted (also called *embedded*) sequence is once again a question / answer pair.

Just as in the case of dispreferred second pair parts or absent second pair parts, delay in response symbolically marks potential unavailability of the expected (i.e. normally automatic) answer. An important finding of CA is that delay is always interpreted as meaningful and represents distance between what is expected and what is provided. Moreover, in many cases distance between conversational partners' expectations marks distance (in terms of social status, power, solidarity, etc.) between the conversational partners themselves.

7.3.4 Pre-sequences



What alteration to the first pair part / second pair part pattern can you observe in the following transactions?

Example 1

A: Whatcha' doin'?

B: Nothin'

A: Wanna drink?

Example 2

A: How ya' doin'?... say what are you doing?

B: Well we're going out. Why?

A: Oh I was just gonna say come over here and talk this evening but if you're going out you can't very well do that.

Example 3

IMMIGRATION OFFICER: Where do you live?

PASSENGER: Evanston, Illinois.

OFFICER: Are you an American citizen?

PASSENGER: No, I'm a resident.

OFFICER: May I see your Green Card?

PASSENGER: [hands over card]

OFFICER: [examines card, punches something into his computer, hands back card]

Do you have a driver's license?

PASSENGER: Yes.

OFFICER: OK, pass on.

PASSENGER: [somewhat astonished] But don't you want to see it?

OFFICER: No, just pass on.

Example 4

TOURIST: Is there a toilet around here?

ATTENDANT: You want to use?

TOURIST: [somewhat astonished] Sure I do.

ATTENDANT: Go down the steps.

Another type of structural pattern that emerges as speakers mutually construct texts is the use of *pre-sequences*, sequences that complement adjacency pairs. Pre-sequences prepare the ground for a further sequence (usually an adjacency pair) and signal the type of utterance to follow. There are, for example, pre-invitations ("I've got two tickets for tomorrow's rugby match ..."), pre-requests ("Are you busy right now?") and pre-announcements ("You'll never guess what's happened!"). Examples 1 and 2 in the **Focus point** contain pre-sequences that prepare the ground for an invitation, one that is actually proposed (Example 1), and one that is subsequently cancelled in light of the second speaker's utterance (Example 2). As the examples illustrate, the advantage of using pre-sequences is that they can be answered either with a "go-ahead" type of response (as in 1) or a "stop" response as in 2. By providing a "stop" response, speakers can turn down invitations, refuse to comply with requests, etc. in a way that is more convenient and less awkward for all parties concerned than providing dispreferred second pair parts.

There is, however, a general pattern of pre-sequences actually being treated as the sequences they lead to. The utterance "Do you have a pen?", for example, is rarely responded to by "Yes, I do", instead, it is usually followed by the action of handing over a pen to the speaker.

However, this 'short-cut' process of going from pre-request to request can be a source of miscommunication. In Example 3, for example, the officer's utterance "Do you have a driver's license" is wrongly interpreted as a 'short-cut' to asking the passenger to actually produce his driver's license. Conversely, in Example 4, the pre-sequence "Is there a toilet around here" is intended as a short-cut to asking for directions to the toilet but is interpreted as ambiguous between a pre-sequence and a request for information.



7A

Compare the examples in the **Focus point** with one of the examples provided in Chapter 5 repeated here for convenience:

(A and B are sisters. A is getting ready for a job interview.)

A: Did you get your velvet jacket back from the cleaners?

B: You're not borrowing it.

A: I don't want to borrow it. I just wondered if you'd got it back.

B: You just wondered!

A: Well, I haven't got anything decent to wear!

What is the difference between pre-sequences and utterances that convey a conversational implicature? What are the advantages of using pre-sequences / implicatures from the perspective of politeness / saving face?

7.4 STORIES, STORY STRUCTURE



Write a short composition describing a weird dream you have had recently. Write as if you were telling a story to a friend or neighbour. Once you are done, re-read what you have just written and identify structural units in your story.

For conversation analysts a story is any report of an event – it may be only one sentence long, but is usually longer, and therefore presents a problem for the story-teller because other speakers are likely to self-select at the first possible TRP.

Therefore, stories are interesting from the ethnomethodological perspective since whenever someone engages in story-telling, regular turn-taking mechanisms are suspended and the current speaker is granted a stretch of uninterrupted talk.

Stories are also crucial points of interest in ESL methodology since, with the suspension of turn-taking mechanisms, text is no longer mutually constructed by the participants but it becomes the current speaker's responsibility to render an extended turn successfully. This task usually presents difficulties for native speakers, let alone second language learners. Consequently, students need to be aware of the structural elements of a successfully rendered story and need to be provided with ready-made formulas used at each point in English narratives.

The most extensively used model for the conversational analysis of narratives comes from Labov and Waletzky (1967), who identify the following elements of story structure:

Abstract: a summary of the experience / event or its point, usually contains an implicit (sometimes explicit) justification of the story's relevance to the flow of the current conversation.

Orientation: background description (who, where, when, why, how it happened). There can be recurring instances of orientation before each narrative clause, especially in longer stories, but they are optional.

Complicating action: “what happened”, a series of temporally ordered events (often called *narrative clauses*) that have beginning and end points. These structural elements are not interchangeable, their order determines the way the storyline moves forward.

The **result** or **resolution** releases the tension and tells what happened in the end. It is the final narrative clause.

Evaluation: syntactic, prosodic, textual asides / alterations of the narrative norm that highlight important parts of the story and/or help convey why the story is being told (i.e. the point of the story). Evaluative utterances can appear at any point in the story, outside the storyline, they are interchangeable, and are not linear.

Coda: closure that brings the hearers back from the *past* of the narrative to its *present* relevance from the perspective of the interaction in which it was told. It might also contain the moral of the story. Its secondary conversational function is to mark that the current speaker is ready to yield the floor to the next speaker.



In the remaining part of this section you will be provided with a story told by a native speaker of English. The story is broken down into structural units (narrative clauses, evaluations, abstract, etc.) Try to identify what these units are and observe formulaic, routinized linguistic features (the use of tenses as well as vocabulary items!) that native speakers use to

- mark new developments in the narrative,
- signal asides, disruptions in storytelling,
- signal when they get back to the main storyline,
- provide orientations at the beginning of narrative clauses, etc.

When you are done, collect additional linguistic features that are not found in the text but are frequently used in narratives.



ABSTRACT: makes a bid for the conversational floor by summarizing the story	Had a hell of a camping trip one weekend
<i>orientation</i> : sets temporal context	<i>been . . . two or three years ago now</i>
narrative clause: simple past tense	went out into this woods
<i>orientation</i> : sets spatial context	<i>was a million miles from nowhere</i>
narrative clause: cannot be switched with clause 2 ("went out into this woods") without switching the "storyworld" order of events.	and ... we cleared a campspot... campsite ...
<i>orientation</i> : identifies characters	<i>John and I</i>
narrative clauses: Note how the order of the clauses models how the order of the events is to be understood: they set the tents up first, then gathered up rocks, then made a firepit.	and uh . . . set our tents up and gathered up some rocks and made a firepit
evaluation (external) : comment on the narrative	had a good looking camp when we were done
narrative clauses. Note how particular choices of words and structures within any clause can serve as evaluation , highlighting how "story-worthy" the events are.	gathered up a bunch of brush and made a big windbreak
<i>orientation</i> : temporal setting, context of events. Word choice also serves an evaluation function.	<i>by late Friday afternoon. . . we were. . . pretty well settled in</i>
evaluation (external) [Note how this narrator uses intakes of breath, cough, pause to separate the story into its temporal episodes.]	uh . . . like I said had a good looking camp . (breath)
<i>orientation</i> : temporal. But note also how the entire temporal structure of the story (the build-up to Sunday morning) also serves an evaluation function.	<i>the Saturday that followed the Saturday of that weekend</i>
These clauses cannot be interpreted as narrative clauses, because their order does not model "storyworld" temporal order. ("Lounging around camp" does not necessarily happen before "doing a little bit of hunting.") They are <i>orientational</i> (representing the context for the main narrative events), but they simultaneously function as evaluation , building suspense.	<i>we just did a lot of shooting and actually just lounging around camp a lot [laughs] did a little bit of hunting really just — took it good and easy that day</i>

[another episode break]	[cough]
<i>orientation</i>	but <i>it was Sunday morning when we got up</i>
evaluation (external)	that. . . was the high point of the whole camp
narrative clause <i>orientation/evaluation</i> (The use of this detail helps characterize the protagonists as accomplished hunters.)	we ... uh . . . got up that morning and . . . <i>wearing our camouflage...</i>
<i>orientation / evaluation</i>	<i>to ... basically didn't want to be seen by any- body else and preferred to see them before w-them before they saw us</i>
narrative clause in simple present ("his- torical present") tense. Note how "happen to" evaluates the action by representing the main event of the story as almost ac- cidental.	<i>we were fixing coffee over the campfire and</i> I happen to look up out across this field <i>at</i> <i>the edge of the woods about three hundred</i> <i>yards out</i>
<i>orientation: new characters introduced</i>	<i>this. . . six buck deer</i>
evaluation	beautiful. . . just majestic as hell
Narrative clause with <i>orientational</i> detail (temporal).	they stood out there <i>for about a half hour</i>
<i>orientation / evaluation</i>	<i>noses in the wind trying to catch our scent</i>
[another break, from the Sunday episode to the wrap-up of the story]	[breath]
evaluation Note the use of "never" and "really" and compare with what the effect would be if this clause had been "They didn't."	never really did
<i>orientation: re-oriens hearers to the tem- poral setting of the final section of the story; also announces that this is the final part</i>	<i>we finally decided to show them what we were</i>
narrative clauses; laughter and choices of phrasing serve as evaluation	and so we both stood up and [small laugh] ... all you saw was six white tails headed the opposite direction
evaluation	but it was truly a fantastic sight
narrative, <i>orientation</i>	we closed up camp that day
evaluation	and came back to civilization
CODA: formulates the point of the story, its consequences, a "moral"	never really been able to forget that day or that campout as a result of it [long pause] it's th- that's the sort of thing I guess that makes life worth living

(Source: Johnstone 2008: 94ff)

7.5 SUMMARY, TEACHING IMPLICATIONS



What can you observe in terms of the exchange structure of the following (typical) classroom transactions?

Example 1

A: What time is it, Denise?

B: 2:30.

A: Thank you, Denise.

Example 2

A: What time is it, Denise?

B: 2:30.

A: Very good, Denise. (Yo-An Lee 2007: 181)

In this chapter we focused on aspects of language that are relevant to developing students' *interactional competence*, i.e. raising students' awareness of / socializing them to the mechanisms regulating conversations, such as the systematics of turn-taking, turn sequences, preference organization, conversational strategies, modes of storytelling, etc.

As was the case with other types of pragmatic socialization described in previous chapters, much of interactional socialization is *implicit*, i.e. occurring either through the learners' repeated participation in target communicative practices, or through participation and various strategies by which the more competent co-participant (i.e. the teacher) makes the particular aspects of the interaction salient / emphatic to the learner.

An important goal of this chapter was to describe and set up criteria for naturally-occurring conversations and exchange strategies practicing teachers can use to turn ESL classrooms into an environment that is conducive to the acquisition of conversational practices. Hopefully, you have achieved this latter goal in the peer discussion forums.

Finally, the examples in the **Focus point** highlight yet another aspect of the artificiality of ESL classroom transactions that practicing teachers need to be aware of. One of the most familiar patterns of pedagogical discourse is the three-turn sequence, often referred to as IRE (Initiation–Response–Evaluation) or 'triadic dialogue' (cf. e.g. Yo-An Lee 2007: 181). This sequence begins with the teacher's question followed by the student's answer(s) in the second turn. The turn then routinely goes back to the teacher who offers feedback on the correctness or adequacy of the second turn answers.

As Examples 1 and 2 illustrate, in the first two turns a genuine information exchange is achieved while the third turn involves a pedagogical engagement.

However, this exchange structure (which, by the way, is characteristic of *frontal* styles of teaching) socializes students to unnatural conversational practices, and should be minimized and replaced by more interactive types of transactions.

7.6 TIPS FOR ANALYSIS

When applying the framework of CA to the analysis of the text of your choice, you will be, naturally, taking a primarily bottom-up approach. The following is a list of suggestions that might help you analyse naturally-occurring conversations, or, conversely, to decide why and how the piece of discourse you have chosen differs from authentic data:

- consider the “grossly apparent facts” about conversation described in the second section and make observations about your text with reference to these facts;
- consider Cook’s (1989) criteria for a transaction to count as a normal, everyday conversation and see if your text fulfils all the criteria;
- identify linguistic devices (DMs, metacommunicative utterances, etc.) speakers use to achieve transitions, hold the floor, yield the floor, provide feedback, handle silences and overlaps, etc.;
- look for pauses and silences, and decide if they are instances of *attributable silence*, signals of hesitations, disagreement, uncooperative verbal behaviour, etc.;
- look for adjacency pairs, insertion sequences, pre-sequences and model the structure of the conversation in terms of their interrelatedness and the order in which these sequences occur;
- identify strategies speakers use when producing dispreferred second pair parts;
- identify stories and elements of story structure (abstracts, narrative units, evaluative units, coda, etc.).



7B

Analyse the turn-transitions in a longer stretch (at least two pages) of conversation taken from an ELT textbook of your choice. What turn-taking rules apply and where do they apply? Identify utterance incompleters, feedback signals, adjacency pairs, etc. Do you think this conversation is naturally-occurring or is read out / acted out for language teaching purposes? How do you know? What are the telltale signs?



Match the following definitions (on the right) with the concepts they describe (on the left).

adjacency pair	The structurally expected next utterance used in a response is _____.
attributable silence	An active, fast-paced, overlapping way of taking part in conversation.
backchannels/feedback signals	The structurally unexpected next utterance as a response, e.g. an invitation is normally followed by an acceptance, so a refusal is _____
conversational style	The opportunity to speak at some point during a conversation.
dispreferred	Vocal indications of attention, e.g. “uh-huh”, “hmm”, when someone else is talking.
first pair part	A pattern in which one type of utterance will be more typically found in response to another in a conversational sequence, e.g. an acceptance will more typically follow an invitation than a refusal.
floor	A non-interrupting, non-imposing way of taking part in conversation.
insertion sequence	The first utterance in an adjacency pair, e.g. “How are you?”
high considerateness style	The systematic change of speakers during conversation.
high involvement style	The absence of talk when a speaker is given the right to speak in conversation.
local management system (LMS)	More than one speaker talking at the same time in conversation.
overlap	The second or response utterance in an adjacency pair, e.g. “Fine, thanks”.
pre-announcement	A sequence of two utterances by different speakers in conversation. The second is a response to the first, e.g. question–answer.
preference/preference structure	Utterance before a request to check if a request can be made.
preferred	The current right to speak in a conversation.
pre-invitation	A metaphor for describing the conventions for organizing the right to speak in conversation.

pre-request	A two-part sequence that comes between the first and second parts of another sequence in conversation.
second pair part	A possible change of speaker point in an interaction.
Transition Relevance Place (TRP)	Utterance before an announcement to check if an announcement can be made.
turn	Particular way of participating in conversation.
turn-taking	Utterance before an invitation to check if an invitation can be made.



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Chapter 8
CASE STUDY I. – DISCOURSE ANALYSIS
OF DRAMATIZED DIALOGUES



Watch the extracts transcribed below for analysis. Apply as many of the approaches to discourse analysis as you can. Identify / look for:

- discourse markers and their functions,
- linguistic features that characterize non-standard English / serve as contextualization cues,
- examples for the non-observance of the maxims of the CP,
- indirect speech acts and their functions,
- politeness strategies,
- turn-taking mechanisms, floor-holding devices, adjacency pairs, pre-sequences, etc.

When you are done, read the sample analysis provided after the transcripts and compare your ideas with mine.

8.1 THE DATA

Legend:

?	rising intonation followed by noticeable pause
,	continuing intonation
!	animated tone
...	noticeable pause or break in rhythm without falling intonation
<i>italics</i>	emphatic stress
CAPS	very emphatic stress
[	two interlocutors talking at the same time (the place of [indicates the point at which the other comes in)
(Transcription conventions taken from Schiffrin: 1987.)	

Extract 1

SIMON: (1) Mr Udall, have you, have you seen Verdell?

MELVIN: (2) What does he look like?

SIMON: (3) Ah, ... my dog.

(4) You know (laugh) my dog with the little face,

(5) lit..., little adorable face,

(6) don't you, don't you know what my dog looks like?

MELVIN: (7) Oh, I got it, you're talking about your dog.

SIMON: (8) [yeah

MELVIN: (9) I thought it was the name of that coloured man, I've been seeing in the house.

SIMON: (10) Which colour was that?

MELVIN: (11) Ah, like, thick molasses, with a broad nose...

SIMON: (12) [Frank, Frank Frank Sachs, Melvin Udall.

MELVIN: (13) How're you doin'?

SIMON: (14) Frank shows my work Mr Udall.

(15) I think, yeah, I think you know that.

MELVIN: (16) What I know is

(17) as long as you keep your work zipped up around me,

(18) I don't give a rat crap

(19) what or where you shove your show.

(20) Are we done being neighbours for now?

Extract 2

(1) (knock)

MELVIN: (2) Yes (furiously)

SIMON (3) Maybe this can wait.

MELVIN (4) (nod)

SIMON (5) I found,

(6) I found Verdell, Mr Udall.

MELVIN: (7) ... Well, that's a load off.

SIMON: (8) [aha, did you, did you do something to him?

MELVIN: (9) Do you realise that I *work* at home?

SIMON: (10) ... No, I wasn't aware.

MELVIN: (11) Do you like to be interrupted when you're potting around in your little garden?

SIMON: (12) No, no, I actually will turn the ringer off my phone and ...

MELVIN: (13) [well, I work all the time,

(14) so *never*, NEVER interrupt me, OK?

(15) Not if there's a fire,

(16) not even if you hear the sound of a thud from my home

(17) and one week later there's a smell coming from there

- (18) that can only be a decaying human body,
 (19) and you have to hold a hanky to your face,
 (20) because the stench is so thick that you think you're gonna faint.
 (21) Even then, don't come knocking.
 (22) Or if it's election night,
 (23) and you're excited and you wanna celebrate
 (24) because some fudge-packer that you date has been elected
 (25) the first queer president of the United States
 (26) and he's going to have you down the camp,
 (27) and you want someone to share the moment with,
 (28) even then,
 (29) ... don't knock.
 (30) Not on this door.
 (31) Not for any reason.
 (32) ... Do you get me, sweetheart?
 SIMON: (33) ... Yes,
 (34) it's not a ... subtle point that you're making.
 MELVIN: (35) OK, then...(leaves)

Extract 3

- MELVIN: (1) How much more have you got to eat?
 (2) Appetites aren't as big as your noses?
 GIRL: (3) What? (leaves)
 BRIAN: (4) All right. That's it.
 (5) That's it. Forget it.
 CAROL: (6) I'm gonna talk to him.
 (7) I'm gonna talk to him and give him one more chance.
 BRIAN: (8) He's barred for life.
 (9) Barred for life.
 MELVIN:(10) They left.
 CAROL: (11) Yeah, what do you know
 (12) ...Brian says he doesn't care how long you've been coming,
 (13) you ever act like this again, you're barred for life.
 (14) I'm gonna miss the excitement but I'll handle it.
 MELVIN: (15) Three eggs....
 CAROL: (16) You're gonna die soon with that diet,
 (17) you know that.
 MELVIN: (18) We're all gonna die soon,
 (19) I will, you will,
 (20) and it sure sounds like your son will.
 (extremely long silence)

CHAPTER 8

CAROL: (21) If you ever mention my son again,
(22) you'll never be able to eat here again,
(23) do you understand?
(24) Give me some sign you understand or leave now!
(25) Do you understand me, you crazy fuck?
(26) Do you?
MELVIN: (27) Yeah, yeah
(28) (clears his throat) yes, yes.
CAROL: (29) OK, I'll get your order.

Extract 4

MELVIN: (1) How old are you?
CAROL: (2) Ha..
MELVIN: (3) 'cause if I'm gonna guess by your eyes
(4) I'd say you were fifty.
CAROL: (5) If I went by your eyes,
(6) I'd say you were kind,
(7) so,
(8) so much for eyes,
(9) but as long as you bring up age,
(10) how old are you?
MELVIN: (11) I... I..
CAROL: (12) [you brought it up
MELVIN: (13) [in other words
CAROL: (14) [no, I'm curious
MELVIN: (15) [in other words
(16) not that you're ugly
(17) it's not what I'm saying
CAROL: (18) [easy, easy pal,
(19) I can take the compliment,
(20) but my knees start knocking
(21) when you turn on the charm
(22) full blast.
MELVIN: (23) I mean,
(24) what's, what's with the dark...
CAROL: (25) (three sec silence) Dawn patrol.
(26) Major dawn patrol.
(27) My son had a full-blown attack,
(28) and this time for extra fun,
(29) they gave us the wrong antibiotics,
(30) so I get him home... (trying to take his plate away)

MELVIN: (31) [no, no, no, no, no, no...

(32) it's for the dog,

(33) the bacon's for the dog,

(34) last week I was playing the piano for him,

(35) he, he liked it,

(36) so I decided I'm gonna make a little joke.

CAROL: (37) So we're all set here.

MELVIN: (38) Yeah.

Extract 5

MELVIN: (1) Hi,

(2) (shouts) Help!

DR GREEN: (3) If you wanna see me

(4) you will not do this,

(5) you will make an appointment.

MELVIN: (6) Doctor Green,

(7) how can you diagnose someone as an obsessive compulsive disorder

(8) and then act as though I had some choice about barging in.

DR GREEN: (9) There's not going to be a debate,

(10) you must make an appointment

MELVIN: (11) [you said you could help me,

(12) what was that?

(13) A tease?

DR GREEN: (14) I can help you

(15) if you take responsibility to keep regular appointments

MELVIN: (16) [you changed the room around

DR. GREEN: (17) Two years ago.

(18) I also regrew my beard

(19) but you're not interested in changes in me.

MELVIN: (20) [ssssh,

(21) I don't have this mountain of available time,

(22) I have to get to my restaurant on time.

DR. GREEN: (23) [no

MELVIN: (24) Do you know how hard it was for me to come here?

DR. GREEN: (25) ...yes

MELVIN: (26) Good.

DR. GREEN: (27) No, we're not doing this...

MELVIN: (28) I changed just one pattern

(29) as you always said I should.

DR. GREEN: (30) No, nope...

Extract 6

PUBLISHER: (1) Yes, you write more than everybody else,
(2) yes, you make us a lot of money,
(3) but I think it's more appropriate to look at it...

MELVIN: (4) [look, look,
(5) I need this,
(6) just say, "Melvin, I'll try"
(7) OK?
(8) Hm?

PUBLISHER: (9) (sigh) Melvin, I'll try.

MELVIN: (10) Thank you,
(11) that's good.

PUBLISHER: (12) Now,
(13) on a pleasanter note,
(14) my son,
(15) he just got accepted to Brown,
(16) my husband was dying...

MELVIN: (17) [yeah,
(18) good,
(19) nice,
(20) thrilled,
(21) exciting,
(22) you don't have to wait with me.

RECEPTIONIST: (23) I can't resist,
(24) you usually move through here so quickly
(25) and I just have so many questions I wanna ask you.
(26) You have no idea
(27) what your work means to me.

MELVIN: (28) What does it mean to you?

RECEPTIONIST: (29) That somebody out there knows
(30) what it's like to be in here.

MELVIN: (31) Oh, god,
(32) this is like a nightmare.

RECEPTIONIST: (33) Oh, come on,
(34) just a couple of questions,
(35) how hard is that?
(36) How do you write women so well?

MELVIN: (37) I think of a man,
(38) and I take away reason and accountability.

8.2 ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

In what follows, I will be analysing the above six arbitrarily selected extracts from the film “As Good as it Gets” with the aid of some of the concepts used in pragmatics, sociolinguistics and conversational analysis. The film is about a sociopath on the loose, who, although extremely successful in his professional life as a writer of romantic pulp fiction, just does not seem to have acquired the rules of peaceful co-existence with his fellow human beings (the main reason being that he fails to treat them as such). The havoc he wreaks damages everybody around him: neighbour, waitress, shrink, publisher alike, until he himself has to endure the agonies so profusely described in his books. His utterances are prototypical examples of disregarding face wants, violating, flouting, opting out of various maxims of both the cooperative principle as described by Grice and Geoffrey Leech’s Principle of Politeness (cf. Leech 1983). I suggest that you first read the extracts a couple of times, then follow the analysis presented below.

In Extract 1 FTAs include utterances (9), (11), (17), (18). (9), in addition to being an FTA, can be considered a violation of the maxim of relevance, since Melvin apparently does not make his contribution relevant to his interlocutor’s request for information, on the other hand, from the viewpoint of conversational analysis, this is an instance of topic conflict, or rather topic abuse, as Melvin is simply voicing his disapproval of the presence of an African-American individual around the house regardless of the fact that this was not the topic proposed, thereby also turning the preference structure “request for information – giving information” upside down.

Moreover, from a sociolinguistic viewpoint we can observe a stark contrast between Simon’s powerless language (frequent use of hedging devices such as in (6) and (15) and our hero’s powerful use of vocabulary items, loaded with (sometimes obscene) content.

The exchange is closed by an extremely impolite metacommunicative utterance in which Melvin makes his abhorrence to social pleasantries, to the social function of language in general, even more pronounced (20).

In Extract 2 Simon’s indirect / off-record strategy in (6) of asking for an explanation why Melvin has thrown poor Verdel down the garbage shuttle is deliberately misinterpreted for its locutionary force (by now, Simon should know that indirectness and saving face does not work with Mr Udall). When the same indirect speech act becomes a direct one in (8), Melvin simply opts out of the maxim of relevance in the following utterance (9). This extract is especially interesting from the viewpoint of conversational analysis: Melvin manages to hold the floor from (13) through (33) without once being interrupted. The fact

is that regardless of the numerous TRPs (transition relevance places), Simon is not given a chance to make use of a single one of them. One can interpret this as the shortcoming of analysing invented discourse, or, on the other hand, it can be explained by Melvin's use of parallel structures (*not if, not even if, not, not*) and discourse markers such as "so" in (14) or "or" in (22) frequently observed as devices for managing to hold the floor over long turns even in real data (cf. e.g. Cook: 1989). A sociolinguist would also observe the use of a special kind of sexist language in the form of pejorative gay imagery (*fudge-packer, queer, garden, camp, sweetheart*).

In Extract 3 the rudeness of (6) can be explained in terms of Leech's Maxim of Tact (minimize cost to other, maximize benefit to other) and its complimentary Maxim of Generosity (minimize benefit to self, maximize cost to self), both are maxims of the Principle of Politeness (no wonder Melvin violates both).

While (5) is a general off-record statement (Mr Udall does have traces of politeness in him after all), it is immediately followed by a bald-on-record (6) of the kind that violates the above-mentioned maxims.

This extract is also interesting from the viewpoint of the meaning of silences, a major concern of conversational analysis. Melvin's sequence of utterances from (18) through (20), this time flouting the maxim of quantity for a change, are followed by an extremely long silence that marks the fact that he has touched on an extremely sore point with Carol. In pragmatic terms he has also violated the maxim of sympathy (as described in Leech's theory of the PP). (23) is followed by what George Yule calls an "attributable silence" (Yule 1996: 73), this time on Melvin's part, hence the justification of the metalinguistics act in (24).

When Melvin does finally reply in (27) and (28), we can observe a shift in style within a single turn from the more careless "yeah" to the more formal "yes".

Extract 4 begins with a blunt question yet again unaccompanied by any pre-sequences or face saving acts, which is a clear sign of anti-social behaviour by any linguistic standards (although we do teach this very sequence of words right at the outset of elementary English classes). In contrast, the edge of Carol's inserted sequence (10) (a question in reply to a question) is taken out by the pre-sequence (9), which serves as an excuse for her asking the same question. After that Melvin spells out what the implicature of his initial question was in (24). Sequences (25) through (30) provide data for the analysis of story structure. Using Labov and Waletzky's model, we can observe (25) and (26) as the abstract, (27) as the orientation, (28) and (29) as the complicating actions of Carol's story. It is interesting to notice that Melvin interrupts her just as she has switched to the historic present in (30), a point which has been observed in the literature

to be either an evaluative device or a means of focusing, drawing attention to the story and thereby creating tension in the listener (cf. e.g. McCarthy 1991:61). This is yet again an example for how invented data, that is a proficient script-writer's intuitions are underlined by the findings of research on the basis of naturally occurring texts.

We can observe a similar story structure in Melvin's turn as well, but with the optional element of an "abstract" being left out.

In the remaining two extracts we can observe further instances of the above discussed pragmatic, conversational analytic and sociolinguistic phenomena. To avoid repeating myself, let me point out two new aspects of these pieces of discourse instead. (13) in Extract 5 is interesting from a speech act theory viewpoint, as it is a "metaspeech" or "metapragmatic" act,⁷ which is often observed to be uttered by people providing explicit speech act labels for their utterances. Its function and effect can be compared with the following example uttered by President George Bush upon the Iraqi take-over of Kuwait in October, 1990.

Iraq will not be permitted to annex Kuwait.

That's not a threat,

it's not a boast...

That's just the way it's gonna be.

In Extract 6, let me draw attention to acts (18) through (21), which support the claim that the existence of rules (be it sociolinguistic, pragmatic or conversational) is proven by the fact that they can be broken. What these utterances illustrate is that even someone like Melvin, who has a tendency to disregard or break these rules must be fully aware of what a normal exchange should be like, in other words what the cultural schema / routinized formulas are for any type of exchange (see Yule 1996: 87). The sexism of the closing remark (38) should not take us by surprise by now.

Finally, we can observe speakers' use of discourse markers as framing, floor-holding and turn-taking devices, hedges or boosters on the force of the utterance as well as the functions DMs fulfil in narrative structure, rhetorical structure and topical coherence. The table below summarizes the use of the most salient DMs in the six extracts.

⁷ Klaus P. Schneider: Is that a threat? *Forms and functions of metapragmatic terms in English discourse*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26379473?seq=1> (accessed 18 March 2021).

linguistic item used as a DM	location (extract/ line)	possible functions
Ah	1/3	marks hesitation, stalling
Oh	1/7	frames sudden realization
I think	1/15	hedge, illocutionary force mitigator
Well	2/7	boosts the force of an ironical statement
aha	2/8	marks topic change
well	2/13	frames an interruption / self-selection
and	2/17, 19, 23, 26, 27	framing devices: mark new points / developments in Melvin's rhetoric
OK, then	2/35	pre-closing / closing transaction
ha	4/2	interjection / surprise
in other words	4/13, 15	frames self-correction
I mean	4/23	frames self-correction
and	4/28	marks narrative evaluation
so	4/30	marks a new narrative clause in story structure / getting back to the main storyline after an evaluation
look	6/4	turn-taking device, marks an interrup- tion, gets hearer's attention
OK?	6/7	elicits agreement
Now	6/12	frames topic change
Oh	6/33	boosts the force of the utterance

In conclusion, in the course of this short analysis I have been trying to prove how fruitful discourse analysis using invented transactions can be and to what extent it can be in accordance with the findings of more thorough, authentic and reliable, real-life analyses.

I am convinced that stretches of discourse taken from dramatised versions of communicative situations can often lend themselves to linguistic analysis and may provide even better and more readily available examples for some of the sociolinguistic or pragmatic phenomena one is otherwise hard put to find even in naturally-occurring data (let alone EFL textbooks). As a result, second language learners can benefit a great deal from teachers' use of dramatized dialogues in ESL classrooms, which, at the same time, might be a nice change from the artificial dialogues provided in most EFL textbooks. This hypothesis seems to be supported by the findings of empirical research as well: Martínez-Flor (2008), for example, claims that films provide "contextually appropriate input", which is a necessary condition for developing learners' sociopragmatic competence in the target language.



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Chapter 9

CASE STUDY II. – THE REPRESENTATION
AND TRANSLATION OF IRISH ENGLISH STEREOTYPES
IN CONTEMPORARY CINEMATOGRAPHY

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9.1. INTRODUCTION

Scripted conversations are usually written so that they resemble naturally-occurring conversations as much as possible, consequently, a translator's major task is to produce a target text that appears as natural to the target text audience as the source text is to its respective target audience. The present chapter focuses on a specific translation issue: the translation of dialect, or, to use Thomas's (1983) term, *pragmlect*, i.e. the pragmalinguistic features of a given speech community. The discussion also takes up the issue of personality extrapolations regarding the use of discourse markers and will argue that this issue is relevant to intralingual communication, i.e. communication between native speakers of (different varieties of) English.

The aim of the chapter is twofold: firstly, it is to examine cinematographic representations of Irish English (IrE) pragmalinguistic features with special reference to the use of IrE discourse markers in scripted (stylized) dialogues; the second aim is to contrast the stereotypes that can be observed in cinematographic representations with the actual pragmalinguistic features of IrE based on recent findings of variational pragmatics.

The structure of the chapter is as follows: after an overview of some of the ways in which the concepts of 'stereotype' and 'stereotyping' are defined and used in sociolinguistics and sociopragmatics, the performance of the speech acts of requests, compliment responses and thanks minimizers are provided as examples of pragmatic stereotyping in the films *Intermission* and *The Guard*.⁸ In the second part of the chapter, the use of discourse markers in present-day Irish English will be discussed and contrasted with the highly stereotypical

⁸ John Crowley (dir.): *Intermission*, 2003; John Michael McDonagh (dir.): *The Guard*, 2011.

representation of Irish English in a corpus of 12 IrE movies and series episodes. Similarly to Chapter 6, the present chapter will also discuss the translation strategies of specification and underspecification in the Hungarian translations of the source text. Regarding the performance of speech acts, the present discussion will provide a qualitative, rather than quantitative perspective because of the small number of examples, however, the size of the test corpus will make the keyness of relevant discourse markers amenable to statistical analysis.

9.1.1 The concepts of ‘stereotype’ and ‘stereotyping’

It is often noted in sociolinguistics (cf. e.g. Jaworski-Coupland 2006: 44) that conversational partners make judgements about each other’s social background as well as personality traits on the basis of trivial linguistic choices in terms of pronunciation features, intonation, lexical or morphosyntactic variants. Pragmalinguistic features such as the use of discourse markers or the manner in which particular speech acts are performed are even more prone to trigger social stereotyping as well as “personality extrapolations” (cf. Tannen 2006: 460). It was argued in Chapter 2 that the inappropriate use of discourse markers might reflect negatively on ESL learners’ personality traits, rather than on their L2 proficiency. Moreover, as Thomas (1983) notes with reference to cross-cultural pragmatic failure, offensive national stereotypes such as ‘the abrasive German’, ‘the obsequious Japanese’, ‘the insincere American’, and ‘the standoffish Briton’ can most likely be traced back to insufficient exposure to the respective speech communities’ pragmalinguistic practices.

In intracultural communication, where communication problems are less often anticipated, it is even more important to raise awareness about differences in pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic norms. In the classical Labovian model the term ‘stereotype’ is used with reference to a particular type of linguistic variant. According to Labov (1972), there are three types of linguistic variants: ‘indicators’, ‘markers’ and ‘stereotypes’. The three-way distinction reflects the social significance / stratification of a particular variant as well as the degree to which speakers are aware of the social significance of particular forms. In the case of ‘indicators’ members of a particular speech community attach no social significance to the use/choice of a particular form, while ‘markers’ reflect social stratification which speakers are usually aware of. ‘Stereotypes’, in Labov’s classification, are variants that are readily perceived and commented on (rightly or wrongly) as salient in the speech of particular social or ethnic groups, nationalities, etc. An item of any linguistic level can be a stereotype in this respect, whether it is a phonological, suprasegmental, morphological, syntactic, lexical or pragmalinguistic feature of the particular variety it is associated with.

It is important to note that the variationist paradigm was originally developed for the analysis of the social stratification of phonological features, and the methodology was later extended for the study of other formal features such as morphosyntactic and lexical variation. Variationist studies of discourse-pragmatic features are even more recent. While studies of phonological and morphosyntactic variation and change have been relatively homogeneous and consistent in focus and methodology, there is no conceptual uniformity in the study of discourse-pragmatic variation due to the heterogeneity of the lexical items themselves.

The formal–functional distinction is also relevant to the analysis of stereotypes in the Labovian sense. The identification of formal stereotypes is straightforward: formal variants complement each other, can be substituted by each other and they have to occur in a particular place for the sentence to be considered well-formed by native speakers. In contrast, the use of functional features is seldom obligatory, they are rarely in complementary distribution, and it is usually the frequency of a particular functional variant which provides a clue to its distribution across different discourse genres, social/regional/ethnic groups, etc. If we take IrE as an example, formal stereotypes about IrE include the use of [t] in *think*, the use of dental, rather than alveolar [t] and [d], the use of the after-perfective, resultative-perfective, etc. (cf. Hickey 2007: 207ff). Although there are a few pragmalinguistic features that are easy to identify, such as the use of discourse markers (discussed in Chapter 2), most functional stereotypes take the form of impressionistic qualifications of Irish conversational style such as Irish ‘indirectness’, ‘retinence’, ‘evasiveness’ and ‘implicitness’.

Another basic difference between formal and functional stereotypes is the fact that while the use of formal variants is completely arbitrary, the choice of pragmalinguistic features is motivated by sociocultural norms, which, in turn, are influenced by fundamental cultural values.

9.1.2. ‘Stereotype’ and ‘stereotyping’ in interactional sociolinguistics and sociopragmatics

In interactional linguistics and sociopragmatics the term ‘stereotype’ is used very similarly to the way it is used in social psychology, i.e. as a set of beliefs shared by in-group members about how one’s own and other groups are characterized by certain traits and behavioural tendencies which may be positive or negative. In the context of cross-cultural communication, stereotyping refers to the process whereby conversational partners extend negative impressions of their interlocutor to the social group and/or speech community their interlocutor is ostensibly a member of, usually as a result of repeated experiences of miscommunication.

In the following I am going to explore some of the most basic stereotypes about IrE communicative style – ‘implicitness’, ‘indirectness’ and ‘conventional pessimism’ (cf. Kallen: 2005) – at the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic level. It is important to note that when considering functional variants such as the use of discourse markers and pragmatic strategies of performing a variety of speech acts, the distinction between stereotype in the Labovian sense and stereotype in the social psychological sense is blurred, since evaluative judgments are implicit in the attribution of discourse-pragmatic features or sociopragmatic norms to a particular group of speakers, such as speakers of IrE.

9.2. EXAMPLES OF DISCOURSE-PRAGMATIC STEREOTYPING

9.2.1. Request strategies

Barron (2008) observes that while there is a great degree of difference between stereotypical IrE request strategies and the actual pragmalinguistic forms used in naturally-occurring data, the underlying general stereotype of increased indirectness and decreased affirmativeness is confirmed by Irish sociopragmatic norms. Accordingly, a stereotypical IrE request is “you couldn’t confirm this in writing, could you?” as opposed to the stereotypically British “could you confirm this in writing, please?” (Scharf – Mac Mathúna 1998: 161, quoted in Barron 2008: 38). However, contrary to the common stereotype, Barron’s (2008) corpus-based analysis shows that IrE speakers decrease the force of the request by means of a whole range of strategies other than negative formulations and tag questions: there are significant differences in lexical upgrading as well as external downgrading. Speakers of IrE use more boosters (cf. 2.5.1) even in non-standard / high-solidarity contexts, moreover, they use more pre- and post-sequences (cf. 7.3.4), in other words, invest more effort into the external modification (explanation, justification, pretext, etc.) of requests. In cinematographic representations of IrE one can find elaborate requests, ample strategies of indirectness and the use of a great deal of internal and external modification, which is especially salient in informal / high-solidarity contexts (Hungarian translation is provided in brackets):

- (1) [Reporter to interviewee:] **Sorry, Sally. Could you** step out of the shot for a minute? Just for a minute. (**Elnézést** Sally. **Kiállna** a képből egy percre? Csak egy perc.) (*Intermission*)
- (2) [Policeman to criminal:] Why d’you kill McCormick, **if you don’t mind me asking?** (Miért ölte meg McCormickot, **ha megtudhatom?**) (*The Guard*)

- (3) [Boyfriend to girlfriend:] Listen, **do you mind if** we stay in tonight? I'm knackered, do you mind? (Figyelj, **nem baj, ha** itthon maradunk ma este? Kivagyok, nem gond?) (*Intermission*)
- (4) [Mother to daughter:] And listen, I wasn't going to say it to you, but since we're having this discussion...**would you not...Would you not** get yourself a bit of Immac or something?⁹ (És figyelj, nem akartam mondani, de mivel épp erről beszélünk... **nem lehetne, hogy... hogy** elmenj valami kozmetikushoz? (*Intermission*)

As Szili (2002) proposed, the performance and indirectness of a particular speech act is a highly complex issue and depends on a variety of contextual factors. Strategy clustering in (1) might be caused by social distance, in (2) it might be ironic attitude, while (3) and (4) include directives that are highly face threatening (cf. Verchueren, 1999: 24). Thus, it is not the performance of the individual speech acts that convey a sense of Irish reticence and overt politeness, but the cumulative effect of the constant recurrence of strategy clustering, especially in informal contexts such as in (3) and (4).

As for the translation of the above directives, one can observe that strategy clustering is present in the target text, while functional rather than formal equivalence is sought in matching the individual strategies of minimizing the imposition (*just a minute*), negative formulation (*would you not*), time distancing (*could*), pre-grounders (*listen*), etc. Moreover, the Hungarian translation in (4) is even more indirect than the source text because of the implication of a culturally embedded product name (Immac). An alternative translation strategy could be explained through the use of a general word rather than a product name (*foundation* instead of *Immac*, e.g. *nem lehetne, hogy használj alapozót vagy valami ~ 'could you perhaps use some foundation or something*), which would enable the translator to provide a functional equivalent of the general extender (*or something*), another stereotypical marker of Irish indirectness, as will be seen in section 9.3 below.

9.2.2. Compliment responses (CRs)

Speakers face a dilemma when responding to compliments because of conflicting sociocultural norms: if a compliment is accepted, the complimentee might appear immodest or vain, conversely, if a compliment is not accepted, the complimentee's opinion is in contrast to that of the complimenter (cf. Szili 2004). In terms of Leech's (1983) theory of the Politeness Principle, there is a

⁹ In this example additional contextual parameters (e.g. size of the imposition) may also warrant the formulation of the request in such indirect/elaborate terms.

clash between the maxim of agreement and the maxim of modesty. Consequently, the ideal response to a compliment is to accept it, if possible, in a way that does not imply self-praise and/or expresses modesty.

Once again, there are interesting differences between the types of CRs one finds in IrE and in other varieties of English. Schneider (1999) found that realization types are more varied in IrE than in either AmE or EE; IrE speakers prefer non-agreement micro CRs to agreement micro CRs, at the same time macro and micro CRs are more evenly distributed. While the Irish informants employed 15 different CR strategies, the American informants used only ten. Moreover, to the conversational gambit of “Nice shirt”, the American informants clearly preferred the macro-strategy of acceptance over refusal (e.g. “Yeah, it’s nice, isn’t it?”, “I’m glad you like it.”), whereas the Irish informants’ first preference was for a non-acceptance macro-strategy (“Do you really like it?”, or “I wasn’t very happy with it.”), followed closely by CRs that fulfilled the macro function of acceptance. As a result, the modesty and agreement maxims are given more equal weight in IrE than, for example, in AmE, where the agreement maxim is more highly valued in CRs than the maxim of modesty.

In the cinematographic representations of IrE under scrutiny the macro-strategy of non-acceptance appears to be stereotyped, as – unlike in naturally-occurring data, where modesty and agreement are given close to equal weight – there is not a single instance of a CR that implies acceptance:

(5)

A: “You will not get the crowd to cry hosanna until you ride into town on an ass.”

Nietzsche. (“A tömeg mindaddig nem fog hozsannát kiáltani... amíg nem lovagolunk be egy számaron a városba.” Nietzsche.)

B: Yeah, that’s a good one. Good quote, nice one. (Igen, ez jó. Szép idézet.)

A: **Oh**, f... it. (Francba.)

(*The Guard*)

(6)

A: Good shot, man. (Jó dobás volt.)

B: Nice one, John. (Szép volt, John.)

C: Get off my groceries, will you, you knacker? (Szállj le a zöldségekről, jó?) (*Intermission*)

(7)

A: That’s nice. Is that real leather? (Ez valódi bőr?)

B: Why, what am I, f...ing cheap? (Azt hiszi sóher vagyok? ~ ‘Do you think I’m cheap’) (*The Guard*)

In the translations we can observe that the micro-strategy of topic avoidance is mirrored in the target text in the case of (5) and (6). In (7), however, the head act of compliment is missing from A’s turn (probably for technical reasons

detailed in section 2.2 of Chapter 6, thus, B's response does not come across as a CR in the target text and does not contribute to the cumulative effect of other compliment refusals that reinforce the cultural stereotype in the source text.

9.2.3. Responses to thanks (RTs)

When responding to thanks, the speaker is faced with a different type of dilemma than in the case of CRs: whether to accept the expression of gratitude and express pleasure at performing the (verbal or non-verbal) action the thank-er is grateful for (cf. e.g. *great pleasure, anytime*), or to minimize / play down the favour or effort invested into performing the action (cf. e.g. *no problem, don't mention it*). In general terms, when the thankee chooses the former strategy, s/he addresses the thank-er's (or his/her own) positive face, thus foregrounding solidarity and/or common ground, while playing down the favour incurs a negative politeness (i.e. distance-oriented) attitude. In certain contexts it is also appropriate to reciprocate with another token of *thanks* or *thank you*.

As far as the differences between IrE and other varieties of English are concerned, the following observations can be made (cf. Schneider 2005): speakers of IrE use more varied realization types of RTs, they frequently combine conventionalized RTs and they use internal modification (modification of the head act) more frequently than AmE or EE speakers. Moreover, IrE speakers use supportive moves (external modification) more extensively than speakers of other varieties. Just as in the case of CRs, the findings suggest that IrE speakers invest more effort and creativity into minimizing thanks, moreover, formulaic and conventionalized expressions are almost invariably accompanied by non-formulaic supporting moves.

In cinematographic representations of IrE, instead of elaborate RTs, supporting moves and RT combinations, we find strategies of RT avoidance, topic shift and credit shift:

(8)

A (speaker of AmE): I wanna thank you for all your help. Really. It's much appreciated. (Köszönök mindent. De tényleg, nagyon hálás vagyok.)

B (speaker of IrE): *Well...* Take care of yourself, now, Wendell. ([no DM] Vigyázzon magára, Wendell.) (*The Guard*)

(9)

A (IrE speaker mother to her son): Thanks for taking me out, Gerry. You're a good boy. Always a good boy. (Köszönöm, hogy elhoztál Gerry. Jó fiú vagy, mindig is az voltál.)

B (IrES): *Oh*, stop it. ([no DM] Hagyd abba.) (*The Guard*)

(10)

A: The DEA believe it to have somewhere in the vicinity of \$500 million worth of cocaine on board. (A Kábítószer-ellenes Ügynökség szerint 500 millió dollár értékű kokain van a fedélzetén.)

B: Er, that's half a billion, lads. Half a billion. (Az fél milliárd, emberek.)

A: Er, thank you, Inspector Stanton. Yes, that's half a billion. (Köszönjük, Stanton nyomozó, az fél milliárd, igen.)

B: [averts his eyes from speaker A] (*Intermission*)

The above examples illustrate that, with the exception of the micro-strategies of topic shift in (8) and non-verbal RT-avoidance in (10), the target text does not convey the adequate strategy clusters of RTs that are present in the source text. The discourse markers *well* and *oh* in (8) and (9), respectively, are omitted in the target text, resulting in a higher degree of directness and unintended bluntness displayed by the characters' portrayal.

9.2.4. Stereotypes incurred by the use of discourse markers

In the present section I focus on the stigmatization and stylizing effects discourse markers can be associated with and complement the previous analysis by quantitative data.

Non-linguists, including language mavens (cf. e.g. Cameron 1995: 50), often associate discourse markers such as *I mean*, *you know*, *well*, *like*, etc. with spoken discourse and oral style, at best, and with the language of women, adolescents, and the illiterate, uneducated, underprivileged, etc., at worst. A variety of discourse markers have also been stereotyped as markers of superficiality as well as lack of intelligence, cf. e.g. *like* as a marker of "Valley Girl speech" (Blythe et al. 1990: 224). In Britain, certain discourse markers such as *like* and *you know* have become stereotypes of the (supposedly inferior) dialect of American English, as is exemplified by the following email joke, in which the writer gives advice to speakers of AmE:

Generally, you should raise your vocabulary to acceptable levels. Look up 'vocabulary'. Using the same twenty-seven words interspersed with filler noises such as 'like' and 'you know' is an unacceptable and inefficient form of communication. Look up 'interspersed'.

(Example taken from Fuller 2003: 370.)

It is well known that people's attitudes to features of any variety of language reflect their attitudes to the speakers of that variety, thus, negative stereotyping of discourse marker uses of *like*, *I mean* and *you know* reflect negative

attitudes to social groups and social situations such items are (often wrongly) associated with. What is more, as is clear from the email joke above, the stereotypical function assigned to discourse markers is strategic rather than interpersonal or discourse organizational, in other words, some native (naïve) speakers perceive discourse markers' role as limited to stalling and marking lexical search. It is important to point out that laypeople's intuitions (and stereotypes) about their own language use are not reliable, what is more, they frequently get embarrassed when confronted with their own speech output in the form of the recordings or transcripts of sociolinguistic interviews (cf. e.g. Labov: 1972).

In short, as was demonstrated in Chapter 2, the functional spectrum of discourse markers extends well beyond lexical search and stalling, while it was also observed that native speakers use discourse markers consistently and with great precision in order to fulfill a wide range of communicative needs. *Like*, for example, rather than being a meaningless social noise is a discourse marker of high frequency and versatility. Its functional spectrum ranges from (1)(a) marking explanation, (b) emphasis/new information, to (c) quotative, (d) approximative and (e) softening functions:

(1)

(a) My roommate never cleans when I ask him to. *Like*, I asked him yesterday to clean, and he never did it.

(b) This guy is so cool. I mean, he's *like* the coolest person you could meet.

(c) I went to the clerk to ask him where the beer was, and he's *like*, 'I don't know, I'm new here', so I'm *like*, yeah, sure, like, you should know this, man!

(d) I missed *like* 40 questions on the exam.

(e) Could you, *like*, loan me \$100?

Utterance-initial and utterance-medial instances of non-propositional *like* – such as the ones in the examples above – occur in similar contexts, with similar distribution and frequency in IrE, AmE and BrE (cf. Kallen: 2005). Despite this fact, the stereotypical use of *like* in IrE is in utterance-final position, moreover, it is typically associated with Irish tentativeness and uncertainty. One can observe this stereotype in a variety of cinematographic representations of IrE; in both *Intermission* and *The Guard*, for example, non-propositional uses of *like* occur invariably in utterance-final position if the speaker is Irish, as in the following examples:

(2)

A: [he is] deliberately disrupting my lecture.

B: *Ah*, I'm only having a bit of fun, *like*. (*Csak szórakoztam kicsit, ne vegye ám komolyan.*) (*The Guard*)

(3)

You know, I've been reading...where they're smuggling the cocaine out of Colombia in little submarines... Submarines they've built themselves, *like*. ([no DM] Utána olvastam, ezek a kokaint Kolumbiából kis tengeralattjárókon csempézik át [no DM]. Olyanokon, amiket saját maguk építettek.) (*The Guard*)

(4)

Bobbie Gentry said she didn't know what it was. Supposed to be mysterious, *like*. (Bobbie Gentry azt mondta, hogy nem tudja mi miatt volt. Nem szabad egyértelműnek lenniük [no DM].) (*The Guard*)

(5)

A: Have I got a ronnie? (Van bajeszom?)

B: A what? (Micsoda?)

A: A ronnie, mustache, *like*. (Bajesz, bajuszféle.) (*Intermission*)

As for the translation of *like* and *you know*, the above examples illustrate some of the translation strategies and the resulting underspecification of *like* in the target text. In (3) and (4) no discourse marker is used in the target text, that is, the discourse markers and (any of) their stylizing effects are completely missing. In (2), the modal particles *csak* ('just') and *ám* ('by no means') are used as explication / specification strategies. While these items can be considered as target language counterparts, the stylizing effect of IrE utterance-final *like* is most likely lost on the target audience. In (5) the Hungarian affix *-féle* is used to explicate the conceptual meaning of *like*, but not its procedural meaning or stylistic effects.

Another discourse marker that displays a unique functional spectrum in IrE is *sure*. In AmE and BrE the discourse marker *sure* is primarily used as a feedback signal, marker of an affirmative answer and/or compliance with a request, as well as an attitudinal disjunct with an interpersonal function of inviting agreement from the person or persons addressed (cf. Quirk et al. 1985: 446). In IrE, in addition to its standard functions, *sure* marks emphasis, reinforcement, epistemic stance, mockery, and a range of additional interpersonal and discourse-organizational functions (cf. Moreno 2005). In Irish films – unlike the discourse marker *like* – *sure* displays a wide range of functions that are also present in AmE and BrE usage, nevertheless, the utterance-final position of *sure* appears to be, once again, stereotyped, as it is more salient in cinematographic representations of IrE than in naturally-occurring or even literary data (cf. Moreno 2005):

(6)

I'm Irish, *sure*. Racism's part of my culture. (*De hát én ír vagyok, a rasszizmus a kultúránk része.*) (*The Guard*)

(7)

A: Are we to assume you're satisfied with the service? (Remélem, elégedett volt velünk.)

B: I'm totally drained, *sure*. (Kipurcantam, fikarcnyi erő sincs már bennem [**no DM**].) (*The Guard*)

(8) You're after blowing your cover, *sure*. (Neked lótték **az biztos**.) (*Intermission*)

(9) It's the new f...ing business, *sure*. Everyone's doing it. (Ez az új cucc b*meg, bizony. Mindenki ezt nyomja [**no DM**].) (*Intermission*)

It is interesting to observe that the translations of utterances (6) through (8) all go to some lengths in explicating the informality, non-standard quality of the source text, such as the use of the target text discourse marker (*hát*, ~ 'well') in (6), slang in (7), (8) and (9), and even obscenity of (9). (9) uses the translation strategy of a target text discourse marker with a similar conceptual as well as procedural meaning. Naturally, in most cases, it is hard to tell if certain target text features are intended as renderings of the source text discourse marker *sure* or other non-standard source text features, whether syntactic (e.g. IrE perfective *after*) or lexical ones (e.g. *drained*, *f*ing*).

9.3. QUANTITATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON IrE STEREOTYPES

9.3.1 Keyness analysis and automated semantic tagging of IrE scripted discourse with reference to AmE scripted dialogues

After an overview of the discourse markers and other pragmalinguistic features that are (rightly or wrongly) associated with IrE, I now turn to statistical measures of identifying the most salient lexical items in IrE scripted dialogues.

In order to test the keyness of *like* and *sure* in cinematographic representations of IrE, the data used for the qualitative phase above was extended, and a test corpus of 103,368 words (IrE corpus, IEC) was compiled based on the subtitles of *The Guard*, *Intermission*, *Circle of Friends*, *Leap Year*, *In the Name of the Father*, *Once*, *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*, *The Butcher Boy* as well as all six episodes of the series entitled *Derry Girls*. At this stage, a scripted discourse corpus (SD), based on seasons 1 through 4 of *House, M.D.*, was used as a reference corpus.

In the first stage of the keyness analysis the 'keyword list' feature of AntConc 3.4.4w (<https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconc/>) was used and all lexical items in the two sub-corpora (IEC and SD) were considered; the full list was then shortened with a focus on items that can be potentially associated with stylizing and stereotyping. Consequently, the IEC was automatically tagged

using USAS (<http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/usas/>) with a view to distinguishing between discourse marker and non-discourse marker uses of the relevant lexical items.

In the course of calculating keyness, each corpus was used as a reference corpus with respect to the other. In order to calculate keyness, the Log Likelihood test was used as a statistical measure. The Log Likelihood value of 3.84 was considered critical ($p < 0.05$): if a lexical item had a value higher than the critical value, it was considered to have keyness in a particular corpus. The results are summarized in *Table 4*, potential discourse markers are highlighted in ***bold italics***.

lexical item	test corpus / reference corpus	normalised frequency (number of tokens per hundred thou- sand words)	keyness (log likelihood)
f*ing	IEC/SD	258	402.170
Jesus	IEC/SD	119	161.021
<i>aye</i>	IEC/SD	83	129.380
<i>now</i>	IEC/SD	448	128.861
<i>man</i>	IEC/SD	202	113.669
da	IEC/SD	81	104.060
wee	IEC/SD	64	99.763
lads	IEC/SD	59	91.969
<i>cos</i>	IEC/SD	24	37.411
please	IEC/SD	107	27.660
<i>mean</i>	IEC/SD	140	27.232
<i>like</i>	IEC/SD	402	10.966
<i>know</i>	IEC/SD	522	6.534
<i>sure</i>	IEC/SD	145	< 3.84
<i>surely</i>	IEC/SD	5	7.794
<i>cause</i>	SD/IEC	131	84.580
<i>because</i>	SD/IEC	242	46.264
<i>figure</i>	SD/IEC	44	40.674
<i>okay</i>	SD/IEC	208	33.994
gotta	SD/IEC	61	32.743
<i>um</i>	SD/IEC	31	26.080
<i>unless</i>	SD/IEC	40	16.391
hey	SD/IEC	110	15.808
<i>think</i>	SD/IEC	355	< 3.84

*Table 4. Keyness analysis of lexical items in the IEC and SD sorted
by test corpus and keyness*

The statistical analysis summarized below is in line with many of the IrE stereotypes noted in the literature with special reference to the following:

- swearing, especially religious swear terms are a salient aspect of language use in Ireland (cf. Moreno 2005: 86);
- continuous use of the discourse markers *aye*, *man* and *now* is foregrounded in stylized representations of IrE in both cinematographic as well as literary dialogues (for an analysis of IrE discourse markers in fiction, cf. Moreno 2005: 87ff);
- *like* and *sure* (especially in utterance-final position) are stereotyped IrE discourse markers even though, as was argued above, they are as frequent in AmE as in IrE;
- IrE is more of a *you know* variety, while AmE is an *I mean* variety of English (cf. Kallen 2005).

While the keyness of *sure* is not significant in the IEC *per se*, the search query for the USAS tag of co-occurrence with <PUNC>, i.e. a punctuation mark, which makes utterance-final position more likely, is significantly higher in the IEC than the SD.

By the same token, *man* has discourse marker and non-discourse marker uses in both corpora, and individual tokens receive non-discourse marker relevant tagging by USAS, but they are twice as likely to appear as syntactically non-integrated in the IEC than in the SD, marked by co-occurrence with <PUNC>.

Based on automated tagging (calculated as the number of Z5 tagged tokens of *like* divided by the total number of tokens), the D-value of *like* is 0.61 in the IEC and 0.52 in the SD, moreover, the <PUNC> tag co-occurs with *like_Z5* more often in the SD.

It is important to point out that USAS does not enable one to differentiate between discourse marker and non-discourse marker uses of *now*. Still, co-occurrence with <PUNC>, as well as sentence-initial tokens once again, make it more likely that the keyness of *now* is a result of its frequent use as a stylized discourse marker.

Propositional lexical items such as *wee*, *da*, *lad*, etc. in the IEC and *gotta* in the DS are included in the table above to illustrate the reliability of the keyness analysis with respect to stereotypical IrE and AmE uses.

9.3.2 Keyness analysis and automated semantic tagging of IrE scripted discourse with reference to BrE scripted dialogues

Since the SD corpus is based on an American TV series, one could argue at this point that the above differences relate to the AmE-BrE distinction, rather than the AmE-IrE one. Accordingly, a second reference corpus (British Scripted Discourse, BSD) based on all 16 episodes of the British TV series *Luther* was compiled. The similar size of the second reference corpus (101,040 words), its general themes (crime, street life, relationships) as well as the predominantly informal style of the dialogues were considered as comparable to the IEC. The results of the keyness analysis are summarized in *Table 5* below:

lexical item	test corpus/ reference corpus	normalised frequency (number of tokens per hundred thousand words)	keyness (log likelihood)
<i>aye</i>	IEC/BSD	83	85.360
<i>cos</i>	IEC/BSD	24	< 3.84
<i>da</i>	IEC/BSD	81	92.263
<i>f*ing</i>	IEC/BSD	258	282.435
<i>Jesus</i>	IEC/BSD	119	81.884
<i>know</i>	IEC/BSD	522	< 3.84
<i>sure</i>	IEC/BSD	145	< 3.84
<i>lads</i>	IEC/BSD	59	67.204
<i>like</i>	IEC/BSD	402	5.961
<i>man</i>	IEC/BSD	202	< 3.84
<i>now</i>	IEC/BSD	448	29.628
<i>sure, surely</i>	IEC/BSD	5	< 3.84
<i>wee</i>	IEC/BSD	64	49.148

Table 5. Keyness analysis of lexical items in the IEC and BSD sorted by test corpus and keyness

The table shows that the keyness of all of the propositional lexical items (swear words, religious terms, *da*, *lads*, *man*, etc.) and most of the discourse markers remains statistically significant with reference to the BSD, although keyness values are somewhat lower in general than they were with reference to the SD.

The keyness of *like* also remains statistically significant, its D-value in the BSD (0.49, based on automated tagging) is even lower than in the SD, thus, the significance is likely to be caused by discourse marker rather than non-discourse

marker uses. Moreover, the search query for the USAS tag of co-occurrence with <PUNC>, i.e. a punctuation mark, which makes utterance-final position more likely, is higher in the IEC than in the BSD.

While the keyness of *sure* is not significant in the IEC *per se* with reference to the BSD (just as it was not with reference to the SD), the search query for the USAS tag of co-occurrence with <PUNC>, i.e. a punctuation mark, which makes utterance-final position more likely, is higher in the IEC than the BSD.

Now still has keyness with reference to the BSD, although its Log Likelihood value is somewhat lower than it was with reference to the SD. Once again, co-occurrence with <PUNC>, as well as sentence-initial tokens, make it more likely that its keyness is a result of its frequent use as a stylized discourse marker.

The discourse markers *cos*, *you know* and *man* lose their keyness with reference to the BSD. There can be a variety of underlying reasons for this finding, including (1) these discourse markers are not stereotypical IrE markers, or they are not perceived as such in British productions, (2) certain discourse markers that are characteristic of BrE at large are perceived as IrE markers in American productions.

9.4. CONCLUSIONS, TEACHING IMPLICATIONS

In the present chapter I have examined Irish English stereotypes at the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic level. In general terms, one can observe that basic stereotypes about IrE pragmalinguistic norms and communicative style – for example, implicitness, evasiveness, downtoning and conventional pessimism – correspond to “salient and distinctive elements” of Irish sociocultural norms (Kallen 2005: 142–143). However, with respect to the specific pragmalinguistic realizations of Irish sociocultural norms one can observe a stark contrast between pragmalinguistic stereotypes, i.e. the features that are perceived to characterize Irish conversational style and the actual linguistic realizations of a variety of speech acts as well as the functional spectrum and distribution of even the most salient discourse markers.

The comparison I have made between IrE stereotypes and the actual findings of variational pragmatics also highlights the difference between the nature of formal and functional variation as distinct areas of investigation within the variationist paradigm. Since functional features are seldom in complementary distribution, it is usually the frequency of a particular functional variant which provides a clue to its distribution across different dialects. Pragmalinguistic stereotypes about a particular dialect are, therefore, misjudgements about the frequency, salience, and/or – in the case of discourse markers – position of a

particular feature. Another difference between formal and functional stereotypes is that while the former tend to recede or even disappear once people become aware that a form is socially stigmatized (cf. Johnstone 2008: 399), functional stereotypes are more resistant to conscious control and, therefore, disappearance.



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