

An Introduction to Discourse Analysis
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London: Longman 1997

We can put discovery methods to good discorsal use by introducing into our materials the kind of questioning Gumperz proposed for his interethnic communicational studies:

1. What is A trying to achieve by talking in this way?
2. What is it about the way he says it that makes you . . . ?
3. Could he be trying to . . . ?
4. How should he have said it if he wanted to . . . ?
5. How did B interpret what A said?
6. How can you tell how B misunderstood?
7. How should B have replied to show that he did understand?

(PREFACE XIV)

There are four conditions which must be satisfied if the performative act is not to *misfire*.

1. There must exist an accepted conventional procedure, having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances.
2. The particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked.
3. The procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly
4. and completely.

(12-13)

[Hymes] suggests that ‘an adequate approach must distinguish and investigate four aspects of competence: *systematic potential*; *appropriateness*; *occurrence*; *feasibility*. By *systematic potential* he refers to ‘whether and to what extent something is not yet realised’ and suggests that ‘it is to this that Chomsky in effect reduces competence’. *Appropriateness* includes ‘whether and to what extent something is in some context suitable, effective or the like’. Thus, two features can vary independently: schizophrenic’s talk is often marked by grammatical but inappropriate utterances A speaker’s competence also includes knowledge about *occurrence*, ‘whether and to what extent something is done’. This theoretical dimension provides for the fact that members of a speech community ‘are aware of the commonness, rarity, previous occurrence or novelty of many features of speech, and that this knowledge enters into their definitions and evaluations of ways of speaking’. The final dimension *feasibility* is concerned with ‘whether and to what extent something is possible’. (30-31)

Topical coherence

The referential and descriptive items within any story are related in highly complex ways and each occurrence serves to reinforce and re-emphasise the topic. Sacks (1972a) presents some techniques for analysing topical coherence by focusing on the story

The baby cried. The mommy picked it up.

Initially he suggests that most people will 'hear' the story in the same way and will agree with the following 'facts'. Firstly, although there is no genitive in the story, the mommy who picks up the baby is the baby's mommy; secondly that the two events occur sequentially; and thirdly that the second event occurs because of the first event. He sets out to produce a descriptive apparatus that will account for these facts, and, because it is 'overbuilt', for similar facts in other stories. (80)