

EXTRA-LINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF CONVERSATIONAL DISCOURSE

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Comunicarea de succes implică anumite principii care trebuie să fie respectate de către interlocutori. Este important de a utiliza anumite formule de captare a atenției, de a găsi modalitatea adecvată de prezentare a informației, menținerea conversației și terminarea acesteia. Dialogul are o funcție comunicativă activă care implică prezența a, cel puțin, doi parteneri cu funcții alternative de ascultător și vorbitor. De asemenea, dialogul implică îndreptarea fiecărui partener către celălalt, schimbul alternativ de replici și se bazează pe interesul față de ceea ce spune și cum spune partenerul și, totodată, la adaptarea la posibilitățile lui de înțelegere. Forma lingvistică în care apare înlănțuirea sintactică, textuală între replici și aspectele extralingvistice ale dialogului joacă un rol important în prezentarea cantității de informație transmisă prin limbaj.

Speech is a bilateral process: there must be, of course, at least two participants, the *I* and *you* a speaker and a hearer, or a “sender” and a “receiver”.

As a communicative activity speaking is usually a face-to-face interaction, a constituting part of the conversation or dialogue. Conversations are excellent examples of the interpersonal nature of communication.

The first and essential rule of conversation is *attention getting*. If one wishes the linguistic production to be functional and to accomplish its intended purpose, one must have the attention of the hearer, e.g. ‘*look here; excuse me; I’d like to tell you*’. We can call this physical contact. After that a channel of communication must be opened and maintained. We often ‘*test the channel*’, by such expressions as *can you hear me?* or encourage it *-speak up*. But contact is not just physical, it is also psychological. We must maintain *rapport* with our hearer, keep him interested, friendly and cooperative, keep the conversation going. We do this by what is often called ‘*small talk*’ about the weather, inquiries about health, giving praise and encouragement. We also test our psychological contact with our hearer: ‘*Do you get me? If you follow me.*’ And we help our hearer to do so by organizing our discourse in a logical fashion: ‘*First of all...*’; ‘*What I mean is...*’; ‘*My next point...*’; ‘*Now I want to explain...*’; ‘*As I have already pointed out...*’ This is a sort of ‘*signposting*’ of our discourse.

Conversation or communication between people does not take place in a vacuum, but at a particular time and place, in a physical and temporal *setting*. The people involved in conversation may be sitting or standing, walking or driving along in a car. They may be in a crowd or alone together, among friends or strangers, in a room, a cathedral or a street. All these factors may play a part in what goes on in the conversation, but they are not what it is *about*. Where we are, who we are with and at what time may limit what we talk about and how we talk about it, but they are not, for that reason, the *topic* of our conversation. Of course, there are places and time for talking about certain things as also for not talking about them.

The topic of discourse is obviously an important element in the speech situation. Once speakers have secured the hearer's attention, their task becomes one of *topic nomination*. There are few explicit rules for accomplishing topic nomination in a language. Usually a person will simply embark on an issue by making a statement or a question which leads to a particular topic.

Sometimes he may also request permission to speak at length usually in order to tell a story. This can be done by saying something like ‘*Do you know what happened to me yesterday?*’ The listener has little alternative but to say ‘*No, what?*’ and then the first speaker can go on to tell even quite a long story. In other words, the speaker is claiming the right to have a long turn. Sometimes the indication that a story is imminent also gives some warning of the kind of story it is going to be: ‘*I had a most frightening experience yesterday, A funny thing happened to me yesterday, Do you believe in coincidences?*’, and so on. This is useful information because it helps the listener to know when the point of the story has been reached. It is important to know this because the storyteller must be allowed to finish the story. The listener also has to give some indication of having understood the story. This can be done by making an appropriate comment such as ‘*That’s incredible!*’ or ‘*How very sad!*’ In the case of a funny story, laughter may be the best response, but it is important not to laugh in the wrong place. One of the ways in which we show that we have understood is to tell a story with a similar point.

H. Paul Grice (1975) noted that certain conversational 'maxims' that satisfy the Cooperative Principle enable the speaker to nominate and maintain a topic.

The Maxim of Relation is crucial to evaluating the appropriateness of responses to the question 'Would you like to go to a movie tonight?' Because we assume that the conversational contributions of others are relevant to the topic at hand, we are able to infer from the response 'I have to study for an exam' that the speaker is unable or unwilling to go to the movie. Similarly, because it is hard to see a connection between *combing one's hair and being able to go to a movie*, we judge the response 'I have to comb my hair' to be irrelevant and hence inappropriate.

The Maxim of Quality requires that the statements used in conversations have some factual basis. If, for example, I ask 'What's the weather like?' and someone responds 'It's snowing', I will normally assume that this statement provides reliable information about the current weather.

The Maxim of Quantity introduces some very subtle guidelines into a conversation. If, for example, someone has asked me where a famous American author lives, then the nature of the response will depend in large part on how much information he believes to be appropriate for that point in the conversation. If he knows that the other person is simply curious about which part of the country the author lives in, it might suffice to respond 'in Michigan'. On the other hand, if he knows that the person wants to visit the author, then much more specific information (perhaps even an address) is appropriate.

The Maxim of Manner imposes several constraints on language use. Imagine that someone is writing a letter of recommendation to an employer and he says about a former student of his 'You will be fortunate indeed if you can get Henry to work for you'. By using a sentence that can be interpreted in two dramatically different ways ('You will be glad to have Henry on your staff versus 'It is not easy to get Henry to do any work'), he violates the Maxim of Manner by using an ambiguous structure. Since the maxims are violated only for specific purposes (as when the Maxim of Quality is suspended to yield sarcasm), the person to whom the letter is written would be justified in concluding that his choice of language constitutes a veiled warning about Henry.

These maxims represent constraints on conversation that may be an integral part of language use. Following these maxims we can make our contribution appropriate to the conversation.

Once a topic is nominated, participants in a conversation then embark on *topic development*, using conventions of *turn-taking* to accomplish various functions of language. R. Allwright (1980) showed how students of English as a foreign language failed to use appropriate turn-taking signals in their interactions with each other and with the teacher. Turn-taking is another of those culturally oriented sets of rules which require finely tuned perceptions in order to communicate effectively.

In orderly conversation the change from one speaker's turn to another is usually accomplished smoothly and very quickly. Speed is important because silences are significant. A pause of more than a split second between turns may indicate some reluctance, opposition, or even rejection of what the previous speaker has said.

LINDA: – Willy!

WILLY: – It's all right. I came back.

LINDA: – Why? What happened? (pause) Did something happen, Willy?

WILLY: – No, nothing happened.

LINDA: – You didn't smash the car, did you?

WILLY: (Long pause) – I said nothing happened. Didn't you hear me?

A. Miller, *Death of a Salesman*

Willy makes this long pause because he becomes irritated at Linda's questions.

Aside from turn-taking itself, topic development, or maintenance of a conversation, involves communication strategies: *clarification*, *topic shifting*, *avoidance*, and *interruption*. Topic clarification manifests itself in various forms of heuristic functions. In the case of conversations between foreign language learners and native speakers, topic clarification often involves seeking or giving *repair* (correction) of linguistic forms that contain errors.

For example:

- *Would you like to come round for a drink tonight? We could look at my slides of our trip to Mexico.*

- *Year... . Could you tell me what you mean by 'to come round'?*

According to R. Schwartz (1980), repair is part of the process of negotiation that is so important in communication; her study provided many examples of both ‘self-initiated’ and ‘other-initiated’ repair. *Topic shifting* and *avoidance* may be effected through both verbal and nonverbal signals. The speaker simply tries not to talk about concepts that are not known to him. ‘*I don’t know what’s this.*’ *Interruptions* are a typical feature of all conversations. Language users learn how to interrupt politely, this being a form of attention getting. Students typically have to be ‘*taught*’ how and when to interrupt.

Topic termination is an art which even native speakers of a language have difficulty in mastering at times. We commonly experience situations in which a conversation has ensued for some time and neither participant seems to know how to terminate it. Usually, in American English, conversations are terminated by various interactional functions: ‘*a glance at a watch*’, or a ‘*Well, I have to be going now.*’ Each language has verbal and nonverbal signals for such termination. These principles can be practiced by using ‘*communicative activities*’ that promote communicative competence such as role-play, problem-solving activities, interviews and one of the most promising and increasingly popular techniques for encouraging communication in the language classroom has proved to be *simulation* or *gaming*.

One of the purposes of a simulation is to broaden and deepen students’ perceptions and interpretations of the real world, while another is to refine their speaking skill. Ch. Fries speaks about the effectiveness of simulations stating that “they are operating models of reality” (1945).

Most simulations demand that the participants should be supplied with background information and materials to work from both before and during the simulation.

It is important for teachers to be acutely aware of the rules of conversation in the foreign language and to aid learners both to perceive those rules and follow them in their own conversations in order to achieve the purpose in communication.

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