

# SPEAKING & LISTENING

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper will attempt to introduce the reader to some of the many (though, of course, not all) factors subsumed in the study of discourse. It will attempt to briefly discuss some of the many ideas concerned with the act (s) of speaking and hearing. It should be noted at the outset that both the speaker (S) and the hearer (H) will react in different-many times predictable ways-to what transpires.

In order to hope to accomplish this, the work of certain scholars must be examined. Two names spring readily to mind-Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). These two men have accomplished much with respect to present day understanding of Speech Act Theory, from which 'discourse' has evolved and their endeavors must form the start of this work.

Of course, others also form an important link with regard to the study of discourse. All men and women involved in the teaching of languages (all of whom cannot be specifically mentioned because of space considerations) fall into this category.

Surely, the manners in which speaking and, of course, listening occur form a crucial role with respect to the 'real-world'. The dependence of people on the spoken word and expected responses to what and, indeed, how things are said form the very basis of the world in which we live. It is for a basic understanding of such things that this paper has been written.

The manner in which people "talk" and "listen" to each other forms the basis of this paper. It is a very immense area and this writing is only meant to be an introduction to this huge undertaking. It is next to impossible to attempt to cover such a vast and complex area in just one, brief, paper. Indeed, entire books have been written in attempts to cover the speech patterns of people. However, this

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subject continues to become larger and more complex and attempts at explanation of discourse must be made. Thus, this present undertaking.

In order to make the point of discourse complexity, one of many definitions must be quoted: "Discourse analysis is widely recognized as one of the most vast but also one of the least defined areas in linguistics." (Schiffrin, 1994:5)

The above quote clearly sums up the present opinion of researchers when attempts are made to discuss speaking and hearing. Again, it is a very difficult area to understand. Attempts to explain and understand Speech Act theory, must be made despite the complexity of this area.

Two famous scholars, John Austin and, later, John Searle wrote very informative, indeed, "must" read ideas about speech acts-in short, "why" such things occur. Attempted explanations were put forward and in order for one to have any "chance" at understanding this area they should be examined. (Readers are encouraged to read the works of these two men. Their ideas form the base from which other, pertinent, thoughts flow with respect to this area).

It can be seen, in these writings, that speech act theory attempts to explain necessary things about talking and listening. How such things, not only form the basis of verbal-indeed, common and important people interaction-but also, maybe much more importantly, why and how such things take place.

It is commonly assumed, (and most assuredly, true) when dealing with "talking and listening", that speech and listening acts perform many, diversified "things" in addition to merely forming the underpinnings upon which discourse things occur. Indeed, this is only one part of what it means to "be human".

It is very true that verbal utterances (by speakers) and their interpretations (by the listener) make up multiple tasks in addition to "mere speaking and listening". Such realities must be assumed and (indeed, must) be separated from one another.

Many scholars, from divergent camps and backgrounds, (not just Austin and Searle) have commented upon and or, written about, discourse analysis. Different insights have been put forward-all important. Gumperz's 'interfactual' approach does well in its attempts to describe how persons' from differing cultures 'talk' and 'listen to' one another.

In short, discourse can be (and often is) defined as language units and/or

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language use. Discourse, is really the 'intention' the speaker has when producing something verbally and the 'intention' the hearer has when these 'verbal' things are heard. Definitions such as this very often exist and become important above the sentence level and are intertwined with language use. Such different ways of defining discourse point to the obvious differences between grammatical (formal) and function intention behind an utterance. These differing approaches to discourse are well summed up by Hymes and summarized by many scholars involved in the study of discourse.

There is an apparent difference between the manner in which 'formalists', like N. Chomsky (to whom language represents kind of mental representation) and 'functionalists' (who see language in terms of social interactions mainly) look upon discourse. These two approaches to language purpose and use differ from each other basically in terms of which part of language is stressed.

Speech act theory then, is basically concerned with what people "do" with language-the functions of language. (See Schiffrin 1994, 90)

Austin really got 'things' going when he attempted to write down what most (if not all) people felt or thought about the acts of speaking and hearing in 1962. This is not to imply that discourse was not an area of interest among scholars studying the implications it implied and that teachers of language did not think that 'how' and 'why' persons engage in such verbal aspects of language use and the implications inherent within such acts as unimportant before them. Indeed, nothing could be further from the truth. Persons involved in virtually all areas of language use and teaching realized how important such things were and went to great lengths to attempt to come to an understanding of the mechanics and meanings contained therein. It was soon (if not always) realized that the understanding of discourse was vital to people and their interactions with one another.

Various and numerous topic areas make up the concept of discourse. For example, there are many different definitions of speech utterances, language use purposes, and formal as well as functionalist ideas, speech act theories, sociolinguistic approaches, communication, pragmatics, conversation and variation analysis, function and structure the message and context issues as well as

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the social interaction implications inherent in language use and understanding.

“...the analysis of discourse, is necessarily the analysis of language in use...”  
Brown and Yule (1983:1)

The above really summarizes the manner in which language is truly used and understood. Language and its use CANNOT be separated. Please note the following to further support this, “discourse is viewed as (a socially and culturally organized way of speaking) through which particular functions are realized.”  
Schiffrin (1994:32)

Many definitions of discourse abound and it has been pointed out on numerous occasions, that the real crux of the problems inherent in discourse studies is that language (use and etc.) is often looked at on a sentence level. This, in itself, contains many potential problem areas concerned with the communicative intent of utterance in terms beyond ‘grammar’.

It can be stated that the theory of Speech Acts really started with the work of John Austin. His work was followed by and expanded upon by John Searle. To say that Searle built upon the work of Austin is true but the former’s work had its own contributions in its own right. All of the contributions of these two are best understood by the careful reading of their works as related to the acts of speaking and listening. Regretfully, both of these scholars discourse related contributions are very long and therefore, cannot be completely included herein for length considerations. However, it must be stated again, that both must be read in order to better understand the workings of speech act theory.

Speech Acts, as defined by Austin, and expanded by Searle, are basically what two (or more) persons do when they verbally interact with each other. It seems to this author that many people are familiar with the terms, locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. The first is basically the uttering of an expression or word utilizing meaning, while the illocutionary act (s) comprises the “thing” performed in stating the locution. Perlocutionary acts, on the other hand, comprise the consequential effects an act may have on the person hearing and performing whatever action is required (requested) by the speaker. Of course, this is very simply stated, but basically this is what is meant.

Meanings, uses and actions are what really happens when people verbally

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interact with each other. Fundamentally, the speaker means something by what he says and the hearer performs the action (s) requested by the speaker. Reasons for non-compliance by the hearer are complex and are dealt with in speech act theory. Included herein are such things as the 'truth' factor, vagueness and etc. Each of these can (and do) affect the statements effect on the hearer in many diverse and complex ways as explained by Austin and Searle.

As can be seen in the written form of speech acts (or in their verbal rendition), they can be put into classifications according to a plethora of groups dependent upon many different factors relating to many things (e.g. purpose, ways the listener takes them, intention of the speaker and etc.).

Indirect speech acts often have a different purpose or meaning (they may even have purposes different than those that seem readily apparent to the so-called trained ear-the ears of professionals in the study of Speech Acts. Searle (1969) aptly points this out. (Readers are encouraged to read this work of his). Native speakers of a tongue pick such things up easily-that is, the 'real' meaning behind each verbal phrase.

Schiffrin (1994) shows how one phrase can be a question, a request, and/or an offer. Which form an utterance takes depends on many things-but, the fact remains, it can (and often does) have different interpretations-most of which the hearer gives. As Schiffrin (1994:85) says, "One-for-many and many-for-one relationships between form and function raise problems that affect the application of speech act theory to discourse analysis." (See Schiffrin, 1994).

Speech Act theory, is really concerned with what people actually 'do' with language. The many possible meanings one utterance can (and often does) have. Such a reality really forms the essence of verbal interactions between persons.

Many fields of study (not only language or linguistics) have made contributions to discourse whether they meant to or not. One of the most instrumental of all was the study of anthropology. It has been said that the meaning of the grammatical structure, in short, language use is very important for the development of cultures.

Gumperz did much study along these anthropological lines and much of his writing is based upon the role which language development had in various cultures. He is most noted from a linguistic point of view. Gumperz did much

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study concerning the role of, and importance of, code switching (that is, the use of different linguistic codes among bilingual or multi-lingual persons with others of similar linguistic make-ups in order for points to have greater effects).

Gumperz went out of his way to show 'how' communication takes place among persons' of a related group. There is a kind of 'linguistic over-lapping' among people of related cultures and this most readily shows itself in language (often verbal ways). In short, persons' that share a common language or culture share other things that facilitate communication. Something is 'shared'.

Sociology also contributed to language use. Goffman's work here and its relation to language had a dramatic effect. Broadly speaking, Goffman's findings complimented the work of Gumperz. (Interested readers are cordially invited to peruse both of these scholar's work and how they influenced linguistics).

These two men must have been aware of each others' work, and it seems to this writer, each more or less, spurred the other on, and this gave much to language understanding and therefore, to linguistics, and should be understood.

Before leaving anthropology completely, it is necessary to briefly mention the work of Del Hymes, who was instrumental in the relationship between the study of so-called 'primitive' cultures and language.

Hymes wrote extensively in the 60's and 70's. Throughout his writings the essence of 'communication' figures predominantly. The 'ethnography of communication' is again and again stressed. He notes that even though anthropology and linguistics differ from each other in many, diverse ways, the former is important to the latter. Hymes' work strongly suggests that linguistic communication (a grammatical system that is responsible in many ways for the development of culture) is extremely important.

It is the opinion of this author that one cannot easily separate 'behavior' and 'knowledge' from language and the resulting development of a given culture is greatly dependent upon the relationship that culture and language have with each other. Indeed, a culture is greatly influenced in numerous and diverse ways by the manners in which ideas are formed. This is done by 'communication' (verbal and written).

Hymes did a lot of work with 'communicative competence' and its role in the

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shaping of culture. Briefly, this concept (communicative competence) involves the use of language (and therefore, grammar) for communication. (Interested readers are encouraged to look at his notion of communicative competence here).

In order for the analysis of communicative competence to be performed a methodology is required. Hymes put forward one that is based upon the important things in communicative events. In short, what is communicated and for what reason (s) this is done takes a position of cardinal importance.

Pragmatics (mainly concerned with the meanings of a linguistic event, the situation in which it occurs, and its communicative intent) is very important. There have been numerous ways in which pragmatics has been defined and it is a matter of choices as to which variant a scholar deems important. However, pragmatics holds a vital place in the manner in which people communicate with one another.

Schiffirin seems to hold the work of Grice in this regard as very important here. Anyone interested in pragmatics is encouraged to consult the works of Grice to see 'why' his dealings with pragmatic theory are of sublime importance. (Also, Schiffirin 1994, should also be consulted).

Most (if not, all) definitions of pragmatics deal with such things as 'speaker meaning and cooperation' among the participants in discourse. Also included here-in, is the manner in which the hearer 'takes' what is communicated. In fact, cooperation is of vital importance for successful communication to occur.

Conversation analysis is of great importance to the understanding of discourse principles. Indeed, conversation 'really' happens amongst people. Many scholars, from divergent disciplines (anthropologists, sociologists, linguists and etc. have examined it). It occupies a place of sublime importance in the understanding of language.

Contrastive analysis deals with actual 'speaking and hearing' events. In briefly summing up what contrastive analysis is concerned with one has to discuss the manner in which a relationship between prior utterances forms the shape of what is to follow. The context is extremely important and contextual relevance is crucial for communication. Utterances and responses to them **MUST** be relevant to each other. If not, non-sense will occur.

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## CONCLUSION

This brief paper has only brushed the surface with respect to discourse between people. It has mainly served as an introduction to this very broad, and yet, important area of study. In order for the teaching of languages to occur, it is crucial for teachers to understand 'how and why' it takes place. This is vital for all teachers of speaking and writing, but maybe of more importance (for practical reasons) to the former.

Interested readers are encouraged to read more about discourse theory. Teachers of language should, of course, learn as much as possible about speaking and listening theory. Only by so doing, can they become even better imparters of language to their charges.

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