Discourse Production

Psychology of Language
Spring 2003
Linguistic Units

- Phoneme
- Morpheme
- Syllable
- Word
- Sentence
- Discourse
Discourse

- Language units that are larger than a sentence.
- Narrative
- Conversation
- Debates
- Meetings
Narrative

- Type of discourse in which someone describes a series of events.
- Unusual type of discourse in that speaker can hold the floor for an extended period.

- Example
Structure of Narrative

• Usually 6 parts of a narrative are conveyed:
  – 1. Brief overview of the story
  – 2. Summary of characters and setting
  – 3. An action that made the situation complicated
  – 4. The point of the narrative
  – 5. The resolution of the story
  – 6. A final signal that the narrative is complete
More about Narrative

- Narratives describe actual or fictional events.

- The storyteller has a specific goal that must be conveyed, but the organization is not fully preplanned at the beginning of the story.
Social Aspect of Narrative

- Storyteller typically keeps track of what the listeners know and how they are making sense of the story.
Language is a social instrument

Herb Clark, 1985

• When we speak, goal often is not merely to express thoughts aloud, but to influence who we are speaking to.
Pragmatics

• Knowledge of social rules that underlie language use.

• Focuses on how speakers successfully communicate messages to their audience.
Pragmatics include...

- Common ground
- Knowledge about conversational format
- Understanding of directives
1. Common Ground

• Conversationalists share the similar background knowledge, schemas, and experiences that are necessary for mutual understanding (Clark, 1992).
Speakers Collaborate to Establish Common Ground

• Listener should provide evidence of understanding ("uh huh" or nod of head, look puzzled).

• Speaker should monitor to make sure listener understands/is paying attention!

• When would people be less successful in establishing common ground?
Mean Number of Turns That Directors in Clark and Wilkes-Gibb’s (1986) Study Required for Each Figure, as a Function of Trial Number.
The Point?

- To produce conversational speech, speakers and listeners quickly become skilled in communicating efficiently (taking other person’s knowledge into account and can plan own message with that constraint).
Lexical Entrainment

- Two communicators create and adopt a standard term to refer to an object.
2. Conversation

- The Given-New Principle

  - *In class today, we will talk about the Given-New principle.*
Listeners expect speakers to be…(Maxims of Conversation)

- Informative
- Truthful
- Relevant
- Clear
- Unambiguous
- Brief
Conversational Format

- When in conversation, people keep pauses very brief, typically less than 1 second.

- Closing conversations is highly structured. 2 speakers make pre-closing statements so that they can negotiate being ready to leave the conversation at the same time.
3. Directives

• A sentence that requests someone to do something.

• Often in a format that anticipates potential obstacles.
  – Gibbs (1986)

• Often, more polite, more words. By any chance, could you lend me your car for a few hours?
  – But too much elaboration may be considered overly polite.
Directives

- Asked in form of indirect questions. Speaker needs a service rather than information. *It’s hot in here, isn’t it?*
Gender Differences in Conversation

- *What do you think?*
Gender Differences in Conversation

- Research in the 70’s suggested there are differences.

- Research in the 90’s suggest the differences are based more on who has power in the relationship.
Gender Differences in Conversation

• What study would you design to test gender differences in conversation?
“[According to Searle, 1979,] comprehending metaphorical meanings requires more time and effort than comprehending literal meanings. This *need not always* be so.

... Perhaps Searle’s (1979) view of how metaphors are understood is applicable to a subset of figurative expressions that do not use common terms, or vehicles, [e.g., “it’s raining salt and pepper,” as opposed to “it’s raining cats and dogs,”] but instead use a brand new vehicle for the first time.