

# 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

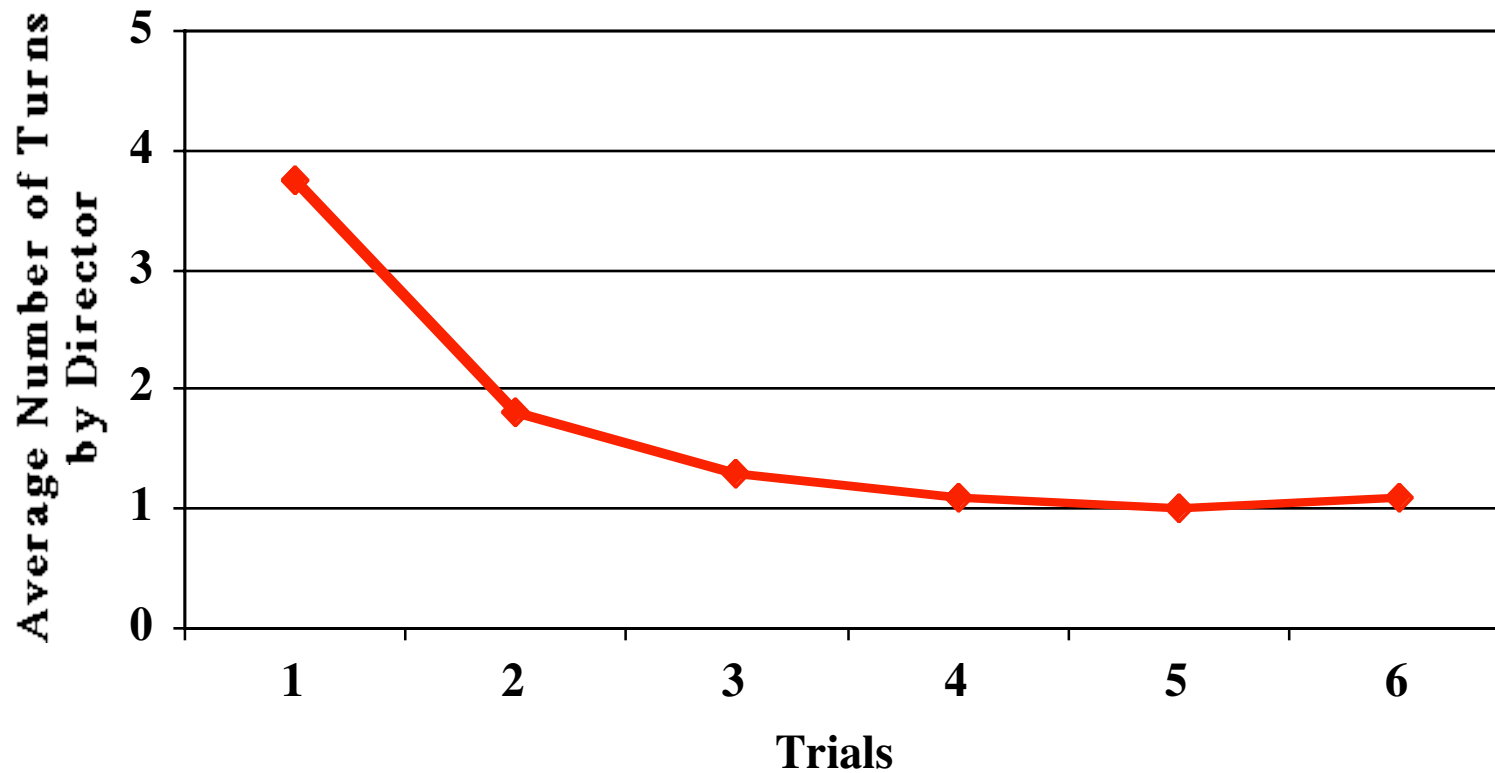
# 1. Common Ground

- 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?

Style of written communication (journal article)

“[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.