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Master One

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Discourse Analysis

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## **Speech Events**

### **1. Introduction and Definition**

The analysis of speech events in relationship to discourse analysis is determined by a number of significant principles that can be summarized as follows:

1. Speech events have contexts or situations to which they are fitted and in which they are typically found.
2. A speech event like 'conversation' can occur appropriately in a wide range of situations, some, like a 'prayer', are highly restricted.
3. The cultural implications of speech events appropriateness or inappropriateness may differ from one culture to another especially with regard to ritual ceremonies such as funerals, prayer, marriages, etc. Socio-cultural factors in this case play a significant role in the interpretation of the act of communication, namely, laughter, silence, tone of voice and the like.
4. Several speech events can take place successively or even simultaneously in the same situation, as for instance with distinct conversations at a party.
5. The relationship between speech events and speech acts is hierarchical: an event may consist of a single speech act, but will often comprise several. For instance, as it is noted by Dell Hymes for English: 'a sentence, interrogative in form, may be now a request, now a command, now a statement; a request may be manifested by a sentence that is now interrogative, now declarative, now imperative in form'.

### **2. Components of Speech Events**

Obviously, speech events are characterized by various stylistic modes and structures, however, some speech events (in particular genres of discourse) are performed for specific purposes in specific places with particular participants. The success or failure of the speech events in terms of accurate communication acts depends on the pragmatic competence of the interlocutors (whether passive or active) which in turn involves three major communication skills:

1. Using language for different purposes such as greeting, informing, demanding, promising, and requesting.

2. Adapting or changing language according to the needs or expectations of a listener or situation- such as talking differently to a baby then to an adult, giving enough background information to an unfamiliar listener, talking differently in a classroom then on a playground.
3. Following rules for conversations and narratives, for instance telling stories, giving reports, recounting events of the day. There are rules for taking turns in conversation, introducing topics of conversations staying on the topic, rephrasing when misunderstood. There are also rules for appropriate use of nonverbal signals in conversation, distance between speaker and hearer, facial expressions, and eye contact. Evidently, rules may vary depending on language and culture.

## **Major Parameters in Speech Events**

### **1. Setting**

All speech events occur of necessity in time and space- sometimes it is one of the defining criteria of an event that it takes place at a specific time or in a specific place. Even when a speech event is not restricted to a particular setting, the latter may affect either the stylistic mode or the stylistic structure. Moreover, Hymes stresses that the analyst should also take note of the ‘psychological setting’ of an event- the cultural definition of an occasion as formal or informal, serious or festive. Besides, certain principal factors determine the setting of any speech event, namely:

- Time and Space.
- Impact on the Discourse Style.
- Psychological setting in terms of the interlocutors’ state of mind.

### **2. Participants**

Traditionally speech has been described in relationship to a speaker who transmits a message and a listener who receives it. However, certain discourse analyst put forward at least four (4) participant roles: addresser, speaker, addressee and hearer (or audience). Any description of a discourse (in a given speech community) must include data on who is and what can fill the participant roles. Certain participant features and particularly certain kinds of relationships between participants directly condition the choice of linguistic items in speech. Thus the following are the essential elements that should be taken into consideration with regard to participants:

- Participant Role: addresser-addressee; speaker-hearer.
- Relationship between Participants: kinship; friendship; professional; intimate; stranger; animosity, etc.
- Degree of Literacy, Personality and Social Status.

### **3. Purpose**

All speech events (and speech acts) have a purpose, even if occasionally it is only phatic. Speech even purposes are distinguished according to their function in, for instance, contracts, trade, communal work tasks or negotiation over a disagreement in order to reach a settlement. The significant principles that are involved in purpose are briefly stated as:

- All speech events are purposeful depending on the objectives of the interlocutors.
- Purposes (or goals) may be assigned in advance in certain speech events where talks, discussions or negotiations are involved, particularly in domains like politics, trade, and business.
- Exceptionally, some speech events sometimes seem to be purposeless (not purposeful) especially in situations with no apparent objectives like in Phatic Communion or in Rapport.

### **4. Key**

Key is usually defined by discourse analysts like Hymes and van Dijk as the ‘tone, manner, or spirit’ in which an event is performed. Events may be identical in setting, participants, message or form but may differ in key between mock and serious, perfunctory and painstaking. The signaling of key may be nonverbal, by wink, smile, gesture or posture, but may equally be achieved by conventional units of speech like tone of voice and stress assignment. In sum, the components that are displayed in Key can be cited in the following points:

- Tone, Manner or Spirit of the discourse.
- Irony or Seriousness with various degrees of each element.
- Linguistic Traits like Tone, Stress and Style; and Non-Linguistic Traits such as Smile, Gesture or Posture and Facial Expressions.

### **5. Message Content or Topic**

For many speech events topic is fully predetermined and invariable, though for others, particularly conversation, topic is relatively unconstrained. The effect of topic on style is disparate and varies from one speech community to another, it may have little impact or it can be strongly marked. The key elements that are implied in message content are indicated as follows:

- Pre-determined in view of Time and Space.
- Invariable in connection with known topics in some particular speech event such as Sermon, Lecture, Business or Political Debate.
- The Topic and Style are mutually influential.
- The Topic may vary in accordance with Cultural Behaviors.

## Conclusion

On the whole, any detailed description of a speech event must include information on all of the components and on the interrelation between them. As a matter of fact, discourse analysis in the context of the foreign language classroom is best done in a way that provides detailed information on the participants, their status, the situations, and the speech events that are occurring. The reason is that- merely presenting linguistic formulas without such background information- can lead to overgeneralizations on how speech acts function in real-life situations.

## Practice

**Task One:** Indicate the different settings, participants, purposes, keys and topics that are respectively present in the following samples:

1 'It's short before half-time, the scoreboard shows England 0, Russia 0. John Haynes takes a pass from Tom Finney and yes! He drives the ball into the net. Gooooooooo! Good Heavens! John is usually a goal-maker rather than a scorer. Wembley is in trance!'

2 'The judge was very lenient, not sentencing the convict to prison, only the fine was pretty stiff. Judge: Quiet please!'

3 'Oh good, you've brought my luggage. Just put it down in the hall, will you, please?'

4 'It's imperative that the present directive be effectuated expeditiously! Yes, sir.'

5 'I'm telling you not to do that!'

6 'Passengers are hereby informed not to cross the line.'

7 'Deep water!'

8 An American teacher: 'Would you like to read?' Russian student: 'No, I would not!'

9 'Since the beginning of life man fought for his freedom.....Malboro a taste of freedom.'

10 Michael: 'Why don't you invite Tom to the classical music concert?'

Brenda: 'Tom? He is an ice cube with wooden ears!'

11 Notice: 'You are welcome to visit the cemetery where famous Russian composers, artists and writers are buried daily except Thursday!' (Moscow hotel)

12 General Bugeaud: 'We will grant you a new-found status of Sultan if you keep peace and trade with France.'

Emir Abdelkader: 'If all the treasures in the world could be laid in the hood of my burnoose and set in the balance against my liberty, I would choose my liberty. I ask neither grace nor favor.'

13 'Soil provides raw material for plants and the type of soil determines the flora and fauna of a region, wind and water can cause erosion of soil.'

14 'On August 1945, at 8,15 am; a solitary plane flew over the Japanese city of Hiroshima. Then, suddenly, the city disintegrated in a single searing atomic blast.'

**Task Two:** Explain the contextual indicators that allow a better understanding or interpretation of the characters, situation, objectives, topic or institutions in the following sequences.

1 'The farce began in 1827 when Hussein, the Turkish Dey was provoked into losing his temper and slapped the consul across the face with his fly whisk.'

2 'When in a trance he was summoned by Gabriel to Jerusalem, to be born aloft on a winged white horse through the seven heavens to the throne of God in the Sacred House.'

3 'In July 1962 the President, Ben Khedda, dismissed him from command of the army; he reacted by marching on Algiers one month later.'

4 'The lower house is elected by the people and has more power, the upper house is made up of a number of peers most of these are appointed by the Queen.'

5 'This company took the name of two brothers Dick and Mac who had run it in the 1940's; it is a large group of US fast food restaurants and has become a symbol of US commercial success.'

**Task Three:** Make a contextual and textual analysis of the following sequences.

1 Michael Latham (Conservative MP, Great Britain: 'Israel's security will be permanently endangered by an independent PLO-dominated West Bank State.'

D.J. McCarthy (Labor MP, Great Britain: 'It is high time someone exposed the absurdity of this. What threat is an impoverished Arab territory smaller than Yorkshire going to be when it would not only be surrounded by Arab neighbors who were party to the peace settlement, but also at the daily mercy of Israel's military power!?'

2 Abdul Kadir (Malay student): 'Hello! How are you? I prayed to Allah for your safety and peaceful livelihood. How's your part-time job at the pharmacy? Work hard, diligent and trustworthy. You will have a long way ahead.'

Jennifer (American student): 'You sound like my mum!'

3 Teacher: 'Speak only when you are spoken to!'

Student: ‘Well, sir if everybody obeys that rule and if you only speak when you are spoken to and the other person always waits for you to begin. You see nobody will ever say anything.’

4 Ajayi (groom’s father): ‘We have come to pluck a red, red rose that in your beautiful garden grows. Which never has been plucked before, so lovelier than any other.’

Ayo (bride’s father): ‘Will you be able to nurture our lovely rose well?’

Ajayi: ‘So well shall we nurture your rose till bring forth many others!’

Ayo: ‘You are admitted! Prayers offered! Drinks served!’

5 Honorable judge: ‘In accordance with Article 16 of the Criminal Code, the Jury has found the defendant guilty and, consequently, he is hereby sentenced to ten- year imprisonment in a high security county jail. The prisoner will be eligible for parole after serving five-year internment!’

### **List of References**

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**Good Luck and God Bless**

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