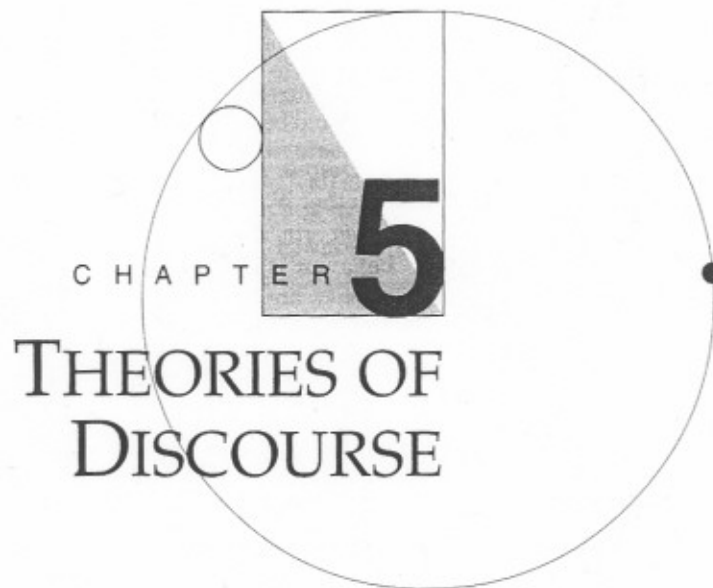


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CHAPTER 5
THEORIES OF
DISCOURSE

In the previous chapter, we discussed language and coding. We saw there that communication can take place with the use of single signs or a combination of signs. Usually communication involves much more than simple utterances and actions. Most communication, from the mundane to the elaborate, consists of complex acts that form messages, or *discourse*.

In his study of the intellectual structure of the communication discipline, John Powers identified *messages* as central to the communication process.¹ He noted that messages have three structural properties: (1) relatively independent signs and symbols, (2) language as a formal code, and (3) relatively interconnected discourse structures.

In the previous chapter, we explored several theories in the first two categories—signs and language. In this chapter, we look to theories in the third category—discourse. This involves using signs and language in a coherent and integrated way to make a statement or achieve a goal.

Discourse analysis enables us to look closely at how messages are organized, used, and under-

stood. The structure of discourse will change depending on what you want to accomplish. The process of discourse analysis enables us to examine the various ways in which accomplishments are achieved through messages.²

Although writing and even nonverbal behavior can be considered discourse, most discourse analysis concentrates on naturally occurring talk. There are several strands of discourse analysis, sharing a common set of concerns.³

Scott Jacobs outlines three types of problems tackled by discourse analysis.⁴ The first is the *problem of meaning*. How do people understand

1 John Powers, "On the Intellectual Structure of the Human Communication Discipline," *Communication Education* 44 (1995): 191-222.

2 Scott Jacobs, "Language and Interpersonal Communication," in *Handbook of Interpersonal Communication*, eds. Mark L. Knapp and Gerald R. Miller (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), pp. 199-228; see also Donald G. Ellis and William A. Donohue (eds.), *Contemporary Issues in Language and Discourse Processes* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1986).

3 For a brief discussion of the various uses of the term *discourse analysis*, see Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell, *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behavior* (London: Sage, 1987), pp. 6-7.

4 Jacobs, "Language and Interpersonal Communication."

messages? What information is embedded in the structure of a statement that enables another person to know that, for example, "Is Sybil there?" means that you want to talk to her on the telephone, or "You sure are hot" means you think the other person is on a winning streak?

The second challenge of discourse analysis is the *problem of action*, or knowing how to get something done through talk. What kinds of choices do we have when we want to do something like make a request or greet someone? How does a person decide how to say something, and how can he or she know the difference between an appropriate and an inappropriate way of putting something into words?

The *problem of coherence*, the third question of discourse analysis, involves figuring out how to make patterns of talk sensible and logical. In a conversation, for example, there is a back-and-forth flow among participants. How do they string words together rationally? What principles are used to connect one statement with another in a way that everyone understands? If you look at a transcript of a conversation carefully, you often find that it seems disjointed; yet, the communicators made sense of what they were saying as they went along. How did they do this?

Because we understand, act, and have coherent conversations intuitively, these questions may seem mundane; but these questions are challenging when you really try to answer them systematically. Several theories have been proposed to explain meaning and action in discourse. Most of these theories are based on the concept of rules, so we begin there.

RULE THEORY

The rules tradition has had a major impact on the field of communication. The idea that people operate by rules in language, discourse, and social action has become widely accepted.⁵ Susan Shimanoff summarizes the point:

In order for communication to exist, or continue, two or more interacting individuals must share rules for using symbols. Not only must they have rules for individual symbols, but they

must also agree on such matters as how to take turns at speaking, how to be polite or how to insult, to greet, and so forth. If every symbol user manipulated symbols at random, the result would be chaos rather than communication.⁶

Despite its diversity, the rule approach is held together by certain common assumptions.⁷ The *action principle* states that although some human behavior is mechanical, our most important behaviors are actively initiated by the individual. People choose courses of action to achieve their goals. Because most rule theorists agree that actions are intentional, they see behavior as rule-governed rather than law-governed.

As we saw in Chapter 1, however, some social scientists do not subscribe to the action principle, believing instead that behavior is mostly governed by causal laws. Even rule theorists will tell you certain rules are so deeply embedded in language that we follow them automatically in an almost causal way. By definition, to speak the language is to follow its rules. Some discourse analysis also uses rules in this highly programmed way, and when this is the case, the distinction between rules and laws becomes fuzzy indeed.

Another basic assumption of most rules theories is that social behavior is structured and organized. Certain behaviors recur in similar situations, although social interaction patterns vary from one to another. Discourse patterns, then, are organized, but organization is highly situational. Thus, most of these theories emphasize the relationship between the way people act and

5 Susan B. Shimanoff, *Communication Rules: Theory and Research* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1980), pp. 31-88, lists some of the major scholars who have studied rules as well as a variety of definitions and explanations of rules.

6 Shimanoff, *Communication Rules*, pp. 31-32.

7 The similarities and differences among rule theories are discussed in such sources as Donald P. Cushman, "The Rules Perspective as a Theoretical Basis for the Study of Human Communication," *Communication Quarterly* 25 (1977): 30-45; W. Barnett Pearce, "Rules Theories of Communication: Varieties, Limitations, and Potentials" (paper presented at the meeting of the Speech Communication Association, New York, 1980); Stuart J. Sigman, "On Communication Rules from a Social Perspective," *Human Communication Research* 7 (1980): 37-51; Shimanoff, *Communication Rules*; and Donald Cushman, "The Rules Approach to Communication Theory: A Philosophical and Operational Perspective," in *Communication Theory: Eastern and Western Perspectives*, ed. D. L. Kincaid (San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 1987), pp. 223-234.

the situation in rules scholars precisely because they reflect such variations.

Rules allow Rules affect the situation, yet because they explain why people do things at certain times and places.

Approaches

There are three rule-following approaches, and the

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Rules allow us to organize social interaction. Rules affect the options available in a given situation, yet because rules are situational, they explain why people behave differently at various times and places.

Approaches to Rules

There are three general approaches to rules—the rule-following approach, the rule-governed approach, and the rule-using approach.⁸

Rule-Following Approach. In this view rules are seen simply as observed behavioral regularities. A recurring pattern is said to happen “as a rule.” Barnett Pearce calls such rules weak laws because they are cast in the form of a statement of what is expected to happen. This approach does not explain why particular patterns happen, but only lists predictable behaviors. Many linguistic and discourse theories are of this type, suggesting that speakers unconsciously follow rules of grammar and discourse with a high degree of regularity.

Rule-Governed Approach. Here, rules are considered to be beliefs about what should or should not be done to achieve your objective. The rule-governed approach attempts to uncover communicators’ intentions and to define the socially acceptable ways goals are accomplished. For example, if you want to join in a conversation at a party, you would approach the group but not speak until recognized nonverbally. Breaking in too quickly would be a rule violation that could ruffle a few feathers. The rule-governed approach presumes that people know the rules and have the power to follow or violate them. It also assumes that people usually act consciously, intentionally, and rationally.

Because you use speech in a variety of ways to achieve your objectives, you know how to do so effectively and appropriately. When you want to greet a person, make a request, object to what

someone is doing, or bond with a friend, you employ the rules. You are free to choose your goals, but once having done so, you must employ certain rules to achieve them.

Rule-Using Approach. This final approach to rules imagines social life to be more complex than do the other two approaches. The actor is confronted with a variety of rules for accomplishing various intentions. The actor chooses which rules to use in carrying out an intention. People are rule critics and choose to follow some rules and discard others. This approach thereby provides a basis for evaluating what choices people make in social situations and even allows for people to create new options.

Rule using also helps us understand communication competence by revealing how well a person sorts through the set of objectives and rules to plan a strategy. In a highly homogeneous situation, such as joining a cocktail party conversation, the rules are few and simple. Here, the rule-governed approach is sufficient to explain what occurs, but in complex situations like preparing for a speech, organizing a meeting, or writing a letter, the rule-using approach is preferable.

To get a better idea of how rules might be used in producing and understanding discourse, let’s look now at speech act theory.

Speech-Act Theory

Ludwig Wittgenstein, a German philosopher, began a line of thought called *ordinary language philosophy*.⁹ He taught that the meaning of language depends on its actual use. Language, as used in

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8 Pearce, “Rules Theories.” See also Joan Ganz, *Rules: A Systematic Study* (Paris: Mouton, 1971).

9 Wittgenstein’s best-known early work was *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922); his later work, which forms the foundation for ordinary language philosophy, is *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953). See also the excellent summary by David Silverman and Brian Torode, *The Material Word: Some Theories of Language and Its Limits* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980); Richard Buttney, “The Ascription of Meaning: A Wittgensteinian Perspective,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 72 (1986): 261–273; and Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein’s Vienna* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973).

ordinary life, is a *language game* because it consists of rules. In other words, people follow rules to accomplish things with language. When you give and obey orders, ask and answer questions, and describe events, you are engaged in language games. Like ordinary games such as chess and poker, each language game has a different set of rules.

Later J. L. Austin referred to the practical use of language as speech acts.¹⁰ Speech-act theory, then, is built on the foundation laid by Wittgenstein and Austin.¹¹ Today Austin's protégé John Searle is most often associated with the theory.

In this theory, the *speech act* is the basic unit of language used to express meaning, an utterance that expresses an intention. Normally, the speech act is a sentence, but it can be a word or phrase as long as it follows the rules necessary to accomplish the intention, or to play the language game.

When one speaks, one performs an act. The act may be stating, questioning, commanding, promising, or a number of other possibilities. Speech, then, is not just used to designate something; it actually does something. That is why it is called *speech act*. Consequently, speech-act theory does not stress the individual referents of symbols but the intent of the act as a whole. If a speech act is successful, the recipient will understand the speaker's intention.

If you make a promise, you are communicating an intention about something you will do in the future, but more important, you are expecting the other communicator to realize from what you have said what your intention is. If you say,

"I promise to pay you back," you assume the other person knows the meaning of the words. But knowing the words is not enough; knowing what you intend to accomplish by using the words is vital.

Whenever you make a statement like "I will pay you back," you are performing at least three and maybe four acts. The first is an *utterance act*, or the simple pronunciation of the words. Second, you are performing a *propositional act* because you are saying something you believe to be true. Third, and most important from a speech-act perspective, you are performing an *illocutionary act* designed to fulfill an intention. (In this example you are making a promise, and it is important to communication that your listener understand this intention.) Finally, you may be performing a *perlocutionary act*, designed to have an actual effect on the other person's behavior. (Maybe you are trying to get him to loan you some money.)

Because the difference between illocution and perlocution is sometimes hard to grasp, let's pursue it a little further. An illocution is an act in which the speaker's primary concern is that the listener understand the intention—to make a promise, a request, or whatever. A perlocution is an act in which the speaker expects the listener not only to understand but to act in a particular way because of that understanding. If I say, "I am thirsty," with the intention of having you understand that I need something to drink, I am performing an illocutionary act. I may also want you to bring me a glass of water. This is called an indirect request, and it is both illocutionary and perlocutionary.

Now let's look at the distinction between propositional acts and illocutionary acts in more detail. The proposition can be understood as one aspect of the content of a statement. It designates some quality or association of an object, situation, or event. "The cake is good," "Salt is harmful to the body," "Her name is Karen" are all examples of propositions. Propositions can be evaluated in terms of their truth value.

In speech-act theory, however, truth and logic are not considered central. Rather, the question is

what a speaker proposition. He always be viewed illocution. Searle such as the following: "The cake is good; I warn you I state that her intention is doing with this in these examples. The meaning of force. You might think "The cake is the opposite: I Here what appears has the illocutionary

Searle states language is engaged behavior."¹² Two constitutive and actually create games or "constituted ball as a game. The rules make people follow the game of football; therefore tell you opposed to base

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10 J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962); *Philosophy of Language* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964). For a general summary of Austin's ideas, see also Potter and Wetherell, *Discourse and Social Psychology*, pp. 14-18.

11 John Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); "Human Communication Theory and the Philosophy of Language: Some Remarks," in *Human Communication Theory*, ed. F. E. X. Dance (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1967), pp. 116-129. Good secondary sources include John Stewart, "Concepts of Language and Meaning: A Comparative Study," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 58 (1972): 123-133; Paul N. Campbell, "A Rhetorical View of Locutionary, Illocutionary, and Perlocutionary Acts," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 59 (1973): 284-296; Robert Gaines, "Doing by Saying: Toward a Theory of Perlocution," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 65 (1979): 207-217.

what a speaker intends to do by uttering a proposition. Hence, for Searle, propositions must always be viewed as part of a larger context—the illocution. Searle would be interested in acts such as the following: I *ask* whether the cake is good; I *warn* you that salt is harmful to the body; I *state* that her name is Karen. What the speaker is doing with the proposition is the speech act—in these examples, to ask, to warn, and to state. The meaning of a speech act is its *illocutionary force*. You might, for example, state the proposition “The cake is good” ironically to mean just the opposite: This cake is the worst I ever ate. Here what appears to be a simple proposition has the illocutionary force of an insult.

Searle states fundamentally that “speaking a language is engaging in a rule-governed form of behavior.”¹² Two types of rules are important—constitutive and regulative. *Constitutive rules* actually create games; that is, the game is created, or “constituted,” by its rules. For example, football as a game exists only by virtue of its rules. The rules make up the game. When you observe people following a certain set of rules, you know the game of football is being played. These rules therefore tell you what to interpret as football, as opposed to baseball or soccer.

In speech acts constitutive rules tell you what to interpret as a promise, as opposed to a request or a command. One’s intention is largely understood by another person because of the constitutive rules; they tell others what to count as a particular kind of act.

For example, how do you know a promise when you hear one? Promising involves five basic rules. First, it must include a sentence indicating the speaker will do some future act. Second, the utterance can only be made if the listener would rather that the speaker do the act than not do it. Third, a statement is a promise only when it would not otherwise be obvious to the speaker and hearer that the act would be done in the normal course of events. Fourth, the speaker must intend to do the act. Finally, a promise involves

the establishment of an obligation for the speaker to do the act. These five rules “constitute” a sufficient set of conditions for an act to count as a promise.

Any illocutionary act must have a basic set of constitutive rules. The *propositional content rule* specifies some condition of the referenced object. In a promise, for example, the speaker must state that a future act will be done, to repay a debt perhaps. *Preparatory rules* involve the presumed preconditions in the speaker and hearer necessary for the act to take place. For example, in a promise the utterance has no meaning unless the hearer would rather the future act be done than not be done. In our illustration, the hearer wants to get repaid. The *sincerity rule* requires the speaker to mean what is said. You must truly intend to repay the debt for the statement to count as a promise. The *essential rule* states that the act is indeed taken by the hearer and speaker to represent what it appears to be on the face. In other words the promise establishes a contractual obligation between speaker and hearer.

These constitutive rule types are believed to apply to a wide variety of illocutionary acts, such as requesting, asserting, questioning, thanking, advising, warning, greeting, and congratulating.

The second kind of rule is regulative. *Regulative rules* provide guidelines for acting within a game. The behaviors are known and available before being used in the act, and they tell us how to use speech to accomplish a particular intention. For example, if I want something, I make a request. When I request something of you, you are obligated either to grant the request or to turn it down.

Speech acts are not successful when their illocutionary force is not understood, and they can be evaluated in terms of the degree to which they employ the rules. Whereas propositions are evaluated in terms of truth or *validity*, speech acts, then, are evaluated in terms of *felicity*, or the degree to which the conditions of the act are met.

Although many speech acts are direct and involve the use of an explicit statement of intent, other speech acts are indirect. For example, in requesting that his family come to the table, a

¹² Searle, *Speech Acts*, p. 22.

father might say, "Is anybody hungry?" On the face this appears to be a question, but in actuality it is an indirect request.

Searle outlines five types of illocutionary acts. The first he calls *assertives*. An assertive is a statement that commits the speaker to advocate the truth of a proposition. It includes such acts as stating, affirming, concluding, and believing. The second are *directives*, illocutions that attempt to get the listener to do something. They are commands, requests, pleadings, prayers, entreaties, invitations, and so forth. *Commissives*, the third type, commit the speaker to a future act. They consist of such things as promising, vowing, pledging, contracting, and guaranteeing. The fourth, *expressives*, are acts that communicate some aspect of the speaker's psychological state, such as thanking, congratulating, apologizing, condoling, and welcoming. Finally, a *declaration* is designed to create a proposition that, by its very assertion, makes it so. Examples include appointing, marrying, firing, and resigning. To illustrate, you are not married until an authorized person actually says the words, "I pronounce you husband and wife."

Speech-act theory identifies what it takes to make a successful statement, to have an intention understood. But speech acts are rarely isolated; they are usually part of ongoing conversations. How we organize conversations is a fascinating and important question in communication theory.

CONVERSATION ANALYSIS

One of the most interesting and popular lines of work in communication is conversation analysis.¹³ This is part of a branch of sociology called *ethnomethodology*, which is the detailed study of how people organize their everyday lives.¹⁴ It involves a set of methods for looking carefully at the ways people work together to create social organization.

A conversation, like any aspect of social life, is viewed as a social achievement because it requires that we get certain things done cooperatively through talk.¹⁵ Conversation analysis at-

tempts to discover in detail exactly what those achievements are. The primary concern of conversation analysis is *sequential organization*, or the ways speakers organize their talk, turn by turn.

Of utmost importance in conversation analysis is the assumption that conversations are stable and orderly. Even when they appear sloppy on the surface, there is an underlying organization to all coherent talk, and the participants themselves actually create it as they go along. The analyst works inductively by first examining the details of actual conversations—many conversations—and then generalizing possible principles by which the participants themselves organized their own talk.

As an example, consider the simple task of telling a story. When you tell a story, it may appear that you just say it, but your story is really a joint achievement accomplished by you and your listeners. Although you probably take an extended turn, your story is made possible by the cooperation of others in carefully organized turns. First, you have to get the floor by offering to tell a story, and others acknowledge and permit you to do so. During the story itself, listeners may take various types of turns to recognize and reinforce the story, indicate understanding, give you further permission to continue talking, direct or affect the story in some way, or correct or repair something you said. All of this requires work and organization on the part of everyone.¹⁶

13 This section deals with conversation in the discourse analysis tradition, emphasizing the verbal structure of conversational texts. There is also a tradition that studies the management of conversations in a broader sense, including the nonverbal elements. See Joseph N. Cappella, "The Management of Conversations," in *Handbook of Interpersonal Communication*, eds. M. L. Knapp and G. R. Miller (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1985), pp. 393-439.

14 Ethnomethodology is most often associated with its originator, sociologist Harold Garfinkel; see his *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967). For a brief description of this tradition, see Potter and Wetherell, *Discourse and Social Psychology*, pp. 18-23. See also Graham Button (ed.), *Ethnomethodology and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

15 For detailed discussions of conversation analysis, see George Psathas, *Conversation Analysis: The Study of Talk-in-Interaction* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995); Anna-Brita Stenström, *An Introduction to Spoken Interaction* (London: Longman, 1994); Robert Nofsinger, *Everyday Conversation* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1991).

16 Jenny Mandelbaum, "Interpersonal Activities in Conversational Storytelling," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 53 (1989): 114-126.

Conversations are a variety of issues. Speakers need to know the rules of conversation: gaps, and over- Conversation rule violation repair errors in

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19 H. Paul Grice *Conversational Maxims*, vol. 3, eds 1975), pp. 41-58.

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Conversation analysis is concerned with a variety of issues.¹⁷ First, it deals with what speakers need to know to have a conversation—knowing the rules of conversation. The features of a conversation such as turn taking, silences and gaps, and overlaps have been of special interest. Conversation analysis is also concerned with rule violation and the ways people prevent and repair errors in talk.

Certainly the most popular, and perhaps the most significant, aspect of conversation analysis is *conversational coherence*.¹⁸ Simply defined, coherence is connectedness and meaningfulness in conversation. A coherent conversation seems well structured and sensible to the participants. Coherence is normally taken for granted, yet the production of coherence is complex and not altogether understood.

Conversational Maxims

A good place to begin the topic of coherence is the theory of H. Paul Grice.¹⁹ Grice proposed a set of very general assumptions to which all conversationalists must subscribe in order to be perceived as competent. The first and most general is the *cooperative principle*, which reads: One's contribution must be appropriate. Cooperation here does not necessarily mean expression of agreement, but it does mean that one is willing to contribute something in line with the purpose of the conversation. More specifically, cooperation is achieved by following four maxims.

Grice's first is the *quantity maxim*: One's contribution should provide sufficient, but not too much, information. You violate the quantity maxim when your comments are too brief or too verbose. The second is the *quality maxim*: One's contribution should be truthful. You violate the quality maxim when you deliberately lie or communicate in a way that does not reflect an honest

intention. The third is the *relevancy maxim*: Comments must be pertinent. You violate this maxim when you make an irrelevant comment. The fourth maxim is the *manner maxim*: Do not be obscure, ambiguous, or disorganized.

You are probably thinking by now that these maxims seem absurdly simple and obvious, but the associated question of how speakers actually use them and how they handle apparent violations is far more complicated and interesting. Of course, the cooperative principle and maxims are often violated, sometimes on purpose, but what makes them so important is that they are never violated without disrupting the flow of conversation or affecting the perceptions of others in the conversation. In other words, violations are a problem communicators must deal with cooperatively.

When a maxim appears to be violated, communicators wonder what is going on. We manage these violations by making certain interpretations, called *conversational implicatures*, that help us understand what is being implied or implicated by the apparent violation. To assume that the violator is living up to the cooperative principle, the listener must attribute some additional meaning that will make the speaker's contribution seem to conform to the principle. In fact, when you deliberately violate a maxim, you assume that your listener will understand that you really do intend to be cooperative. If, for example, you say, "It is raining cats and dogs," you are technically violating the quality maxim, but others know that you are speaking metaphorically. This is an example of conversational implicature.

Conversational implicature allows you to use all kinds of interesting, indirect statements to achieve your purposes, without being judged incompetent. In fact, competence itself requires the effective use of implicature. Without it our conversations would be dull, predictable, and lifeless.

One of the most common types of violation is to say something indirectly. Indirect communication is important for a variety of social and personal reasons such as politeness. If, for example, someone asks you how much your car cost, you

17 These issues are outlined in Margaret L. McLaughlin, *Conversation: How Talk Is Organized* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1984).

18 See Robert T. Craig and Karen Tracy (eds.), *Conversational Coherence: Form, Structure, and Strategy* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1983).

19 H. Paul Grice, "Logic and Conversation," in *Syntax and Semantics*, vol. 3, eds. P. Cole and J. Morgan (New York: Academic, 1975), pp. 41-58.

might say, "Oh, quite a bit." Now, on the surface, that violates the maxim of quantity and appears uncooperative, but competent conversationalists will realize that this is really an indirect statement meaning, "It's none of your business."

The study of conversational implicature is really the study of the rules people use to justify violations of other rules; and these implicatures are very important for the overall management of conversations.

Another way that you manage the cooperative principle is to give clues that you are violating a maxim while still intending to be cooperative. Such clues are called *licenses for violations* because they enable you to violate a maxim without objection. For example, you could say, "I might be exaggerating a little, but . . ." Or you might end a statement by prompting, ". . . if you know what I mean." Using phrases and qualifications such as these is a way of asking for a license to violate one or more of the maxims.

Here's a portion of a typical conversation:

- Kay: How did you and your husband meet?
 Betty: Well, that's a long story.
 Kay: Okay, I'm not going anywhere, let's hear it.

When Betty says, "It's a long story," she is seeking Kay's permission to violate the quantity maxim.²⁰

Conversational Coherence

Coherence involves the question of how communicators create clear meaning. How do you know what is appropriate or inappropriate for keeping a conversation well organized? A variety of theories have been proposed.²¹ Some of these use *local* principles, and other theories use *global* ones.

Using Local Principles: The Sequencing Approach. The idea behind the sequencing approach is that a conversation consists of a series of rule-governed speech acts, and coherence is achieved by making sure that each act is an appropriate response to the previous act. For ex-

ample, the question, "Hi, how are you?" is normally followed by, "Fine, how are you?"

Sequencing approaches focus on the *adjacency pair*, which is two speech acts in a row. The *first-pair part* (FPP) is the first utterance, and the *second-pair part* (SPP) is the following utterance. By this approach, a conversation is coherent if proper rules of sequencing are consistently used between the FPP and the SPP.

Perhaps the most influential sequencing model is that of Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson.²² This is basically a turn-taking theory, which stipulates that the next turn in a conversation must be a proper response to complete a particular adjacency-pair type. For instance, a question is to be followed by an answer, a greeting by another greeting, an offer by an acceptance, a request by an acceptance or a rejection. A number of adjacency-pair types have been discussed in the literature: assertion-assert/dissent, question-answer, summons-answer, greeting-greeting, closing-closing, request-grant/denial, insult-response, apology-acceptance/refusal, compliment-acceptance/rejection, threat-response, challenge-response, accusation-denial/confession, and boast-appreciation/derision.

The completion of one speech act signals a turn for another speaker, who is obligated to respond according to appropriate rules. The speaker may designate who the next speaker is to be, or another speaker can appropriately take a turn, as long as a proper response is given. Failing a response, the speaker may continue talking.

Further, adjacency pairs include a *preference for agreement*. In other words, the SPP is normally expected to agree with the FPP. For example, a statement is normally followed by an agreement ("Don't you just love the sun?" "Sure do.") and a

20 Examples of violations are from Susan Swan Mura, "Licensing Violations: Legitimate Violations of Grice's Conversational Principle," in *Conversational Coherence: Form, Structure, and Strategy*, eds. R. T. Craig and K. Tracy (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1983), pp. 101-115.

21 For a summary of some of the approaches, see Craig and Tracy, *Conversational Coherence*.

22 Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson, "A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn Taking for Conversation," *Language* 50 (1974): 696-735.

request is followed by "Fine, how are you?"

Of course, a conversation is coherent if proper rules of sequencing are consistently used between the FPP and the SPP.

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request is followed by an acceptance ("Can I bor-
row your sunscreen?" "Sure."). This does not
mean that people always agree, but disagree-
ment calls for special action in the form of an ac-
count, excuse, or argument.

Of course, conversations are usually more
complex than the simple adjacency-pair concept
implies. For example, you might use a pre-
sequence or an insertion. A *presequence* is an ad-
jacency pair whose meaning depends on another
series of acts that has not yet been uttered. Here,
the initial FPP is an invitation for a subsequent
one:

- FPP: Have you washed your hands?
(presequence)
- SPP: No, why?
- FPP: 'Cause dinner's ready.
- SPP: Okay, I'll do it.

The speaker here intends to make a request, but
it cannot be understood as such without includ-
ing the presequence question.

An *insertion* is an adjacency pair that is be-
tween the two parts of another pair and is subor-
dinate to the main pair. Such insertions are nec-
essary to clarify the intention of the initial FPP.
Here is an example:

- FPP₁: Would you like to go out sometime?
- FPP₂: With you? (insertion)
- SPP₂: Yeah, me.
- SPP₁: Oh, okay.

Such a move is also an example of an *expansion*,
which means that a subsequent speaker expands
the sequence to include additional or subsidiary
intentions. An expansion is involved whenever a
segment of talk that could theoretically be accom-
plished in one turn, like a greeting, compliment,
or request, is played out over several turns. This
system enables us to parse, or separate, a conver-
sation into parts. Table 5.1 shows an example.

The adjacency-pair idea has been quite useful
and applies to many conversations, but conversa-
tion analysts now generally agree that coherence

TABLE 5.1

A Conversational Sequence

Greeting-greeting	FPP		Hi.
Compliment-acceptance	FPP	SPP	Hi. Great dress.
	SPP	FPP	Thanks. My mom bought it for me this weekend.
Assertion-assent			
Compliment-rejection	FPP	SPP	Yeah, it looks great on you.
	SPP		Well, not that great really.
Question-answer		FPP	How's Terry?
		SPP	He's okay, getting better and better.
Question-answer		FPP	Will he be out of the hospital soon?
	FPP	SPP	In about three days, I think.
Assertion-assent		SPP	Great.
		FPP	Well, I gotta go.
Closing-closing		SPP	Yeah, me too. See ya.

cannot be explained strictly by local rules such as these. It is easy to identify sequences that are obviously clear to the communicators but have adjacent statements that do not make sense out of context. In the next section, we look at how these more complicated situations are handled.

Using Global Principles: The Inferential-Strategic Approach. The pragmatic, or rational, approach to conversational coherence assumes that conversations are practical acts that achieve goals. Achieving the goal of a conversation requires that the participants reason their way through it. "If I want such and such, I have to do thus and so." Thus the coherence of a conversation depends on the reasoning process of the communicators. They make decisions about what to say and how to achieve their intentions, and coherence is really judged in accordance with this overall reasoning. If the sequence of acts appears rational in relation to agreed-on goals, it is judged coherent.

This theory, most often associated with Sally Jackson and Scott Jacobs, definitely uses a global approach.²³ These scholars use the game analogy to explain how conversation works. The game itself is controlled by a set of rules, which players must know. The players have objectives in the game, and they use the rules of the game to achieve those objectives. The game is coherent because the appropriate use of rules accomplishes rational objectives. So players must have two kinds of knowledge: They must know the rules of the game and what constitutes rational play within the parameters of the rules.

For example, in playing Monopoly you are expected to accumulate properties and cash by purchasing property, houses, and hotels, and you must do this according to rules. In Monopoly your moves are not judged rational or coherent based on whether they are consistent with

the moves that came before or after but on whether they are consistent with the overall objectives of the game.

Conversations can be complicated because, like a game, they are played with other people. One person's moves must mesh with those of other players, and this requires agreement on purpose and some reciprocity of perspective. Utterances have a force that obliges a hearer to understand the speaker's intent, and the speaker must meet certain felicity conditions in order for understanding to occur. Communicators respond not to each individual speech act but to the overall intentions of others. The coherence of a conversation is not judged by adjacency pairs, but by the unfolding plan of the game.

Jackson and Jacobs stipulate two kinds of rules necessary for such coherence. *Validity rules* establish the conditions necessary for an act to be judged as a sincere move in a plan to achieve a goal. *Reason rules*, Jackson and Jacob's second type, require the speaker to adjust statements to the beliefs and perspectives of the other participants. This does not mean that speakers say only what listeners want to hear but that they frame their statements in a way that makes logical sense within the perspective of what the other person thinks is going on. For example, if you are talking with a friend about how you did on an exam, you might think it a bit odd if he just blurted out, "I want pizza for dinner." You would wonder what that has to do with anything.

Basically, then, these rules help communicators set up a logical system so that a conversation will feel coherent. Remember that these rules may be violated, and coherence is not always achieved. Communicators may also disagree about whether a sequence meets the required conditions of validity and reason, and such disagreement is often the basis for conflict. Ultimately, because conversations are practical, goal-oriented acts, communicators must constantly judge whether the interaction is leading toward the desired goal and, if it is not, whether and what kinds of adjustments must be made in the conversational moves. This fact makes conversa-

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23 Scott Jacobs, "Language," in *Handbook of Interpersonal Communication*, eds. M. L. Knapp and G. R. Miller (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1985), pp. 330-335; also see Scott Jacobs and Sally Jackson, "Speech Act Structure in Conversation: Rational Aspects of Pragmatic Coherence," in *Conversational Coherence: Form, Structure, and Strategy*, eds. R. T. Craig and K. Tracy (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1983), pp. 47-66.

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Donald Ellis proposes a *coherentist theory of meaning* to explain this process further.²⁴ Understanding discourse is a pragmatic act in which communicators use shared meanings to achieve coherence. Communication is possible only because communicators possess shared meanings. Three characteristics of discourse make understanding possible.

The first characteristic is *intelligibility*. Discourse is intelligible if it contains or points to evidence that enables communicators to make inferences about its meaning. A father may ask his son, "Is that your coat on the floor?" The son correctly reasons that this is a request or command for him to pick up the coat. Both father and son have experience in similar situations that make it possible for them to share this meaning. The coat on the floor, the timing of the father's question, and the use of similar questions in the past are evidence that the boy can use to draw this conclusion.

The second characteristic is *organization*. Statements are part of larger organized systems of linguistic structures. You cannot assign any meaning you want to a sentence, but a statement's meaning is limited, and competent communicators know what the possible range of meanings are. This quality of discourse makes rational talk possible.

Jackson and Jacobs's analogy of the game is useful here. The rules of the game tell us what moves mean and how to respond rationally within the system of permissible moves. In the game of making requests, communicators know that questions can be taken as a form of request, so the father's question may be understood as a statement about what his son should do. Indeed, within this situation, it probably should be understood in this way.

And this fact leads to Ellis's third characteristic of discourse—*verification*. In the stream of a conversation, one's statements can verify, or confirm, the meaning of other statements. When the son in our example replies, "Yeah, I'll pick it up." He is verifying the command issued by the fa-

ther. Thus, participants use the give and take of their conversation to test meaning and reason their way to an agreed-upon conclusion.

Using global principles does not negate the value of local principles. Indeed, adjacency-pair coherence is a special case of a rational action. The FPP invites the listener to join into a kind of microplan for achieving a goal, and the SPP is coherent if it joins into that plan. A greeting invites the listener to make contact, and a returned greeting fulfills a kind of greeting contract. Responses to an FPP may simply and directly cooperate, may indirectly cooperate, may approximate agreement, or may attempt to extend, change, or refuse the goal set up by the first utterance. Over a sequence of utterances, communicators actually negotiate a goal-achievement plan. Jackson and Jacobs call this *the transformation of belief/want contexts*. Communicators ask themselves mentally, What do we want to accomplish here and what logical moves are required by each of us to accomplish this? The conversation will be coherent if agreement is achieved and the actions seem appropriate for achieving the goals.

To see more concretely how these ideas can be applied, let's look at Jackson and Jacobs's applications of their theory to requests.²⁵ Actually, requests are among the most studied of all speech acts, and their theory provides an excellent extension and modification of a whole line of research.

You can handle requests in a variety of ways. Your actions can range from very direct to indirect to irrelevant. The clearer and more direct a request and the clearer and more direct the response, the more coherent the request sequence. This is because directness supports clarity and relevance. Therefore, if I say, "Please pass the butter," my goal is clear and your response,

24 Donald G. Ellis, "Fixing Communicative Meaning: A Coherentist Theory," *Communication Research* 22 (1995): 515-544.

25 Scott Jacobs and Sally Jackson, "Strategy and Structure in Conversational Influence Attempts," *Communication Monographs* 50 (1983): 285-304; Sally Jackson and Scott Jacobs, "Conversational Relevance: Three Experiments on Pragmatic Connectedness in Conversation," in *Communication Yearbook 10*, ed. M. McLaughlin (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1987), pp. 323-347.

"Sure," is obviously relevant. On the other hand, if I say, "My toast is dry," my goal of getting you to pass the butter is less clear, and your response, "You should turn the toaster down a little," just frustrates me.

Jackson and Jacobs provide a list of utterance types that may be taken as a request, ranging from direct to irrelevant. "Please pass the butter" is an absolutely direct request. An indirect request would be less clear: "My toast is dry." A hint is even less direct: "Some people at this table have something I sure would like."

There are also utterances commonly found in conversations that function as prerequisites. These set up the listener for a request in the future. An example is, "Could I interrupt to ask for something?"

Once a request or prerequisite is made, a listener can respond in a variety of direct or indirect ways. If the communicator recognizes the intent of a request, he or she can clarify things by responding directly. An example would be an *anticipatory move*, in which the listener recognizes the hidden or indirect request and grants it immediately ("My toast is sure dry." "Here, have some butter."). Such moves provide coherence because they are oriented to the apparent goals of the other communicator. Responses that misinterpret the speaker's statement are less coherent, as in the case of someone who takes an innocent statement to be a request that was never intended as such.

A fruitful line of theory that illustrates the inferential-strategic approach is conversational argument, the topic of the following section.

Conversational Argument

The study of conversational argument is another major application of the rational/pragmatic model explained above, and it illustrates that model very well.²⁶ This area of study treats arguments as conversations, showing how they follow rational coherence rules. Specifically, conversational argument allows people to manage disagreement. Managing disagreement, like any of the structural features of talk, is a rule-governed, cooperative achievement.

There can be a number of levels of disagreement in conversation. In the typical case, both parties openly disagree and state reasons for their positions. More typically, however, the disagreement is less open. Because of the preference for agreement, the goal of conversational argument is to achieve agreement. Each turn must be a rational move toward bringing agreement about, and the coherence of an argument is largely judged in terms of the rationality of moves in achieving this objective. Thus, conversational argument is a method of managing disagreement so that it is minimized and so that agreement is achieved as quickly as possible.

There are basically two kinds of arguments. *Argument₁* involves *making* an argument, or stating a case by giving reasons. One makes an argument by presenting a case or supporting one's position with reasons, as in "Mary is arguing that smoking is bad for her son's health." *Argument₂* is *having* an argument, or exchanging objections, as in "Mary and her son are arguing about smoking." People can make an argument without having one, but they cannot easily have an argument without making one.²⁷

Here is an example of a typical argument:

- George: Well, I better get this grass cut.
 Harry: Yeah, me too.
 George: Can I borrow your mower?
 Harry: Well, I really need it myself.
 George: I'll return it right away.
 Harry: Last time you kept it two weeks.
 George: No, I'll return it.
 Harry: Last spring you kept it a month.
 George: Gosh, Harry, I really will get it back to you today.

26 The best recent statement of the theory of conversational argument is Frans H. van Eemeren, Rob Grootendorst, Sally Jackson, and Scott Jacobs, *Reconstructing Argumentative Discourse* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993). See also Frans H. van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst, *Argumentation, Communication, and Fallacies: A Pragma-Dialectical Perspective* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1992); Douglas N. Walton, *Plausible Argument in Everyday Conversation* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992); Scott Jacobs and Sally Jackson, "Building a Model of Conversational Argument," in *Rethinking Communication: Paradigm Exemplars*, vol. 2, eds. B. Dervin, L. Grossberg, B. J. O'Keefe, and E. Wartella (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989), pp. 153-171.

27 This distinction was originally made by Daniel J. O'Keefe, "Two Concepts of Argument," *Journal of the American Forensic Association* 13 (1977): 121-128.

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Here, George makes a request and a promise. The argument (argument₂) ensues because Harry does not grant the request as would normally be expected and he challenges George's promise. In objecting, Harry makes an argument (argument₁) by saying that George has not been reliable in the past, and George comes back by supporting his intent to return the item.

Like all conversations, arguments have a certain order and rationality that may or may not be apparent on the surface. For the participants the argument will probably seem coherent because of the cooperative principle, which, in the case of arguments, requires the communicators to cooperate in creating a dispute-resolving episode.

This is ironic because arguments do not sound very cooperative, but you cannot have an argument unless both parties cooperate in doing so. Notice that the following somewhat comical conversation is not a very coherent argument because one party refuses to cooperate:

- Katie: You never turn your reports in on time, Sara.
Sara: I know, I really like taking my time on things.
Katie: But this infuriates me!
Sara: Just what I really like, a good emotional reaction.
Katie: Stop it. I want to know why you are falling down on the job.
Sara: I sure do enjoy being the center of attention. This is great!

Arguers are essentially agreeing to use certain kinds of speech acts and to meet certain goals, and in the above conversation, Sara refuses to participate in the game.

Just as promises and requests have their own requirements, so do arguments. To have an argument, you must put forth an opinion that you do not expect the other person initially to accept. In conversational argument theory this is called a *standpoint*. You have to support the standpoint with certain assertions that you expect will not be immediately apparent to the other person. And, of course, you are not cooperating in "having an argument" if you do not at least initially believe your own standpoints and assertions.

There are many forms an argument can take, but there is one idealized form that most arguments approximate. This consists of four stages necessary for a complete argument to take place—opening, confrontation, argumentation, and concluding. These should not be considered the "steps" of an argument because they rarely occur in this order. Instead, you should think of these as aspects or parts of an argument. When they are all present, the communicators are said to be participating in a *critical discussion*.

The *confrontation* stage identifies the disagreement. The *opening* stage establishes agreement on how the dispute will be handled. The *argumentation* stage includes an exchange of competing positions. The *concluding* stage establishes resolution or continued disagreement.

These stages are characterized by certain kinds of speech acts, as outlined in Table 5.2.²⁸ In general the idealized model is like a code of conduct for having an argument. People will come as close to it as they can within the constraints of the situation. The idealized model is a measuring stick by which actual arguments can be compared and evaluated.

COMMENTARY AND CRITIQUE

No discussion of language or communication is complete without addressing discourse, or message units larger than sentences that are part of ongoing communication, including talk, written texts, and even nonverbal forms. Although language and other symbol systems are the building blocks of communication, discourse is the product of communication itself.

Discourse as a part of everyday life is governed by rules, and much has been written about this topic. Rules are guidelines for action, and they say how language is used at every level—semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic. In other words, communicators use rules to determine how a sentence should be uttered, what words

28 Van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson, and Jacobs, *Reconstructing*, p. 31.

TABLE 5.2

Distribution of Speech-Act Types Across Functional Stages in Discussion

Stage in Discussion	Speech-Act Type
Confrontation	
1.1	expressing standpoint (assertive)
1.2	accepting or not accepting standpoint (commissive)
Opening	
2.1	challenging to defend standpoint (directive)
2.2	accepting challenge to defend standpoint (commissive)
2.3	deciding to start discussion; agreeing on discussion rules (commissive)
Argumentation	
3.1	advancing argumentation (assertive)
3.2	accepting or not accepting argumentation (commissive)
3.3	requesting further argumentation (directive)
3.4	advancing further argumentation (assertive)
Concluding	
4.1	establishing the result (assertive)
4.2	accepting or withholding acceptance of standpoint (commissive)
4.3	upholding or retracting standpoint (assertive)
(Any stage)	
5.1	requesting usage declarative (directive)
5.2	defining, precisizing [<i>sic</i>], amplifying, and so on (usage declarative)

mean, and how to use language in ongoing communication. In this chapter we have seen how rules are used in the production of speech acts and in conversations.

The rule concept has been popular in communication studies because it acknowledges that people can make choices while still behaving

somewhat predictably. Still, rule theory has had its share of critics. Criticism of rule theory has centered around two issues: conceptual coherence and explanatory power. Even its adherents admit that the rule tradition lacks unity and coherence. Jesse Delia verbalizes this objection in strong terms:

The terrain covered by notions of "rules," then, is broad, grossly diffuse, and imprecisely articulated. And the real problem for any position purporting to be a general rules perspective is that the meaning of "rule" does not remain constant either within or across these domains. The "rules" territory taken as a whole is, in fact, little short of chaotic. At the least, it is clear that there is no unifying conception of the rule construct, of the domain of phenomena to which the construct has reference, of whether rules have generative power in producing and directing behavior . . . or of the proper way to give an account of some domain of phenomena utilizing the construct. The idea of "rules" as a general construct represents only a diffuse notion devoid of specific theoretical substance.²⁹

The theories we have covered illustrate this lack of coherence. Linguistic rules are bound to an inherent structure of language and as such pretty much determine how sentences are generated and understood. As described by Searle, speech acts also are regulated by strict rules. Wittgenstein, on the other hand, considers the rules of language games to be malleable and changeable, much as in the rule-using tradition. The original conversation-analysis work, especially that governed by adjacency sequencing, used rules in the narrower, more restrictive sense; but Jackson and Jacobs in their global, rational approach see rules as something that communicators negotiate in the conversation itself.

The second issue related to rule theory involves its explanatory power. Critics generally believe that rule approaches cannot be explanatory as long as they fail to develop general principles that cut across contexts. To identify the rules in operation within a particular context is

²⁹ Jesse Delia, "Alternative Perspectives for the Study of Human Communication: Critique and Response," *Communication Quarterly* 25 (1977): 54.

not sufficient to Berger believes beyond the desirability of asking why some [and] what social conventions are we now observing law approaches and rule theories laws in disguise

Most rule approaches are argument. Some explanations, in fact, are practical, or rather explained in terms of attaining desired explanations are even possible, giving explanations classes of situations for predicting

The approaches to rule theories of explanation. Clearly, Berger's level of generalization. We must rule theories of explanatory power.

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not sufficient to explain communication. Charles Berger believes that "at some point one must go beyond the description of 'what the rules are' and ask why some rules are selected over others . . . [and] what social forces produced the kinds of conventions and appropriate modes of behavior we now observe."³⁰ Berger's view is that a covering law approach is necessary to explain events, and rule theories are nothing more than covering laws in disguise.

Most rule advocates do not go along with this argument. Shimanoff points out that most rule explanations, in contrast to law explanations, are practical, or reason giving. Behaviors are explained in terms of their practical impact on creating desired outcomes. Although universal explanations are not desirable, and perhaps not even possible, rule theories should seek reason-giving explanations that cover relatively broad classes of situations, even to the point of allowing for prediction.³¹

The appropriate question here is not whether rule theories are explanatory but what kind of explanation the critic believes is necessary. Clearly, Berger and Shimanoff disagree on the level of generality necessary for adequate explanation. We must also keep in mind that different rule theories possess different levels of explanatory power.

Recall from Chapter 2 that explanation is made possible by principles of necessity and generality. Pearce discusses rule approaches in terms of these criteria.³² Rule-following approaches tend not to be explanatory because they merely describe recurring behavior without indicating any form of necessity. Rule-governed approaches explain in terms of practical necessity, although their generality is somewhat limited. Pearce believes that the rule-using approach has the highest potential for explanatory power in terms of both practical and logical necessity and generality.

An important application of rule theory has been ordinary language philosophy and speech-act theory, which are among the most productive and useful creations of contemporary philosophy and social science. The power of these theo-

ries is in their use of intent to explain discourse. When we communicate we not only convey content, referential meaning, or our own version of truth but also an intent to do something with the words we use. This idea expresses so clearly how people use language to act or to accomplish objectives.

Still, speech-act theory has influenced a number of other theoretical lines of work, including conversation analysis. As researchers have worked with the concept of speech acts and applied it to various contexts, they have brought a number of weaknesses to light.

Critics generally agree that intentions are an important aspect of meaning, that speech constitutes a form of action, and that speech acts are governed by rules, but they argue that the conceptual categories of speech-act theory are vague or meaningless. Austin's threefold distinction among locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts has been severely criticized from this standpoint, prompting one critic to state: "And now Austin has, in my judgment, erected a structure that is in imminent danger of collapse."³³

Critics question the utility of locution as a concept, if the utterance of a locution automatically constitutes an illocution, as Austin claims it does. The distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts is equally unclear to many readers, who point out that even if one could observe the difference between these concepts, it is doubtful that they constitute a useful distinction for guiding our understanding of speech acts. It would perhaps be more fruitful to recognize that any given speech act may be fulfilling a variety of intents and may be taken in a variety of different ways by different listeners.³⁴

30 Charles R. Berger, "The Covering Law Perspective as a Theoretical Basis for the Study of Human Communication," *Communication Quarterly* 25 (1977): 12.

31 Shimanoff, *Communication Rules*, pp. 217-234.

32 Pearce, "Rules Theories."

33 Campbell, "A Rhetorical View," p. 287.

34 This point is made by John Lyne, "Speech Acts in a Semiotic Frame," *Communication Quarterly* 29 (1981): 202-208; and by Robert Trapp, "The Role of Disagreement in Interactional Argument," *Journal of the American Forensic Association* 23 (1986): 23-41.

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The distinction between regulative and constitutive rules is equally fuzzy.³⁵ The problem here is that once any act becomes standardized, as in the case of almost all illocutionary acts, rules no longer are constitutive in the sense of creating new acts. Rules that regulate can be taken as constitutive, and rules that constitute an act also regulate.

Another application of rule theory, and one also heavily influenced by speech acts, is conversation analysis, the ethnomethodological study of ways actors cooperate in organizing interaction. It involves the careful examination of the details of actual conversations in an attempt to discover how people accomplish tasks and solve problems together.

Basically, conversation is a cooperative endeavor. People must play the game by the same rules or they would never know what was going on. For cooperation to occur, participants make certain assumptions about the other person, that he or she is conversing in good faith with the intent to speak in accordance with the rules. Even blatant violations of conversational rules are interpreted through implicature as being cooperative. Indeed, the combination of basic rules of cooperation such as appropriate quantity of talk, truthfulness, relevance, and organization with the flexibility permitted by conversational implicature makes it possible for humans to enact an infinite number of often creative expansions of talk to meet a whole array of intentions.

Perhaps the most important aspect of conversation analysis is the discovery of ways conversations are made coherent. This is also one of the most problematic aspects of the field. Originally, conversation analysts explained coherence strictly in terms of local rules, or the ways adjacent pairs of turns were consistent with one another. Most analysts now agree, however, that strictly local, adjacency explanations are inadequate.³⁶

This weakness has given rise to more global explanations of coherence. Perhaps the most interesting of these is the rational model of Jackson and Jacobs. In this more humanistic explanation, communicators understand what is going on

within a broader context than the simple sequence of acts at a given moment. They use conversation to negotiate plans, and the overall conversation itself comes to be rational. Acts that appear unrelated to one another when examined locally become consistent when you understand the broader context in which they appear.

A significant application of the rational approach is Jackson and Jacobs's work on conversational argument, which looks at the ways communicators manage disagreements in conversations. It examines the ways speakers and listeners have an argument and the ways they make arguments in conversations. The distinction between *making* an argument and *having* one is important and captures two dimensions of conversations—the individual speech act and the organization of interactions.

One major objection to conversation analysis is that it works entirely within the confines of the discourse itself. The researcher makes observations and inferences entirely on the basis of the text, without reference to outside factors or even the opinions of the participants themselves. The researcher relies solely on his or her own intuitions as a member of the culture in analyzing the discourse.³⁷ Although this procedure has merits, it is insensitive to the problem of possible multiple interpretations of speech acts. The participants in a conversation may not understand what is going on in the same way as the researcher thinks they do. Kathy Kellermann and Carra Sleight have written that coherence is not in the text but is in the cognitive system of the perceiver.³⁸ Although cues may be presented in the discourse, the actual coherence itself results from the application of a knowledge structure in the mind of the communicator to the discourse.

35 Shimanoff, *Communication Rules*, pp. 84–85. For additional critique, see McLaughlin, *Conversation*, pp. 63–68.

36 Jacobs, "Language."

37 This process is discussed in some depth by Wayne Beach, "Orienting to the Phenomenon," in *Communication Yearbook 13*, ed. James Anderson (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990), pp. 216–244.

38 Kathy Kellermann and Carra Sleight, "Coherence: A Meaningful Adhesive for Discourse," in *Communication Yearbook 12*, ed. James Anderson (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989), pp. 95–129.

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This view is supported by Teun A. van Dijk. Van Dijk adds another level of analysis, however, in suggesting that cognition and societal power structures are linked through discourse.³⁹ Certain ideologies of domination and control are expressed through discourse and thereby come to affect the thinking of both the oppressor and oppressed in society. In turn, these thoughts, held in cognition, affect how we talk, or discourse, which in turn reproduces societal power arrangements and oppression. For van Dijk, you cannot separate societal structures, discourse structures, and cognitive structures.

A related issue is whether conversational organization is correlated without other outside factors such as characteristics of the communicators or social situation. Without going outside the discourse itself, the researcher cannot know whether such associations exist. Most conversation analysts agree that they are not concerned with these kinds of issues and leave such questions to others who do not use conversation-analysis methods.

A natural tension exists between discourse analysis and poststructural approaches to texts. Discourse analysts of every variety assume that the meaning and function of talk can be uncovered by careful examination of the structure of the text. Poststructuralists deny this assumption out of hand.

Poststructural theorists do not see discourse as a strategic method of accomplishing individual objectives. Poststructuralism is most generally understood as a reaction against structural theories of language and discourse, including most of the theories discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

Most poststructuralists reject the idea that discourse is primarily a tool of communication. It may be considered so by communicators, but in fact it functions in far more profound ways that defy the traditional methods of discourse analysis discussed in this chapter. The three best-known poststructuralists are Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, and Michel Foucault. Their ideas differ substantially from one another, and, in fact, calling poststructuralism theoretical at all is stretching the truth. If anything, it is probably

antitheoretical because of its rejection of the truth claims of discourse, including theories themselves.⁴⁰

Jacques Derrida rejects absolutely the idea that language means anything definite.⁴¹ He believes that there are always alternative meanings in a text and that any proposed meaning is only one alternative. Derrida's method of *deconstruction* is designed to take meaning apart and show that texts cannot be understood as expressions of particular meanings or truths.

Jacques Lacan, a student of Freud, deals with the effects of discourse on the self.⁴² He shows how, at an early age, when the child is beginning to see the self as a unified being, language shapes some ideas about the self and represses others. The self is thus nothing in and of itself but is a product of discourse.

Foucault takes a somewhat different approach and denies that communicators create and use discourse to meet their goals.⁴³ The structure of

39 Teun A. van Dijk, "Discourse Semantics and Ideology," *Discourse and Society* 6 (1995): 243-289; Teun A. van Dijk, "Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis," *Discourse and Society* 4 (1993): 249-283; Teun A. van Dijk, *Communicating Racism: Ethnic Prejudice in Thought and Talk* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1987).

40 For an excellent discussion of poststructuralism, see Art Berman, *From the New Criticism to Deconstruction: The Reception of Structuralism and Post-Structuralism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988). A briefer treatment is Robert Young (ed.), "Post-Structuralism: An Introduction," in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 1-28.

41 Derrida's chief work is *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976). For a brief overview, see the third edition of this book, *Theories of Human Communication* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1989), pp. 58-60. A more thorough treatment is that of Berman, *From the New Criticism*, pp. 199-222. See also Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), pp. 28-48.

42 See Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. A. Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1981). See also Berman, *From the New Criticism*, pp. 185-194.

43 Foucault's primary works on this subject include *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972); *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon, 1970); and *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1927-1977*, trans. Colin Gordon and others, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980). For an excellent short summary, see Sonja K. Foss, Karen A. Foss, and Robert Trapp, *Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 1991). See also Carole Blair, "The Statement: Foundation of Foucault's Historical Criticism," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 51 (1987): 364-383; Sonja K. Foss and Ann Gill, "Michel Foucault's Theory of Rhetoric as Epistemic," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 51 (1987): 384-402; Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp. 17-68.

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discourse and how it is used are determined, not by communicators, but historical and social processes in which certain forms of discourse are made necessary by power structures prevalent during the period. In Foucault's theory, discourse forms the very structure of knowledge in an era. The rules embedded in discourse dictate how we do what we do, and speakers are merely taking roles established in the discursive formation. For Foucault, as one poststructuralist, the text precedes the talk in the sense that language has both knowledge and action embedded in it and predetermines how actors will respond in their use of speech.

Donald Ellis, a defender of language and discourse theory, attacks poststructuralism head-on:

Little could be more contrary to a theory of communication than principles that emerge

from poststructuralism and the critical theory that it spawns. Human beings are language-using and message-producing animals, and theories of human communication engage us in understanding how messages are interpreted, evaluated, understood, and produced. A theory of communication must position itself away from poststructuralists who "de-form" language, and move closer to a theory of communication based on intentionality where meaning is "in-formed" by how language is directed toward objects and processes in the world.⁴⁴

In the next two chapters, we move to a set of theories that deal with communicators apart from discourse. We will examine the cognitive structures and processes that affect discourse production and processing.

⁴⁴ Donald G. Ellis, "Post-Structuralism and Language: Non-Sense," *Communication Monographs* 58 (1991): 213-224.

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¹ For a discussion John H. Powers, " Communication D: 191-222; Howard C Characteristics and nication, eds. Mark Oaks, CA: Sage, 199