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The diversity of discourse linguistics reflects the richness of its subject matter. Increased understanding of language in actual use calls for the examination of a maximally wide range of data, as well as free access to an unrestricted arsenal of methods and theoretical approaches (Chafe 1986). Discourse provides a focus and meeting ground for all investigations of language as it really is. Its diversity, reflecting as it does the diversity of language and the human mind, offers a liberating challenge to a linguistics freed of the bonds of parochial concerns.

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Acquisition of Competence

'Discourse' refers to the set of norms, preferences, and expectations relating language to context, which language users draw on and modify in producing and making sense out of language in context. Discourse knowledge allows language users to produce and interpret discourse structures such as verbal acts (e.g. requests and offers), conversational sequences (such as questions and answers), activities (such as story-telling and arguing), and communicative styles (such as women's speech). Competent language users know the formal characteristics of these structures, the alternative ways of forming particular structures, and the contexts in which particular discourse structures are preferred and expected. For example, competent communicators know the range of linguistic structures which one can use to ask for things, and they know which particular structures are preferred in particular social circumstances. (For general reference, see Ervin-Tripp & Mitchell-Kernan 1977, Shatz 1978, Bullowa 1979, Ochs & Schieffelin 1979, Umiker-Sebeok 1979, Garvey 1984, Romaine 1984, McTear 1985, and Hickman 1987.)

Discourse knowledge relates language to psychological as well as social contexts. Competent language users vary their language according to their perception of the cognitive states of interlocutors. Every language has structures used to elicit others' attention, to heighten

attention to something expressed, and to distinguish old from new information. Terms of ADDRESS, emphatic particles, pitch, voice quality, and repetition are attention-getting devices. Similarly, certain determiners, pronouns, and word order mark old and new information.

Psychological context includes perceived emotion. Languages throughout the world have linguistic resources for conveying emotion. In Thai and Japanese, for example, passive voice indicates negative affect towards a proposition. In other languages, affixes, particles, quantifiers, tense-aspect marking, word order, and intonation carry emotional meaning. Competent language users know which structures convey affective meaning, and they know the norms, preferences, and expectations surrounding their use.

1. Acquisition by children. In the course of experiencing language in context, children come to know how language sometimes reflects context, and sometimes creates it. They learn how to use language as a tool to elicit attention, to establish relationships and identities, to perform social actions, and to express certain stances. All this is part of being a speaker of a language. Acquiring a second language entails discourse knowledge for use of that language. In many cases, second-language acquirers are grammatically competent, but their discourse competence may lag, as they map norms, preferences, and expectations from their first language onto second-language situations. Second-language acquirers may have different norms from native speakers for greeting, asking, essay-writing, interviewing, story-telling, instructing, or arguing, and for displaying interest, fear, concern, pleasure, or emotional intensity. Discrepancies between non-native and native discourse competence have both personal and economic consequences when interlocutors misunderstand the contextual meanings of one another's language behavior.

Children are born with a predisposition to be social; they begin communicating long before they can speak. They shout, cry, point, and tug at others for communicative purposes in the first year of life. These behaviors establish joint attention, a prerequisite of communication. In this period, infants monitor and respond appropriately to expressions of emotion and to greetings, directives, and certain other speech acts. In all societies, care-givers encourage the sociability of infants, although cultural conceptions differ as to appropriate communicative behavior for infants. Further, societies differ in the discourse practices expected of care-givers. In some societies, care-givers are expected to converse with in-

fants from birth on. In much of middle-class Europe and the United States, mothers engage infants in greeting exchanges as early as twenty-four hours after birth. Long before infants can utter words, mothers impute communicative import to infants' nonverbal behavior and vocalizations, and they speak for the infant as well as for themselves. In other societies, care-givers do not presume that infants are necessarily intending to communicate when they vocalize and gesture; they wait until infants are somewhat older before engaging them as conversational partners. Through such differing discourse practices, care-givers socialize infants into the local culture.

When infants around the world begin to speak, how do they use words to accomplish social acts and activities, to express affect, and to constitute social identities and relationships? In other words, how does discourse competence develop? Let us examine some specific domains.

2. Social acts. All children come to know that language is a tool not only for representing the world but also for constituting and changing that world. Children use linguistic structures as resources to carry out a range of tasks, such as asking questions and making requests, offers, or promises. They also develop understandings of what others are trying to accomplish with their words, and they adjust their subsequent linguistic acts accordingly—e.g. accepting/rejecting offers, assessing announcements, agreeing/disagreeing with assertions, satisfying/refusing requests, and answering questions.

Let us consider how children acquire competence in one of these acts: the request for goods and services. In the first year of life, infants vocalize and gesture to request desired objects. At the single-word stage, English-speaking children incorporate single words such as *more* and *want* into these schemata for requesting. In many speech communities, young children also use affect-laden constructions to get what they want, e.g. sympathy-marked pronouns, affixes, and particles. English-speaking as well as Italian children use imperatives *(Gimme bear!)* and declaratives expressing 'want/need' *(I want/need bear)* before they use interrogative forms *(Can you give me bear?, Will you give me bear?)* and declarative hints *(I sure miss bear)*. These latter forms appear in children's speech around two and a half to three years of age, but not frequently. While young children use indirect request forms, they may not distinguish the various indirect forms of request used by others. They may respond appropriately to formally

variant requests, either because they attend primarily to action predicates embedded in them, or because of contextual clues as to what action is desired by the speaker. By age four, however, children are able to comprehend a wide range of indirect request types.

3. Affect. The term 'affect' refers to expressed emotion, including displays of moods, attitudes, dispositions, and feelings. Early in their development, children display affect and interpret the affective displays of others. Before using words, children vary intonational contours and voice quality to indicate affect. At the single-word stage, children perform a variety of affect-loaded SPEECH ACTS [*q.v.*], such as greeting, begging, teasing, cursing, and refusing. In certain speech communities, they use affect-marked pronouns and affixes, morphological particles, and respect vocabulary. They switch from one phonological register to another to intensify or deintensify affect, and to display sympathy, anger, deference, or other feelings. Research to date indicates that very young children use language rhetorically, and draw on affect-marked language to achieve rhetorical ends.

4. Activity. A set of coordinated practices is called an 'activity' when it realizes some motive. Telling a story, arguing, reviewing homework, and giving a lecture are all activities in which language plays an important role. Activities are socially constructed, even where participants do not speak. Eye gaze, facial expressions, and other demeanors of those present affect the direction that an activity takes, along with more explicit verbal contributions. In this sense, activities are joint accomplishments of at least two persons. In all societies, members guide the participation of novices in culturally relevant activities. However, societies differ in what is expected of novice and member. Some, such as middle-class European and American societies, frequently plan language activities in which young children are given roles that place high cognitive, social, and linguistic demands on them, requiring skills they do not yet fully command. To accomplish the activity, members then provide considerable assistance—speaking for the children, and prompting or expanding their verbal contributions. In other societies, young children are given actions to perform as part of larger language activities, but close assistance by members is rarely elicited or provided.

Activities entail complex discourse structures. Narrating and arguing, for example, have internal components; they are constrained by norms, preferences, and expectations concerning their order and form. These constraints vary across speech communities; what counts as a narrative for Anglo-Americans, for example, does not match what counts as a narrative for Athabaskan Indians. To succeed in mainstream educational institutions, children growing up in culturally distinct, non-mainstream communities often have to acquire narrative competence in mainstream terms as well as their own. Most research on the acquisition of narrative skills has focused on white middle-class English-speaking children, and on the narrative structures preferred in their communities.

While scholarly definitions of narrative vary, most agree that a narrative contains a sequence of clauses with at least one temporal juncture. Narratives may depict events in the future (e.g. plans) and in the present (e.g. radio broadcasts), but research on the acquisition of narrative structures focuses on past-time narratives. The development of such narratives is rooted in children's early attempts to refer to non-present objects and to past events, observed as early as fifteen months of age. Children talk about the past long before acquiring past tense morphology (around twenty-seven months). In white middle-class households, children are encouraged to remember experiences already known to mothers. The mother elicits and helps to structure such narratives, in addition to providing tokens of appreciation and support. By contrast, in speech communities such as the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea, young children are not asked to recast shared past experiences in narrative form; care-givers do not scaffold children's narratives through prompting, questioning, or expanding the child's talk about the shared past.

Narratives of past experience may include an introduction, abstract, orientation (to person, time, place, etc.), complicating actions (e.g. initiating event, attempts), evaluation, result, and coda. [*See* Narrative, *article on* Conversational Narrative.] Up to age three, children rarely include all these components in their narratives. Three-year-old middle-class English-speaking children frequently omit the abstract, orientation, and results. Five-year-old children more consistently provide all narrative components. In relating one clause to another within a narrative, younger children tend not to use connectives that specify consequence and causality, but rather leave such meanings implicit.

Three-year-olds routinely engage in narrative activities with peers and adults at home and at school. Four-year-old children not only initiate stories, but actively acknowledge and comment on stories that their peers

initiate. Indeed, the stories of three- and four-year-old children are often motivated by a story just related. In this sense, children are actively constructing stories early in the pre-school years.

5. Social identities and relationships. A critical domain of discourse competence is the ability to create and maintain social identities and relationships through language. In every social group, children acquire the ways of speaking expected of children, adults, peers, males, females, people of lower and higher status, intimates, strangers, and members of other social categories. Linguistic forms associated with social acts, stances, and activities are also associated with specific speaker/writer identities and specific social relationships. Indeed, these identity/relationship contexts are part of the 'social meaning' of these forms. Very young children are sensitive to such variation and modify their speech accordingly. For example, two-year-old English-speaking children adjust their request forms to the age and rank of addressees—using imperatives to peers, while directing desire statements, questions, and requests for permission to adults and older children. Similarly, Samoan-speaking children of this age switch phonological registers to create or reflect intimacy vs. distance, and they modify the form of their requests with the ranking of speaker and addressee. By four years of age, children everywhere display considerable competence in altering communicative styles to establish particular identities and relationships.

Discourse competence involves the ability to build contexts through linguistic structures. Children and other acquirers come to understand that a single structure or a set of structures may, in the same moment of use, build a multitude of contexts—e.g. a type of affect, a social act, and a social identity. Acquirers also come to understand that contexts are built sequentially; they develop the competence to create and interpret language activities through ordered acts and expressed stances.

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Discourse Markers

The production and interpretation of coherent discourse is an interactive process that requires speakers and hearers to draw upon several different types of knowledge. One type of competence is SOCIAL and expressive—the ability to use language to display personal and social identities, to perform actions, and to negotiate relationships between self and other. Still other types of competence are COGNITIVE, e.g. the ability to organize conceptual information and to represent it through language, and TEXTUAL, e.g. the ability to create and understand messages within units of language longer than a single sentence.

One set of linguistic items that function in the cognitive, social, expressive, and textual domains is commonly referred to as D[iscourse] M[arker]s: sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk (Schiffrin 1987a:31). Examples are connectives *(and, but, or)*, particles *(oh, well)*, adverbs *(now, then)*, and lexicalized phrases *(y'know, I mean)*. DMs typically characterize units of talk which can be defined only through their role in discourse. Sometimes the unit being marked is a sentence; at other times, the unit is defined as an action, an idea unit, or the like (Schiffrin 1987a:31–36). The functions of the markers are always relative to the form and content of both prior and upcoming discourse. The particular aspect of discourse to which they pertain, however, varies for different markers; e.g., *oh* pertains most to the distribution and management of information,