

The overwhelming effect of a dispreferred is that more time and more language are used than in a preferred. More language essentially represents more distance between the end of the first part and the end of the second part. From a pragmatic perspective, the expression of a preferred (in response to an offer or invitation, for example) clearly represents closeness and quick connection. The expression of a dispreferred, as mapped out in [19], would represent distance and lack of connection. From a social perspective, it is easy to see why participants in a conversation might try to avoid creating contexts for dispreferreds. One obvious device for accomplishing this is to use those pre-sequences described at the end of Chapter 7. The best way to avoid a dispreferred second is not to get to the point where a first part of the pair is uttered. It must follow, then, that conversations between those who are close familiars will tend to have fewer elaborate dispreferreds than conversations between those who are still working out their social relationship. The amount of talk employed to accomplish a particular social action in conversation is a pragmatic indicator of the relative distance between the participants.

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Discourse and culture

The emphasis in the preceding chapter was on the sequential structure of conversation, particularly on aspects of the turn-taking procedures for control of the floor, with less attention paid to what speakers had to say once they got the floor. Having gained the floor, speakers have to organize the structure and content of what they want to say. They have to package their messages in accordance with what they think their listeners do and do not know, as well as sequence everything in a coherent way. If those speakers decide to write out their messages, creating written text, they no longer have listeners providing immediate interactive feedback. Consequently, they have to rely on more explicit structural mechanisms for the organization of their texts. In this expanded perspective, speakers and writers are viewed as using language not only in its *interpersonal function* (i.e. taking part in social interaction), but also in its *textual function* (i.e. creating well-formed and appropriate text), and also in its *ideational function* (i.e. representing thought and experience in a coherent way). Investigating this much broader area of the form and function of what is said and written is called discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis covers an extremely wide range of activities, from the narrowly focused investigation of how words such as 'oh' or 'well' are used in casual talk, to the study of the dominant ideology in a culture as represented, for example, in its educational or political practices. When it is restricted to linguistic issues, discourse analysis focuses on the record (spoken or written) of the

process by which language is used in some context to express intention.

Naturally, there is a great deal of interest in the structure of discourse, with particular attention being paid to what makes a well-formed text. Within this structural perspective, the focus is on topics such as the explicit connections between sentences in a text that create cohesion, or on elements of textual organization that are characteristic of storytelling, for example, as distinct from opinion expressing and other text types.

However, within the study of discourse, the pragmatic perspective is more specialized. It tends to focus specifically on aspects of what is unsaid or unwritten (yet communicated) within the discourse being analyzed. In order to do the pragmatics of discourse, we have to go beyond the primarily social concerns of interaction and conversation analysis, look behind the forms and structures present in the text, and pay much more attention to psychological concepts such as background knowledge, beliefs, and expectations. In the pragmatics of discourse, we inevitably explore what the speaker or writer has in mind.

Coherence

Generally, what language users have most in mind is an assumption of **coherence**, that what is said or written will make sense in terms of their normal experience of things. That 'normal' experience will be locally interpreted by each individual and hence will be tied to the familiar and the expected. In the neighborhood where I live, the notice in [1a.] means that someone is selling plants, but the notice in [1b.] does not mean that someone is selling garages.

- [1] a. Plant Sale
b. Garage Sale

Although these notices have an identical structure, they are interpreted differently. Indeed, the interpretation of [1b.], that someone is selling household items from their garage, is one that requires some familiarity with suburban life.

This emphasis on familiarity and knowledge as the basis of coherence is necessary because of evidence that we tend to make

instant interpretations of familiar material and tend not to see possible alternatives. For example, the question presented in [2] is easily answered by many people.

- [2] How many animals of each type did Moses take on the Ark?

If you immediately thought of 'two', then you accessed some common cultural knowledge, perhaps even without noticing that the name used ('Moses') was inappropriate. We actually create a coherent interpretation for a text that potentially does not have it.

We are also unlikely to stop and puzzle over 'a male and a female (what?)' as we read about the accident reported in [3].

- [3] A motor vehicle accident was reported in front of Kennedy Theatre involving a male and a female.

We automatically 'fill in' details (for example, a male person driving one of the motor vehicles) to create coherence. We also construct familiar scenarios in order to make sense of what might first appear to be odd events, as in the newspaper headline in [4].

- [4] Man Robs Hotel with Sandwich

If you created an interpretation for [4] that had the sandwich (perhaps in a bag) being used as if it was a gun, then you activated the kind of background knowledge expected by the writer (as confirmed by the rest of the newspaper article). You may, of course, have created a quite different kind of interpretation (for example, the man was eating the sandwich while robbing the hotel). Whatever it was, it was inevitably based on what you had in mind and not only on what was in the 'text' in [4].

Background knowledge

Our ability to arrive automatically at interpretations of the unwritten and the unsaid must be based on pre-existing knowledge structures. These structures function like familiar patterns from previous experience that we use to interpret new experiences. The most general term for a pattern of this type is a **schema** (plural, **schemata**). A schema is a pre-existing knowledge structure in memory.

If there is a fixed, static pattern to the schema, it is sometimes

called a **frame**. A frame shared by everyone within a social group would be something like a prototypical version. For example, within a frame for an apartment, there will be assumed components such as kitchen, bathroom, and bedroom. The assumed elements of a frame are generally not stated, as in the advertisement in [5].

[5] Apartment for rent. \$500. 763-6683.

A normal (local) interpretation of the small fragment of discourse in [5] will be based on not only an 'apartment' frame as the basis of inference (if X is an apartment, then X has a kitchen, a bathroom, and a bedroom), but also an 'apartment for rent' advertisement frame. Only on the basis of such a frame can the advertiser expect the reader to fill in 'per month' and not 'per year' after '\$500' here. If a reader of the discourse in [5] expects that it would be 'per week', for example, then that reader clearly has a different frame (i.e. based on a different experience of the cost of apartment rental!). The pragmatic point will nevertheless be the same: the reader uses a pre-existing knowledge structure to create an interpretation of what is not stated in the text.

When more dynamic types of schemata are considered, they are more often described as scripts. A **script** is a pre-existing knowledge structure involving event sequences. We use scripts to build interpretations of accounts of what happened. For example, we have scripts for what normally happens in all kinds of events, such as going to a doctor's office, a movie theater, a restaurant, or a grocery store as in [6].

[6] I stopped to get some groceries but there weren't any baskets left so by the time I arrived at the check-out counter I must have looked like a juggler having a bad day.

Part of this speaker's normal script for 'getting groceries' obviously involves having a basket and going to the check-out counter. Everything else that happened in this event sequence is assumed to be shared background knowledge (for example, she went through a door to get inside the store and she walked around picking up items from shelves).

The concept of a script is simply a way of recognizing some expected sequence of actions in an event. Because most of the

details of a script are assumed to be known, they are unlikely to be stated. For members of the same culture, the assumption of shared scripts allows much to be communicated that is not said. However, for members of different cultures, such an assumption can lead to a great deal of miscommunication.

Cultural schemata

Everyone has had the experience of surprise when some assumed component of an event is unexpectedly missing. I remember my first visit to a Moroccan restaurant and the absence of one of my 'restaurant script' requirements—there were no chairs! (The large comfortable cushions were an excellent replacement.) It is almost inevitable that our background knowledge structures, our schemata for making sense of the world, will be culturally determined. We develop our **cultural schemata** in the contexts of our basic experiences.

For some obvious differences (for example, cushions instead of chairs), we can readily modify the details of a cultural schema. For many other subtle differences, however, we often don't recognize that there may be a misinterpretation based on different schemata. In one reported example, an Australian factory supervisor clearly assumed that other factory workers would know that Easter was close and hence they would all have a holiday. He asked another worker, originally from Vietnam, about her plans, as in [7].

[7] You have five days off. What are you going to do?

The Vietnamese worker immediately interpreted the utterance in terms of being laid off (rather than having a holiday). Something good in one person's schema can sound like something bad in another's.

Cross-cultural pragmatics

The study of differences in expectations based on cultural schemata is part of a broad area of investigation generally known as **cross-cultural pragmatics**. To look at the ways in which meaning is constructed by speakers from different cultures will actually

require a complete reassessment of virtually everything we have considered so far in this survey. The concepts and terminology may provide a basic analytic framework, but the realization of those concepts may differ substantially from the English language examples presented here.

When we reviewed the cooperative principle and the maxims, we assumed some kind of general middle-class Anglo-American cultural background. What if we assumed a cultural preference for *not* saying what you know to be the case in many situations? Such a preference is reported in many cultures and would clearly require a different approach to the relationship between the maxims of quality and quantity in a more comprehensive pragmatics.

When we considered turn-taking mechanisms, we did not explore the powerful role of silence within the normal conversational practices of many cultures. Nor did we include a discussion of a socially prescribed 'right to talk' which, in many cultures, is recognized as the structural basis of how interaction proceeds.

When we explored types of speech acts, we did not include any observations on the substantial differences that can exist cross-culturally in interpreting concepts like 'complimenting', 'thanking', or 'apologizing'. The typical American English style of complimenting creates great embarrassment for some Native American Indian receivers (it's perceived as excessive), and can elicit a reaction similar to apologizing from some Japanese receivers (it's perceived as impossible to accept). Indeed, it is unlikely that the division one cultural group makes between any two social actions such as 'thanking' or 'apologizing' will be matched precisely within another culture.

The study of these different cultural ways of speaking is sometimes called **contrastive pragmatics**. When the investigation focuses more specifically on the communicative behavior of non-native speakers, attempting to communicate in their second language, it is described as **interlanguage pragmatics**. Such studies increasingly reveal that we all speak with what might be called a **pragmatic accent**, that is, aspects of our talk that indicate what we assume is communicated without being said.

If we have any hope at all of developing the capacity for cross-cultural communication, we will have to devote a lot more

attention to an understanding of what characterizes pragmatic accent, not only in others, but in ourselves. I hope that this brief survey has provided a beginning, and an incentive to explore further.