Conceptual and Communicative Functions in Written Discourse
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1. INTRODUCTION

All movements which attempt to set up a new scheme of values, whether this be political or pedagogic or whatever, are subject to *distortion and excess*. Practical action requires the consolidation of ideas into simple versions which can be widely understood and applied. This is a necessary process if the movement is to have any kind of stability and substantial effect in the practical domain. The problem of application is: *how can we consolidate without misinterpretation? How can we prevent our simple versions from being misleadingly simplistic?*

2. THE PRIMACY OF COMMUNICATION

The movement concerned here is that which proclaims the primacy of communication in language. Its manifesto to pursue the metaphor, which can be collated from a range of writings by different hands, contains expressions like *notions, functions, speech acts, and assertions* like:

- 'There is rule of use without which the rules of grammatical would be useless (Hymes),
- 'The object of linguistics must ultimately be the instrument of communication used by the speech community' (Labov), '
- 'Languages are learnt for the purposes of communication' (Wilkins), etc.

There are signs of distortion and excess in the understanding of ideas and their application to practical pedagogy. What I am going to do in this paper is *to consider certain issues relating to a communicative approach to language teaching, with particular reference to written discourse.*

The first problem is to tackle a terminological one. The term 'communication' is commonly interpreted in a narrow sense to refer to what language users do with their language when engaged in social activity. That is to say, there is a tendency to equate it with 'categories of communication', illocutionary acts: *promises, requests, orders, descriptions, definitions,* and so on. But as Chomsky points out, the ability to communicate in this sense presupposes the ability to use language in the formulation of thoughts:

. . . communication is one of the functions of language. In communicating we express our thoughts in the hoe that the listener understands what we are saying. We may be hoping to persuade him, to inform him that we believe such – and – such, and so on. The function of language for the expression of thought is not 'opposed' to its communicative function; rather it is presupposed by the use of language for the special purposes of communication (Parret 1974: 52).

3. THE DEPENDENCE OF COMMUNICATION

In a wider sense, the dependence of communication on this conceptual function of language has not always been fully recognized. Thus although Wilkins talks about 'semantico – grammatical categories', which are conceptual, as well as categories of communicative function, it is the latter which have attracted most attention and their relationship with the conceptual categories has been largely left unexplored and unexplained. Again, Searle's work, it is the illocutionary element in the speech act that has been seized upon, even to extent in some quarters of assuming an equation between speech acts and illocutionary acts. The proposition, the conceptual element, and the speech act, has not been very much considered. This neglect is to some extent sanctioned by Searle himself since he represents the proposition as essentially only a condition on the effective performance of the illocution: it serves, as it were, a facilitating function. But one could shift the emphasis, as Chomsky appears to do, and say that it is rather the illocution which facilitates the expressing of the proposition. There seems to be no obvious way of deciding, in principle, whether it preferable to think of the illocution as primary, with the proposition serving as the means for performing it, or of the proposition as primary, with the illocution serving as the means for conveying it.

In this occasion, I want to argue that neither proposition nor illocution is primary and that we shall continue to run the risk of distortion and excess if either is given emphasis at the expense of the other. Language is naturally used both for the framing of thoughts and for their conveyance for some purpose in social interaction. The central issue is *how these two basic functions operate in communicative use,* or, *how the language user reconciles the operation of these functions in discourse.* Lets see how this works. First, a discussion of these functions, then a consideration of how they are realized in written discourse, followed by a suggestion of how they relate to the

procedures of reduction and expansion in reading and writing. The general purpose of this is to reinstate conceptual activity in the contexts of communication as a whole.

4. THE FUNCTIONS OF LANGUAGE

There have been a number of proposals for defining the functions of language. Buhler, Malinowski, Jakobson, Hymes, Halliday have all had turn at it. Widdowson (1984) suggests that there are at least two principal functions: *conceptual* and *communicative.*

The first function provides the individual with a means of establishing a relationship with his environment, of conceptualizing and so, in some degree, *controlling reality*. This is language used for thinking, formulating concepts, fashioning propositions. It is essentially, to use Halliday's term, "ideational", and it provides for the private security of the individual by enabling him to define his experience. Halliday puts it in this way:

> Language serves for the expression of 'content': that is, of the speaker's experience of the real world, including the inner world of his own consciousness. . . . In serving this function, language also gives structure to experience, and helps to determine our way of looking at things, so that it requires some intellectual effort to see them in any other way than that which our language suggest to us. Halliday 1970: 143).

The second function serves as social purpose. The individual is necessarily involved with his fellow men so that he needs language not only to formulate his ideas but also to convey them to others in the process of performing social activity of different kinds. So language has also to have a communicative function so that the individual can *do* as well as think, can engage in social interaction as well as in private cognitive activity. This function of language is essentially 'interpersonal':

> Language serves to establish and maintain social relations: for the expression of such roles, which include the communication roles created by language itself – for example, the roles of questioner or respondent, which we take on by asking or answering a question; and also for getting things done, by means of the interaction in between one person and another. . . (Halliday 1970: 143)

Furthermore, Halliday postulates also the third function: *the textual*. The textual, according to Halliday, provides the means whereby language makes links with itself so that individual sentences are fused into texts. Indeed, Halliday sets up his functional grammar in direct opposition to the idea that language structure develops in detachment from its use in serving human needs. The textual function is surely more consistently considered as the means whereby the language user organizes propositional content so that it is effectively conveyed. The trextual function, in other words, serves a communicative purpose: its business is to provide alternative versions of propositions so that they are appropriate to the state of shared knowledge and the dynamism of sharing knowledge at a particular point in an interaction.

Widdowson draws up a simple scheme. Language serves the individual as means of conceptualizing reality, of establishing some control over his environment. In this role *it formalizes knowledge and facilitates thinking*. This is the conceptual function. Language also provides the means for conveying basic conceptual propositions, for setting them in correspondence with those in the minds of other people, and for using concepts to get things done in the business of social interaction. *The adjustment of proposition so that they fit into the changing situation of shared knowledge is the 'textual' aspect of the matter. The use of such propositions to conduct social business, to perform illocutions of different kinds, is the 'interpersonal' aspect of the matter*. Both are the features of the communicative function of language.

5. THE EVOLUTION OF LANGUAGE

Language, of course, continues to evolve and their evolution is the consequence of recurrent reconciliations of these private and social functions. Halliday, in common with most linguist, represents grammatical rules as inhabiting stable systems in peaceful harmony. But the very fact that they have to serve different purposes creates conditions of internal strife. In describing the language systems one can represent different options as conveying neatly into a unified product, but in using the system there are conflict to be resolved in the process. And *these resolutions, these reconciliations of private and social requirements are the source of language change and of language development in acquisition*.

Slobin has relevant remarks to make on this matter. He refers to 'four basic ground rules which a communicative system must adhere to'. These are: (a) be clear, (b) be humanly processible in ongoing time, (c) be quick and easy, and (d) be expressive. He continues on to say:

> Language is always under competing pressures to conform to all four of these charges. Because the pressures are inherently competitory, languages are constantly changing . . . A gain in compactness or expressiveness of communication is often purchased at the expanse of ease of processing or semantic transparency or message (Slobin 1975: 5)

Widdowson suggest that the first of Slobin's charges are essentially conceptual and the second two essentially communicative. That is to say, the requirements of clarity and processibility are basic to formulation of propositions and relate to cognitive processing and storage, whereas the other two requirements relate to the conveying of proposition on communicative occasions. These latter charges can be associated with the Gricean maxims of the co-operative principle (Grice 1975).

From these concepts we can see that language works in two ways. On the one hand it provides for conceptual activity whereby clear and processible propositions are formulated in the mind. On the other hand, it provides the means whereby such propositions can be converted in the most effective manner for particular communicative purposes. These two functions, potentially in conflict, have to be reconciled by negotiation on every occasion of social use and this negotiation is realized in discourse.

6. WAYS OF EXPRESSING PROPOSITIONS

To engage in discourse is to try to find ways of expressing propositions so that they will be understood and, where relevant, acted upon. As Chomsky says, there all kinds of reasons why one would wish to express propositions: *to direct further action, to transfer information, to display knowledge, and so on.* So the proposition can take on a range of illocutionary values. There is now a good deal of literature about the conditions that have to be met ffor illocutionary acts to be achieved and on the interpretative procedures which are engaged in the actual achievement. What I am going to discuss in this paper is *how, in written discourse, the writer gets his propositional meaning across, and how the reader takes in it.*

The problem for the writer is that he has to convey his propositions without the benefit of overt interaction which enables conversationalists to negotiate meanings by direct confrontation. This means that he has to anticipate possible reactions by in effect enacting the roles of both first and second person participants. He is engaged in a covert interaction, shifting roles to pose and respond to questions like 'What do you mean by that?' 'So what?' 'Can you give me an example?' and so on. All the time he must provide for the possible lack of convergence of shared knowledge: of the world, of social conventions, of the language shift.

The writer of course typically records the first person participant's contribution to this interaction. This partial record of the discourse is written text. Turning now to the reader, his task is to derive a discourse from the text. The extent to which this derivation will reconstitute the writer's discourse will depend on how far it corresponds in actually to the interlocutor the writer has presupposed. He may not need, or may not want, to follow the course of interaction so painstakingly plotted by the writer on his behalf. He can take short cuts according to the state of his knowledge, or according to his purpose in reading.

The writer's recording of discourse as text and the reader's derivation of discourse from text can be related to the process of *expansion,* on the one hand, and to the process of *reaction,* on the other. And these processes can be referred to the two principal language functions: the conceptual and the communicative.

7. THE EXPANSION OF LANGUAGE

According to Labov and Fanshel, expansion of language is a device for analyzing spoken discourse. It consists of the following procedures:

1. We expand the meaning conveyed by the cues into the nearest equipment in text terms, according to our best understanding of it.
2. We expand and make explicit the referent of pronouns to other utterances and events in other time frames.
3. We introduce factual material that is presented before and after this utterance, sometimes from widely separated parts of the interview.
4. we make explicit some of the shared knowledge between participants. (Labov and Fanshel 1977: 49)

Such procedures are especially necessary for the analyst, concerned as he is with a third person rendering, when the discourse under consideration is very close to its conceptual source. In general, it will follow that the closer the correspondence of conceptual worlds, the smaller will be the communicative effort called for, and the greater the task of the analyst in textualizing the discourse to make it interpretable.

Procedure for expansion are not, however, the prerogative of the analyst. They must be available to participants too as a communicative resource in conversation. There will be occasions when they have, as such, a particularly important role to play. This will be the case when one participant in an interaction does not, for one reason or another, have the inclination or capacity for communicative elaboration. In this case, the other participant becomes the custodian of the co-operative principle and has to provide expansion to sustain the interaction.

The familiar question now arises as to the relationship between the analyst's procedures and those of the participant. With respect to the above description, Labov and Fanshel point out the danger of disparity:

> . . . the expansion itself is often a help to our understanding and plays a crucial role in the analysis of *interaction*. But the expansion can also be somewhat descriptive, since there is an interactive component of over – explicitness, which throws many of the actions into a wrong light . . . Expansion magnify the strains and tensions in the social fabric and will produce distorted interpretation unless we remember that the expansion loses the important dimension of backgrounding, which subordinates one form of social interaction to another . . . Psychoterapists at the agency being studied expressed their appreciation for the insights gained, but remarked that this kind of analysis makes the therapeutic session seem like a type of 'warfare', and make the relationship with patients seem much more abrasive than they actually are (Labov and Fanshel 1977: 51).

Expansion requires close attention to surface structure so that it is fashioned in such a way as to ensure the affective conveyance of information. Reduction, on the other hand, is a device for directing attention to the silent features of information, for stripping the discourse of its communicative integuments to get to the conceptual gist. The demonstration of such a procedure applied to written discourse appears in van Dijk (1977), when it is represented as the recovery of semantic 'macro – structures' by the techniques of deletion, combination, and generalization. The assumption seems to be that the analyst's reduction matches that of the participant. If the reader is regarded as taking a non – reciprocal role in interaction corresponding to that of the writer, such an assumption might seem reasonable. There is an important reservation to be made, however, which comes to presently. Meanwhile, it is worth noting that reduction, like expansion, is a common resource in spoken interaction. Indeed both activities are described by Garnfikel and Sacks under the general heading of 'formulations':

> A member may treat some part of the conversation as an occasion to describe that conversation, to explain it, or characterize it, or explicate, or translate, or summarize, or furnish the gist of it, or take note of its accordance with the rules, or remark on its departure from rules. That is to say, a member may use some part of the conversation as an occasion on *formulate* the conversation . . . We shal speak of conversationalists' pratices of saying – in so – many – words – what – we – are – doing as fromulating. (Garfinkel and Sacks 1970: 350, 351)

This quotation appears in Heritage and Watson (1979). They are concerned with reductive formulations and they, too, specify three operations: *in their case, preservatin, deletion, transformation.*

Although the properties of formulation, as presented here, and those of reduction too, can be seen to have some correspondence, it is not clear how the interviewer's formulating utterance can be understood as the semantic macro – structure of this conversation. And here we return the question of the equivalence of analyst and paerticipant reduxctions. The critical point about the interviewer's formulation is that it is made to further some conversational purpose. He selects the information he wishes to present as of particular relevance; he does not abstract the whole. And the same is true of reader reductions of written discourse. The communicative condirions provide the reader with the opportunitu to recover the conceptual macro – structures of the writer's intention, but he may not wish to take advantage of it.

Written discourse operates by means of the same basic interactive procedures as characterize spoken conversation but the absence of reciprocity calls for a different mode of exploitation. The writer is involved in a process of discourse inactment wherby conceptual content is expended for conveyance and in the absence of an active interlocutor to negotiate the course of the interaction, his expansions will tend to match those recoverable by analysis. This discourse process is partially recorded as a textual product. The reader reconverts this product into a process and so derives a discourse from text. This discourse, however, is reduced and this reduction yields not the underlying macro – structure of the writer's original formulation but whaever conceptual content corresponds with the reader's state of knowledge and his purpose in reading. One might say, in general terms, that I writing expansion provides the means whereby the conceptual function can come to terms with the communicative, and in reading reduction provides the means whereby the communicative function san come to terms with the conceptual.

8. CONCLUSION

The teaching of language should be concerned with communication. But we must take care not define this too narrowly. Our aim must be to develop in learners a capacity for using language for both thinking and acting so that they can exploit its meaning potential in discourse. This is not a simple matter of learning how to express a selection of notions or perform a selection of illocutionary acts it is, more fundamentally, a matter of learning strategiesfor reconciling conceptual and communicative functions in the discourse process.

The dangers of misinterpretation in simplifying ideas for practical application, and some might say that the present paper is itself a good illustration. Perhaps it might appear so. But my inteention has been to try to correct disrortion and discourse exess by presenting a more balanced model of language communication than is commonly promoted at present. At all events the responsibility of applied linguists in this matter is clear: tom medicate between the theory of language communication and the practice of teaching it without misinterpreting the former or misleading the latter. A difficult task , but if we do not achieve it we shall be discredited.

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