

University Mohamed Kheider of Biskra

Master One.

Faculty of Letters and Languages

Discourse Analysis

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Second Term

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## **Speech Events**

### **Introduction**

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

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

### **1. Characteristics of Speech Events**

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

1. Using language for different purposes such as greeting, informing, demanding, promising and requesting.
2. Adapting or changing language according to the needs or expectations of a listener or situation- such as talking differently to a child than to an adult, giving enough background information to an unfamiliar listener, talking differently in a classroom than on a playground.
3. Following rules for conversations and narratives (for instance telling stories, giving reports, recounting events of the day). There are rules for taking turns in conversation, introducing topics of conversations and staying on the topic, rephrasing when misunderstood. There are also rules for appropriate use of non-verbal signals in conversation, distance between speaker and listener, facial expressions, and eye contact. Obviously, rules may vary depending on different languages and cultures.

## 2. Components of Speech Events

1. **Setting:** all speech events occur of necessity in time and space- sometimes it is one the defining criteria of an event that it takes place at a specific time or in a specific place. Even when a speech event is not restricted to a particular setting, in fact, the setting may affect either the stylistic mode or the stylistic structure. Moreover, Hymes stresses that the analyst should also take note of the 'psychological setting' of an event- the cultural definition of an occasion as formal or informal, serious or festive.
2. **Participants:** traditionally speech has been described in terms of a speaker who transmits a message and a listener who receives it. However, certain discourse analysts put forward at least four participant roles: addressor, speaker, addressee and hearer (or audience). Any description of a discourse (in a given speech community) must include data on who is and what can fill the participant roles. Certain participant features and particularly certain kinds of relationships between participants directly condition the choice of linguistic items in speech.
3. **Purpose:** all speech events (and speech acts) have a purpose, even if occasionally it is only for phatic communion. Speech events purposes are distinguished according to their assigned function, for instance contracts, trade, communal work tasks or negotiation over a disagreement in order to reach a settlement.
4. **Key:** key is usually defined by discourse analysts namely Hymes and van Dijk, as the 'tone, manner or spirit' in which a speech event is performed. Speech events may be identical in setting, participants, message or form; nevertheless, they may differ in key as between mock and serious, perfunctory and painstaking. The signalling of key may be non-verbal, by wink, smile, gesture or posture, but may equally be achieved by conventional units of speech like tone and stress.

5. **Message Content:** for many speech events topic is fully determined and invariable, though for others, particularly conversation, topic is relatively unconstrained. The effect of topic on style is disparate and varies from one speech community to another, it may have little impact or it can be strongly marked.

## **Conclusion**

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

## **Bibliography**

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## Workshop Session

**Practice One:** Make a textual and contextual analysis of the following with regard to the nature of the speech event, actual or possible participants, topics, setting, socio-cultural and psychological factors if any.

### Case1.

In 1963, H. Boumediene declared: 'The Algerian revolution can no more be contained within its borders than was Colonel Nasser's by the Nile Valley. The socialist revolution can triumph only if it spreads to Morocco and Tunisia.'

The authorities of the Kingdom of Morocco angrily commented: 'This is utterly a declaration of war.' (A Dictionary of Politics. Florence Elliot & M. Summerskill)

### Case2.

'Dey needn't call me worn yet', said she; lifting her shaking hands. 'I can cook yet, and scrub, and scour- I'm wuth a buying, if I do come cheap; tell 'em dat- you tell 'em', she added earnestly. Haley here forced his way into the group, walked up to the old man, pulled his mouth open and looked in, felt his teeth, made him stand and straighten himself, bend his back, and perform various evolutions to show his muscles; and then passed on to the next.

(Carpentier-Lamar. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Washington, DC, 1763)

### Case3.

'To be perfectly clear, we set forth herewith the main lines of our political programme:

Goal: National independence through:

- The restoration of the Algerian state, sovereign, democratic and social, in the framework of Islamic principles.
- The respect of all basic freedom without distinction of race or confession.'

November 1, 1954. National Secretary's Council.

### Case4.

Copenhagen Airline Publicity: We Take Your Bags And Send Them In All Directions!

### Case5.

'No general election yet says the Prime Minister.'

‘Five people die in an earthquake in Italy.’

‘\$ 1 million is stolen from a security van.’

**Case6.**

‘Ten minutes gone in the second half..... Liverpool 1 Manchester 1..... Bailey kicks a long ball down field into Liverpool half..... Albiston receives the return ball and..... shoots..... Goallllllllllll!’

**Case7.**

‘International Bank Corporation. Good afternoon.’

‘Good afternoon. Mr. Henry Chalmers, please.’

‘Mr. Chalmers is at lunch at the moment, sir. Can I put you through to his secretary?’

‘No, thank you. Can you give him a message?’

‘Certainly, sir what’s your name please?’

‘Bill Watkins. Could you tell him I called and I’ll call back later?’

‘Certainly, sir.’

‘Thank you. Goodbye.’

‘Goodbye, sir.’

**Case8.**

‘This is the final call for Sabena to Brussels flight number SN 608. Any remaining passengers must go immediately to gate 8 where the flight is now closing. Sabena flight number SN 608 closing now at gate 8.’

**Practice Two:** Indicate the functions of the discourse in the following samples, and support your answer by two linguistic features from each of the sequences. Please make sure to use the elements that have been suggested by M. A. K. Halliday.

1. ‘The density of a substance is defined as its mass per unit. The most obvious way to determine the density of a solid is to weigh a sample of the solid and then find out the volume that the sample occupies.’

2. 'Guayota was a Manitou, the spirit of the volcano, and he needed something with him that tied him to the Dragon Islands. He'd said that the creature I'd killed, his child, was immortal.'
  3. 'Dreaming of sapphire waters? Our club PRIVATSEA grants you access to the finest yatching lifestyle!'
  4. 'In every cry of every Man,  
  
In every Infant's cry of fear,  
  
In every voice, in every ban,  
  
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.'
  5. 'The next train to arrive at platform 2 will be the 15.01 to Newport calling at Filton. Passengers for Newport and all stations to Cardiff are advised to catch the train leaving platform 6 at 15.25 and change at Bristol Parkway.'
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