

10 Rules and procedures in discourse analysis

It seems to me that the central issue in discourse analysis relates to the old problem of distinguishing between what people know and what people do. It has been generally assumed that the essential facts regarding what people do with their language can be accounted for by rules describing their knowledge, that performance is a projection of competence. The proposing of an extended notion of competence to embrace a knowledge of how linguistic forms are used in the performance of appropriate communicative acts has not essentially altered the basic assumption that knowledge in some sense *determines* behaviour. It is still generally held that communicative activity is rule-*governed*, with the implication that once the rules are specified we automatically account for how people use language.

But in what sense do rules *determine* behaviour, and how do they *govern* our actions? The fact that there is considerable room for manoeuvre in individual behaviour makes it clear that there are no absolute constraints upon us. A good deal of what we do, linguistically and otherwise, seems not to conform exactly to rules but a manipulation of rules to suit particular occasions. Now, is this individual variation, this freedom of speech, so random as to be beyond the scope of systematic inquiry? If not, there would appear to be two possibilities: either the rules for knowledge which have been specified are not (are not yet at least) sufficiently refined to capture these aspects of use, although in principle they can be so refined; or we need to formulate statements about behaviour which are not expressed in the form of rules, or at least not in the form of the same kind of rules as are used to account for knowledge.

I do not think that it is possible to account for how people behave simply by specifying rules for knowledge, whether these relate to linguistic or communicative competence. It seems to me that if one attempts to do so, one gets into all kinds of difficulties. How, for example, do we explain stylistic innovation and our ability to interpret its meaning and appreciate its effect? There has been a tendency among some generative grammarians to dismiss such phenomena as metaphor, for instance, as in some sense aberrant ways of using language and of course it may be convenient to take this view when constructing a sentence grammar. But metaphor surely lies

at the heart of our everyday communicative behaviour. What seems to be abnormal is *non*-metaphorical communication, a strict conformity to rule. Indeed, if language users were strict conformists, their language would presumably lose its capacity for adaption and gradually fossilize.

Now of course innovatory uses of language are understood *in relation* to our knowledge of rules. But how do we bring these rules to bear? How do we use them in the production and interpretation of instances of communicative behaviour? It cannot simply be a matter of correlation: we do not just *identify* instances of use as manifesting the rules we already know. We draw upon our knowledge of pre-existing rules, we create discourse and commonly bring new rules into existence by so doing. All competence is transitional in this sense. Knowledge and behaviour are interdependent: what we do is to some degree relatable to what we know, but what we do also extends the scope of our knowledge. This, I take it, is what learning means. It seems to me that the central task in discourse analysis must be the investigation of this interrelationship.

So I want to suggest a distinction between *rules*, which represent what we know and to which we make reference when we use language, and the *procedures* we employ in realizing the communicative import of language in use. I suppose one might call these procedures rules of performance but this term 'performance' is not free of the taint of dogma and its use here might suggest, firstly, that these rules are of less immediate concern than those relating to knowledge—competence rules—and secondly that they are dependent upon them unilaterally, that the competence rules 'underlie' performance rules. But I want to suggest that both kinds of 'rule' have a claim on our concern and that one kind does not have any natural precedence over the other. I also feel that the notion of rule loses precision when it is applied both to a pre-existing principle and to the manner in which we make appeal to it in actual behaviour. So I think we might find it useful to make a terminological distinction between rule and procedure.

Let me follow established tradition at this point by illustrating the distinction I am trying to make by reference to the game of chess. We may claim that we know how to play the game if we know the moves it is permitted to make with different pieces, that is to say, if we know the constitutive rules of the game. But when we are actually engaging an opponent we do not merely move our pieces in accordance with these rules: we *use* the rules to create openings, to develop a plan of campaign, to make a game of it. Although the moves we make, do, of course, manifest rules and can be referred to as evidence that we know how to play (that we know that the different pieces can only be moved in certain specific preordained ways), what is of interest to the players (and the observers of the game) is the manner in which these rules are being manipulated, the procedures whereby each player tries to get into a favourable position and which

demonstrate his skill in using his knowledge of the rules. At any point in the game each player is faced with a number of possibilities, created by his own manoeuvres as limited by the manoeuvres of his opponent, and he chooses one of the possibilities, anticipating his opponent's move, and of course shifting the whole pattern of the game at the same time. As I shall suggest presently, it is very like conversation. Now certain procedures may in the course of time take on the status of rules. I know nothing about the history of chess, nor of the conventions that are held to constitute acceptable chess behaviour in particular groups of players, but I would suppose that as certain procedures become common practice they assume the role of rules and are considered to be constitutive of the game. So I should think it likely that there is change and variation in chess just as there is change and variation in language and that in both cases they proceed from particular ways of using the existing rules.

I want now to make a distinction between two kinds of rule. The first kind, which I will refer to as *rules of usage*, account for linguistic competence in the Chomskyan sense: they represent the language user's knowledge of the formal systems of his language. We might say that they constitute his basic grammatical source of reference. The second, which I will refer to as *rules of use*, account for the language user's knowledge of speech acts and can be said to constitute his basic communicative source of reference. The kind of inquiry conducted in Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), for example, is directed towards a formulation of rules of use. Such rules relate to our knowledge of what it is to promise, warn, predict, insult, and so on, of what certain activities, not necessarily linguistic, conventionally count as.

Both rules of usage and rules of use are subject to variation. Chomsky and Searle deal in ideal cases: sentences and acts in standardized abstraction. But just as there are different kinds of usage operating in dialects, so there are different kinds of use operating in different universes of discourse. For example, we may know what it is to explain something and what constitutes agreement within the conventions accepted in our particular area of social operation, but it does not follow that we know what counts as a scientific explanation or a legal agreement. Problems arise when we attempt to transfer rules of use from one universe of discourse to another. I take it that one of the central concerns of formal education is to resolve this problem and to extend the repertoire of such rules.

One of the central concerns in linguistic description, on the other hand, is the specification of the relationship between these two kinds of rule. Can we, for example, incorporate illocutions into the modality component of sentences as appears to be proposed in Ross (1970)? Can we not simply deal with speech act analysis in terms of the semantic analysis of performative verbs, as is proposed in Fillmore (1971)? What is the relationship between the semantics of performative verbs recorded in a lexicon and

accounted for, therefore, as usage, and the pragmatics of actual communication which attempts to account for the acts that these verbs are customarily used to refer to, and which therefore has to do with use? Is the knowledge of what a verb like *promise* means the same as knowing how to promise as a social activity? Questions like these appear against a background of old issues like the relationship between sign and concept, and between language, thought, and behaviour.

And questions like these are sometimes confused with questions of another kind: those which relate to the link between rules and procedures. Questions concerning the relationship between different kinds of rule (whether, for example, illocutions can be accommodated in the base component of a generative grammar) are different from (though, I assume, ultimately related to) questions concerning the manner in which particular acts are realized in particular circumstances.

How the uttering of a certain linguistic form comes to take on the illocutionary force of a promise, request, explanation, or what have you, has to do with the procedure of making sense. Rules of use are one thing, but *procedures* of use are another. Let us consider an example. Labov proposes a number of what he calls 'preconditions' for the performance of the act of ordering or requesting action. The specification of such preconditions is, in effect, like Searle's characterization of different speech acts, a formulation of rules of use. But Labov then goes on to demonstrate how these rules are deployed in actual behaviour, how speakers put their knowledge to work in creating coherent discourse. Thus, having defined the act of ordering in terms of four necessary preconditions, he then describes what I would wish to call a procedure whereby a particular utterance is taken as counting as this particular act. He expresses this procedure as follows:

If A makes a request for information of B about whether an action X has been performed, or at what time TX will be performed, and the four preconditions hold, then A will be heard as making a request for action.

Labov 1972a: 256.

It will be noted that it is taken for granted that a request for information will be recognized as self-evident here, but of course one will need to describe the procedure whereby *this* act is realized in discourse by reference to *its* rules. In the paper referred to above, Labov leaves one with the impression that he does not see the relationship between rules and procedures as particularly problematic. This is not the impression one gets from the work of the ethnomethodologists.

In a well-known paper, Sacks, for example, investigates what it is that enables us to hear the two utterances 'The baby cried. The mommy

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picked it up' as a complete and coherent narrative (Sacks 1972). His investigation makes reference to what he calls 'membership categorization devices'. These consist of collections of membership categories and application rules. The former would appear to be semantic constructs and to be, therefore, Sacks' somewhat idiosyncratic expressions of rules of usage. His application rules, on the other hand, refer to the manner in which the language user's knowledge of such devices is used to make sense of the particular instance of discourse he is concerned with.

One of these application rules runs as follows:

If some population of persons is being categorized, and if a category from some device's collection has been used to categorize a first member of the population, then that category, or other categories of the same collection *may* be used to categorize further members of the population.

A corollary to this 'rule' is what Sacks calls a 'hearer's maxim', which runs as follows:

If two or more categories are used to categorize two or more members of some population, and those categories can be heard as categories from the same collection, then: hear them that way.

Sacks 1972: 333.

There are a number of features in Sacks' description which I find a little obscure, but it seems to me that what he is trying to capture are the procedures which language users employ when they make communicative sense of language data, the manner in which they *use* their knowledge of semantics, or, as Sacks would have it, membership categorization devices as encoded in their language.

Both Labov and Sacks are concerned with the way a pair of actual utterances are recognized as being meaningfully related. In the case of Labov, the focus of attention is on the relationship between procedures and what I have called rules of use. In the case of Sacks, the focus is on the relationship between procedures and what I have called rules of usage. Following on from this observation, I now want to suggest that in discourse analysis we are concerned with procedures of two sorts: those which relate to rules of usage and which realize propositional development, which I will call *cohesion procedures*, and those which relate to rules of use and which realize the illocutionary development of discourse, which I will call *coherence procedures*.

By cohesion procedures I mean the way the language user traces propositional development in discourse by, for example, realizing the appropriate value of anaphoric elements, the way in which a sequence of units

of information encapsulated in linguistic units is provided with a conceptual unity. The devices of thematization (cf. Halliday 1967/1968, 1973) and grammatical cohesion (cf. Hasan 1968, Halliday and Hasan 1976) can be described by rules of usage, just as can Sacks' categorization devices, but how these devices are actually put to use on particular occasions is a matter of procedure. How, for example, do we select the appropriate value for a pronoun when there is more than one grammatically possible referential link? At what point is it necessary to relexicalize a reference? When does a discourse take on a life of its own so that the cumulative effect of what has preceded in some way takes precedence over the individual meanings? When do the expectations created by the propositional development within a particular instance of discourse override the meanings of particular propositions? To put it another way, when does the unity of the whole cease to depend on the separate signification of the parts? Questions like these have to do with the procedures whereby language users draw upon their knowledge of rules to synthesize meaning in discourse.

By coherence procedures I mean the way in which the language user realizes what communicative act is being performed in the expression of particular propositions, and how different acts are related to each other in linear and hierarchical arrangements. Thus the recognition that a particular expression counts as an invitation rather than an order is a matter of realizing that the context provides for the fulfilment of one set of conditions rather than another. Again, the adjustment of interpretation in the light of new evidence is also a matter of coherence procedure. I may, for example, interpret a particular remark as a casual observation and then be obliged to revise this interpretation as the discourse proceeds and as it becomes apparent that the remark was intended as, let us say, an explanation.

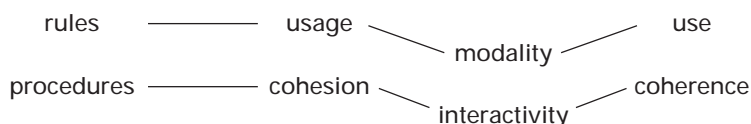
But coherence is not, I think, simply a matter of illocutionary connections in dissociation from propositional development. Procedures of cohesion and coherence are not entirely distinct, any more than are rules of usage and use. I think that there are two ways of looking at the communicative activity that goes on in the creation of discourse coherence. We can, on the one hand, consider a particular instance of discourse as a large scale illocutionary act of the Searlean sort and establish which constituent acts there are within it, these acts in effect realizing the set of conditions which define the large scale act. Thus, we might wish to characterize a particular instance of discourse as a report consisting of such constituent acts as definition, hypothesis, description, and so on. This kind of description focuses on the communicative intent of the speaker/writer in so far as it relates to the illocutionary acts he wishes to perform. In this view, propositions are only of interest to the extent that they serve to realize conditions on different acts. A second kind of approach would focus not so much on *what* communication is achieved in

a discourse as on *how* the communication is achieved. Attention here is directed at the interaction management aspects of use. In this approach, different communicative acts are defined internally, as it were, with reference to their function as elements of discourse structure. Examples of such 'interactive' acts would be agreement, disagreement, initiation, response, elicitation, and most of the communicative units described in Sinclair and Coulthard (1975). With acts of this kind, the proposition does not simply enter into the picture as a condition but is central to the act itself. We might say, in fact, that in the case of illocutionary acts of the Searlean kind the proposition is ancillary to the act, whereas in the case of these interactive acts the act is ancillary to the proposition.

We might regard interactive acts, then, as instruments of propositional development. In this respect they serve as the link between cohesion and coherence procedures. But now the question might arise: how can interactive procedures operate when there is no interaction, as would appear to be the case in written discourse? This question touches on the relationship between production and interpretation. It seems to me that all discourse is interactive and that the same interpretative procedures are brought into play whether one is involved in the actual production of discourse or not. When a spoken interaction takes place each participant develops his own scheme which he adjusts according to what his interlocutor says. I am sure that it is a mistake to suppose that one participant's responses are simply reactions to what the other has said: they are, rather, readjustments to his own communicative intents. As I have already suggested, verbal interactions resemble games of chess: each participant works out his moves in advance and modifies them tactically as the encounter develops. In a serious game, analogous to academic argument, each player will be trying to project his own pattern on the game and to force his opponent into error, or at least into a move which can be turned to advantage. The producer of written discourse is playing with an unseen, and often, to some degree at least, an unknown player, although he will usually have a fair idea of what skill to allow for and will play the game accordingly. In the case of written discourse, the player/producer anticipates his opponent's moves by writing them into the discourse. In consequence, the game may well proceed in a way which is different from how the writer originally intended it to go because his anticipation modifies his intentions. And the reader too begins to anticipate from the first move onwards, and plays his own game as he reads. When we talk of monologue and dialogue we refer to the overt differences of surface performance, but it seems likely that the same interactive interpretative process underlies both.

Let me now draw a simple sketch map of what I have been trying to work out. We have rules of usage and rules of use and these together constitute what a language user knows. The relationship between them is problematic

but a likely link is modality. We have procedures which represent what a language user does with his knowledge in the creation, productively or receptively, of discourse which has propositional cohesion and illocutionary coherence. A possible link between these is interactivity. Interactivity, then, mediates between the procedures of cohesion and coherence in much the same way as modality mediates between the rules of usage and the rules of use. We might express these relationships as follows:



There is a deceptive neatness about this, an enchanting simplicity when viewed from a distance. But there are, of course, all kinds of difficulties, which do not disappear simply by having a frame put around them. A major one has to do with orientation. In what I have said so far, for example, I have assumed that rules and procedures can be inferred from an observation of data; that the methodology of discourse analysis is in this respect straightforward. But it is really not straightforward at all because what the analyst observes is not necessarily what the participant experiences. This is the problem of ethnocentric contamination which social anthropologists have been long aware of, as have researchers into child language acquisition, itself a kind of special branch of social anthropology. It is the same problem which has particularly exercised the minds of scholars working within ethnomethodology. It underlies the conflicts between stylistic analysis and literary criticism.

To put the matter simply, there are two possible methodological perspectives on discourse analysis. One can, on the one hand, deal with instances of discourse from the point of view of the third person analyst: that is to say, one can treat discourse in detachment from its instantiation, after the event, as a product. On the other hand, one can deal with discourse from the point of view of the participants caught, as it were, in the act; that is to say, one can treat discourse as a process. To return once more to our game of chess. At the end of a particular game, one can specify the moves that have been made and thereby give an account of the structure of that particular encounter. But this account does not of course record how the game developed from the players' point of view, it does not reveal the experience of planning moves, modifying them to counter the moves of the opponent, and so on. A product analysis does not capture how the game assumed the structure it did assume, the process of the game's development.

I am not at all sure myself how far process analysis is possible. The ethnomethodologists seem to make claims that they are dealing with process, with the ongoing accomplishment of practical reasoning, but although they make inferences about process, they typically deal with products. There is no evidence, to my knowledge, that they have attempted to conduct experiments which might yield information about how the participants see the discourse at a particular point in its development and what controls their choice of options at this point. A process analysis should presumably take an interest not only in the paths that are taken but in those which are not but could have been.

In fact, I think there is a general and natural tendency for the analyst to withdraw from involvement, to come to terms with his data by putting himself at a distance from it and so reducing it in perspective to methodological size. The analyst is inclined to move from process to product, and then to convert procedures inferred from product into rules of use and then, wherever possible, into rules of usage. There is a comfortable sense of security to be found in the specification of precise invariant rules and we shall perhaps never feel really at our ease until we can express all behaviour as knowledge within a unitary theory of linguistic description; until all the creative procedures of human beings are expressed in terms of exact rules. But one sometimes wonders whether this sense of security is worth the price that one might be paying for it.

Notes

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