

Linguistics, Language, and the Real World:  
Discourse and Beyond: Georgetown  
University Round Table on Languages and  
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## Introduction

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Even before I joined its faculty in 1979, I admired Georgetown University because of the Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics. I had regarded this alluring meeting with a combination of awe and envy throughout my graduate student days, as I saw my professor, John Gumperz, fly off to take part and return to write up his papers for inclusion in the volume. I could hardly have imagined then that eventually I would be fortunate enough not only to take part in but to organize three Round Tables: the 1981 meeting, "Analyzing Discourse: Text and Talk"; the 1985 meeting, "Languages and Linguistics: The Interdependence of Theory, Data, and Application," held in conjunction with the LSA/TESOL Institute that I directed at Georgetown in the summer of 1985; and finally the current one, "Linguistics, Language, and the Real World: Discourse and Beyond"—exactly two decades after the first. I suggested to my co-chair, James E. Alatis, that he write a brief history of the Round Table to be included in this volume, partly because I myself wished to learn the history of these meetings. I am personally grateful for his insight and wisdom. No one is better placed to bring this history into present awareness.

What Jim Alatis does not emphasize in his brief account is the enormous role he himself has played in establishing the Georgetown University Round Table (affectionately if somewhat unaesthetically called GURT) as a major force in the development of the field of linguistics. The role of GURT in the rise of sociolinguistics and discourse analysis as subfields of linguistics is an exemplary case of the importance of GURT meetings and volumes, and also Jim Alatis's vision. In his historical survey, Dr. Alatis notes the establishment of the sociolinguistics program in the Georgetown University Linguistics Department in 1970, thanks to a grant from the National Science Foundation, but he neglects to mention that he himself was the driving force behind the winning of that grant.

Throughout his tenure as dean of Georgetown University's School of Languages and Linguistics (SLL), Dr. Alatis also has been the force behind GURT by ensuring funding, frequently organizing meetings himself, and—in years he did not do so—selecting an organizer from the SLL faculty and lending his decanal support in every way possible. I remain personally grateful to him for the matchless opportunity to play a role by organizing three GURTs. I also would

like to take this opportunity to honor Dr. Alatis's unrelenting efforts and contribution to the Round Table tradition leading up to GURT 2001, which I have had the honor of co-chairing with him.

Given his unique role in supporting the Round Table from the time he assumed the position of dean of the School of Languages and Linguistics in 1973, the name James E. Alatis will always be associated with the Georgetown University Round Table. Yet this is the last GURT in which Dr. Alatis played an official role. Administration of future Round Tables will reside with Georgetown University's linguistics department. In light of this transition, I was able to convince Jim Alatis to allow me to dedicate this volume to him, so it may stand as concrete recognition of his incomparable contribution to maintaining the Round Table for nearly three decades.

GURT 2001, "Linguistics, Language, and the Real World: Discourse and Beyond," was designed to contribute to the field of linguistics in two ways: to advance research in the field of discourse analysis and to bring linguistic insight to bear on issues of importance to American society at large. This Round Table thus continues a tradition not only in the field of sociolinguistics but also of the Round Tables, as Dr. Alatis outlines in his brief history, which follows this Introduction.

GURT 1981 addressed the topic "Analyzing Discourse: Text and Talk." In my introduction to that volume, I define *discourse* as "language in context across all forms and modes." GURT 2001 promises to extend work in discourse "beyond" the analysis of language to include examination of how language affects issues of importance to the world at large. Robin Lakoff remarks in a note to her chapter, "As in previous years, GURT 2001 served as a reminder to all of us of the importance and centrality of sociolinguistics." Indeed, she continues, "as Labov remarked many years ago, the field might be better off if what we call 'sociolinguistics' were recognized as, in fact, the central concern of the field, under the name of 'linguistics,' and if what is commonly referred to as 'core linguistics,' on the other hand, had been given a hyphenated or complex name like 'autonomo-linguistics.'" In this spirit, let us think of this and the other papers in this volume as contributions to "linguistics" proper.

Into the 1980s, GURT meetings were composed of all-plenary, all-invited papers. The economics began to change, however, and beginning in 1988 GURT meetings became a combination of concurrent sessions composed of papers refereed on the basis of submitted abstracts and a smaller number of invited plenary speakers. The present volume is composed entirely of plenary addresses. Following is a brief overview of what lies in store.

## Overview

The volume opens with two essays that address fundamental and underresearched aspects of discourse. First, Frederick Erickson gives us "Some notes on the musicality of speech." Throughout his long scholarly career, Erickson has

been a leading researcher into the rhythmic nature of spoken discourse and its importance in understanding the outcomes of interaction—including, prominently, the paper he delivered at GURT 1981 in which he transcribed the conversation he analyzed in musical notation (Erickson 1982). In the essay in this volume, Erickson begins his demonstration of both the musical nature of speech and the usefulness of a quasi-musical transcription of discourse by examining cadential sequences in well-known Western musical compositions that, he argues, deliberately imitate speech. He then examines the rhythmic patterns in speech recorded at a dinner-table conversation and in first-grade and fifth-grade classrooms. The cadential organization of spoken discourse makes listener response possible by signaling "transition relevance" (cuing a speaker's willingness to transfer a speaking turn) and "listening response relevance" (an invitation to provide a sign of listenership such as "mhm" or "uh huh"). Given listeners' inevitable ebb and flow of attention, Erickson notes, the ability to not only interpret but also anticipate customary patterns of prosodic emphasis makes possible both comprehension and participation in interaction.

In "Laughing while talking," Wallace Chafe gives us the first (as far as I know) detailed linguistic account of a phenomenon that has been little studied by linguists but is pervasive in conversation: laughter. Based on audiotaped examples of laughter in naturally occurring conversation, he begins with the phonetics of laughter, examining its components (such as number of expulsion-of-air pulses and quality of vocalic articulation). Next he considers laughter as the expression of emotion, the "feeling of nonseriousness," and examines its properties (such as its lack of voluntary control and its universality and contagiousness). He then considers the function of nonseriousness in conversational interaction, both in response to intentionally nonserious performance such as joke-telling and other forms of verbal play and also in more frequent instances of laughter in the course of conversational interaction to replace unpleasant emotions, to evince ridicule, to serve as a conversational lubricant, and so on. Thus, Chafe suggests—and demonstrates by his own analysis—that research into the forms and functions of laughter in conversation can add to our understanding of human cognition and interaction.

The third chapter is my own: "Power maneuvers or connection maneuvers? Ventriloquizing in family interaction." Like all the papers that follow, this chapter has relevance to a specific domain of the "real world" of our theme (in this case, family interaction), while also adding to our general understanding of discourse in interaction. It grows out of two of my ongoing and interrelated theoretical interests: framing in discourse—a process I regard as central to the discursive creation of meaning, identity, and human relationships—and the interplay of hierarchy and connection, which I see as a corrective to the tendency to focus on power in discourse to the exclusion of the inextricably intertwined dimension of solidarity, or connection. Here I approach these interwoven threads through analysis of a linguistic strategy I call "ventriloquizing" in tape recordings taken

from a larger project in which dual-career couples with children tape-recorded all of their interaction over a week. I examine instances in which one family member communicates to a second by speaking through, to, or as a third. For example, a mother might ventriloquize her infant child by saying, in her husband's presence and in a baby-talk register, "My diaper is dirty!" My analysis focuses on how these interactions are simultaneously "control maneuvers" and "connection maneuvers." My goal is to better understand family discourse, as well as to investigate how creative framing of utterances allows speakers to integrate the dynamics of power and solidarity, or control and connection, in their discourse.

The next four chapters address a range of "real-world" domains by examining narrative discourse. William Labov, who ushered in three decades of linguistic analysis of narrative with a seminal paper that has been the foundation of all subsequent structural analyses of narrative in our field (Labov and Waletzky 1967), here revisits the topic in "Uncovering the event structure of narrative." He begins with an examination of the event structure of a narrative told by a seventy-three-year-old man living in a small midwestern town about a frightening experience he recalls from his teen years. Labov then examines a narrative told in the context of testimony before the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In that testimony, the speaker recounts events leading up to the murder of an innocent black couple—a murder in which the speaker participated but for which he would like to downplay his responsibility. Labov shows that analysis of the underlying event structure of the narrative "helps to accomplish the initial goals of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: to discover what was done and who was responsible." At the same time, Labov contributes to the linguistic analysis of discourse by advancing our understanding of "the process by which narratives are created, transmitted, and understood."

Deborah Schiffrin, author of the classic essay "Tense Variation in Narrative" (Schiffrin 1981), also returns here to the topic of narrative. Her essay, "Linguistics and history: Oral history as discourse," addresses the intersection of linguistics and history by comparing two different accounts of a single experience by a Holocaust survivor. While briefly interned at a Budapest prison before being sent to Auschwitz, Susan Beer encountered a fellow prisoner named Hannah Szenes (sometimes spelled Senesh), a now legendary but then unknown young Hungarian Jewish emigrant to Palestine who had been captured (and later was tortured and executed) after parachuting into Hungary on a failed rescue mission. Schiffrin compares Beer's accounts of her meeting with Szenes as taken from two separate interviews and presented in two different modes. One excerpt comes from an interview conducted in 1984; the other appears on a website titled "Women and the Holocaust," in which Beer's account of her meeting with Szenes is excerpted from an interview conducted in 1982. As Schiffrin shows, even though the two texts were told by the same speaker about the same event, they "speak in different voices," reflect different stances, and include different aspects

of the truth. By viewing oral history through the perspective of discourse analysis, Schiffrin demonstrates "the impact of transcription and other modes of presenting texts, the intertextual relevance of personal and historical themes, and the display of identity through referring terms and event-types." Thus, Schiffrin's analysis sheds light on issues of linguistic as well as historical concern.

We again encounter a single speaker saying "the same thing" in different contexts in Alessandro Duranti's "The voice of the audience in contemporary American political discourse." Having accompanied and videotaped congressional candidate Walter Capps as he campaigned in California, Duranti compares multiple instances on a single day when Capps told "the same" joke and made "the same" political points to different audiences. By analyzing the varied rhetorical strategies Capps uses in different contexts, Duranti shows not only how the candidate sculpts his speech to accommodate a variety of audiences but also how the different audiences impose their own interpretations on the same words—interpretations that at times diverge from Capps's own intentions. This phenomenon poses a dilemma for the speaker, who must choose between his own "voice" and the "voice of the audience": Will he reassert control of his own meaning or "go along" with the audience—an especially tempting choice when their reaction displays enthusiastic approval of the meaning they heard. Duranti's chapter demonstrates that an ethnographically informed discourse analysis can contribute to an understanding of political discourse, as well as to an understanding of the moral dilemma between "pleasing others and asserting oneself" that is central to "the construction of human agency through talk."

The chapter by Robin Lakoff dovetails with Schiffrin's and Labov's in compelling ways. Lakoff also addresses the intersection of historical events and narrative, and she also is concerned with varying versions of the same "text." Her focus, however, is on narrative in the larger sense of a socially agreed-upon storyline that connects divergent events, rather than a particular story told by a single speaker about a personal experience. The narratives Lakoff addresses are news stories about current events—"public stories"—in which different groups of citizens agree on details, interpretations, and evaluations that differ markedly from those to which other groups of citizens ascribe. Lakoff contrasts two pairs of public stories. One is the O. J. Simpson saga, in which celebrity athlete Simpson was tried and acquitted for the murder of his former wife, Nicole, and her friend Ron Goldman. The other is the political fate of President Bill Clinton and his wife, now-Senator Hillary Clinton. With respect to Simpson, Lakoff shows that the black and white communities in the United States accepted as truth irreconcilably contrasting narratives. Similarly irreconcilable are the stories—that is, the network of facts, interpretations, and evaluations—about the Clintons that are embraced as truth by divergent groups of Americans. For Lakoff, these sets of stories are "about" race and gender, respectively, and she sees the competition for narrative rights that they represent as both reflecting and aggravating

social discord. Lakoff suggests that understanding public discourse as a struggle for narrative rights can shed light on the frequently remarked and frequently bemoaned rise of incivility in public discourse.

The last three chapters all address, in different yet related ways, the intersection of language and public institutions. Heidi E. Hamilton—whose groundbreaking analysis of the language of an Alzheimer's patient (Hamilton 1994) established her as a leading scholar in the domain of discourse and medicine—examines the accounts given by patients to explain why they fail to comply with their doctors' advice regarding management of their diabetes. Echoing Lakoff's observation that dominant voices suppress the narrative rights of subordinate voices in news stories, Hamilton demonstrates in "Patients' voices in the medical world: An exploration of accounts of noncompliance" how patients' voices are similarly though inadvertently suppressed in medical encounters. Starting from the premise that physicians sincerely wish to help their patients, Hamilton surmises that doctors treating patients for diabetes would be better able to help patients comply with medical advice if they better understood their patients' reasons for noncompliance. Yet these reasons, which patients volunteered in postexamination interviews, did not emerge in interaction with their doctors. Hamilton's analysis of the contents and structure of patients' accounts shows that they know what they need to do to manage their diabetes but are hampered by an identifiable range of real-life obstacles, which they explain by reference to an identifiable set of excuses and justifications. With this understanding as background, Hamilton then presents examples of physician-patient interactions to show how patients' admissions of noncompliance could (but don't) provide an opportunity for physicians to address the reasons for noncompliance. Her analysis of patients' accounts is useful not only for the domain of doctor-patient communication but also for a wide range of human interactions in which accounts of various types are given. Moreover, Hamilton's chapter joins with those of Schiffrin and Duranti to elucidate how discourse varies in response to different contexts.

In "Discourse of denial," Shirley Brice Heath also presents a structural analysis of account-type discourse: the discursive strategies employed by well-intentioned policymakers and educators in denying the import of research findings. Heath draws on her own encounters with such policymakers in bringing to their attention her own research in two divergent contexts: first, a decade of investigations into the impact of community-based, arts-centered learning environments on high-risk youth; second, her work with linguists and literacy specialists attempting to help Papua New Guinea villagers address their concerns about potentially disastrous threats to their environment. With regard to high-risk youth, Heath notes that educators and policymakers deny the well-documented promise of community-based youth programs in part because they see such programs in opposition to, and consequently a threat to, school-based programs. Interestingly (and sadly), Heath notes the power of narrative as a denial strategy, as when a policymaker sim-

ply tells an engaging narrative that disputes the research findings. Heath then examines the linguistic strategies (in her terms, "stylistic maneuvers") by which these narratives effectively sidestep the research. Shifting to Papua New Guinea, Heath shows that villagers presented clear evidence that "a wide range of texts in several languages could be made accessible to villagers, so long as oral patterns of information transmission were honored." Yet educators, linguists, and literacy "experts" questioned the evidence because of their unwavering commitment to the necessity of literate skills such as decoding written texts and individuals' abilities to read aloud and use written texts in public. Again, Heath's chapter demonstrates that discourse analysis can help elucidate and address the most pressing problems in the real world, while enhancing our understanding of interpersonal interaction.

The volume ends with a success story. In "Implementing a district-wide foreign language program: A case study of acquisition planning and curricular innovation," G. Richard Tucker and Richard Donato report on their successful six-year consulting experience with a public school district in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, that resulted in the planning and implementation of a system-wide Spanish language program. By discussing the steps involved in selecting the target language and incorporating active participation by all senior administrators in every aspect of program planning and implementation, Tucker and Donato provide an in-depth glimpse of successful researcher-policymaker collaboration. They describe the program, which was completing its fifth full year in 2001, as well as their documentation of the students' success in learning Spanish. Among the themes that emerge in the account, the notion of "empowerment" stands out, as the authors note the unanimous reports of satisfaction at feeling "ownership" of the program among teachers, department heads, principals, and others.

Taken together, then, the chapters in this volume contribute to the field of discourse analysis by enhancing our understanding of language in interaction, at the same time that they illustrate that linguistics can address real-world problems, in both private and public domains. In his brief history of the Round Table, James E. Alatis notes that GURT was founded following World War II as a way to address what is surely the most pressing problem humans face: to ensure world peace. This noble purpose is even more urgent as I write this introduction; the rise of international terrorism and the proliferation of nuclear as well as chemical and biological weapons capability constitute threats to world peace as grave as any since the Cuban missile crisis brought the world to the brink of nuclear war. Perhaps we have become more jaded in our faith in the ability of languages and linguistics to create peace in the world. If the goal of world peace seems ever more elusive, the goal of using our linguistic expertise to address human problems in society at large seems ever more urgent. As Robin Lakoff observes in the note to her paper, this goal is neither more nor less than the business of linguistics. That is the optimistic hope of this volume.

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