

INTRODUCTION

The topic of the Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics 1981 is 'Analyzing Discourse: Text and Talk.' Perhaps a word is in order concerning the meaning and use of the terms 'discourse', 'text', and 'talk'.

The subtitle, 'Text and Talk', can be understood to refer to two separate modes of discourse: text as written prose, and talk as spoken conversation. This is a common use of these terms (for example, Cicourel 1975). But 'text' is often used interchangeably with 'discourse'. Indeed, the term 'discourse' is used in varied ways, to refer to anything 'beyond the sentence'. The term appears in reference to studies of the structure of arguments underlying written prose (for example, van Dijk in the present collection), and to analysis of pairs of hypothetical sentences (for example, Bolinger 1979). However, 'discourse' is also used to refer to conversational interaction. In fact, a book entitled *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis*, written by a participant in this meeting (Coulthard 1977), is concerned only with conversational interaction. Schegloff (this volume) argues that rather than conversation being a subvariety of discourse, all forms of discourse are subvarieties of conversation.

Discourse, as the term appears in the title, and as it is used in the papers collected here, encompasses all these. It refers to both text and talk, and these not as two separate genres to be compared and contrasted, but rather as overlapping aspects of a single entity. As the object of study, spoken discourse is 'text', much as words spoken in a speech are commonly referred to as the text of the speech. In this sense, 'discourse' and 'text' are synonymous.

In a nonlinguistic discussion of what linguists know as the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, Laing (1959) suggests that speakers of English cannot conceive of mind and body as one, because their language does not provide a word to express them so. The best that English speakers can do is attempt to conceptualize *mindandbody*, squishing them together but never really

perceiving them as a single entity. It is fortunate, therefore, that there exists in English a word that refers to language in context across all forms and modes. That word is discourse, and that is the sense in which it is intended here.

Given this unified approach to discourse, it would be infelicitous to think of written and spoken language as separate, that is, of text as anything written and talk as spontaneous conversation. The inadequacy of such a division is a recurrent theme in recent research (see papers collected in Tannen 1982a and 1982b). Features that have been associated exclusively with spoken or written language are often found in discourse of the other mode. For example, Bright (this volume) shows spoken discourse to exhibit verse markers previously considered poetic; Chafe (1981) finds spoken ritual Seneca to share many features with written language; and written fiction exhibits many features expected in spontaneous conversation (Tannen 1982c).

In their study of all forms of discourse, linguists are concerned with central questions: of structure, of meaning, and of how these function to create coherence. How do people put words together? How do particular combinations of words yield particular meanings? In short, what makes individual words into discourse?

Discourse analysis raises another issue which is dramatized in the following personal experience. Recently, my parents visited me, and my father asked about my work: How do I really know when I have made a discovery? How can I prove my findings? How scientific is the study of language? I began to comment on interpretive vs. statistical methods; that statistics may lie; that sometimes it is necessary to look beyond what will fit into a test tube, to understand what is in the world. My voice must have taken on an intoning quality, because my father (who is a lawyer) hesitated, looked at me, smiled slightly, and said, 'It sounds as if you've had this discussion before, but I'm having it for the first time, and that gives you an advantage'.

It is likely that many analysts of discourse have had this discussion before, from one or more of these perspectives. How and to what extent can linguistics claim to be--and does it aspire to be?--a science? The expansion (or, more accurately, the return) of our sphere of study to discourse, to language in context, raises more and more troubling questions of accountability, reliability, and verifiability; the role and nature of interpretation, or hermeneutics; and, again and again, the question of whether linguistics is one of the sciences, or of the humanities, or of the arts.¹

Perhaps the choice is not really a choice at all. In a well-reasoned argument identifying science as an art, Judson (1980) quotes Nobel laureate physicist Paul Dirac: 'It is more important to have beauty in one's equations than to have them fit experiment' (p. 11). 'It seems that if one is working from the point

of view of getting beauty into one's equations, and if one has really a sound insight, one is on a sure line of progress' (p. 199).

How can science be seen as an endeavor seeking beauty? For one thing, in searching for explanations, science, like art, discovers patterns and relationships. It seeks to understand the exhilarating tension of creativity within constraints. Just so, linguists seek to discover patterns that create and reflect coherence. Just so, the linguists whose work is collected here have discovered the principles and processes underlying coherence in a wide variety of texts. Thus linguistics, at the same time that it is scientific, is also concerned with aesthetics, for aesthetics is (in the terms of Becker 1979, citing Bateson), 'the emergent sense of coherence'. An aesthetic response is made possible by the discovery of the coherence principles underlying a text.

In Christopher Hampton's play, *The Philanthropist*, a linguist is introduced to a novelist, who asks him how he can bear to do such narrow work. The linguist replies that he is interested in the same thing as the novelist--words. The novelist, unimpressed, scoffs, 'But one at a time--not in a sequence'.

The study of discourse means that linguists are indeed interested in words in a sequence, and in that mysterious moving force that creeps in between the words and between the lines, sparking ideas, images, and emotions that are not contained in any of the words one at a time--the force that makes words into discourse.

Those who came to linguistics from the study of literature, and those who came from mathematics, or anthropology, join together in the study of discourse, seeking to discover patterns in language--a pursuit that is humanistic as well as reasoned, that is relevant at the same time that it is elegant, that is theoretical and empirical, and even beautiful.

The diversity of work in discourse analysis is reflected in the papers collected here, and in the range of pre-conference sessions that were organized in conjunction with the Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics, as can be seen in the following list of session titles (organizers are shown in parentheses).

1. Oral proficiency assessment (James Frith, Foreign Service Institute)
2. Applications of discourse analysis to teaching: Spanish and international affairs (William Cressey, Georgetown University)
3. Toward adequate formal models of natural discourse (Jerry R. Hobbs, SRI International)
4. Functions of silence (Muriel Saville-Troike, University of Illinois)
5. Pragmatics (Nancy Yanofsky, Georgetown University)

6. Spoken vs. written language (Deborah Tannen, Georgetown University)
7. Cordel literature in Brazil: Oral or written? (Clea Rameh, Georgetown University)
8. Writing (Marcia Farr Whiteman, National Institute of Education)
9. Linguistics, psychotherapy, and plain talk (Daniel P. Dato, Georgetown University)
10. Discourse answers to syntactic questions (Flora Klein, Georgetown University)
11. Discourse approaches to reading comprehension (Ulla Connor, Georgetown University)
12. Association to cure monolingualism (Joshua Fishman, Yeshiva University, and Dorothy Goodman, Washington International School)
13. Discourse analysis and its relevance for translation and interpretation (Margareta Bowen, Georgetown University)

Proceedings of many of these sessions will be published in collections edited by their organizers. Papers from Hobbs' session will appear in a special issue of the journal *Text*, and papers from Tannen's session are included in Tannen (1982a) and (1982b).

I want to thank the organizers of and participants in the pre-conference sessions, and the participants in the plenary sessions whose papers appear in this volume. Indeed, there are many people--far more than I can name--who deserve heartfelt thanks. First, I am grateful to Dean James E. Alatis for giving me the opportunity to organize this year's Georgetown University Round Table. I want to thank my colleagues, especially Roger Shuy, for their generous support, and the many Georgetown students who selflessly volunteered time and enthusiasm. Finally, my deep thanks go to Susan Dodge, who was at my side from start to finish, and without whose able and cheerful assistance I cannot imagine this year's Round Table having materialized at all.

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NOTES

These remarks have gone through a number of transformations, from typed notes to oral face-to-face discourse (a blend of reading and extemporaneous talk) to typed transcription (for which I thank Marta Dmytrenko) to revision for print. In the last stage, I was helped by comments from Alton Becker, Wallace Chafe, Robin Lakoff, Fr. Richard O'Brien, and Roger Shuy.

1. Becker suggests, following Burke (1961), that linguistics may be none of these, but something else entirely: a unique epistemological realm.

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