

Conversational strategy and metastrategy in a pragmatic theory: The example of *Scenes from a Marriage**

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The question of artistic verisimilitude — the relationship between the representation and the reality — is one of the more intriguing issues in a theory of aesthetics. Until now, linguists have largely been isolated from this area of philosophical speculation because it seemed irrelevant to our interests and impervious to our methodology. But as we get more involved in the formal analysis of naturalistic conversations — through tape recordings or transcripts — we are struck, often, in a perverse way by their apparent unnaturalness, their difficulty in being understood. Compared, say, with the dialog in a play or a novel, naturalistic conversation strikes us as not what we expected, not working by preconceived pattern.

We would not claim that constructed dialog represents a reality lacking in transcripts, but rather that artificial dialog may represent an internalized model or schema for the production of conversation — a competence model that speakers have access to. If, then, we are interested in discovering the ideal model of conversational strategy, there is much to be gained by looking at artificial conversation first, to see what these general, unconsciously-adhered-to assumptions are; and later returning to natural conversation to see how they may actually be exemplified in literal use. Thus, we are not claiming that the artificially-constructed dialog we are going to discuss literally represents natural conversation, but rather that one can inspect a different level of psychological reality and validity through the use of literary data, and in this paper we will illustrate how such work might responsibly be done. In this sense, our work here is in support of a theory of communicative *competence* — the knowledge a speaker has at his/her disposal to determine what s/he can expect to hear in a discourse, and what s/he is reasonably expected to contribute, in terms of the implicitly internalized assumptions made in her/his speech community about such matters.

We need, then, some notion of what parameters the speaker can use as reference points in determining how a contribution can appropriately be made in a particular context. The speaker must know first what sort of

extralinguistic facts pertain: what kind of a conversation it is, how well the participants know one another, what sorts of things must be communicated; and additionally, what mode of communication is the normal style for each speaker — what can be expected of each from prior acquaintance and/or a priori assumptions based on age, sex, social position, and so on. All this specific information need not be directly represented as part of the speaker's specifically linguistic competence; but what is reflected in her/his pragmatic grammar is a general schema, a theory of communicative competence.

It has been suggested (Lakoff 1979) that there are four principal foci of communicative competence: that is, that while competence itself comprises a continuum, with infinite possible points prescribing the appropriate interaction for an individual in a particular setting, these infinite possibilities are organized in terms of four targets, and which target is relevant depends on the participant's perception of her/his role in the conversational setting as s/he perceives it. For each person, in any culture, there is a more or less unconscious sense of an idealized interactional human being: an idealized human being behaves in *such* a way, in *this* setting. The four points as they have been specified are: (1) Distance; the aim is to inspire separateness and privacy. The least intrusiveness is the best. Hostility is not expressed, therefore, by confrontation (which is unthinkable) but by sarcasm, irony, impersonality. (2) Deference; the aim is to avoid imposition. That is, unlike distance, deference allows interaction as long as the speaker does not attempt to get the upper hand. Hostility cannot be directly expressed, but can be made clear enough through questions or silence, for instance. (3) Camaraderie; the aim here is to acknowledge interrelationship. Participants are to express their equality and their feelings toward one another, friendly or hostile. The ideal is to be totally open, though openness in this mode is as politeness is to the others — it can be conventional, though this is not perceptible to people who do not use this mode as an ideal. (4) Clarity; where the other modes implicitly or explicitly expressed relatedness, or the fact that the relationship was an important part of the communication, clarity is used where the pure expression of factual information is at issue. Hence closeness or distance is not an issue. This is not normally a possibility in ordinary dyadic communication; it is found with television newscasters (sometimes), or with certain forms of lecturing.

Our task, then, is to select a constructed example of dialog; discover what each participant's preferred strategy is, or whether what it appears to be is what it really is, and why; and talk about how the writer's realization of his/her characters' styles represents a reality that has correlates, if not necessarily direct ones, in more naturalistic texts.

We could have selected any of a wide variety of examples. We had to choose between plays, movies, novels, television — just as a start. We felt that a genre that used dialog as the principal expository means of expressing characters and their relationships would make our position clearest. Novelists have many other techniques to fall back on, but for a playwright, dialog and its concomitant extralinguistic behavior is all the audience has to go on. Interpretation must be done by the viewer, or listener — as in actual conversation; whereas in the novel, the novelist by careful selection and description can do a lot of his/her own interpretive work.

We wanted to find a contemporary example, as that would be the clearest to us. We needed something with a lot of dialog between relatively few people — so that register differences would be minimized, and we would be dealing with something like a minimal pair. We would want to examine as many interactional types between as few participants as possible — to see what a single individual's or two people's strategies were, when confronted by different contexts. That is, we wanted the largest possible sample of conversational situations involving the smallest number of people to maximize the contributions and types of contributions of each.¹

We wanted something that was supposed to approximate natural conversation, and that would seem to its audience to be natural and something they could identify with, something similar to their intuitive assumptions about ordinary conversation. Ideally, we would have preferred a contemporary American setting. But when practical factors were considered — amount of text, availability, and so on — what we found to be the most useful compromise was the screenplay of the original six-hour television version of Ingmar Bergman's *Scenes from a Marriage*. There is the possibility that Swedish couples do not talk to each other as American couples do, but the successful reception of this work in the United States, both in the shortened movie version and the complete version presented several times on PBS in 1979, indicates that we can understand perfectly well what's going on, and that although there may be slight differences in a particular choice of how to say a particular thing, the general concepts are universal, or at least the same in Swedish and American conversation.²

Scenes from a Marriage consists of six scenes (i.e., six acts), tracing the relationship of a couple, Johan and Marianne. Scene One, entitled 'Innocence and Panic', introduces Johan and Marianne as 'the perfect couple' (they are even interviewed for a magazine article). In this scene there is only a hint of difficulty, in that Marianne is pregnant and has an abortion. Scene Two, 'The Art of Sweeping Under the Rug', contains

stronger hints that both are dissatisfied, but all is under the surface. In Scene Three, 'Paula', Johan announces that he has a lover and leaves Marianne. Scene Four, 'The Vale of Tears', shows Johan visiting Marianne at their house some time after the separation. In the Fifth Scene, 'The Illiterates', they meet at his office after hours to sign their divorce papers, and end up in a brutal battle. Scene Six, 'In the Middle of the Night in a Dark House Somewhere in the World', shows Marianne and Johan meeting secretly; they are both married to new spouses and have been having an affair with each other for a year.

When Johan and Marianne are presented in the early sections of *Scenes from a Marriage*, their cooperative metastrategy is to avoid recognition of their deep differences and dissatisfactions — while maintaining the illusion of open communication and rapport. This can be seen clearly in Scene One, when Johan and Marianne have just witnessed a grisly display of mutual viciousness by their friends Peter and Katarina. After the friends leave, Marianne tells Johan that Peter's and Katarina's problem is 'They don't speak the same language', and she contrasts this with what she sees as the happy situation between Johan and herself:

(1) Marianne. Think of us. We talk everything over and we understand each other instantly. We speak the same language. That's why we have such a good relationship. [p. 26]³

Evidence to the contrary abounds in this very discussion. Johan does not agree with Marianne at all; he contends that Peter's and Katarina's problems stem from money, and he responds to Marianne's analysis with characteristic sarcasm: 'You and your languages' [27]. Marianne, in turn, chides him, 'You always confuse the issue' [27].

In Scene Four, after they have separated, Marianne admits that she never understood Johan at all. In that scene, she responds to something Johan said:

(2) M. I don't know what you're talking about. It seems so theoretical. I don't know why. Perhaps because I never talk about such big matters. I think I move on another plane. [119]

After Johan's reply, she continues:

(3) M. I remember you always talked and talked. I used to like it, though I hardly ever took any notice of what you said when you held forth at your worst. [120]

In the last scene, they both acknowledge this lack of communication:

- (4) Johan. It just struck me that you and I have begun telling each other the truth.
M. Didn't we before? No, we didn't.... [196]...
J. Did we even know that we kept things secret?
M. Of course we lied. I did, anyway. [197]

This recognition of their lack of communication comes belatedly and painfully. While they are together, Marianne steadfastly insists that she and Johan 'speak the same language', despite evidence to the contrary.

The tension between the appearance of successful communication and the underlying unacknowledged discord is the theme of Scene Two, entitled 'The Art of Sweeping Under the Rug'. When one partner tries to express dissatisfaction, the other 'sweeps it under the rug' to maintain the appearance of harmony. In the beginning of this scene it is Marianne who expresses dissatisfaction:

- (5) M. Just think about it. Our life's mapped out into little squares — every day, every hour, every minute. And on every square it's written down what we're supposed to do. The squares are filled one by one and in good time. If there's suddenly an empty square we're dismayed and scrawl something onto it at once.
J. But we have our vacation.
M. (*With a laugh*) Johan! You haven't a clue to what I mean. On our vacation we have more of a schedule than ever. It's all Mummy's fault, actually. And your mother's not much better.
J. (*Laughing*) What have the dear old ladies done wrong?
M. You don't understand anyway, so there's no point talking about it. [44–45]

Later in the same scene, Marianne makes another attempt to confront the problems in their marriage. She calls Johan and asks him to meet her for lunch. During that meeting, she suggests that they take a trip together in order to bring them closer together, but Johan is unenthusiastic, and she gives up the idea. In the conversation below, she again declares that communication between them is open, and Johan agrees with this interpretation, although we know from the next scene that he too is deeply dissatisfied with their relationship; in fact, he is having an intense love affair with another woman.

- (6) M. (*Searchingly*) Has something happened?
J. Nothing. Absolutely nothing. I swear.
M. We're pretty honest with each other, you and I. Aren't we?
J. I think so.
M. It's awful to go around bottling things up. One must speak out, however painful it is. Don't you think?
J. (*Irritably*) Hell, yes. What time is it?
M. One fifteen.

J. My watch is always stopping. What were you saying? Oh yes, honesty. I suppose you mean over sex, to put it bluntly.

M. Sometimes I think we ...

J. People can't always live cheek by jowl. It would be too tiring.

M. Yes, *that* is the big question.

J. Anyway, I must go now. [66–67]

In this dialog, Marianne purports to believe in talking about everything, and Johan sweeps the matter under the rug by proclaiming that some things (especially sexual) are better not talked about.

Later in the same scene, Johan and Marianne switch roles. He tries to confront their problems, and she sweeps them under the rug using devices characteristic of her style. Denying that there is anything wrong, she obstinately states that things are fine.

(7) J. Must it always be that two people who live together for a long time begin to tire of each other?

M. We haven't tired.

J. Almost.

M. (*Indulgently*) We work too hard — that's what's so banal. And in the evenings we're too tired....

M. But we like each other in every way.

J. Not in that way. Not very much anyhow.

M. Oh yes, we do. [72]

In this interchange, it is Marianne who blames their personal problems on circumstance ('We work too hard').

When Johan persists in trying to articulate their difficulties, Marianne deflects the confrontation:

(8) J. It's just that our life together has become full of evasions and restrictions and refusals.

M. I can't help it if I don't enjoy it as much as I used to. I can't help it. There's a perfectly natural explanation. You're not to accuse me and give me a bad conscience about this.

J. (*Kind*) You needn't get so upset!

M. (*Hurt*) I think it's all right as it is. God knows it isn't passionate, but you can't expect everything. There are those who are much worse off than we are.

J. Without a doubt.

M. Sex isn't everything. As a matter of fact.

J. (*Laughing*) Why, Marianne!

M. (*On the verge of tears*) If you're not satisfied with my performance you'd better get yourself a mistress who is more imaginative and sexually exciting. I do my best, I'm sure. [72–73]

In another reversal, it is now Johan who blames the problem on maternal interference, and Marianne who rejects the idea:

(9) J. Sometimes I wonder why we complicate this problem so frightfully. This business of lovemaking is pretty elementary, after all. It was surely never meant to be a huge problem overshadowing everything else. It's all your mother's fault, if you ask me. Though you don't like my saying so.

M. I just think it's so damn superficial of you to talk like that. [73–74]

At the end of this discussion, it is Marianne who espouses the distance strategy, proclaiming that some things (particularly sexual) are better not discussed:

(10) M. Let me tell you this. You can talk too much about these things.

J. (*Giving up*) I suspect you're right.

M. I know you're supposed to tell everything and not keep anything secret, but in this particular matter I think it's wrong.

J. (*Who has heard this before*) Yes, you're probably right.

M. (*Following up her advantage*) There are things which must be allowed to live their life in a half-light, away from prying eyes.

J. (*Total retreat*) You think so?

M. I'm quite convinced of it.... [75]

This, then, is the metastrategy of Johan's and Marianne's communication with each other. They agree to maintain a surface of harmony and deny their underlying discord. Each one resists the other's attempts to confront their problems, or, put another way, each one can attempt to confront their problems in the safety of the knowledge that the other will deny them. In Scene Five, after their separation, Marianne recognizes this:

(11) M. ... Has it struck you that we never quarreled? I think we even thought it was vulgar to quarrel. No, we sat down and talked so sensibly to each other. And you, having studied more and knowing more about the mind, told me what I *really* thought. What I felt *deep down*. I never understood what you were talking about.... And all our subsequent discussions as to why we didn't get any pleasure out of making love. Neither of us realized that they were warnings. Red lights and stop signals were flashing all around us. But we only thought that was as it should be. We declared ourselves satisfied. [155–156]

In maintaining this declaration of satisfaction, Johan and Marianne employed verbal strategies that were characteristic of their own styles and different from the other's. A close examination of the linguistic forms

taken by their conversational contributions reveals that their conversation shows a pattern of relationships between deep and surface structure that replicates, on the pragmatic level, the basic semantic relations of synonymy, homonymy, and identity. That is, Marianne's and Johan's utterances alternately evidence:

- I. Pragmatic synonymy or paraphrase. They use different linguistic devices to achieve similar ends.
- II. Pragmatic homonymy or ambiguity. They use similar linguistic devices to achieve different ends.
- III. Pragmatic identity. They use the same device toward the same ends.

Before proceeding to examples of pragmatic identity, synonymy, and homonymy, let us examine Johan's and Marianne's characteristic styles. Each one's style is made up of habitual use of linguistic devices according to the broad operating principles outlined above. Marianne's style reflects a combination of deference and camaraderie. She frequently talks (and acts) like a child. She habitually puts herself down, and she puts up a smokescreen of nonstop verbiage made up of impressionistic romanticism or a flurry of questions. Johan's style, on the other hand, is distancing. He uses sarcasm and irony, pontification, generalization and abstraction, and high-flown language in complex sentences. When one of the partners uses devices characteristic of the other, s/he is summarily corrected. Their differing styles create, on the surface, dissimilar-looking utterances, but in terms of the deeper intentions, they can be seen as cooperative.

Many of these devices are seen in the dialog that has already been quoted. For example, Marianne repeatedly states that things are fine, clinging to romantic unreality in a childlike way:

(1) M. We speak the same language. That's why we have such a good relationship.
[26]

(6) M. We're pretty honest with each other, you and I. Aren't we? [66]

(7) M. But we like each other in every way.

J. Not in that way. Not very much anyhow.

M. Oh yes, we do.

Thus, when confronted with the problems of their sexual relationship, Marianne begins by denying that there is anything wrong. When this fails, she pouts like a child and claims helplessness:

(12) M. I can't help it if I don't enjoy it as much as I used to. I can't help it. There's a perfectly natural explanation. You're not to give me a bad conscience about this.
[72]

Not only does Marianne herself act like a child. At other times, she treats Johan as if he were a child. For example, when he asks for help in cutting a nail, she chides him:

(13) M. ... What do you *do* to your nails? [98]

She habitually uses a kind of teasing in place of expressing anger at Johan:

(14) M. You're sillier than I thought. ... [28]

The confrontation about their sexual relationship ends with Marianne indulging in a frenzy of this sort of teasing:

(15) M. (*Kissing him*) You're kind anyway, even if you *are* an idiot.

J. Then it's lucky I'm married to you.

M. (*Kissing him*) You have your great moments, but in between you're horribly mediocre.

J. At our age tens of thousands of brain cells snuff out every day. And they're never replaced.

M. (*Kissing him*) With you it must be ten times as many, you're so silly. [76–77]

Along with her 'playful' criticism, Marianne showers Johan with physical affection, a classic Batesonian double bind.

At the outset of Scene Three Johan returns unexpectedly to their country house where Marianne is about to go to bed alone. The ensuing conversation reveals that Marianne and Johan had a fight on the phone when they talked last, and that when she immediately called him back, he was not at home. This fact, combined with his surprising arrival late at night, gives her reason to suspect that something is wrong. After making some offhand comments about the telephone argument, Marianne launches a long and irrelevant soliloquy about life-as-it-should-be:

(16) M. ... Sometimes everything seems utterly pointless. Why should we grudge ourselves all the good things in the world? Why can't we be big and fat and good-tempered? Just think how nice it would make us. Do you remember Aunt Miriam and Uncle David? They were perfect dears and got along so well together, and they were so *fat!* And every night they lay there in the big creaky double bed, holding hands and content with each other just as they were, fat and cheerful. Couldn't you and I be like Aunt Miriam and Uncle David and go around looking comfortable and safe? Shall I take my curlers out? [83]

This passage combines Marianne's characteristic use of denial by romanticism as well as her use of nonstop verbiage. Another form of this

device is seen when she produces a barrage of questions. She greets Johan with a series of offers of food combined with random references to irrelevant details. The stage directions supply a nonverbal analogue to her verbal strategy, just as in Example (15), when Marianne showers Johan with a display of physical affection.

(17) *Before he has time to take his coat off, she flings her arms around his neck, hugs him, and gives him four loud kisses.*

M. Here already! You weren't coming until tomorrow. What a lovely surprise. Are you hungry? And me with my hair in curlers. How good of you to come this evening. The children are asleep, we went to bed early. There was nothing on TV and we thought it would be nice to have an early night. The girls and I have been dieting today. Would you like an omelette or a sandwich and some beer?

J. That sounds good.

M. Or would you like a real meal? Shall I fry some eggs and bacon? Or heat some soup? [81]

And yet again, in the scene in which Marianne suggests that they take a trip together, she makes so many alternative suggestions that none of them can be taken seriously:

(18) J. Where did you think of going?

M. Anywhere. We've never been to Florence, for instance. Or what about the Black Sea? That's an idea. Or Africa? There are some fantastically cheap trips to Morocco. Or Japan. Suppose we went to Japan! [64]

Marianne's and Johan's contrasting styles can be seen in the very first scene in which they are interviewed for a women's magazine. When asked to describe themselves, Johan launches a long speech full of self-praise, but Marianne can't think of a thing to say:

(19) J. Yes. It might sound conceited if I described myself as extremely intelligent, successful, youthful, well-balanced, and sexy. A man with a world conscience, cultivated, well-read, popular, and a good mixer. Let me see what else can I think of ... friendly. Friendly in a nice way even to people who are worse off. I like sports. I'm a good family man. A good son. I have no debts and I pay my taxes. I respect our government whatever it does, and I love our royal family. I've left the state church. Is that enough or do you want more details? I'm a splendid lover. Aren't I, Marianne?

Mrs. Palm. (*With a smile*) Perhaps we can return to the question. How about you, Marianne? What do you have to say?

M. Hmm, what can I say ... I'm married to Johan and I have two daughters.

Mrs. Palm. Yes ...

M. That's all I can think of for the moment. [4]

Thus, Johan is comfortable talking himself up — albeit ironically — while Marianne is not. In contrast, she is comfortable putting herself down. When the interviewer misinterprets something Marianne says, Marianne takes the blame:

(20) M. No, I didn't mean that actually. In fact, I meant just the opposite. You see how badly I express myself. ... [14]

Johan's most characteristic strategy is sarcasm. This has already been seen in a number of examples; for instance, in their early discussion about their relationship, when Johan counters, 'You and your languages' [27], as well as the following:

(5) J. What have the dear old ladies done wrong?

Other examples abound. For instance, in the same discussion:

(21) J. You're suffering from mother persecution mania. [49]

In Scene Three, after Johan has announced that he is leaving Marianne in order to live with his girlfriend, Paula:

(22) J. ... I'm not taking anything with me except perhaps my books, if you have no objections. ... [89]

In Scene Five, Marianne and Johan meet to sign their divorce papers:

(23) M. ... But I think I'm free now and can begin to live my own life. And how glad I am.

J. Allow me to congratulate you. [155]

In Scene Six, Marianne has answered Johan's question about her sex life with her new husband; Johan is not happy with her answer:

(24) J. (*Fiercely*) Do you think I care about your orgasms with that goddamn slob and his blood pressure? You're welcome to them. I'm full of admiration for your complete emancipation. It's most impressive. You should damn well write a novel. I bet you'd be applauded by Women's Lib. [205]

In addition to sarcasm, Johan characteristically pontificates; he talks in broad generalities, using high-flown language. For example, when Marianne in Scene Three makes reference to the fact that when she called him back the night before (presumably at their home in the city) he did

not answer the phone, Johan launches a pompous diatribe aimed at bureaucrats:

- (25) M. I called you right back, but you must have pulled the plug out.
 J. I was pretty tired last night. I'd been out all day at the institute with the zombie from the ministry. You wonder sometimes who these idiots are who sit on the state moneybags and determine our weal and woe. [82]

In the scene in which Marianne attempts to express her dissatisfaction with their life, Johan uses all his habitual devices to evade the confrontation. He blames her discontent on a physical cause, and a peculiarly feminine one:

- (26) J. Is it the curse?
 M. You always think it's that.
 J. Well, isn't it? [44]

Later, he evades a direct request for information with an ironic rhetorical question:

- (27) M. Do you like coming home?
 J. (*Kindly*) Is everything so awfully complicated today? [48]

He is sarcastic, in a line previously cited:

- (28) M. If only I were sure that it's we who have chosen [our life], and not our mothers.
 J. You're suffering from mother persecution mania. [48–49]

He evades another direct information question with pontification:

- (29) M. Did you *want* your life to be like this?
 J. I think that life has the value you give it, neither more nor less. I refuse to live under the eye of eternity. [49]

He uses the same device later on, in Scene Five, following the passage cited above as Example (11):

- (30) M. ... We declared ourselves satisfied.
 J. I think that these retrospective expositions are awfully boring and unnecessary. [156]

These examples show how Marianne and Johan more or less consciously use their strategies for their individual advantage. But their strategies also

work together to powerful effect, a force of which they are unaware, but which, as we shall see, serves to keep them together and drive them apart at once.

To take one example, in Scene Four Johan has come to visit Marianne in their home. They have been separated for some time. Johan's relationship with Paula is deteriorating. He is lonely.

(31) J. Do you know what my security looks like? I'll tell you. I think this way: loneliness is absolute. It's an illusion to imagine anything else. Be aware of it. And try to act accordingly. Don't expect anything but trouble. If something nice happens, all the better. Don't think you can ever do away with loneliness. It is absolute. You can invent fellowship on different levels, but it will still only be a fiction about religion, politics, love, art, and so on. The loneliness is nonetheless complete. ... [118]

Johan continues in this vein for four times the length of the passage quoted. Finally Marianne comments, in a previously cited response.

(32) M. I don't know what you're talking about. It seems so theoretical. I don't know why. Perhaps because I never talk about such big matters. I think I move on another plane. [119]

Johan's response to Marianne's implicit complaint about his philosophical style is, of course, sarcasm:

(33) J. (*Roughly*) A more select plane, oh. A special plane reserved for women with a privileged emotional life and a happier, more mundane adjustment to the mysteries of life. Paula too likes to change herself into a priestess of life. It's always when she has read a new book by some fancy preacher of the new women's gospel. [119-120]

This passage also shows Johan's tactic of attacking women as a group, rather than Marianne in particular, in keeping with his habitual strategy of avoiding direct confrontation by generalizing. To use an example cited earlier, when talking about his dissatisfaction with their marriage, Johan expresses his dissatisfaction in general terms, and Marianne immediately answers in terms of their particular life together:

(7) J. Must it be that two people who live together for a long time begin to tire of each other?

M. We haven't tired. [72]

Again, at the end of this discussion, when Marianne attacks Johan in a teasing style, he accedes to her ploy by talking generally (and academically), and she responds by referring to him personally once more:

(15) M. (*Kissing him*) You have your great moments, but in between you're horribly mediocre.

J. At our age tens of thousands of brain cells snuff out every day. And they're never replaced.

M. (*Kissing him*) With you it must be ten times as many, you're so silly. [77]

Johan's tactic of attacking Marianne by attacking women in general has already been seen as well. For example,

(24) J. ... I bet you'd be applauded by Women's Lib. [205]

This device is seen most strikingly in Scene Two, when Marianne and Johan return from having seen Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Marianne liked the play; Johan didn't. Ostensibly goaded by the play, he indulges in a three-part diatribe against women, punctuated only by short and noncommittal responses from Marianne. Just a few lines from his speeches suffice to give the flavor of his comments:

(34) J. (*Laughs and yawns*) Feminism is a worn-out subject, Marianne. Women nowadays can do whatever they like. The trouble is they can't be bothered. [68]

...

J. Have you ever heard of a female symphony orchestra? Imagine a hundred and ten women with menstrual trouble trying to play Rossini's overture to 'The Thieving Magpie'. [69]

...

J. ...What I'd like to ask is this: Don't women have a very special talent for cruelty, brutality, vulgarity, and ruthlessness? ... [70]

It is interesting to observe that this generalized attack by Johan immediately precedes the discussion about sex, in which Johan complains of Marianne's lack of interest in sex with him, and in which she again repulses his sexual advances.

An interesting aspect of Johan's and Marianne's communication system is the way in which they both continue to use only their own strategies. When Marianne uses sarcasm, Johan does not let her get away with it. For example, in Scene Three:

(35) J. I don't have much self-knowledge and I understand very little in spite of having read a lot of books. But something tells me that this catastrophe is a chance in a million for both you and me.

M. Is it Paula who has put such nonsense into your head? Just how naive can you get?

J. We can do without taunts and sarcastic remarks in this conversation.

M. You're right. I'm sorry. [95]

And again, in Scene Five:

(36) J. ... I have to fork out a hell of a big maintenance, which incidentally I have to pay taxes on and which is completely ruining me. So I don't see why I should have a lot of idiotic expenses on top of that. There's nothing to that effect in the divorce agreement, at any rate. Or is there?

M. It's not the children's fault if we're worse off because you went off with another woman.

J. I never expected that remark from you.

M. No, I'm sorry. It was crude of me. [149]

Johan's objection to Marianne's remark comes immediately after he himself has been searingly sarcastic, just as in the preceding example.

Finally, in Scene Six, Johan delivers a long piece of philosophizing, but when Marianne responds with a small exercise in a similar style, Johan sarcastically rebukes her.

(37) J. Hmm, that's the big difference between you and me. Because I refuse to accept the complete meaninglessness behind the complete awareness. I can't live with that cold light over all my endeavors. If you only knew how I struggle with my meaninglessness. Over and over again I try to cheer myself up by saying that life has the value that you yourself ascribe to it. But that sort of talk is no help to me. I want something to long for. I want something to believe in.

M. I don't feel as you do.

J. No. I realize that.

M. Unlike you, I stick it out. And enjoy it. I rely on my common sense. And my feeling. They cooperate. I'm satisfied with both of them. Now that I'm older I have a third co-worker: my experience.

J. (*Gruff*) You should be a politician.

M. (*Serious*) Maybe you're right. [206–207]

Let us compare Johan's and Marianne's speeches in this interchange for overall strategy and effect. His is composed of long intricate sentences, hers of short, simple ones. His words are long, Latinate, hers short and of the native vocabulary. (Here, of course, we must rely on the accuracy of the translation more than usually.) More important, he defines his situation in abstractions like 'meaninglessness' and 'awareness'; the value of life; 'something to believe in'. She, on the other hand, makes abstract concepts concrete, to the point of anthropomorphizing them: they 'cooperate'; they are 'co-workers'. Again, he uses professional distance, she a form of childlike camaraderie. And each irritates the other. But curiously, where his posturing and pontification are finally used in the service of an admission of weakness, a plea for help (a gesture of

camaraderie), her simplicity and apparent openness are used to express smug self-satisfaction, her sense that she needs nothing from him. So from the surface to the deeper levels, their strategies cross and re-cross in a most confusing design. What is perhaps even more striking, as much as each despises the other's style in the other's mouth, the recognition that the other has adopted his/her own techniques evokes strong ammunition — as with Johan in this passage, which follows (37) in the text. With increasing sarcasm (and a dose of his familiar antifemale generalization), he batters home the message that it is not appropriate for Marianne to use his strategy of smug sententiousness.

(38) J. Good lord.

M. I like people. I like negotiations, prudence, compromises.

J. You're practicing your election speech, I can hear it.

M. You think I'm difficult.

J. Only when you preach.

M. I won't say another word.

J. Promise not to tell me any more homely truths this evening?

M. I promise.

J. Promise not to harp on that orgasm athlete?

M. Not another word about him.

J. Do you think that *for just a little while* you can restrain your horrible sententiousness?

M. It will be difficult, but I'll try.

J. Can you possibly, I say *possibly*, ration your boundless female strength?

M. I see that I'll have to.

J. Come then. Let's go to bed. [207–208]

Having seen examples of Johan's and Marianne's individual uses of their separate styles, let us go on to examine how their cooperative employment of these styles works toward pragmatic identity, synonymy, and homonymy.

To create pragmatic identity, the partners use similar devices to similar ends. For example, both Johan and Marianne employ the tactic of proposing sleep when unpleasant information has been confronted. In Scene Two the couple have confronted the fact of their unsatisfactory sex life. When Marianne becomes visibly upset, Johan says, 'Let's drop this subject now and go to bed. It's late anyway.' [74] In Scene Three, after Johan has told her that he is planning to leave her for another woman, Marianne adopts a similar strategy:

(30) J. You know the truth now and that's the main thing.

M. I know nothing. Let's go to bed. It's late. ... [86]

This is one variant of both Johan's and Marianne's common tactic of suggesting that a painful subject not be discussed. At the very beginning of the film, when they are interviewed for the woman's magazine, the interviewer asks Marianne her opinions about love; she becomes upset and says, 'I can't see through this problem, so I'd rather not talk about it' [13]. In the Fifth Scene, she is trying to tell Johan that they must get divorced, whereas he has changed his mind. Just when he seems to be seeing her point, she says, 'Let's not talk about it' [165]. This is just what Johan says in Scene Three, after he has confronted Marianne with his plans to leave her: 'We'd better not talk. There's nothing sensible to say in any case' [86]. Just as Marianne did not want to talk to the interviewer about love in marriage, Johan in Scene Five begins to tell Marianne about his unhappiness with Paula but then stops: 'I can't talk about this. You know it all anyway' [161].

We have already seen that Marianne uses this strategy, too, when Johan fails to respond to her expressions of dissatisfaction in Scene Two: 'You don't understand anyway, so there's no point talking about it' [45].

Pragmatic synonymy can be seen, for example, in the way Johan and Marianne avoid confrontation in Scene Three, when he returns to their country house and is about to tell her that he is leaving. Marianne deflects confrontation by excessive verbiage (Examples 16 and 17), while he does so by pontification (Example 25). The function of both their tactics is to avoid mention of the real issue: they had a fight on the phone; she called him back and he was not at home. Where was he, and what are the implications of that fact? (I.e., he has a lover; he is leaving her.)

Pragmatic synonymy can be seen as well in Examples 32 and 33, and the passages that precede and follow them in the dialog. Johan and Marianne are in his office, after hours, for the purpose of signing the divorce papers. Again, they collude not to communicate, but they do so using different pragmatic devices. This section is shown here in full.

(40) J. It's nothing but words. You put it into words so as to placate the great emptiness. It's funny, come to think of it. Has it ever struck you that emptiness hurts? You'd think it might make you dizzy or give you mental nausea. But my emptiness hurts physically. It stings like a burn. Or like when you were little and had been crying and the whole inside of your body ached. I'm astonished sometimes at Paula's tremendous political faith. It's both true and sincere and she's incessantly active within her group. Her conviction answers her questions and fills the emptiness. I wish I could live as she does. I really mean it, without any sarcasm. (*Leaning forward*) Why are you sneering? Do you think I'm talking rubbish? I think so too as a matter of fact. But I don't care.

M. I don't know what you're talking about. It seems so theoretical. I don't know

why. Perhaps because I never talk about such big matters. I think I move on another plane.

J. (*Roughly*) A more select plane, oh. A special plane reserved for women with a privileged emotional life and a happier, more mundane adjustment to the mysteries of life. Paula too likes to change herself into a priestess of life. It's always when she has read a new book by some fancy preacher of the new women's gospel.

M. I remember you always talked and talked. I used to like it, though I hardly ever took any notice of what you said when you held forth at your worst. It sounds as if somewhere you were disappointed.

J. (*Quietly*) That's what you think.

M. (*Gently*) I want you to know that I'm nearly always thinking of you and wondering if you're all right or whether you're lonely and afraid. Every day, several times a day, I wonder where I went wrong. What I did to cause the breach between us. I know it's a childish way of thinking, but there you are. Sometimes I seem to have got hold of the solution, then it slips through my fingers.

J. (*Sarcastically*) Why don't you go to a psychiatrist? [119–120]

Johan and Marianne both try to express their sadness about the loss of their relationship. He does so by talking in abstract generalizations ('emptiness hurts'), and by talking about finding meaning in life, using someone else as an example (Paula, his girlfriend). Marianne does so by talking simply and directly about her own feelings for him. She also blames herself and puts herself down. In both cases, the other refuses to 'hear' the other's message. Marianne denies the validity of what Johan says; she dismisses his concerns ('I never talk about such big matters') as irrelevant and proclaims her own domain of feelings ('I move on another plane'). Johan dismisses Marianne's expression of feelings with sarcasm ('Why don't you go to a psychiatrist'). In response to Marianne's refusal to respond to his admission of loneliness, he again uses sarcasm and the device of attacking her as a woman. Marianne's response to this is to redouble her tactic of dismissing what he says as irrelevant and again to bring the conversation to the area of feelings, and of him personally ('It sounds as if somewhere you were disappointed').

To create pragmatic homonymy, Marianne and Johan use the same surface devices to achieve different ends. For example, both Johan and Marianne employ barrages of questions. As we saw earlier, Marianne greets Johan at their country house with a barrage of questions offering him different types of food. In the same episode, Example 16, she utters a string of rhetorical questions in which she invokes 'a better life'. While these questions have the apparent intent of inviting camaraderie (by requiring a response, they seem to involve the partner in the communication), their underlying effect is distance, served by avoiding the real

problems between them. Still another time, Marianne uses a barrage of questions to avoid hearing answers to any one of them:

(41) M. Do you want a divorce? Are you going to marry her? Anyway, why do you have to tell me about this tonight of all times? Why the sudden hurry? [85]

By asking the follow-up questions, Marianne prevents Johan's answering the first, real ones.

Johan also asks a barrage of questions, but his are rhetorical, and their function is quite different:

(42) J. Do you know how long I've had this in mind? Can you guess? I don't mean about Paula, but about leaving you and the children and our home. Can you guess? [88]

Johan's rhetorical questions take the form of taunts. Similarly, he mocks Marianne's style by asking a barrage of questions which are purported to reveal what she is thinking:

(43) M. ... You're putting me in a ridiculous and intolerable position. Surely you can see that.

J. I know just what you mean: What are our parents going to say? What will my sister think, what will our friends think? Jesus Christ, how tongues are going to wag! How will it affect the girls, and what will their school friends' mothers think? And what about the dinner parties we're invited to in September and October? And what are you going to say to Katarina and Peter?... [91]

While Johan's questions have the apparent intent of distance — by their sarcasm, they can only drive Marianne further from him — yet they work toward a deeper effect of camaraderie, by drawing her into emotional interaction. Taunts can only rouse Marianne to anger and therefore to involvement.

To see still more clearly how this couple's verbal strategies operate on these multiple levels, we can examine the use of questions in Scene Three, the scene in which Johan returns to the country home and announces that he will leave. In sheer numbers, Marianne asks nearly twice as many questions as Johan: 63 to his 37. If questions are the linguistic form that seeks to involve the interlocutor by necessitating a response, then Marianne shows herself to be seeking involvement through her greater use of questions. It is even more revealing, however, to examine the types of questions they ask. Overwhelmingly, Marianne asks real questions while Johan asks rhetorical ones. Of her 63 questions, 50 are real; that is, they ask for information in most cases, and in some cases for a response

(for example, 'Can't you help me with this?' [92]). Thirteen of Marianne's questions are rhetorical: i.e., no response is expected. In other words, 21 percent of Marianne's questions are rhetorical, while 79 percent are real. In contrast, of Johan's 37 questions, 32 (86 percent) are rhetorical, and five (14 percent) are real.

Although the purpose of Marianne's questions seems to be to keep Johan involved with her, the only questions that succeed in eliciting talk from him are those that seek information about his relationship with Paula; therefore Marianne asks one after another of these. In addition, she uses the indirect device of offering assistance in question form:

(44) M. Shall we pack now or have breakfast first? Would you like tea or coffee, by the way? [98]

M. Shall I pack the shaver, or will you take the one you have in town?

M. ... Do you want the receipt for the dry cleaners?...

M. ... Which pyjamas are you taking? [99]

Johan, in contrast, does not ask for help in question form, but uses simple imperatives or declaratives.

(45) J. Help me, please. I've a split nail and can't manage it. [98]

While Marianne uses information questions to draw Johan into the interaction by getting him to talk about himself, Johan's five real questions do not function in this way. Three of those five real questions seek information about his belongings:

(46) J. Do you know if my grey suit is here or in town?... [86]

J. Do you know what has become of Speer's memoirs? I'm sure I left the book on the bedside table. [98]

J. with reference to retrieving his grey suit ... Which cleaners is it? [99]

These questions remind Marianne of her involvement with Johan, but it is the involvement of caretaking, of household management. In contrast, Marianne tries, through questions, to involve Johan in a personal way. Whereas in Scene Two he was sexually interested in her and she avoided his advances, in this scene she tries to interest him sexually but he does not respond. For example, after her flight of fancy about Aunt Miriam and Uncle David, she asks suddenly,

(47) M. Shall I take my curlers out? [83]

This seems like an invitation to bed, to make herself more sexually attractive as a prelude to lovemaking. However, Johan fends off the proposition:

(48) J. Don't mind me. [84]

Similarly, early in the scene, she tries to elicit a remark from him about her body, but meets with similar lack of interest:

(49) M. ... I've lost over four pounds this last week. Does it show?
J. No. [83]

Johan and Marianne both make much use of questions but though their utterances may appear superficially alike, they have different communicative intentions or meanings. His questions are rhetorical, superficially designed to repulse further interchanges. On the surface they are hostile, and provoke distance. Superficially, Marianne's questions look like Johan's: a question is a question. But in intent — the consciously-perceived intent of the speaker, insofar as the audience can make assumptions about it — her questions are asked in search of information. Unlike Johan's, they are asked with the expectation of eliciting a reply. They are designed to invite camaraderie.

But in fact, at a still deeper level, not accessible to the participants themselves, the level at which we determine the effect of others' utterances on ourselves, the strategies match once more. While Johan's questions preclude surface interaction, they create continuing involvement by arousing anger, perceptibly or not. (If Johan merely withdrew, the effect would be truly distancing.) Marianne, that is, perceives and responds to Johan's distancing questions as if they were camaraderie-creating, as hers are: she understands his contributions in terms of what they would mean if they were hers. (This is a general principle of discourse, that we can understand the contributions of others only in terms of what we would mean by producing them.) But they shut off true communication by creating anger. Marianne rises to the bait, and is moved by his diatribes to respond with ever more furious spates of information-seeking questions and offers of help. Although these are, superficially, camaraderie-inviting, Johan's skill in fending them off, coupled with their very intensity, guarantee that they will not create interaction — that they will stifle it. Johan perceives her questions as barrier-creating devices — as, ultimately, they are, in effect. So Johan's and Marianne's strategies match at the level of surface form; conflict at the level of deeper intent; but match once more at the deepest and least accessible level, that of the effect on the other participant; and the ultimate effect of the couple's communicative strate-

SURFACE	Johan and Marianne both ask questions	MATCH
DEEPER LEVEL: (Sp's <i>intent</i>)	Johan's questions are distancing; Marianne's questions generate rapport	CONFLICT
DEEPEST LEVEL: (<i>Effect</i> on A)	Johan's and Marianne's stylistic differences create shared implicit strategy: noncommunication	MATCH

Figure 1.

gies is complicity — an implicit agreement or metastrategy to avoid real communication. These intertwining are represented in Figure 1.

The complicity at the deepest level underlying the dissension between Johan and Marianne is a key to the general plot of the series. At first glance, it is puzzling that these two apparently so compatible people should have to separate; but after a while, what becomes still more curious is that these two people who apparently are continually at odds with each other cannot stay apart. We who watch feel that it makes sense — we know relationships like this — but offhand it seems merely paradoxical, one of the inexplicable mysteries of human psychology. But if we disentangle Johan's and Marianne's communicative strategies thoroughly enough, the mystery turns out to be quite predictable.

Johan and Marianne become quite aware of their surface discord and, somewhat more dimly, of their deeper stylistic incompatibility. What they do not see is their essential complicity at the deepest level: their implicit agreement to disagree. Because of that underlying and overriding similarity of intent and desire, this couple actually has a great deal in common. It may not make for pleasant or productive communication, but the similarity creates a need, and an indissoluble bond between them. As long as they both are in this close bond, they cannot break apart. But as long as they are operating under different assumptions about what constitutes an effective or appropriate contribution, they will create friction between them with everything they say.

The levels of cooperation and conflict create a sort of paradoxical communicative situation: people can operate in complicity by talking at apparent cross-purposes, and an understanding of their communicative strategies is only possible through a recognition of this paradox. What is apparently conflict-ridden and anticomunicative is in effect deeply satisfying to the participants.

The situation in *Scenes from a Marriage*, then, has overtones of the Batesonian double bind (Bateson 1972) in which a paradoxical communicative strategy keeps participants from fulfilling their communicative needs. A double bind, however, is by definition unilateral: it is effected from above by an authority who himself or herself remains free. But the

situation here, while it has certain aspects of the double bind, is bilateral: it is arrived at by negotiation by both participants, both derive equal benefit, and it can be resolved by both participants together. In this way, while it creates confusion and conflict in its participants, it is not pathogenic in the way the double bind is.

This examination of one couple's interaction pattern suggests, tentatively, a general hypothesis: these alternations of match and conflict are typical of couples that are intermeshed like Johan and Marianne, who can neither live together compatibly nor separate cleanly. A truly harmonious relationship (supposing this is more than a mythical construct) would entail matchings at all levels; a clearly discordant one, conflict at all levels. It is this intermediate type that is problematic for its users, as well as being most interesting to theorists of communication. (For instance, see Watzlawick et al. 1967 for a different but related view of troubled interaction.)

In this paper, taking *Scenes from a Marriage* as a text, we have suggested both a new methodology for interpreting communication and a new development of a theory of communicative competence. We have argued that the examination of a constructed text enables us to inspect pragmatic competence — speakers' abstract knowledge of what is expected of them in a discourse. We have also given some evidence of the complexity of communicative strategies and the number of factors participants are operating with. We show that pragmatic structures, like those elsewhere in grammar, entail a multi-leveled analysis, from superficially accessible to deep and implicit, and that contributions of different participants can be related to each other in terms of their functioning as pragmatic paraphrases, ambiguities, or identities. We argue finally on this basis that the choice of forms and the effects of these forms can only be understood with reference to these levels, and that both the structure of a single conversation and the pattern of an entire relationship is explicable in terms of the matchings and conflicts among the consciously-accessible and deeper levels of the participants' conversational strategies.

Notes

- * The authors are grateful to David Gordon and Marcia Perlstein for helpful discussion, suggestions, and criticism. Additionally, the paper by Friedrich and Redfield (1978) has been a source of inspiration to us as an example of the use of linguistic theory to illuminate our responses to characters in literature. An earlier and shorter version of this paper appeared in Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistic Society (1979).
- 1. See Tannen (1984) for an extended analysis of conversational style, with data from natural conversation.

2. It may be objected that the fact that *Scenes from a Marriage* is accessible to us only in translation invalidates it for the purpose of close textual analysis. Certainly this is a serious issue, but it is difficult to be sure how, or how seriously, the fact of its being a translation affects its utility to us. It is probable that no significant problems would arise on the word-by-word, or even sentence-by-sentence level; however, we might wonder, for instance, whether a question in Swedish had the same pragmatic effect as its English counterpart. Tannen (1979a) has shown that questions do not necessarily have the same pragmatic effect for contemporary Greeks and Americans, nor even necessarily for members of the same linguistic community. Since abstract problems like this have not been discussed in the literature on translation, we must leave this theoretically valid and fascinating question open and hope for the best. But the American audience's recognition of the validity of the dialog seems to indicate that there is no serious difficulty.
3. Ingmar Bergman, *Scenes from a Marriage*, translated by Alan Blair. New York: Bantam (1974), p. 26. All quotations are taken from this edition. Future page references will appear in square brackets in the text.

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