

Analysis of professional texts and discourse

Handout

1.12.2012

Plan

- administrative/organizational
- analysis of Bono's speech
- presentation and discussion of papers by Geluykens & Perlsmaekers and Heritage (SB)
- preparation for presenting papers by Glover, Nickerson, Hyatt (in groups?)
- Presenting and discussing papers by Glover, Nickerson & Hyatt
- tips for term projects, further readings

Geluykens & Perlsmaekers

Main points

Professional discourse

- External factors
 - o Media, business, education, health care, government, politics,...
 - o Discourse in an institutional setting
 - Institutions/organizations: social structures with economic gain as the main objective, members have: a) specific roles, b) different tasks, c) power inequalities
 - o Is chatting around the cooler or work-related meeting at a private home professional discourse?
- Internal factors
 - o Context as a defining force: context determines the shape, form, trajectory, content, or character of the interaction
 - o Understanding of contextual frames needed for analyzing the discourse, but does the analyst have access to these frames?
 - o Lexical choices (e.g. 'we'), within-turn design (cautiousness, politeness,...), turn-taking (e.g. pre-allocation)
 - o Knowledge systems are dynamic, continuously (re)negotiated through history and communication

Methodological approaches

- Conversational analysis
 - o Social order revealed through the study of spoken interactions, mostly through sequential analysis of turns
 - o Person-to-person interactions mutually construct and sustain organization
 - o Glover and Heritage papers
- Interactional sociolinguistics

- Inspired by Searle's Speech Acts (requests, acknowledgments,...) and Grice's implicatures (Be relevant, efficient,...)
- Face and FTA
- Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)
 - Relationship between discourse and power struggles in social structures
 - Organization studies
 - Organization as coordinated social collectives (re)produced and transformed by their members' communications practices
 - Power and inequality groups compete at shaping the organizational reality
- Systemic functional linguistics
 - Halliday: three basic meanings/aspects/functions of language (based on three aspects of within-clause structure)
 - Ideational meaning, transitivity (verbs), participants (nouns), ... Field
 - Inter-personal, Mood, declarative vs. interrog., certainty, ... Tenor
 - Textual, Theme, relationship of coherence and cohesiveness, ... Mode
 - Hyatt's paper
- Intercultural communication
 - Mostly business communication, (non)native speakers
- ???
- Modes of speaking & writing: speeches, letters, face-to-face conversations, meetings,...
 - Writing and speaking practices
 - Intertwined?
 - "[...] understanding and producing [a written] professional [text] means negotiating and determining relevant aspects of (professional) context" (p. 4)

Heritage

Thesis/Goal

Describe a) sequence analysis, b) identification of conversational practices, and c) description of the order(s) as fundamental tools for analyzing conversational interaction. Additionally, using the example of *oh*-prefacing, describe three interrelated elements in the analysis of a practice: (i) identifying its distinctive characteristics, (ii) locating it within the context of conversational sequences, and (iii) determining the role and inter-subjective meaning of the practice.

Definitions/Terms

Basic features

Human interactions are “shared sense-making enterprises” and are approached by CA as:

- meaningful: involve **shared** reasoning and meaning-making of actions as well as goals, beliefs, practices,... Continuous checking if interlocutors are ‘on the same page’, gradiency between public and private (Ex. p. 3)
- context-dependent: previous, current, distal features of context. Also, context specifies meaning. Examples: *okay, Is it serious?*

Principles

Sequential approach: disambiguation of immediately preceding utterance, Ex. of Ann and Barbara (SB: what about chatrooms?)

(Organization of) Practice

dfn: “(i) has a distinctive character, (ii) has specific locations within a turn or sequence, and (iii) is distinctive in its consequences for the nature or the meaning of the action that the turn implements.” SB: rather unclear definition, what is “distinctive character” in (i) and (iii)? I miss the mention of repetitiveness and contrast.

Organizations group various practices that achieve broader interactional (taking a turn) or social (showing group affiliation) goals.

Methods

analytic induction (SB: loaded term, check google!), search for deviations. Case study of turn-initial *oh*

1. decide that a practice is distinctive (SB: still does not show the meaning of distinctive)
2. locate the practice sequentially; it seems to start the turn of the 2nd pair after a question, or a response after an answer
3. determine the distinctive role/meaning of the practice: *oh* seems to mean wrongly inferred information/assumption (Ex 9, 12) or reaffirming obvious (Ex 8, 10, 11), and these meanings are not only inferred by the analyst but by interlocutors themselves (Ex 13,14)

The role of context

- important to show that the practice is context-free, i.e. appears in a range of interactional situations (friends, TV interview, doctor-patient,...)
- the usage of a practice in different contexts may extend the original meaning and be exploited “manipulatively” (SB: I understand this like a metaphor development)

Ethnography

(SB: use of tenor, p. 16 based on Halliday: who is taking part; the social roles and relationships of participant, the status and roles of the participants)

Deep analysis of Ex 25, p. 17 of the importance of selecting the linguistic means to suit the goals and the situation, and also framing (p. 19), and face-saving

SB: how many instances are needed to get a “quantitative index” of a practice, or how do we know it is sufficiently “distinctive”?

Glover

Thesis/Question: Face address identifies low-power distance value system and face-preservation is a means of solving conflicts in this system. Is power-distance index procedurally relevant (i.e. important in interactions)?

Answer: minimal diffs between roles analyzed as a feature of low-power distance culture (effort to minimize power differences), the existence of power differences IN CONTEXT might be problematic

Data: transcripts of a goal-oriented meeting between Planners and Developers

Terms

low- and high-power distance societies (power-distance index)

sequential adjacency pairs with (dis)preferred responses, projectability of turns

accounts (explanation of a response, seen as dispreferred response), repairs, formulations (SB: not very clear!)

Assumptions

face-imposition signaled by hedges, overtly expressing (rather than implying) context, and deictics (like we)

Arguments for low PDI

- presence of accounts, since they are linked to dispreferred responses, evidenced by questioning the developer's account by the planner
- mere presence of discussion as opposed to outright refusal from planners
- implying that higher-status planners may have been unclear (675-691)
- face-saving strategies
 - o "a little unclear" (591)
 - o hedges: just, virtually, I mean, uh, you know (kinship, appeal for agreement), decent, sort of, nothing → not anything (650),
 - o accounts (p. 115, since they signal dispreference)
 - o developer's 'even' (604) offers face saving for planners
 - o not finishing with negative context (659)
 - o postponement as a solution and attribution of problem to outside party (trust)
- implicit power invocation
 - o we 'certainly' asked you before we went to the trust
- use of feedback backchannels to signal understanding, not agreements (but gender difference in Mulac's paper)

Discuss

- "may have been resolved" (592)
- How does "um I mean just coming through" (621) save face of the developer? (mentioning the same info the 2nd time)
- How do turns by P and PA around 644 'minimize the inherent inequality represented by the planners power' (p. 119)?

General

SB: Is low PDI an assumption or the result? Similar with face-address. Circular reasoning?

Nickerson

Main point: identify strategies both positive and negative for mitigating face-threats, provide basic descriptive frequencies of these strategies in a corpus of 82 business letters

Good example of a possible term paper

Senders mitigate threats to Receiver's face in response to three variables: social distance, power asymmetry, and the degree of imposition. The greater these are, the more likely and more pronounced the mitigations against FTA are.

positive and negative mitigation, somewhat confused with positive and negative face, for examples, what is "I am pleased to confirm...", analyzed as an optimistic mitigation of a positive threat to face"?

Hyatt

Information vs. antagonistic interviews, institutional talk

Data: 30 interviews in British TV

Context → Model → Moves

Formal model of antagonistic interviews using Halliday's Field (What), Tenor (Who), Mode (How) model

Field

- Participants have different goals, interviewer wants to get better of the interviewee, increase viewership, while interviewee wants to limit damage, preserve unity, convince viewers not interviewer.

Tenor

- Both participants but viewers as well (divided illocution)

Mode

- Style of language, some interviewers are friendly and attempt 'disclosure among friends', or aim to anger the opponent. In general, politeness strategies mask the antagonistic nature of the interviews

Model

Look at especially 4b