

Preface

It is all too easy to find fault with the prevailing interpretations without risking a clear vision of one's own. It is not difficult to criticize, or to deconstruct the schemes of others. It is a much more arduous task to be positive, and to produce a fresh and reasoned outline of a subject's parameters. But the exercise must be attempted (Davies, 2006, p. 16).

We have chosen the citation of Davies from his book on World War II as an epigraph for the Preface because it expresses very succinctly what we have tried to do in this book: “to produce a fresh and reasoned outline” of a psychological approach to verbal interaction between listeners and speakers, undertaken by them for genuinely communicative purposes. Such a pretentious project, committed to a historical, theoretical, and empirical approach, by necessity involves the selection of issues and parameters from among the complexities involved in verbal communication. This is why, in Chap. 1, we discuss the concept of *selectivity* and present a reasoned selection of taxonomy and parameters for our own psychological approach. One crucial and at the same time new parameter in our research underlies our conviction that a basic and primary genre of spoken interaction is the *occasional* use of spoken discourse embedded in otherwise nonlinguistic activity. This viewpoint is in contradiction to the dominant conviction among scholars dedicated to dialogism, that conversation – the *ongoing* use of spoken discourse via turn-taking – alone enjoys this primacy.

And so, we have decided to make this Preface, insofar as we can reconstruct it, an overview of our own process of discovery as we wrote this book. For that it has been. It would be convenient to say that we had a clear grasp on the logical outline of this volume as we undertook to write it. But such is not the case. Instead, at every turn, we were confronted with realizations that were new to both of us. It was a humbling and confounding experience, but a learning experience withal. And we are persuaded that the book is better for the anguish of uncertainty we went through during its formulation.

The Title

The title itself has grown out of months of discussion. Among the priorities, the importance of listening emerged. The term *empractical setting* also assumed inevitable importance. Even the claim of a new direction for a psychology of verbal communication was virgin territory for us. The title grew like topsy through the months of discussion. The dynamic of discovery in all of this was clearly derived from our dissatisfaction with the current state of psycholinguistics and its inability to engage everyday spoken dialogue. This constellation has driven us in turn to the historical roots of modern psycholinguistics where we found encouragement, especially from long neglected German sources of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

One of the first historical facts to emerge was the consistent neglect of the listener in empirical research. The priority of the listener is based on the fact that she or he controls the advance of any dialogical enterprise: If there is deficient understanding, the project falters.

The importance of empractical settings proved to be far more complicated. Suffice it to say here that settings with two or more participants in which nonlinguistic activity is salient do indeed provide a non-conversational, albeit clearly dialogical offset to traditional views of a psychology of verbal communication.

A Footnote

The name of Erwin A. Esper has long since faded into the dusty shelves of archival libraries of the twentieth century. And yet – in a footnote, of all things – it was in Esper (1935) that we were startled to find the clearest *negation* of Schegloff's (2001) conviction that conversation is the "primordial environment" (p. 230) for learning language. At the same time, we found in Esper's (1935, p. 455) footnote the most forthright articulation in the entire twentieth century of the "primary uses of language," those which occur in practical situations in the context of "manual-locomotor adjustment to such situations"; thus, Esper made conversation itself a "derivative type of speech." For us, this was a wake-up call to a new direction in our own thinking.

Revisionist History

But Esper turned out to be only one cog in an overall revisionist history of a psychology of language use. The mid-twentieth-century heyday of modern psycholinguistics had by and large negated the relevance of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century contributors such as Lazarus, Brugmann, Wegener, Mauthner, and Bühler. What they all emphasized was the realistic situation of listening and speaking. The abstract philology of the earlier nineteenth century was fading, and the gradual movement

toward an empirical approach to language research in which dialogue could take its rightful place was developing. For Philipp Wegener (1885/1991), “exposition” was the key that serves “the purpose of clarifying the situation” for the listener (p.21; our translation), and the utterance directed at something observable “can then be expressed most tersely” (p. 27; our translation). For Karl Bühler (1934/1982), a new terminology became imperative. The *empractical setting* is one in which nonlinguistic activity predominates. In such a setting, *empractical speech* emerges only as needed, that is, in a *diacrisis*. For ourselves, Bühler thus provided a theoretical framework for Esper’s insights, which he himself had pursued no further than his own footnote.

With the exception of this footnote (Esper, 1935, p. 455) and a parenthesis (Pronko, 1946, p. 213) on the part of two behaviorists in the United States, nearly all of our nineteenth- and twentieth-century historical sources were originally in German. Hence, many of our own translations appear in the following pages, and overall, more than 20% of our references are in the German language. The rationale for this approach has been not only the need for a revisionist history but an effort to offset the almost inevitable Anglophilia intrinsic to modern psycholinguistics.

Rather late in our development of this book, quite independently of the historical approach we had been taking, we discovered the most recent twenty-first-century work of H. H. Clark (2006) on *joint activities*. Without adverting to the historical background which we have briefly sketched above, Clark has articulated an approach which parallels both the domain of empractical speech and our own analyses thereof in the following pages.

Pilot Research

Inveterate empiricists that we are, we found it necessary to seek out a corpus of empractical speech, and inevitably, experimental psychologists that we are, we also found it necessary to formalize the research into a comparison with an otherwise comparable conversational corpus. But because we have become increasingly cautious regarding the two extremes, artificial laboratory situations on the one hand and the ethical danger of surreptitious recording of spontaneous dialogue on the other, we chose to use the dramatic dialogues available in American feature movies. Our *status quaestionis* was whether characteristic properties of empractical speech are notably different from those of conversational speech.

Empractical Speech

With the analyses of our empractical and conversational database in hand, we were finally in a position to realize that empractical speech was indeed the key to the entire book. Almost instantly, the title, the footnote, the revisionist history, and the

pilot research all fell into place. We had arrived at a gratifying level of clarity out of our rather perturbing consternation.

Parameters

And the rest of the book has fallen into place accordingly. The successive chapters simply emphasized the roles of various parameters: first an analysis of the historical invisibility of empractical speech in empirical research, then the importance of time, the priority of listener roles, and finally the integration of social responsibility into psychological research on spoken dialogue. Our last chapter was intended to explain what we meant by new directions. But there remained one more item: a debt of gratitude to Ragnar Rommetveit for his almost unassisted insistence on the incorporation of moral values within the science of psychology. And that has become our Epilogue.

Last Things

Somewhere along the line, we seem to have lost a good bit of our (or at least the first author's) agonistic spirit; if so, good riddance. We still cling to our basic four principles of psychological organization which we are convinced are absolutely necessary for a comprehensive understanding of spoken dialogue: *intersubjectivity*, *perspectivity*, *open-endedness*, and *verbal integrity*.

Our readers will find a notable amount of redundancy throughout the book. This has been quite deliberate on our part in an effort to enable readers, insofar as possible, to engage individual chapters relatively independently.

Our readers will also find that we have made use of numerous citations of various voices in this field of research. We apologize for the multiplicity. However, we have sought to find in both the historical and contemporary approaches of our colleagues in the communication sciences as much intelligibility as possible. And to all our colleagues in scholarship must go our very first expression of gratitude, perhaps especially to those with whom we have had to disagree.

And speaking of debts, we must acknowledge that this volume could never have reached completion without the continuous assistance of a community loosely defined in terms of friendships and kinships with the authors. They have been extraordinarily helpful in pushing, pulling, and gluing us into authorship. The SKYPE and phone network consisting of the following on both sides of the Atlantic, plus many more occasional members, deserves our heartfelt thanks for their ever willing help. We've given only a list of first names of couples and individuals here in order to protect the innocent. Among the couples were June and Art, Bonnie and Ed, Gisela and Rüdiger, Maria and Jan, Jean and Kevin, Petra and Peter, and Cheryl and Terry. And among the individuals were Matthias, Nanette, Naomi, Swantje, and Tricia.

Professional colleagues have also played an important role in the preparation of this volume. The principal consultants have been Robert W. Rieber and Sharon Panulla. In addition to being an inveterate and loyal friend, Bob Rieber is the series editor for *Cognition and Language* at Springer Publishers, and Sharon Panulla is Springer's psychology editor. Both have worked generously with us so as to make our work optimally productive. We have also enlisted Professor Clemens Knobloch of Siegen University (Germany) to write the Foreword to the book. He was the first colleague we approached in this regard because his credentials are exactly appropriate for the subject matter of this book. And finally, we have been fortunate to obtain endorsements from two more colleagues for Springer's public relations efforts: Professor Robert E. Innis of the University of Massachusetts (Lowell, MA) and Professor Brigitte Nerlich of Nottingham University (UK).

Last, but by no means least, a number of institutions have for many years now supported our research. Saint Louis University has been alma mater to us both. Loyola University of Chicago, Georgetown University, the Free University of Berlin, and the Technical University of Berlin have been most cooperative, as have also the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung, the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, and the Fulbright Commission. Two research librarians at the Law Library of St. Louis University, Mary Ann Sampson and Joanne Vogel, have been most helpful in tracking down materials for us.

To sum it up, we are grateful for the opportunity to write this book and for the help so many people have given us along the line. We can now celebrate New Year's Eve 2011 with a certain amount of both relief and closure.

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Dialogical Genres

Empractical and Conversational Listening and Speaking

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