SPEECH NORMS

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- Although there is individual variation in the way speakers use language, one may be impressed by the amount of agreement that is often found among speakers.
- It is important to point out that the degree of similarity generally found between speakers goes well **beyond what is needed for sufficient communication**.
- This comes as a direct result of the existence of rules governing speech and the knowledge that speakers have of them

Individualism and conformity

- The amount of variation or similarity found within any given community depends on the relative strengths of **two forces** that Hudson call **individualism** and **conformity**.

- Each one of these two forces **leads to a different result** as far as language use is concerned.

- If individualism predominates, it would lead to individual differences, whereas if conformity has the upper hand, it would lead to similarities between individuals.

Individualism

- Individualism is driven by **the individual's freedom to choose the pattern** to be used in any given situation.

- It, therefore, leads to **differences** among individual speakers.

- This is the result of the fact that the individual speaker is **shaped and moulded by his experience** (as a listener: his/ her speech…), by his/ her sociolinguistic past and backgrounds. '…no two speakers have the same experience of language' (Hudson: 12)

Conformity

- Conformity leads to similarities between individuals in the way they use language.
- It most of the time **triumphs** over individualism as there is **a general and natural tendency towards conformity**:
- Speakers tend to conform to the speech norms of a given community and to model their way of speaking on that of the others they choose to join as a social group.

Communicative competence

- According to Hymes, a speech community is not defined by common language, but rather by **common linguistic norms:**

'a community sharing rules for conduct and interpretation of speech, and rules for the interpretation of at least one linguistic variety' (Hymes 1972b: 54).

- This definition moves the ethnographer away from questions of grammar and grammatically possible utterances, to questions of coherence and efficacy in the socially situated use of language.

- The question for Hymes is not only whether speakers have a common understanding of syntax and semantics but also whether or not they share ideas about the use of silence, ideas about the meaning of irony or emphasis, speech taboos, ways of formulating requests and statements and so on.

Communicative Competence

- Communicative Competence (CC), which is a term most usually attributed to Dell Hymes's paper 'On communicative competence' (Hymes 1970)

- It is the knowledge which enables someone to use a language effectively and their ability to use this knowledge for communication.

- According to Hymes, Communicative Competence involves :
  - knowing not only the language code but also what to say to whom, and how to say it appropriately in any given situation.

  - Further, it involves the social and cultural knowledge speakers are presumed to have which enables them to use and interpret linguistic forms.

- Hymes (1974, 1987**) augmented** Chomsky's notion of linguistic competence (knowledge of **systematic potential**, or whether or not an utterance is **a possible grammatical structure** in a language) with **feasibility** (whether and to what extent something is possible under particular circumstances), **knowledge of appropriateness** (whether and to what extent something is suitable), and **occurrence** (whether and to what extent something is done),

Four sectors of Communicative competence

- Hymes distinguishes **four sectors** :

  – knowledge of what is **possible, feasible**, **appropriate** and **actually done.**

- It is a reinterpretation of Chomsky's linguistic competence.

Linguistic competence vs Communicative competence

- Hymes begins his advocacy of CC by drawing attention to the narrowness of Chomskyan linguistics, and its inability to account for many aspects of language use.

Chomsky (1965: 4) had distinguished between:

-competence (the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language).

-performance (the actual use of language in concrete situations).

Chomsky argues that only the former which is competence (conceived as an **idealized static knowledge of phonological and syntactic rules**) is the proper subject-matter of linguistics.

Rules of use

- Hymes's main point is that there must be **other kinds of knowledge, 'rules of use'**, which enable actual speakers to use the language effectively.

- In other words, actual individuals may also possess other knowledge which enables them to make use of their linguistic competence.

- Hymes distinguishes **two very different conceptions of performance:**

1-One is the 'actual data of speech', seen as rule-less *in contrast to* the rule-bound nature of linguistic competence:

Linguistic Competence= rule-bound

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Performance=rule-less

2-Another is behaviour governed by underlying **rules of use** which, *in addition to* **the rules of linguistic competence**, allow the language user to communicate effectively.

- **Linguistic competence** (rules of grammar) + **rules of use** → effective communication

- According to Hymes, there are **additional rules** which, he argues, must of necessity exist. His main argument to support this is that:

For a person whose linguistic behaviour was governed ONLY by 'the ability to produce and understand (in principle) any and all of the grammatical sentences of a language' would be regarded as mad, and in addition would not produce many appropriate but **ungrammatical utterances** which occur in language use.

Conception 1

- In the Chomkyan sense, **perfomance** is in a way seen as being **rule-less** and therefore **flawed** being by this a kind of **garbage bin** full of disregarded material and data not worthy of being seen as a proper subject-matter of linguistics

- Performance is seen as merely comprising actual language use which is dismissed in Chomskyan linguistics as being full of imperfections and flaws due to issues such as memory limitations, distractions, and other psychological factors which might affect the quality of the language that people produce.

Conception 2

- Hymes' concern is with the second of these interpretations.

- According to Hymes, performance, which is seen as the other side of the coin, is also **governed by rules** of competence for use (it is not rule-less as it is perceived in Chomskyan linguistics):

- So, what is needed for **effective communication** is '**competence for use'**, which comprises the knowledge that is 'communicative competence'.

- Hymes proposes four questions which this additional knowledge must be able to answer:

(1)   Whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible;

(2)   Whether (and to what degree) something is feasible in virtue of the means of implementation available;

(3)   Whether (and to what degree) something is appropriate (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated;

(4)   Whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done, actually performed, and what its doing entails.

Whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible:

- This has often been interpreted as linguistic competence in Chomsky's sense. There are, however, important differences.

- It is concerned with whether a language permits a structure as grammatical (possible) or rejects it as ungrammatical (impossible).

- Hymes's criterion of possibility encompasses not only **linguistic grammaticality** but also **non-verbal and cultural 'grammaticality'** (i.e. conformity to meaningful rules of behaviour).

Whether (and to what degree) something is feasible

- This refers to **psycholinguistic factors** such as 'memory limitation, **perceptual device(s**), effects of properties such as nesting , embedding, branching and the like'.

- Canale and Swain (1980) illustrate this with the following sentence:

  - **the cheese the rat the cat the dog saw chased ate was green**

- This is grammatical in that it follows the rules for embedding clauses, but **cannot be feasibly processed automatically.**

- Our restricted powers of processing such a sentence cannot in any real sense be said to form part of our competence
- Talking to **a deaf person using the oral channel of communication** rather than sign language.
- This person lacks the sense of hearing that would enable them to understand what you are saying to them.

Whether (and to what degree) something is appropriate

- Attention has concentrated particularly on cultural appropriateness, on the way in which an utterance or sequence of utterances may be grammatical and feasible but inappropriate in a given context.

- This inappropriateness may be **linguistic** (e.g. in Britain, addressing one's new bank manager as 'comrade') or, in line with Hymes's broad interpretation of the term 'grammar', **non-linguistic** (e.g. kissing the new bank manager on being introduced).

Whether (and to what degree) something is done

- As Hymes observes: 'something may be possible, feasible, appropriate and not occur.'

- Language users, it may be assumed, have some knowledge of which forms actually occur, and of the probability of that occurrence. (Accepted usage)

Syntatictic restrictions on the use of particular words:

- All English speakers agree in restricting 'probable' to use with a that-clause, in contrast with its synonym 'likely' which can be used either with a that-clause or with an infinitive.

  – It is probable that share prices will fall even more.
  – Share prices are likely to fall even more.

The norms governing speech

- Skill in speaking depends on… a knowledge of the relevant rules governing speech and these vary from one society to another, which makes it easier to see that there are rules.
- We shall call such rules norms because they define normal behaviour for the society concerned. (Hudson 1980: 116)

Norms governing quantity

- First, there are norms governing the sheer **quantity** of the speech that people produce, varying from very little to very much.

- Dell Hymes describes a society where very little speech is the norm (Hymes 1971)

Puliya in southern India

- Peter Gradener (1966) did some fieldwork...in **southern India**, among a tribal people called **the Puliya**, describing their socialisation patterns.

- There is no agriculture and no industry, and the society is neither particularly cooperative nor particularly competitive; so children are led neither to be particularly interdependent nor to be aggressively competitive with each other, but simply to busy themselves with their own concerns in reasonale spatial proximity.

Puliya in Southern India

- He observed that, by the time a man was forty, he practically stopped speaking altogether. He had no reason to speak. People there, in fact, just didn't talk much and seldom seemed to find anything much to talk about, and he saw this as a consequence of the particular kind of socialisation pattern.

Roti in eastern Indonesia

- We may contrast this society with one Roti, a small island in eastern Indonesia, described by James Fox (1974) :

- For a Rotinese the pleasure of life is talk – not simply an idle chatter that passes time, but the more formal taking of sides in endless dispute, argument and repartee or the rivalling of one another in eloquent and balanced phrases on ceremonial occasions…

Roti in eastern Indonesia

- Lack of talk is an indication of distress. Rotinese repeatedly explain that if their 'hearts' are confused or dejected, they keep silent. Contrarily, to be involved with someone requires active verbal encounter.

Denmark

There may be problems when people from societies with different norms meet, as shown by the following anecdote quoted by Coulthard (1977 : 49)

- An…ethnographer describes staying with in-laws in **Denmark** and being joined by an American friend, who, despite warnings, insisted on talking with American intensity until 'at 9 o'clock my in-laws retired to bed ; they just couldn't stand it anymore'.

The number of people who talk

- Another kind of norm controls **the number of people who talk** at once in the conversation. Most readers would probably accept the principle that only one person should speak (otherwise there must be more than one conversation taking place, as at a party), but apparently this norm is not universal. The practices in a village in Antigua, in the West Indies, are described by Karl Reisman (1974) :

Antigua in the West Indies

The practices in a village in Antigua, in the West Indies, are described by Karl Reisman (1974) :

- Antiguan conventions appear, on the surface, almost anarchic. Fundamentally, there is no regular requirement for two or more voices not to be going at the same time. The start of a new voice in not in itself a signal for the voice speaking either to stop or to institute a process which will decide who is to have the floor.

Antigua in the West Indies

- When someone enters a casual group, for example, no opening is necessarily made for him ; nor is there any pause or other formal signal that he is being included. One appears to pay any attention. When he feels ready he will simply begin speaking. He may be heard, he may not. That is, the other voices may eventually stop and listen, or some of them may ; eyes may or may not turn to him. If he is not heard the first time he will try again, and yet again (often with the same remark). Eventually he will be heard or give up.

Antigua in the West Indies

Similarly, most readers would accept that there must be a limit on the number of interruptions permissible in a conversation; not so in Antigua:

- In a brief conversation with me, about three minutes, a girl called to someone on the street, made a remark to a small boy, sang a little, told a child to go to school, sang some more, told a child to go buy bread, etc., all the while continuing the thread of her conversation about her sister.

Content

- Other norms refer to **the content** of what is said and it is related to being 'informative' when speaking. (the cooperative principle of Paul Grice).

- Other norms refer to **the content of what is said** and it is related to being 'informative' when speaking.

- The effect of this norm is that one **should specify a referent as informatively**, that is as precisely, as one can.

- For example, I am talking to you and I want to say that your sister is outside. I should say, 'your sister' (or use her name if I know it), rather than simply **somebody** or **a girl**).

- If any of these expressions are used, you'll be entitled **'to read between the lines'** that **I do not know** any more precisely who the person is, because you know that we are subject to the norm 'be informative' and I would have used a more precise expression if I had been able to.

- This norm is not as universal as one might expect. **Elinor Keenan's** study of the speech norms in **a rural Malagasy village** is a good example of this.
- This investigation is based on extended participant-observation in a small hamlet in south-central Madagascar (Vakinankaratra region).
- In this village, there are different rules of communication which come as a direct result of the fact that in this community different rules of behavior and value system apply.

The speech norms in a rural Malagasy village

As Keenan and Ochs (1979:138) put it:

- The European learner of Malagasy who had perfected his knowledge of the sound system of the language and the various ways of forming words, phrases and sentences would...still find himself unable to perform successfully most social acts requiring the use of speech in the type of peasant community in which we lived.

- He would frequently draw many incorrect inferences from what people said and equally frequently be misunderstood and find that his attempts at communication prompted reactions quite different from those he intended.

- In this village, it would be quite normal for a Malagasy boy to refer to his own sister as 'a girl' in an utterance such as:

  - 'there is a girl who is coming', referring to his own sister.

There is a number of reasons why speakers are so uninformative in this community.

- One is that they are afraid that identifying an individual may bring him to the attention of evil forces, and get him into trouble in other ways.
- Another reason is that news is in short supply in small isolated villages, and people like to keep it to themselves as a precious commodity. Consequently, there is no reluctance to give information when it is easily available to anyone.
- For instance, if there is a pot of rice cooking over a fire, people will refer to it as 'the rice' since anyone can see that there is rice there.

Specific norms and constraints

- Finally, there are very specific norms and constraints which may vary from society to society. In Germany, a hostess in a formal dinner party would probably use a **declarative** sentence to ask the guests to take their seats. She would use a sentence like 'I may now ask (you) to take (your) places'. An English hostess would use an interrogative construction such as: 'May I ask you to come and sit down now?)

- Clearly, different norms for speech in different societies can often be explained by reference to other aspects of their cultures and cannot, therefore, be satisfactorily studied in isolation.

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