I. INTRODUCTION

Language is an instrument people use for everything from gossip to diplomacy. It is a complicated instrument like an airplane, and just as engineers can describe the structure of an airplane, linguists can describe the structure of a language—its sounds, words, phrases, and sentences and their organization. Yet, just as we could know the structure of an airplane with little idea of how it is used, we could know the sounds, syntax, and meaning of a language with little idea of how it is used. Knowing the structure of I am hot does not tell us how a particular speaker used it on a particular occasion to do something—or even how speakers in general could use it for doing things. We will focus on how people use language, a field of study often called pragmatics, especially on how they use it in discourse, broad but bounded stretches of language activity.

At the heart of language use is human action, people doing things with language. At the grossest level, people transact business, gossip, plan everyday chores with each other. At a lower level, they make statements, ask questions, and apologize to each other. At a still lower level, they utter and identify words, phrases, and sentences. At an even lower level, they produce and attend to sounds, gestures, and facial expressions. People using language take actions at all of these levels simultaneously. But what actions are these, and how do they fit together to form the whole?
People take actions for particular purposes, and in language use, their purposes are fundamentally social. Some of their purposes are public, and some are private. Some of their purposes are precise, as when they ask for a telephone number, and some are vague, as when they gossip with friends. Some of their purposes are fully formed ahead of time, as in church ceremonies, and others are worked out only as they go along, as in most conversation. Some of their purposes are in the foreground of their awareness, as when they decide to ask a question, and others are only in the background, as when they try to maintain their face and not look foolish. People are always trying to satisfy multiple purposes. So what purposes do people use language for, and how?

Our review of pragmatics and discourse has five parts. In the first, we consider the traditional view of the actions people perform in using language. In the second, we consider a contrasting view about the way speakers and addressees act jointly in discourse. In the next two parts, we look at how the participants in a discourse achieve local and more extended joint projects, and in the last, how they coordinate with each other in telling stories.

II. SPEECH ACTS

Speakers do many things in uttering even a single sentence. In John Austin’s (1962) account, they act at several levels at once. When Paul says to Jean, “Please sit down,” he is doing these things among others:

1. **Phonetic act**: Paul is producing the noises that constitute “Please sit down.”
2. **Phatic act**: Paul is uttering the vocables or words of “Please sit down.”
3. **Rhetic act**: Paul is using these vocables with a certain sense and reference.
4. **Locutionary act**: Paul is saying to Jean, “Please sit down.”
5. **Illocutionary act**: Paul is asking Jean to sit down.
6. **Perlocutionary act**: Paul is getting Jean to sit down.

Austin’s names for these acts may be abstruse, but the acts themselves are simple in conception. They bear important relations to one another. Phonetic, phatic, and rhetic acts are parts of locutionary acts. Illocutionary acts are performed in performing locutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts are performed by performing illocutionary acts. All of these acts have come to be called *speech acts* (Bach & Harnish, 1979; Cole & Morgan, 1975; Searle, 1969). Since Austin, most of the focus has been on illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. There have been so many studies of illocutionary acts that they form the foundation of most pragmatic theories.
A. Illocutionary Acts

Paul is doing something *in* saying, "Please sit down" to Jean; he is asking her to sit down. He may also be doing something *by* asking her to sit down, namely getting her to sit down. According to Austin, to do something *in* saying something is an illocutionary act, and to do something *by* saying something is a perlocutionary act. The difference lies in what Paul expects to accomplish. He will have succeeded in asking Jean to sit down (the illocutionary act) when she recognizes what he wants. He will have succeeded in getting her to sit down (a perlocutionary act) when she actually sits down. She could recognize that he wants her to sit down (his illocutionary act would be successful) and yet refuse to sit down (his perlocutionary act would be unsuccessful). Notice that Paul can say, "I hereby ask you to sit down" as a way of asking Jean to sit down, an illocutionary act. He cannot say, "I hereby get you to sit down" as a way of getting her to sit down, a perlocutionary act. The contrast is characteristic of illocutionary and perlocutionary acts.

Illocutionary acts come in many types. They include telling, asking, warning, ordering, offering, thanking, congratulating, appointing, firing. Verschueren (1980) counted more than 150 such illocutionary verbs in English. According to John Searle (1975b), these acts differ principally in what he called their *illocutionary point*, their primary publicly intended perlocutionary effect. In making a request, speakers are trying to get their addressees to do something: the illocutionary point is to get them to do that something. For other illocutionary acts, the point is different. Searle divided illocutionary points into five main categories:

1. **Assertives.** The point of an assertive is to get addressees to form or attend to the belief that the speaker is committed to a certain belief. When Paul tells Jean, "I'm tired," he is trying to get her to accept the belief that he is tired. Assertives range from simple assertions through predictions, notifications, confessions, denials, retorts, conjectures, suppositions, and many others.

2. **Directives.** The point of a directive is to get addressees to do things. When Paul asks Jean to sit down, he is trying to get her to do something, to sit down. Directives fall into two major classes: requests for nonlinguistic actions (as with most commands and suggestions), and requests for linguistic actions (as with most questions). In asking Jean, "What time is it?" Paul is requesting a linguistic action: she is to tell him what time it is. Directives range in force from mild hints to commands, and they vary on other dimensions, too.

3. **Commissives.** The point of a commissive is to commit the speaker to some future action. The commonest commissive is the promise. When Paul
says to Jean, "I'll be there in a minute," he is committing himself to being there in a minute. A promise can be absolute or conditional, and when it is conditional, it is called an offer. When Paul says to Jean, "Can I get you a beer?" he is committing himself to getting Jean a beer, but only if she wants one.

4. **Expressives.** The point of an expressive is to express certain psychological feelings toward the addressees. When Paul steps on Jean's foot by mistake, he says, "Sorry." In doing so, he presupposes that he has caused Jean some harm and tries to get her to recognize his regret in having done so. Expressives include thanking, greeting, congratulating, apologizing, well-wishing, and many other types.

5. **Declarations.** The point of a declaration is to effect an institutional state of affairs. Declarations take place within institutions such as the law, the church, and organized games, and speakers do certain things by virtue of their institutional roles as judges, priests, or referees. In a company, a boss can appoint, promote, or fire people, and an employee can quit, simply by saying the right words at the right time: "You're fired" or "I quit." Likewise, with the right words at the right times, a judge can indict, pardon, and sentence people; a referee can start a game, call fouls, and call time-outs; a police officer can arrest people; and a priest can baptize, marry, and bless people. As Austin noted, all of these acts must be performed with the proper institutional authority or they are defective, null and void.

Like any taxonomy, this scheme has problems. Some illocutionary acts appear to belong to more than one category; for example, the order of a general or of a police officer has properties of both a directive and a declaration. The categories are not by any means mutually exclusive or exhaustive. The scheme has also been criticized for misclassifying acts (Hancher, 1979; Linell, Alemyr, & Jonsson, 1993; Linell & Markova, 1993; van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1982) and cultural bias (Wierzbicka, 1985). Other schemes have been proposed (e.g., Austin, 1962; Ballmer & Brennenstuhl, 1981; van der Auwera, 1980), but they suffer from similar problems. Still, the scheme illustrates the range of what speakers can intend to do with respect to their addressees, and it has heuristic value for describing illocutionary acts.

**B. Speaker's Meaning**

An illocutionary act is an act by which the speaker means something. Although Austin and Searle focused on the act itself, one could focus instead on what the speaker means by the act. That is what H. Paul Grice (1957) did in his account of meaning.

As Grice noted, English has two different notions of meaning. Compare these two statements:
1. Those black clouds mean rain.
2. In uttering "Please sit down" Paul meant that Jean was to sit down.

Statement 1 describes a connection between certain events or states in the world and their natural consequences. Grice called this *natural meaning*. Statement 2, in contrast, describes the connection between a person's action and certain of its intended consequences, or what Grice called *nonnatural meaning*. 

Nonnatural meaning itself divides into subtypes. Some have to do with what signals mean, such as "The word *up* can mean 'happy'" or "The sentence *I'm up* can mean that the speaker is happy at the moment of utterance." Let us call this *signal meaning*. Other subtypes have to do with what speakers mean in using such signals, as in "In uttering 'Please sit down,' Paul meant that Jean was to sit down." This is what Grice called utterer's meaning, and what others have called speaker's or speaker meaning (e.g., Bach & Harnish, 1979). We will use the term *speaker's meaning*.

Speaker's meaning is any proposition \( p \) that fits the formula "In doing \( x \), a speaker \( S \) meant for hearers \( H \) that \( p \)." Grice and his successors have shown that the actions that fit this formula must satisfy the following condition:

In doing \( x \), a speaker \( S \) means that \( p \) for hearers \( H \) if and only if:

(\( i \)) \( S \) intends that \( H \) recognize that \( p \) in part by recognizing that \( i \).

Notice that speaker's meaning, unlike signal meaning, is really a type of intention. The intention is special because of two properties. The first is its *reflexivity*. The \( i \) in "recognizing that \( i \)" refers to the full statement labeled (\( i \)), namely, "\( S \) intends that \( H \) recognize that \( p \) in part by recognizing that \( i \)." The statement refers back to itself—it is reflexive. So, in uttering, "Please sit down" to Jean, Paul intends her to recognize that she is to sit down in part by recognizing that he has that very intention. The second property of this intention is its *linkage*. It is an intention by one person that cannot be satisfied without the linked action of another person. Paul cannot fulfill his intention toward Jean without her coordinated action in recognizing that intention.

In Grice's account, then, the actions by which speakers mean things, the \( x \) in the formula for speaker's meaning, are special. They are signals and have signal meaning. Ordinarily, when we think of signals, we think of linguistic utterances, and that is what most psychological and linguistic theories concentrate on. But signals do not have to be linguistic. One of Grice's own examples was of a bus conductor (in the old British system) ringing a bell twice to tell the driver that the bus could now proceed. Nonlinguistic signals are an essential ingredient of spontaneous discourse, where they come mainly in the form of gesticulations, facial expressions, and vocal gestures (Bavelas, 1994; Bavelas, Black, Chovil, Lemery, & Mullett, 1988; Bavelas, Black, Lemery, & Mullett, 1986; Clark & Gerrig, 1990;
Discourse cannot be understood without considering all the actions by which people can mean things for their addressees. Grice’s characterization of speaker’s meaning takes us far beyond the simplistic view that discourse is all linguistic. Even a casual look at face-to-face conversation shows how central a role nonlinguistic signals play. In ordinary talk, communicative acts are a mix of all types of signals.

C. Implicatures

How do we decipher what speakers mean? The traditional answer is that we look at what they say. But in his 1967 William James Lectures, Grice argued that we must view what they say against the ongoing discourse and its “accepted purpose or direction.” He put it this way (Grice, 1975, p. 45):

Our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks, and would not be rational if they did. They are characteristically, to some degree at least, cooperative efforts; and each participant recognizes in them, to some extent, a common purpose or set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction. The purpose or direction may be fixed from the start (e.g., by an initial proposal of a question for discussion), or it may evolve during the exchange; it may be fairly definite, or it may be so indefinite as to leave very considerable latitude to the participants (as in a casual conversation). But at each stage, some possible conversational moves would be excluded as conversationally unsuitable.

The participants of a conversation, Grice argued, therefore expect each other to adhere to the cooperative principle, which he expressed as an exhortation to speakers:

Cooperative Principle: Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.

In Grice’s view, people take for granted that actions in discourse are to be interpreted against the “accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange.” Grice’s insight can be pursued in many ways. He chose to apply it to the traditional problem of what sentences are taken to mean on the occasion of their use.

To see what speakers mean, Grice argued, we generally go beyond what they actually say. He asked us to imagine A standing by an obviously immobilized car and striking up a conversation with passerby B:
A: I am out of petrol.
B: There is a garage round the corner.

All B has said is that there is a garage, a gas station, around the corner. Yet that is not all A takes him as doing. A can suppose B was trying to offer information relevant to the situation at hand, that A is stranded and has just remarked that he is out of gasoline. So B must also mean, in Grice's words, "that the garage is, or at least may be open, etc." This he called an *implicature*. In Grice's scheme, speaker's meaning divides into two parts: *saying* and *implicating*.

What is the difference? What is *said*, in Grice's sense, is what speakers mean mostly through the conventional content of the sentence they utter. In uttering "There is a garage round the corner," all B is saying is that there is a garage around the corner. The rest of what B meant is implicated. Some implicatures are conventional and, therefore, part of the sentence meaning. The ones we shall be concerned with Grice called *conversational implicatures*. One example is B's implicature that the garage may be open and selling petrol. A recognizes it not because of any conventional connection with what B said. Rather, as Grice puts it, A "works it out."

For Grice, conversational implicatures have three main properties (but see Nunberg, 1981; Sadock, 1978). (1) They are *nonconventional*. They are not conventionally associated with the words or sentence uttered. "There is a garage round the corner" does not conventionally mean that the garage is open. Yet (2) they are *calculable*. Speakers intend addressees to be able to work them out. A is to work out that B means that he believes the garage may be open. Conversational implicatures are the parts of what speakers mean that addressees can recognize only by "working them out." Finally (3) they are *defeasible*: Speakers can cancel them, rendering them null and void. B could have said, "There's a garage round the corner, but I doubt if it's open," nullifying the implicature A would otherwise work out.

How are implicatures to be worked out? Since Grice argued that every utterance "contributes" to the "accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange," we might have expected him to develop the notions of "contribution" and "accepted purpose" and show how implicatures follow. What he did instead was offer four rules of thumb, four *maxims*, that he argued enable listeners to work out implicatures. He expressed the maxims as exhortations to speakers (Grice, 1975, pp. 45-46):

**Maxim of Quantity**
1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

**Maxim of Quality**
1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack evidence.
Maxim of Relation  Be relevant.
Maxim of Manner 1. Avoid obscurity of expression.  
2. Avoid ambiguity.  
3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).  
4. Be orderly.

Once listeners take for granted that speakers adhere to these maxims and to the cooperative principle itself, they can work out what the speakers are implicating.

Speakers create implicatures in two main ways. The first is by direct appeal to the maxims. Take this invented exchange:

Burton: How many children do you have?  
Connie: I have two children.

All Connie has said is that she has two children, which would be literally true even if she had three or four or twelve. Yet, by the maxim of quantity, Burton can assume she has been as informative as she needs to be for the current purposes of this exchange. And because in this exchange he was asking about the total number of children she has, she must be giving the total number. Contrast that exchange with this one:

Burton: Does anyone have two quarters I could borrow for the pay phone?  
Connie: I have two quarters.

In this exchange, Burton is not trying to find out the total number of quarters Connie has, but trying merely to borrow two quarters. Connie may have three, four, or twelve quarters, but she is being “as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange” by saying that she has two quarters. These two circumstances contrast. In “I have two children” the “two” implicates “and no more than two,” whereas in “I have two quarters” it does not. Both are meanings Connie expects Burton to work out via the maxim of quantity. Direct application of the other maxims works in similar ways.

The second main way speakers create implicatures is by blatantly violating, or flouting, a maxim. In the following example, Kate is describing a visit to a women’s college (1.3.560):  

Kate: and um then, a bell rang, and millions of feet, ran, along corridors, you know, and then they it all died away, it was like like sound effects from the Goon Show

When Kate claimed “millions” of feet ran along the corridors, she was blatantly violating the Maxim of Quality, “Do not say what you believe to be false.” The violation was so blatant, indeed, that she must have intended
her audience to reason: "Kate is flouting the maxim, yet is otherwise being cooperative. She must therefore intend 'millions' to be taken, not literally, but as hyperbole. It only seemed as if there were millions of feet." Flouting maxims also leads to meiosis, metaphor, irony, and other effects.

There may be a better account, however, for the implicatures created by the flouting of maxims. Irony is one example. When Burton fails Connie in some way, she might say, "What a fine friend you are!" In doing so, she is merely pretending to compliment Burton, and he is expected to discover that. But pretending to say something is not the same type of action as actually saying something, and it takes more than the flouting of the maxim "Be truthful" to establish that. The same goes for hyperbole and other related tropes (see Clark & Gerrig, 1984, 1990; Isaacs & Clark, 1990; Sperber & Wilson, 1981).

All things considered, the cooperative principle has offered a creditable first account for a variety of phenomena, and most investigators have accepted its basic insight. The issue is how best to formulate it. Various investigators have quibbled with the maxims, offered new versions (e.g., Horn, 1984; Kasher, 1977; Leech, 1983; Levinson, 1987), and have even tried to reduce them all to the maxim of relevance (Sperber & Wilson, 1986). But in the end, rules of thumb can never be more than just that—rules of thumb. To understand the phenomena Grice noted, we need to understand two notions from which all the maxims follow: "the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange," and how people "contribute" to that accepted purpose or direction. These are topics we turn to next.

III. COORDINATING ACTIONS

In Austin's and Searle's accounts, the acts of interest are performed by speakers, and listeners are passive receptacles. The acts Austin named, from phonetic to perlocutionary acts, are those performed by speakers, not listeners. Grice's account of meaning is of what speakers mean, not what addressees understand, and his maxims are exhortations to speakers, not listeners. Searle (1969, p. 16) was quite explicit about the centrality of speaking: "The unit of linguistic communication is not . . . the symbol, word, or sentence, but rather the production or issuance of the symbol, word, or sentence, in the performance of a speech act." For him, linguistic communication is like writing a letter and dropping it in a mailbox. It does not matter whether the addressee receives, reads, or understands it.

But communication can no more be done by the speaker alone than clapping can be done by the left hand alone. It requires two coordinated actions: speaking and listening.2 Despite its name, speaker's meaning requires, depends on, certain actions by the addressees; this is the property we have called linkage. It is not enough for Paul to intend Jean to recognize that
he wants her to sit down. To fulfill his intention, he must get her to recognize what he is doing. And to accomplish that, he must get her to attend, listen to his utterance, and try to understand him precisely as he speaks. When we view speaker's meaning this way, the speaker's and hearer's intentions index each other like this:

(1) By doing $x$, $S$ intends $H$ to recognize that $p$ by means of (2).
(2) By identifying $x$, $H$ intends to recognize (1).

Speakers cannot fulfill their intentions in (1) without the belief that the addressees are trying to fulfill their own intentions in (2), and vice versa. In Grice's formula, meaning and recognition are inherently linked, interdependent, coordinated.

When two people shake hands, play a piano duet, waltz, or make love, the pair of them are doing things that one of them could not do alone: they are performing joint actions. A joint action is an action performed not by an individual person but by an ensemble of people. Likewise, speakers and listeners accomplish communicative acts that neither of them could do alone. They, too, are performing joint acts.

One basic communicative act is the contribution (Clark & Schaefer, 1989; Clark & Wilkes-Gibbs, 1986). Take the question Alice asks Betty (8.31.1062):

Alice: well, um, he came through the British Council, did he?
Betty: sorry?
Alice: he came through the British Council did he?
Betty: well no, it's not through the British Council, it's on a Goodman Fellowship, but it, it, it's suh- sort of in association with the British Council.

In the first turn, Alice presents an utterance, "well, he came through the British Council, did he?" as a way of asking Betty a question. Apparently Betty does not hear the utterance to her satisfaction, for she asks Alice for a repeat with "sorry?" and Alice obliges. This time Betty understands and is willing to go on to answer "well no." The point is this. Although Alice tries to ask Betty a question with her first utterance, the two of them do not consider it complete until Betty has understood her well enough to go on. So, contributing to a conversation takes more than an illocutionary act, an attempt to get a listener to understand. The participants must reach the mutual belief that the act has succeeded, that the addressee has understood what the speaker meant. So, one form of contribution is an illocutionary act plus its mutual acceptance.

Contributions require actions from both speakers and their addressees. In face-to-face conversation, contributions ordinarily consist of two phases, the first initiated by the speaker and the second by the addressee:
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Presentation phase. A presents B with utterance \( u \).

Acceptance phase. B provides A with evidence that B has understood what A meant by \( u \) well enough for current purposes.

In our example, the presentation phase consists of Alice's utterance, "well, he came through the British Council, did he?" The acceptance phase consists of Betty's request for a repeat "sorry?" plus Alice's repeat plus Betty's willingness to go on to the answer "well no." The criterion A and B try to reach is this: the mutual belief that B has understood A well enough for current purposes. This is called the *grounding criterion*, and the process by which A and B reach it is called *grounding*.

Most of the time, the acceptance phase takes one of two forms. The first uses what have traditionally been called *back-channel responses*, signals like "uh-huh," "yeah," head nods, and smiles from the addressee while the speaker continues speaking (Duncan, 1973; Schegloff, 1982; Yngve, 1970).

Take this example from a spontaneous British conversation (2.1.318):

Bernard: I don't quite know, but they would be worth approaching,
Alan: m
Bernard: - because that again, is a technical or unremunerative type of book, -
Alan: m
Bernard: in a sense I mean, it's - a limited *market*,
Alan: *mhm*
Bernard: and once you've sold it, [continues]

Alan punctuates Bernard's utterance three times with what Schegloff (1982) called *continuers*, "m," "m," and "mhm" (British equivalents to North American "yeah" and "uh-huh"). Alan's message, according to Schegloff, is "please continue," implying he has grasped what Bernard has said so far. Listeners like Alan tend to place continuers at or near the ends of clauses, often overlapping the ends, in order to accept each clause separately.

In a second common form of acceptance, the current addressee initiates an appropriate next turn. Take this example (3.1.174):

Ken: uh what modern poets have you been reading -
June: well I'm . I like Robert Graves very much -
Ken: who else
June: (continues)

In the first turn Ken presents an utterance in order to ask June what modern poets she has been reading. As evidence that she has understood him, she simply proceeds to answer the question. This way she shows that she believes: (1) Ken's utterance does not need clarification; (2) it is a question; and (3) it is appropriately answered by saying she likes Robert Graves very
much. Her answer might actually have shown Ken that she had misunderstood him, and he would have followed up with something like “No I mean avant garde poets.” In fact, he accepts her answer, affirming her interpretation, by following up with “Who else?”

Although these two forms of acceptance, acknowledging and proceeding on, are the commonest, there are many other forms as well. One is illustrated in the earlier example by Alice and Betty, when Betty follows Alice’s question with a request for a repeat. The result is an exchange of turns called a side sequence (Jefferson, 1973) or an insertion sequence (Schegloff, 1972):

Betty: sorry?

Alice: he came through the British Council did he.

Only once Betty and Alice have completed the side sequence does Betty proceed on to the answer. Other times the current addressee may accept a speaker’s presentation by cutting into it, as illustrated in this exchange (7.1a.83):

Burton: wuh- what day are you going to have off or are going to have a day off or

Connie: I have a half day off, *I have*

Burton: *when*

Connie: Wednesday morning **off**

Burton: **Wednesday** day morning . uh-huh

When Connie begins “I have a half day off,” she is deliberately cutting into Burton’s utterance after “or” to save him the trouble of offering another alternative. The current addressee may also accept a presentation by repeating part of it, as when Burton says, “Wednesday morning, uh-huh” as evidence that he has registered Connie’s “Wednesday morning.” Each acceptance phase is shaped by the participants working together, and its form and length depend on what the participants need to do to reach the grounding criterion. That may vary as widely as the topics of talk itself.

IV. LOCAL PROJECTS

Speakers say things not merely to get addressees to recognize their intentions, but to get things done. Take this British telephone conversation (8.11.851):

Betty: (rings C’s telephone)

Cathy: Miss Pink’s office - hello

Betty: hello, is Miss Pink in .

Cathy: well, she’s in, but she’s engaged at the moment, who is it?
Betty: oh it’s Professor Worth’s secretary, from Panamerican College
Cathy: m,
Betty: could you give her a message *for me*
Cathy: *certainly*
Betty: uh: m Professor Worth said that, if Miss Pink runs into difficulties, on Monday afternoon, with the standing subcommittee, over the item on Miss Panoff, — —
Cathy: Miss Panoff?
Betty: yes, that Professor Worth would be with Mr Miles all afternoon, so she only had to go round and collect him if she needed him, — —
Cathy: ah, — — thank you very much indeed,
Betty: right
Cathy: Panoff, right *you* are
Betty: *right, *
Cathy: I’ll tell her,
Betty: *thank you*
Cathy: *(2 to 3 syllables)* bye bye
Betty: bye

When Betty asks, “Is Miss Pink in?” she expects Betty to do more than recognize what she means, that she wants to know if Miss Pink is in. Locally, she wants an answer, and she gets one, “Well, she’s in, but she’s engaged at the moment.” She also has a larger purpose, to tell Miss Pink where Professor Worth would be if she needed him. She asks her question as part of that more global project. Betty and Cathy do not stop with illocutionary acts or contributions. They use them to further the “accepted purpose or direction of a talk exchange.” To see how, let us start with Austin’s notion of perlocution.

A perlocutionary effect, or perlocution, is any effect ... addressees that is caused by their understanding of what a speaker meant (Austin, 1962; Davis, 1979). Many perlocutions are intended. When Paul warns Jean, “There’s a bicycle coming up behind you,” he may intend to frighten her so she will jump out of the way. If she believes him, she may become frightened and jump, and if she does not, she will not jump. Other perlocutions are unintended or unexpected. When Paul tells Jean, “It’s six o’clock,” he may intend for her to learn what time it is, but he may not realize she will be upset because she just missed her train.

One perlocution has a privileged status, and it is the primary point of the illocutionary act. When Cathy asks Betty, “Who is it?” the primary intended perlocution (the primary thing she is trying to get Betty to do) is to
tell her who is on the telephone. She would have judged Betty as having misunderstood if she had not recognized this. So, actions like these are expected to come in pairs:

Cathy: who is it?

Betty: oh it’s Professor Worth’s secretary, from Panamerican College

Cathy’s question is expected to be followed by its primary intended perlocution, the answer. Likewise, a request is expected to be followed by compliance, a thanks by an acknowledgment, and an invitation by an acceptance or rejection.

A. Adjacency Pairs

Pairs of utterances like these constitute what Schegloff and Sacks (1973) called *adjacency pairs*. According to them, adjacency pairs have five properties:

1. Adjacency pairs consist of two utterances, a *first pair part* and a *second pair part*.
2. The two parts are spoken by different speakers.
3. The first and second pair parts belong to specific types, for example, question and answer, or thanks and acknowledgment.
4. The form and content of the second pair part depends on the type of the first pair part.
5. Given that a speaker has produced a first pair part, the second pair part is relevant and expectable as the next utterance. This property is called *conditional relevance*.

The first condition needs to be relaxed a bit to accommodate pairs of actions like these:

Paul: Please sit down.

Jean: [Sits down]

Here the second pair part is not an utterance even though it is the primary intended perlocution, the act of complying with the request. We assume that the parts of adjacency pairs may be either linguistic or nonlinguistic.

Adjacency pairs come in many types, some of which are illustrated in Betty and Cathy’s conversation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjacency Pair</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part 1. Summons</td>
<td>Betty: (rings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 2. Response</td>
<td>Cathy: Miss Pink’s Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 1. Greetings</td>
<td>Cathy: hello</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 2. Greetings</td>
<td>Betty: hello</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This is only a sample of potential types.

B. Minimal Joint Projects

It is striking how much of the work in Betty and Cathy’s conversation is accomplished with adjacency pairs. Every one of their utterances is a first or second pair part, and many are both. The conversation is less a sequence of single actions than it is a chain of paired actions. But why?

Adjacency pairs form units in which people achieve certain goals together, certain joint purposes (Clark, 1994). Suppose Paul asks Jean to sit down, and she does. But Jean does not just sit down. She sits down for Paul, in response to Paul’s request, completing what Paul proposed that they do together. Paul’s and Jean’s individual actions together constitute a special type of joint action. Paul proposes what we will call a joint project: with his request he “projects” a joint action in which she sits down for him. Jean, with her response, takes up his proposal and completes the joint project. So it goes with each of the adjacency pairs in Betty and Cathy’s conversation. Joint projects come in many sizes. Adjacency pairs are minimal joint projects.

Joint projects can be accomplished only by the participants working together. When Paul asks Jean to sit down, when he proposes that she sit down for him, she may understand him perfectly and yet be unable or unwilling to take up his proposal. With questions, respondents can deal with proposed joint projects in at least four ways (see Goffman, 1976; Stenström, 1984).

(1) Full compliance. Respondents may comply fully with the project as proposed:

Cathy: who is it?
Betty: oh it’s Professor Worth’s secretary, from Panamerican College
(2) Alteration of project. Respondents may alter the proposed project to something they are able and willing to comply with (1.2.349):

Reynard: Oscar is going to the States?
Charles: well, this is what I heard just before I came away - - -

Charles is not in a position to give a certain "yes" or "no," so he alters the project to one of telling Reynard what he has heard just before he went away. He signals the change in stance with "well." Alterations like this are a common feature of evasive or equivocal answers by politicians and salespeople, as in this example (Bavelas, Black, Chovil, & Mullett, 1990b, p. 149; see also Bavelas, Black, Chovil, & Mullett, 1990a):

A: Your brother told me you have a car for sale. What kind of shape is the car in?
B: Well- it needs—ah, a little bit of minor repairs—ah. Basically it runs, ah—I—that’s what I use it for . . . So, ah, otherwise it’s—it needs a few minor repairs you know, I— . . . it’s not in perfect condition.

Here, after a telltale "well," B tries to say a lot about the car without revealing how bad it really is.

(3) Declination of project. When respondents are unable or unwilling to comply with the project as proposed, they can decline to take it up, usually by offering a reason why they are declining (1.8.40):

Jane: what happens if anybody breaks in and steals it, - are are is are we covered or.
Kate: um - I don’t know quite honestly.

Jane presupposes that Kate knows whether they are covered by insurance, but Kate does not and declines with her reason.

(4) Withdrawal from project. Respondents can also withdraw entirely, for example, by ignoring the question and changing the topic.

With these four options, and there are further subtypes, people create not just adjacency pairs strictly defined (option 1, full compliance), but other paired utterances. The range of pairings results from two people trying to coordinate on a joint project and finding success (option 1), partial success (option 2), failure (option 3), or a termination of the attempt (option 4). Their form comes from what the participants are trying jointly to do and how they succeed, not vice versa.3

C. Turns

In carrying out local projects, people coordinate on who speaks when. The reason seems clear. For Paul to ask Jean a question, he must get her to attend
to his voice, identify his phrasing, and understand what he means precisely as he is uttering what he says. He will not succeed if she is attending to something else—if, for example, she is speaking to *him*. To contribute successfully, they must ordinarily make sure that at each moment only one of them is talking and the other is listening. Likewise, for Paul and Jean to complete a minimal joint project, he must make his proposal before she takes it up, since she cannot know what to take up until she has heard his proposal. That, too, forces them to take turns. Turns emerge from coordinating on contributions and joint projects.

Turns, Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) noted, tend to conform to these, among other, properties of conversations:

1. Speaker change recurs, or, at least, occurs.
2. Overwhelmingly, one party talks at a time.
3. Occurrences of more than one speaker at a time are common, but brief.
4. Transitions from one turn to a next with no gap and no overlap between them are common. Together with transitions characterized by slight gap or slight overlap, they make up the vast majority of transitions.
5. Turn order is not fixed, but varies.
6. Turn size is not fixed, but varies.
7. Length of conversation is not fixed, specified in advance.
8. What parties say is not fixed, specified in advance.
9. Relative distribution of turns is not fixed, specified in advance.

Many of these properties are illustrated in the telephone conversation between Betty and Cathy.

To account for these properties, Sacks et al. argued, we need a system of rules. In conversation, the participants speak in units that are potential turns, so-called *turn-constructional units*. These range in size from a single word (e.g., Cathy’s “Certainly”) to clauses filled with many embedded clauses (e.g., Betty’s “uh:m Professor Worth said that, if. Miss Pink runs into difficulties, on Monday afternoon, with the standing subcommittee, over the item on Miss Panoff, --- that Professor Worth would be with Mr Miles all afternoon, --- so she only had to go round and collect him if she needed him, ---”). Each such unit ends at a *transition-relevance place*, a point at which the next speaker may begin a turn. The participants then follow a set of turn-allocation rules, to quote Sacks et al.:

(1) For any turn, at the initial transition-relevance place of an initial turn-constructional unit:
   (a) If the turn-so-far is so constructed as to involve the use of a “current speaker selects next” technique, then the party so selected has the right and is obliged to take next turn to speak; no others have such rights or obligations, and transfer occurs at that place.
(b) If the turn-so-far is so constructed as not to involve the use of a “current speaker selects next” technique, then self-selection for next speakership may, but need not, be instituted; first starter acquires rights to a turn, and transfer occurs at that place.

(c) If the turn-so-far is so constructed as not to involve the use of a “current speaker selects next” technique, then current speaker may, but need not continue, unless another self-selects.

(2) If, at the initial transition-relevance place of an initial turn-constructional unit, neither la nor lb has operated, and, following the provision of 1c, current speaker has continued, then the rule-set a–c reapply at next transition-relevance place, and recursively at each next transition-relevance place, until transfer is effected. (p. 704)

The result of these rules is an orderly sequence of turns.

These rules look more complicated than they actually are. Rule 1a reflects the structure of minimal joint projects. When Cathy asks Betty, “Who is it?” she is using a “current speaker selects next” technique to oblige Betty to take the next turn, an obligation that begins at the end of Cathy’s question. Rules 1b and 1c reflect the structure of contributions. For Cathy to complete the presentation phase of a contribution, she must ordinarily complete a turn construction unit, such as “Well, she’s in, but she’s engaged at the moment.” If Betty had spoken up at that point, she would have been following Rule 1b. In fact, Cathy continues to the next turn-constructional unit—the presentation phase of the next contribution—by saying, “Who is it?”

These rules, according to Sacks et al., account for the nine properties listed earlier. Take brief overlaps (property 3). For adjacency pairs, according to rule 1a, Cathy should try to project the end of Betty’s turn so she can begin her response at that point. That is, she should try to predict the end of Betty’s turn, not merely react to it, as is assumed in an alternative model of turn taking (Duncan, 1972, 1973). But if Cathy’s projection is off, her response may overlap. Indeed, when Betty says, “Could you give her a message . . . ,” Cathy apparently projects the turn’s end after “message” and responds “certainly.” The trouble is, Betty happens to extend her question with “for me,” which overlaps with Cathy’s “certainly.” The overlap was an inadvertent consequence of projecting the turn’s end.

Turns at talking are not the whole story (see, e.g., Brennan, 1990; Edelsky, 1981; C. Goodwin, 1987; Houtkoop & Mazeland, 1985). Speakers quite deliberately use overlaps, interruptions, and unfinished turns as devices for completing contributions, as we have seen in earlier examples. They often deliberately produce “uh-huh” and “yeah” to overlap the ends of what they acknowledge. They sometimes interrupt with precise timing to indicate references they already understand (Jefferson, 1973). Other signals in conversation are not performed in turns at all, and these include head
nods, smiles, frowns, empathetic winces, eye gaze, and unison completions of utterances (Bavelas et al., 1986, 1988; Chovil, 1991–1992; Tannen, 1983). What is important in the end are the joint actions by which the participants coordinate on the “accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange.” Some of these actions lead to turns at talk, but others do not.

Conversations, then, are ordinarily dominated by adjacency pairs, which emerge as the participants try to complete joint projects. The minimal joint project takes two utterances, the first from the person proposing the project, and the second from the person taking it up. The two utterances have to be done in sequence, and that leads to turns. The participants also have to ground what they say as they go along, and that also leads to turns. Turns are not really “turns at talk;” that would be taking only the speaker’s point of view. They are “turns at who speaks and who listens,” and occasionally people have reasons and the wherewithal for doing both at once.

V. EXTENDED PROJECTS

Conversations pose a paradox. On one hand, people engage in conversations, as in any joint activity, to do things with each other. On the other hand, they can never know in advance what they will actually do. Betty and Cathy’s telephone conversation is a good illustration. Betty rang up to tell Miss Pink where Professor Worth would be that afternoon. When she discovered Miss Pink was busy, she recruited Cathy to pass on the information. Cathy had her own aims in answering the telephone. Her job was to take messages and keep callers from interrupting Miss Pink’s meeting, but she had no idea who was calling or what they would say. Even though Betty and Cathy began with their own purposes, they could not know what they would end up doing. As Sacks et al. (1974) argued, they had to manage their conversation turn by turn. They had to adapt their actions to deal with the exigencies of each moment. In conversation, the participants’ actions are local and opportunistic.

The paradox leaves us with a puzzle: how do people in conversation ever achieve their broader goals or interests. How do they engineer the large joint projects of their talk exchange? Part of the answer is by the clever use of minimal joint projects.

A. Pre-sequences

One remarkable device for achieving larger joint projects is what Schegloff (1980) and others have called pre-sequences. A good example is the pre-question, as illustrated in this sequence from an American conversation:

Adam: Let me ask you a question off the subject though.
Bret: Okay.
Adam: You're in, you're living in the Castle Park area?
Bret: That's right.
Adam: I grew up in Oak Cliff.
Bret: Did you really?
Adam: Yes, I did. Uh, just close to Methodist Hospital.
Bret: Okay, yeah.
Adam: On Candy, C A N D Y.
Bret: Right
Adam: Oh, in fact, I lived there oh, until nineteen, late nineteen fifties.
Bret: Okay, okay.
Adam: And that area, is it changing back again? So many people are moving back into those old houses and are restoring them.

When Adam says, "Let me ask you a question off the subject though," he is performing a pre-question. He is asking Bret to allow him to ask a question, and Bret consents with "Okay." But what does Adam do next? He does not ask what he wants to ask, Is the Castle Park area changing back again? Instead, he takes up preliminaries to that question, establishing that he and Bret both know the area. Only then does he ask, "Is it changing back again?" Pre-questions request space not just for questions, but for preliminaries to those questions. They are, as Schegloff (1980) put it, preliminaries to preliminaries. The result is a structure like this:

I. Pre-question plus consent
II. Preliminaries to a question plus answer
III. Question plus answer

Locally, the pre-question and its response (I) form a minimal joint project: Adam seeks permission to ask a question and Bret grants it. But in doing that, Adam projects a larger enterprise consisting of I, II, and III, and when Bret consents, he is agreeing to that enterprise, too. Put another way, Adam and Bret use the minimal joint project (I) to initiate the larger joint project (I + II + III).

Pre-questions are only one type of pre-sequence. Just as pre-questions gain consent to ask a question, pre-announcements gain consent to make an announcement, pre-invitations to make an invitation, pre-requests to make a request, and pre-narratives to tell a story. Here are some examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-sequence</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-question</td>
<td>A. Let me ask you a question off the subject though.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
<td>B. Okay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-announcement</td>
<td>A. tell you who I met yesterday—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
<td>b. who</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pre-invitation  A. Are you doing anything tonight?
Response      B. No.
Pre-request   A. Do you have hot chocolate?
Response      B. Yes, we do.
Summons      A. Hey, Molly
Response      B. Yes?
Telephone summons A. (rings telephone)
Response      B. Miss Pink's office
Pre-closing statement A. Well okay
Response      B. Okay
Pre-narrative A. I acquired an absolutely magnificent sewing machine,
                  by foul means, did I tell you about that?
Response      B. no

For each pre-sequence, once A has got B's consent, he or she has B's permission to proceed with the question, announcement, invitation, request, conversation, closing, or narrative.

B. Indirect Speech Acts

Another type of extended project achieved with pre-sequences is the indirect speech act. When Jean asks Paul, "Can you reach the salt?" she appears to be asking whether or not he can reach the salt, a yes/no question. Yet she also appears to be asking him to pass the salt, a request. In traditional terminology, the question is a direct or literal speech act, or illocutionary act, and the request is an indirect speech act. In Grice's scheme, indirect speech acts are implicatures (Searle, 1975a). Jean expects Paul to see that she knows he can reach the salt, so she cannot be asking whether or not he can. She expects him instead to see that she is flouting the maxim of quality, "Be truthful," and to work out that she is requesting him to pass the salt. Indirect speech acts come in a great many types, though the best studied are requests, the type we will concentrate on here.

Treating indirect speech acts as implicatures has problems. One is that indirect speech acts range in how conventional they are (Clark, 1979; Morgan, 1978). "Could you pass the salt?" is a highly conventional way of requesting salt. "Are you close enough to the salt to pass it to me?" is not. Addressees view the first yes/no question ("Could you . . . ?") as pro forma, not to be taken seriously, but the second one ("Are you close enough . . . ?") as serious. As a result, they are more likely to answer "yes" to "Are you close enough?" than to "Could you?" before complying with the indirect request (Clark, 1979). Implicatures give us no account for these variations. Worse, they give us no account for the collaborative way in which indirect requests get taken up. Let us see how.
In conversation, requests always arise as parts of local joint projects. Requests and their uptake take at least two steps, as in this hypothetical example:

Waitress: What'll ya have? [request for order]
Customer: A hot dog and an order of fries. [uptake of request]

The waitress asks for the customer's order and gets it immediately, the two turns forming a minimal joint project. Other requests require a more complicated uptake (Merritt, 1976, p. 333):

Waitress: What'll ya have girls? [request for order]
Customer: What's the soup of the day?
Waitress: Clam chowder.
Customer: I'll have a bowl of clam chowder and a salad with Russian dressing. [uptake of request]

Again, the waitress asks for the order, but before the customer can comply, she needs to know the soup of the day, so she initiates an embedded joint project to find out. The embedded project is designed to satisfy a precondition on her uptake. Every request has preconditions, and many are dealt with in the course of local joint projects.

Prerequests are often based on such preconditions (Gordon & Lakoff, 1971; Labov & Fanshel, 1977; Searle, 1975a). Let us consider four cases. Case 1 is a spontaneous example from a notions store (Merritt, 1976, p. 324):

Customer: Do you have uh size C flashlight batteries? [prerequest]
Server: Yes sir. [answer to prerequest]
Customer: I'll have four please [request]
Server: (turns to get) [uptake of request]

The customer checks on the availability of size C flashlight batteries before he makes his request. Turn 1 queries a precondition for the request, so it is heard as a prerequest. Often, the respondent can short-cut the process by anticipating the initiator's request, as in Case 2 (Merritt, 1976, p. 337):

Customer: Do you have the pecan Danish today? [prerequest]
Server: Yes we do. [answer to prerequest] Would you like one of those? [offer]
Customer: Yes please [uptake of offer]
Server: O.K. (turns to get) [uptake of request]

Again, the customer checks on a precondition, but this time the server preempts the customer's request with an offer of a pecan Danish.
From here it is a short step for respondents to anticipate the request entirely, as in Case 3, a telephone call to a business (Clark, 1979, p. 441):

Caller: Do you close before seven tonight? \([\text{prerequest} + \text{request}]\)
Merchant: Uh, no. \([\text{answer to prerequest}]\). We're open until nine o'clock. \([\text{offer of information, or uptake of request}]\)

The merchant takes up the prerequest, but without waiting for an explicit request, he provides the information he assumed the customer wanted. Respondents can go one step further and treat the prerequest as \textit{pro forma}, not answering it, and offer the wanted information immediately, as in Case 4 (Clark, 1979, p. 444):

Caller: Could you tell me what time you close tonight? \([\text{prerequest} + \text{request}]\)
Merchant: Nine. \([\text{offer of information, or uptake of request}]\)

The caller here uses a highly conventional prerequest ("Could you tell me?") that invites the merchant to treat it as \textit{pro forma}.

Prerequests are useful precisely because they leave the respondents options for uptake, or, at least, make the appearance of doing so. In Case 1 the prerequest elicits a literal answer alone; in Case 2, a literal answer plus an offer; in Case 3, a literal answer plus compliance; and in Case 4, compliance alone. Which of these are indirect requests? This may be the wrong question because it depends on how they were construed. Cases 1, 2, and 3 were treated as questions, but Cases 2 and 3 were treated as initiating something more as well. Only case 4 was treated as a request \textit{pure and simple}.

The construal of prerequests is partly in the hands of the respondents. In one study (Clark, 1979), a woman telephoned 50 restaurants and asked, "Do you accept credit cards?" The restaurant managers gave her three types of replies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Direct answer</th>
<th>Indirect compliance</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Yes, we do.</td>
<td></td>
<td>we accept Mastercard and Visa.</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Yes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. We accept Mastercard and Visa.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The same prerequest was treated as a direct question by 44% of the restaurant managers, as a question plus a request by 38%, and as a request alone by 16%. So, when the caller asked, "Do you accept credit cards?" was she performing an indirect request? Yes and no. She deliberately left the construal of her utterance for the manager to determine. When a manager said, "Yes, we do," it would have been odd to correct him, "Oh, but I wanted to know what credit cards you accept." He could justifiably have complained, "Then why didn't you say so?" Indirect requests are jointly determined, though only ostensibly so in the most conventional cases.
People should often give such options if they want to be practical. For many requests, it will save time to check on certain preconditions first, because if they cannot be satisfied, there is no use in going further. If the answer to “Do you have size C flashlight batteries?” had been “No,” the follow-up request would have been unnecessary. Are people really that practical? If they are, they should design their prerequisites to address what they think is the greatest potential obstacle to compliance by the respondent. Paul wants to borrow *Huckleberry Finn* from Jean. If he thinks she owns the book, but may be unwilling to lend it, he might ask, “Would you mind lending me *Huckleberry Finn* for a couple of days?” But if he is not sure she owns it, he might ask, “Do you happen to own a copy of *Huckleberry Finn*?” Evidence suggests that speakers choose their requests on just these grounds (Francik & Clark, 1985; Gibbs, 1986).

It is also polite to give options, as long as they are the right options (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Clark & Schunk, 1980; Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1983). When Paul asks Jean, “Would you mind lending me *Huckleberry Finn*?” he indicates that she might mind, and that is being considerate of her. He is also giving her the chance to decline the proposed project by saying yes to the precondition, “Yes, sorry, I’m reading it myself,” and that is considerate as well. In contrast, if he had asked “Won’t you ever lend me *Huckleberry Finn*?” he indicates a different potential obstacle, that she will probably never want to lend him the book, and to accuse her of stinginess is a threat to her self-esteem. People have an immense range of prerequisites to choose from depending on what they want to accomplish, the obstacles they see, and how polite they want to be.

C. Emergence of Conversations

Conversations are activities that individual people are “in,” but never by themselves. At least two people must be “in” the same conversation at the same time, or it is not a conversation. As a result, two people trying to talk with each other must coordinate: (1) their simultaneous entry into the conversation; (2) what they do in it, its body; and (3) their simultaneous exit from it. How do they manage these feats? One important resource is the presequence, as we can see in Betty and Cathy’s telephone conversation.

The opening of a telephone conversation is ordinarily initiated by a caller causing the recipient’s telephone to ring (Schegloff, 1968, 1979, 1986), as here:

Betty: (rings C’s telephone)
Cathy: Miss Pink’s office - hello
Betty: hello

Betty’s first action, a summons, is a request to enter a conversation with whoever is willing and able to answer that telephone. Cathy’s response,
"Miss Pink's office," displays such a willingness and ability. It also identifies Cathy as speaking for Miss Pink and willing to accept calls in that role. The purpose of the summons and response is endorsed by the exchange of greetings initiated by Cathy's "hello." The summons–response exchange, then, is a presequence by which Betty and Cathy engineer joint entry into a conversation. It commits them to an extended joint project, a conversation together, even though they do not yet know what it will be about.

The body of the conversation is ordinarily initiated by the caller, too. Here Betty sets up a prerequest of a request to talk to Miss Pink:

Betty: is Miss Pink in .

Cathy: well, she's in, but she's engaged at the moment

Cathy recognizes Betty's projected request but blocks it because Miss Pink is engaged at the moment. Betty, as a result, takes an opportunistic action. After identifying herself, presumably to establish her legitimacy, she sets up a second prerequest to accomplish much the same thing as she would have accomplished with the first:

Betty: could you give her a message *for me*

Cathy: *certainly*

This time Cathy accedes, and Betty makes the request proper, allowing the two of them to complete Betty's purpose for calling.

Making a joint exit from a conversation is also a feat because the participants must pull it off simultaneously (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). Betty cannot hang up once she is done, because a unilateral withdrawal would offend Cathy by letting her believe she was still in the conversation when she was not. So Betty initiates yet another presequence to open up the closing section of the conversation:

Betty: right

Cathy: Panoff, right you are

Betty produces a preclosing statement, "right," with which she proposes closing the conversation, and Cathy accepts that proposal with "right you are." That done, they enter the closing section proper:

Cathy: I'll tell her,

Betty: *thank you*

Cathy: *(2 to 3 syllables)* bye bye

Betty: bye

In it they review pieces of the conversation and exchange "bye bye" and "bye," all so that they can hang up simultaneously without cutting each other off.

The entry, body, and exit of a conversation are needed so the participants
can get in the conversation together, do their work together, and get out together. These sections change shape depending on the number of participants (Sacks et al., 1974), the medium of communication (e.g., face-to-face vs. telephone vs. computer terminals; Clark & Brennan, 1991; Cohen, 1984; Oviatt & Cohen, 1991), the formality of the setting (Irvine, 1984), cultural expectations (Frake, 1964; Gumperz, Aulakh, & Kaltman, 1982; Keenan & Ochs, 1979; Schiffrin, 1984), whether the participants are strangers, acquaintances, or intimates (Coupland, Coupland, & Robinson, 1992; Irvine, 1974; Tannen, 1984), and other factors. Regardless of the situation, the problem to be solved is this: how to enter, carry out, and finish off extended joint projects by local means.

VI. NARRATIVES

Language is ordinarily used for greatly extended projects, global projects. Two people might plan a party, discuss a film, negotiate a contract, or gossip, or one person might buy a car from another, pass information on to others, or tell others stories. People try to establish and manage “accepted purposes and directions of a talk exchange” that are global in scope, and what emerges are the longer stretches of language use called discourse. Although the Latin discursus means “conversation,” the term now covers any circumscribed piece of language use created for a coherent purpose, including lectures, narratives, essays, novels, newspaper articles, and many more.

Global projects are more complex than local projects. Local projects get proposed by one person and taken up, altered, or declined by another. It takes more serious social engineering to complete the sale of a car, the telling of a joke, or the negotiation of a contract. The participants also have auxiliary goals—establishing social solidarity, maintaining face, impressing each other, keeping certain information hidden, for example—and these complicate the engineering still further (Greene, Lindsay, & Hawn, 1990; Tracy & Moran, 1983; Waldron, Cegala, Sharkey, & Keboul, 1990). Still, the fundamental problem is how to initiate, carry out, and complete global projects by local means. We will consider the issue for narratives.

A. Entering Narratives

Narratives are a type of discourse in which people describe a series of events from an actual or fictional world in the past (Labov, 1972; Labov & Waletzky, 1967; Polanyi, 1989). In conversation they are common in the form of stories, jokes, and anecdotes. Narratives are special in several ways. They tend to be told, or controlled, by a single speaker. They are usually told in extended turns. And they have a special organization. These features pose two problems for the participants of a conversation. The first is how to set
narrators up with the extended turn they need for their narrative. The second is how to coordinate the ideas, or mental representations, of the narrator and audience as they navigate the narrative world. Let us consider the entry problem first.

Narratives, like all joint activities, must be entered into together by all the participants, and that takes coordination. In conversation, narratives ordinarily need an occasion: (1) the participants want the narrator to tell the narrative; (2) they want this narrative in particular; and (3) they want it told now. These occasions can be engineered by either the narrators or their partners.

Narrators are often explicitly requested to provide narratives, as in this example (Polanyi, 1989, p. 67):

Bill: I heard second hand or whatever that you got robbed
Susan: Yeah
Bill: That's distressing. Was it near your house?
Susan: Yeah. We parked down at the hill you know (continues story)

In his first turn, Bill brings up an episode Susan could tell a story about, hinting that he would like to hear the story now. Susan could easily have construed his utterance as a request for the story, but she seems reluctant to do that. In his second turn, Bill reemphasizes his interest and indicates that he wants to hear this particular story now. He accomplishes that by asking her, "Was it near your house?" which forces her to start in on the story setting. So Bill initiates a global joint project, Susan's telling him the story of the robbery, through two local joint projects, the assertion and assent, and the question and answer.

It is more complicated for narrators to introduce their own stories into a conversation because they have to persuade their partners that they want to hear the story now. They accomplish this in what Sacks (1974) called the preface. Consider this example (Polanyi, 1989, pp. 50–51):

Livia: Do not eat on the New York Thruway
Carol: Yeah, no don't it's
Alice: I forget
Carol: I mean I mean Did I ever tell you the story about the water? I mean the coke?

The discussion about eating on the New York Thruway reminded Carol of a story she wanted to tell Alice. But she could not launch into it straightaway. She had to get her partners to agree that they wanted to hear it now. The cardinal rule of stories is, "Don't tell people a story they have already
heard,” so Carol’s technique was to ask them, “Did I ever tell you the story about the water? I mean the coke?” This served as a prenarrative, and when no one objected, she started her story:

Carol: I went i- . . . I always drink coke, right?
Livia: Right.
Carol: So, Livia is thr- . . . walking around with this gallon of spring water and I can’t understand (continues story)

Conversational partners can of course decline a story, as here (2.14.600):

Jane: did I tell you, when were in this African village, and *- they were all out in the fields, - the*
Kate: *yes you did, yes, - yes*
Jane: babies left alone, -
Kate: yes .

Once Kate answered yes, Jane aborted the story. In all these examples, the participants negotiated the entry into a global joint project, a story, by means of local joint projects, the prenarrative and its response.

B. Situation Models

The participants in any joint activity must keep track of what the others are thinking, or the activity will collapse. When people enter an activity, they presuppose they share a certain common ground, certain mutual knowledge, mutual beliefs, and mutual assumptions (Clark & Marshall, 1981; Lewis, 1969; Schiffer, 1972). With each joint action they take, they add to this common ground (Clark & Schaefer, 1989; Clark & Wilkes-Gibbs, 1986; Stalnaker, 1978). For their additions to be orderly, the participants must each have a representation of the current state of the activity. They will be able to understand the next utterance only if they can figure out how it changes the current state. The point here merely echoes Grice’s cooperative principle, “Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.”

Suppose Jean is telling Paul how to get from San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park to Fisherman’s Wharf, or how an interview went, or why it is his turn to clean their apartment. In each case, they take for granted a shared representation of the situation being described and build on it. For the directions, the two of them might assume a shared mental map of San Francisco, and as Jean gives directions, Paul tries to imagine the route on his mental map. For the interview, they might assume that they both know who the interviewer
is, why Jean was being interviewed, and the circumstances of the interview, and as Jean narrates, Paul tries to build a model of these agents and what they did. For cleaning the apartment, they might assume shared beliefs about the rights and responsibilities of roommates, and as they talk, they try to build a model of where they agree and disagree in their beliefs.

So people's mental representation of the current state of an activity includes what is often called a situation model: a representation of the situation being talked about (Perrig & Kintsch, 1985; Schmalhofer & Glavanov, 1986; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983). Precisely what is represented in these models has been an issue of debate. Among the types of information they may represent are these:

1. **Visual information**, for example, a mental map of a city or building (Perrig & Kintsch, 1985; but see Taylor & Tversky, 1992a, 1992b).

2. **Spatial information**, for example, where one object is with respect to another (Mani & Johnson-Laird, 1982; Miller & Johnson-Laird, 1976; Morrow & Clark, 1988; Taylor & Tversky, 1992a, 1992b). Narrators and their audiences, for example, can foreground certain parts of the model or certain objects within the model (Bower & Morrow, 1990; Glenberg, Meyer, & Lindem, 1987; Morrow, Bower, & Greenspan, 1989; Morrow, Greenspan, & Bower, 1987).

3. **Scripts of routine cultural activities**, for example, what people are expected to do in a restaurant or in a doctor's office (Bower, Black, & Turner, 1979; R. C. Schank, 1975; R. Schank & Abelson, 1977).

4. **Temporal information**, for example, how one event occurs after another (Clark & Clark, 1968; Foos, 1992; Taylor, 1992; van Jaarsveld & Schreuder, 1986).

5. **Causal information**, for example, what causes a light to turn on or a person to become sad (Black & Bern, 1981; Myers, Sinjo, & Duffy, 1987; Trabasso & Sperry, 1985; Trabasso & van den Broek, 1985).

6. **Kinematic information**, for example, the way things move (Hegarty, 1992; Hegarty, Just, & Morrison, 1988).


The idea is that the participants in a discourse update their situation models as the discourse progresses, adding, deleting, or changing elements to mirror changes in the situation being described (Gentner & Stevens, 1983; Johnson-Laird, 1983).

Situation models are essential if the participants are to coordinate what
they are thinking. Listeners often need to keep track simply to know what speakers are referring to. In one study (Morrow, 1985), people memorized the layout of an apartment and then read brief descriptions like this:

Bill and Kathy prepared to go for a drive to the mountains.
Bill went outside to wait for Kathy in the car.
Kathy freshened up before leaving.
Suddenly Kathy noticed that she didn’t have her sunglasses.
She walked from the study into the bedroom.
She didn’t find the glasses in the room.

When asked “Which room is being referred to?” they answered “bedroom” 77% of the time and “study” 21%. When the italicized sentence was replaced with “She walked past the living room to the bedroom,” they answered “living room” 73% of the time and “bedroom” only 21%. To make these assignments, readers had to do more than register the word and sentence meanings. They had to follow the narrator’s focus of attention and imagine the room Kathy would be in at the moment the narrator announced she did not find her glasses. The narrator signaled the focus of attention through the use of prepositions (into vs. to), verb aspect (walked vs. was walking), deixis (this vs. that, come vs. go), and many other features (Clark, 1973; Fillmore, 1975; Talmy, 1975, 1983, 1988). The issue is what the narrators’ and their audience’s situation models represent and how, and that issue is hardly resolved.

C. Narrative Organization

Narrators and their audience know they have to coordinate situation models, and that helps dictate the way narrators organize their stories and the way their audience interprets them. As an illustration, consider what Labov (1972) called narratives of personal experience. These narratives, he argued, tend to divide into six parts, which we will illustrate with Susan’s narrative about the robbery (Polanyi, 1989).

1. **Abstract.** Narrators usually begin with an abstract, a brief summary of the entire story. In Susan’s narrative, it was expressed by Bill, “I heard secondhand or whatever that you got robbed.”

2. **Orientation.** Narrators then create an orientation, a stage setting about the who, when, what, and where of the story. Susan began, “We parked down at the hill you know... we were walking home. It was late at night.”
3. **Complicating action.** Next, narrators describe the complicating action, what happened. Susan, for example, went on, “and then this strange car pulled up and we thought ‘oh,’” and continued telling what happened.

4. **Evaluation.** Narrators ordinarily describe the complicating action along with what Labov called an evaluation, “the point of the narrative, its raison d’être: why it was told, what the narrator is getting at” (Labov, 1972, p. 266). As Susan related what happened, she made remarks such as these: “You know, it was real scary cause you know at a whim he could have shot at us,” “Oh God,” and “It was really like a movie.”

5. **Result or resolution.** Narrators finish off the complicating action, usually, with a result or resolution, how the complicating action got resolved. In Susan’s narrative, she said, “And so when [the police] came they said ‘Come identify them. We’ve caught them.’ It was ridiculous. It was about five or ten minutes after.”

6. **Coda.** At the end, narrators produce the coda, a signal that they have completed their narrative. In Susan’s case, she turned to her audience and asked, “Has anything like that ever happened to you? Have you ever had your purse snatched?”

Narrators are really guides. They help their audience create a mental model of the narrative world, and then take them on a tour through it. The six parts of spontaneous narratives reflect their guiding strategies.

The abstract and coda mark the boundaries of the narrative world. The narrators and audience usually begin in the here-and-now, talking about people, things, and happenings around them. Susan, Bill, Livia, and Nancy might have been sitting around a kitchen table drinking coffee. For a narrative, they must leave the here-and-now together, enter the narrative world, conjure up its own people, things, and happenings, and, at the end, leave that world and return to the here-and-now. They enter the narrative world by means of the abstract, which offers a brief description of that world (“you got robbed”), and they leave it via the coda, which refocuses their attention on the here-and-now (“Has anything like that ever happened to you?”).

It is the orientation that supplies the initial frame of reference for the narrative world. The idea is that narrators cannot describe a complicating action without presupposing (1) the people taking that action, (2) the time and place of the action, and (3) other background facts. Nancy’s initial orientation allows her audience to imagine the place (“we parked down at the hill you know”), the time (“it was late at night”), and other circumstances (“we were walking home”) to set up her vulnerability to a robbery. It gives just enough background for her to introduce the complicating ac-
tion ("a strange car pulled up . . . and then this guy ran around and around to the back of it"). The audience could not know the significance of these events if they had not known Nancy was on the street alone with a friend late at night. The orientation is essential to creating a vivid model of the narrative world.

Labov's complicating action and evaluation correspond to what have sometimes been called the foreground and background of a narrative (Grimes, 1975; Hopper, 1979; Hopper & Thompson, 1980; Polanyi, 1989; Polanyi-Bowditch, 1976). Narrators treat certain events in their story—Labov called them narrative events—as foreground. They describe these events in strict chronological order (except in flashbacks and flashforwards), often introducing them with and or and then, in order to stake out a clear temporal path through the narrative world, as here:

and then this strange car pulled up
and we thought "oh"
and then this guy ran around and around to the back of it
and he held his gun
and said "Gimme your purse"
and I said I didn't have one
and I just gave him my wallet fast

These events define the chronological foundation of what happened. The background is everything else. It is used to comment on, evaluate, give reasons for, or otherwise situate what happened, as in these clauses:

and he had an actual gun
You know, it was real scary
cause you know at a whim he could have shot at us

Here Nancy describes relevant background about the robber’s gun and her emotions.

If the foreground is intended to identify the time course of the narrative, it should describe events that resemble clock ticks, and it does. The events tend to be punctual, goal directed, volitional, affirmative, and real, such as hitting, noticing, telling, and finding. These are ideal for the foreground because they can be ordered chronologically. The background, in contrast, tends to describe states or properties that are durative, stative, passive, negative, and hypothetical, such as knowing, having, sleeping, seeing, and not finding. In English it is common to express the foreground in independent clauses (not subordinate clauses) and in the simple past or historical present tense (not in the progressive), as illustrated in Nancy’s narrative.
clauses beginning “and then this strange car pulled up.” Subordinate clauses and other tenses and verb forms are reserved for backgrounded information.

Narrators use the foreground and background to guide their audience on the paths they have chosen to take through their narrative worlds. By exploring these constructions, they can highlight protagonists against minor characters, important props against unimportant ones, essential events against inessential ones. And they get their audience to infer the right causal relations among the events, which events were the causes of which. People have been shown to recall stories around the foregrounded events and the causal relations between them (Black & Bern, 1981; Trabasso & van den Broek, 1985). The more causal connections a foregrounded event has, the better it is remembered.

Narratives, therefore, emerge with an organization shaped by the narrators’ attempts to coordinate with their audience. The two must coordinate their entry and exit from the narrative world, and that leads to the abstract and coda. The two must create a starting model of the narrative world, and that requires an orientation. And the two must coordinate on the path that narrators have chosen to take through the events of the narrative world, and that separates foreground from background, the actions proper from their evaluation of them. The point of a narrative is ordinarily to create emotions—surprise, mystification, amazement, sympathy, suspense—and that cannot be ordinarily done without a vivid mental re-creation of the narrative world by both narrators and their audience (Gerrig, 1993; Walton, 1990).

VII. CONCLUSION

Whenever people use language, they are taking actions. But their individual actions are not autonomous. They are parts of joint actions in which the participants are trying to coordinate with each other. When Paul speaks to Jean, he expects her to try to attend to, identify, and understand what he is saying while he is speaking. In particular, they try to reach the mutual belief that she has understood him well enough for current purposes, and that requires coordination at all levels. Speakers and addressees cannot do without each other. Illocutionary acts cannot succeed without coordinated acts of recognition. Speaker’s meaning makes no sense without the reciprocal addressee’s understanding.

But people use language to do things with each other. Paul may use an utterance to propose a local project for Jean and him to accomplish together; for example, she is to tell him what time it is. She, in turn, has the choice of taking up the project as is, altering it, declining it, or withdrawing altogether. Remarkably, people can accomplish extended projects only by
means of such local projects. Discourses are global joint activities that emerge from an artful and opportunistic series of local joint actions.

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Endnotes

1. All of the examples marked with this notation come from a large corpus of spontaneous British conversations transcribed by Svartvik and Quirk (1980). Each example is identified by text number (here 1.3) and beginning line (560). In the transcription, a comma indicates the end of a tone unit, - and . indicate long short pauses, colons (: ) indicate stretched vowels, and adjacent pairs of phrases in asterisks indicate overlapping speech.


3. For a related notion, see the discussion of preferred response by Davidson (1990), Houtkoop (1987), Levinson (1983), Pomerantz (1984), and Sacks (1987).

References


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