

Squibs and Discussion

Linguistic Inquiry 2.2 (1971)

IN A MANNER OF SPEAKING*
Arnold M. Zwicky,
The Ohio State University

To what extent is it possible to predict certain properties of words (syntactic, semantic, or phonological), given others? Insofar as there are such dependencies among properties, what general principles explain them? Put another way: What sorts of word classes are there, and why these and not others? In what follows, I consider a class of English words and enumerate their common properties, by way of asking why this rather long list of properties should happen to characterize a large and open word class in English.

The class in question is exemplified by

- (1) shout, scream, yell, holler, bellow, whisper, shriek, wail, lisp, hoot, growl, grunt, mumble, moan, howl, mutter, whine

all of which are verbs referring to intended acts of communication by speech and describing physical characteristics of the speech act. Hence the label *manner-of-speaking verbs* is appropriate.

I take up first those properties of manner-of-speaking verbs which, it seems to me, are most likely to be predictable from their semantic characteristics; these are properties A through F below.

A. A manner-of-speaking verb is an activity verb (Lakoff 1966, Lee 1969, 41-45); it occurs in the progressive, in the imperative, as a complement of *force*, and in the frame *What John did was* ____ (among other tests):

- (2) He was shouting obscenities.
- (3) Yell to George about the new quota.

* This work was supported in part by the National Science Foundation through Grant GN-534.1 from the Office of Science Information Service to the Computer and Information Science Research Center, The Ohio State University, and in part by the 1970 MSSB Advanced Research Seminar in Mathematical Linguistics (sponsored by the NSF through a grant to the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Stanford, Calif., and held at The Ohio State University).

- (4) I forced them to whisper that they were tired.
 (5) What John did was lisp French to Mary.

B. The referent of the subject of a manner-of-speaking verb is typically human.

- (6) { My father }
 { *My desk } howled for me to pick up the chair.

C. A manner-of-speaking verb may have an indirect object, marked by *to*, and the referent of this object is typically human.

- (7) Scream "Up the Queen" (to the first person who passes).
 (8) *She will howl "O my stars and garters" to the essence of friendship.

D. A manner-of-speaking verb may have a direct object, which is either a nominal referring to the product of a speech act, a desentential complement (*that*-clause, indirect question, or infinitival construction) or a direct quotation.

- (9) Hoffman will probably mutter { a foul oath
 two or three
 words
 something un-
 intelligible }.

- (10) Martin shrieked { that there were cockroaches
 in the caviar
 how we could free him from
 the trap
 for Pierre to fetch a nurse }.

- (11) Regrettably, someone mumbled, "I suspect poison."

E. Desentential complements of a manner-of-speaking verb are construed nonfactively (Kiparsky and Kiparsky, to appear); the speaker of

- (12) The simian usher grunted that all the seats were taken.

is not committed to the belief that all the seats were taken, and

- (13) *He howled Joan's being eager to eat peanuts.

is ungrammatical, because the *Poss-ing* complement must be construed factively.

F. Manner-of-speaking verbs may be used parenthetically:

(14) The line, she {moaned
growled}, was busy.

Each of the properties A-F is shared by many verbs other than manner-of-speaking verbs, of course, and there is at least some degree of predictability among these properties. Thus, it appears that verbs that occur with significant direct quotations (i.e. quotations that report both the content and the form of the speech act; see Sadock 1969, 316-324) as objects also occur with nonfactive *that*-clauses as objects. And, in general, verbs which take *that*-clauses as objects may be used parenthetically. In any event, it seems likely that properties A through F either are consequents of the fact that manner-of-speaking verbs refer to intended acts of communication by speech and described physical characteristics of these acts, or else are directly predictable from such consequents. The remaining properties are more opaque.

G. The direct object of a manner-of-speaking verb is deletable, and when such a verb occurs with no objects (direct or indirect), it is not necessarily interpreted as referring to an intended act of communication by speech; instead, it describes merely the physical characteristics of a sound. Thus,

(15) My companion {mumbled
shrieked
hollered
whined
hooted}.

does not imply that my companion made an attempt to convey information, only that he made a noise of some kind. Other *verba dicenda* are different: *say*, *tell*, and *ask*, for example, do not permit deletion of an indefinite object (when they occur without an object, the understood object must be supplied from the context), while *speak*, although it occurs freely without an object, takes only an extremely restricted class of objects (none of them desentential):

(16) I wondered who was coming, but no one
{said
told (me)
asked}.

(17) Margaret spoke (to me).

(18) *Margaret spoke $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{that there were cockroaches} \\ \text{in the caviar} \\ \text{how we could free her from} \\ \text{the trap} \\ \text{for Pierre to fetch a nurse} \\ \text{Joan's eagerness to eat pea-} \\ \text{nuts} \end{array} \right\}$.

H. A manner-of-speaking verb may also be interpreted noncommunicatively when its object is a direct quotation:

(19) The neighbors $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{howled} \\ \text{moaned} \\ \text{wailed} \end{array} \right\}$ "Futz."

However, the verb is interpreted communicatively if there is an indirect object, no matter what the nature of the direct object. Thus,

(20) ?She howled $\left(\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{"Futz"} \\ \text{something} \end{array} \right\} \right)$ to me, but she wasn't saying anything to me.

seems contradictory. That is, properties G and H are exceptions to the general statement that manner-of-speaking verbs are interpreted communicatively. Two classes of apparent, rather than real, exceptions are discussed in I and K below.

I. A manner-of-speaking verb may occur with certain directional adverbials, some of which closely resemble indirect object clauses and are mutually exclusive with them:

(21) Our guide $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{whispered} \\ \text{moaned} \\ \text{hollered} \end{array} \right\}$ in our direction.

(22) He $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{wailed} \\ \text{bellowed} \\ \text{mumbled} \end{array} \right\}$ at us (*to Sam).

Inasmuch as these adverbials are not indirect objects, the verb may be interpreted noncommunicatively in their presence; compare (20) with

(23) She howled $\left(\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{"Futz"} \\ \text{something} \end{array} \right\} \right)$ at me, but she wasn't saying anything to me.

Note that most other *verba dicenda* fail to occur with *at*-phrases:

- (24) *She $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{said} \\ \text{declared} \\ \text{related} \\ \text{remarked} \\ \text{alleged} \\ \text{claimed} \\ \text{reported} \end{array} \right\} \text{ (something) at me.}$

The exceptions are few (*lecture* and *declain*, for example).

J. To each manner-of-speaking verb there corresponds a homophonous nominal referring to the speech act independent of its communicative content.

- (25) I heard a $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{mumble} \\ \text{mutter} \\ \text{bellow} \\ \text{shriek} \end{array} \right\}.$

- (26) Ernest's $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{scream} \\ \text{whine} \\ \text{whisper} \end{array} \right\} \text{ frightened me.}$

Note again that other *verba dicenda* have rather different properties. Many nouns are not homophonous with their verbs (*speech* from *speak*, *tale* from *tell*, *declaration* and *allegation* from *declare* and *allege*, etc.), and the verb-noun relationships are not so regular semantically as in the case of manner-of-speaking verbs (the noun *say* is not analogous to the noun *scream*, for instance).

K. The homophonous nominal occurs as a cognate object to its verb.

- (27) The referee shrieked a shriek.
 (28) I'm sure he will whisper a nearly inaudible whisper.

If cognate objects are derived transformationally from their verbs, then it should be possible to interpret these verbs noncommunicatively, and it is:

- (29) Gilbert howled an awful howl (at us), but he wasn't saying anything to anyone.

L. The homophonous nominal occurs in the idiomatic construction *give a* —, which acts as a punctual form of the verb.

- (30) A large brown bear gave a $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{howl} \\ \text{hoot} \\ \text{moan} \\ \text{yell} \end{array} \right\}.$

The construction is somewhat less natural with manner-of-speaking verbs describing soft speech (*whisper, lisp, mumble*, for example).

M. A manner-of-speaking verb may occur with a prepositional phrase headed by *about*.

(31) After lunch the guests $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{shouted} \\ \text{growled} \\ \text{muttered} \end{array} \right\}$ (to the waiter)

about $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{the food} \\ \text{Mary's nakedness} \\ \text{how the meal was cooked} \\ \text{having no dessert} \end{array} \right\}$.

(32) I $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{whispered} \\ \text{shrieked} \\ \text{whined} \end{array} \right\}$ $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{"Et tu, Brute"} \\ \text{something nasty} \end{array} \right\}$ about the fact
that there was a knife in my chest.

Although the facts about the interpretation of these phrases are not entirely clear to me, I believe that the following two observations are essentially correct: (a) if the object of *about* is a factive nominal, it is open to two interpretations—that the referent of the subject believes in the truth of the object clause, or that the speaker of the sentence believes in the truth of the object clause; (b) if the object of *about* is a subjectless gerundive, the understood subject is either the subject of the main sentence, the indirect object of the main sentence, the two conjoined, or a generic pronoun. The first observation is illustrated by

(33) Billy screamed (to Janet) about the police attacks on students.

which may report either a statement of Billy's in which he declared that the police attacked students, or a statement of Billy's about some event which is described by the speaker of (33) as a police attack on students. That is, (33) may illustrate the usual opacity of indirect discourse. With respect to the second observation, consider

(34) Billy screamed (to Janet) about going to Montreal.

In (34), what Billy screams about may be either his going to Montreal, or Janet's (or an unexpressed addressee's) going to Montreal, or their going there together, or the general prospect of going to Montreal, but not some specific third person's going there. These properties of

SQUIBS AND DISCUSSION

manner-of-speaking verbs are the same as properties of the verba dicenda *speak* and *say* (*something*); compare

- (35) Billy $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{spoke} \\ \text{said something} \end{array} \right\}$ (to Janet) about the police attacks on students.

with (33), and

- (36) Billy $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{spoke} \\ \text{said something} \end{array} \right\}$ (to Janet) about going to Montreal.

with (34).

N. Of the desentential complements referred to in D above, the *that*-clauses and indirect questions are interpreted as reports of assertions, while infinitival constructions are interpreted as reports of commands or requests. That is,

- (37) Ann shrieked to George that there were Peruvians in the pantry.

is a report of Ann's saying something on the order of

- (38) There are Peruvians in the pantry.

and

- (39) Ann shrieked to George how many Peruvians were coming to the party.

is a report of Ann's saying something on the order of

- (40) (X many) Peruvians are coming to the party.

On the other hand,

- (41) Ann shrieked to George to purge the Peruvians.

is a report of Ann's saying something on the order of

- (42) Purge the Peruvians!

or

- (43) You should purge the Peruvians.

Similarly,

- (44) Ann howled to George for Alphonse to clean the cellar.

is a report of Ann's saying something on the order of

- (45) Alphonse should clean the cellar.

The imperative nature of examples like (41) is indicated by the possibility of

- (46) Ann whispered to George to please keep quiet.
 (47) Alphonse hooted to Ann to stop giving orders or else.

- (48) George growled to Alphonse to obey without fail.

with the imperative indicators *please*, *or else*, and *without fail*.

The full paradigm of infinitival complements to manner-of-speaking verbs is of some interest:

- (49) X v-cd to Y for Z to y
 (50) X v-cd for Z to y
 (51) X v-cd to Y to y
 (52) X v-cd to y

exemplified by

- (53) Lily whined to Marlene for Nedra to keep quiet.
 (54) Lily whined for Nedra to keep quiet.
 (55) Lily whined to Marlene to keep quiet.
 (56) Lily whined to keep quiet.

The points of special interest are that in (55), the understood subject of *keep quiet* is *Marlene*, and that in (56) the underlying subject of *keep quiet* must be distinct from *Lily*, as Perlmutter (1968, sec. 1.1) has observed. In fact, in my speech the possible understandings of (56) are quite restricted: the understood subject of *keep quiet* is either the speaker of (56), the addressee of (56), or some group of persons containing at least one of these, or the understood subject is a generic pronoun. One other verb of speech, *say*, has exactly these properties:

- (57) Lily said to Marlene for Nedra to keep quiet.
 (58) Lily said for Nedra to keep quiet.
 (59) Lily said to Marlene to keep quiet.
 (60) Lily said to keep quiet.

are construed in the same way as (53)–(56), respectively. In O through Q below, I formulate these properties more generally.

O. The rule of Equi-NP Deletion (for a recent discussion, see Postal 1970) applies to the subject of an imperative complement to a manner-of-speaking verb, when that subject is coreferential with the indirect object of the verb.

P. The subject of an imperative complement to a manner-of-speaking verb must be distinct from the subject of the verb.

Q. The subject of an imperative complement to a manner-of-speaking verb in an S may be deleted if it is (a) coreferential with the speaker of the S; (b) coreferential with the addressee of the S; or (c) generic. Thus, (56) may be understood as any one of the following:

- (61) Lily whined for $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{me} \\ \text{us} \end{array} \right\}$ to keep quiet.
 (62) Lily whined for you to keep quiet.
 (63) Lily whined for people to keep quiet.

but not as

- (64) Lily whined for George to keep quiet.

R. Another property that the manner-of-speaking verbs share with *say* (plus *ask*, *tell*, and a few other verba dicenda) is that they are entirely acceptable when they precede their direct quotation objects, as in

- (65) The umpire $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{shrieked} \\ \text{bellowed} \\ \text{said} \\ \text{told him} \end{array} \right\}$, "I disagree with you."

whereas many verba dicenda are less acceptable in this position than they are when they follow such objects:

- (66) ?The umpire $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{lectured} \\ \text{insisted} \\ \text{indicated} \\ \text{reported} \\ \text{revealed} \\ \text{conceded} \\ \text{contended} \\ \text{uttered} \end{array} \right\}$, "I disagree with you."

- (67) "I disagree with you," the umpire $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{lectured} \\ \text{insisted} \\ \text{indicated} \\ \text{reported} \end{array} \right\}$.

- (68) "I disagree with you," $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{revealed} \\ \text{conceded} \\ \text{contended} \\ \text{uttered} \end{array} \right\}$ the umpire.

Since the properties just discussed are peculiar to *say* and the manner-of-speaking verbs, it is worthwhile to point out a few more ways, S and T, in which *say* has characteristics not shared by any of the manner-of-speaking verbs.

S. No manner-of-speaking verb can be used performatively (Austin 1962; Ross 1970; and Sadock 1969). That is, despite the acceptability of

- (69) I say that gold is malleable.
 (70) I tell you that Cincinnati will win.

the sentences in

- (71) ?I $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{mumble} \\ \text{grunt} \\ \text{shriek} \end{array} \right\}$ that Baltimore will win.

cannot be construed as constituting either an assertion that Baltimore will win, or a mumble/grunt/shriek to that effect, if indeed the sentences in (17) are grammatical at all.

T. A manner-of-speaking verb is passivizable when it is not understood communicatively, and only then:

- (72) "Glop" was $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{screamed} \\ \text{hooted} \\ \text{bellowed} \end{array} \right\}$ (at them) by the dean.

- (73) *It was $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{howled} \\ \text{shouted} \\ \text{whined} \end{array} \right\}$ by Morris that night was falling.

- (74) *"Glop" was $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{mumbled} \\ \text{shrieked} \\ \text{growled} \end{array} \right\}$ to us by an onlooker.

Say is acceptable (if somewhat stilted) in these contexts:

- (75) It was said by Morris that night was falling.
 (76) "Glop" was said to us by an onlooker.

The observations in A through T are actually more remarkable than it might appear. For if you invent a verb, say *greem*, which refers to an intended act of communication by speech and describes the physical characteristics of the act (say a loud, hoarse quality), then you know that *greem* will have every one of the properties in A through T. It will be possible to greem (i.e. to speak loudly and hoarsely), to greem for someone to get you a glass of water, to greem to your sister about the price of doughnuts, to greem "Ecch" at your enemies, to have your greem frighten the baby, to greem to me that my examples are absurd, and to give a greem when you see the explanation. That is, properties A-T are all SYSTEMATICALLY associated with the semantic representation of manner-of-speaking verbs. The question is: How?

References

- Austin, J. L. (1962) *How to Do Things with Words*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
 Kiparsky, R. P. V. and C. Kiparsky (to appear) "Fact," in M. Bierwisch and K.-E. Heidolph, eds., *Recent Advances in Linguistics*, Mouton, The Hague.

SQUIBS AND DISCUSSION

- Lakoff, G. P. (1966) "Stative Adjectives and Verbs in English," in *Mathematical Linguistics and Automatic Translation, Report NSF-17*, the Computation Laboratory of Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.
- Lee, P. G. (1969) "Subjects and Agents," in *Working Papers in Linguistics*, No. 3, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.
- Perlmutter, D. M. (1968) *Deep and Surface Structure Constraints in Syntax*, unpublished Doctoral dissertation, MIT.
- Postal, P. M. (1970) "On Coreferential Complement Subject Deletion," *Linguistic Inquiry* 1, 439-500.
- Ross, J. R. (1970) "On Declarative Sentences," in R. Jacobs and P. Rosenbaum, eds., *Readings in English Transformational Grammar*, Blaisdell, Waltham, Mass.
- Sadock, J. N. (1969) "Hypersentences," *Papers in Linguistics* 1, 283-370.