University of Tkrit /College of Education/English Department /Ph.D. Studies

Speaking and Pronunciation

By

Asst.Prof. Hadeel Kamil Ali (Ph.D)

What are speaking and pronunciation?

 We take as our starting point the notion of spoken language in use, drawing on insights from discourse analysis which make it clear that language is used to negotiate and achieve meaning in social contexts and so cannot be divorced from those contexts (see Chapter 4, Discourse analysis). Corpus linguistic research over the last decade and a half, involving computer analysis of large bodies of naturally produced language has also greatly influ enced the way in which spoken language and the patterns of its grammar are understood (see Chapter 6, Corpus linguistics; O'Keeffe, McCarthy and Carter, 2007). This perspective takes us beyond a purely psycholinguistic model of speech, where underlying mental pro cesses are highlighted (Levelt, 1989). The perspective also takes us beyond the focus on the sentence, which has traditionally been the unit of analysis in much grammatical analysis and language teaching. In our discussion here, 'sentences' as formal grammatical units are irrelevant; rather, we are concerned with spoken 'utterances', which could be anything from 'yeah' to an extended monologue. We would argue that this more contextualized perspective represents a shift from what has been a prevailing model of spoken language in second language teaching– one that is essentially sentence- and form-based– to one that takes text and function as a starting point (see McCarthy and Carter, 1994; Burns, 2001; Hughes, 2006; Thornbury and Slade, 2006). 'Speaking' is so much part of daily life that we tend to take it for granted. However, learning speaking, whether in a first or other language, involves developing subtle and detailed knowledge about why, how and when to communicate, and complex skills for pro ducing and managing interaction, such as asking a question or obtaining a turn. One of the most important aspects of everyday talk is that it always takes place in cultural

and social contexts. We speak in order to carry out various social activities and, although we may not always be consciously aware of doing so, we attune our language and the meanings we wish to exchange to our specific purposes for speaking in that context. Zooming in on speaking more closely, we can make further intriguing discoveries about other things we are usually unaware of when talking to somebody. Every time we open our mouths to say anything at all, even a short utterance such as 'Thank you!', several things happen all at once that fall within the scope of pronunciation: we can say 'Thank you' loudly or softly, quickly or slowly, with a certain voice quality, with a certain speech melody; we can stress either the first or the second syllable, and there are Speaking and pronunciation 241 different ways of pronouncing the individual sounds which make up the utterance. All these elements together make up the way we sound to our interlocutors, and so are crucial factors in conveying meaning when we talk. For language teaching this means that every lesson involving the spoken language is (also) a pronunciation lesson (see Gilbert, 2008 for a very accessible discussion of the interrelatedness of factors involved in speaking and listening). The way we sound to our interlocutors is not a trivial or unimportant matter; it is how we project our identity as individuals and how we indicate our membership of particular communities as social beings– like the way we look, the way we sound influences how we get judged by fellow humans. At the same time, and sometimes even in conflict with this 'identity' function, our pronunciation is also responsible for 'intelligibility'–whether or not we can get our message across. The issue of intelligibility is one that second or foreign language learners are keenly aware of. In pronunciation learning and teaching, matters are complicated by the fact that many of these things normally happen subconsciously and so are not really accessible to conscious analysis and intervention. Overall, then, the sig nificance of understanding what makes up 'pronunciation' is far-reaching, and a basic knowledge in this area can be avaluable and powerful resource for language teachers and learners alike (see also Seidlhofer, 2001). Issues in speaking Spoken interaction involves producing and negotiating language rather differently from the way it is used in writing. Speakers and listeners ('interlocutors') are involved simultaneously in both producing and processing spoken interactions. They are under time constraints which mean that they must process language as they go, with no opportunities to go back and make changes. Speakers must also take account of rela tionships with others, adjusting their language according to the meanings they wish to get across, and responding to verbal or non-verbal signals from their listeners that they are being understood. Many spoken interactions consist of commenting on

immediate actions or events, or casually moving from one topic to another. However, it is also true that some types of speech may be more planned in advance (such as meetings) or written to be spoken (such as news broadcasts). Differences between spoken and writ ten language are probably best thought about as a 'cline' or 'continuum',ratherthana sharp division (see Cook, 1989; Halliday, 1989; Cornbleet and Carter, 2001). We can see some of the features that result from 'online' processing of speech in the following text. Here, two female Australian friends, Anne and Jane, talk about a time when Anne's neighbour, Stan, was bitten by a poisonous insect, a funnel web spider. We will use this text throughout the chapter for illustration. A funnel web spider jumped out … A =Anne, J = Jane A1: years ago when I was married, about I don't know how long ago about 10 or 12 years ago I lived in Mosman and I had a really nice neighbour called Stan … sometimes he used to cut the grass outside our place and sometimes we'd cut the grass outside his place … and one weekend, I was away when this happened, but he told me about it much later, this weekend Stan cut the 242 Burns and Seidlhofer grass outside the front and was clipping along the edges of our garden with a little axe. J1: mmm … A2: and a funnel web spider jumped out and … J2: a funnel web! A3: yeah, and bit him on the fleshy part of his thumb … and unbelievably he banged the spider with the axe or something, took off his belt, wrapped his belt around his arm, went in and got a jar, put the spider in the jar and walked to the corner … you … do you remember Rosebery Street almost went up to Military Road? J3: yes, yes A4: on that corner was a doctor's surgery– he walked up to the doctor's surgery J4: good heavens A5: and um … J5: did the doctor have an antivenene? [American spelling: antivenin] A6: no, the doctor called an ambulance and they put him in, took him straight to North Shore [hospital] and … J6: aaah A7: and that's … he said the pain was excruciating, it was like someone had turned a blowtorch on his hand J7: what the poison goes straight up the arm into their … A8: Idon't know if it was the poison or the fangs of the spider or whatever it was that caused the pain but he said it was just like a blowtorch J8: ahh A9: and then he had antivenene in hospital but two weeks later his hand was still numb J9: good heavens! A10: he was terribly lucky J10: ohhh A11: I mean I would never have reacted that way would you? J11: my God, doesn't it give you the creeps? A12: yes, absolutely dreadful (From de Silva Joyce and Burns, 1999: 98–99.) Anne produces her first turn (A1) fluently, mainly by using a series of clauses linked by the co-ordinating conjunction and (but is also a common spoken con junction). Informal spoken language tends to contain many clauses that are inde pendent of each other, in contrast to written language, which typically contains more dependent clauses. We can

also notice diversions and backtracking as Anne processes the information she wants to deliver, 'I was away when this happened'. Anne's utterance also contains 'formulaic expressions' (see Schmitt and 2004; Seidlhofer, 2009), wordings that commonly go together and are used as a kind of shorthand in familiar situations, for example, 'Idon't know how long ago'. 'Ellip sis', the omission of parts of structures that would usually be expected, also eases the pressure in speaking production. Anne refers to 'outside the front', in the expectation that Jane will understand from the context and her previous reference to 'our place' that shemeans the frontof thehouse. Speaking and pronunciation 243 Genres of speaking One way we can think about spoken discourse at a macro-level is to consider the concept of discourse types, or 'genres'. In daily life, we use this concept repeatedly to identify the kinds of interactions in which we are involved, for example speeches, jokes, doctor'scon sultations, etc. (see Chapter 4, Discourse analysis, for more on genres). Martin and Roth ery (1980–1981) define genre as a 'staged,goal-oriented,socialprocess', indicatingthat: 1 agenre evolves within a culture and its social institutions (hence social) 2 social processes are purposeful (hence goal-oriented) 3 it usually takes a number of steps to achieve one's purpose (hence staged) (Painter, 2001: 168) Within particular social contexts, having identified genres with their different purposes, speakers also anticipate the various kinds of interactions and language they might use in relation to a genre. Purposeful language variation will involve recognizing the overall shape or structure of the text, but also selecting from the vast repertoire of language resources available to us, the language features and patterns appropriate to a particular spoken 'trans action or interaction'. Transactional communication is primarily motivated by an exchange of goods and service, for example, booking a flight at a travel agent or phoning a careers' centre for information, whereas the motivation for interactional communication is primarily to create and maintain social relationships, for example, casual conversations between friends (see also Dalton and Seidlhofer, 1994: 9–12, 53). We say 'primarily' because in reality talk in daily life is often a mixture of the two. Work by Slade (1997) on casual conversation distinguished between 'chat', highly inter active multiple speaker sequences of conversation, and 'chunks', sequences where primarily one speaker holds the floor. Chunks are more readily analysable for their generic structures as they tend to follow predictable patterns (see Eggins and Slade, 1997; Burns, 2001; Thornbury and Slade, 2006 for further discussion). The spider text is an example of a complete chunk where Anne is the speaker who has gained an extended series of turns. The text she and Jane produce is an example of 'story telling' (Slade, 1997), a genre that is very commonly found

in casual conversations. To sum up, the text is i) more chunk than chat; ii) interactional. Generic structure Generic or schematic structure (Martin, 2001) refers to the overall way in which a text unfolds. The spider text is a personal 'narrative' (an entertaining story involving the reso lution of a crisis), which typically shows the structure (Labov and Waletkzy, 1967: 39): (Abstract)^Orientation^Complication^Evaluation^Resolution^(Coda) [( ) = optional elements; ^ = followed by] Genres contain both obligatory and optional elements; Abstract and Coda will not be present in all instances of narrative. However, the obligatory elements are the key ele ments and must be present for a text to be defined and recognized as reflective of a particular genre. 244 Burns and Seidlhofer The Abstract, which summarizes or encapsulates the main point, usually signals the start of a story– aclassicexamplemightbe'Did I ever tell you about … [my neighbour's encounter with a funnel web spider?]. This is followed by the Orientation– the who, what, where, when– that orients the listener to the situation, place and time. In the text Anne begins the story at the Orientation stage, indicating the main player, Stan, and the time and place, but towards the end of her first long utterance (A1) she shifts towards the Complication. The Complication, the main part of the narrative, presents events in time sequence which leads up to a problem or crisis. 'And one weekend, I was away when this happened …' begins Anne's move towards the Complication, which culminates in the crisis, 'And a funnel web spider jumped out …' (A2) and the surrounding events (A3). The Evaluation shows the speakers'reactions to the story and we can see this in Anne's (A7, A8, A10) and Jane's (J6, J7, J8, J9, J10) utterances. The Resolution stage reveals how the story's main players resolve the crisis (A4–A6). In this text, as with other narratives, the Evaluation may appear at any stage, running through the text, sustaining the story and reflecting its personal and social significance to the speakers. We can see that Resolution and Evaluation are interspersed. In the concluding stage of Coda the story is brought full circle; Coda makes a point about the text as a whole and reorients the speakers to the present (A11, J10, A12). We can go further than providing an analysis of the overall generic structure. Dif ferent stages of a genre are characterized by typical lexical (vocabulary) and gramma tical (grammatical structures) patterns. Table 14.1 illustrates some of the linguistic choices that characterize a narrative. The information above is valuable in language teaching and learning because lan guage learners who wish to speak fluently and coherently must have an understanding, at least implicitly, of the organization of the genres in which they will be interacting, and of the linguistic features which realize the generic structure. Exchange Texts do not, of course, emerge intact as finished products; Anne and Jane

must negotiate their narrative together dynamically at a micro-level, turn by turn. Exchange structure analysis (see Chapter 4, Discourse analysis) provides a way of showing 'how speakers can keep taking turns' (Eggins and Slade, 1997: 44). The 'classic' Initiation (I)–Response (R)–Follow-up (F) exchange (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975) is illustrated in the following: J7: What the poison goes straight up the arm into their … (Initiation) A8: I don't know if it was the poison … just like a blowtorch (Response) J7: Aah (Follow-up) The function of follow-ups is to acknowledge information supplied in the response, show our social and emotional reactions to the topic and indicate 'convergence' (Wid dowson, 1979) or shared understanding. Formulaic expressions ('Isn't that great, terri ble …', etc.) are common in follow-ups: J11: My God, doesn't it give you the creeps? A11: Yes, absolutely dreadful Speaking and pronunciation 245 Table 14.1 Characteristic choices that characterize a narrative Stage Lexico-grammatical features Abstract Signals the story and the reason for telling it Orientation (A1) Orients the listener to the story by giving details of time, location, characters, etc. Complication (A2–A3) Introduces the problem Evaluation (J6–J8) Establishes the significance of the story and builds suspense Resolution (A4–J6, A9–J10) Explains resolution of problem Coda (A11–A12) Comments on the overall story and brings it back to present (No abstract stage in the text) Expressions of time/place– who, what, where, when: in Mosman, one weekend, outside his place Past tense verbs (was, had) Use of nouns and pronouns for participants (I, Stan, he, our) Events sequenced in time Past tense action verbs (bit, banged, took off) Expressions of place (on the fleshy part of his thumb) and manner (with the axe) Action suspended through evaluation of events and suspense-building Repetition (it was just like a blowtorch) Intensifiers (excruciating, terribly) Confirmation check (what, the poison goes …?) Events are time-sequenced Past tense action verbs Normality restored (he was terribly lucky) Evaluation of story through: Vocabulary expressing speakers' attitude (absolutely dreadful) Return to present (doesn't it give you the creeps?) However, in many interactions, follow-ups are delayed by a more protracted series of responses when, for example, further clarifications or checks are sought. Learner exchanges in classrooms may omit the follow-up, making them sound stilted and interview-like, and so learners should be helped to produce more nat ural exchange patterns. One way of doing this is to explore similar expressions in other languages. By giving learners opportunities to observe and use this core aspect of spoken interaction, their repertoire of discourse skills should be usefully extended. Turn-taking and turn types Jointly constructing the interaction means that speakers must also judge when and how to take a turn (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson,

1974: see also Hutchby and 246 Burns and Seidlhofer Woofitt, 2008). One possibility for obtaining a turn is to self-select. Jane does this in J5, taking advantage of a slight break in the flow of Anne's story(A5) (see also comments below on pitch and volume). Turns can be difficult to get when there is high competition, urgency or disagreement and speakers must attune to local tran sition points in the conversation such as pauses, or signals that turns are ending (for example, laughter, fillers such as 'so' or 'anyway'). Another turn-taking oppor tunity comes when the current speaker nominates the next. This may be done directly– 'What do you think, Jane?'– or through the type of turn the speaker selects. In A11, Anne poses a question, thereby offering Jane the opportunity to respond. 'Adjacency pairs' are major types of turns occurring together that enable speakers to allocate or give up turns. Question/answer is one of the most common, although there are many others, for instance, 'Hello/Hi' (greeting/greeting); 'Close the window/OK' (request/grant). Not all responses are preferred (or positive); some are dispreferred, and in English typically accompanied by some kind of justification or explanation, as in this invented example: Anne: Did I ever tell you about my neighbour's encounter with a funnel web? Jane: No … look, I'd love to hear about it some other time, but I have to rush to catch my train right now … In a narrative, it is the storyteller (here Anne) who gets more turns than the other speakers. However, the listener's role is also important. Although their turn-taking rights are limited, it would seem very odd if listeners remained passive and silent; Jane's contributions play an important part in showing she is on track (J1) (backchannelling), predicting what will come up (J5)– 'Did the doctor have any antivenene?'– and assisting Anne to evaluate the significance of the events (J8), without which the entertainment value (the 'so what?') of the story would be absent.