

Discourse Inadequacies, Language Problems And Term Work

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I approach terms as a researcher who is interested in language problems and in how people manage language problems. My interest is in some regards different from the interests of those who engage in practical ongoing term work and I realize that much of what I say will seem self-evident to practitioners.

My purpose in this talk is to stimulate discussion of research opportunities with term problems in the center of attention. I invite your cooperation in exploring such opportunities.

I will rely on a model derived from the General Theory of Language Management (Neustupny 2003). The model has two major dimensions, a discourse dimension and an organizational dimension. The two are interdependent. Key concepts are "language problems" and "(discourse) inadequacies" (Jernudd 2000, 2001).

Language problems that arise in discourse can be conceptualized as deviations from some person's norm in application to that discourse. The norm provides the standard of behaviour against which the speaker/writer notes, evaluates, adjusts deviations, and implements these adjustments in his/her speech or writing. Implemented discourse adjustments normally occur within a few turns of noting while speaking. Listeners and readers, too, note, evaluate, and adjust deviations, and may communicate these reactions to the interlocutor.

Let me take you through a few slides to make myself clear:

(1)



Fireman!



(2)

That is *not* how
you say it!!

-fire fight-



- (3) The next slide notates a bit of talk between a manager and a specialist in a company in Hong Kong.

The specialist had returned from inspecting how fabric is printed in an industrial plant and is reporting to the manager.

(4)

Director: How do they run the print?
Specialist: It's...
Director: Acid dye?
Specialist: Yes they have keep a... a machine to cure the fabric - + How to say?
Director: What's the print process? They steam it?
Specialist: Yes they steam it yes just like baking right?
Director: This is circle right? The fabric is fit inside and then a pressure steam... something like that
Director: Oh I know. Oh.

(5) Discourse management

- [a] v-woz (I was)
- Noted deviation of [v]
- Evaluated [v] is inadequate
- Adjusted [v] to [w]
- Implemented

(6) Discourse management = On-line management

(7)

... let's look at the writing process
(and then at speaking)

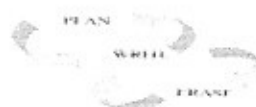
(8) Managing writing

Is there a reply to writing?
Not during writing
(production).
If there is a reply at all, it comes "much later".

(9) Managing writing

So what does the writer have to do?
That the speaker need not do?

(10) When people write, they



DRAFT

EDIT

(11) Discourse Management



(13) Discourse Management



(12) And now to (the) speaking (process)...

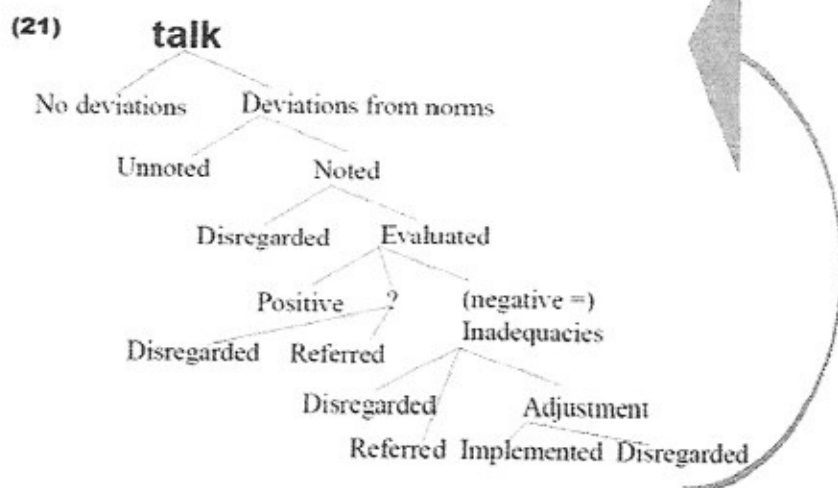
People may discuss what has been noted, evaluated or adjusted, i. e. , they make "on? line" discourse management a topic of deliberation "off? line". This discourse about discourse (meta? discourse) may lead to problem solving. Negative evaluations of inadequacies in the flow of discourse that become topics of overt attention can be called language problems.

(19) Discourse management

- Language behavior is generation of utterances and evaluation of utterances.
- Generation of utterances is shaped by and allows overt expression of evaluation.
- Evaluative behavior is language management.

(20) Discourse management

- Language management interacts with language generation in a circular process of causation
- sustained by and embedded in the interaction of participants



(22)

Directed management
= Off-line management

(23)

Discourse management

Off-line management:
The *inadequacy* becomes the
problem

(24)

Language Management

Discourse management
= On-line management

Directed management
= Off-line management

Problems may have solutions. It follows that solutions to language problems do not exist as adjustments according to anybody's norm until someone uses them to generate on? line discourse. They remain prescriptive until they are implemented in on? line discourse.

Off? line, people may refer their concern with language to specialist managers. Probably all speech communities have their designated or self-proclaimed language specialists. We as terminologists are such manager specialists.

It is a fact that difficulties arise in the process of communication. It is equally a fact that when people talk, they manage these difficulties in subsequent turns. This fact is incorporated in several discourse theories, e. g., in conversational analysis and ethno-methodology, and in theories of speaking. These theories recognize the process of repair.

The difficulties, or inadequacies as the theory calls them in accordance with the terms defined in the language management theory, can be as various as people make them. Ways in which people note potential inadequacies and implement adjustments also vary.

However, when people talk, there are some patterns; noting by speaker ('self') is often an interruption of an ongoing utterance accompanied by a murmur ['uh']; and implementation of adjustment of an expression noted by self is often preceded by a repetition of the syllable or word immediately preceding the "product-item" when it is repaired (as ethno-methodologists term the noted speech segment and its adjustment, respectively).

Inadequacies are difficulties in discourse, during "on-line" communication; their equivalents "off-line" are language problems. What people cannot handle as they speak become problems for discussion and resolution, they become meta-difficulties, their solutions then to be accessed and implemented as adjustments in discourse.

Terminologists receive a lot of such queries.

*People manage in order to get the
right message across:*

What is *non-woven cloth*?

[insert pictures]

fiberflortyg or laminerat
tyg' (laminattyg)]

(18)

TNC Aktuell 1959:1:3

Terminologists agree on one reason at least for intervention from outside discourse and this is the fundamental dictum of all terminological work: that terms arise when definitions are agreed for a specific set of related vocabulary by a group of their users and made available for use in such contexts of discourse as are deemed relevant.

But there are also other concerns. Language problems arise in many ways. People may project language problems onto discourse on the basis of social, economic or political interests. Some people may also rely on mistaken lay theories about language and opine, for example, that shorter words are better than longer words or that spellings should be "regular", or that "mixing" of languages is harmful, and so forth. Any specialist who intervenes in language use shall have to define for him/herself the reasons for intervention.

There is obviously room for other kinds of problem solving besides standardizing/ coordinating term work by term agencies. A very major motivation for this other role of the term agency is the language user's perception that s/he needs a norm authority (Bartsch 1985:158). Sometimes a referral to the sister agency in the speech community that deals with general language use may be called for, if for no other reason to respect their respective institutional roles and maintain good relations, sometimes particular work has to be done to find a solution.

A claim that there is a language problem must answer the following questions:

- What is the problem?
- Whose is the problem?
- Who is responsible for solving the problem?

The answers will reveal whether the claim addresses a communication problem or some other kind of problem, whether the claim is an imposition or has indeed a motivation in discourse, and what the relation of the claimant is to the problem.

How can we find out? We can observe what happens. We can introspect. We can produce a data record by vocalizing introspective thoughts. We can play back interactions to the interlocutors and tap their short-term memories about their discourse work. And from such research, we have learnt that people manage deviations and inadequacies in the discourse they produce and in

responding to the other's discourse. They pursue understanding of the other at least to the extent of continuing communication or of reaching a non-troubled (satisfying) exit. In the absolutely totally overwhelming proportion of discourse events, challenges or even remarks to the other about deviations or inadequacies are not made. But they do of course occasionally happen.

I feel that intensive discourse-analytical research (observation, recording, transcribing, follow-up) can yield interesting results despite its obvious tediousness and cost.

Self-report and referrals are already part of term work relationships between users and institutions which brings me to the second dimension of the model, the institutional one. In view of what we have seen in our exploration of the first dimension of discourse, an obvious question to me is to what extent or whether at all and how term agencies identify inadequacies.

An accumulated sense of discourse trouble and agreement that something needs doing to vocabulary use in one's field of specialized work is one source of language problems - and an extremely significant one for term agencies.

References

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