

Behavior toward Language

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Talk has to come from somewhere. The fundamental research question in linguistics must be to explain how talk arises out of the brain. Given that people generate speech, and given also the grammatical competence that orders speech, logic has it that there must exist some kind of steering mechanism to discourse. This is the mechanism that language management attempts to capture. Language management also investigates deliberate actions by us to shape language and how such actions relate to speaking.

I will give an example of an instance of managing speech. As a learner of English as an additional language, I noted that I pronounce a [v] instead of what I know to be the adequate pronunciation according to the common norm, namely [w], so I interrupted myself as I was pronouncing the inadequate [v], rearranged my articulation and adjusted my speech to [w]: [aj v- wɔz] <I was>.

Discourse management goes far beyond pronunciation monitoring which could be regarded as fairly trivial. There is so much more that is required to accomplish communication, to accomplish what I call *happy communication*. Discourse management is the creation and recreation of discourse that sustains continuing exchange of meaning between people. An example is in order.

In the following, a quality control specialist reports on a visit to a Chinese textile factory in a meeting at her company's office in Hong Kong. The manager supports the specialist with language and the specialist makes good use of that support:

Example 1

Director: How d'they cue the print?

Specialist: Er...

Director: Acid dye?

Specialist: Yes they have keep + a... a machine to cue the fabric + + How to say?

Director: What's the print process? They steam it?

Specialist: Yes they steam it yes just like baking right? This is circle right?

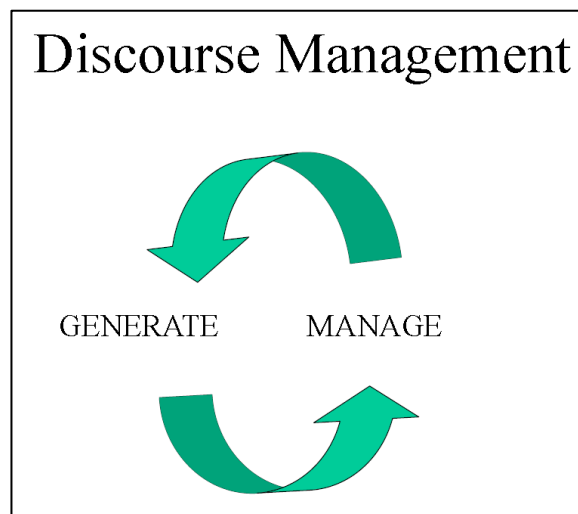
The fabric is fit inside and then a pressure steam | |... something like that

Director: | | Oh Oh I know

(from Jenny Chow's MA thesis 1996:84, A Study of Communication in a Textile Quality Management Services Company)

We can capture the flow of discourse management (simple or *on-line* management at its most general with this graph:

Figure 1: Discourse management



Another part of language management is overt, deliberate attention to aspects of language as a system and to use of language in discourse. Deliberation complements discourse management when we think about our own or others' language behavior. A convenient label is *off-line* language management because we think about and talk about language in the abstract.

The most basic reason for off-line language management is that people have an interest in understanding themselves and this 'thing' we call 'language' and its exemplars, our languages. Also, it is a fact that difficulties arise in the flow of interaction. When people talk, they manage these difficulties in (own or other's) first or subsequent turns. Whether people handle these difficulties in the flow of interaction or not, they may become *problems* for discussion and resolution. In general terms, participants may have noted items of generated speech for any reason, whether humorous, unsuitable, offensive, grammatically deviant, suggestive, innovative, and so on. Problems therefore, once what was noted becomes a topic, must be understood very inclusively.

Nevertheless, linguists focus on the mechanics of construction of utterances and may therefore be forgiven for directing their disciplinary efforts also in the study of language management at language norms, thus, at deviations from norms and at deliberations on norms.

In 1963, I attended a sociolinguistics class that the late Charles Ferguson taught. He gave us a work sheet that asks how one would speak meeting someone in a situation without shared languages. Sort of, a 'me Tarzan, you Jane' situation. His point was that when people interact to make meaning, in the process they firm up routines that may become norms — which obviously makes for very happy continued communication.

You can think of people who find themselves in contact communication situations, as airline cabin staff who interact with speakers of different language backgrounds, or expatriates anywhere, for that matter, who develop a "third way" of discourse, so as to anticipate and thus avoid inadequacies in future communication.

I will take a big leap now: languages are made by people who make them their own. Contemporary history offers many examples.

In post-colonial Malaysia and Indonesia, the governments created agencies, the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (the language and literature agency) and the Pusat Bahasa (the language center), respectively, to develop and standardize a national language. In both cases, their work led to the successful creation and general use of Bahasa Malaysia and Bahasa Indonesia. The two are closely similar, yet differ in some regards because of having been developed along slightly different paths by different agencies in two different states that have different other languages composition and histories. Both created vocabulary and terminology, normalized spellings, supported writing in a range of genres, awarded prizes of literature to encourage writing in the new languages, and so on. Obviously, mandating the use of the emerging languages in education and official business also quite decisively helped them along into general use.

In language development of the kind that the Malaysian and Indonesian agencies did, the overarching language problem was one of adding vocabulary in particular and of standardizing language expression in general. The absence of expressive resources motivated their work, and an ideology of the value of a national language justified the expense. Organized, systematic long-term management to develop Bahasa Malaysia and Bahasa Indonesia was undertaken in the interest of a developing state and to make real an imagined nation. And in both, it was successful. So it was in Israel with Hebrew, although along a different management path. These are only a few cases among many.

You must know about language academies. The ‘academies’ are but one among very many different kinds of agencies that manage language. The first academies were founded more than 500 years ago in Europe. The Malaysian and Indonesian agencies can be understood as contemporary academies, by what they were charged to accomplish.

In the same way, when Sweden wished to assert its political and cultural independence in northern Europe in the 18th century, the state founded a Swedish Academy in 1786.

I reproduce a couple of key paragraphs from its charter, paragraphs 22 and 23:

XXII §

- Academiens yppersta och angelägnaste göromål är, at arbeta uppå Svenska Språkets renhet, styrka och höghet, så uti Vettenskaper, som serdeles i anseende til skaldekonsten och Vältaligheten uti alla thes tilhörande delar, jemväl uti then, som tjenar at tolka the Himmelska Sanningar.
- ... to work on the purity, strength and dignity of the Swedish Language, in the Sciences and especially in regard to Poetry and Rhetoric in all their parts, as in the part which aims at interpreting Heavenly Truths.

XXIII §

- Ty åligger äfven Academien at utarbete en Svensk Ordabok och Gramatica, jemte sådana Afhandlingar som bidraga kunna til stadga och befordran af god smak.

- ... to produce a Swedish Wordbook and Grammar, and such Dissertations as contribute to the stability and enhancement of good taste.

The Academy still exists, with a specific and limited mission as to language management. Its most important publications on Swedish are a word list (SAOL) which serves as an orthoepic standard and also endorses (or not) loan words, a word book (SAOB) which offers detailed etymological and usage information on words, a work in progress, and the recently published comprehensive grammar of Swedish (Svenska akademies grammatik, 2010). There are other agencies that manage Swedish, foremost among them the Swedish Centre for Terminology (TNC) and the Language Council of Sweden (Institutet för språk och folkminnen; www.sprakochfolkminnen.se). Other agencies are listed in www.svenskaspraket.nu.

For most of the last century, *cultivation* of Swedish, i.e., continuous fine-tuning of standard usage, governed language management agency work. But something happened shortly after Sweden joined the European Union. The EU requires determination of minority languages, which led to a language policy process in Sweden, and to the designation of Swedish as the country's "main language". Such a determination had not been thought necessary earlier. This site links to information on Swedish language policy: www.sprakochfolkminnen.se/om-oss/kontakt/sprakradet/om-sprakradet/in-english.

Both the terminology center and the language council compile inventories of queries about language that they receive. One can learn from these queries. Most questions concern what is correct or good usage, precisely which term should be used for a particular object or process, also which borrowings from English and other languages are acceptable to use. Unfortunately, the original discourses that gave rise to these questions are not recorded. We would need that information to know what are the inadequacies gave rise to these language problems and to referring them to the agencies? Do the problems resolve inadequacies in discourse or do they reflect some kind of non-linguistic interest? These are the sites list questions (in Swedish!): www.tnc.se/component/option,com_quickfaq/Itemid,40/cid,1/view/category/ for terminology and for 'general' language, www.sprakradet.se/GetDoc?meta_id=1950.

For Japan, may I refer you to the *Gengo Seikatsu* and to *kokugo kokuji mondai*.

A team I worked with looked at newspapers in a number of countries to find out what kinds of language problems such a look could reveal. An example of what we found is the following classification from a three month survey of newspapers in Marathi in Maharashtra state in India, from 1983.

Maharashtra state in India: language mentions in newspapers

- THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE PROBLEM
- REGIONAL LANGUAGES AND REGIONALISM
- THE PROBLEM OF LINGUISTIC MINORITIES
- LANGUAGE AND STATE BOUNDARIES
- LANGUAGE CONFLICTS ABROAD
- DEMAND FOR LANGUAGE SERVICES, SKILLS
- THE HANDICAPPED
- LANGUAGE TEACHING

CORRECT LANGUAGE

- ✓ Correct pronunciation
- ✓ Correct grammar
- ✓ Correct lexical item, word
- ✓ What is in a name?
- ✓ Correct writing
- ✓ Overt comment on norms and evaluation principles
- ✓ Contact correction, translation
- ✓ Codemixing and codeswitching
- ✓ Speaking
- ✓ Reading

We must go behind the submitted questions to truly recover what the motivations for them are. Some motivations arise out of discourse, as inadequacies that have been referred off-line, become overt, subject to discussion and reflection. The inadequacies become language problems. Some motivations arise out of interests of various persuasions, and are referred 'back' to discourse. These are also language problems. An example of the latter kind of interest is dislike-in-principle of borrowings from 'foreign' languages. Such a person would ask, what is the *Swedish* word for such and such a word that others use but that the person regards as foreign.

In order to discover, classify and describe motivations for inadequacies in discourse (on line) and problems overtly (off line) in a meaningful way we need a model. With the help of the model, we can direct our enquiry. We explore this scaffolding for research in our search for a language management theory. This is the model that researchers in the language management field work with:

Figure 2

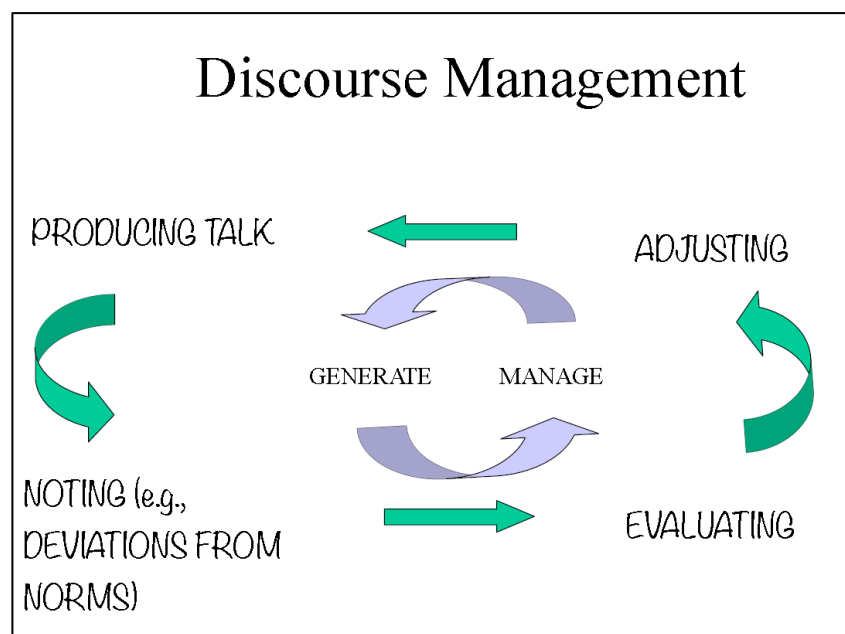
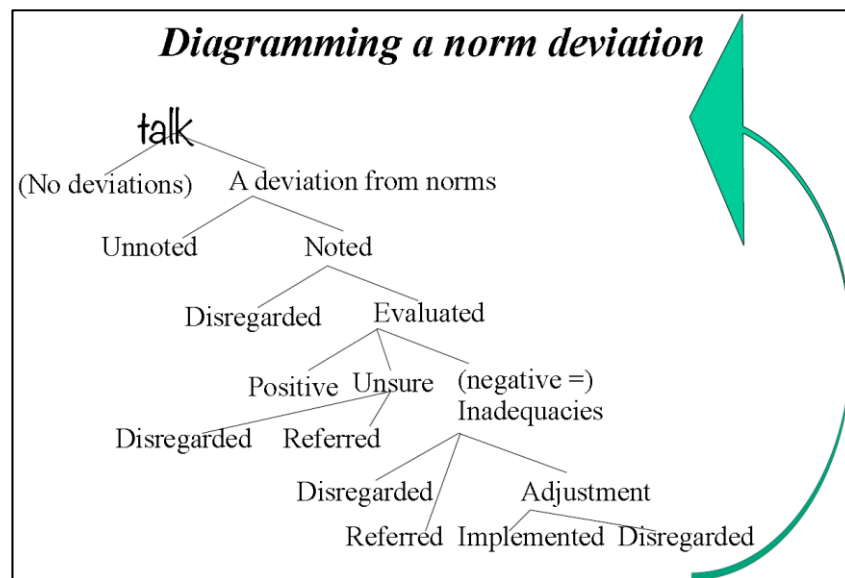


Figure 3



The model refers to what goes on in continuing interaction. There is never ending adjustment by all participants to enable continuing communication in spoken interaction, and mutual accommodations require noting of the generated (product-) item. Items in texts get noted by readers but with only the most restricted opportunity of feed-back, for obvious reasons. A writer recreates a text by his/her drafting and may benefit from editing remark before releasing it. It is the perceived deviation, the ‘friction’ if I may use that image, from what is expected — not necessarily but probably usually what is normal, *what is the norm* — that sets in motion a process of evaluation and adjustment of some item, some feature, of the means of communication.

People quite naturally reflect on what’s going on when they talk and some notings, evaluations and/or adjustments will become topics of further discussion. In language management, we then say that people discuss a language problem.

I encourage you to think about language problems, where they come from and how they can be solved. I trust you find the language management model useful when you do.