

Form, Function, and Personality in Discourse

David Mayo

1 Introduction

The tenets of discourse analysis at first seem strangely obvious: that we use language to do things, that the import of an utterance must be understood in context, that intonation can make all the difference in meaning, perhaps even that we organize our remarks with certain devices. Granted, many arcane concepts and terms have been introduced, such as “illocutionary force” for the verbalization of the speaker’s will and “perlocutionary force” for the change wrought by an utterance. But surely the shop clerk who remarks, “We won’t be having another sale like this” or the swain who murmurs, “It’s just my fate to be alone, I guess” is, without knowledge of these concepts, consciously committing an illocutionary act and plotting a perlocutionary one. Why, one may wonder, should it be deemed necessary to theorize these things? The answer is that the declaration of discursial principles is itself an act of illocution: discourse analysis was established less as a source of knowledge for language users or learners than as a corrective to the misguided theories and practices of other language professionals. In pedagogy it is a reaction against the teaching of literary forms as the standard, and of grammatical rules that have been worked out to vindicate a sentence-based model of language (Cook 1989; Hughes & McCarthy 1998).

The negative genesis of discourse theory left the field open to development along disparate lines. Today, although the lines often cross and sometimes reinforce each other, there is no single comprehensive method of discourse analysis (Hatch 1992; Yule 1996). Poetry may be analyzed, as well as conversation; either structure or content may be taken as the starting point; the existence of sentences may be presumed or not. If there is one element common to all notions of discourse, it is that what is going on when people use language is more than the mere transmission of those meanings that are said to reside in semantic constituents, or of aggregations of such resident meanings across phrases or sentences (the highest level to which traditional grammar takes its descriptions). Many discourse analysts stress the need to examine relationships above the sentence (Halliday & Hasan 1989; Sinclair & Coulthard 1992). However, discourse analysis is practiced at almost every structural level, from the individual word (Gardner 1998) to the ordering of society (Foucault 1972). What is common to the various approaches to discourse is not a certain scope of inquiry; it is the premise that language use takes place in a medium which is less than transparent, through which effective meaning, or function, is seen to diverge from linguistic form. Hence the definition of discourse analysis as

the study of how stretches of language used in communication assume meaning, purpose and unity for their users: the quality of coherence.

(Johnson & Johnson 1998: 99)

It is the aim of this article to examine the multifaceted notion of form-function divergence from the point of view of a professional in second-language pedagogy, not discourse analysis. After a survey of the variations on this theme in discourse theories, several salient points will be selected for closer examination. Finally, an aspect of form-function divergence will be demonstrated with examples from a text.

2 Overview

2.1 Function from without

Notions of form-function divergence among theories of discourse can be arranged roughly along a scale of attention initially given to one element or the other. Discourse analysis is not the province of linguists alone. To the philosopher Michel Foucault and others, it is the study of conventional frames of reference that shape the conduct of human affairs and thereby determine which participants, by the mastery of requisite language forms and other social resources, will be dominant. Here the starting-point is ideological content: the logic of the encompassing frame entails certain communicative functions, which in turn have their linguistic forms (Foucault 1972; Fairclough 1992). It is thought that by first comprehending and then altering these discursal frames, a reordering of social relationships can be accomplished. Because its primary subject is neither linguistic form nor communicative function, but sociopolitical design, the Foucauldian approach to discourse is usually set apart from the rest.

The frame is also an important concept in approaches that attend more directly to language. Schema theory holds that we understand new experience, including the continual experience of language, by reference to frames, or schemata, formed from past experience (Brown & Yule 1983a). That is to say, linguistic forms in use are understood by interpretation from the receiver's knowledge and expectations. They ultimately function in ways that reflect not only the intention of the speaker, but also the receptive environment of the hearer. This idea, the frame or schema that guides interpretation and thereby induces function from form, is nearly always implicit at some level in the various approaches to discourse analysis. In genre theory, the schema takes the form of an institutionalized category of discourse, such as the church sermon, to which the participants bring a special set of intentions and expectations

that will influence, respectively, their choice and their interpretation of forms. This broadly function-based notion, the genre, has much in common with the form-based notion of the speech event (Swales 1990).

2.2 Communicative function and relevance

In pragmatics, the outline of the conceptual frame recedes from view. The interpretive focus shifts from the experience of the interpreter to the linguistic forms that must be interpreted, and especially to interrogative and imperative sentences, which are considered to exceed declarative sentences in functional volatility. The imperative “Come in”, for example, can range in function from a stern command to the warmest of invitations. The functional variability of questions is a frequent subject of discussion in the literature (Tsui 1992). Successfully “situating” the utterance is held to be of central importance by pragmatics, since any interpretation must start from the assumption that an utterance is relevant to the circumstances in which it is made (Sperber & Wilson 1986). For this approach to become possible, however, it was necessary that the ideas of communicative function and form-function divergence should already have been conceived.

The Prague School drew attention to the concept of language as communicative function in the early 1960s. Jakobson’s initial description of the inherent semiotic functions of linguistic forms was carried further by Karcevskij, who differed from Jakobson (and Saussure) in refusing to posit invariant meanings, stating that a form may have “several conventional semiological values ...” (Leska 1996: 133). This is a crucial development, for it retains the reference to functions inherent in forms while introducing the element of unpredictability.

Here lies the secret of the creativity of language: language retains its indispensable conventionality whilst concurrently permitting a reflection of the constantly changing linguistic evaluation of the contents of the user’s consciousness.

(Leska 1996: 133)

Cook (1989) cites the early attempt of Hymes, after Jakobson, to establish broad categories of function in language use. One of these, the poetic function, actually depends on the linguistic form chosen. A similar but broader idea was popularized by the Canadian communications theorist Marshall McLuhan, whose book *The Medium is the Massage* argued, from its trick title onward, that the medium *is* the message, because we are more receptive to the ways in which things are put to us than to informational content.

Recognition of the inherence of function in form is a hallmark of the Hallidayian approach to discourse analysis. Halliday's linguistic functions have been extended by others into structural descriptions of verbal communication beyond the sentence (Sinclair 1985); however, it is important here to bear in mind that although discursal structure is seen to overlap grammar, which stops at the level of the sentence, the two are entirely separate. One should also be aware of "problems about the status of Halliday's categories" (Coulthard 1985: 165), which may have assumed too much about speakers' intentions. What is being built upon today is the combination of two ideas: that function is implicit in language, and that functions are performed across entire "texts", or stretches of language, and not merely sentences. Note that throughout this article *text* refers to both writing and speech, as is conventional in the literature of discourse analysis (Brown & Yule 1983a). Although the Hallidayian approach to text has also been adapted, in critical linguistics, to the analysis of sociopolitical processes, Fairclough finds the results flawed by a neglect of spoken discourse, of communicative processes (as opposed to products), and of the ideological functions performed through aspects of text other than grammar and vocabulary (Fairclough 1992).

Studies in the Hallidayian mainstream have identified certain categories of communicative acts in classroom discourse (Sinclair & Brazil

1982). From these categories emerge patterns of divergence between form and function, such as the teacher's use of interrogations as tests or of apparent declarations ("We have a lot of ground to cover") as signals. Such patterns gain a richer texture when combined with those noted by Brazil and others in the aural effects of speech. Not only may a question function as a test or a request, but it may also be fraught with subtleties of intention and attitude that must be interpreted from aspects of intonation or prosody (Brazil 1995; Clennell 1997).

Two prosodic elements-tone and key-work in different ways to mark pragmatic intention. By 'tone' I mean the choice of pitch contrast the speaker makes... By 'key' I mean the choice of relative pitch made by the speaker...
(Clennell 1997: 120)

Thus the meaning that one normally associates with an isolated linguistic form may be overridden by a contextual function, which may in turn be altered or even sarcastically subverted in the delivery. From this observation, the analysis of spoken discourse branches out into the province of paralinguistics, where one reads functions between the forms, as with a sigh, or in the apparent collapse of forms, as with stammering; functions that may be unrelated to conscious intent (Bloch 1996; Brown 1990).

2.3 Speech and writing

The question of the status to be accorded spoken language was not settled by the birth of discourse analysis. It persists as a variable factor in the comprehension of form-function divergence, to the extent that it affects one's view of forms. Perhaps inevitably, those who invest great effort in the study of speech are more inclined than others to see it not merely as the primal, hence primary, realization of language, but as virtually a system unto itself. Svartvik recognizes a common grammar but stresses "the difference in information structuring in speech as

compared with writing” (Svartvik 1991: 560). Similarly, McCarthy & Carter assert that

spoken grammar requires separate descriptive articulation, not least because some forms would appear to be endemic to spoken dialogic exchanges.

(McCarthy & Carter 1997: 422)

Brown & Yule, having emphasized the differences between speech and writing, go on to discriminate written forms, referring to literary writing as “a special, privileged outcrop on the fundamental functions of the written language” (Brown & Yule 1983b: 10). However, Hatch (1992) points out Tannen’s arresting observation, based on extensive conversation analysis, that speech bears a stronger resemblance to literature than to those “fundamental”, transactional uses of writing. Such inter-relationships notwithstanding, much of the work in discourse analysis has gone toward describing acts and events of spoken language.

2.4 Speech acts and speech events

The Sinclair-Coulthard classification of classroom “acts”, which resulted from analysis of data, must not be confused with speech act theory, which is essentially introspective (Levinson 1983; Searle 1979; Sadock 1974). This approach, propounded in the early 1960s by Austin and systematized by Searle, uses such terms as *illocutionary* and *perlocutionary* to illustrate the points that language is used not only to convey meaning but also to do things, and that an utterance can function on several levels at once, being, for example, both a locutionary act (a literal statement) and an illocutionary act, such as a request (Stern 1983). Perhaps owing to its origins, speech act theory tends to over-resolution.

Historically the trend in speech act theory seems to move gradually away from the originally maintained conception of meaning as use and to approach in various steps more and more the conception of a correspondence theory relying on a representation of facts. Thus it seems that the notion of meaning in speech act theory approaches more and more the view held in philosophical and

mathematical logic.

(Ballmer & Brennenstuhl 1981: 60)

Though speech act theory remains useful to discourse analysts as a referential shorthand, Levinson (1983) shows that it is crucially flawed as a basis for theoretical development and suggests that we should look instead to the speech event, a concept that tends to merge with the more literary concept of the genre and that defines itself by the communicative business at hand.

2.5 Conversation in context

In contemplating the speech event, we again approach the question of situational relevance. McCarthy (1991), discusses situation in terms reminiscent of genre theory, but also of the notional-functional syllabus of the 1970s: the different conventions of form that speakers observe in shopping, in talking with a doctor, and so on. The notional-functional syllabus, by its pairing-off of functions and forms, called attention to categories of meaning; however, its categories tended to be ill-defined (Coulthard 1985) and anyway did not address the probability of divergence between effective meaning, or function, and linguistic form. That probability looms all too large in conversation analysis, an approach to discourse that attends especially to conversational norms such as turn-taking procedures and the management of hesitations. Here, the emphasis is on the ways in which utterances manage the structure and direction of the discourse (Coulthard 1985). Ethnographic approaches produce such a variety of particular findings from authentic data that they are criticized for being non-generative and too narrowly focused on the internal dynamics of conversation (Coupland 1988). Even so, there is broad support in discourse analysis for two complementary views that seem to preclude an orderly conception of form-function divergence. One is that a speaker's or writer's success in expressing an intention

depends ultimately on inferences made by the receiver (Shiro 1994). The other is that the context of expression and inference, and thus the function of an utterance, is affected by such factors as age, occupation, dialect, register, shared knowledge, and style (McCarthy & Carter 1994; Hickey 1989). The potential for combination of these personal and interpersonal factors, let alone the variability of their relative weights or the harmonic effects of their merging, defies calculation; and the literature of discourse analysis has almost nothing to say about personality itself.

3 Some issues in discourse analysis

A field as diverse as discourse analysis can be perplexing for those who do not toil in it daily. Several questions that remain after surveying the various notions of form and function will now be examined from the perspective of a teacher of English as a foreign language (the author), rather than an exponent of discourse analysis.

3.1 Significance for second-language learners

A native speaker who interpreted 'Is that the mint sauce over there?' or 'Can you tell me the time?' as yes/no questions, 'Have a drink' as a command, or 'I wish you'd go away' as requiring just a murmur of agreement, would find the world a bewildering place full of irritable people. These are examples of a lack of fit which can occur between form and function.

(Sinclair & Coulthard 1992: 9)

It is unlikely that people at any level of second-language learning would really misconstrue those utterances, if they were mature enough to be placed in the envisaged situations. It seems that the authors have mistaken beginning learners for beginning thinkers. Such examples serve to remind us that the business of discourse analysis is description, not language pedagogy. There is general agreement that much of the subject is unnecessary or inappropriate as material for second-language

learners (Johnson & Johnson 1998). Let us consider, instead, what may be learned about the recognition of form-function divergence through the experience of non-native speakers, from which certain questions of analytical consistency emerge.

Nunan (1998) and J. Field (1998) can help orient us to non-native learners' encounters with English discourse. Nunan, at the outset of proposing an organic approach to second-language pedagogy, cites a need to stress the importance of discursal context in making grammatical choices and of functional interpretation in comprehending grammatical structures. In detail, his approach seems to reflect the expectation that most learners will have their hands full learning the established communicative functions of different grammatical forms, let alone attaining the ability to sort out, in the midst of conversation, the possible functions of a single form. If that is indeed Nunan's position, it is reinforced by the findings of Field, who cites his own classroom research as evidence that learners contrive to follow spoken discourse while recognizing far fewer linguistic items than was previously believed. He adds:

To compensate for this lack of adequate "bottom-up" information, L2 listeners form inferences: they use their knowledge of the context to make intelligent guesses about the ideas which link the sometimes dislocated words which they have been able to recognize.

(Field, J. 1998: 115)

It may be pointed out that native speakers, too, use knowledge of context to guess ideas, but not without comprehending many of the words spoken or recognizing the patterns in which they are strung together. The contexts obtained, respectively, by the native speaker and by Field's L2 learner are very different, and so are the guesses that can be attempted.

It is not unusual, at least in the experience of this writer, to be interrupted in mid-utterance by a non-native interlocutor who is trying to

answer a perceived question when what has actually been said is something like, “When you started learning English, ...” Let us consider this use of *when* from the point of view of the non-native speaker, to whom the referential intonation of the clause may well sound like the (mistakenly presumed) rising intonation of questions, and for whom interrogative syntax may be a very stubborn problem. On one of Japan’s television networks, there was for years a senior interviewer who seemed to have given up trying to put English verbs into the interrogative form. Despite long experience in using the language, his dialogues with such personages as Henry Kissinger were marked by many declarative sentences with rising intonation and by indisputably interrogative sentences with faulty syntax, as in “How the US will respond, if that happens?”. From the native speaker’s point of view, it seems that such misapprehensions as “when you started” for “when did you start” can have nothing to do with form-function divergence, because the forms are patently different. But from the point of view of a non-native speaker who sensed the difference much less acutely, or who was able to parse the speech stream less thoroughly, the word *when* would present a persistently challenging duality of function.

3.2 Scope

The preceding discussion raises the possibility that our working conceptions of form and function vary according to the extent and complexity of the language apprehended. To continue the previous example: given the word *when* alone, we see a duality of basic grammatical function; but given “*when* did you start learning English”, as opposed to “when you started learning English”, we see nothing of the kind, because the function of *when* has been established syntactically. Instead, we may be led to contemplate the communicative function of the whole utterance: the probability, for example, that it is functioning as an expression of admira-

tion. With a change of scope, we recognize an entirely different category of form and function.

One may ask what, then, is the appropriate scope for analysis of form and function. Discourse analysts have addressed that question but have not comprehensively answered it. Analysts sometimes look at individual words, as Gardner (1998) does in his study of *yeah* and related signals of affirmation. More often, analyses of spoken discourse treat at least a single exchange; however, Francis & Hunston (1992: 124) report that “discussion about the limits of the exchange: how long it may be and what it may contain” continues, unresolved.

3.3 Transparency

It seems that when we compare form and function, we are really comparing two functions that are attributable to the form: the function that we expect, and the one that confronts us. Without the first, the unpredictability of the second could not be felt. What we need to know, then, is where the range of expected functions ends, and that of unexpected functions begins. Writers on spoken discourse style emphasize that conversation is a dynamic joint production by the interlocutors (Stubbs 1983; Brazil 1992). This suggests that the interlocutors of the moment can best judge whether function has in fact diverged from form. Where there is mutual understanding, it is a matter of perspective whether one concludes that certain discoursal challenges were met, or that none were issued. If the point of view of the “joint producers” is the correct one, then it may be that form and function diverge only to the extent that misunderstandings occur, and that whatever is readily understood should be classified, for the occasion, as a predictable function of the form. That has been suggested by some writers (Coulthard & Montgomery 1981; Grosz 1981).

The analyst faces certain difficulties in the study of inferences. For example,

inferences are elusive because once they have been drawn they do not appear to be inferences any more.

(Shiro 1994: 167)

Hormann emphasizes that interlocutors actively seek this sense of transparency:

Understanding is a goal-oriented process. The speaker, as we have already emphasized, has the intention of directing the consciousness of the listener. Now it becomes recognizable that the listener also has a certain intention in every act of communication: to see the world around him clearly, to make it intelligible.

(Hormann 1986: 260)

3.4 Coherence

Since textual coherence, as a precondition for the correlation of functions with forms, is essential to discourse analysis, one might assume that analysts had at least agreed on the nature of coherence. However, there is a sharp division between advocates of a text-based Hallidayian model and advocates of a participant-based interactive model. As Tyler (1995) describes the Hallidayian view, represented by Hoey, coherence results from features of the text itself. The opposing model, which Tyler herself propounds, holds that:

... coherence has to do with the ease with which a listener can integrate the speaker's utterances into a reasonable, consistent interpretation of the discourse.

(Tyler 1995: 268)

It should be noted that neither model is directly concerned with theories of form-function divergence. What is of interest to us here is the way in which each would affect the assumptions that we bring to a consideration of such theories.

Those represented by Hoey believe that textual coherence is produced by the cohesive effect of patterns, and particularly patterns of repetition, within the text. Tyler and others counter, in effect, that coherence is in the mind of the beholder, who brings it into being by recognition when a

text is readily susceptible of “a reasonable, consistent interpretation”. Though the two positions, stated as simply as that, do not seem to be mutually exclusive, they represent fundamentally different conceptions of function in discourse.

The kind of function implied by the Hoey model is internal to the text: the systemic function of setting up patterns of cohesion. From Hoey’s own diagram as reproduced by Tyler, it is obvious that the producer of a text would ordinarily be unaware that this was being accomplished. Similarly the receiver, presented with a cohesively-functioning discourse, could not but find it coherent. It is as if language had its own communicative style, which it manifests through the compulsive arrangement of words by human beings. In contrast, the Tyler model stresses the interaction of minds wherein the producer’s intended meaning is intelligently noted and reconstructed by the receiver, any discoursal functions being in some way felt by the producer and acknowledged by the receiver. It seems, then, that the premises of the Tyler model are implicit in nearly all discussions of form-function divergence (Brown 1990; Brazil 1992; Sperber & Wilson 1986; Carter 1997). The ultimate significance of any such discussion must be considered an open question as long as competition continues between descriptions of the nature of textual coherence.

3.5 Speech and writing revisited

As noted above (2.3), recent writings on linguistics and language pedagogy show increased interest in speech. Most tend to stress differences between the spoken and written modes; some, to assert the primacy of speech in pronounced opposition to the long-held view that the written word is the ideal standard to which speech rarely measures up. It is not clear whether that extreme pro-speech stance is due more to the professional incentive to falsify an established notion or to sociopolitical antagonism toward the lettered classes. At any rate, as often happens where

there is academic partisanship, the middle ground has gone begging for cultivation. The middle ground is this: Many generations have passed since at least some people in most societies began producing both speech and writing, and conversely assimilating both modes. From that factual ground the thought arises that a member of a literate society will, by experiencing language in all its aspects, develop a unified personal language system in which no sharp modal distinction exists; in which a certain individual potential for “book-like” precision and grace is always present but not always dominant; and in which that potential depends not only on direct exposure to written language, but also on exposure to the speech of other members of society. It is only a thought. However, as a viable thought it denies *a priori* validity to the treatment of speech and writing as separate modes. It implies, instead, that our personal notions of coherence and effectiveness in speech refer naturally to everything we know about language, spoken or written.

There is a circular paradox in basing the need for a new departure in language studies on the premise that the prevailing conception of language embodies a false principle (the error of taking written language as the norm). If that error is, or for many years was, sufficiently widespread to alter the prevailing conception of language, then knowledge of written forms should in fact have come to influence the way we try to speak. The “false” principle must be seen either as passing into truth or as vaguely representing a quite unexceptionable view: that literate society constitutes the matrix of modern spoken discourse. Brown & Yule briefly address the issue of the literate society, but move quickly to contain it.

There is however, one further distinction which is rarely noted, but which it is important to draw attention to here. That is the distinction between the speech of those whose language is highly influenced by long and constant immersion in written language forms, and the speech of those whose language is relatively

uninfluenced by written forms of language. ... For the majority of the population, even of a 'literate' country, spoken language will have very much less in common with the written language.

(Brown & Yule 1983a: 14)

Brown & Yule do not inquire into the question of widespread, indirect acquisition of literary forms through the speech of others. Indeed, they propose a sharp and arbitrary division between a small set of people who are steeped in written language and a much larger set who are practically unexposed to it. In this larger set they include even most secondary-school graduates.

... we shall draw an admittedly simplistic distinction between spoken and written language which takes highly literate written language as the norm of written language, and the speech of those who have not spent many years exposed to written language (a set which will include most young undergraduate students) as the norm for spoken language.

(Brown & Yule 1983a: 14)

It is a matter of opinion whether one should conclude, as Brown & Yule seem predisposed to do, that people at some point become too literate to count as producers of normal spoken language, or that normal spoken language is really a long continuum intersected by personalities. Carter (1997) makes the notion of the continuum explicit in his thinking about written forms but does not apply it to language as a whole. In his work with McCarthy, the two writers argue forcefully for separate grammars of spoken and written English (McCarthy & Carter 1997). Fairclough sees speech and writing as influencing each other, although his focus is on the play of social forces rather than the assimilation of language within the individual.

The division between speech and writing is no longer the commonsense one it may seem to be, in either direction. The expression 'talking like a book' reflects a popular perception of how written language has influenced more formal speech, and one finds the shift towards conversation not only throughout the printed media and advertising, but also in new designs for official forms ... The shifts of

speech towards writing may have had their heyday; contemporary cultural values place a high valuation on informality, and the predominant shift is towards speech-like forms in writing.

(Fairclough 1992: 204)

Even here we find speech and writing preconceived to be competing modes of language, advancing from opposite poles to encroach on each other's territory. So very long after the advent of writing, it should be possible to take a more integrated approach. The false starts, asides, and syntactic shipwrecks heard in spontaneous speech may signify a deep interrelation of language forms and communicative requirements: a relationship in which all our experience of language affects the texture of our thoughts, our thoughts make us try to speak in the most effective language we know, and the constraints of real-time communication make us compromise. Available ethnographic findings could probably go a long way toward confirming or refuting the intuition that those native-speakers of English with the least pretensions to literacy (as distinct from literarily embarrassed undergraduates) are also among the most fluent in their own variety of speech. However, such a foray into sociolinguistics is beyond the scope of the present study.

3.6 Personalities

In parts of the literature, one sees discourse analysis put forward as a basis for empowering people, for liberating them from social schemata. Even the self is said to be constituted by discourse (Fairclough 1992). Here it seems that a great variety of human experience and thought is being glossed for the sake of discourse theory, if not for that of ideology. Even where ideology is not at stake, writers on discourse rarely take the discussion of variable factors down (or up) to the level of individual, autonomous personalities for more than a brief reference. This is probably inevitable. Let us borrow the wastebasket metaphor that Yule uses

in explaining why some kinds of evidence have so often been ignored in descriptions of language:

By placing the investigation of the abstract, potentially universal, features of language in the center of their work tables, linguists and philosophers tended to push any notes they had on everyday language use to the edges. As the tables got crowded, many of those notes on ordinary language in use began to be knocked off and ended up in the wastebasket.

(Yule 1996: 6)

Yule has a specific point to make, but the tendency that he describes is a general one endemic to activities of classification. As we have seen, ethnographers produce too great a variety of evidence for the purposes of most discourse analysts, whose chosen occupation is to discern patterns of language use from which descriptions may be generated. Given that occupation, there is no incentive to pile unique personalities on one's work table. There is, rather, an incentive to focus on conceptual classes that cut across personalities, such as registers and social contexts. As these classes accumulate, and unclassifiable notes disappear over the edge of the table, it begins to seem plausible that individual minds are little more than discursively conditioned agents.

Hymes is aware of this occupational hazard and evidently troubled by it. He acknowledges that discourse analysis cannot support "an infinity of possible contextual factors" (Hymes 1974: 102), but his overriding message is that one must resist the lure of an artificially ordered view of context:

The worlds in which persons live and talk are secondary, not primary; ... discourse is to be analysed in terms of a speaker (and hearer) freely placed to relate words and world, and to each other, on the basis of a few universal principles. (Hymes 1986: 102)

Coupland, citing the same article by Hymes, carries the argument further:

If discourse analysis is to recognise that 'the same behaviours, the same verbal conduct, may have different implications for different actors', and that 'the repertoires of individuals may differ ...' ..., it will need to represent social context

in an altogether less idealised and much more explicitly variationist way than it has to date. The problem is how this might be achieved, and in a way that does not conflict with the epistemological requirements of discourse analysis.

(Coupland 1988: 8)

Personal patterns of linguistic form and function can be seen in spoken conversational English, including dramatic dialogue. Let us end by examining a few examples, taken from the Hollywood film *It's a Wonderful Life*, that illustrate both the general tendency of function to diverge from form and the particular tendency of a certain personality to "relate words and world" in distinctive ways.

4 Personal form-function divergence

4.1 The text

The text examined here, the dialogue of the film *It's a Wonderful Life*, is not the shooting script itself, but this writer's transcript of the dialogue as actually delivered. It thus includes the actors' occasional improvisations and, in places, paralingual effects.

Among those who write on the subject of authentic text, some argue that the calculated tidiness of dramatic dialogue makes it unsuitable for study as conversation (Brown & Yule 1983b). Others believe that a good playwright or screenwriter can supply dialogue that displays the instructive elements of authenticity without the obstructive ones, making it useful at least in language learning (Carter 1998). Still others accept dramatic dialogue outright as a valid example of verbal interaction (Herman 1995). Language teachers often adopt films as texts, tacitly acknowledging the point made in a different context by Frank Capra, the director of *It's a Wonderful Life*: that dramatic dialogue is supposed to be understandable when overheard (Basinger 1986). One might add that while real people have the virtue of being real, fictional ones have the virtue of being thoroughly accessible.

Dramatists, novelists, and screenwriters must all confront the question of characterization in some way or fail at their craft. Some, like D. H. Lawrence, consciously agitate against the coalescence of personality and strive to show individual human lives as surface waves on a primal ocean (Sabin 1987). Others, considering it essential that their characters should have fully-developed personal identities, go so far as to work out details of the characters' origins and growth that will never be published. Charles Dickens invents distinctive but superficial characters who become bywords for particular traits, while his contemporary Anthony Trollope seems to be a chronicler of life in a parallel world where the most minor personage is as irrepressibly real and self-contradictory as ourselves. The important thing, for our purposes, is not that some invented personalities are more believable than others. It is that personalities make themselves known to us through their use of language, especially when they must speak to us directly. Dramatists commonly work with a variety of personae ranging from the allegorical to the psychologically complex, but they know that in any case their characters must "bring themselves into existence in speech" (Herman 1995: 45), since there is no narrator to explain them to us as in a novel. That applies as well to the writing of screenplays.

Dialogue must communicate information or the facts of your story to the audience. It must move the story forward. It must reveal character. Dialogue must reveal conflicts between and within characters, and emotional states and personality quirks of character; dialogue comes out of character.

(Field, S. 1979: 32)

In the transcript of *It's a Wonderful Life* we shall see an example of characters establishing themselves by speech alone, followed by some examples of personal form-function divergence in the speech of the central character.

4.2 Self-establishing speech

At the very beginning of the film, no characters appear on the screen: we only hear the voices of several people praying. Each utters no more than a sentence or two, as follows:

Man 1: I owe everything to George Bailey. Help him, Dear Father.

Man 2: Joseph, Jesus, and Mary-help my friend Mr. Bailey.

Woman 1: Help my son George tonight.

Man 3: He never thinks about himself, God. That's why he's in trouble.

Man 4: George is a good guy. Give him a break, God.

Woman 2: I love him, Dear Lord. Watch over him tonight.

Boy: Please, God. Something's the matter with Daddy.

Girl: Please bring Daddy back.

Even in transcription, those few words enable us to begin discerning the characters we will meet around the central one, George Bailey. If told that they will include a diffident Italian immigrant and an easygoing cab driver, we can find them here. Without suspecting that two others are a policeman and a respected merchant, we are aware of an incisive frankness in the speech of one and, at least by comparison, a touch of allusive gentility in that of the other. The first woman seems to understand that she has defined herself completely when she has let us know she is the protagonist's mother. His wife's more complex character must develop gradually, but already her somewhat fatalistic "Watch over him tonight" has alerted us to expect a degree of self-mastery and a committedly nurturing disposition rather than, say, vulnerability or possessiveness. The boy and girl show themselves to be children accustomed to domestic stability.

Much more is required to produce a Trollopian individual. However, many of these characters have begun, through their discourse, to differentiate themselves not only as stock figures but as personalities. Finally,

let us see how the personality of the central character, George Bailey, expresses itself in three instances of form-function divergence.

4.3 Specific examples of personal form-function divergence

The following examples were noticed in the process of analyzing the transcript of *It's a Wonderful Life* with concordancing software, which collects all occurrences of a specified text string (usually a word or phrase) from a digital corpus and displays them on a single screen.

One of the words examined by concordancing was about. It was initially noted that “know about” was one of the more frequent patterns, with seven entries, and then that six of these were separate instances of a single utterance, “What do you know about that”. A viewing of the scenes in question confirms that in no case is this interrogative form functioning as a question; it is always uttered in a moment of wonder. Moreover, it is a pet phrase of the character George Bailey. On top of the divergence between the interrogative form and the communicative (or ruminative) function which usage makes theoretically available to everyone, there is a level of personal function at which the utterance actually marks this particular speaker’s language.

Analysis of other common words in the text revealed that of 153 entries of the word *here*, there were thirteen in which it apparently did not perform a locative function but only served to round off the end of an utterance, as in “This requires a little thought, here”. In several others, such as “I just happened to be passing by, here”, a very weak locative function could be claimed against the intuition that these, too, were really examples of *here* being used as a kind of tail. This divergence of form and function in the use of *here* was limited, with one exception, to the speech of George Bailey. It is interesting that *here* can be found several times in the transcript, and has been confirmed by reviewing the film, where it does not appear in the published shooting script: it was a feature

of the actor James Stewart's delivery.

Another of George Bailey's pet phrases is "hot dog!", an exclamation by which he shows great pleasure on three occasions (if function did not diverge from form here, the expression would be remarkable indeed). It is a common enough expression in American English, and yet not a universal one among American speakers; it gains a place in some personal language systems, but not in others. In the world of *It's a Wonderful Life*, it is the property of a single character. Like the other two examples, it marks that character individually, and not as a member of a group or as a speaker momentarily situated in a certain context. The location of a language pattern within a personality, rather than a community or an age group or a social situation, distinguishes it from those features commonly treated by discourse analysis.

5 Conclusion

The notion of divergence between linguistic form and communicative function was reviewed, and some of its salient points examined from a teacher's perspective. It was observed that the various approaches to discourse analysis present a picture of diversity, not to say disorder, in which even the underlying concept of coherence remains a subject of debate. At the same time, it was found that there is a point of negative consistency among the approaches: although they recognize many contextual factors that may influence the uses of linguistic forms, none make more than passing reference to the personality of the individual language user. However, an analysis of dramatic dialogue revealed patterns of form-function divergence that could be identified as personal characteristics.

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