language

The Language
of Everyday Life

Judy Delin

everyday

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An Introduction

Judy Delin

In memory of my grandfathers

Charles Dzialoszinsky
1902–1936

John Hughes
1899–1992

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PREFACE

While there is a considerable literature on most of the kinds of texts that are discussed in this book, much of it is neither brief nor introductory. My own students' experience has been that there is a need for a book that will open up texts without requiring a huge theoretical apparatus to be assembled beforehand: they wanted to get their hands dirty and get *into* texts, learning the necessary terms and concepts along the way. What was needed, then, was a book that would dive straight in, providing a first introduction to several different text types, and laying the foundations for further study of a more advanced and extended kind.

The aim of this book, therefore, is to give an overview of a wide range of everyday texts at a consistent level of linguistic sophistication. Through an accessible theoretical approach, the book provides a jumping-off point for further and deeper analysis of the kinds of texts covered. I hope this book will prove to be a useful starting-point in the linguistic study of not only the text-types explicitly introduced here, but a wide range of others.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1 Introduction

The aim of this book is to raise awareness of the richness of the language that plays such a central role in everyday life. By examining a small number of selected text types, the book presents concepts and ways of going about looking at language that will, it is hoped, expose some of the intricacy of human linguistic behaviour and its role in shaping and reflecting society. If the resulting understanding thereby invokes a sense of wonder at what we do through and with language day by day, then so much the better.

The book is also intended to be empowering. This may be on a practical, 'life skills' level: it is useful to know, for example, how advertising messages influence us, or situations of unequal power affect us in a job interview. In addition, however, the book aims to provoke independent research on language in everyday life, where so much remains to be discovered. There is a fascinating diversity of social situations in which language plays a role. This leaves ample room for projects that, even if the researcher is new to this kind of work, can yield genuinely interesting and even novel findings about how humans interact and how we use language.

LANGUAGE AND EVERYDAY LIFE

Myers takes the view that everyday talk is a distinct discourse type, and draws a distinction between this and 'other' text types such as advertising:

> Everyday life is not institutional – not politics, or church services, or courts. . .talk in everyday life is man to man, or woman to woman, or woman to man or whatever . . . everyday talk is created out of a contrast with advertising talk. (1994: 108)

If we take his view, this book is mistitled. On Myers' approach, the kinds of language we are looking at are not everyday, but are trying to either evoke the everyday (as in advertising, trying to use conversational devices in order to seem 'ordinary' and believable) or to avoid it (as in interviewing, where the 'ordinary' kinds of responses of interest and approbation towards what another is telling you have to be withheld). However, I have quite consciously adopted the title *The Language of Everyday Life* because the text types examined here are so common that they constitute an important part of our everyday experience, and the features of all of them overlap substantially with

the features of everyday language. If everydayness is confined to face-to-face conversations between equals, it is surprising how much of our everyday life would have to be described as not everyday. However, it will be clear from much of the discussion in the book that face-to-face conversations between equals are a very useful touchstone for comparison of the text types that are examined. For example, the kinds of instructions a step aerobics instructor gives to her class are usefully contrasted with how people ask one another to do things when they are in an equal relationship. I have not devoted a chapter to face-to-face interaction between equals, although by the end of this book readers should find themselves well armed with terms and concepts with which to describe it. There are many good introductions to casual conversation: I recommend Eggins and Slade (1997) in particular.

CHOICE OF TEXTS

The book is organized around types of texts that we all intuitively know to exist, and expect to have different properties. Sports commentary, for example, will predictably be different from the language used in an interview, and the language of advertising will be different from that of instructions. This much is obvious. Given this observation, however, it is not always easy to see what can be said to pin down what makes a text of a particular type identifiable as such a text, and what can be said about how it achieves its purpose. What this book does is provide a survey of the more significant characteristics of each text type, providing the reader with a set of terms and ideas, taken from an eclectic range of linguistic theories and approaches, that can be used as a toolkit to open up the text, and, it is hoped, many other texts after that.

   This book does not attempt to describe exhaustively the differences, or even the characteristics, of the different text types, and does not pretend to present text examples that can be guaranteed to be representative of their types in any formal way. The suggestions presented are not based on large bodies of text, but on relatively short, closely analysed, selected examples. These are all from real texts, not constructed ones. The texts discussed in the book were chosen because they are interesting, and display many of the characteristics that might normally be found in texts of their type. There is, therefore, an attempt to present informally what might be thought of as *normal* texts. I have not deliberately gone for the weird. The important point is that the texts presented here could easily have been found by the reader, and the skills, ideas and approaches described herein could easily be adapted to those texts. To reinforce the point, the final chapter of the book is dedicated to describing how just such a project in text description could be designed and carried out by someone who had read the book, with a view to illuminating his or her own texts in a similar way.

   Following Christie (1990: 238), the book seeks to introduce a skill: 'the skill . . . in identifying those elements of the grammar which most usefully illuminate the particular text in hand'. We should be careful to interpret the

term 'grammar' very inclusively: the whole system of choices that language presents. This is not a use of the term grammar as it is conventionally understood, referring to the way words are combined into the constituent parts of clauses, and clauses into sentences, but many other levels of description (here we use the term 'syntax' for referring to sentence structure). Levels of description used in the book include:

Production values	The way in which texts of certain types are constructed around expectations of what they will, and will not, contain.
Rhetorical structure	The constituent parts of texts, such as summaries, descriptions, narrative, warnings, step-by-step directions, etc.
Conversation structure	How a dialogue is constructed in 'turns' between speakers, and how these are formed, begun, and ended.
Syntax	The way certain syntactic constructions – different sentence types – are used.
Lexical choice	The way words are chosen, and used in relation to one another.
Semantics	The way meaning is conveyed by certain grammatical and lexical choices.
Pragmatics	The way meaning is retrieved through inference and through the use of shared knowledge and context.
Sound	The way audible elements such as intonation and stress contribute to meaning.

We also look at the ideological 'work' a text does as it is interpreted by its intended audience, and how this and all the levels listed above are orchestrated together to make a text work. This eclecticism of description illuminates not only the text, but the relationship it has with its producer, its consumer, and its situation.

TYPES OF TEXTS?

What is it that makes us feel that there are different 'types' of text? I noted above that most of us have quite secure intuitions about what texts are of the 'same kind', and which are of different kinds. A useful and widely used system for describing different kinds of text is the notion of **register**. The idea of register is meant to capture 'differences in the type of language selected as appropriate to different situational features' (Halliday et al., 1964: 77, cited in Leckie-Tarry and Birch (1995: 6)). On this approach, language is seen as arising from its context of situation, and different situations will predictably give rise to different language features. As Leckie-Tarry and Birch (in Halliday et al., 1964: 7) argue, both linguistic and situational features need to be captured in a proper account of the register of a text. Typically, the description of register is divided into three categories (see, for example, Halliday and Hasan, 1976):

Field	Characteristics of the nature of the situation (institutional or non-institutional; its location; participants; purpose) and domain, subject matter, or content.
Tenor	Characteristics of the social relationships of the participants; formality or informality; social identity; age; sex; power relations.
Mode	Means of transmission: spoken or written; planned or unplanned; the possibility or impossibility of feedback; closeness of relationship to some activity; distance over time and space.

We can see the description of register in action through applying it to a piece of text used later in this book. In the following extract, two presenters are commentating a football match between England and Romania. The 'main' presenter is Brian, but every so often an ex-footballer, Kevin, makes his own comments. The extract begins at the end of a long contribution by Kevin about England's performance in a previous match against Colombia, who tired in the last 20 minutes of the game:

Kevin	the Colombians did it in the last twenty minutes and we're good enough to do it
	We've just just got to believe and we've got to push forward and we can cause them problems
Brian	Le Saux – from Campbell – but it was difficult to take and there were too many Romanians round him
	And it's Popescu on the break
	Ilie

While the statement of field, tenor, and mode is not an exact science, the outline features of each category given above should give sufficient pointers for what to look for. Here is a suggested register description of the discourse. It is somewhat complicated by the fact that Kevin and Brian seem to be doing rather different things: Brian is doing play-by-play commentary to the television audience, while Kevin tends to address his more evaluative and conversational remarks to Brian.

Field	Institutional, football, evaluative, informative; TV station representative and ex-footballer to co-presenter, Kevin 'overheard' by home audience; Brian speaking directly to audience.
Tenor	Casual, unplanned, more knowledgeable than home audience but one presenter more powerful than the other.
Mode	Television, live broadcast, spoken to Brian/to camera, impossibility of feedback from audience but possible between presenters; Brian closely related to action of the game, Kevin less action-linked.

The next step is then to go on to look at what features of the language or its organization reflect, or make us perceive, these situational factors. For example, elements of the mode become clear in the turn taking behaviour of the two presenters and how they address one another (Kevin talks to Brian, Brian talks to the camera). Field is indicated by specific vocabulary such as players' names, phrases like 'difficult to take' and 'on the break' and the distinctive syntactic constructions, including elements such as 'from Camp-

bell' and 'and it's Popescu . . .' that we might not expect to find in everyday conversation. The evaluative nature of some contributions and an obvious bias towards the perspective of the English team come through in Kevin's 'we're good enough to do it' and 'we can cause them problems', and in Brian's 'too many Romanians' (presumably not too many from the Romanians' point of view) and the tendency to perspectivize the action from the England players' point of view. Tenor is created partly through the 'unplanned' characteristics of the speech, leading to repetitions and utterances that look, on paper, ungrammatical or incomplete, and through certain informal vocabulary choices, such as 'causing them problems' as a metaphor for gaining an advantage in the game, and referring to winning as 'doing it' and progressing in the game as 'pushing forward'. There are many more features to comment on, but these few should give an idea of how we can relate various aspects of linguistic choice and organization to the three register features.

A consideration of the register of a text can highlight some features of its relationship with situation, and therefore its language, which may otherwise be overlooked, often because they are obvious. Using a technique like this, moreover, can provide a means of stating more carefully the relationship between texts of very disparate types, and therefore finding ways of comparing language features that might otherwise be confusing and difficult to approach.

Somewhat overlapping the notion of register is the notion of genre. Some theorists have seen genre to be a subdivision of register, and others as a super-category. Because of its difficulty of definition, the term is not used in this book, although Swales' definition of genre as a 'socially recognized communicative event' (1990: 13) may suggest, as Leckie-Tarry and Birch (1995: 10) point out, that a genre may be a complete communicative event, such as a church service or a coffee-break, while the notion of register can be used to describe segments or sections of such events. Register might change, therefore, as a text or discourse progresses, while genre would remain constant. For a very useful and readable discussion of the interrelationship between the two notions, see Leckie-Tarry and Birch (1995, Chapter 1).

Readers will also be aware throughout the book of the influence of researchers who see the use of language as an **ideological** activity. That is, language use and understanding require certain sets of assumptions to be in place in both speaker (or writer) and hearer (or reader). As Fairclough (1989: 2) argues very clearly, even when we feel these assumptions to be simply 'common sense', they actually reflect, enshrine, and even create differential relationships of power in society. To give a concrete example, when an advertiser suggests in an advert that such and such a shampoo gives a healthy shine to the hair, the advertisement is appealing to a 'common sense' assumption that shiny hair is desirable. If a reader or viewer does not have that assumption already, the advertisement may cause them to construct it for themselves and store it away for future use. Now, it may be difficult to imagine a situation in which shiny hair is not desirable, but this may be seen as testimony to how hard it is to examine one's own common sense and see it as a potentially ideological construct. To make this easier, recall that it is not

currently constructed as desirable to have shiny *skin*: indeed, cosmetics are sold that are intended to banish just this effect. These values are entirely cultural. What the advertisement does is construct a wish or common-sense need for shiny hair (or matt skin), and present the product as the answer to the need. This creates a consumption role for the onlooker, and a powerful role for the shampoo or cosmetic company as a provider and adviser. It is often the case that advertising communication will fit into a whole slew of similar communications (magazine features, TV programmes, films) in which similar values are adopted, and so individual advertisements will not stand out as abnormal in terms of the assumptions they require and communicate. In the following chapters, many uses of language will be examined that make a particular contribution to the conveying of assumptions, or that appear to require certain assumptions to be in place on the part of the hearer or reader in order to make sense of the message. Although language is not the only medium through which this work is done, language plays an important ideological role in many communicative contexts.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

Texts in the book, as I noted above, were chosen because they were interesting and not too outlandish, but also because they represent a spread of different situations, modes (spoken or written), and interesting linguistic characteristics.

Chapter 2 deals with the language of written news reporting, concentrating on the story of Tracey Andrews, whose lover was stabbed to death in an apparent 'road rage' murder of which Tracey herself was subsequently found guilty. Apart from the inherent interest of the story, it provides the opportunity to examine the changing attitudes in the press to Tracey herself throughout the case, from a position of sympathy to one of suspicion. The chapter also sets out in some detail the conventions of constructing written news narrative, and presents a framework for describing the difference between how events happen in the world and how they are reported in the news. The chapter also looks at conventions for attributing views and speeches to news actors, and at how people are named, and blamed, through the use of certain linguistic constructions.

Chapter 3 examines a spoken form of language: the language of sports commentary. Using transcripts from football and racing, the chapter describes the distinctive sound and pace of the commentary, including the kinds of errors that are often made in such fast speech. We look at the kinds of functions commentary serves, and at how two commentators signal to one another how turn-taking should happen between them, smoothly and usually without error. The chapter also examines the distinctive syntactic constructions that arise out of the need to locate sports protagonists, particularly in football, by verbal means before identifying who they are – often because it takes a while for the commentator to work out their identity, and needs a way of playing for time.

Chapter 4 looks at the language of instructions in two contexts: written instructions and spoken instructions. In the first case, we look in detail at the instruction leaflet for some home hair colour and, in the second, at the language used by an instructor during a step aerobics workout. The chapter first examines in some detail the myriad choices available in English grammar for telling or asking someone else to do something, and the choice between these is presented as a flow chart that takes into account issues such as social distance and the perceived benefit to the hearer of doing the action. However, it is also noticeable that instructions do not just consist of being told what to do: there are a lot of other language functions, such as describing, warning, narrating, identifying, and teaching, that also take place. We look at the rhetorical structure of both the written and spoken instructions to ascertain how the text is segmented into these different functions, and at the grammar and vocabulary to see how readers or hearers manage to work out which is which.

Chapter 5 focuses on the language of interviews, looking at three different interviewing situations: a police interview with a suspect, an interview between lawyers and a client who is interested in taking someone else to court, and an interview for an academic post in a University. Using techniques from conversation analysis, the chapter sets out how interview language differs from casual conversation, and what it is that makes the participants feel that the situation is 'formal' in some way. The chapter presents a framework for arranging the many kinds of interview on a grid of perceived threat or benefit to the interviewee, and of degree of compulsion to attend the interview, and relates this to the kinds of behaviour that can be expected from the participants. The chapter shows in some detail the way in which power is constructed and allocated in formal face-to-face interactions, and how this is linked to language use. It is also shown what interviewers are not expected to do, such as tell stories about themselves, or appear impressed with interviewees' answers.

Chapter 6 looks at magazine features, concentrating first of all on the kinds of characteristics that enable features to be identified as such. The discussion then focuses on 'in-depth' features, looking at an example from the *Guardian* newspaper's magazine section on the 'chicken flu' virus in Hong Kong which resulted in the slaughter of millions of chickens. We look in detail at the rhetorical structure of the feature, showing how the aims of the feature – to give evidence for a position, to elaborate arguments, and to give a point of view – are met by the use of text segments with particular goals, and with particular relationships between them. The chapter discusses how point of view is also supported by vocabulary choice, as the point of a feature is not to remain neutral on a topic, but to give an interpretation of events. There is also a discussion of how magazines appeal to certain audiences, and how they 'position' or 'place' readers ideologically by their choice of content and language.

Chapter 7 is devoted to the discussion of advertising language. After a look at how advertisers get to know who is buying their products, we look at the available media for advertising and the kinds of advertising strategies that producers can adopt. The chapter looks at printed advertisement structure,

outlining some common rhetorical organizations for print ads and looking at characteristics of advertising syntax. We then look at how ideology works in advertising, following a framework in which consumers, products, and the relationships between them are all seen as being 'built' by successful adverts. Linguistically, the chapter focuses on the kinds of construction and vocabulary choices that are used to convey, imply, or even elicit certain knowledge and beliefs in readers and hearers, encouraging complicity with the advertising message and a certain amount of voluntary positioning of the part of the consumer.

Chapter 8 describes how to go about planning and carrying out a linguistic project that involves getting hold of your own data, written or spoken. It provides a means of working out an interesting project idea, and practical guidelines for taking the project through from the planning stage, through recording and transcribing conversation, to presenting the finished product.

There is an extensive glossary, which includes additional references, giving further explanation of many terms and concepts used in the text. The glossary was designed in part to be scanned in its own right, and not merely used for look-up. It may be a particularly useful aid in planning projects, since it provides a comprehensive list of the linguistic phenomena discussed in the book.

CONVENTIONS USED IN THE BOOK

The following conventions are adopted in the book:

Bold type Bold type, when it appears in running text, refers from this point on to an entry in the glossary.

Italics Italics are used in running text to quote words or phrases of linguistic data, and for emphasis.

A simple set of conventions is also used for the presentation of tape-recorded and transcribed speech:

A:	indicates who is speaking
15	lines are numbered in long extracts of data for ease of reference
(.)	indicates a pause of less than a second
(3)	indicates a pause of a counted number of seconds
[yeah	utterances that are bracketed together indicate speakers talking at
[to buy some	once, and where this begins and/or ends
to::	colons or double colons indicate a drawn-out syllable; number of colons give an impression of length
hhhh	audible breath
(2 sylls)	a number of syllables inaudible on the tape
it's NOT	capitals indicate special volume or emphasis on the capitalized element

Some additional transcription conventions, not used in the book, are given in Chapter 8, for potential use in a personal project. There is no universal agreement on the 'right' conventions to use, although those given here are relatively common.

One thing that may strike the reader on a first encounter with transcribed speech is how messy, disfluent, and disorganized it looks. We filter out a great deal of this when listening, and are not so aware of it. On the relatively conservative medium of the page, where we are used to seeing planned, edited, and revised material, the contrast with transcribed speech can be particularly striking. This surprise is often alleviated by attempting to transcribe a close friend's, or even your own, speech, even for a couple of minutes. This can be a very revealing exercise. This, and the tools and concepts presented in the book, will show that speech is not only quite messy, it is also highly organized.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDITIONAL READING

Many references on the specific kinds of language dealt with in subsequent chapters are given throughout the book. There are many good general source books, however, that are relevant background and will prove a considerable help in taking your study further.

A handy reference on the kinds of grammatical ideas used in this book is Crystal (1996), which explains concepts such as the parts of speech, clause structure, and how clauses are combined into sentences very accessibly. Hurford (1994) provides a thorough reference-style treatment of grammatical terms. A more exotic, but delightfully readable, grammar reference book is Gordon (1993). An extremely comprehensive, not to say definitive, grammar of the English language is Quirk et al. (1985), which, although out of reach of most purses, is an excellent reference source if you can find it in a library. A reduced and less expensive version of the same grammatical framework is Quirk and Greenbaum (1993). Also recommended is Biber et al. (1999), a study of the grammar of spoken and written English based on a 40-million word computer corpus composed of different registers of text.

A very good reference on conversation analysis, an approach to describing conversation in great detail that stems from sociology, is Eggins and Slade (1997). This book describes in detail the nature of casual conversation and the tools and concepts proposed in conversation analysis for understanding how it is achieved. A briefer overview of the CA approach is given in Schiffrin (1994, Chapter 7): this book also provides a useful overview of other approaches to language, including discourse analysis and pragmatics. There is also useful advice on collecting your own data.

Carter (1987) is a useful reference on vocabulary, while Carter and Nash (1990) is an engaging and enlightening approach to a range of different text types. Fairclough's books, which are referred to in many places throughout this book because of the many very fruitful insights he has into the relationships between language, society, power, and ideology, are in my view

somewhat indigestible because of the intricacy of theory that builds up throughout. However, they are well worth the effort, and I would particularly recommend Fairclough (1989) as an introduction to the general framework of what is now termed 'critical discourse analysis'. Bolinger (1980), although now somewhat dated, is still a very readable, if somewhat eccentrically organized, overview of the political and persuasive functions of language.

2 The Language of Written News Reporting

News reporting is important to us because it is a key source of access to events that affect our lives culturally, politically, economically, and often emotionally. News is necessarily selective and partial, both in what is selected as worth reporting, and in how it is presented. This chapter describes some important elements of the language found in news reports, looking in particular at some of the frameworks that have enabled researchers to reveal how news writing achieves its social and informative purpose. Pointers for further reading in this thriving field of research should enable you to follow up specific areas for further study.

WHAT IS NEWS REPORTING?

A look at any newspaper will reveal a range of different kinds of texts with different aims, presentation, and content. Bell (1991: 14) divides written news coverage into the following categories:

1 Hard news.
2 Soft news, such as feature articles.
3 'Special topic' news, such as sports or arts.
4 Headlines, subheadings, photo captions, etc.

In this chapter, we will concentrate on just one of these text types: hard news, and, in particular, 'spot news' (cf. Bell, 1994: 100), stories of crime, disasters, fires and so on. However, as Bell notes, the category of headlines, captions, and other such devices cuts across the others, since all news writing will feature some or all of these.

The chapter will draw on the reporting, over a period lasting from December 1996 to April 1997, of an alleged 'road rage' killing. Lee Harvey had, according to his fiancée, Tracey Andrews, been drawn into a 'cat and mouse' car chase and had been stabbed in a remote country lane by the passenger in the other car, a dark blue Ford Sierra. The other car was never found, and Tracey herself was subsequently charged and later found guilty of Lee Harvey's murder. Apart from allowing us to explore some of the typical characteristics of news reporting, it is also interesting to observe the change in sympathy that