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Emerald Book Chapter: Interactions and the Drama of Engagement
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INTERACTIONS AND THE DRAMA OF ENGAGEMENT

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"The time has come," the Walrus said,
"To talk of many things:
Of shoes—and ships—and sealing-wax—
Of cabbages—and kings—
And why the sea is boiling hot—
And whether pigs have wings."

– Lewis Carroll

ABSTRACT

Purpose – *People do not just* interact*, with each other; rather, they* engage *with each other using the visual and verbal instrumentations of communication at their disposal, constructing meaningful and intelligible conversations with differing degrees of precision of intention and clarity of expression. In doing this, they employ the "fundamental features of language," described in various semiotic and structuralist theories.*

Methodology – *Here, we synthesize and integrate the key aspects of these language theories in an attempt to apply them to everyday conversations. The language features in question are routinely put into play by human agents to convey attitudes, emotions, opinions, and information and to achieve an engagement with the other.*

Findings – *Human relations, expansive in their range and intricate in their forms, demand complex instrumentations with which to conduct them.*

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These instrumentations are essential features of the linguistic socialization of human agents, integral to both memory and habits of speech.

Keywords: Interaction; language; semiotics; linguistic theories

People do not just *interact* with each other; rather, they *engage* with each other using the visual and verbal instrumentations of communication at their disposal, constructing meaningful and intelligible conversations with differing degrees of precision of intention and clarity of expression. *Engagement is the active and systematic use of already mastered elements of the language to deliberately influence the other's attitudes, emotions, and actions*. When human agents encounter each other, they engage in conversations by managing, with varying degrees of skill, the fundamental features of language. One answer to George Simmel's question, "How is society possible?" (1910, p. 372) is that "society" is possible because agents talk with each other and let each other take turns while doing this. Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson's (1974) study of turn taking in conversations provided one answer to Simmel's question. Another answer is found in Goffman's remark (1967b, p. 58): "If an individual could give himself the deference he desired, there might be a tendency for society to disintegrate into islands inhabited by solitary cultish men, each in worship at his own shrine." The same could be said of turns: if agents do not take turns in conversations and allow each other to speak, human aggregations will not be societies but assemblies of solitary agents listening only to themselves. Allowing oneself to listen to the other is indeed to show due deference to the other and in the end to avoid becoming an inhabitant of islands of solitary and cultish men and women that Goffman described. However, it is not just that one takes a turn that is important in maintaining interactions and cultivating relationships, but what one puts into the turn that is taken.

Every attempt to explain human action should begin with the unassailable fact that *human agents are voluble and conversant creatures*. They talk to each other, as often as they can manage to do so, and talk to themselves in what has been called "inner speech." Caryl Emerson (1983) has elaborated on this using the work of Bakhtin and Vygotsky, and Nobert Wiley has examined this phenomenon using the work of Peirce and Mead in addition to the work of Saussure, Bakhtin, and Vygotsky (Wiley, 2006). Each person is talked to and talks back, and each one talks to himself or herself, carrying on these discursive activities throughout their lives. In conducting such

verbal activities human agents seek to reach multiple goals. Among these, the constitution and conveyance of emotions, attitudes, opinions, and information seem the most important ones. In every encounter, a human agent is obliged to say something that is not only intelligible and plausible to the other but also emotionally relevant and situationally appropriate, or else face various unpleasant consequences. In other words, human agents undertake complex and intricate verbal performances for each other – as well as nonverbal ones. These talkative beings not only pursue *interaction with others* but also seek *engagement* with others as well.

Human agents engage each other in complex ways by using a multitude of instrumentations. In such engagements, agents (adapting some concepts from Gregory Stone's (1970) study of identity and appearance) announce their identities and give recognition to the identity of the other, display their status, express the emotional aspects of the situation at hand, and indicate various attitudes to the other in which they are participants. Engagement involves intricate linguistic maneuvers by which agents enrich their encounters with each other and seek to convey complex significations that will further the social relationship in which such engagements are occurring.

Indeed, human agents achieve what Alfred Schutz (1967) described as "intersubjectivity" by the adroit use of language and its fundamental features to *objecti*fy their intentions and attitudes. Intersubjectivity cannot be achieved in any other way, since human agents are neither clairvoyants nor mind readers. Human agents systematically use phonological, symbolic, and syntactic features of the linguistic medium to articulate their intentions and attitudes to the other and to interpret the articulations the other provides to engage in fruitful interactions. The use of these features of a language endows the human agent with what Dell Hymes (1972) calls *communicative competence*, which translates into *performative skills*. Without such competencies and skills, it would be impossible to achieve successful interactions or to even experience intersubjectivity.[1]

Such engagements between human agents are the stuff and fiber of human interactions. Human agents, when they encounter each other in the ordinary course of their everyday lives, typically seek not only to interact with each other but to engage the other discursively by putting into practice various strategies. The chosen strategies have a significant impact on the fate and destiny of human relationships and of a human life. We call these instrumentations and their systematic use the "fundamental features of language." They include signs, symbols, codes, structures, speech genres, and tropes, as well as what has been called the "technology of conversation"

(Frohlich & Laff, 1990). These features are essential elements in a human agent's linguistic socialization and eventually become elements of one's memory and habit structure. In using language to engage the other, human agents do not create their own instrumentations of communication but draw from their linguistic, to use one of Pierre Bourdieu's (1972, p. 78) concepts, *habitus*. He describes it this way:

> The habitus, the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations, produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle, while adjusting to the demands inscribed as objective potentialities in the situation, as defined by the cognitive and motivating structures making up the habitus. (1972, p. 78)

Habitus operates in the production and reproduction of practices, including linguistic ones, by the operation of, not immaculately and instantaneously conceived practices, but "regulated improvisations," suitable to the situation and the occasion. Indeed no other phrase captures so neatly the uses of the fundamental features of a language than this one. In the practices of everyday life, human beings' actions are both creative and "structured" by the very features of the language they use. The paradox in which the socialized human agent finds himself or herself is that he or she cannot escape these structures just as he or she cannot help but put them to creative use.

Such engagement in an interaction is the antithesis of what Goffman called "alienation from interaction." It was in one of his more neglected essays that Goffman wrote about this, focusing on the fact that human agents become "involved" in talking to the other even while ostensibly doing other things simultaneously. "Joint spontaneous involvement is a *unio mystica*, a socialized trance" (Goffman, 1967a, p. 113). In such involvements, agents are obliged to indicate their attentiveness to the ongoing proceedings. Human agents who neglect their "involvement obligations" to a conversation run the risk of alienating themselves and those with whom they happen to be interacting. Such alienation from interaction is a comparatively aberrant event in ongoing conversations and interactions. Rather our interest here is on the routines of everyday life where engagement with the other is the rule. Indeed, it could be claimed that human agents spend their time seeking engagement with things as well as with people in the world, and go to great lengths to find and sustain this engagement.[2]

The way to avoid alienation from interaction is to engage the other in *focused conversation* as opposed to *desultory ones*. In such significant

conversations, agents commit themselves to the subject or topic of the conversation and participate as fully as is necessary in the comprehension and appreciation of the messages being exchanged. Agents will present as clear and effective messages as are warranted and that they are capable of producing, unless, of course, their intention is to obfuscate. In either case – clarification or obfuscation – similar skills are involved and the recipient will have to undertake alert and attentive readings of the ongoing proceedings. An injection of narrative tension as well as some humor and verbal rhythms might be used to engage the attention of the other. Finally, almost a *sine qua non* of a significant conversation is the introduction of some affect or emotion into the exchange. In fact, emotional signs are often used to signal to another, and to oneself, the full engagement in the transactions at hand. But the main issue in engaging the other is to make the other attend to what one is saying, to comprehend the message as fully as possible, and to continue to do so, thereby converting an exchange of words into a significant conversation and engaged dialogue. Further, significant conversations will have the features of the classical dialectical process: there will be a thesis enunciated by one party and an antithesis spoken by the other in ongoing sequences, though a synthesis may be a long time coming.

Engagement with the other, then, is undertaken by using the fundamental features of language, with varying degrees of skill and competence, to create meaning. These features of language can be described as signs and symbols, icons and indices, as described by Charles Sanders Peirce and George Herbert Mead on the one hand, and the "structures" that are inherent in languages as described by Ferdinand de Saussure, Roman Jakobson, and Noam Chomsky on the other. In addition to these features, agents also resort to standard and culturally shared linguistic formations that Mikhail Bakhtin called "speech genres" (Bakhtin, 1984). These signs and symbols, and structures and formations, are put to use by human agents to interact and engage the other in ongoing transactions and to play, as Wittgenstein said, one language game or another.[3]

GAMES, SOCIAL ACTS, AND SEMIOSIS

Wittgenstein (1953) famously wrote, "For a large class of cases – though not for all—in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language" (p. 43). Such usages occur within delimited spheres of activity or "forms of life." In these forms, a "language-game" is being put into play. Wittgenstein (1953) wrote, "Here

the term language-game is used to bring into prominence the fact that *speaking* a language is part of an activity, a form of life'' (p. 23). He defines a language game as follows:

> We can think of the whole process of using words as one of those games by means of which children learn their native language. I will call these ''language-games.'' I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, a ''language game.'' (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 7)

A language game, like any other game, is a series of moves and countermoves made by human agents and addressed to another following certain well-specified rules. In Quinton's words, ''[Wittgenstein] sums up his theory of meaning by saying that the language-games, within which alone words have meanings, are forms of life, modes of activity governed by systems of rules. A form of life involves attitudes, interests, behaviors; it is something far more comprehensive than the manipulation of a clearly specified calculus'' (1966, p. 13).

Further, in games the players operate as self-correcting entities: each time a rule is violated, the other participant will seek to point it out and oftentimes extract a penalty. Language games, too, function as self-correcting systems. In David Pears's words, ''We correct each other and conformity is enforced by the need to communicate'' (1988, p. 458). In actual games, as in language games, mutual conformity to the rules of the game is enforced not only by the need to communicate but also by the desire to continue to play. If the rules are violated systematically not only will communication fail, but the game itself will come to a halt.

In this view of words and meaning, a major transformation in approaches to the description of language is being accomplished: a recognition that language is not merely a *representation* of reality but in its usage it is also a mode of *action*. Such a view has also been canvassed by Kenneth Burke in his many works. That is, *using* words is in fact to *actively* constitute a meaningful world as well as to constitute meaningful relations with fellow human agents. Language, he argued, is a mode of ''symbolic action'' (Burke, 1966; Burke, 1969a). It is, however, not that language is action; rather, a more careful phrasing would say that the *usage* of language is action, that language is in fact an instrument of action. Further, it must be said, that insofar as human actors are irrefutably *interactive agents,* the use of language is not only a mode of action but also a means of interaction.

This is the position that George Herbert Mead took in his work on the nature of mind and meaning, self and society ([1922] 1964). In another essay, he gave further expression to his original views on language using the

concept of "significant symbol": "The significant symbol is then the gesture, the sign, the word which is addressed to the self when it is addressed to another individual, and is addressed to another, in form to all other individuals, when it is addressed to the self (Mead, 1964 [1922], p. 246)."

In a later version, Mead said, "The response of one organism to the gesture of another in any given *social act* is the meaning of that gesture" (1934, p. 78, emphasis added).

Mead's concept of "the social act" is analogous to Wittgenstein's metaphor of a game. Games are preeminently social acts, though the social act is the more general term. For Mead, meaning is constituted: "In the triadic relation of a gesture of one individual, a response to that gesture by a second individual, and a completion of the given social act initiated by the gesture of the first individual" (Mead, 1934, p. 81).

Yet, there is another issue that Mead's definition of the "significant symbol" raises: What is the relationship between Mead's "symbol" and that of C. S. Peirce on the same topic? There is no doubt that Mead's work was, directly or indirectly, influenced by the work of William James and Peirce, but one needs to specify the particular relationship between Mead's theory of symbolism and Peirce's semiotic theory. Peirce (1955) discusses "signs" as appearing in three forms: icons, indices, and symbols. These signs represent something, an "object" as Peirce called it:

> A sign or a *representamen* is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, it creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign or perhaps a more developed sign than that sign which it creates. I call it an *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its *object*. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea which I have sometimes referred to as the *ground* of the representation. (1955, p. 99)

Peirce then goes on to discuss the various intrinsic features of these signs, features subject to what may be termed the *rule of interpretation*: whatever their intrinsic features may be, they *address* someone – including the one who is producing the sign – and create in the mind of both the addresser and the addressee an equivalent sign or a more developed sign, a sign that can be called the *common interpretant*. Peirce puts it this way:

> There is the *intentional* interpretant, which is a determination of the mind of the utterer; the *effectual* interpretant, which is a determination of the mind of the interpreter; and the *communicational* interpretant, or the *cointerpretant*, which is a determination of the mind into which the mind of utterers and interpreters have to be fused in order that any communication may take place. (1977, p. 197)

Yet a problem remains: What if an agent signs an intentional interpretant and the recipient is unable to create an effectual interpretant because the intentional interpretant was obscure or ill formed? At this stage, in practical everyday life, the initiator is obliged to explain further and create a less obscure intentional interpretant. In other words, both the initiator of an interpretant and the respondent must *work* at producing a "cointerpretant" in Peirce's word or a "significant symbol" in Mead's. A significant symbol or cointerpretant does not emerge readily all the time but is often subject to further negotiation between participants who have to labor to produce it.

Such common interpretants are reached by following the rules that specify the particular interpretation that is the relevant one for that particular language game. Peirce's semiotic theory, in other words, needs Wittgenstein's theory of rules to become complete. One is able to interpret a sign only by situating it within a particular language game, thus limiting the parameters of the interpretation by using the relevant rules. Once the game is so limited, both intelligibility and communicability are achieved. In other words, signs are deployed and managed and presented to self and the other in a delimited situation – often an immediate face-to-face situation – and at other times, not so immediate.

Clearly, then, meaning for both Mead and Peirce arises within the framework of an interaction and, conversely, interactions are characterized by the *interdependent* creation of meaning through the deployment of signs. These procedures can also be described thus: *Meaning arises within game-like frameworks or social acts in which an agent articulates a sign, to which he or she is able to attach an interpretant and address it to another. The other is then able to attach an interpretant to the sign. The agent and the other person each does this following certain rules of interpretation*. These particular signs were also *selected* by the participants so that they might convey the intended significance with as much *precision* as possible. In selecting them, each participant had to reject or *deselect* other such icons and indices and symbols. If then the meaning of a word is to be found in its usage in language games and such language games can be more broadly defined as social acts in which agents put signs and symbols and icons and indices into play so as to elicit interpretants, they still must do so according to certain other constraints. These are concerned with the use of various structures and forms of speech that aid in the constitution of meaningful interactions and engagement with the other.

The great strength of Mead's concept of the social act, and Peirce's description of the semiotic process in which meaning is generated, is that each recognizes that both gestures and languages are inherently addressive

mediums; indeed, language itself evolved into a complex system so that initiators could address other agents – probably involving communication between one proto-human agent and another. For example, Roger Brown (1981) reports a number of cases where agents with various disabilities invented their own iconic (i.e., gestural) means of communication. A study of deaf children, for instance, who were not taught sign-language, showed that they invented their own signing system to address each other. The point and purpose of such inventions and usage, as in standard languages, is to address another and incorporate him or her into one's own act, mind and self. The dialogic imperative, it appears, is too strong to be resisted.

Such generation of meaning – through semiotic exercises or gaming with words or symbolizing – significantly occurs not in one-time exchanges, but in ongoing conversations. *In each case of verbal interaction, the participants work to ensure that each of them is following the relevant rules of interpretation*. In such conversations, the test that the participants had understood each other is that participant neither challenges the responses nor asks for clarification. In all verbal exchanges, there is always the possibility of further exchanges. The initiator of a verbal exchange has the opportunity to reject the response – the interpretant or the significant symbol – that has been offered and ask for another one, just as the respondent can ask for further clarification from the initiator of the sign that has been proffered. In other words, signing activity typically occurs as part of ongoing conversations rather than as single episodes. *Playing language games, undertaking social acts, or practicing semiosis in ongoing sequences of interactions seem, in spite of their varying provenances, when applied to the ordinary uses to which human agents put them, to be similar enterprises: they use them to communicate with another human agent and engage him or her, as warranted by the situation, as fully as possible*

DRAMAS OF ENGAGEMENT

A game is not only a form of activity governed by rules but also a form of life in which agents speak to each other, in one way or another, and engage each other in ongoing interactions. In the course of these verbal interactions, human agents use language in all its complexity to play their language games more efficiently. If human agents could not use these features, human "speaking" would be impossible, and even if one manages to articulate sounds, one would be incomprehensible. In fact agents have to use phonological structures and syntactic structures, binary codes, signs, tropic

mechanisms, and speech genres in language games and the forms of life in which human agents participate in order to create meaning in their speaking relationship with others. What exactly is one doing when one is playing a game in general or a language game in particular? He or she is in fact directing "symbolic actions" as Kenneth Burke called them, toward another, actions that are organized systematically according to certain rules of composition drawn from the language system. Wittgenstein himself says, "In the practice of the use of language, one party calls out the words, the other acts on them"(Aphorism, 7). These words are in fact symbols being used to act and elicit a responsive act. To make his or her symbolic actions signify his or her intentions, an agent must also invest his or her actions with the quality of addressivity so that the other can understand him or her as fully as possible. In speaking to others, human agents do not then merely seek to convey the lexical significance of words as they occur in language games, but in such usages they perform symbolic actions in which they inscribe various emotionalities as well as gross or subtle attitudes. In other words, human agents may play language games but for all that they are essentially addressing the other in order to elicit a response from him or her. In fact, then, these language games in which human agents speak to each other following certain rules can be best described as dramas in the sense in which Kenneth Burke used the term:

> In this sense, man is *defined* literally as an animal characterized by his special aptitude for symbolic action, which is itself a literal term. And from there on drama is employed, not as a metaphor, but as "a fixed form that helps us discover what the implications of the term "act" and "person" really are. (1968, pp. 445–451; my emphasis).

In dramas, human agents act, that is *perform*, to each other by using the symbolic/linguistic resources at their disposal. The words that human agents speak no doubt become meaningful in given language games, but they become more richly meaningful as they are used as symbolic actions in the dramas of human relations. It seems then that games are really dramas in which human agents *act* and address each other using various symbols which have significances within the parameters of that drama. Further, games define various bounded *scenes* in which the actions of the game are to occur, the nature of the *agents* who will play the game, the *agencies* with which they are to be played, and the *purposes* to which the acts of the game are directed – the very features that Burke described as the key elements of dramas and which he claimed were the fundamental features of human being and doing in the world (1969a, p. xv). It seems that between the two, "drama" is a more inclusive term than "games": Games are in fact dramas

in which agents act, act in and through symbols, and address them to others.

In these dramas, human agents will seek to undertake not just to interact but to engage the other, both cognitively and emotionally, and will also seek to construct significant relationships with each other. In undertaking these dramatic moves, human agents will put to use the features of a language – phonological structures, syntactical structures, tropic structures, speech genres, and narrative strategies – that they can command, and use them as symbolic actions to address the other. Thus, they will seek to enact "dramas of human relations" as William Reuchert described Burke's thesis (1963) and engage the other both cognitively and emotionally. Still, it is possible that the concept of "language-games," having a particular significance in the games that philosophers and logicians play, may be more useful for their purposes than the concept of drama, but if one is interested in dealing with the uses of language in everyday interactions between human agents, drama seems more productive. In these dramas, human agents are able to enact their identities, project their attitudes and emotions, set the scenes, and define the situations by using all the features of the language that they can muster, features that both *constrain* them and *enable* them.[4]

ENGAGING WITH SOUND

The initial process by which a language game or a social act is initiated is through the sound structure of spoken words. In speaking these words the agent will produce sounds that are differentiated from each other in order to be intelligible. The initial statement on this topic was made by Roman Jakobson:

> Since the sound matter of language is a matter organized and formed to serve as a semiotic instrument, not only the significative function of the distinctive features, but even their phonic essence is a cultural artifact. Phonic entities draw on the gross sound matter, but readjust this extrinsic stuff, dissecting and classifying it along their own line. The gross matter knows no oppositions. It is human thought, conscious or unconscious, which draws from this sound matter the binary oppositions for their phonemic use. (1962, p. 423)

Jakobson calls his system of binarism "metaphor" and "metonymy" – the former characterized by similarity and the latter by dissimilarity of sounds. To produce a word in speech, an agent has to combine the two forms to construct intelligible words and assemble them into a comprehensible

sentence. In order to make meaningful contact with the other, then, an agent must be able to distinguish between similarities and differences in the sound of words. If one is unable to do that, in the extreme case, he or she would be suffering from one or another disorder that is characteristic of aphasia. Jakobson observed, "The varieties of aphasia are numerous and diverse but all of them fall between two polar types: similarity disorder and contiguity disorder … The relation of similarity is suppressed in the former and the relation of contiguity is suppressed in the latter" (Jakobson, & Halle, 2002, p. 90). While this condition affects only people with brain injuries, it nevertheless calls attention to the importance of proper sounding to achieve effective communication and successful engagement with the other.

To signify his intentions, a surgeon described by Goffman says to the nurse-assistant, "A small Richardson, please." The nurse answers, "Don't have one" (Goffman, 1961, p. 118).

For the nurse to answer the surgeon's request, she must decode his words using the phonemic binary system. The "R" sound in "Richardson" should be differentiated, say, from the "L" sound and the "ch" sound should be differentiated from the "k" sound so that she can interpret the request as "Richardson" and not "Lickerson." To the extent that the surgeon was able to speak (pronounce) his Rs and chs with accurate phonemic clarity, the nurse is able to interpret him accurately and to allow the interaction to proceed with a measure of success.

If, however, one is not able, in a systematic way, to sound his or her intentions well enough or not at all, he or she has to resort to other means, the most conspicuous example of which is "sign language," to achieve, no doubt with some effort, a measure of engagement.[5]

ENGAGING WITH STRUCTURES

The next step in constructing an intelligible meaning system is to produce categories in one's speech that can be interpreted by the auditor as precisely as possible in terms of their affinities and differences. Saussure has argued that language can be best described as consisting of two aspects: *langue* and *parole*, the language as such and the spoken version of it. Language consists of structures which Saussure labeled "paradigmatic" and "syntagmatic," the former defined by similarities (a paradigm, consisting of similitudes, that is opposed to another paradigm of similitudes), and the latter by "contiguity" (Saussure, 1959). The structuralist claim is nicely summarized by Trier as, "The value of a word is first recognized when one sets it against

the value of a neighboring and opposed word. The word has meaning only as part of a whole'' (quoted in Pettit, 1977, p. 13). It is by managing these structures that language becomes meaningful.

In ''paroling,'' so to speak, an agent chooses words – *signifiers* in Saussure's concept – that display these structural properties, and addresses them to another, words that are chosen to represent a *signified*, as Saussure put it. Expressed differently, an agent attaches a particular significance to a word as he or she uses it and it becomes a *signifier* in Saussure's usage. These signifiers become *significant symbols* in Mead's usage (1934) when another is able to recognize them and respond to them.

To return to the example used earlier, a surgeon in an operating theater turns to his nurse and says, ''A small Richardson, please'' (Goffman, 1961, p. 118). This simple sentence has binary systems represented in it:

(a) The surgical instrument, ''Richardson,'' is contrasted with other instruments that are not Richardsons.
(b) The ''small'' instrument is contrasted with a larger one.
(c) ''Please,'' the polite form, codes the sentence as a more-or-less cordial request, as opposed to an imperative demand. These coding procedures may not be undertaken with deliberate forethought or with instantiated decision making, but insofar as the aim of the speaker is to have himself or herself understood by the other, the fact that they occur at all seems to indicate their necessity. In fact, one can take any piece of interactional discourse and see the presence of such a coding.
(d) The words in the sentence constitute a syntagmatic chain: they are functionally different from each other and together work to convey the significance that the speaker wants to convey. ''The syntagmatic strategy essentially involves the idea of syntax'' argues Pettit, in an analogy to Chomsky's work (1977, p. 13). The words are functionally different from each other and together work to convey the significance that the speaker wants to convey. If such a chain was not constructed by the speaker, a failure to communicate and a loss of engagement would have resulted.

ENGAGING WITH SYNTAX

However, such interactional moves are not enough: these words have to be arranged in a particular form for them to achieve maximum clarity and significance. In other words, they need a syntactic ordering.

A great deal has been written on the conflicting claims of Chomskian theories of language and mind and those of the radical behaviorists such as Watson and Skinner, and even the "social behaviorism" of Mead, who conducted his own battle against radical behaviorism. One way to examine this issue is to begin with an actual communicational event and examine how syntax as such aids the processes of understanding a message and undertaking a response to it. In Chomsky's version of the nature of linguistic theory, a well-formed sentence, an ideal typical construction, has a specific form. In one of his essays, he put this succinctly:

> Linguistic theory is concerned with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogenous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, drifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of language in actual performance. (Chomsky, 1965, p. 3)

Such an ideal speaker would produce sentences by assembling words that conform to "phrase-structure rules." In its basic form, a well-formed sentence will be assembled with a noun phrase and a verb phrase, with the possibility of adding other nouns and verbs, adverbs and adjectives, as may be deemed necessary.

However, for sociologists and social psychologists, who are interested in the manner in which interpersonal communication is successfully conducted, the interest is in precisely how any word-assembly, well-formed or ill-formed, errors and all, affect such communication. Insofar as every verbal communicative activity is undertaken by manipulating words, the syntax in which the words are articulated becomes of paramount importance because a change in the syntactical ordering of the words can radically alter the message. Furthermore, even truncated and contracted word assemblies can successfully convey meaning to another and usually with the necessary precision and clarity.

Human agents do not typically present such well-formed sentences to the other. Consider this exchange between the surgeon and a nurse used earlier:

Surgeon: A small Richardson, please.
Nurse: Don't have one.
Surgeon: O.K. Then give me an Army and Navy.
Nurse: It looks like we don't have one.

In this exchange, the first two statements are incomplete or contracted ones. Such contractions are very useful in the tense and tight situations such

as operating theaters. One would not be amiss in claiming that the surgeon chose the fractured syntax in order to make his intentions clear and method of communication economical. The well-formed version of the first statement would read, ''Please give me a small Richardson.'' This has a noun phrase and a verb phrase, and an adjective too, and will achieve clear and precise understanding from whomever it is addressed. Nevertheless, even when the agent fails to present a well-formed sentence, the addressee was able to respond satisfactorily to the request. It can be presumed that the nurse was able to do this because he or she supplied what in fact was the unspoken verb phrase and produced the correct response. It seems that well-formed sentences need not be articulated by an agent to achieve communication with the other, and it is equally the case that the availability of syntactic competence facilitates mutual understanding.[6]

In fact those who are unable to produce well-formed sentences in their speech, namely, those who are ''agrammatic,'' manage to produce word assemblies that successfully achieve both communication with the other as well as engagement in normal everyday relationships (Beeke, Maxim, Best, & Cooper, 2010).

Syntactic structures may well be part of a bioprogram of human agents that is inherited, as has been claimed, but it is indubitably the case that these bioprograms manifest themselves in symbolic forms. *Significant symbols need to be articulated with syntactic structures, but syntactic structures manifest themselves in interactionally acquired significant symbols*. After all, human agents do not spout structures as such but words, in a *particular* language, say English, or medical speak, or sociology speak, that has structural properties, words that they had learned interactionally from others. *Human agents are born with structuralist faculties, but they demand Meadian processes to manifest themselves and become useful in human affairs*. This is evident in the indisputable observation that human agents are not born with language but with certain neurological structures that enable them to develop the facility to use, not a universal language as such, but specific dialects that are unique to delimited communities – dialects that are mutually incomprehensible to others, unless they take special efforts to attain the necessary mastery.

Chomsky seems to be acknowledging this to some extent with his observation, ''We may take UG (universal grammar) to be a theory of the language faculty, a common human attribute, genetically determined, one component of the human mind. Through interaction with the *environment,* this faculty of mind becomes articulated and refined, emerging in the mature person as a system of knowledge of language'' (1977, p. 164, italics added).

Chomsky writes further, "We can explain some property of attained linguistic competence by showing that this property necessarily results from the *interplay* of the genetically determined language faculty, specified by UG, and the person's (accidental) experience" (1977, p. 164, italics added).

Surely when Chomsky refers to interaction with the "environment" becoming articulated and refined in the mature language user, or when he writes of the "interplay" of UG with "experience" he is acknowledging, though rather grudgingly, the part that symbolic interaction plays in the way a mature language user comes to use language – or rather, his or her dialect, in particular – in his or her everyday life. It is therefore rather misguided to pit these approaches to human communication in opposition to each other and get caught in an either/or trap. It is the case that both approaches to the description of language as such and their value for communication between human agents have empirical support and explanatory power. Rather, one should look at the *uses* to which these features of language are put by agents in everyday communication, and the actual texts that occur in interactions.

It is a gross mistake to call the possession of these neurological structures "knowledge" of structures and syntax. It is not the linguistic structures that are innate but the brain structure that enables a human agent to use one or more of these structures – but *only* after he or she has been exposed *interactionally* to the dialects in which these structures can manifest themselves. Children who are isolated from such interactions, either maximally or minimally, do not develop the capacity to use the syntactic structures of the language. They typically display not only an intellectual impoverishment but also a linguistic maiming.

It is this complex system – neurologically situated bioprograms and interactionally acquired symbolic systems – that human agents use to convey emotions and attitudes, opinions, and information in interactions and to engage with others, even the interactions that occur between linguists.[7]

ENGAGING WITH SPEECH GENRES

In these examples of language use, agents can be seen to be using what Mikhail Bakhtin (1986) calls "speech genres." He wrote: "Each separate utterance is individual, of course, but each *sphere* in which language is used develops its own *relatively stable* types of utterances. These we may call 'speech genres'" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 60, emphasis added).

Such "spheres" describe a circle of communicators, those who share an understanding of these expressions and are able to readily apprehend the intentionality of the author and thereby to close the circle of understanding. The circle of communicators can be said to be affiliated with each other in some way, though not constituting strictly a network, and the continuous and habitual use of specialized genres of speech defines their identities. These specialized vocabularies enable systematic identifications with the circle of communicators to occur and achieve engagement when they do interact.

Speech genres, Bakhtin observes, are characterized by:

> … extreme *heterogeneity* (oral and written). In fact, the category of speech genres should include short rejoinders of daily dialogue (and these are extremely varied, depending on the subject matter, situation and participants), everyday narration, writing (in all its various forms), the brief standard military command, the elaborate and detailed order, the fairly variegated repertoire of business documents… and the diverse world of commentary (in the broad sense of the word: social, political). (1986, p. 60)

To the extent that these genres of speech are used more or less regularly by participants in interactions, they achieve both effective and parsimonious communication, as well as succeed in defining a social circle of relative intimacy and successful identification.

The person who says, "Pass the butter, please," is using a speech genre that is common in some circles. In the army, according to a passing remark by Goffman (1959, p. 14). The speaker might use another locally common genre: "Pass the fucking butter," establishing or validating his relation with a robust, masculine, and impolite circle. However, when he comes home and inadvertently uses the same adjective to his mother, the genre loses its communicative potency and relevance and succeeds only in establishing the speaker as impolite and a vulgarian.

ENGAGING WITH TROPES

In everyday conversations, agents can often be blunt and direct in their speech, but often enough their phrasing and vocalization convey subtlety and nuance to their messages with adequate degrees of specificity, animation, and color, to provide a certain concreteness. This is accomplished by using what Kenneth Burke has called "tropes," describing metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony as "master tropes" (1969b, p. 503). These tropes are put to good use by human agents to enhance and to

embellish the intentions of their significations and to introduce elements of style into them in order to achieve a fuller engagement with the other. Consider the following:

(Q) How did he do in the job?
(A) Not very well. He dropped the ball on too many occasions.

Catching a ball is one of the most frequent acts of a successful performance in many games: football, cricket, and baseball. Using the phrase "dropped the ball" captures the intentions of the author very parsimoniously. To the extent that the metaphor is a common enough speech genre, it facilitates a successful engagement. Further, it concretizes the significance, gives it body and form, and enables an immediate apprehension of the author's intentions.

Often in the interactional life, agents find themselves having to engage the other with expressions of contempt or anger or hostility. One of the common tropes that is used is the allusion to excrement: shit, bullshit, and chicken shit or the organ of excretion itself often comes into the discourse and carry some emotional weight. If this is not the preferred trope with which to compose certain attitudes, the other readily available one is the allusion to sexual activity and to sexual organs. These tropes, like the excretory ones, are readily available for use by agents and demand little thought and less creativity. These usages, as they occur in the discourse, leave no ambiguity regarding the attitude of the speaker to the one addressed and without a doubt will lead to the emergence of an acrimonious engagement.

Human agents use the figures of metonymy and synecdoche, in which a complex phenomenon is reduced to a simpler one. This makes communication more efficient and parsimonious and enables a quicker engagement between speakers and auditor.

Consider the following:

John: Who else is coming for dinner?
Susan: Carmen and Sam and Ashok.
John: Ashok?
Susan: Yeah, Ashok Sharma.
John: He is an orthodox Hindu.

By referring to Ashok as a Hindu, John has indicated that Susan should not serve beef that evening, and a number of vegetarian dishes will have to be made available to him. The phrase, "orthodox Hindu," has collapsed a

host of cultural and dietary preferences and made it possible for Susan to act accordingly.

Irony and its close kin, sarcasm, are used often to engage others. The point about irony and sarcasm is that the auditor must pay close attention to the context and situation to be able to decipher it. A boss tells his/her secretary:

> "Well, you have come in time for the lunch break," to indicate the secretary is late again.

Needless to say, the secretary would not have been likely to miss the point of the remark, and she would not interpret it as an invitation to lunch. The apprehension of irony, in fact, calls for alert interpretation. Tropes and speech genres are, in fact, handy instrumentations with which agents can engage the other with a certain degree of efficiency and economy, not to speak of colorfulness.

ENGAGING WITH NARRATIVES

In constructing texts to elicit the attention of the auditor and achieving engagement by putting the features of language to intelligible use, agents will find themselves having created texts characterized by narrativity. Indeed, in watching plays, movies, games, or reading textual materials, agents are in fact responding to their inherent narrativity and achieving varying levels of engagement. The importance of narrativity was given memorable articulation by Alasdair McIntyre: "It is because we all live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives that we live out that the form of narrative is appropriate for understanding the actions of others" (1984, p. 212).

Not only is the narrative form appropriate for understanding the *actions* of others but also the *texts* that they compose and articulate. Human agents, in fact, take some pains to ensure that their words are assembled with at least some cognizance of the principles of narrativity. The narrative form that allows the temporality of experience to be represented is constructed by putting into effect, judiciously, circumspectly, and with a certain degree of deliberation, the various features of language described earlier. Indeed these features come to fruition in the narrative structures that human agents construct as cognitive and interactive instrumentations. Such a consciousness of temporality nevertheless demands the use of the various features of a language in order to manifest narrativity in one's consciousness as well as in its representation to others. In Ricoeur's words: "Time becomes human time

to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience'' (1984, p. 3).

Human agents are inextricably immersed in the consciousness of the passage of time. In their experience of the world as well as in their comprehension of their own presence in the world, a segmentation into a then, a now, and a later, or a before, an immediate moment and a soon, are ever present. Ricoeur articulates this awareness, borrowing from St. Augustine, as *expectation, attention, and memory* (1984, p. 52). In the examination of narratives, the awareness of the moments of the passage of time leads to a demand that they follow an interconnected sequence in the telling – that there would be an intelligible *beginning*, a *middle* to which attention is directed, and an implication of the likely *consequences* of the material to which attention is being drawn and as it is remembered. This sequencing of temporality can be discovered in the most ordinary of conversations. *Every situation in which a human agent finds himself or herself is characterized by such a tripartite structuring of temporality*. Consider here the simplest possible discourse from an everyday conversation:

Beginning: Do you know what I did yesterday? (The question creates an expectation making the auditor wait for an answer.)

Next Step: I beat the shit… (This phrase fulfills the expectation created by the assertion of the first-person pronoun. The trope and the genre of speech that is being used establish what he actually did, calling his auditor to attend to it.)

End: …out of Sam. (This fulfills the expectation created by the earlier words.)

From the point of view of the auditor, the speaker's ''I'' could have been followed by any number of revelations – ''I resigned my job,'' ''I got married,'' and so forth. The verb ''beat'' induces the auditor to wonder who the victim of the assault was: the speaker's wife, boss, neighbor, Ted or Sam, and so forth. Each of these units of a narrative structure begins and then *proceeds* to the next unit and so on until the terminus, aided by the opening with the interrogative operator.

The second aspect of Ricoeur's work (1984) that is useful in explicating the presence of narrativity in everyday discourse is the related concepts of *muthos* and *mimesis*. Borrowing from Aristotle, he refers to these concepts as *interdependent processes* that are useful instruments with which to unravel

narrativity in fictional discourse. That is, authors use them to compose fictional and poetic narratives. Authors of everyday discourse do use them – though no doubt in less elaborate ways. Muthos, observes Ricoeur, refers to the process of *emplotment* that is an ever-present phenomenon in all narratives: "Plot was defined first, on the most *formal* level, as an integrating dynamism that draws a unified complete story from a variety of incidents… [it] transforms this variety into a unified and complete story" (1984, p. 8).

Emplotment is achieved by undertaking a mimesis of action and character. Mimesis is the artful representation of action in the narrative actions that also bespeak character, which are realized by the particularity of the actions.[8]

Consider here a fragment of an everyday conversation where simple strategies of both mythos and mimesis are put into play:

Sam: So here you are.
James: I have been here every day. Kim came over the weekend, so we had a good time. How about I see about the other matter later. Shelley spoke to me last week about that. He said he would like me to take the super's position.
Sam: Yeah. Shelley told me, but Lou got it.
James: Oh? That's too bad. It was promised to me.
(Office Transcripts)

Sam makes a statement with an implicit criticism of James for being late or absent. James defends himself and then proceeds to describe his activities. Three units are related: (1) his weekend with Kim, (2) his desire to discuss another matter later, and (3) his interest in a job that Shelley promised him, and all of them are integrated into a common story line. All three of these units are of interest to James, and he gives them to Sam, but Sam, without rejecting an interest in the first two units, takes up the latter one about the job as superintendent. In this exchange, then, the narrative provided by James does engage Sam, and there is a level of mutual engagement achieved by what may be called "collaborative emplotment." Together, the participants engage each other with the plotting and the remembrances of earlier events, ending on a note, if not of tragedy, at least of disappointment.

In these short narratives, the speaking agents can be seen to be making use of phonemic structures, binary systems of signifiers, syntactic structures, and genres of speech and tropes to construct temporally structured

narratives with which to engage the other. Consider, in contrast, the following example: "Gosh, I don't know what it is. You see – she says – I don't know, I am sure there is Cinderella. There is much better play than that – He is an awful idiot" (Abse, 1971, p. 55).

This statement, violating many rules for successful engagement, was articulated by one who was diagnosed as schizophrenic. It would have been impossible to enter into dialogic relation with this agent. Clearly, this person lacks the necessary communicative competencies to successfully undertake engagement with the other.

FORMS OF ENGAGEMENT

The engagements with the other that human agents cultivate can be distinguished in terms of their respective purposes and the strategies that are employed to achieve them. These strategies – used to achieve and maintain the necessary degree of engagement in an interaction – are not mutually exclusive and can be discovered, in varying combinations and permutations, in all these forms. To successfully achieve such engagement, human agents put into practice the features of language described here, as well as others that we have not considered.[9]

Thematic Engagement

In such engagements, the discursive exchanges are more complex and intricately structured and contain more subtleties, nuances, and allusions than in the other forms of engagement. In the following fragment from a conversation between Richard Heffner, the host of a long-running "talk show" on TV, and the well-known historian, Eric Foner, one can hear many of the dialogic features that elicit engrossment and engagement.

> HEFFNER: But I want to ask my guest just how whole he feels the story of American freedom is. Is its seeming "wholeness" there mostly for the sake of its readers, or does it actually represent its author's essential "act of faith" which is what Charles A. Beard called all recorded history. Tell me about this matter of freedom in America.
>
> FONER: Well, Richard, that's a very good question and I suppose citing Beard, really that could be asked about any work of history. Any historical narrative is to some extent an invention simply because the historian, through his or her active intellect creates order out of a tremendous chaos of events and influences and selects certain themes and issues and events in the past to write about and excludes many other things. So, I wouldn't … I think what Professor Brinkley said was very kind. I certainly don't intend

this book to be a whole portrait of American history, but I do think that if you look at American history through the lens of this very central notion of freedom which is so important to us in our conception of ourselves as a people, you do get a new way of looking at familiar events whether it's the Revolution or the Civil War or the New Deal, and you highlight maybe some unfamiliar things which … whose importance, I think, can be shown by seeing them through this lens of freedom.

HEFFNER: You know when I read Alan Brinkley's blurb I thought to myself now "The story of American Freedom"… is it the story of my concern as an American a hundred years ago for the story of American freedom. Or is it my concern about myself? Is the story of American freedom a parochial one? One that has to do with the history of individuals and groups who are concerned about themselves but not concerned about the larger society.

FONER: Well, I think there's some of both in this story. And I guess my main point in this book is that the very idea of freedom, so important to us as Americans, is not a fixed idea, it's not a pre-determined concept, it's not an end or a goal to which history just moves in a straight line down a railroad track. It's constantly contested, it's constantly up for grabs. Different people, different groups in our history have defined or understood freedom in different ways … That's the story, and I think that's a much more interesting story than if we just said "Okay, well, the Founding Fathers sort of created a country based on freedom and it's been getting better ever since" … They can also be taken away, or challenged. So this is an open-ended history. It's a contested history. And I think it's the debate itself which gives this history its dynamism and its drama.

HEFFNER: Why is freedom such a theme? Could you have picked some other theme or is freedom, in your estimation, the predominant, the prevailing theme in America?

FONER: Well, I think freedom is more central to our political vocabulary, to our sense of ourselves as a people than any other word.

In these exchanges, engagement is achieved by a question which introduces the topic and invites a response and the rest follows. A question is, in fact, an effective instrument to elicit the engagement of the other. Typically, it possesses rich addressivity insofar as the questioner is seeking a particular answer and will fashion the question accordingly and give it as much clarity and precision as can be mustered. A speaker will make use of the appropriate semiotic instruments, structural principles, genres of speech, and rhetorical devices to ensure the appropriate answer. However, the most significant aspect of this exchange is the syntactical interdependence of the functional units in the exchange: a statement by Heffner is succeeded by Foner's and then by Heffner's in a temporal and logical sequence and, above all, since this is the feature that makes mutual engagement work, a *thematic sequence*.

In this passage, Heffner starts with a question regarding Foner's recent book and with an allusion to another famous historian Charles Beard.

Foner is able to frame his answer accordingly. He addresses the issues raised by Heffner, expanding on the themes that have been introduced by Heffner. Once Foner's answer is completed, Heffner picks up a theme from what he has said and introduces a new one: Is "freedom" a concern for selected individuals about their private freedom or do they concern themselves with the larger society? Foner is once again able to expand on this issue and to introduce a complexity, so to speak: it is both individual and collective.

This illustrates a principle of *dialogicality* that one often finds in long and engrossing exercises*: the construction of a chain of themes* where each moment is a link to the next one. In such chains, one theme begets another related one and continues thus for a few exchanges; or, one allusion leads to another and yet to another, and so on. In this case, while the topic of the discussion is Foner's book, the recurring theme is the idea of "freedom" and its place in American history. In these exercises, Ricoeur's theses about the operation of memory, attention, and anticipation as elements in the structure of narrativity are being put into play. The thematic sequencing follows this temporal logic enabling attentiveness and engagement to emerge.

If the foregoing is an example of a rather formalized intellectual engagement conducted by two attested intellectuals, in the following exchanges one sees ordinary individuals constructing intellectual engagement in their own way with others. Their engagement has certain elements of informality and intimacy, but nevertheless deploys some of the same strategies as the Heffner and Foner exchange, besides the usual linguistic features: allusion, interjections, thematic chains, and effective self-presentations and identifications. In this form of interactional engagement, ideas and abstractions, contradictions and challenges abound – though not necessarily always in large measure. Such engagements are common enough in debates, seminars, and discussions in classrooms and even in some talk shows.

Practical Engagement

Practical engagement involves the processes by which one engages the other in facing and solving some immediate practical problems. In such communications, agents seek to "stick to the point," avoid digression into other problems unless they are relevant to the original problem; they do not seek to embellish their discourses in any unnecessary ways. Consider here the conversation between U.S. President Richard Nixon and his aides

during what came to be known as the "Watergate crisis" (Johnson, Meyers, Woodward, & Bernstein, 1974, pp. 43–44).

DEAN: Good morning, Sir.

NIXON: Oh, Hi.

DEAN: How are you?

NIXON: I wanted to talk with you about what kind of a line to take. I now want Kleindienst on the – it isn't a matter of trust. You have it clearly understood that you will call him and give him directions and he will call you, etcetera, and so on, and so on. I just don't want Dick to go off – you see, for example, on executive privilege – I don't want him to get off and get the damn thing – get us.

DEAN: Make any deal on it –

NIXON: Make a deal – that is the point. Baker, as I said, is going to keep at arms' length and you have got to be very firm with these guys or you may not end up with many things…

DEAN: Yeah.

NIXON: (To Secretary) I sent some notes out—a couple of yellow pages—something on the teachers' thing that I am not doing today—just send it back to me, please.

SECETARY: All right, Sir.

NIXON: So you see, I think you better have a good, hard face to face talk with him and say, look, we have thought this thing over. And you raise the point with him that this cannot be in executive session because he is likely to float it out there and they will grab it.

DEAN: That's right and as I mentioned yesterday, he is meeting with Sam Ervin and Baker in this joint session and that is probably one of the first things they will discuss.

In this fragment, John Dean greets Nixon and receives a rather perfunctory response and the conventional second greeting "How are you?" is pointedly elided. Further, the subordinating and superordinating roles of a president and his assistant are reaffirmed discursively: Dean greets with a conventional phrase and Nixon does not reciprocate – just a short "Hi," and a nod. In other words, "Let's get to the point, without wasting words, and face our problem." There is also, in this exchange, a remarkable absence of adjectives or metaphorical enrichment. Nixon's "Hi" is able to convey the message: Here is the problem; here is how we will solve it. Yet, one can also detect a tone of

anxiety in Nixon's words and in their arrangement: the incomplete sentences, the insertion of qualifications into a sentence, and rapid rhythm.

These elements facilitate a ready engagement with his listener and subordinate, someone who will not only grasp the instructions but also understand the importance of these instructions as well as the emotions associated with Nixon's attitudes at the moment.

The effects of the discourse between Nixon and Dean and the engagement that ensues between the two are achieved by the management of the features of the language used by them. The opening gambit displays a subtle binary coding: Dean is deferential and produces a conventional greeting and ends with an addressive supplication. Nixon, however, does not reciprocate: a simple "Hi" is proffered. This is an abbreviation of "How are you?" conventional in American society and suggesting informality. Once again, Dean comes up with the full locution, "How are you?" The superordinate/subordinate structure is thus established: the subordinate is deferential and avoids familiarity, while the superordinate is free to admit to the informal. Again, in the next exchange, Nixon does not even bother to respond to Dean's "How are you?" and goes directly to the subject of the meeting.

The next few sentences are marked by Nixon going straight to the point about the moves that he wants Dean to make. Nixon is able to establish the structural opposition between himself and Dean and then go on to do the same with Richard Kleindienst and Howard Baker. Each is given a semiotic significance and contrasted with the other in this game: each of them has a character that is to be understood and taken into consideration in Dean's handling of them in order to protect Nixon's own interests.

Emotional Engagement

Insofar as there is a variety of emotions, there will also be a variety of strategies by which they are transformed into engaging features of language. Consider the following exchange between a patient and his therapist. The patient had missed an appointment without calling to cancel it:

> THERAPIST: Maybe you felt that the kind of interpretation I was making on Monday was the same thing and you couldn't come yesterday 'cause you were scared of the faggot here—who made a pass at you.
>
> PATIENT: It is almost as if I don't want you to get the idea that I am going to pursue you and at the same time I can get an indication of whether you are trying to pursue me or not, you know. Like, if I come in here and you were pissed off, you know, I'd

really be afraid, you know, I'd say "Fuck me, man, you know, this guy is really after my ass."

THERAPIST: Oh, you mean if I were pissed off.

This passage addresses a number of emotions – from the anger in the therapist's statement and the client's fear and ambiguity about the satisfaction of being pursued as a love object. The therapist's displeasure is conveyed by his self-deprecatory description of himself as a "faggot." This is a term that is typically used by non-homosexuals to demean homosexuals. Using it to describe himself, the therapist is really implying that this is the way the patient is thinking about him and using the sign to convey both his antagonism to the patient as well as putting the patient off as a bigot.

In response, the patient – besides conveying his ambiguity of feeling about being pursued and his fears about this – uses standard obscenities, a common speech genre, to convey his feelings. The commonly used word for sexual intercourse has, of course, multiple uses and here the patient is using "fuck you" as an expletive to indicate his feeling of exasperation at being the object of a homosexual's gesture of attraction. The use of the word "ass" here has a double signification: In American usage the word "ass," a transformation of the word "arse," is used ordinarily to refer to the backside, posteriors, or buttocks; from a Middle English usage (tail), it can also refer to the male and female genitals. *Ass* can also refer to the woman as a sexual object ("a piece of ass").

Insofar as the therapist and patient are dealing with homoerotic matters, it becomes an allusion to both the object of sexual desire as well as to anal intercourse. This particular sign has elicited complex interpretants and thereby enriched the discourse and successfully created a degree of emotional engagement. These signs are not merely "intensifiers" but are instruments for the conveyance of given emotions and attitudes.

Jocular Engagement

Jokes are discursive events with a particular construction that evoke smiles and laughter and sometimes groans, if they are bad ones. Human agents produce jokes in one of two ways: first, they use the material that emerges in the conversation to make a joke: witticisms. Second, they recount joke stories that have a longer narrative structure than a witticism and have all the evidence of being deliberately constructed for delivery at the appropriate time.

As an example of a witticism that emerges spontaneously from the discursive situation itself, consider the following. It occurred in the backyard of a property that Mac had just acquired. A friend, Hobbie, dropped in to visit:

Mac: Isn't that a lovely ash tree?
Hobbie: Ash tree? That is not an ash – it is a peach tree.
Mac: I don't know: Noel dropped in yesterday and he told me it was an ash tree.
Hobbie: Noel? What does he know about trees? He doesn't know an ash from a pole in the ground.

The double pun comes as a witty rejoinder to Noel's unfounded claims to horticultural knowledge and elicits laughter and discursive engagement, an engagement communicated by the *schadenfreude* that emerges at the expense of the common friend.

This kind of engagement is achieved by making use of an American speech genre – "he doesn't know his ass from a hole in the ground" – and using the phonetic similarities between ash and ass and hole and pole to make a twinned pun. It is the structural opposition between ash and ass and hole and pole, on the one hand, and the simultaneous presence of both phonetic similarity and difference between the operative words that make the witticism work.

In this next vignette, we see two young boys engaging each other in playful banter and accomplishing their purposes by artful uses of coding phrases:

MICHAEL J.: I bet you a nickel.
GEORGE J.: What?
MICHAEL J.: Gotta see some money … bet you a nickel that I am looking sharper than you.
GEORGE J.: No you wasn't.
MICHAEL J.: No you had your play clothes on (laughter).
GEORGE J.: I ain't have my play clothes on.
MICHAEL J.: You had your Batman socks on too.
GEORGE J.: I did (laughs) did not.
MICHAEL J.: You did (laughs) so.
GEORGE J.: A? A?
MICHAEL J.: Got something else to say?

GEORGE J.: Wait a minute—let me tell you something. Greg Barker look better than you. You come in here with you clothes hanging down all the way down to here (laughs.)

After the initial sally of a bet, Michael contrasts his appearance with that of George and establishes an opposition and a contest. Facing a rejection of this proposition, he adds a verisimilitudinous detail: You had your ''play clothes'' on and Batman socks to boot. This establishes George as childish compared to the older brother. George comes back with another contrast: Greg Barker looks better than you. The entire exchange is made in a playful tone, interspersed with laughter, and the engagement is achieved with the help of the ''bet'' as an underlying metaphor for the exchange.

A joke story, recounted by one agent to others in the course of an ongoing conversation, is a common occurrence among agents who already have some kind of relationship to each other. The canonical example here is Harvey Sacks's (1974) report of what he termed ''the course of a joke's telling.'' A close examination of his report reveals not only the course that a joke's telling follows, but the binding engagement that the telling creates among all the participants. There is no other text in the literature that illustrates as vividly the difference between agents merely interacting with each other and engaging each other than this one. It is rather a long account but a small fragment will nevertheless show its relevant features:

Ken: You wanna hear? My sister told me a story last night.
Roger: I don't want to hear it.
Al: What's purple and an island? Grape Britain. That's what his sister…
Ken: No. To shock me she says there are these girls, and they just got married.
Roger: Ah uh.
Ken: Ah uh.
Roger: Wait a second.
Ken: (Silent)
Al: He
Roger: Drag that by me again. Hehh/he/hh
Ken: There… there were these three girls and they were all sisters. And they just got married to three brothers.
Roger: You better have a long talk with your sister.
Ken: Wait a minute.

In this fragment alone, there are many signs of engagement: the sarcastic rejoinders, the questions, and the interruptions. One is sarcastic to both indicate an attitude to the other and to evoke a response from him or her. One questions the other to elicit an answer as well as to indicate both interest and participation in the ongoing proceedings and one interrupts also to do the same, altogether a telling example of mutual engagement.

The joke that Sacks recounts is really a joke story. These joke stories typically have a well-plotted narrative structure, with capsule-characterization of the actors, and a denouement with a decisive quality to it. In these stories, structural exposition is used as well as relevant speech genres, all of them joining together to bring human agents closer together, at least for the time being, as each of them deciphers the structures of the story.

CONCLUSION

Neither the well-established concept of "interaction" nor that of "intersubjectivity" fully describes what occurs when human agents encounter each other; rather, they *engage* each other by using the means of communication that are available to them. When human agents encounter each other, they undertake various acts of communication using both linguistic and visual instrumentations. It is the systematic and often *calculated usage* of these instrumentations *addressively* that leads to the emergence of engagement between agents as well as to what is called "intersubjectivity." To achieve engagement and intersubjectivity, one must necessarily objectify one's own "subjectivity," by one means or another. Among these, the linguistic signs are certainly more important than the visual signs, since they can convey greater complexities and subtleties of meaning and can even undermine the very meanings conveyed by the visual signs. The linguistic form of communication embodies many complexities of its own and these may be described, as we have done here, as its "fundamental features." These features consist of sign systems, grammatical systems, phonological systems, tropic systems, and genres of speech.

In the daily activities of communicating with each other, human agents use these various features of language and do so habitually and, often, with conscious aforethought, not just to *interact* with the other, but *to engage the other both emotionally and cognitively*. In such communicative relationships, agents are able to convey attitudes, emotions, opinions, and information, in all their complexity, by the adroit management of the fundamental features of language. The systematic and more-or-less skillful use of these features

invests everyday exchanges with the quality of *addressivity*: in its composition and style, it takes account of the most efficient and effective form in which the talk should be wrought, so that the recipient's attention and engagement can be won and maintained.

Signs, structures, codes, and grammar, as well as speech genres and tropes, gain their standing in the real world *as they are used*, wittingly or unwittingly, by human agents. By examining everyday discourse, then, one can discover the value and the standing of academic theories of human communication. Peircean signs, symbols, and icons; Mead's significant symbols; Jakobson's structures relating to sound and meaning; Saussure's binary codes; and Chomsky's syntactic structures are *pragmatic instrumentations* that ordinary human agents use to engage the other in interactions. Such skills and competencies will certainly not guarantee escape from alienation from interaction, but without these skills, it would be difficult to construct engaged and responsive interactions.

NOTES

1. Any definition of ordinary human agents that does not take into account that they are both communicatively competent and can put such competencies into practice by using the technologies of conversation to address the other treats these agents as beings who are routinely "autistic," that is, who operate without taking the other(s) into account; that they accomplish meaning, self, and identity *on their own*, so to speak. In fact theories that put a more or less "autistic" being at their center have been proliferating in the social sciences for some time now as phenomenological sociologies. This argument has been made by Dorothée Legrande and Marco Iacobani (2011) in a penetrating analysis of this issue (citing the work of Gallagher, 2000), leading to what may be termed the "autistic turn" in philosophy and the social sciences.

2. An excellent example of the significance of these elements of conversational technology for achieving engagement is Harvey Sacks' description of "the course of a joke's telling" (1974), though he himself, keeping faith with a strict ethnomethodological code, does not draw this conclusion. For an example of an approach that rejects a focus on the "structure of talk and language" in interaction, see Turner (1986). He is content to describe the processes of the "mechanics of social interaction" – the communicative processes in interactions – as "signaling" and leave it there.

3. When they are not engaging with others, human agents often find artistic objects with which to engage themselves. These are either in the performing arts such as dramas, concerts, games, and circuses or in the inanimate arts, such as books, paintings, sculptures, and photographs. Indeed, human agents, in all cultures and down the ages, have allowed themselves to get emotionally engaged with fictional characters. As in Shakespeare's play Hamlet wondered, "What is Hecuba to him, or

he to Hecuba, that he would weep for her?" implying, "Just imagine what he would do if he had the cause for the feelings that I have." Watching the actor performing a mourning on stage makes Hamlet ask this question. The audience watching the play will be moved by this double play – the play and the play within the play. And so, one might ask oneself the question today: "What is Roger Federer to me and what am I to Roger Federer that I grieve when he loses a tennis match?"

4. The analogy of playing games for the use of language in everyday life has been used separately and independently by Wittgenstein and Saussure. For a study of the uses of games and their relationship to language-games in Wittgenstein and Saussure, see Roy Harris (1990).

5. We will use the conversation reported in Goffman (1961) throughout this section of the exposition to make the point that the simplest exchange between agents will perforce use the fundamental features of a language.

6. See Hymes (1972) for a thorough examination, with many examples of this issue. He notes that a linguistic theory must deal with three problems: the variable and socioculturally determined capacity of people – that is their *performative* skills; the organization of verbal instruments for socially defined purposes; and the sensitivity to (i.e. their malleability in) situations.

7. In an examination of the relationship between Chomskyan theories and those of George Herbert Mead, Albert Bergesen (2004) comes to a different conclusion: "First, research evidence strongly suggests that mental operations exist prior to language onset, and conversation of gestures or social interaction. Second, language is not just significant symbols: it requires syntax."

Having said this, Bergesen (2004) goes on to what appears as a triumphant conclusion: "Symbolic interaction may turn out to be more of a Chomskyan than a Meadian process … it does not appear that symbolic interaction creates our mind or the basic computation algorithms of language" (p. 357). While Bergesen has an indisputable case that significant symbols do not occur in isolation and need syntax to make sense to the users, it is also indisputable that the facility to use symbols with syntax emerges only after a newborn child has been exposed to social and symbolic interaction. It is the case that while our "bioinheritance," as Bergesen calls it, has programed human agents to produce language and syntax, such an inheritance becomes operational *only* as a result of participation in interactional processes. Indeed, variations in the complexity and intensity of such processes result in variations in the richness and variety of the symbolic elements manifested in syntactic forms that human agents will be able to produce. To explain human being and doing one does not have to fall into the either/or trap. See also Puddephat (2011) for an analysis of the relationship between the work of Mead and Chomsky. Ochs and Shieffelin (1984) examine the importance of socialization for the emergence of the capacity to use language.

8. Ricoeur's "meditation," as he calls it, on time and narrative, is a complex and probing work. We are using only one small aspect of it here for our purposes.

9. One of the elements of interactional communication that contributes to the emergence of engagement between human agents is the use of prosody – "'the musical' attributes of speech – auditory effects such as melody, dynamics, rhythm, tempo and pause" – as Coupler-Kuhlen and Margaret Selting (1996) call it – has not been discussed here, though we have no doubt about its importance.

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