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#### What the Course is About:

The assignment of meaning to events and objects is central to communication. In fact, many people define communication as the assignment of meaning or the sharing of meaning. In recent years scholars have intensively investigated linguistic meaning and other types of meaning (e.g., "social meaning"). Indeed, in the past decade, real advances in understanding meaning and communication are developing from work in philosophy, linguistics, sociology, communication and psychology. Researchers have paid special attention to the ways in which words and actions take on meaning in context. Hence, researchers have had more and more to say about the full communicative event--i.e., context, including physical and social parameters; pragmatics, the actual use of language to accomplish everyday goals; grammatical structures and communication; conversational structures (e.g., question and answer); and types of meaning (e.g., literal and implied, digital and analogic).

For our purposes, the question which underlies this research area is simply this: How do people interpret what other people say? This course will look at research and theory concerned with how we interpret one another's linguistic behavior.

#### What We'll Do:

We'll study a small number of concepts which researchers have found to be useful in understanding language usage (e.g., inference, speech acts, indirect speech acts, a game model of conversation, implicature, context, action sequences, coherence, and more). We'll study each concept in two ways: (1) by reading and discussing what researchers/theoreticians have had to say; (2) by getting out and collecting data on naturally occurring spoken or written discourse. At one meeting we'll discuss a concept and at the next meeting you'll present what you were able to find in "the real world." The attitude of this course will be: "I don't believe it until I see (hear) it."

The course will run in a seminar-like format (within the limits of constraints imposed by the number of students in the course) in which the level of participation, hopefully, will be high, both in discussion of texts and presentation of data.

Evaluation:

Participation. . . . .25%

1. Discussion
2. Written exercises
3. Presentation

Two Essays:

Essay #1 . . 35%

Essay #2 . . 40%

Participation:

Your active involvement in meetings constitutes participation, as well as the written exercises you hand in each week. Please ask questions (if you're puzzled by something, chances are, so are others). Question the texts--that's what we are all about. Find examples that refute the text, the teacher (G-d forbid), and your colleagues. When you challenge ideas you think things through for yourself. The examples (data) you bring to class will be crucial to the quality of the experience we all have in the course. Also, I urge you to work hard on your data collection and analysis (i.e., the exercises for class discussion)--tape record and sometimes distribute transcriptions. You'll present essay #2 during our last few meetings (about 5 minutes per presentation) and the presentation will make up part of the participation grade.

Exercises--A Form of Participation:

Each week there are exercises assigned. The exercises are intended to help you learn the concepts presented in the texts. The exercises are simply for the purpose of applying the concepts. At one meeting each week we will go around the group and have each student talk about what they found in doing the exercise. Exercises are to be handed in at the class when they are discussed. These written exercises will be graded and counted toward participation.

Essays:

The essays each require that you make use of the information you gain from this course. But the quality of the essays will depend upon not only your ability to understand the information, but to be able to apply it creatively. Each essay should be 4 to 6 typed, double spaced pages (not including data). These essays make up the bulk of your grade, so they deserve your full effort. Late essays will lose one letter grade for each day they are late. Again, please remember that these essays are intended to be carefully thought out, organized themes. You will need to integrate course material with your observations and creativity.

Essay #1:

(See exercises #2, 3, 4, & 7)

Collect and transcribe a small amount of naturally occurring conversational language (approximately 1 to 2 minutes--you can use the conversation you've been using for exercises). Based on your data, discuss the way in which one or more of the following concepts operate in conversation (i.e., contribute to conversational structure and coherence):

speech acts

conversational implicature

indirect speech acts

the context of action

action sequences

Essay #2: (CHOOSE EITHER A. OR B.)

A.:

Based on ideas stimulated by Nofsinger and Tannen, and with reference to data you collected (your transcription), discuss the

idea that "communication is a continual balancing act, juggling the conflicting needs for intimacy and independence" (Tannen, p. 27). Tannen writes: "To survive in the world, we have to act in concert with others, but to survive as ourselves, rather than simply as cogs in a wheel, we have to act alone" (Tannen, pp. 27-28). What would be particularly interesting is to explain how an utterance is multi-functional, one that serves to both sustain connectedness and independence. Be careful to support your analysis. Try to make use of Nofsinger's discussion of language games and speech acts, and turn organization. (Please note: this is not phrased as a gender issue. So, you do not need to limit your answer to the gender issue, but you can address it if you wish).

B.:

For this last essay, let's see how we can apply concepts from this course to help illuminate issues of social relationship. Your task is to analyze a brief transcription of your choice (data you have collected) to demonstrate how talk may both use background knowledge and be illuminated by the background knowledge that the participants hold.

Nofsinger closes his book with reference to this connection between the social or interpersonal and talk. He writes:

In telling a story, expanding an argument, or producing some other conversational structure, a participant may design utterances to invoke knowledge assumed to be held in common with a specific other participant. This is some item of background knowledge or shared experience that each person 'knows, presumes that the other knows, and presumes that the other presumes [that he or she knows]' (Maynard & Zimmerman, 1984, p. 303, n. 5). The other participant may then respond in a way that displays a recognition of what that knowledge is. Such an interactive display that two participants share a certain item of knowledge and thus have a "history" together may make their relationship (or some aspect of it) momentarily relevant to the conversation. (Nofsinger, p. 163)

Similarly, in the closing chapters of her book, Tannen focuses upon the relationship between talk and friendship. She makes the point that we cannot tell from the act just what the meaning is. She explains that this is the case, since the act is embedded within a system, e.g., of cultural ritual, or relationship history, or style (e.g., genderlect).

Again, you are asked to find a transcription that allows you to explore this point that background knowledge is needed to understand the act, that when we talk to one another we make use of

such background knowledge.

### Exercises

#1.

Collect one minute of recorded conversation and transcribe it. Come to class prepared to respond to two points: (1) what did you discover about recording and transcribing naturally occurring speech; (2) what major conclusions about conversation can you draw from the data you gathered? Refer to Nofsinger's "Appendix: Transcribing Conventions," pp. 167-169.

#### Nofsinger, Chapter 1

#2.

Can you apply the ideas of the language game metaphor (Nofsinger, pp. 6-9) to your data? E.g.: moves, turns, goal, & rules.

Can you find some conversational actions (p. 7) in your data? What are they? Do you find instances of recipient design (bottom, p. 9)?

#### Nofsinger, Chapter 2; Tannen, Chapter 1

#3.

Discuss speech acts--specify 5 from your data.

#4.

A. Discuss indirect speech acts(see pp. 32-46) --specify 5 from your data.

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|  
| The Problem of Indirect Speech Acts  
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|. . .how it is that participants can say one thing and yet  
| be interpreted as meaning something more, or even something  
| quite different" (p. 43).  
|

B. Is a metamessage (Tannen, p. 32) the same thing as an indirect speech act? explain

Tannen, Chapter 2

#5.

Do you find any metamessages in your data? If you do, describe and explain. Do you find examples that help to make the distinction between the message and the metamessage?

In your data, do you find instances of women and/or men displaying asymmetries of status? displaying connection?

What is the invisibility of framing, and do you find any instances in your data? (p. 63)

Tannen, Chapters 3 & 4

#6.

Find instances of talk to preserve independence, to negotiate and maintain status; find talk as a means to rapport. Can you find instances of conversational style (p. 79); public and private talk.

Find instances of gossip

Nofsinger, Chapter 3

#7.

Do you find instances of adjacency pairs? e.g., summons-answer.

Do you find instances of presequences--e.g., prerequisites, preannouncement. Do you find instances where presequences act as indirect speech acts? (p. 60)

Do you find insertion sequences?

Can you point to instances where adjacent placement helps to explain the interpretation given to utterances?

Do you find examples of occasioning? (p. 69)  
preferred and/or dispreferred actions?

Nofsinger, Chapter 4

#8.

Find instances of "transition relevance place." (p. 81)

Do you find instances of:

(1) current speaker selects next (p. 82)

(2) self-select (p. 83)

(3) speaker continuation (p. 85)

Do you find examples of silence that seem to bear meaning, that hold significance for the conversation? (p. 94)

Nofsinger, Chapter 5

#9.

Aligning

Please note that Nofsinger presents two senses of align, the first is focused upon giving accounts for unexpected behavior, and the SECOND is what the chapter is all about-- devices for checking on understanding between the participants, e.g., assessments, formulations, and others detailed in the chapter.

Do you find instances of assessments, newsmarks and "oh" receipts, continuers, formulations, collaborative completions.

Do you find instances of repair (pp. 124-132).

Do you find instances of disclaimers and licenses (pp. 132-134).

Do you find alignment instances at conversational boundaries-- (pp. 137-142), e.g., openings, closings.

Just in case you wish to explore the first sense of aligning, giving accounts, here's a question to explore with your data.

Do you find instances of the first sense of aligning. e.g., disclaiming, requesting and giving accounts, offering apologies, formulating the definition of the situation, talking about motives.

Tannen, Chapters 9 & 10

#10.

IT ALL DEPENDS

Tannen talks about the idea that symmetry and asymmetry are key features in understanding talk between friends (pp. 277 & 296).

Discuss what is meant by symmetry and asymmetry in talk. Can you find instances of symmetry and asymmetry in your transcription(s).

Can you find an example to support Tannen's claim that the meaning of an act is not found in the act itself, but in the cultural backdrop-- the other's perspective (see pp. 295-296).

#### Required Texts

R. Nofsinger, *Everyday Conversation*

D. Tannen, *You Just Don't Understand*

REQUIRED READING AND EXERCISES

Date	Meeting/Assignment
1.	Syllabus
2.	Exercise #1; Tannen, Preface Nofsinger, Preface
3.	Insights on Your Data
4.	Nofsin, Chapter 1, "Introduction" Tannen, Chapter 1, "Different Words, Different Worlds"
5.	Exercise #2
6.	Nofsin, Chapter 2, "Conversational Action"
7.	Exercise #3
8.	Nofsin, Chapter 2, "Conversational Action"
9.	Exercise # 4
10.	Tannen, Chapter 2, "Asymmetries: Women & Men Talking at Cross Purposes"
11.	Exercise # 5

12. Tannen, Chapter 3, "Rapport-talk & Report-talk"  
Tannen, Chapter 4, "Gossip"
13. Exercise #6
14. Nofs, Chapter 3, "Action Sequences"
15. Tannen, Chapter 5, "Lecturing & Listening"  
Exercise #7
16. Tannen, Chapter 6, "Styles in Conflict"
17. Essay #1 is Due
18. Nofs, Chapter 4, "Turn Organization"  
Tannen, Chapter 7, "Dominance & Control"
19. Exercise #8
20. Nofs, Chapter 4, "Turn Organization"  
revisited  
Tannen, Chapter 8, "Damned if You Do"
21. Nofs, Chapter 5, "Alignment"
22. Exercise #9
23. Tannen, Chapter 9, "Cross talk Across the Ages"  
Tannen, Chapter 10, "Living with Asymmetry"
24. Exercise #10
25. Nofs, Chapter 6, "Extended Structures"

26.

Essay #2 is Due

PRESENTATIONS

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27.

PRESENTATIONS

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