

events involving wife-stealing and Kimberly Fortier, but more generally about the more permanent background against which these events take place: the politics of the Tories and New Labour, and the nature of the three publications that are mentioned. But it is also assumed that the reader will accept the subjective way these events and their background have been represented here, recognize that this text is intended to have the force of ridicule and the effect of amused contempt.

Conclusion

The contexts that texts, whether spoken or written, are designed to key into are constructs of reality as conceived by particular groups of people, representations of what they know of the world and how they think about it. Although, as we have seen, some of the knowledge that the text producer assumes to be shared is of particular things, events, persons, either within the immediate situation of utterance or not, these particulars are typically related to more general schematic structures of knowledge. Thus it is assumed in the text we have just been considering that the particular mention of wife-stealing and Kimberly Fortier will be related to the more general **schema** of British politics, and the mention of Tony Blair and his astonishing announcement in the text cited earlier will be related to the more general schemata of the Kosovo crisis and of the European Union and its affairs. If readers cannot ratify these assumptions, they will be at a loss to know what discourse the writers intend to mean by their texts in terms of their reference, force, and effect.

Of course, even if the receivers of texts are contextually in the know and *are* in a position to ratify the intentions of the text producers, they may fail to engage this knowledge for one reason or another. Communication is not simply a matter of bringing kinds of knowledge into correspondence, but of bringing them into a degree of convergence, and this may call for quite complex negotiation. We will take up what this involves in Chapter 6. But meanwhile, we need to take a closer look at how kinds of contextual knowledge are conventionally structured. We need to explore the concept of the schema.

4

Schematic conventions

Context and situation

As we have seen in the previous chapter, language use is a matter of constructing and construing texts by keying them into contexts so as to realize discourse meaning, that is to say, the message in the mind as intended by the text producer on the one hand, and as interpreted by the text receiver on the other.

As was pointed out earlier, context is an abstract representation, a mental construct. It may be abstracted from the immediate situation of utterance, as when reference is made to something that is directly perceptible by both parties in an interaction. So if somebody asks me to close the door, for example, I can readily infer that what is being referred to is a particular door in the room we are in. This is a case of what is called **deixis**—the pointing out of something immediately and perceptibly present in the situation of utterance: that door there, this door here.

But context is obviously not confined to what is situationally present in the here and now. The language we produce or receive in the process of communication does not come unexpectedly out of the blue. It is part of the continuity of our individual and social lives, and so always related to the context in our heads of what we know and believe. This context in the head is what was referred to in the preceding chapter as schematic structures of knowledge, and it is this that we engage to make sense of language, when we realize discourse from the text.

The concept of the schema

A **schema** is a construct of familiar knowledge. How it works is best illustrated by reference to the work of the psychologist F. C. Bartlett, who introduced the concept over 70 years ago in a book called *Remembering*, to account for the findings of certain experiments he carried out. In one of his experiments a group of British students were asked to read a North American Indian story called *The War of the Ghosts* and then rewrite it from memory as accurately as possible. What they did in their versions of the story was to change the events so that they corresponded more closely with their own conventional and customary reality, very different from that represented in the original. In other words, the discourse they derived from the text was one that suited their preconceived schematic expectations.

The text that these students were asked to read and retell came, of course, from a culture very different from their own, and we can describe the disparity between the original story and their versions of it as an instance of cross-cultural misunderstanding. To the extent that schematic assumptions are socially shared by a particular community, we can say that they are indeed cultural constructs. But we also have to allow for what is familiar and customary and expected, and so schematically shared, among smaller groups of people—professional and family groups, for example, who we would not normally speak of as sharing a culture. The process of making sense by taking schematic bearings applies to the interpretation of all texts. You cannot make sense of anything without bringing it within the confines of what is preconceived as familiar. Everything new has to be related to what is given. But it is, of course, a matter of degree: sometimes it is relatively easy to accommodate new information into existing schemata, sometimes (as in *The War of the Ghosts*) relatively difficult, but some accommodation needs always to be made.

Frames of reference

What happens in text interpretation is that the language triggers off the recall of some familiar state of affairs, some schema or other, and this sets up an expectation of what is to follow.

Here, to take a simple example, is the first sentence of an article from a recent edition of a British news magazine:

In the past it took a disaster to bring the Olympics to London.

The language here activates schematic knowledge about the Olympic games and how different cities bid to host them every four years. So it indicates a **frame of reference** and at the same time projects the reader's attention forward to what is to come next. Readers anticipate that they are to be told more about previous occasions when the Olympic games were held in London. Sure enough, the text continues as follows:

In 1908 the city stepped in after Vesuvius erupted, leaving Rome bereft. In 1948 it was called upon to rescue the Olympic ideal for a Europe ravaged by fascist dictatorship.

Again, readers can only understand all this about London rescuing the Olympic ideal if they can call up the frame of reference of the Second World War in Europe.

This process of keying the language into an appropriate frame of reference to make sense of text comes so naturally to us that we take it for granted, and it is easy to suppose that the meaning is actually in the text itself and not derived from it by this kind of schematic inference. But it is not difficult to demonstrate how much our interpretation depends upon it.

Suppose, for example, you overheard the following remark:

The service left much to be desired.

Now if you look up the word 'service' in a dictionary you will find that it has several semantic meanings (religious ceremony, public assistance, set of crockery, and so on). The question is which of them is pragmatically appropriate in this text, and the answer is that we cannot tell. We lack a frame of reference, and so we cannot anticipate what is to come next. But if we were to modify the text a little:

The service last Sunday left much to be desired.

Now we would tend to interpret the word as meaning a *church* service because in our familiar world such services are customarily held on Sundays. And once the church service schema is invoked,

then we would anticipate that what follows would fit into that frame of reference:

The service last Sunday left much to be desired. The hymns were badly chosen, the prayers inappropriate, and the sermon too long. And what is more, the organ was too loud.

Notice that once a frame of reference is established, the use of definite articles becomes appropriate ('the hymns,' 'the prayers', and so on) because the phrases refer to what is common schematic knowledge: a church service conventionally includes prayers, hymns, a sermon, and there is a choir, an organ, and so on.

Of course readers can be mistaken and invoke the wrong frame of reference. They can be deliberately misled and their expectations thwarted. We might, for example, extend our text in different ways:

The service last Sunday left much to be desired. Most of the staff had taken the day off, and we had to wait ages between courses.

Or:

The service last Sunday left much to be desired. So we lost the game.

Having been induced at the beginning of the text to think of a church service, readers now have to shift the frame of reference and adjust their expectations.

But it is possible (if you are feeling perverse enough) to compose a text which frustrates this shift and adjustment because it continues to be relatable to two quite different possible frames of reference at the same time. Consider the following:

Rocky slowly got up from the mat, planning his escape. He hesitated a moment and thought. Things were not going well. What bothered him most was being held, especially since the charge against him had been weak. He considered his present situation. The lock that held him was strong, but he thought he could break it.

What is being described here? The text is ambiguous in that it admits of two interpretations. If we take 'Rocky' as referring to a

prisoner, then what we have here are his thoughts about escaping from his cell. In this case, we might propose extending the text by adding:

But he would have to wait until the warder had finished his rounds.

We could, however, take 'Rocky' to refer not to a prisoner but to a wrestler and then what we have are his thoughts about how to get the better of his opponent. In this a quite different textual extension would be schematically suitable:

Then the bell rang for the end of the round.

The ambiguity of the text here is sustained by the use of words which call up two possible and competing frames of reference. As mentioned earlier, word forms frequently encode more than one semantic meaning and these are recorded in a dictionary. When put to pragmatic use, words function as schema activators, but of course they are not usually on their own: they connect with other words in a text, and the connection will usually have the effect of directing the reader's attention to just one schema by elimination. Thus readers connect the words *hymn* and *prayer* with *service* to project a church schema and all other semantic meanings of the word are discarded. In the case of ambiguity, readers do not know what to eliminate and they have to keep more than one possible schema in mind at one and the same time.

Of course, in reference to the text about Rocky, if you know nothing about wrestling, there will be no wrestling schema to invoke, and words like *escape* and *lock* are then likely to bring only prisons to mind. Similarly, the words *hymn*, *prayer*, *sermon*, and so on will only call to mind a religious service if these things are customary in the kind of religious service you know about. Schemata are representations in the mind of what is familiar or customary. But all this is relative: what is familiar to one group of people may be unknown to another, and customs vary across communities. So what such schemata represent are culturally different ways of ordering the world, different versions of social reality.

Frames and cultural assumptions

These schemata are cultural, taken-for-granted constructs, and they become so firmly entrenched in our consciousness that we often find it difficult to envisage any alternative ways of thinking. We talk about common sense but tend to forget that this sense is only locally common and is in fact communal sense—the way a particular community has constructed reality for itself. As with Bartlett's subjects, when we encounter a text that does not fit our culturally schematized world, we naturally find it hard to make sense of it. Consider the following often cited example:

A man was taking a walk with his son one day and as they were crossing the road, a car came round a corner unexpectedly and hit the boy, injuring him badly. An ambulance was called for and the boy was taken to the nearest hospital and into the operating theatre. On seeing the boy, the surgeon suddenly let out a cry of horror: 'My God this is my son!'

Anybody who reads this text for the first time may well be mystified by it. How can it be that the surgeon suddenly recognizes his son at the hospital, when he was with the boy earlier at the time of the accident—and anyway how can the father be out walking with his son and working at the hospital at the same time? It seems that we have a mystery here that we need a Sherlock Holmes to solve. But the mystery only comes about because of our preconceived schematic assumptions and is easy enough to dispel. Suppose the surgeon is a woman. As soon as that possibility is suggested, then the mystery disappears. By the same token, if we were to change the text by replacing the word *surgeon* with *nurse*, there is no mystery at all. Elementary, my dear Watson, as Sherlock Holmes might say (and in writing this, I am aware that I too am assuming cultural knowledge my reader might not share!).

The idea that the surgeon is a woman does not (for many people at least) come immediately to mind is because the mind is naturally inclined to interpret things by relating them to what is schematically established as normal and customary. A reader with different schematic expectations, someone living in a society where it is common for surgeons to be women (and nurses, say,

men), would not find this text mysterious in the least. But notice that once the possibility of the surgeon being a woman is proposed, this is readily recognized as solving the mystery, and it all seems so obvious—'Of course', people usually say, 'why didn't I think of that?' So it is not that the idea of a woman surgeon is difficult to entertain. It is simply that it is less directly accessible.

What schemata do is to provide us with a convenient framework for understanding. Without them we would be at a loss to make sense of any text, or indeed to make sense of any of the circumstances of everyday life. At the same time they have their disadvantages in that they can impose a preconceived pattern on things and impede us from recognizing any alternative concept of reality. The danger is that once a text has triggered off a particular schema, the reader may interpret what follows in reference to it and disregard anything in the text that does not sustain it. As we have seen, a particular schematic projection, then, can override textual signals that would allow the engagement of a different schema. This accounts for the lack of convergence, mentioned previously, between the discourse that is interpreted (what the text means to the reader or listener) and the discourse that is intended (what a writer or speaker means by a text).

Interpersonal routines

So far we have been talking about schemata as frames of reference, as **ideational** constructs, that is to say, as shared conceptions of a third-person reality—the reality out there. As such they represent what a group, large or small, consider to be customary, normal, natural ways of thinking about events. But there are also schematic constructs of a different kind. These represent not the customary ways in which we conceive of the third-person world, but customary ways in which we engage with second persons, the conventions we take for granted that concern how people normally interact with each other. These we can refer to as **interpersonal schemata**.

Examples of such schemata would be those that inform the everyday routines we follow when meeting or greeting people, or the different transactions we carry out in **service encounters**—buying a train ticket, checking in at a hotel, making enquiries over

the phone, and so on. The customary ways of doing these things are so familiar to us that we take them for granted, until we discover, sometimes to our discomfiture, that they do not always apply and that other people, from different cultures or social groups, follow rather different schematic conventions of behaviour. Consider the routine of introduction and first meeting. The following three move pattern might be taken as typical.

- A *Introduction*: Tom, this is Jane
- B (Tom) *Greeting*: How do you do?
- C (Jane) *Greeting*: How do you do?

There are, however, all kinds of variations that might occur in the actual wording of these moves. The introduction might be formally expressed as *Tom, may I introduce you to Jane*, or informally as *Tom—Jane*, depending on the occasion or the people involved. These factors are also likely to affect which **terms of address** are used for the first person mentioned (*Mr Jones*, *Professor Jones*, *Sir Tom Jones*) and which terms of reference for the second (may I introduce *Jane Grey*, *Mrs Grey*, *Lady Jane Grey*). There may be conventions about which of the two people is to be the referent and which the addressee. According to one code of etiquette, the man should always be the referent and always introduced to the woman as addressee, and not the other way round, so the introduction move in our example should really be formulated as *Jane, this is Tom* or *Jane, may I introduce you to Tom*. For other people, the order is a matter of indifference—it is not in their schema for this particular routine.

Turning now to the two greetings moves, these two might be differently expressed as, for example, *How are you?* *How are you doing?* *Nice to meet you*, or quite simply, and very informally, *Hi*. These might be in free variation, so that it does not matter which expression is used. But again it could be that factors like the kind of social occasion, or the status of the people being introduced would customarily require one form of wording rather than another. So in some situations, the use of *How do you do* or *Hi* would be considered out of place, marked as not conforming to customary practice. We might note, too, that although the greetings in our example take the linguistic form of interrogative sentences, they do not function pragmatically as questions in this

routine: the first greeting does not call for an answer, and if one were to be given, like *I am doing very well thank you*, this would be unexpected and rather odd. We might also note that in the rather different routine customarily used for greeting people you know already, it was be equally odd to use the expression *How do you do*, though *Hi*, with or without *How are you*, would be appropriate—appropriate, that is to say, in some communities on some occasions.

When these different schematic conventions for appropriate interpersonal behaviour are described in detail in this way, it makes them seem complicated—perhaps absurdly so. But people do not generally experience them as complicated because they acquire them quite naturally as part of the process of being socialized into the accepted ways of behaving in the social groups they belong to. It is when we find ourselves in situations where the interpersonal routines are different from those we have become accustomed to that difficulties arise. Take the example of Eliza Doolittle in George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion* (made familiar by the musical version, *My Fair Lady*). Eliza is a cockney flower girl who Professor Higgins sets out to train to converse like people in a higher social class. This (slightly abridged) is the scene where she tries out her newly acquired polite routine for the first time:

MRS EYNSFORD HILL (*introducing*) My daughter Clara.

LIZA How do you do?

CLARA How do you do? ...

FREDDY I've certainly had the pleasure.

MRS EYNSFORD HILL My son Freddy.

LIZA How do you do?

(*a long and painful pause ensues*)

MRS HIGGINS (*at last, conversationally*) Will it rain, do you think?

LIZA The shallow depression to the west of these islands is likely to move slowly in an easterly direction. There are no indications of any great change in the barometrical situation.

FREDDY Ha! ha! how awfully funny.

LIZA What is wrong with that, young man. I bet I got it right.

(*Pygmalion*, Act 3)

Liza did get the language right in that she made no mistakes in her grammar and pronunciation. What is wrong with her utterance is that it does not conform to the convention that the mention of weather is only a ploy to get a conversation going. Liza, unaware of this, produces a totally inappropriate and unexpected reply and does not understand why Freddy finds it funny. For his part, Freddy would naturally assume she knows the convention and so is deliberately flouting it in order to be amusing.

The point to be made is that what we take for granted as 'ordinary' or 'normal' behaviour actually presupposes a mutual understanding of quite complex schematic conventions. And we have only been discussing how these regulate the language we use. But we must remember that these utterances we have been considering, these introductions and greetings, are kinds of social action and are accompanied by other conventions that define appropriate behaviour. We have already mentioned one of these, namely which of the two people being introduced is to be the addressee, and which the referent. This might depend on sex, or on age, or on social status. Another convention has to do with accompanying physical action—do you shake hands or not, do the people being introduced look at each other? Another convention concerns proximity—how close do people stand to each other, not only when they meet and greet but when they engage in conversation more generally?

Adjacency pairs

The apparently very simple routine we have been considering is only one of numerous sets of schematic conventions that regulate interpersonal behaviour. Whenever we engage in interaction with other people we bring with us expectations about customary procedures. Thus in a conversation, the participants assume that they will take turns to speak and that there will be conventional signals that indicate when it is time to take a turn, and what kind of turn is expected. So in the example we considered earlier, Tom recognizes that A has completed a turn and knows that it is time for his turn, and knows too that the kind of turn he needs to produce is a greeting. Similarly, Jane recognizes that it is now her turn and that she is required to produce a reciprocal greeting. If

they failed to take up their expected turns, it would be noticed as a marked departure from the normal routine.

A greeting, whether following an introduction (as in our example) or not, conventionally requires a greeting in return. The two turns make up a minimal routine which has been called an **adjacency pair**. Another example would be question and answer turns. The asking of a question will generally signal a shift of turn and require that the turn should take the form of a reply. What kind of reply is appropriate will, of course, depend on the kind of question, and in some cases this dependency is also a matter of conventional routine. When A asks a question of B, it will be, more often than not, in order to elicit something that B knows about but A does not. If A is a teacher, however, and B a pupil the question is likely to be about something A already knows about, its purpose being to get the pupil to display their knowledge in an approved way. As every pupil knows, there are penalties for not conforming to this particular routine. Similarly, questions asked in a cross-examination in court are of a particular kind and are designed to elicit particular kinds of answer. In both classrooms and courtrooms, the dependency between the question/answer adjacency pair is exploited to constrain and control. This brings up the question of how people use routines to exercise power—a question we shall be taking up in more detail later (in Chapter 6).

So far we have been looking at the adjacency pairs greeting/greeting and question/answer separately, but they can also combine as sub-routines in, for example, service encounters like

- A (shop assistant): Good morning. Can I help you?
- B (customer): Good morning. I am looking for ...
- A (hotel receptionist): Good morning. Can I help you?
- B (guest): Good morning. I have a reservation.
- A Name?
- B Smith

Here we have routine patterns in a single turn, as we do in what has become quite common as a waiter's self-introduction in a restaurant:

Good evening. How are you doing? My name is Martin. I am your waiter for the evening. Are you ready to order?

Or the reply we get when we make enquiries at a telephone call centre:

Good morning. My name is Linda. How can I help you?

Typically in these cases, the greeting, introduction, and question occur in this fixed sequence and without a pause to allow for a shift of turn. It would be an unconventional departure from the routine for the addressee to take up a reciprocal turn and take the greeting and introduction at their face value:

WAITER Good evening. How are you doing? My name is Martin.

CUSTOMER Nice to meet you. I am doing very well, thank you. My name is Ronald, and this is my wife, Audrey ...

CALL CENTRE OPERATOR Good morning. My name is Linda.

CALLER How do you do. My name is Ronald.

In these waiter and call centre examples, the token greeting (combined with the self introduction) is an obligatory part of a standard one-turn routine. In other service encounters, greetings may be optional. At a busy ticket counter in a railway station, for example, they might be dispensed with so as to carry out the transaction more briskly:

A (*traveller*): Return to Brighton, please.

B (*ticket seller*): Thirty pounds.

A Thanks.

Genres

The interpersonal schemata we have been looking at so far are those which find expression in the regular routines of everyday spoken interactions. Although, as has been noted, they represent socio-cultural knowledge of a subtle kind, they are relatively simple in structure, consisting as they do of a few turns at talk. But there are also interpersonal schemata which are much more extensive. So it is that we recognize certain stretches of interaction as **speech events** of specific kinds, or **genres**, and we have names to attach to them: meeting, interview, cross-examination, debate, and so on. Here again there are procedures which those involved

are assumed to be familiar with and are expected to conform to. A committee meeting of a formal kind, for example, follows a certain agenda which specifies the order of business, with a chairperson who sees to it that the order is respected, and who controls how discussion proceeds by nominating those who are to take turns at talk, even requiring them to address what they say to the chair rather than to other people present. Those who depart from the established procedure are said to be speaking 'out of turn' or to be 'out of order'. Not all meetings, and certainly not all other kinds of genre, are as ritualistic or schematically rigid as this, of course, but there will always be a set of assumptions and expectations about what behaviour is appropriate to the genre, about what is the 'done thing' and what is not.

The kinds of genre referred to so far—meeting, interview, debate, and so on—are all speech events which involve turn taking. There are others which do not: speeches, for example, or sermons (in one tradition at least), which consist of only one, long (sometimes all too long) turn. Here, obviously, the kind of communication cannot be defined by reference to schematic assumptions about the appropriate way of participating in an exchange, for there is no exchange. But although there is no participation, this does not mean that there is no engagement. It is indeed the purpose of the politician on the podium, the priest in the pulpit, to get the listeners interpersonally engaged, and the speaker designs what they have to say to that end. And the listeners know what to expect and respond accordingly. They know well enough what is likely to be referred to and what kind of communicative force and effect the speakers intend to achieve by what they say. So, the schematic pattern here is not that of directly interactive turn taking, as with the introductions, greetings, and service encounters we considered earlier in this chapter, but of kinds of illocutionary act and their intended effect as were discussed in Chapter 2.

Speeches and sermons are examples of speech events which are single-turn genres. The most obvious examples of single-turn genres, however, are those of written language use. Although there are times when the interactants overtly participate in written communication (in an exchange of notes, for example, or email messages), written texts, as was pointed out in Chapter 1,

are generally not jointly produced in the process of interaction. Nevertheless, here, too, there is obviously interpersonal involvement. The writer seeks to engage the reader and does so by making appeal to the conventions that define particular genres which are assumed to be common knowledge. So if I open up my newspaper to read a football report, or look up a menu in a cookery book, or consult a manual of instructions for assembling equipment, I will have some idea of what to expect because I know how football reports, menus, and instructions are typically written. Or, if I venture into writing myself and decide to offer an article to a learned journal, reporting on a piece of research, I know that I will be expected to structure it in conformity to the genre which has been established by the **discourse community** of scholars in this area of learning as appropriate for this kind of written communication. This might require me to begin by locating my own study in the context of current research in the field, to follow a certain format in describing the design of my investigation, to present my findings in a certain way, and so on. Compliance with such requirements can be seen as a condition of membership of this particular discourse community, and of publication in this particular journal.

Conclusion

How strict the compliance has to be will vary, of course. Genre conventions are by no means rigidly fixed and always adhered to: they are naturally subject to variation and change because there will always be some room for individual manoeuvre. People will have schematic knowledge of what is typical of particular genres and this will prime their expectations. But these expectations may need to be subsequently adjusted. The ideational and interpersonal schemata we have been considering in this chapter are relatively stable knowledge structures or states of mind, customized or conventionalized as normal in a particular community. But we also need to consider how they are put to work, made operational in the production of actual text. This is the concern of the next chapter.

5

Co-textual relations

Information structure

As was pointed out earlier (in Chapter 2), one of the things we do when we use language is to formulate a proposition, to make reference to some state of affairs. Let us suppose that we want to express a proposition about a certain event, a demonstration, for example, and the actions of the police in dispersing the crowd. English allows for the possibility of expressing our proposition in different ways, for example:

The police dispersed the demonstrators.

The demonstrators were dispersed by the police.

If we think of these as linguistic forms, we recognize the first as an active and the second as a passive sentence with *the police* being the subject in the first case and *the demonstrators* in the second. But if we think of these expressions as utterances, they are textual variants, different ways of distributing the propositional information. In terms of textual structure, the first piece of information, which here takes the form of a subject noun phrase, is said to be the **theme**, and the rest of the utterance the **rheme**. But what if we want to go on and say something else? How would we order the information in the next utterance? We could follow the same pattern and start with the same theme (T):

The police(T) dispersed the demonstrators. Some of the law officers(T) ...

Or we might reverse the order and thematize the previous rheme (R):