

DIALOGUE IN FICTION**

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Characters and narrators, in fictional narrative discourse, exchange speech. Their interaction however is pseudo (see Sinclair, 1981), since it is not interactive in the real sense but imagined by an author, and it only happens intra-textually (the conversation only exists on a page of a book.) Composed dialogue therefore, has features that distinguish it from real talk, although authors base their representation of speech on a model of what they think conversationalists do.

Just as a spectator in a theatre viewing from a distance a heavily made-up face has the impression of normality, so a reader confronted with pseudo-interaction, which differs in significant ways from real interaction, has the impression of reality. If the face is examined closely, however, one realizes that the first impression is achieved through exaggeration and simplification. In the same way authors exaggerate and simplify features of real interaction.

It is my intention in this article to examine features of pseudo-interaction in terms of real interaction. For this, I will use insights from ethnomethodological studies.

Supermeaningfulness of simulated interaction

In real talk, people communicate for a variety of reasons: to exchange information, to persuade, to command and also simply to make contact. In fiction, by contrast, dialogues

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are supermeaningful in the sense that everything that is said has a specific significance. Reports of phatic communion, for example, are rare, since the main purpose of this type of interaction is the opening of channels of communication. In most cases, in fiction, the initial contact between characters is assumed or reported:

I must have been pretty desperate too, for without a loss of time, after a few indifferent and friendly sentences, which he answered with languid readiness...

(Conrad, J. (1969) *Lord Jim*, p.44)

Characters do not talk about the weather phatically unless the writer wants to implicate further meanings. If this happens, what is phatic in real interaction, becomes supermeaningful. But in general, phatic exchanges are simplified, if not totally excluded from pseudo-interaction.

Dialogue, in written simulated interaction, therefore, has to be more meaningful than in real talk, since the author not only represents the interaction between people, but creates a conversation which extends itself to the reader who will derive from it what he/she wants to implicate — development of a theme, action, etc.

The overall organization of conversation: openings and closings

Conversations do not simply begin or end but, as Schegloff and Sacks (1973) and Schegloff (1979) demonstrate, openings and closings are organized, recognized and accomplished by participants. According to Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) they have adjacency pair format (pairs of utterances where the first constrains the form of the second: question-answer, greeting-greeting, for example.) Items like 'okay', 'alright', 'so', 'well' pre-close a terminal exchange and signal that the speaker is not willing to contribute or develop another topic and wants to finish the conversation. Levinson (1983) commenting on the work of the ethnomethodologists suggests that

closings are a delicate matter both technically, in the sense that they must be so placed that no

party is forced to exit while still having compelling things to say, and socially in the sense that both over-hasty and over-slow terminations can carry unwelcome inferences about the social relationships between the participants.

Interestingly, like phatic communion, opening and closing sequences are rarely present in fictive interaction. If openings do appear, the narrator tends to report them:

One evening, long ago, I heard laboured footsteps approach, and then a knock. I opened, and a stranger came in. He was old and tall, and he was wrapped in a threadbare blanket. A scar marked his face. His years seemed to have given him authority and frailty, but I noticed that he was unable to get about without the aid of a staff. We exchanged a few words that I no longer remember. At the end he said: 'I am homeless and sleep wherever I can. I have travelled the length and breadth of this land of the Saxons.'

(Borges, J.L. (1980) 'The Disk', p.84)

But in the majority of cases, openings are not even reported:

Connie had a sitting room on the third floor, the top floor of the central portion of the house. Clifford's rooms were on the ground floor, of course. Michaelis was flattered by being asked up to Lady Chatterley's own parlour. He followed blindly after the servant..... he never noticed things, or had contact with his surroundings. In her room he did glance vaguely round at the fine German reproductions of Renoir and Cézanne.

"It's very pleasant here", he said with his queer smile, showing his teeth. "You are wise to get up to the top."

"Yes, I think so", she said.

(Lawrence, D.H. (1971) *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, p.26-7).

An old man with steel rimmed spectacles and very dusty clothes sat by the side of the road..... It was my business to cross the bridge, explore the bridgehead beyond and find out to what point the enemy had advanced. I did this and returned over the bridge. There were not so many carts now and very few people on foot, but the old man was still there.

"Where do you come from?" I asked him.
"From San Carlos", he said and smiled.

(Hemingway, E. (1966) 'The Old Man at the Bridge'. p.78).

In both these examples, the conversation in fact begins not with an opening sequence but directly with an inform (in D.H. Lawrence) and with an elicit (in Hemingway) which are significant for the development of the story line. Greetings are apparently unnecessary.

In the few examples in my data where openings do occur their presence is super-significant because they do not simply mark beginnings of interactions. In the following passage from Burgess, for instance, two characters Crabbe and Fenella, are waiting for Mr. Talbot at his house. He arrives and says:

"Don't tell me, don't tell me", said Talbot.
"It's Bishop. We're back together again. God, it's been a long time. Mrs. Bishop, how are you? Young and beautiful as ever, despite the heavy weight of the years. And the other boys, how are they, Bishop?"

(Burgess, A. (1979) *The Malayan Trilogy*, p.243)

The significance of the greeting and the reason for its appearance at all is that Mr. Talbot does not recognize Victor and Fenella Crabbe and talks to them as if they were Mr. and Mrs. Bishop. The greeting is an economical way of showing this. The conversation then continues as follows:

"Crabbe", said Crabbe. "You may have had a letter about me."
"Crabbe", said Talbot. "I thought you were Bishop. You're very like Bishop. And of course there must be a connection somewhere. Let me see. Yes. Bishop was an eighteenth century drink. Dr. Johnson was very fond of it. And you use crab-apples for making lamb's wool. That, you'll remember, was an Elisabethan drink. 'When roasted crabs hiss in the bowl'. He made 'bowl' rhyme with 'owl'. Or perhaps there was a Bishop Crabbe. There must be somewhere in Anthony Trollope. Are you any relation to the poet?" (p.243).

Just as openings are normally reported, if acknowledged at all, so are preclosings and closings, but in the main, these sequences do not occur. Characters simply stop talking and the narrator continues with report:

"Did you leave the dove cage unlocked?" I asked.

"Yes".

"Then they'll fly."

"Yes, certainly they'll fly. But the others. It's better not to think about the others" he said.

"If you are rested, I would go", I urged. "Get up and try to walk now."

"Thank you" he said and got to his feet, swayed from side to side and then sat down backwards in the dust.

"I was taking care of animals." He said dully, but no longer to me. "I was only taking care of animals."

There was nothing to do about him. It was Easter Sunday and the Fascists were advancing toward the Ebro.

(Hemingway, E. (ibid) 'The Old Man at the Bridge, p.80).

Narrators, however sometimes report a final sequence without quoting the actual words produced:

I suggested that we plan to see each other the next day, on this same bench which existed in two times and in two places. He agreed at once and without looking at his watch said that he was late... **We said goodbye** without having once touched each other.

(Borges, J.L. (ibid) 'The Other', p.10)

If the closing sequences are quoted within the dialogue proper, they signify more than an ending to a conversation. For example, Crabbe and Fenella having entered Talbot's apparently empty house and sat down to wait for somebody to turn up, are surprised by a handsome man appearing from a door that presumably leads to the bedrooms. The handsome man's uniform has "only recently been reassumed"! He makes embarrassed conversation for a while and then continues:

"I've got to go now. Mrs. T. will be up, out any minute now. Do come round to the mess sometime. Or see you at the club. We'll have

a drink" he added, as though this thought were a sudden inspiration. Then he left with a hurry of a man who has fulfilled a duty that, with the long passage of time, has become more and more perfunctory, a function that has developed economy of action...

(Burgess, A. (ibid) p.240)

There is no opportunity for Crabbe and Fenella to produce a second closing-adjacency pair and the reader does not even know how they react to the leave-taking.

The turn-taking system

Another form of local organization operating in conversation and studied in detail by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) is the turn-taking system.

When we consider fictional conversations in terms of the turn-taking system we find that writers seem to follow strictly **only** what Sacks et al (ibid) point out as being the most basic rules in any conversation:

"one party speaks at a time"

and

"speaker change recurs, or at least occurs."

Other rules of this system, however have to be reconsidered: (see Sacks et al, ibid, for more detail on rules).

Rule 3/4: "occurrences of more than one speaker at a time are common but brief" and "transitions from one turn to a next with no gap and overlap between them are common. Together with transitions characterized by slight gap or slight overlap, they make up the vast majority of transitions" (Sacks et al, p.10-1).

In written dialogue, for clarity of purpose, turns are clearly divided. The written medium prevents authors from presenting simultaneous speech. Overlaps and interruptions, therefore, either have to be marked by incomplete utterances (ending with a dash, for example), or they have to be reported,

if they are important. But generally, speakers in simulated interaction do not overlap, and readers assume there is no gap between the turns. Only when a gap (or silence) is significant, is it reported:

In this house are several English Bibles, including the first — John Wiclif's. I also have Cipriano de Valera's, Luther's — which, from a literary viewpoint, is the worst — and a Latin copy of the Vulgate. As you see, it's not exactly Bibles I stand in need of." After a few moments of silence he said: "I don't only sell Bibles.

(Borges, J.L. (ibid) 'The Book of Sand'. p.88)

Rules 5/6/7/8/9:

"turn order is not fixed, but varies";
"turn size is not fixed, but varies";
"length of conversation is not fixed, specified in advance";
"what parties say is not fixed, specified in advance";
"relative distribution of turns is not fixed, specified in advance." (ibid)

Since simulated dialogues are composed by a party external to the interaction itself, the author is in absolute control of turn-taking mechanisms. Therefore turn order, turn size, length of conversation, what parties say and distribution of turns are all going to be predetermined and not locally managed as in real interaction.

The struggle for the floor is an aspect of real conversation that is not usually present in pseudo-interaction for the same reasons mentioned above.

Fictional dialogue is neatly arranged in general. Other features of face-to-face talk like hedges, initiators, reformulations, backtracks, fillers (see Jefferson and Schegloff, 1975) which reflect the speaker's ongoing planning procedures are therefore rarely found in composed conversation. Repetitions, hesitations, interruptions, pauses, false starts

which also characterize on-going talk can be found in pseudo-interaction but are exceptional occurrences.

The two examples below from Tannen (forthcoming) and Borges (1979), where in both cases, one speaker in a single contribution, narrates a series of events, emphasize the difference between real and fictional utterances:

...A:nd u:m ... Dale is going to go to A ... junior high school. She's going into the ninth grade..... But they put the ninth graders ... in with the all right. The way they've got it, they're in a period of transition at their school system now, OK? [Yeah], U:m They've got an el elementary school in every project. But junior highs ... um ... there isn't one in every project. They you know, [uh huh] ... develop development I mean, rather than project Community. [Yeah] And ... the ninth grade... is with, because the high school's overcrowded I guess they're building a new high school? So they're ... they're putting the ... eighth ... and the ninth in ... the junior high, [hmm] (portion omitted) U:m ... Dale ... is going into the ninth grade, and she is supposed to be going into high school normally, ... but she, because of this situation, will be ... in junior high This is a school. that is ... seventh uh eighth and ninth graders only, ... two thousand ... Out in a little sticky place like Willingboro New Jersey (laugh). Two thousand. It's only eight and ninth graders. (Tannen-forthcoming)

'Mother is healthy and well in her house on Charcas and Maipu, in Buenos Aires, but father died some thirty years ago. He died of heart trouble. Hemiplegia finished him: his left hand, placed on his right, was like the hand of a child on a giant's. He died impatient for death but without complaint. Our grandmother had died in the same house. A few days before the end, she called us all together and said, "I'm an old woman who is dying very, very slowly. Don't anyone become upset about such a common, everyday thing." Your sister, Norah, married and has two sons.'

(Borges, J.L. (ibid) 'The Other', p.5)

While the former is fragmented as the result of numerous

pauses, false starts, fillers, repetitions and backtracks, the latter has a clear sequencing of information according to the events reported and also by more complex syntactic structuring.

In real time interactions, cohesion in the discourse is established by the participants in the conversation not only linguistically, but also through para-linguistic and non-verbal channels — tone of voice, intonation, kinesics. Conversationalists also make maximal use of outside context, shared knowledge of the world and on many occasions, meaning is implied rather than stated. Participants also make sense of apparently disconnected sequences. In fictional interaction, however, explicit background information is needed and authors tend to gloss the way the speech is supposedly delivered generally in an utterance outside the dialogue proper:

"We'll never get anywhere" he **lamented** to Ursula.

(Marquez, G. (1970) **One hundred years of solitude**, p.21)

"Yes, yes" **gasped** Nabby Adams, breathless after the first draught.

(Burgess, A. (ibid) **The Malayan Trilogy**, p.16)

"Ah, how good!" She **whispered** tremulously...

(Lawrence, D.H. (ibid) **Lady Chatterley's Lover**, p.31)

Whereas an oral act of communication is syncretic, that is, the verbal and non-verbal elements occur at the same time, fictional interaction must be dispersed, i.e., its components occur in a linear succession. The linearity of written texts virtually forces neatness on conversation simulations.

This dispersion, plus non-fragmentation, the author's control of turn-taking mechanisms, simplification (and exaggeration) of some of the features of real talk are basically the major differences between pseudo and real interaction. The reader, when confronted with simulated

interactions has the first impression of normality/reality because pseudo-dialogues are tidied-up versions of real talk. The two kinds of interaction, however, as I hope to have suggested, differ in many ways.