

Language and communication

- What is language?
- How do we communicate?
- Pragmatic principles
- Common ground

What is language

- Language is the most complex form of communication used by any animal
- Allows the transmission of culture
 - Permits us to teach others
 - The ratchet effect (Tomasello)
 - Each generation more sophisticated than the last

The components of language

- Speech sounds
- Written symbols
- Words
- Syntax
 - Permits language to be productive
- Communication strategies
- All have been a topic of study

Communication

- Why start with communication?
 - Understanding why we would study the rest of the components of language does not make sense without understanding communication.
- Prototypical type of conversation
 - Two people
 - Face-to-face
 - Speaking
- Many communication situations differ, though
 - Phone calls, lectures, books
 - Communication can go astray in these situations.

What is a conversation like?

- A: Well, let's see, we have on the bags Who's on first, What's on second, I Don't Know is on third.
- C: That's what I want to find out
- A: I say, Who's on first, What's on second, I Don't Know is on third.
- C: Are you the manager?
- A: Yes.
- C: Are you going to be the coach too?
- A: Yes.
- C: And you don't know the fellows' names?
- A: Well, I should.
- C: Well then, who's on first?
- A: Who.

This appears to follow rules

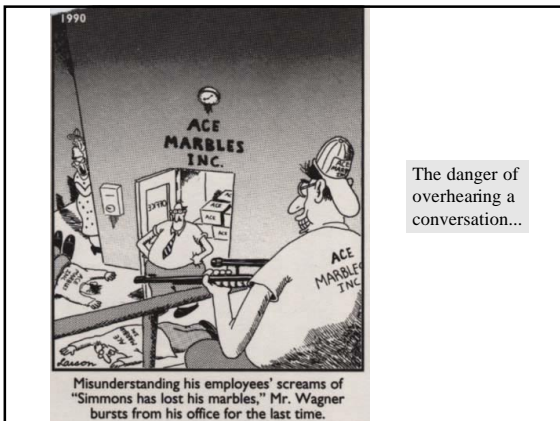
- Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson
- People take turns speaking
- When one person speaks, everyone waits for the other person to finish.
- The speaker may suggest the next speaker
- If there is a break, someone may jump in
 - The first person to speak gets to continue
 - If two people start at the same time, one will stop.

This misses a lot

- These rules are a set of actions a person takes
- Communication is more of a joint action
 - Dancing and shaking hands are joint actions
- Both the speaker and listener are active participants
 - Rapid corrections are made
 - Lots of back-channel feedback
 - Conventions are established

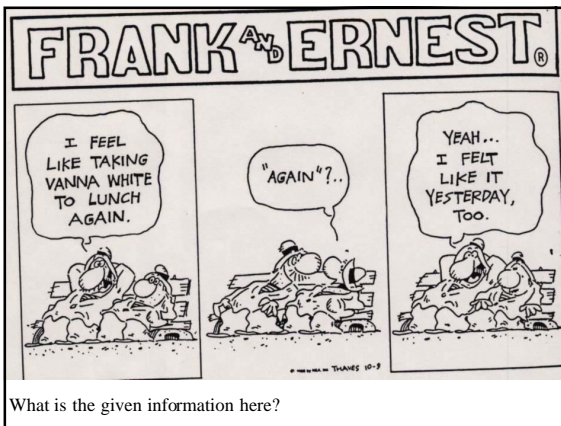
Speakers and overhearers

- Schober and Clark
 - Examining communication as a joint action
- Pair of people play a communication game
 - Must get a set of figures in the same order
- Tape of interaction then played to another person
 - Must also get the figures into the proper order
 - Overhearer less accurate than participant
- Why?
 - Participant can get immediate corrections
 - Use of backchannel feedback (e.g., uh-huh)



Principles of communication

- We often do not speak in complete sentences
- We rarely say what we mean literally
 - Previous cartoon is an example
- How do people interpret what is said?
 - A set of social conventions
 - Determines how utterances are structured
- Given-new convention



Conversational Maxims

- Grice
- Quantity: Be informative
- Quality: Tell the truth
- Relation: Be relevant
- Manner: Be clear
- A "normal" utterance satisfies these maxims

Violations of the maxims

- Quantity
 - Do you have a watch?
 - Interpreted as a request for the time.
 - Do you accept credit cards?
 - Interpreted as a request for the types of cards taken.
- Quality
 - I'm so hungry, I could eat a horse
 - Interpreted as an exaggeration of hunger

More violations

- Relevance
 - A: Do you have a watch?
 - B: Yes.
 - Interpreted as (a weak attempt) at humor, or perhaps annoyance.
- Manner
 - Use of jargon in social settings
 - Interpreted as an attempt to exclude

Indirect speech acts

- We use these violations to communicate
- Why don't we just say what we mean?
 - Direct speech may sometimes be rude.
- Ironic and sarcastic statements
 - John, that was a *really* intelligent answer.
 - Less rude than, "John, that was stupid."

Summary

- Language is used to communicate
- Communication is a joint action
- We often communicate non-literally
- Next classes
 - What are the basic components of language
 - What enables us to talk about so many topics
