Using language By Herbert H. Clark (review)

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nomenon in Modern German. This alternation between voiced and voiceless obstruents has been analyzed numerous times in such theoretical frameworks as SPE phonology, autosegmental phonology, and lexical phonology. This book reviews a number of earlier solutions and also presents a government phonology (GP) analysis.

The first chapter, 'The ''facts'' of final devoicing' (3–23), deals with a variety of issues, beginning with the definition of final devoicing, continuing with a discussion of why German final devoicing is such a popular object of study, and proceeding to a brief discussion of the history of final devoicing. Brockhaus then touches on several issues of German phonetics including the realization of orthographic ⟨r⟩ and the phoneme system of Modern German. The final section of this chapter presents the final devoicing data.

The second chapter, 'Twenty-five years of final obstruent devoicing: Earlier approaches from 1968 to 1993' (24–88), critically examines a number of earlier studies ranging from Theo Vennemann's 1968 UCLA dissertation to a 1992 study done by Tracy Hall These analyses are not considered chronologically, as might be surmised from the title of the chapter, but with regard to their answers to two questions: (1) What is final devoicing? (2) Where does final devoicing occur?

The third chapter, 'What is final obstruent devoicing? A government phonology approach' (89–157), consists of two parts. The first presents an informal introduction to GP. The second deals with some phonetic questions: What exactly is voicing? How is it signaled phonetically? What kind of change is final devoicing? among others.

Ch. 4, 'Where does final obstruent devoicing occur?' (158–237), discusses the various environments where final devoicing takes place, beginning with the more straightforward cases (e.g. word-final position), and then proceeds to examine some of the more problematic ones (e.g. certain consonant clusters). This chapter also introduces some additional GP ideas, most prominently the empty category principle.

The final chapter, 'Final obstruent devoicing and neutralisation' (238–62), begins with a review of the traditional notion of neutralization, consisting mainly of a discussion of N S. Trubetzkoy's and Paul Kiparsky's views on the subject. This section also considers some of the relevant literature from experimental phonetics. The final section of the chapter presents a GP analysis of final devoicing which, B argues, better accounts for the data, especially as regards the spirantization of velars in word-final position, a phenomenon found in some Northern dialects of German.

The book is clearly written; the earlier analyses are well-presented, as is the introduction to GP. It is a welcome addition to the substantial literature on final devoicing in German and is recommended to those interested in German phonology. [MARC PIERCE, *University of Michigan.*]

Using language. By HERBERT H. CLARK. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Pp. 431.

A woman says to a girl: 'And where is your little brother?' The girl answers: 'He's in the house playing a piano duet. I finished first.' Why is this funny? Because it makes no sense to say that two people are playing a piano duet when one finishes before the other. What is less funny is that language use has for a long time been studied as if one could understand how language use works by analyzing how one player plays a duet. Clark, by contrast, studies language use radically as joint action using the analogy of playing a Mozart duet throughout the book.

Since at least the middle of this century, it has become clear that one can study language from two points of view: as an abstract semiotic system set apart from its users or as it is used by people to do things in social contexts. In the battle for scholarly recognition, the system-based approach to language has up to now always had the upper hand over user-centered theories. In this book C sets out to systematize and at the same time rehabilitate these user-centered theories of language. Concepts such as use and context, which hitherto had only been vaguely defined, are given sound theoretical foundations inside a theory of language use as joint action. In doing so C goes beyond Charles Sanders Peirce, John Langshaw Austin, John Searle, Herbert Paul Grice, David Lewis, Robert Stalnaker, Erving Goffman, Harvey Sacks, Emmanuel Schegloff, Gail Jefferson, Stephen Levinson, Dan Sperber, Deirdre Wilson and himself, who all contributed to a theory of language use. In contrast to work within the cognitive sciences, which sees language use as an individual process, and to work within the social sciences, which sees it as a social process, C argues that language use embodies both individual and social processes.

C's account of language use weaves three insights into a theoretical synthesis: that language use is joint action; that it is communication via nonlinguistic as well as linguistic signals (such as gestures, facial expressions, and so on); and that it is only one aspect of broader activities (such as buying things, playing games etc.). C's theory of language use is based on six propositions; that language is fundamentally used for social purposes, that it is a species of joint action, that it always involves speaker's meaning and addressee's understanding, that the basic setting is face-to-face conversation, that it often has more than one layer of activity, and that the study of language use is both a cognitive and a social science (23–24).

The most central proposition is the third: Language use is based on meaning and understanding. Face-to-face communication is the most basic form of language use, and in this setting speaking and listening are central corresponding actions on the part of the two actors engaged in conversation. C divides these actions into three levels of joint actions which, together, compose the overall joint action of language use. These levels are vocalizing and attending to the vocalizations; formulating utterances and identifying utterances; and meaning something for somebody and understanding somebody's meaning. The third level, speaker's meaning and addressee's understanding, is privileged 'because it defines language use' (21).

C claims that language use is a 'natural kind' in the sense of John Stuart Mill, and he takes the 'joint action' of creating speaker's meaning and addressee's understanding to be criterial (21–23). This passing comment would merit further attention. The notion of natural kinds is often helpful in identifying the categories that matter. 'Language itself' treats nouns differently from verbs, in a way that it does not distinguish short and long words, for example. But this seems a weaker instance, perhaps because there is no 'natural' process which sorts instances into natural language use versus the rest, rather a process which occurs in natural language use and not elsewhere.

Meaning and understanding are only possible on the basis of a common ground. The redefinition of the vague concept of 'context' by a detailed analysis of the function of common ground in communication is central to C's project. What somebody means by a gesture, word, or sentence depends not only on the gesture, word, or sentence but on the current state of the common ground shared by the interactants. This common ground itself has three parts: (1) The initial common ground—the set of background facts, assumptions, and beliefs the participants presupposed when they entered the joint activity (2) The current state of the joint activity—what the participants presuppose to be the state of the activity at the moment. And (3) Public events so far—the events the participants presuppose have occurred in public leading up to the current state. (43). C should have stressed that the conjecture about what happens next is even more important to the speaker and hearer than the presupposition about what happened before. The future structures our talk just as much as the past.

What somebody means and what somebody understands depends on the coordination of their joint actions. Meaning and understanding are coordination problems (73), depending on what is done in the joint action of language use and when it is done. Meaning and understanding, common ground, and coordination are the three cornerstones of C's theory from which all the intricate patterns of coordinated joint actions flow, in the framework set by a complex pattern of common ground. These cornerstones are established in Chs. 2–5. In Ch. 6, C reaches beyond linguistic meaning and understanding to include other forms of 'language use' or signalling into the scope of his project He distinguishes between three methods of signalling—demonstrating a thing, indicating a thing, and describing as a type of thing—but he stresses that in language use we normally mix these three methods (160–61).

Chs. 7–11 use the foundations laid in Chs. 2–6 to explore the various levels of joint action, from adjacency pairs to global joint projects, from minimal joint projects to whole conversations, where the coordination of meaning and understanding and the accumulation of a common ground take on ever more complex forms. But language use cannot only become more complex sequentially, it can also become more complex internally Utterances are nonlinear and have more than one track, a topic explored in Ch. 9. This means that we do not only talk to each other, we also signal about the communicative acts themselves so as to keep our conversation on the right track. Furthermore when we talk, we sometimes put layers of meaning upon layers of meaning, as in ironical remarks, teasing, stories, and drama, a topic explored in Ch. 12.

C's overall goal is to find the principles of language use. These principles (from the cooperative principles to the principles of synchrony) are posited throughout the book. It would have been helpful to draw all these principles together in the concluding chapter (Ch. 13) to indicate their precise status in a theory of language use and to explain what kind of principles we are actually dealing with.

C summarizes the most important results of this book as follows: 'Many phenomena have been treated as features of language use when they are really features of the joint activities in which the language is being used. These phenomena include coordination, co-operation, conventions, turns, closure, joint projects, opportunistic actions, and the accumulation of common ground'. And: 'Using language is usually treated as if it were a single line of action. . . . Using language is not that way at all It is composed of separate lines of actions along three distinct dimensions: levels, tracks, and layers. The most basic of these is levels, but we need tracks and layers to account for a variety of things people do with words and gestures' (388).

The book deals with these complex issues, peeling away one layer of complexity after another very carefully until the whole of language use has been uncovered. It provides a gentle, well-balanced, and accessible guide through the maze of issues related to 'language use'. The most distinguishing feature of the book is indeed its methodical approach. At every step of the way, we find diagrams illustrating the levels, tracks, and layers of language use.

This book does not provide any truly original insights into language use, but it does establish a skillful synthesis of the work done on this issue in the Anglo-American tradition (although the extensive research into language use carried out in France and Switzerland, for example, is ignored). It will become indispensable as a reference work to students of language use, conversation, discourse, and so on in linguistics, psychology, and sociology. [BRIGITTE NERLICH and DAVID D. CLARKE, *University of Nottingham.*]

Women talk. By JENNIFER COATES. Oxford & Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996. Pp. xv, 324. $19.95.

This is an ethnographic study of conversation between women friends in Great Britain. The analyses are based on over nineteen hours of recorded conversation between groups of women interacting socially. Coates' purpose is to define the role that talk plays in female friendship and to some extent even to determine linguistically what female friendship is and why women participate in it.

What to me is most illuminating about this work is that these conversations, which are full of occasions when two or more women are talking at once, would seem utterly chaotic if analyzed according to turns. But these are not conversations in which the floor is passed from one speaker to the next; neither do they conform to Gricean maxims. C shows instead that such conversations are in fact joint efforts which include a number of identifiable (if unconsciously used) linguistic strategies. Such conversation has a 'collaborative floor' in which participants work together to achieve a sense of unity. These women 'work together, rephrasing what each other says and adding new material to it, to arrive at an account that satisfies' all participants. Stories are shared on a common topic before a discussion finally leads to consensus; this 'reciprocal self disclosure'—which C labels 'mirroring'—is normally lacking in men's conversations (61).

The first three chapters discuss the problems, genesis, and methodology of the project (with, it is worth noting, a refreshing candor). The next six chapters analyze the conversations themselves. After discussing the range of conversation topics, C examines the function of stories (topic introduction and community building) and the organization of friendly talk, which is frequently overlapping. Other salient features of these conversations are hedges, questions, and repetition. All the linguistic features discussed in these chapters are instrumental in enabling the supportive sort of discourse that C has recorded. Hedges, for example (including qualifiers such as *sort of, like,* and *maybe* as well as the modals *might* and *may*), allow the speaker to decline the 'expert' role, which is not conducive to collaborative talk. Questions, especially tag questions, play a similar role, avoiding signals that a speaker's utterance is the final word on any subject and inviting others to make their own contributions.

While these features all underpin the collaborative nature of these discourses, they also have the dual function of helping to structure conversations. This is true of questions, for example, which not only invite others' participation but also serve to introduce topics and to begin narratives. A major structuring burden is borne by repetition which provides points of reference which tie together the various participants' contributions.

The final two chapters argue the importance of this research not just to professional linguists but to a presumably humane society in general. Ch. 10, which shows how talk allows the participants to construct 'different femininities', provides examples of conversations in which women covertly identify with one or more value systems, whether traditionally patriarchal or feminist. Ch. 11, on the linguistic nature of friendship, presents an interesting discussion of communicative competence failure in this group—when a woman, for example, talks too much or too little according to the norms of the group.

While this text is important reading for specialists in discourse, it is accessible to lay readers as well, so it is both an important research text as well as a good tool to use in introducing students to discourse analysis. [TIMOTHY C. FRAZER, *Western Illinois University.*]

Experimental syntax: Applying objective methods to sentence judgments. By WAYNE COWART. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1997. Pp. xii, 187. Paper $17.95.

Linguistic theory traditionally relies on evidence from acceptability judgments which are typically obtained in an informal, intuitive fashion. Cowart's book discusses potential problems with this informal approach and introduces a framework for eliciting judgments based on standard methods from experimental psychology.

The book consists of a methodological part (Chs. 1, 2, 4, 6), which investigates the empirical properties of acceptability judgments and presents relevant experimental results, and a tutorial part (Chs. 3, 5, 7–12), which contains an introduction to the design and statistical evaluation of judgment experiments.

Ch. 1, 'Introduction: Are judgments stable?' (1–30), discusses the stability of judgments within populations of linguistically naive speakers. C presents experimental data for subjacency, *that*-trace ef-