

Culture & Communication

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Lecture # 6: Formal Speech Events

Today

1. From speech acts to speech events
2. Features of formal speech events
3. Examples & Analysis
4. Hypotheses about why formality exists
5. Mishaps, misfires, or “glitches”.

Overall Goal

- To understand some features of public events and their language



An anthropological technique

Transform the strange into familiar and the familiar into strange.

Difficult but necessary task for an anthropological understanding of human practices, customs, beliefs, sentiments.

Properties of Formality

(from J. Irvine's chapter in *Reader*)

1. Increased code structuring (i.e. restrictions)
- 2 Code consistency (i.e. features remain the same across the speech event)
3. Positional, public identities are invoked
4. Central Focus

1. Increased Code Structuring, i.e.

Restrictions on:

- People's physical movements, postures, gestures
- Pitch, loudness, and other qualities of talk
- Content of interaction & talk
- Coordination between channels, media, modes, e.g. talk in sync with gestures or music
- Turn-taking (who speaks when)
- Audience (who is addressed)
- When applaud occurs.

2. Code Consistency, i.e. Avoidance of Mixing Codes, Styles, Genres, Registers

- Certain features of interaction are kept constant over time (Consistency)
- Avoid mixing languages, pronunciation, volume, intonation, style of delivery, etc .

“Code” is a general term for any “sign system” (e.g., English, clothes/dressing, street signs, Morse code)

3. Positional, Public Identities are favored

- People are introduced or talked about in terms of their role(s) in institutions
- Use of TITLES (e.g. Dr., Prof., Minister, Senator)

4. Central Focus of Attention

- Everyone pays attention to particular speaker/performer/performance
- Side-activities are reduced or conventionally ignored (e.g., people pretend not to see/hear what happens off-stage)

2 more concepts

“Performance”

“Speech event”

Performance

“... performance as a mode of spoken verbal communication consists in the **assumption of responsibility to an audience** for a display of communicative competence. This competence rests on the **knowledge and ability to speak in socially appropriate ways**. Performance involves on the part of the performer an **assumption of accountability to an audience for the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content**. From the point of view of the audience, the act of expression on the part of the performer is thus marked as subject to evaluation for the way it is done, for the relative skill and effectiveness of the performer’s display of competence.”

(Richard Bauman 1975: 293, emphasis added; see also Duranti 1997, section 1.4.1, pdf)

A speech event

1. PhD Hooding Ceremony, Psychology
Department, UCLA

VC = Vice Chair for Graduate Affairs

Example # 1a



Hooding-waiting.mov

Example # 1b



Hooding-Begins.mov

Example # 1c



VC; We have twenty-eight candidates who have completed all requirements, for the PhD ([pi::eytʃ di::])

I am proud to present, Dr. Martia. Collar.

((3sec pause while she walks to front)).

Aud;((claps while candidate goes to stand facing side of room))

VC; The chair of her- the chairs of her doctoral committee, are Jackson Batering, and Melissa Heins.

((two professor walk toward candidate and stop holding hood))

VC; The title of Dr. Collar's dissertation is, (.5) "Do ovarian hormones play a role. in human cognitive development? Findings, from Turner's sndrome".

(2 sec)

Aud; ((clapping, cheers, while candidate turns to face audience and the two faculty move behind her. After a brief exchange with Heins, candidate smiles and lowers herself to make hooding easier))

Aud claps again while candidate hugs Prof H. and then Prof B.)

VC; I am proud to present, Dr. Monique. Cloud. Bodrol.

(1. sec)

Aud; ((claps while candidate goes to stand facing side of room))

VC; The chair of her doctoral committee, (.5) is Professor Paul Abramson. (.5) Dr. Bodrol will be hooded by professor Irving, Molsman. (.5)

The title of Dr. Bodrol's dissertation is,

[

((Prof A. walks toward her holding the hood))

“Abducted and murdered children; behavioral based analysis of victims, offenders, and remains disposal methodologies.”

Aud; ((clapping, cheers, while candidate turns left to face audience and the professor moves behind her.))

((etc.))

Why these features in large public events?

Hypothesis # 1:

To ensure **predictability** and favor **coordination** among individuals and groups in joint activities.

Hypothesis # 2:

Formulaic, consistent, routine, predictable behavior provides **control** over unpredictable variation that might lead to “mishaps,” “glitches,” breakdowns, embarrassment, offense, conflict, etc.

Why these features in large public events?

Formality “leaks”

Austin used the notion of “misfire” for cases in which a speech act doesn’t perform what it is supposed to.

Even in highly formal speech events, things can go wrong.

What do we learn from such cases?



TW; I am pleased to present- [present Dr. Shawn Levin.

[

Audience; (((giggles and laughter)))

Audience; ((claps and cheers while candidate walks to front stage))

TW; The chair of her doctoral committee is professor James
Sedanious. (1 sec)

JS; ((walks toward candidate while holding hood))

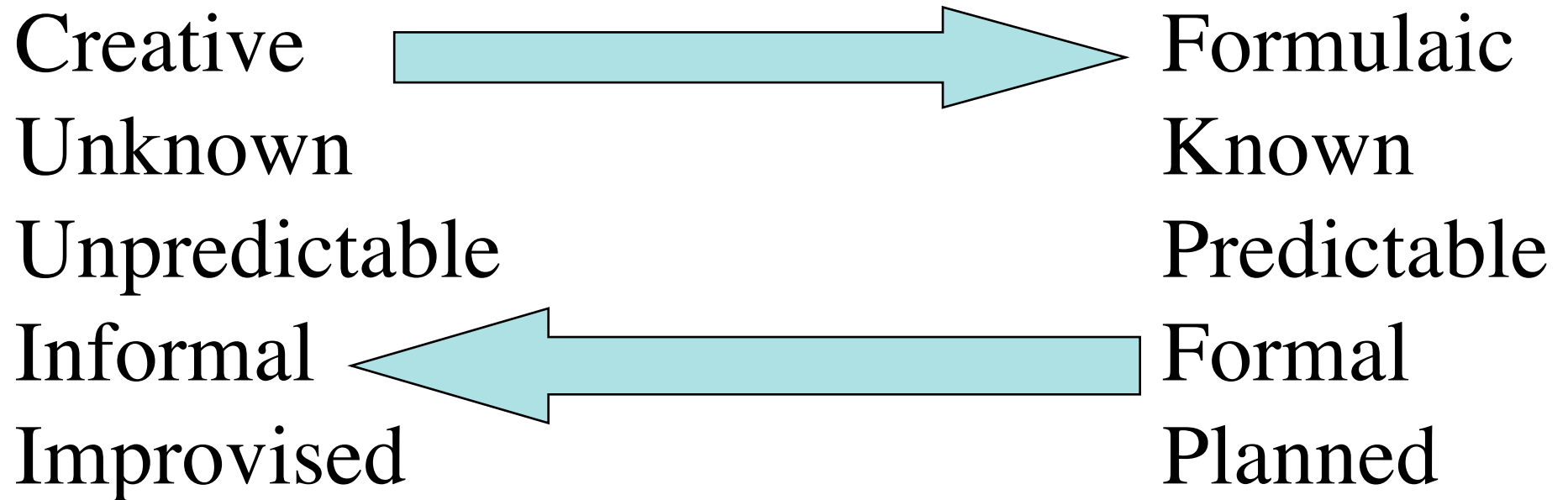
TW; The title of Dr. Levin's dissertation. is, "A social-
psychological approach to understanding intergroup attitudes.
in the United States and Israel".

((professor walks to position himself behind her with hood while
audience claps, etc.))



Hooding Psych Extra clapping for Prof.mov

The Creative-Formulaic Continuum



How much room do formal
events have for variation and
improvisation?

Some possible generalizations

Given that:

The more formal an event is, the fewer code options, the higher expectations for consistency of behavior and for conforming to the social role/status, and the higher the attention to the details of performance.

Then:

The more formal an event is, the less room there is for improvisation, which is needed to fix errors, mishaps, or “interactional glitches”).

Queen's Toast to the Obamas



Buckingham Palace, May 24, 2011, State Visit to U.K.

Ladies and gentlemen

we are here to celebrate (.)

the tried. tested. and yes.

special relationship between our two countries.

I therefore ask you- now to join me in raising your glasses

to the continued health. happiness. and prosperity

of the United States. of America.

and especially, to the health. of President and Mrs. Obama.

((All stand))

((Band does a drum roll and begins “The Star-Spangled Banner”))

Guests at Banquet



Buckingham Palace, May 24, 2011, State Visit to U.K.

Attentional Focus, Audience, Accountability

If we think of performance as entailing accountability for how messages are conveyed (beyond their content) and for displaying communicative competence (i.e., knowledge of rules of communication), a distinction can be made between the accountability of those (main) participants who are front stage and the rest. The example given is the Queen versus guests.

Members of the audience are not being watched as closely as those who are “performing” (but watch the example of a few members of audience in the hooding ceremony starting to applaud the professor).

Review

- a) Think of the implications of expanding the analysis of culture and communication to “events,” which include “acts” and “utterances”. What do we gain from this expansion?
- b) Irvine’s article goes beyond “language” to include other “codes”. Examine the video clips of the Hooding Ceremony to identify examples of “formality” in speech and other codes (e.g., dressing, walking, gesturing).
- c) Reflect on the hypotheses about the utility or functions of formality.
- d) What are some of the interactional advantages and disadvantages of formality?

