

- Elbow, Peter. "The Shifting Relationships Between Speech and Writing." *CCC*, Vol. 36 (October 1985): 283-303.
- Forster, E. M. *Aspects of the Novel*. 1927; rpt. San Diego and New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, 1985.
- Fry, Dennis. "Duration and Intensity as Physical Correlates." *Journal of Linguistics* 28 (1955): 765-68.
- . "Experiments in the Reception of Stress." *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 28 (1955): 126-52.
- Gates, Rosemary L. "Forging American Free Verse from Speech Rhythms: Williams after Whitman." *Poetics Today*, (Winter 1987), forthcoming.
- . "The Identity of American Free Verse: The Prosodic Study of Whitman's 'Lilacs.'" *Language and Style*, 18 (Summer 1985): 246-278.
- Gee, James Paul. "The Narrativization of Experience in the Oral Style." *Journal of Education* 167 (1985): 9-30.
- Goyvaerts, Didier L., and Pullum, Geoffrey K., eds. *Essays on the Sound Pattern of English*. Ghent: E. Story-Scientia, 1975.
- Gumperz, John J., Hannah Kaltman, and Mary Catherine O'Connor. "Cohesion in Spoken and Written Discourse: Ethnic Style and the Transition to Literacy." In Tannen. *Coherence in Spoken and Written Discourse*.
- Gussenhoven, Carlos. *On the Grammar and Semantics of Sentence Accents*. Dordrecht, Holland/Cinnaminson, N.J.: Foris Publications, 1984.
- . "Two Views of Accent: A Reply." *Journal of Linguistics* 21 (1985): 125-38.
- Halliday: *System and Function in Language*. Ed. Gunther Kress. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1976.
- Hill, Archibald A. *Introduction to Linguistic Structures: From Sound to Sentence in English*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1976.
- Ladefoged, Peter. *Elements of Acoustic Phonetics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.
- Leech, Geoffrey N., and Michael H. Short. *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*. *English Language Series* 13. Ed. Randolph Quirk. London and New York: Longman, 1981.
- Macrorie, Ken. *Writing To Be Read*. Rev. Third Edition. Upper Montclair, N.J.: Boynton/Cook, 1984.
- Michaels, Sarah. "Hearing the Connections in Children's Oral and Written Discourse." *Journal of Education* 167 (1985): 36-56.
- Mohr, Marian. *Revision: The Rhythm of Meaning*. Upper Montclair, N.J.: Boynton/Cook, 1984.
- Scollon, Ron. "The Rhythmic Integration of Ordinary Talk." In Tannen. *Analyzing Discourse: Text and Talk*, 335-49.
- Smith, Rochelle. "Paragraphing for Coherence: Writing as Implied Dialogue." *College English* 46 (1984): 22-31.
- Tannen, Deborah, ed. *Analyzing Discourse: Text and Talk*. *Georgetown University Roundtable on Languages and Linguistics* 1981. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1982.
- , ed. *Coherence in Spoken and Written Discourse*. *Advances in Discourse Processes* XII. Ed. Roy O. Freedle. Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex, 1984.

CONFERENCING, CULTURE AND COMMON SENSE

Michael Feehan
University of Texas at Arlington

As composition theory becomes progressively more committed to viewing the writer's work as essentially interactive, Freshman English programs become more deeply involved in various kinds of intervention, conferencing, peer group workshops, even collaboration. On the whole these projects open valuable new arenas for the acquisition of writing abilities, replacing the Romantic view of the isolated genius hoping for the influx of grace with a broadly dramatic view of the writer as never quite alone, always accompanied by some created reader. Such a view invites writers to connect their native intuitions about how conversations work with the specialized demands of the blank page. If all goes well, the inexperienced writer will come to the writing project with some useable resources for addressing the writing to some real person in a real situation. Moreover, the student can begin to take the teachers' comments as more than an insistence on correctness, rather as contributions toward the shared success of common discourse. Freshman English, on such an interactive view, might become a genuinely functional part of the students' whole learning process, the place where the various emerging discourses of the University take form and focus. Using various methods of intervention should help students recognize that texts are not inevitable, that all writing develops through negotiated revision.

At the same time, all methods of intervention share a single, unstated presupposition that introduces a broad new range of problems into the teaching of writing. Whenever we confer with students about writing, whenever students talk among themselves about writing, all of us assume that ordinary expectations about conversation will suffice for communication. We assume that our conversations about writing will take the same form and succeed within just the same range of limitations as our conversations about everyday subjects. The question of writing will not interfere with the common sense work of talking together. Certainly ESL students will have more trouble than others and we may encounter the occasional glitch in comprehension, but for the most part, conferences, workshops and collaborations will proceed without problems.

Recent studies in cross-cultural conversation call this common sense assumption into question, arguing that all conversations demand intricate interpretive negotiations. The more closely we look at the actual workings of conversation, the more clear it becomes that misunderstandings far outnumber understandings, that in fact, we all expend a great deal of energy in masking the many ways our conversations misfire. Most particularly, conversations that must cross cultural boundaries often go awry in ways so odd that the participants cannot even tell how or when they became lost. Teachers recognize such problems when speaking with students from very different cultures, but the sociolinguists admonish us to look more closely at the conversations we think are working effectively. We regularly encounter more, and more complex, cultural boundaries than we have allowed ourselves to suppose. Indeed our most ordinary, everyday conversational strategies actively prevent us from seeing just how many methods we possess for circumventing confusions. Everyday conversation forms the substructure for interactive composition

instruction; everyday conversational misfires form the context for confusions in student revisions.

The impact of culturally conditioned conversational strategies on student-teacher interactions begins to be clear when we take a closer look at the complexities of the simplest conversations. A useful example appears in Deborah Tannen's analysis of a short, apparently straightforward conversation that inexplicably devolves into confusion, frustration and anger. A Jewish-American wife, a Greek-American husband, happy together, having known one another for years:

Wife: John's having a party. Wanna go?

Husband: OK.

(Later)

Wife: Are you sure you want to go to the party?

Husband: OK, let's not go. I'm tired anyway (220).

Both partners want to go to the party; they do not go. Wife and husband each believe they have made their preferences clear; each feels betrayed by the other who is seen as having refused to negotiate fairly, changing directions in midstream. Moreover, both partners recognize that such disruptions have been occurring more and more frequently as their relationship has grown closer and deeper. They never used to fight like this.

We've all seen this, a fight that was no fight, anger out of nowhere, confusion on all sides. We've all wondered, "How could this happen? We haven't spoken five words all day." Over the years, we get so close we stop looking for the subtle signals. We start assuming that we are both completely transparent. After all, we know each other so well.

This is where Tannen's analysis begins: Why do our conversations deteriorate as we grow closer? Tannen turns away from the vacuous contents of this conversation to look at the ways in which two quite different cultures organize the concept of culture itself. "To the listener, a misunderstanding is indistinguishable from an understanding; one commits to an interpretation and proceeds to fit succeeding information into that mold. People will put up with a great deal of seemingly inappropriate verbal behavior before questioning the line of interpretation which seems self-evident" (221). After all, everybody knows how to talk. Everybody has enough common sense to follow an ordinary conversation. These two people have been talking together for years. How could the process of conversing have suddenly become a problem?

In the wife's Jewish-American culture, one expects volubility. The more one says about a subject, the more one likes the idea. Volubility equals emotional assent. For the Greek-American husband, exactly the opposite expectation operates deep below the surface of conversation: Just say yes, don't waste words. Thus, the husband's first "OK" strikes the wife as at least ambiguous, perhaps even ironic, "Are you saying yes just to please me or do you really want to go? Tell me more." So she reopens the conversation. For the husband, the reopening of a closed conversation indicates a change of mind, "She knows how much I want to go. After all, I said OK. Therefore, she has decided against the party, but doesn't want to disappoint me. Why not take the burden on myself and say I'm tired." And so they find themselves going around in circles, unable to locate the source of the problem.

Common sense prevents common understanding. The presumption that conversation operates the same for everybody creates a circle of misunderstanding. Tannen says: "In seeking to clarify, each speaker continues to use the very strategy that con-

fused the other in the first place. In this way, interaction often results in increasing divergence rather than convergence of style. That is, each partner's characteristic style leads the other to apply increasingly extreme forms of the conflicting strategy" (221-22). The more they talk, the worse it gets. They know each other so well, they cannot believe that they could be caught in some fundamental, invisible pattern of misunderstanding. Yet this circle of frustration can end only when both partners shift their attention to the cultural expectations that lie below the surface of their conversation.

Writing teachers need to make the same shift of attention. We need to begin taking seriously the odd misfires that result from our conferences and workshops. Remembering Mina Shaughnessy, we should take student misinterpretations not as failures, but as signals of an intelligence different from ours. When a student presents us with a revision utterly foreign to our expectations, we should try to see in that work a process of translation from the student's conception of everyday conversation toward the strange, uninterpretable discourse of the University. As inexperienced writers listen to the teacher's talk about writing, they are inevitably filtering that talk through their native expectations, taking as metaphors just those statements which we understand literally.

Though we cannot yet list all the various patterns of conversation we face in teaching writing, we can make a first pass at the problem of cultures by juxtaposing the rules of the academic essay with a generalized description of conversational common sense in standard Anglo-American speech. For instance, the most basic rule of conversation, "Take Turns," becomes the first casualty of the essay, where we are required to construct and sustain one dominant voice throughout the discourse. Granted that the essay allows us to take cognizance of other voices, but only under the control of the dominant voice, whether through paraphrase or haltered within quotation marks. (Judging the need for quotation marks involves a complex understanding of the role of dominance and politeness in the culture of the essay.) Each of the rules of the essay violates some expectation of standard conversation; all those rules together make the essay appear as the epitome of bad taste.

The essay demands that we focus on a single topic, refusing to switch topics, "developing" that one topic in depth, expecting the reader to surrender to the demands of the one topic. In ordinary conversation, we shift topics as interest shifts, or as new participants enter. We provide just enough depth for our partners to follow the conversation or to conduct the work at issue. The essay demands explicit transitions; conversation assumes that we all know how to connect sentences. The essay demands "proofs," while conversation can rest content with authority or feeling. The essay demands unrelenting expository or argumentative prose, where conversation shifts continuously across dialogue, song, story, joke, whatever. From the standpoint of ordinary conversation, the rules of the essay seem bizarre, pedantic, obsessive, patronizing, patriarchal.

A student who sits alone remembering a teacher's comments will inevitably translate our words into some more reasonable configuration, arguing, "Even an English teacher could not want me to behave so badly. These comments must be meant metaphorically, must call for some kind of literary analysis like a poem." Most often, this process of translation results in what Macrorie calls "English," a half-absorbed mimicry of the voice of some generic English Teacher. That mimicry, in all its guises, should be reconceived as directions for connecting the students' native expectations with the specialized demands of the essay.

At the simplest level, the sociolinguistics of conversation suggests that we take greater care in identifying the particular cultural expectations our students bring to the classroom. More seriously, these studies suggest that the deep structure-surface structure, competence-performance distinction has misdirected our attention in theories of literacy acquisition. We need to turn our attention to the surfaces of conversations, to performance, to ritual. Strategies encompass and condition meanings. John Gumperz goes so far as to argue that the surface features of conversation should be seen as a coherent system for organizing conversational interpretations: "The notion of contextualization conventions enables us to treat what on the surface look like quite separate linguistic phenomena—codes and style switching, prosody, phonetic and morphological variations, choice of syntactic and lexical option—under the same heading by showing that they have similar relational and signalling functions" (208). Each culture possesses a set of conventions for creating common sense interactions. All members of a given culture believe that their own native common sense conventions actually constitute a universal outline of human rationality, "I can't imagine anybody not knowing how to follow a conversation in just the same way I do." At the most immediate surface of conversation, we see the system for creating the deepest levels of "common sense."

Ironically, Gumperz' approach calls for a return to that tradition of stylistic analysis that has been marginalized into the sub-field called Oral Interpretation. Gumperz wants us to look at just those apparently trivial aspects of gesture and voice that written culture works so hard to suppress. At the same time Gumperz goes beyond the tradition by arguing that these features of performance constitute a system and that, for each culture, that system constitutes the groundwork of common sense.

We learn to follow from one sentence to the next, how to use inference patterns, by learning how various styles of voice and gesture signal particular conversational rules. Freshman English teachers can predict some of the subcultural differences that will emerge in conferences and workshops, differences of gender, class, nationality and generation. However, surrounding all these sub-cultures, at the source of our difficulties, resides the problem of medium—the blank page has not body, does not speak.

One of my brightest students, a leader in workshop discussions, continuously missed writing assignment deadlines, turning in late papers of one scribbled paragraph. She reported her difficulty as a quite simple one, "I can't be alone." Whenever she found herself alone before the blank page, she felt panicked by the deathlike silence. This student is confronting the crucial disjuncture between conversation and literacy, the silence of texts. Gumperz argues, "Of primary importance for conversational analysis is the role prosody plays in enabling the conversationalists to chunk the stream of talk into the basic message units which both underlie interpretation and control the turn taking or speaker change strategies that are essential to the maintenance of conversational involvement" (107). The blank page offers no prosodic cues. My student confronted the silence of the blank page as an avalanche of non-conversation. Happily, however, she loved to read, had acquired a large, diverse set of inner reading voices. She had only to grasp the analogy between voices created for reading with voices emerging onto the blank page in order to begin writing effectively.

Many of our students do not possess this reservoir of inner reading voices; many of our students hear nothing when they read. Those students who read aloud in a computer-like monotone are accurately reporting their experience with the printed

page. No people, no sound, no human contact, no intonation. Without self-created intonation patterns, Gumperz implies, these students merely process word lists, not meanings, not values, not genuine conversation. For these students, the work of reading has never yet felt like a genuinely human contact with a real, inner voice. These students cannot pass into the realm of literate discourse merely through increased volume of reading; these students need a different quality of experience, the opportunity to encounter a text, any text, as human discourse.

Finally, a conversational approach calls on us to rethink the concept of revision. From the standpoint of ordinary conversation, revision appears as a confused and contradictory idea. Teachers tell students to rethink, resee, rewrite their papers toward improved coherence, cohesion, style, effect, etc. Inexperienced students return with superficial repairs to mechanics, inserted sentences which merely paraphrase old sentences, or perhaps a completely new paper on a new topic. From the standpoint of conversation, these strategies make perfect sense: A slip of the tongue is repaired with, "Oops, I meant to say . . ."; a misunderstanding is repaired by a restatement from a different angle; a signal of boredom or satiation is repaired by switching topics. Spoken words go out into the world, sometimes effectively, sometimes not. When we recognize misfires, we repair them. Texts show no evidence of repair; texts are perfect, inevitable. Texts never change; from the first moment we see them, all the right words appear in all the right places. Texts require no repair. All the work we teachers call revision goes on in secret places, beyond time, hidden in the souls of geniuses, performed perfectly, revealing neither seams nor flaws. When we set the rules of ordinary conversation beside the concept of revision in writing processes, we are challenged to recognize that ordinary talk does not involve the complex, highly specialized project that turns the messy work of composition into the pristine linearity of text.

Works Cited

- Gumperz, John J. *Discourse Strategies*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982.
- Tannen, Deborah. "Ethnic styles in male-female conversation." In *Language and Social Identity*, Ed. John J. Gumperz. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982. 217-31.

INVESTIGATING PRODUCTIVITY AND OTHER FACTORS IN THE WRITER'S PRACTICE

Robert Tremmel
Washburn University of Topeka

One of the most powerful and widely discussed ideas in composition studies the last ten years or so is the notion of a shift from the so-called current-traditional paradigm to a process-centered one. The power to believe in this changing of paradigms has given the profession a focus and rallying point for making important progress. But like any compelling belief, attachment to this idea has caused some problems.

One serious problem is that the practical outcome of paradigm change in the classroom too often comes to resemble the oil change in a car—out with the old, in with the new. More and more, it seems, I find myself talking with teachers and composition directors who say they have changed from teaching grammar or teaching rhetorical patterns or teaching expository