Chapter 6
Intentionality

This first step in planning an utterance is the conception of a communicative intention. In view of this end, appropriate means will have to be marshaled (Levelt, 1989, p. 4).

Chapter Prospectus

Chapter 6, *Intentionality*, engages the rationale for initiating speech, continuing to speak, and ceasing to speak. Hence, we are here concerned with the psychological meaning of intentionality rather than with the philosophical meaning as presented, for example, by Austin (e.g., 1962) and by Searle (e.g., 1983). Spontaneous spoken discourse is not a continuous or constant activity of human beings. It is a chosen activity; it must be initiated, and this initiation requires on the part of a speaker a reason or reasons to begin to speak and to continue speaking or not. The same is correlatively true of the listener: Listening must be engaged initially and then sustained; it is not automatic. The basic motivation on the part of both speaker and listener is a search for intelligibility and coherence that cannot be satisfied by nonverbal means only, but requires words. Even more fundamentally, these considerations are based on the fact that we are not dealing with a sort of *homo linguisticus*, one whose nature is to be constantly engaged in speaking or listening. Instead, we are dealing with the occasional speaker and listener.

Starting, Stopping, and Continuing

Both speaking and listening are motivated social interactions. There must, therefore, be a reason for a speaker to begin to speak: some need or desire that he or she feels can be fulfilled by verbal interaction rather than by nonverbal means. For example, if one enters a living room and spies a large amorphous mass of wooden furniture, one might ask one's host about it: "What is it? What does it do for a living? Is it an objet d'art?" Such a setting seems to fulfill ideally *Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary*'s (11th ed.,

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2003, p. 273) definition of a *conversation piece*: "Something (as a novel or unusual object) that stimulates conversation." One could, of course, snoop about alone, but this would be taken as impolite in the presence of a host. After all, as a guest, one enters a living room in order to interact with the people therein. It would be an arch insult to enter a home and not address one's host. These are simple expectations that we live by, and violations are immediately perceived as at least odd, if not insulting or pathological. We are all socialized into such expectations along with the acquisition of our native language.

Chris Raschka (1993; German translation, 1997) has written a lovely children's story that has been singled out as a Caldecott Honor Book. The story itself may be used to exemplify very eloquently the concept of intentionality in spontaneous spoken discourse. We wish to use it here to further explicate the requirement of intention in speaking and listening. Note that we are, in this instance, using a written example to explicate intentionality in spoken discourse.

First of all, the words of the book fulfill, even more eloquently than those of books written primarily for adults: Ong's (1982, p. 75) description of them as merely "marks on a surface." A children's book must be brought to life in a specific setting: an adult reading aloud beside a child – who perhaps very authoritatively assumes the prerogative of turning pages. In other words, the interaction that brings the words to life is quite essentially dependent upon the simultaneous seeing of pictures and hearing of words. Anyone who thinks of such a reading aloud as a monological role has never read a storybook to a child: The concomitant commentaries, pointings, exclamations, questions, and control of the sequencing by page turning are all very much dialogical and are vivid realizations of the intimate dialectical relationship between the written and the spoken in everyday life.

For our purposes here, however, the *narrative* itself is the object of our interest insofar as it has to do with the initiation and sustaining of both speaking and listening on the part of the characters therein. Two summaries of the story can be applied to our purposes: (1) On the page after the title page of the English original, the publisher has inserted: "Two lonely characters, one black and one white, meet on the street and become friends" (Raschka, 1993). (2) A newspaper announcement provides a somewhat longer description of the German translation (B., 1997, August 3, p. 4; our translation):

> MONOSYLLABIC. The two exchange few words in their "conversation." The boy in the baseball shoes is direct and forward, when he sees the other boy shyly and sadly looking away. He begins the dialogue with "Yo!", whereupon the other replies only half-heartedly "Yes?" The shy boy finds himself lured out of his reserve by the insistent questions of the black boy. It lasts for only a few pages, but a conversation begins in which at most two words are spoken at a time. In short, the shy boy has no friends, and the other boy volunteers himself. Why not?

The storyline is important for our purposes insofar as it prominently displays a major problem in initiating both speaking and listening: The black boy has no reason to be optimistic about the white boy's listening; and the white boy's shyness prevents him from engaging the black boy except with a hesitant "Yes?"

In fact, he leans away from the black boy. The story tells us how the difficulties are overcome.

The story accomplishes this goal in a quite charming manner – and certainly not through the use of syntactically well-formed sentences. The pictures carry the story, and the voice of the adult reader brings the pictures to life with only a very few words, mostly one word at a time. Table 6.1 summarizes the words along with the accompanying terminal punctuation of both the English and the German versions of the story: These constitute the total verbal content of the narrative. The respective needs that are invoked here are, on the part of the energetic black boy, the necessity to share his exuberance, and, on the part of the sulking white boy, the very joy of spirit the other boy stands for. The first boy must coax the other into interaction – first into acknowledgement of his presence, then acknowledgement of the possibility of interaction, then, quite specifically, acknowledgement of the offer of his friendship, and finally acceptance of the offer. All this is brought about for each boy with only the vertical string of words with their punctuation as given in Table 6.1. Externally, very little happens, but a touching story of new friendship is told.

The burden of communication in this instance seems to be on the energetic black youngster. He is the one who is motivated to speak, certainly not in the first instance the other boy. But the need for fun and friendship gradually and reluctantly emerges in the second boy's words, and his motivation both to listen to the message of the black boy and to respond to it in words comes to life. It is interesting that, typographically, the two boys end up in the last two spreads

Table 6.1 Words, Along with their Terminal Punctuations, in the English- (E; Raschka, 1993) and German-language (G; Raschka, 1997) Versions of *Yo! Yes?* (G: *Hey! Ja?*) On the Left (L) and Right (R) of Sequentially Numbered Spreads of Adjacent Pages

Spread	Words, Along with their Terminal Punctuations			
	E		G	
	L	R	L	R
1.	Yo!	Yes?	He!	Hä?
2.	Hey!	Who?	Hey!	Ja?
3.	You!	Me?	Du!	Ich?
4.	Yes, you.	Oh.	Ja, du.	Oh.
5.	What's up?	Not much.	Was läuft?	Nicht viel.
6.	Why?	No fun.	Wieso?	Kein Spass.
7.	Oh?	No friends.	Oh?	Keine Freunde.
8.	Oh!	Yes.	Oh!	Ja.
9.	Look!	Hmmm.	Hier!	Hmmm.
10.	Me!	You?	Ich!	Du?
11.	Yes, me!	You!	Ja, ich!	Du!
12.	Well?	Well.	Na?	Ja. . .
13.	?	Yes!	?	Ja.
14.	Yo!	Yes!	Hey!	Ja!
15.	Yow!		Ye-a-h!	

literally on the same page, whereas before the black boy who initiates the conversation always appears on the left, the shy white boy on the right page; one should note that the left–right sequence is used here by the author to indicate initiation and response, respectively. And so, the necessary intersubjectivity of the two boys, if their communication is to continue – that is, their mutual and reciprocal consciousness of one another – is symbolized by their co-presence on the first page of the last two spreads. Hence, in an extraordinarily simple interaction of two youngsters, the accompanying presence of intention both to speak and to listen is eloquently expressed – for the most part without well-formed sentences and without many words. The specific words used by the boys are themselves of interest: There are eight interjections in the English and nine in the German version; there are seven turns involving *you* and *me* in both the English and the German versions; and there are six *yes*es in the English and seven *ja*s in the German version.

In passing, some peculiarities of the words and punctuation might well be noted. In English, the question and answer are the same, "well," but in German different ("Na," "Ja") in spread number 12. In spread number 13, the question is entirely wordless, signified graphically by a question mark over the head of the black boy. Both examples illustrate the relative unimportance of the specific words to communicate the story and the importance of the question mark as a symbol of the momentary intentionality of the black boy. In general, one may note that the dramatic punctuation serves as a cue for the adult who reads the story aloud and suggests both the intentionalities of the youngsters and the appropriate prosody for the reader. In fact, in Table 6.1, the terminal punctuation listed under R for the white boy's responses in both the English and the German versions proceeds from question marks at the beginning to periods in the middle, and finally to dramatic exclamation marks at the end (for further considerations of punctuation see our Chapter 9).

The story thus manifests how reading a picture book aloud can truly simulate many of the properties of spontaneous spoken discourse, even the very special ones of a bedtime story told by an adult to a preliterate child.

A Historical Note on Intentionality

Intentionality undoubtedly has to do with consciousness. As such, it was completely incompatible with the Zeitgeist of the twentieth century in psychology. The myopia of behaviorism held the profession pretty much in thrall. And yet, in their everyday engagement of the social environment, human beings address one another with consciousness and purpose. Not that the purpose is always entirely transparent to the consciousness; even our simplest utterances can be complex, devious, indirect, and convoluted. But they are engaged with purpose.

For all its claim to be at the very core of modern psychology, cognitive psychology is still dealing with behavior as mechanistic, automatic, determined; cognitive

psychologists continue to "treat people as machines" (Costall, 1991, p. 163; cited in Linell, 1998, p. 58). We are convinced that psychology cannot effectively engage the occurrence of speaking and listening from such a mechanistic point of view. Until recently, the most extensive and definitive treatments of speaking and listening have been, respectively, suggested by Levelt (1989, p. 1) and by Handel (1989, p. 547). Levelt has considered the speaker as "a highly complex information processor," and Handel has acknowledged that his own emphasis on "the psychophysics of listening" leaves as unengaged "the role of the listener's knowledge and experience and of the listener's goals and intentions in representing the world."

It is precisely this level of "goals and intentions" that we wish to emphasize in our treatment of speaking and listening. Short of such a level of engagement, spontaneous spoken discourse ceases to be spontaneous and ceases to be discourse, defined appropriately, although incompletely, as: "**2 :** verbal interchange of ideas; *esp*: CONVERSATION" (*Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary*, 11th ed., 2003, p. 357). As we shall see, far more than "ideas" is spoken of and listened to in spontaneous spoken discourse. We might add here that the acoustic–auditory mode is nearly always supplemented in spontaneous spoken discourse by the optical–visual mode. Only telephone conversations are generally excluded from this supplement.