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Dealing with Overhearers

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When we talk, we design our utterances for all the people we believe may be listening. But we don't treat listeners equally. We implicitly relegate them to a caste system depending on our responsibilities and intentions toward them. Our first responsibility is to our addressees—the people we are addressing directly. We also have responsibilities for any other participants there are in the current conversation. We even feel responsibilities toward anyone who may be overhearing us, although these responsibilities are quite different. When we go to formulate our utterances, we try to satisfy all these responsibilities at once. Doing that can be a genuine feat of engineering, because these responsibilities influence our formulations in a myriad of ways. This is a property of utterances called *audience design*, and it must be accounted for in any adequate theory of language use.

Why study audience design? For us there are two main reasons. One is that most theories of language use treat "one speaker, one listener" as if it were a constitutional guarantee. It isn't, of course. Any speaker can have a multitude of listeners in a multitude of roles. "But," you ask, "does that really change anything? All it may do is add new wrinkles to the old theories." We will suggest that it does much more than that. What is remarkable is how many essential aspects of language use it affects and, therefore, how many theories are incomplete, or wrong, without it.

The second reason for studying audience design is to investigate the role of common ground in language use. Common ground is the information shared by two or more people. Technically, it is the sum of their mutual knowledge, mutual beliefs, and mutual assumptions. The notion has played an essential part in theories that we and our colleagues have proposed about reference (Chapters 1, 3, 4, this volume), word

meaning (Clark 1982; Clark and Clark 1979; Chapter 11, this volume), contributing to discourse (Clark and Brennan 1991; Chapters 9 and 5, this volume), and dialogues between experts and novices (Isaacs and Clark 1987). It has also been essential to theories of convention (Lewis 1969), speaker's meaning (Schiffer 1972), and illocutionary acts (Cohen and Levesque 1990; Stalnaker 1978). Despite this, there is skepticism in some quarters about whether it is really needed. We will argue that it is. Audience design revolves around the notion of common ground and cannot be accounted for without it.

The argument is that speakers design their utterances taking all potential listeners into account. Now there is wide recognition among linguists, psychologists, and philosophers that speakers take addressees and even other participants in the current conversation into account. But there is almost never any mention of overhearers. As it happens, it is complicated to deal with overhearers, because speakers can take a variety of attitudes toward them. Designing utterances for overhearers, then, offers us a new perspective on audience design and on language use in general.

This chapter is about how speakers deal with overhearers. But we can't look at that without looking at how speakers deal with addressees and participants too. We first try to characterize the responsibilities speakers have toward addressees, participants, and overhearers and, therefore, the attitudes they can take toward each of them. We then take up the logic of designing utterances for all three types of listeners. From there we turn to the techniques speakers have available for dealing with overhearers. And finally, we describe how speakers do things by the way they deal with overhearers.

1 Responsibilities toward Listeners

In conversation, we treat listeners both as individuals and as agents in certain roles. If we think Veronica is listening, we take note of her as an *individual*. We look at the common ground we share with her and design our utterances accordingly. But we also take note of her *role* in the current discourse, which shapes our utterances in other ways. Audience design is subject to judgments about listeners both as individuals and as holders of listener roles. To see how, we must first see the roles listeners can take.

Listener Roles

Speakers distinguish sharply among listeners. In Goffman's (1975) proposal, listeners have three main roles. There are *overhearers*, "whether

or not their unratified participation is independent of whether or not it has been encoded" (260). They are the ratified participants in the current conversation, whom we will call simply *participants*, whether or not they are being addressed at the moment. And there are the *addressees*, "those ratified participants who are addressed, that is, oriented to by the speaker in a manner to suggest that his words are particularly for them, and that some answer is therefore anticipated from them, more so than from the other ratified participants" (260).

The scheme we propose is simply an elaboration of Goffman's. It assumes four basic contrasts among listeners. The first is self versus other listeners. Speakers, of course, listen to themselves in order to monitor what they say, so we will call them self-monitors or, more simply, *monitors*. The second contrast is between participants and nonparticipants, or overhearers. The third is between the two types of participants, the addressees and the rest. We will call the other participants *side participants*. The final contrast is between two types of overhearers. *Bystanders* are those listeners who have access to what the speakers are saying and whose presence is fully recognized. *Eavesdroppers* are those listeners who have access to what the speakers are saying, but whose presence is not fully recognized. To be more precise, speakers believe that they and the bystanders mutually believe that they, the bystanders, have access to what is going on. But speakers believe that they and the eavesdroppers, if there are any, don't have this mutual belief. At one point in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Hamlet realizes that King Claudius and Polonius are hiding behind a curtain listening to him talk to Ophelia, but he believes they don't know that he knows. In our terminology that makes Claudius and Polonius eavesdroppers.

Speakers assign listeners to the roles of addressee, side participant, and overhearer by the way they engineer their utterances in the current situation. Not, of course, that just anything is possible. Speakers must get listeners to recognize their assigned roles. In a conversation among Alan, Barbara, and Carl, it is easy for Alan to continue to treat Barbara and Carl both as participants. As participants in the previous turns, they will each assume they are still in the conversation unless Alan marks their exclusion. It should be hard for Alan suddenly to make Carl a bystander.

Speakers assign these roles for only limited periods of time. Alan might address Barbara with Carl as a side participant for one utterance and switch their roles in the next. Speakers can even switch addressees and midutterance—and more than once per utterance. Take this utterance by Elsie to three others in conversation, as recorded by Goodwin (1981), where 0.2 marks a pause of 0.2 seconds:

See first we were gonna have [turning to Ann] Teema, Carrie and Clara. (0.2) and myself. [turning to Bessie] The four of us. The four [turning to Connie] children. But then—uh:: I said how is that gonna look.

As Elsie gazes successively at Ann, Bessie, and Clara, she repeats and expands on *Teema, Carrie, and Clara, the four of us, the four children*, engaging each addressee singly, before going on. She designs each section of her utterance specifically for the woman she is addressing.

What, then, are these listener roles of? They cannot be roles with respect to utterances. For one thing, roles can change midutterance. For another, speakers can perform more than one illocutionary act—question, request, promise, or the like—with a single utterance, and these illocutionary acts may be addressed to different listeners. In an example invented by Searle (1969), "Suppose at a party a wife says, *It's really quite late.*" With the single utterance, she may (1) object to the host that it is late and, at the same time, (2) ask her husband to take her home. Her husband is the side participant for the objection, and the host is the side participant to the request. The three listener roles appear to be assigned, then, not for each utterance, but for each illocutionary act. Still, when there is no confusion, we will speak of these roles with respect to utterances.

Conversational Responsibilities

What distinguishes participants from overhearers is that the participants are taking part in what the speaker is currently doing, and the overhearers are not. What does it mean to take part in what the speaker is doing? The answer lies, we suggest, in the way conversations work. In the right circumstances, certain individuals, Alan, Barbara, and Carl say, consider themselves to be an ensemble of people who are "in a conversation." To be in a conversation is really to hold certain responsibilities toward each other:

Principle of responsibility. In a conversation, the parties to it are each responsible for keeping track of what is said, and for enabling the other parties to keep track of what is said.

The idea is that each party individually—Alan, Barbara, and Carl—keeps track of an accumulating body of information called the discourse record. This is a record of all the public actions the parties have taken, where by a public action we mean an action openly intended for all the parties. The discourse record is part of Alan's, Barbara's, and Carl's common ground. When Alan says *He's there* to Barbara in a conversation with both Barbara and Carl, he intends both Barbara

and Carlo ~~at the end of the conversation~~ ~~who he is, where there is, and that he is saying~~ ~~Barbara not to see, that's~~ Chapter 7, this volume). That is the only way the three of them can guarantee the orderly accumulation of the discourse record. Let us call these their *conversational responsibilities*.

Listeners are overhearers to an utterance whenever they aren't taken as members of the ensemble "in the conversation" at the moment and therefore don't share in or benefit from their conversational responsibilities. If Alan, Barbara, and Carl consider Oscar a bystander, they needn't feel any responsible for making sure he understands. Conversely, if they don't feel responsible for making sure he understands, they are treating him as an overhearer. And if Oscar is a bystander, it would be rude of him to stop Alan to ask him what he was saying. That would be to intrude, to insinuate himself on Alan, Barbara, and Carl's conversation as if he were a party to it, and that is a social offense.

Collaborative Responsibilities

Speakers bear certain responsibilities toward addressees that they don't bear toward side participants. Or so it appears. For the participants in a conversation to fulfill their conversational responsibilities, they must try to reach what we have called the *grounding criterion*:

Grounding criterion. The participants in a conversation mutually believe that the current listeners have understood what the speaker meant to a degree sufficient for current purposes.

How do they reach this criterion? For two people talking, the answer is clear: They collaborate moment by moment in trying to *ground* larger or smaller stretches of what has been said (Clark and Brennan 1991; Chapters 9, 5, and 4 this volume). If Alan is talking to Barbara, he may ask her to confirm that she has understood what he meant, and she will spontaneously give evidence of her understanding or ask for repairs for anything she hasn't understood.

Most collaborative devices—at least the commonest and most direct ones—are possible only between two people. When there are three or more people in a conversation, collaboration has to be modified. Just how is not yet clear. It appears to us, but only from informal observation, that when the current speaker, say Alan, has singled out Barbara as the addressee, he is granting her a special status. If he wants to know what she did on her recent trip to Italy, he will orient toward her and pay her special attention. He will collaborate with her directly, much as if he would in a two person conversation with her. Not that he and Barbara forget their responsibilities toward Carl, the side par-

ticipant. It is just that Carl isn't given the opportunity to collaborate directly. He has to be satisfied with clearing up misunderstandings in natural breaks in their talk, or when Alan and Barbara address him specially with information they think he needs. Let us call the Alan and Barbara's collaborative techniques *direct*, and Alan, Barbara, and Carl's *indirect*. Our conjecture is this:

Principle of collaboration. Speakers collaborate directly with addressees and only indirectly with side participants.

We will call these two responsibilities both *collaborative responsibilities*.

Politeness Responsibilities

People are responsible for being polite to each other no matter where they are. Politeness has to do with people's face, or image of themselves. According to Brown and Levinson (1987) and Goffman (1965), people have two face wants, one positive and one negative. The positive desire is to feel appreciated or esteemed—what we will call *self-esteem*. The negative desire is to be personally unhindered—to have what we will call *freedom of action*. For Alan to be polite to Barbara is to try to satisfy both of these desires. It is to maintain or enhance her self-esteem and not to infringe on her freedom of action. We will call these responsibilities toward others' *face politeness responsibilities*.

Now there are many ways of threatening another person's face by saying things. Alan can threaten Barbara's self-esteem by, for example: (1) asserting or implying bad things about her; (2) using language that is offensive to her; (3) making information public that is embarrassing to her; or (4) burdening her with sensitive information. And he can threaten her freedom of action by, for example: (1) obligating her to do things; (2) threatening her; (3) interrupting her while she is talking; or (4) interfering with her legitimate activities, e.g., by yelling. These are all *face-threatening* acts, as Brown and Levinson (1987) have called them, and they come in a great variety. There are also *face-enhancing* acts with the opposite effects. Alan can use them to raise Barbara's self-esteem or increase her freedom of action.

All of these actions, both face-threatening and face-enhancing, can be taken toward the other parties to a conversation. You can threaten, embarrass, obligate, or burden a fellow participant, for example, just by telling them things. Only some of these actions can be taken toward overhearers, and these include interrupting or embarrassing them, burdening them with sensitive information, and interfering with their activities. So Alan should feel a responsibility to be polite to Oscar even though he is only a bystander. He may, for example, avoid using

profanity, gossiping, blabbing, or making loud Oscar can't continue ~~speaking~~. ~~Listeners are placed in a position to~~ ~~con-~~ ~~ventionally~~ have the right to silence. So speakers also have a responsibility that goes something like this:

Politeness responsibilities. Speakers try not to threaten other people's face without reason.

If speakers hold to this principle, they will be polite toward participants and overhearers alike.

Personal Acquaintance

The responsibilities people bear toward each other depend vitally on personal acquaintance. Suppose Alan and Oscar are close friends. They may have long standing obligations to keep each other informed about some topics and to avoid others. They will also know a great deal about what topics, language, and actions will please or offend the other. The story is quite different when they are strangers. They expect each other to know in general what they should and shouldn't be informed about and what topics, language, and actions will please and offend, but they cannot expect anything more specific. And there are many degrees of acquaintance between close friends and total strangers. Personal acquaintance is generally critical in determining listener roles in the first place. Strangers are more likely to be bystanders than friends are. When you join Jane and Ken in order to speak to Jane, you may find it possible to treat Ken as a bystander if you don't know him, but impossible if you do, especially if you know him better than Jane. The prototypical bystander may be a stranger, but he needn't be.

It is politeness that is most clearly regulated by personal acquaintance. If Alan and Oscar are friends, then Alan will know precisely what will and won't threaten Oscar's self-esteem and restrict his freedom of action. To be polite, Alan must attend to these threats and restrictions. Alan's responsibilities are regulated in part by Oscar's current role. He is clearly responsible for being polite when Oscar is a participant. He is even responsible when Oscar is a bystander. He realizes that he and Oscar mutually know that Oscar may be listening in, so if he says something to threaten Oscar's self-esteem, and if Oscar thinks he could have avoided it, Oscar will conclude that Alan threatened his face on purpose, and that is a clear social offense. But when Oscar is an eavesdropper, and the two of them do not mutually know he is listening, he can't hold Alan responsible for deliberately offending him. Although he may think Alan is crass, he can't accuse him of a deliberate slight. In summary, speakers hold several major responsibilities toward

their listeners—conversational, collaborative, and politeness. How these apply depends on whether the listeners are addressees, side participants, bystanders, or eavesdroppers.

2 Attitudes toward Listeners

Speakers may hold a range of attitudes toward their listeners regardless of the responsibilities they feel toward them, and these attitudes affect the design of their utterances in radically different ways. Some of the attitudes we will call legitimate: they are fully compatible with a speaker's responsibilities. Others are illegitimate: In one way or another, they are *not* compatible with a speaker's responsibilities. To understand the attitudes speakers can take toward overhearers, we must first recognize the attitudes they can take toward participants.

Attitudes toward Participants

There is really only one legitimate attitude speakers can take toward other parties in the conversation, and that is to be openly informative. They must be sincere in what they tell, ask, promise, and offer their addressees and in letting the side participants know what they are doing. Not that everything they do is serious. They may be ironic, sarcastic, or facetious. They may overstate or understate. They may tell tall stories or jokes. They may overdramatize for effect. But all these devices are intended to be recognized for what they are: non-serious uses of language. Like all serious uses of language, these are intended to be *mutually* recognized by all parties of the conversation. They would be illegitimate uses if they weren't.

Speakers, of course, can choose to violate one or more of their responsibilities. They can fail to keep track of what has been said. They may repeat things others say, fail to presuppose what they all take to be common ground, or otherwise ignore what their partners know from the conversation so far. They can decide to be obtuse or obscure, saying things they know cannot be understood. They can fail to give their partners a chance to repair uncertain interpretations or failures in understanding. Or they can offend their partners directly or indirectly by using offensive language or bringing up threatening topics. There are many ways speakers can deal with the other participants in violation of their principles of responsibility and collaboration.

Attitudes toward Overhearers

In dealing with overhearers, in contrast, speakers can legitimately choose among a range of attitudes. Since they aren't responsible for

making sure ~~overhearers understand what they say~~ they are free to choose among ~~four attitudes~~ ^{the University of Chicago Press, 1992.}

1. **Indifference.** For any part of what they mean, speakers can be indifferent about whether or not the overhearers can grasp it.
2. **Disclosure.** For any part of what they mean, speakers can design their utterances so that the overhearers can grasp it fully.
3. **Concealment.** For any part of what they mean, speakers can design their utterances so that the overhearers cannot grasp it and will recognize that they cannot do so.
4. **Disguisement.** For any part of what they mean, speakers can design their utterances so that the overhearers will be deceived into thinking it is something that it is not.

We will reserve the term *concealment* for overt attempts to conceal and *disguisement* for covert attempts.

Are these four attitudes always legitimate? Not at all. It depends on the circumstances. Overhearers may have no rights to the information being exchanged, but they do retain the right to self-esteem and freedom of action. It would be illegitimate, in our sense, for a speaker to disclose information that would threaten their self-esteem or freedom of action. Indeed, it might be illegitimate *not* to conceal, or even disguise, that sort of information. The right to save face limits when and where speakers can take these four attitudes.

Here there is a question of ethics. We don't ordinarily worry about all the eavesdroppers who could conceivably be listening in on us. It is always possible that the CIA or your boss or a blackmailer has bugged the room and is recording every word we say. Many paranoids live in just this fear. Should we moderate our talk just because of this remote possibility? Most of us would say no, so here is a good case for the attitude of indifference. To worry about eavesdroppers everywhere is to become a certified paranoid. But in circumstances in which there is a chance someone is overhearing us, we may feel morally obligated to worry about that person's face. That may be why some people who use profanity in the locker room or by themselves would never use it anywhere else. They don't want to run the risk of any offense that might incur.

So speakers can take many attitudes toward their listeners and still live up to their conversational, collaborative, and politeness responsibilities. With addresses and side participants, they have little choice but to be informative and polite. But with overhearers, they can choose among indifference, disclosure, concealment, and disguisement. The question is how they achieve these ends.

3 Designing Utterances

Speakers are primarily responsible, as we have argued, to other participants in the conversation, with special responsibilities to addressees. Unless they fulfill these responsibilities—keeping everyone informed about everything said—the conversation is open to failures, errors, misunderstandings. Indeed, when most theorists speak about the design of utterances, they have only addressees in mind—and usually only one addressee at that. So let us begin with the logic behind how speakers tailor utterances for particular addressees. Our proposal is that the form these utterances take depends fundamentally on what speakers take to be their common ground with the addressees. As background, let us briefly recount what is in two people's common ground (see Chapter 1, this volume).

Common Ground

The common ground between two people—here, Alan and Barbara—can be divided conceptually into two main parts. Their *communal common ground* represents all the knowledge, beliefs, and assumptions they take to be universally held in the communities to which they mutually believe they both belong. Their *personal common ground* represents all the mutual knowledge, beliefs, and assumptions they have inferred from personal experience with each other.

Alan and Barbara belong to many of the same cultural communities. These communities are defined by such characteristics as these:

1. *Language*: American English, Dutch, Japanese
2. *Nationality*: American, German, Australian
3. *Education*: University, high school, grade school
4. *Place of residence*: San Francisco, Edinburgh, Amsterdam
5. *Occupation*: Physician, plumber, lawyer, psychologist
6. *Religion*: Baptist, Buddhist, Muslim
7. *Hobbies*: Classical piano, baseball, philately
8. *Subcultures*: Rock music, drugs, teenage gangs

Within each community, there are facts, beliefs, and assumptions that every member believes that almost everyone in that community takes for granted. So if Alan and Barbara mutually believe they both belong to these communities, this is information they can take to be communal common ground.

What sort of information is this? As English speakers, Alan and Barbara take for granted a vast amount of knowledge about syntax, semantics, phonology, word meanings, idioms, and politeness form-

las. As educated Americans, they take for granted a certain acquaintance with Argentine and English literature, world history and geography, and recent news events—disasters, election results, military coups, films. They also take for granted such broad concepts as the nature of causality, religious beliefs, and expected behavior in standing in lines, paying for food at supermarkets, and making telephone calls. As physicians, they take for granted facts about basic human anatomy, the major diseases and their cures, and the technical nomenclature taught in medical school.

Regardless of the information Alan and Barbara share as English speakers, San Franciscans, and physicians, it isn't part of their common ground until they have established the mutual belief that they both belong to these communities. They can establish this in many ways—by assertion (*I'm a pediatrician; Ah, so am I*), by showing (they both recognize each other speaking American English), and by other means (Isaacs and Clark 1986; Krauss and Glucksberg 1977; Schegloff 1972). The more communities they establish joint membership in, the broader and richer is their communal common ground.

Once Alan and Barbara meet, they begin openly to share experiences, and these form the basis for their personal common ground. Most joint experiences originate in one of two sources—*joint conversational experiences* or *joint perceptual experiences*. Whenever Alan and Barbara participate in the same conversation, as we have noted, they are responsible for ensuring that everyone understands what has been said, and everything they succeed on they assume to be part of their common ground. For example, if Alan asserts, *I'm leaving for Edinburgh in the morning*, and he and Barbara establish to their mutual satisfaction that she has understood him as intended, that becomes part of their personal common ground. Likewise, whenever Alan and Barbara attend to the same perceptual events, such as a shot in a basketball game, and realize they are both doing so, they can ordinarily assume that everything they are jointly attending to is also common ground (Schiffer 1972; Chapter 1, this volume). Even if at first they didn't know they were at the same basketball game, once that becomes mutually known, they can assume that its salient public parts are common ground.

People must keep track of communal and personal common ground in different ways. For communal common ground, they need encyclopedias for each of the communities they belong to. Once Alan and Barbara establish the mutual belief that they are both physicians, they can immediately add their physician encyclopedias to their common ground. For personal common ground, they need to keep diaries of

their personal experiences. But not personal experiences alone. Alan's diary, to be useful, must record for each personal experience who else was involved in it—who else was openly copresent with him. Alan can count as personal common ground with Barbara only those diary entries for which the two of them were openly copresent. The more entries there are, the larger and richer their personal common ground.

Interpreting Utterances

The parties to any conversation, as we noted earlier, accumulate common ground in a regular way. Alan and Barbara begin a conversation with a certain initial communal and personal common ground. When Alan issues his first utterance, they add its content to their initial common ground, and with each further utterance, they add to the common ground that has accumulated so far—the current common ground. At least, this is the view assumed in most theories of discourse (Gazdar 1979; Heim 1983; Kamp 1981; Lewis 1979; Stalnaker 1978). This process can only work if Alan and Barbara ground what they say as they go along (Chapter 5, this volume). They must establish the mutual belief that what is said has been understood well enough for current purposes, and only then does it become part of the discourse record.

Alan tries to design each of his utterances to be interpreted against his and Barbara's current common ground. Suppose Alan utters one of these three sentences:

1. Where is Jack?
2. I just did three houses.
3. Do you have ten dollars?

For each utterance, Alan must ordinarily assume mutual knowledge of English. For 1, he must also believe that Jack is mutually identifiable to Barbara and him. The two of them may know many Jacks, but this Jack must be uniquely identifiable from their current common ground. For 2, he must assume that what he did to the three houses—whether it was to carpet, torch, or ransack them—is also mutually identifiable from their common ground. For 3, he must assume that what he is saying indirectly—he is reminding Barbara to buy a ticket to an orchestra concert that night—is also uniquely identifiable from their common ground. Each example requires both communal common ground (e.g., mutual knowledge of English) and personal common ground (e.g., mutual beliefs about Jack, Alan's business, and orchestra concerts). And Barbara can be confident, ordinarily, that Alan has tried to provide her with conclusive evidence of what he meant.

If Oscar is only an overhearer of Alan's, he begins at a distinct disadvantage. He hears that Alan says "George's responsibility toward making sure he understands what Alan said. Worse than that, Alan doesn't even have to reveal whether his attitude is indifference, disclosure, concealment, or disguise." For all Oscar knows, Alan and Barbara may have devised a secret code in which *Jack* is the name of a battleship, and *ten dollars* means "George's telephone number." Even if he assumes that Alan has taken the attitude of indifference, he still can't know what Alan means without knowing what is in Alan's and Barbara's common ground. That forces him to make assumptions about their common ground, about what Jacks they mutually know, what Alan does to houses, what social relations they have with each other. These are things he can only guess at. Unlike Barbara, Oscar can never be sure he has conclusive evidence of what Alan meant.

There is, then, a fundamental difference between the inferences that participants and nonparticipants make in trying to understand what is said. We will call this a difference between *recognition* and *conjecture*:

Recognizing speaker's meaning. Addressees and side participants are intended to recognize what speakers mean—that is, infer it from conclusive evidence.

Conjecturing about speaker's meaning. Overhearers can only conjecture about what speakers mean—that is, draw inferences about it from inconclusive evidence.

Barbara tries to recognize what Alan meant by 1, 2, and 3, but Oscar can only conjecture about it.

How does conjecturing differ from recognizing? Suppose Oscar isn't acquainted with Alan and Barbara—he is overhearing them sitting on a bus in San Francisco. When he hears Alan utter 1, *Where is Jack?* all he has to go on are general assumptions about middle class San Franciscans and how they talk. If he assumed that Alan took for granted Alan's and Barbara's mutual knowledge of American English, he might conjecture: *The man could be asking the woman about the location of a man named Jack—though, come to think of it, Jack could be a dog, a cat, or even a car. The man must also believe that Jack is mutually identifiable to him and woman.* Of course, the more Oscar knows about Alan and Barbara, the better his conjectures may be. Yet as long as he is an overhearer, he should realize that his conjectures can never be any more than just that—conjectures.

Overhearers like Oscar are forced to work backward. Let us de-

note Alan and Barbara's current common ground as $CG(a,b)$, his utterance to her as $U(a,b)$, and his meaning for her with the utterance by $SM(a,b,U)$, where SM stands for "speaker's meaning." Barbara, as addressee, should go about recognizing $SM(a,b,U)$ by the first schema, and Oscar, as overhearer, should go about conjecturing about $SM(a,b,U)$ by the second:

Participant's recognition schema:

1. Assume $CG(a,b)$.
2. Identify $U(a,b)$.
3. Given $U(a,b)$ in relation to $CG(a,b)$, infer $SM(a,b,U)$.

Overhearer's conjecture schema:

1. Identify $U(a,b)$.
2. Conjecture $CG(a,b)$ and $SM(a,b,U)$ such that:
 - 1'. Assume $CG(a,b)$.
 - 2'. Assume $U(a,b)$.
 - 3'. Given $U(a,b)$ in relation to $CG(a,b)$, infer $SM(a,b,U)$.

So Barbara's and Oscar's routes begin in different places. Barbara starts with her current common ground with Alan and asks, *How does Alan intend his utterance to increment our common ground?* Oscar starts instead with Alan's utterance and asks, *What common ground is the man presupposing such that he can use his utterance to add to it and mean something reasonable?* The two routes also differ in the evidence they assume is available. Barbara's assumes her evidence is conclusive. Oscar realizes his is inconclusive.

What complicates the picture, as we noted earlier, is that Alan and Barbara also ground what he says. If Barbara doesn't understand—if she believes the evidence she has registered isn't conclusive enough—she can ask for confirmation of an interpretation (for 1, *Jack Sears?*), for clarification (*Jack who?*), or even for a repeat of the utterance (*What did you say?*). Still, the grounding process itself works by the same recognition schema. When Barbara asks *Jack Sears?* she assumes a certain common ground between Alan and her—adjusted slightly from what Alan had just assumed—and intends him to recognize what she means against it. Grounding adjusts to slight differences in judgments about the conclusiveness of the evidence. If Alan misjudges the clarity of his utterance, or what Barbara assumes to be common ground, that will get sorted out in the process of grounding.

Alan's job in designing each utterance, therefore, is to play to these schemas. He must think primarily about Barbara—and any side par-

In Clark, H. H. *Arenas of Language Use*. Current participants such as Carl, for them the range of possible utterances is limited to what he means. But in considering Oscar, he needs to do a great deal more. What he does depends on whether his attitude is indifference, disclosure, concealment, or disguise.

4 Designing Utterances for Overhearers

For speakers to deal with overhearers, they must estimate how much the overhearers can conjecture, and design their utterances accordingly. When Alan is talking to Barbara, and Oscar is an overhearer, he needs to estimate one main piece of information: Oscar's assumptions about CG(a,b), Alan and Barbara's common ground. With this, he can judge whether Oscar will be able to apply the overhearer conjecture schema successfully or not. Only then can he decide how to disclose, conceal, or disguise what he is saying to Barbara. Let us look at the logic of designing utterances for overhearers.

Open and Closed Information

Both the recognition and the conjecture schemas are built on the common ground between Alan and Barbara, CG(a,b). Now although CG(a,b) is something Alan and Barbara themselves can take for granted, it is something Oscar can only conjecture about. If he makes the right conjectures, he can also conjecture correctly about what Alan meant, and if not, he can't. What Alan needs to estimate, then, are these two parts of CG(a,b):

Open information. Information that O believes, or could readily guess, to be in CG(a,b).

Closed information. Information that O doesn't believe, and could not readily guess, to be in CG(a,b).

But what is open and closed to Oscar may not be open and closed to another overhearer, so dividing CG(a,b) into these two parts depends on Alan's analysis of Oscar as an individual, if he happens to know him, or as a type, if he does not.

What information is closed to Oscar? Alan might first consider communal common ground. For that he needs to find cultural communalities that he and Barbara belong to but that Oscar has no knowledge about. He might come to one of these judgments:

1. *Language:* Alan and Barbara know Japanese, and Oscar doesn't.
2. *Nationality:* Alan and Barbara are American, and Oscar is German.

3. *Education:* Alan and Barbara are adults, and Oscar is eight years old.
4. *Place of residence:* Alan and Barbara are San Franciscans, and Oscar is a New Yorker.
5. *Occupation:* Alan and Barbara are physicians, and Oscar is a lawyer.
6. *Religion:* Alan and Barbara are Episcopalians, and Oscar is a Buddhist.
7. *Hobbies:* Alan and Barbara are both birders and mountain climbers, and Oscar is neither.
8. *Subcultures:* Alan and Barbara are both part time rock musicians, and Oscar is known to abhor rock music.

It is discrepancies like these that Alan must exploit if he is to conceal or disguise his meanings from Oscar, or that he must avoid if he is to disclose them to Oscar.

For information closed to Oscar, Alan might also consider his and Barbara's personal common ground. First he must find conversations that he and Barbara were both participants in, or perceptual experiences that they were copresent at, and that Oscar couldn't know about. But it isn't enough to pick just any information from these sources. Alan must assure himself that Oscar couldn't even guess the information to be common ground. Even though Oscar didn't see *Night at the Opera* with Alan and Barbara, he could have seen it on his own and guess what Alan is talking about when he speaks of "the stateroom scene." For closed information, Alan must set his criterion very high. He must be sure Oscar is not only ignorant of that area of CG(a,b), but not even able to guess it is an area of CG(a,b).

The notions of open and closed information, properly formulated, are just what we need to account for the four main attitudes speakers can take toward overhearers.

Indifference

The simplest attitude Alan can take toward Oscar is indifference: He doesn't care whether Oscar understands what he is saying or not. Once he takes that attitude, he can design his utterances as if Oscar weren't there. But he cannot always take this attitude. By *indifference*, we mean "conversational indifference" and not "personal disregard." Alan is still responsible for not threatening Oscar's self-esteem and freedom of action. He must still try to be polite. He may be forced to conceal or disguise all or part of what he is saying from Oscar. Or he may have to soften his use of profanity.

In Clark, H. H. Arenas of Language Use.

Disclosure^{Chicago}: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

With disclosure, Alan tries to provide Oscar with enough evidence so that he, Oscar, can come to the right conjectures about Alan's meaning. To do this, Alan must design his utterances to be interpretable against those parts of CG(a,b) that are open to Oscar. For example, he shouldn't use Japanese or medecalese unless he thinks Oscar speaks Japanese or medecalese. Nor should he design his utterances around personal common ground that is closed to Oscar.

To illustrate, let us set up a scenario, a web of information against which Alan must design utterances like 1, 2, and 3:

Scenario A. Barbara's father is named Jack McCall; Alan is a professional arsonist; Barbara needs ten dollars for a Beethoven concert she and Alan intend to go to. Alan takes these three facts to be salient parts of Alan and Barbara's common ground, CG(a,b), but believes they are closed to Oscar.

Under Scenario A, Alan couldn't use utterances 1, 2, or 3 (repeated here) and be sure of complete disclosure:

1. Where is Jack?
 2. I just did three houses.
 3. Do you have ten dollars?
- He couldn't be at all confident that Oscar could infer that Jack was Barbara's father, that to *do a house* would be to torch it, or that Alan was reminding Barbara of the concert. To ensure disclosure, he might instead say something like 1', 2', and 3':
- 1'. Where is your father?
 - 2'. I just torched three houses.
 - 3'. Have you bought your ticket for the Beethoven concert tonight yet?

With these, not only should Barbara be able to understand, but so should Oscar by making the obvious assumptions.

Disclosure should be easy when Oscar is a close friend of Alan's, and hard, maybe even impossible, when Oscar is a stranger. When Oscar is a friend, Alan can be sure of finding open areas of CG(a,b) to work with. When Oscar is a stranger, Alan can never be sure of doing that. What if Oscar speaks only French, or Tagalog, or Finnish? What if he speaks English but doesn't know the slang interpretation of *torched*—he thought it meant "shine a light, a torch, on"? What if he doesn't know of the Beethoven concert? All Alan can do is make broad guesses at the type of person Oscar is—say, middle class educated American,

English speaking—work with open parts of communal common ground, and hope for the best.

Disclosing to an overhearer may look at first just like informing a side participant, but it isn't. When Alan treats a listener as a side participant, he intends the listener to infer what he means by recognizing that very intention (Grice 1957 1968). When he treats the listener as an overhearer, he no longer has that full intention. The difference lies in what he leads the overhearer to believe. If he leads Zoe, a listener, to think she is guaranteed to have everything she needs to understand him, he is treating her as a side participant. If he gives her any reason to doubt this guarantee, he is treating her as an overhearer. In practice, the opportunity for collaboration makes a big difference. If Zoe feels she can check on what Alan meant through delayed or indirect collaboration, she can consider herself a side participant. If not, she can't be guaranteed of success, and she must consider herself an outsider. If she is an eavesdropper, that is, if she doesn't think Alan knows she is listening, she can't be sure he is making himself comprehensible to her. So, like it or not, Zoe is once again stuck with the conjecture schema.

Concealment

With concealment, Alan tries to deprive Oscar of enough evidence to conjecture correctly about what Alan means—at least about the *targeted parts* of what he means. For this, Alan must design his utterance so that Barbara understands, as usual, on the basis of CG(a,b), but on parts of CG(a,b) that are closed to Oscar. For Scenario A, he couldn't use 1', 2', or 3', for these are designed around open parts of CG(a,b). He might well use 1, 2, and 3. But if he did, he would be concealing only selected parts of what he was saying—in 1 who he was referring to with *Jack*, in 2 what he meant by *doing a house*, and in 3 what he was reminding Barbara of. He would be making no attempt to hide the fact in 1 that he was asking Barbara where someone or something was, or in 2 that he was doing something to three houses, or in 3 that he was ostensibly asking Barbara if she had ten dollars.

To conceal every last scrap of what he means, Alan would have to go to a lot more trouble. One way would be to use closed parts of communal common ground. If he and Barbara knew Japanese and he thought Oscar didn't, he could switch to Japanese. If he and Barbara were adults and he thought five-year-old Oscar didn't know how to spell, he could switch to spelling. If he and Barbara had the foresight, they could set up a special code ahead of time that would be part of CG(a,b) but impervious to Oscar's conjectures. Whether the talk is in Japanese, spelling, or spy codes, Oscar is still likely to identify pieces

In Clark, H. H. Arenas of *I and you* use the importance of what Alan means. Even if the pieces are of little importance. For example, any utterance that Alan openly addresses to Barbara would suggest that he is trying to communicate with her. With skill, Alan and Barbara may be able to forestall even this conjecture.

Just how easily Alan can conceal his meaning from Oscar depends on his knowledge of Barbara and Oscar. If both are strangers, and there are no obvious communities Alan and Barbara but not Oscar belongs to, concealment may be all but impossible. Where could Alan find parts of CG(a,b) that are closed to Oscar? It should also be difficult if Oscar is a friend and Barbara a stranger. Imagine asking directions from a stranger in an airport while trying to conceal what you are doing from your bystanding spouse. It won't be easy to find a piece of common ground with the stranger that is closed to your spouse. Concealment should also be tricky when Alan, Barbara, are Oscar are all intimate friends. They belong to most of the same cultural communities, have shared many of the same experiences, have talked about many more, and will be able to guess many of the rest. It should be hard to find a corner of CG(a,b) that is closed to Oscar. Concealment is probably easiest when Barbara is a friend and Oscar a stranger of an obvious type. In this case Alan and Barbara have vast areas of personal and communal common ground to work with.

Even in optimal circumstances, concealment isn't easy. In an experimental setting (Chapter 9, this volume), we gave pairs of Stanford University students each eight photographs of the Stanford campus and asked one of them, the director, to get the other, the matcher, to arrange them in a particular order. They were to do this all while not allowing an overhearer, also a Stanford student, to arrange his or her photographs in the right order. So the director and matcher had to conceal their references. The director and matcher were always friends, and the overhearer a stranger. Even so, they managed to conceal their references only 45% of the time. Why?

Try as they might, the director and matcher found it difficult to identify information that was *completely* closed to the overhearer. They were almost perfect at finding pieces of common ground that weren't known to the overhearer. Only once did the bystander happen to identify a person the director and matcher assumed he couldn't identify. What they misjudged was how deft the overhearer was at using other information to infer the references. Once when a director told a matcher *This is where someone wanted to put my teddy bear*, the overhearer was successful because there was only one picture of a thing where one might put a teddy bear.

Speakers can also conceal through the collaborative techniques they

normally use in conversation. In our study, the director and matcher's main strategy, as expected, was to seek, find, and then exploit closed parts of their common ground. They used collaborative tactics on top of this. Directors often began with queries like *Okay, remember in Hiltonhead* to establish areas of common ground before they keyed on them in their references. They also tried out exotic areas of their common ground, confident that their partners would ask for repairs if the areas were too obscure. They sometimes talked faster to make it hard for the overhearer; again, they relied on matchers asking for repairs if necessary. And, finally, once matchers believed they understood a reference, they would often cut directors off midsentence to keep them from revealing any more than they already had. All of these techniques were possible only through moment collaboration.

Disguisement

With concealment, overhearers normally see they are being kept in the dark. When Alan tells Barbara *You-know-who finally did you-know-what*, Oscar realizes that they don't want him to know who did what to whom. That may be a problem. Oscar may be offended that they think there are things he shouldn't know, even if he is an overhearer. Or they may not want Oscar to know they are gossiping. If so, they may want not merely to conceal what they are saying, but to disguise it as something else.

Disguisement is the most complicated attitude of all. In designing an utterance for Barbara, Alan must, as usual, depend on his common ground with her, CG(a,b). Then, to conceal his meaning from Oscar, he must key on closed parts of that common ground. But, also, to mislead him, he must key on open parts of that common ground. Disguisement is really the disclosure of a misrepresentation, and that takes careful engineering.

For an example, let us return to utterances 1, 2, and 3. To use them without change would merely conceal what Alan meant. To disclose a misrepresentation, Alan needs other information:

Scenario B. Everything in Scenario A is true. In addition, Jack McCall's nickname is Mac; Alan has been looking for Jack; and Alan and Barbara jokingly call Ludwig Beethoven Louis. Alan takes all this to be common ground to Barbara and him but *closed* to Oscar. Further, Mac is also the name of John Macleod, a good friend of Alan and Barbara's; and Louis Levesque is lecturing that night at the University. Alan takes this to be common ground to Barbara and him and *open* to Oscar.

Alan could overhear *H. Barbara* as well as *A* with a *public* wink:

1' *Where is the University of Chicago Press, 1992.*

2' *I just installed heating systems in three houses.*

3' *Do you have ten dollars for your Louis ticket?*

Barbara should interpret these utterances correctly (the same as 1, 2, and 3, or 1', 2', and 3'), but Oscar should interpret them incorrectly. He should take them to mean *Where is John Macleod?*, *Alan just installed three furnaces*, and *Do you have ten dollars for Louis Lefesque's lecture?* Further, he should have no reason to suspect Alan meant anything else. If Alan is successful, he will have deceived Oscar without Oscar realizing it.

What makes disguise so difficult is that the circumstances have to be just right for Alan simultaneously (a) to get Barbara to recognize what he means, (b) to conceal this from Oscar, and (c) to get Oscar to think he means something else. With Scenario B, we had to create a very special situation. It is hard to imagine how Alan could achieve these conditions if he, Barbara, and Oscar were all strangers, or if Barbara was a stranger and Oscar a friend. Like concealment, disguise should be easiest when Alan and Barbara are friends and Oscar is a stranger of an identifiable type. Also, it is hard enough to disguise parts of what is meant—such as references to people, places, or objects—and to disguise hints and other indirect speech acts. It is much harder to create larger disguises and sustain them.

In dealing with overhearers, then, Alan must make delicate judgments not only about his common ground with Barbara, but about his common ground with Oscar. Here are the areas we have identified for A, B, and O (speaker, addressee, and overhearer):

1. *A and B's common ground*: A's saying anything to B.
2. *Open parts of 1*: A's disclosure to O; A's disguise from O.
3. *Closed parts of 1*: A's concealment and disguise from O.
4. *A and O's common ground*: A's decision of whether or not to be indifferent to O.

Mutual beliefs, and conjectures about mutual beliefs, are crucial at every step in the process. It is hard to see how to deal with addressees and overhearers without them.

5 Uses of Audience Design

Speakers, as we have noted, have many goals in designing utterances. Their primary ones deal with addressees and side participants. Publicly, they may want to tell their addressees things, ask them questions,

offer them things, order them to do things. At the same time, they will inform the participants of what they are doing with their addressees. Privately, they may want to impress the participants, confuse them, get them to stop talking, or induce them to change topics, all without their goals becoming public. All these goals are generally recognized as influencing the design of utterances.

What is less well recognized are speakers' goals toward nonparticipants. These are what lead them to disclose, conceal, disguise, or be indifferent. When speakers conceal what they mean, their aim isn't merely to conceal what they mean. It is to do something by means of the concealment. What speakers can do with these four attitudes is in principle without limit, but it is instructive to look at examples. These examples highlight the possible uses of audience design and point up the deficiencies in theories that deal only with participants.

Indifference

Theories of language use that ignore overhearing—and almost all do—tacitly assume that the default attitude toward overhearers is indifference. They take for granted that speakers don't take overhearers into account unless they have to. Let us call this the *default attitude hypothesis*. At first blush, the hypothesis is plausible enough. Still, we suggest that it is incorrect.

The problem is that speakers cannot know whether to take overhearers into account without taking stock of the situation. As they plan an utterance, they must ask themselves, *Are there any overhearers around? If so, what effect will the utterance I am planning have on them? Will it offend, divulge a secret, or have any other untoward effects? Or they might ask, Could the utterance I am planning have untoward effects on anyone other than the participants? If so, are there any overhearers around who fit that description? If either series of questions ends in yes, speakers must choose an attitude other than indifference. Speakers cannot be indifferent without choosing not to disclose, conceal, or disguise.*

Indifference has its uses precisely because it contrasts with the other three attitudes. With it, speakers might show bystanders they have nothing to hide or disclose. In the right circumstances, they can confer status by reassuring bystanders that their presence isn't a problem—that they can be trusted with what is being said. In other circumstances, they can show bystanders that they are so unimportant that it doesn't matter whether or not they hear. In British novels, when a household gossip in front of the servants, they sometimes imply trust and sometimes imply insignificance. So overhearers can as-

sume speakers take. Helen Aschmann and I drew their inferences accordingly (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

Disclosure

What can speakers do by disclosing what they are saying? That depends on whether the overhearers are bystanders or eavesdroppers. Let us consider disclosure to bystanders first.

In a California restaurant, a man and a woman found themselves being served by an inept waitress. At one point, the waitress dropped the man's forks on the floor and took them away to replace them. When she returned with food, she didn't bring any new forks and gave no hint that she realized she had forgotten them. Just as she turned away and was still within earshot, the man said politely to his companion, *Could I use one of your forks?* When one of us questioned him after the waitress had left, he said he was just trying to be polite. He intended the waitress to hear him without recognizing that he had intended her to hear him. This way he could get her to bring a fork without having to confront her about her lapse in conduct.

In a California post office, a woman and her son were speaking German as they waited in line to be served by a postal clerk. When her turn came—one of us was behind her—she started rummaging through her purse and, while the clerk waited, turned to her son and asked, now in English, *What did I do with my wallet?* Apparently, she disclosed her question to the clerk to account for her delay in stepping up to the counter. She switched to English so he could understand and draw that inference.

When people have partners to talk to, as in the last two examples, it is easy to create utterances to be overheard. What if they are alone? They can always speak to themselves in what Goffman (1978) called *self-talk*. Suppose you are sitting at the counter of a cafe when you accidentally knock over a glass of water. You exclaim to yourself *Damn* just loud enough for the strangers on both sides to hear. But why talk to yourself here when it is considered impolite, even slightly deranged, to talk to oneself in public? According to Goffman, you do so to account for yourself to the bystanders. In uttering *Damn*, you show them you recognize your blunder and are still fully in control. You use disclosure to get the bystanders to draw just the right inferences. Self-talk of this type Goffman called *response cries*.

Response cries are an essential part of most spectator sports. In American football, when a quarterback muffs a handoff, or a receiver drops a pass, and they are clearly to blame, they are obliged to do a little theater. They put on a hangdog look, stare at the ground

or into the sky, beat one fist into the other palm, and, under their breath but clearly enough for the television audience to identify, utter a juicy expletive. Their aim isn't just to exclaim to themselves—if it is that at all. It is to disclose their disappointment to the spectators—to show them they recognize their blunder. Television audiences must enjoy these theatrics, for television cameras invariably focus on the quarterback and receiver for their reactions. What would football be without it?

Disclosure can be used for quite a different purpose with eavesdroppers. If you think your superior, say Verona, might overhear you, it may serve your purpose to disclose information that is flattering or critical. Your disclosure would be most effective if she were eavesdropper—if she thought you didn't know she was listening in. As a bystander, she could suspect you of calculated effects. As an eavesdropper, she would have more reason to take your statements as sincere. In a study by Walster and Festinger (1960), overhearers were more persuaded by what they heard if they were eavesdroppers than if they were bystanders.

Disclosure can also be used in teasing. In a technique described by Phillips (1975), one boy A was telling a second boy B a number of things that were false. The real audience, however, wasn't B, but a third boy, O, a bystander, to whom A was disclosing all this information and who knew it to be false. With this technique, A and O could play a joke on B at his expense and without his knowledge.

Concealment

If Alan wants to tell Barbara something but keep it from Oscar, he has several options. He might postpone telling her, or whisper, or scribble a note to her. If these options are impractical—he is on the telephone and he has to tell her now—he may have to speak but conceal what he is saying.

The most extensive use of concealment is probably for transmitting diplomatic, military, and commercial information. There are many schemes for encrypting written messages between diplomats, between spies, between commanders, and between banks. There are audio scramblers for encrypting telephone signals between government officials, and video scramblers for encrypting television transmissions to paying customers. All of these devices are meant to keep overhearers from identifying the information being passed. And they don't conceal the fact that they are concealing.

In World War II, the American military discovered a simpler method of concealment with the use of Navaho (Kahn 1967). Although thousands of Navahos spoke the language, the military assumed only a

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Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

designs an utterance for Barbara alone, he has to take their common ground into account. She is to recognize what he means by considering his utterance against their current common ground. To deal with Oscar at the same time, Alan has to work with areas of his and Barbara's common ground that are open or closed to Oscar. For disclosure and disguise, he needs to exploit the open parts, and for concealment and disguise, the closed parts. Without working from their common ground, Alan cannot guarantee that Barbara will recognize what he means while at the same time disclosing, concealing, or disguising it for Oscar.

How does Alan carry out these complex plans? About this, almost nothing is known. Dealing with Barbara and Carl alone is complicated enough. Adding Oscar should make the process more elaborate. One thing is certain. Theories about everything from utterance formulation to Gricean implicatures will change once they accept that speakers deal with overhearers and side participants as well as addressees.