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Language as Social Action: Social Psychology and Language Use by Thomas M. Holtgraves. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2002,xii+232 pp.

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Given the diversity and number of disciplines that take an interest in the social aspects of language use, providing an interdisciplinary perspective on this topic would be a challenging prospect for many scholars. Holtgraves, a social psychologist, meets this challenge in an admirable fashion. The book's stated aim, as outlined in the introductory chapter "The Social Bases of Language and Linguistic Underpinnings of Social Behavior," is to approach the topic of language use as social action from an interdisciplinary viewpoint, and the material covered is an impressive, wide ranging synthesis of research from the fields of philosophy, linguistics, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, anthropology, and cognitive and social psychology. Fundamental to the approach taken is the reciprocal relationship between language and social context: How the social dimensions of language cannot be ignored and how social psychological processes are mediated by language. A chapter is devoted to each of five major themes of language use: language as action, language as interpersonal action, language as contextualized action, language as coordinated action, and language as thoughtful action.

Chapter One, "Speech Acts and Intentions: The Things We Do With Words," reviews the core aspects of speech act theory, starting with Austin's (1962) fundamental insight in explicating the pragmatic function of language, and moving onto a description of Searle's (1969) speech act taxonomy and felicity conditions. A discussion that may be of more interest to those already familiar with the basic tenets of speech act theory is intentionality. e.c. how hearers recognize illocutionary force is a problematic issue, particularly in the case of indirect speech acts, where the intended illocutionary force differs from the literal illocutionary force. Two contrasting approaches are considered: those that assume inferential processing, e.g., Grice's (1975) theory of conversational implicatures, and those that suggest a direct or idiomatic approach to recognition. Holtgraves observes that illocutionary force interpretation has been studied much less than illocutionary force production, and regards this lack of attention paid to the hearer as a deficit in speech act theory's social credentials.

Language as interpersonal action is addressed in the next two chapters. Chapter Two, "The Interpersonal Underpinnings of Talk: Face Management and Politeness," considers the interpersonal aspects of language production. A succinct review of Brown and Levinson's (1987) influential politeness theory model is provided, with a discussion of the concept of face, face-threatening acts, and the

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strategies used by interlocutors when they engage in face-work. Holtgraves then describes subsequent research in the areas where Brown and Levinson failed to provide sufficient evidence: the ordering of politeness strategies, the effect of social variables on politeness, and the conceptualization of face. He concludes that a gap exists in the literature on the possible role of politeness in language comprehension.

Turning away from language production, Chapter Three, "The Interpersonal Consequences of Talk: Impression Management and Person Perception," presents research on how language mediates two core concepts in social psychology: person perception (how we perceive others and vice versa) and impression management (how we strategically vary our talk to affect the perception that others have of us). Since verbal interactions are a prime source of information used in forming and managing impressions, Holtgraves contends that greater insight into these social psychological processes can be achieved if the language in such interactions is examined. He identifies two types of language variation that demonstrate his point. The first is social variation, where a language variable (e.g., accent) is linked to some form of group membership (e.g., social class) and so can be used in forming (possibly stereotypical) impressions. The second is stylistic variation, where, based on the associations above, speakers make linguistic choices to influence how others see them.

Chapter Four, "Conversational Structure," turns to language as collective action. In particular, the chapter underlines the importance of the sequential context of utterances and examines how interlocutors achieve coherence in their interactions through collaborative action. It deals primarily with the origins, methodology, and fundamental findings of Conversation Analysis (CA). According to the author, the major insight of CA is the principle of sequential implicativeness, since it foregrounds the significance of utterance context. This principle also contributes to the theories presented in earlier chapters of the book. For example, it adds to Grice's formulation of implicatures in that it specifies a particular instance—the absence of the second part of an adjacency pair—when inferencing may be triggered. Although not explicitly noted, CA's concern with demonstrating the mutual orientation of participants to the talk certainly addresses the lack of attention paid to the hearer in speech act theory. Overall, however, Holtgraves seems to be only lukewarm in his assessment of CA, contending that it has a limited contribution to make towards a *psychological* model of language production and comprehension because (a) CA does not address the potential interpersonal reasons for why conversational structure exists as it does, (b) the focus on talk alone ignores the psychological aspects of the interpretation process, and (c) the methodological stance leads to doubts about the realistic possibility of a purely inductive approach and the generalizability of findings. Arguably, the relevance of these points to the CA research agenda is questionable. Despite an endeavor to orientate to diverse research traditions, all researchers are perhaps inextricably tied to the biases of their own theoretical and epistemological backgrounds.

The theme of language as coordinated action is taken up in Chapter Five,

"Conversational Perspective Taking." This chapter discusses how utterance production and interpretation requires both speaker and recipient to take into account the other's perspective. Holtgraves summarizes the empirical evidence on perspective taking, and in interpreting the findings he suggests that mutual perspective taking is necessary for successful language use. He also suggests that such common ground, although difficult to document in empirical studies, is established and displayed in talk rather than being a precursor to interaction. Applied linguists may be particularly interested in how the author posits the central importance of perspective taking in the discussion of Gricean conversational maxims, politeness strategies, and intercultural (mis)communication.

The final theme, language as thoughtful action, is addressed in Chapter Six, "Language and Social Thought." This chapter examines the much-debated relationship between language and human cognition. Holtgraves shows how early empirical research on the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, particularly relating to the universality of color perception, led to the rejection of linguistic determinism. However, he goes on to argue that language plays a much greater role in the social cognitive domain of person perception via lexical choice constraints, the implicit causality effects of certain verbs, and conversational pragmatic principles. The reader with little background in social psychology may find this complex chapter the most challenging of the book, since some of the terms may be unfamiliar to outsiders. More explicit, fuller explanations would have been desirable. Nevertheless, through the tying of unfamiliar concepts to familiar issues in applied linguistics, the author ensures that the arguments presented are thought-provoking and relevant enough to encourage a sustained reader effort.

The concluding chapter, "Summary: Language as Social Action," begins with a useful integrative summary of the five themes and then returns to the fundamental ideas presented in the introduction. First, language use is of central importance to many social psychological processes, and their analyses can be illuminated by the use of linguistic concepts such as illocutionary force, implicatures, and adjacency pairs. Four core social psychological research areas (person perception and impression management, social reasoning, attitudes and prejudice, and aggression and altruism) in which research has shown, and could show, the centrality of language processes are examined. Second, recognition of the socially situated nature of interaction draws attention to the social (psychological) bases of language use. The author concludes that the interpersonal aspects of utterance comprehension and production cannot be ignored in research.

This is certainly an accessible and well-written book. It is more than a competent response to Holtgraves' own perceptive comment, "Language is truly an [*sic*] multidisciplinary topic; unfortunately it is not often an interdisciplinary topic" (p. 1). The author achieves clarity in explanation with insightful parallels and differences drawn between the different bodies of work. The stated aim of providing an interdisciplinary perspective on language use is achieved by enabling the reader to view familiar concepts and theories through a social psychological lens.

In terms of scope, Holtgraves does not cover the area of work that has become known as discourse analysis in social psychology (DASP), arguing that its primarily anti-experimental stance is in conflict with the book's openness to all methodologies. DASP (as described by Wood & Kroger, 2000) posits that psychological concepts of how people categorize the world should be understood through the discourse that produces them. Language is central in *constituting* psychological phenomena that have traditionally been thought of as individual and mental processes, and does not merely *reflect* those processes. For example, when you wrinkle up your nose or say "I hate spinach" when presented with a plate of spinach, neither action nor utterance merely reflects your underlying attitude (i.e., indicates a cognitive or mental structure), but instead your attitude is constituted in your utterance or action (Wood & Kroger). Given the centrality of language to DASP and the commonality of many of its assumptions and goals with the other approaches in this book, its inclusion would have been appropriate and welcomed. Furthermore, barring it on the grounds that it is anti-experimental could be questioned because CA also does not draw from experimental data. However, the decision not to include it is by no means a significant detraction from the book's quality or usefulness.

Considering the integrated nature of discussion throughout the book, it is probably best read from beginning to end rather than as a selective reading of chapters. It is highly recommended for students and researchers who wish to further their knowledge of the social psychological aspects of language use and for those interested in how an interdisciplinary awareness can foster new research questions.

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