

Predicting Language Function: Looking Beyond Form

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The functions of linguistic items are often not predictable simply from a consideration of their forms. Choose an authentic written or spoken text and discuss how this text demonstrates this lack of predictability.

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1. Introduction

Sentence linguists and discourse analysts focus on language from different perspectives (Cook, 1989: 12). Both aim to gain a better understanding of language; however, discourse analysts view language in the context where communication actually occurs. Consideration of this variable, as well as others such as intonation and the relationship between participants, creates uncountable examples of how the functions of utterances cannot be reliably predicted based on their forms alone. This paper will first review the literature regarding this phenomenon, and then proceed to demonstrate this point by examining excerpts from an authentic piece of written text. Finally, this essay will conclude with a brief discussion of notable implications for my students.

2. Grammatical and Contextual Approaches to Language

2.1. Grammatical Approach

There are various approaches or ways to look at or analyze language. Sentence linguists create or alter utterances in order to understand language patterns through grammatically acceptable, isolated sentences (Cook, 1989: 12). Through this, a thorough description at the level of grammar has been formed. At its top rank, the sentence dominates, and below that exists the clause, which includes the familiar labels declarative, imperative, and interrogative. Under this rank scale, developed by Halliday, all sentences can be disassembled into clauses, then groups, words and morphemes, and vice versa. This traditional view of language has given teachers a systematic way of explaining and dissecting the English language; however, as the field

of linguistics has continued to evolve, grammar alone has not been able to successfully or convincingly explain the patterns in language above the level of the sentence.

2.2. Contextual Approach

According to Coulthard and Brazil, 'all this suggests strongly that an artificial ceiling has been reached' (1992: 60). In response to this dilemma, a new level of language was formed. Discourse, defined as 'language which has been produced as the result of an act of communication', is larger than the sentence and refers to language used in both speech and writing, e.g. conversations and essays (Richards and Schmidt, 2002: 160). As stated by Sinclair, McHardy and Brazil, '...when the sentence becomes part of a text, or becomes an utterance in a conversation, it acquires an ability to *do* something: to be active as communication.' (1982: 13). This view of language was embraced by J.L. Austin, who claimed that 'every utterance is some sort of performance of an action' (Sinclair, McHardy and Brazil, 1982: 19).

These discourse analysts and others believed it necessary to study authentic language in context in order to gain insight into what language does or what function a particular piece of language serves and how meaning is achieved (Cook, 1989: 12; Brazil, 1995: 5). By attending to context, they have found that different forms can accomplish the same function and vice versa (Thornbury, 1999: 7). For example, all of the following have the same function: to get the door closed.

- (Declarative) Flat mate A: John, the door's open.
Flat mate B: Oh, sorry.
- (Interrogative) Co-worker A: John, would you close the door?
Co-worker B: Sure.
- (Imperative) Superior: John, shut the door.
Subordinate: Yes, sir.

The previous examples also point to the importance of the broader meaning of context.

Succinctly stated by McCarthy, there exists 'the fact that function is arrived at with reference to the *participants*, *roles* and *settings* in any discourse, and that linguistic forms are interpreted in light of these' (1991: 18). In order to gain a fuller picture of how this is achieved, discourse analysts have approached the study of discourse from a variety of perspectives, more specifically from a philosophical, sociological, and linguistic point of view.

2.2.1. Philosophical

Austin claimed that when speaking, one could 'perform three acts simultaneously': a locutionary act, which is related to meaning; an illocutionary act, which is a linguistic act related to force or intention; and a perlocutionary act, which is a non-linguistic act related to the results of the utterance or the effects on the listener (in Coulthard, 1985: 18).

Act A or Locution:

He said to me 'Shoot her' meaning by 'shoot' shoot and referring by 'her' to her.

Act B or Illocution:

He urged (or advised, ordered, etc.) me to shoot her.

Act C or Perlocution:

He persuaded me to shoot her.

(Example reproduced from Coulthard, 1985: 18)

Austin emphasized the importance of the illocutionary act or speaker's intention; however, in successful interaction, much depends on how the listener comprehends or interprets what the speaker says. Searle recognized this fact and redefined the illocutionary act as 'a product of the listener's interpretation' (Coulthard, 1985: 22).

The Speech Act theory of Austin and Searle is not without problems, one of which is 'explaining how and when the grammatical moods declarative, interrogative and imperative do *not* realize the macro-functions statement, question and directive' (Coulthard, 1985: 26). One explanation of this well-recognized lack of a one-to-one form-function fit is what Searle calls indirect speech acts, which are acts performed indirectly through other speech acts. For example, the declarative 'I'm hungry' can function, among many others, as a directive for someone to cook dinner; however, Searle does not expand upon how listeners can accurately determine the intended functions of a speaker's utterance (Coulthard, 1985: 28).

Addressing this point, Grice proposed the Cooperative Principle, whereby participants work together in order to achieve a common goal in conversation (Jaworski and Coupland, 1999: 17), and the four Conversational Maxims of quantity, quality,

relevance and manner (Brown, 2000: 257). By defining these maxims and noticing transgressions of them, the process of how listeners can reach an understanding of the underlying meaning of utterances has become more transparent. Again, this 'theory of inference' (Coulthard, 1985: 32) is only a beginning; however, the knowledge that

...listeners are expected to meet speakers half-way in seeking to respond to what they mean and not necessarily to what they say is important partly because it helps to explain how listeners cope with the apparently very loose relationship between form and function. (Brazil, 1995: 108).

2.2.2. Sociological

Related to the ideas about speakers' intentions and listeners' interpretations is Hymes' ethnography of speaking. The aim of this endeavor is to identify what is appropriate in conversation by, first, defining a particular speech community or 'group which shares both linguistic resources and rules for interaction and interpretation' (Coulthard, 1985: 35), and then identifying a set of rules which apply to that particular community; however, actually defining a particular speech community has proven to be an idealistic task. Despite this set back, Hymes' work on speech events does shed light on the numerous factors that can affect the relationship between form and function. Eight points listed by Hymes are: 1) situation, 2) participants, 3) ends, 4) act, 5) key, 6) instrumentalities, 7) norms of interaction, and 8) genres (Jaworski and Coupland, 1999: 26-27).

Another discourse theory that addresses factors beyond form is Goffman's notion of face developed by Brown and Levinson. Briefly stated, face is related to how people are emotionally involved in the utterances they send or receive and 'many aspects of utterance form can be explained in terms of speakers attempting to defuse or mitigate a Face Threatening Act (FTA)' (Coulthard, 1985: 50). This notion can help to explain 'the convoluted departures from plain speaking found in every society that are called politeness' (Pinker, 1994: 230) and can be seen in action in exchanges where speakers use indirect speech acts in order to make requests or disagree. Essentially, speakers 'do not always "say what they mean"' in an effort to be polite (Jaworski and Coupland, 1999: 29) and because of this, listeners must infer what is indirectly stated or implied in order to uncover the function or intention of the speakers words. In order to do so, the listener must consider what is known, what has been said previously, and what is expected to come in the conversation according to the norms of conversation.

These are factors also considered in Conversational Analysis. Three pioneers in this field, Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, examined social interaction in conversation in hopes of understanding the organization of conversation (Coulthard, 1985: 59). Through this endeavor, concepts such as adjacency pairs and insertion sequences have helped to explain how conversation is structured (Coulthard and Brazil, 1992: 51-52; McCarthy, 1991: 24); however, like the ethnography of speaking, Conversational Analysis lacks a consistent 'overall descriptive framework' (Coulthard and Brazil, 1992: 55) which means that there then lies the possibility of an endless number of

categories. In order to provide a viable model for discourse analysis, conversational analysts must consider or define what units will be included in their framework and how these units will relate to each other (Coulthard and Brazil, 1992: 56).

2.2.3. Linguistic

One modal of discourse analysis that has attempted to represent language at a higher-level, i.e. above the level of the sentence, which also attends to situational factors, from a linguistic framework, is the seminal work originally developed by Sinclair and Coulthard (Coulthard, 1985: 120). Based on Halliday's grammatical theory that units of language could be organized on a rank-scale (Coulthard, 1985: 120-121), Sinclair and Coulthard proceeded to examine language above the level of the sentence between teachers and students in the classroom (Willis, 1992: 177-178).

Among the ranks of transaction, exchange, move, and act, it is especially necessary to mention the exchange, more specifically, the three-move eliciting exchange. This exchange is comprised of an Initiation, Response, and Follow-up move, and its importance lies in its frequency in classroom discourse. One reason for the frequent occurrence of the IRF exchange is due to the type of question that teachers ask (McCarthy, 1991: 125).

(Initiation)	T: What time is it?
(Response)	S: Five.
(Follow-up)	T: That's right. It's five o'clock.

This type of question is one to which the teacher already knows the answer. The function of such questions is to elicit the students' knowledge of the language and therefore, the questions are not genuine. In the context of the classroom, the follow-up, 'That's right.', is not only acceptable, but essential (Hewings, 1992: 185). In any other situation, one might expect to hear a 'Thanks' or 'Oh wow. I'd better get going'.

According to Sinclair *et al.*, this understanding of what is and is not acceptable can be more systematically expressed by interpreting utterances according to its situation and tactics. By which,

Situation refers to all relevant factors in the environment, social conventions and the shared experience of the participants, while tactics handles the syntagmatic patterns of discourse, the way in which items precede, follow and are related to each other. (Coulthard, 1985: 129).

Sinclair and Coulthard's model of discourse analysis offered a way to understand how different forms realized different functions in the tightly controlled discourse of the classroom; however, 'different situations will require different formulae, depending on roles and settings' (McCarthy, 1991: 17) and the complexity of discourse outside of classroom necessitated a change in the complexity of the exchange structure: I (R/I) R (F) (Coulthard and Brazil, 1992: 72). Due to a lack of space, this adapted version of the Sinclair and Coulthard model will not be detailed (See Francis and Hunston, 1992:

123-161 for more details); however, it is worth mentioning that this evolution of the exchange structure was designed to create a more flexible model so that it could be used to include the analysis of everyday conversation.

Finally, to further strengthen or compliment the Sinclair and Coulthard model in analysing discourse to uncover how meaning is achieved is Brazil's model of intonation. As stated by Halliday, 'If you change the intonation of a sentence you change its meaning' (Coulthard, 1985: 99). A simple example of intonation contour (Richards and Schmidt, 2002: 272) follows:

It's at 7:30 (falling intonation) (statement)

It's at 7:30 (rising intonation) (question)

Of course, a closer examination reveals a much more complex enterprise. Beginning with Halliday's ideas on intonation and meaning, Brazil created a model that was compatible with Sinclair and Coulthard's model of discourse analysis. Unlike the Hallidayan model, which linked intonational choices to the grammatical clause, Brazil claimed that 'the intonational divisions speakers make in their utterances are motivated by the need to add moment-by-moment situationally-specific meanings to particular words or groups of words' (Coulthard, 1985: 100).

Brazil saw each tone unit or group as having four options: prominence, tone, key, and termination (Coulthard, 1985: 101) and describes how an utterance's function can be

affected by these options. States Hewings, ‘without analysis of the intonational characteristics of any utterance in discourse, the ability accurately to interpret its pragmatic function is much reduced’ (Hewings, 1992: 196). At the same time, however, it is not possible to give accurately specific meanings to these intonational choices (Coulthard, 1985: 96). According to Crystal, even ‘native speakers find it virtually impossible to agree when matching attitudinal labels with intonation contours’ (Coulthard, 1985: 98). In sum, these options must ‘interact with other factors such as syntax, lexis, non-verbal communication and the context itself’ (McCarthy, 1991: 104) in order to fully appreciate or understand the functions of particular utterances.

3. Demonstration of Form-Function Unpredictability

As detailed above, many linguists from various backgrounds have provided a variety of theories and frameworks to explain and illustrate the well-accepted point that form alone cannot predict the functions of linguistic items. Rather, it is essential to consider other factors, both linguistic and situational, among which participants’ inescapably subjective and individual natures are key. In order to further exemplify the complexity and lack of predictability of function from form in discourse, an examination of Philip and Miss Abbott’s first and final conversations in E.M. Forster’s *Where Angels Fear to Tread* will be presented. Of particular emphasis in this examination is how the participants’ changing roles and relationship affects their discourse.

3.1. Synopsis of E.M. Forster’s *Where Angels Fear to Tread*

In E.M. Forster's *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, two acquaintances, Philip Herriton and Caroline Abbott, are forced into a situation that creates the opportunity for their relationship to become more intimate. Below is a synopsis:

When a young English widow takes off on the grand tour and along the way marries a penniless Italian, her in-laws are not amused. That the marriage should fail and poor Lilia die tragically are only to be expected. But that Lilia should have had a baby – and that the baby should be raised as an Italian! – are matters requiring immediate correction by Philip Herriton, his dour sister Harriet, and their well-meaning friend Miss Abbott. (Forster, 1920: Back cover).

3.2. Background: First Conversation

In their first conversation at the beginning of the novel, Philip and Ms. Abbott are mere acquaintances. Ms. Abbott, who had gone to Italy with Lilia, meets Philip at the train station. Together, they head towards Monteriano, where the initial problem of Lilia's engagement awaits. In this conversation, the communication is mainly transactional and Philip is clearly the dominant speaker. (See Appendix 1 for a reproduction of the entire conversation)

3.3. Examination: Excerpts from the First Conversation

Philip: Are we to talk it over now?

Miss Abbott: Certainly, please. If you will be so very kind.

Philip: Then how long has she been engaged?

Miss Abbott: A short time – quite a short time.

Philip: I should like to know how long, if you can remember.

Miss Abbott: Exactly eleven days.

The conversation starts without a verbal greeting, which emphasizes the distance between Philip and Miss. Abbott as well as the fact that Philip has come unwillingly to Italy on family business. Instead, the first words spoken come from Philip in the form of an interrogative, ‘Are we to talk it over now?’. In fact, his question is actually a command. By using an indirect speech act, he is able to lessen the severity of a Face Threatening Act while still making his intention of wanting to know about Lilia’s current situation known. It is also an attempt by Philip to gain Miss Abbott’s confidence and encourage her to be honest. Miss Abbott recognizes this intention as well as his role as dominant speaker by responding affirmatively, then reinforcing her understanding by saying, ‘if you will be so very kind’. With their roles established, he proceeds to interrogate her by presenting her with a series of questions.

He begins by asking, ‘Then how long has she been engaged?’; however, Miss Abbott fails to answer the question sufficiently by responding with a vague answer, “A short time – quite a short time”. Her vague answer may be in part due to her reluctance to break the Gricean maxim of quality. She knows Lilia is already married to Carella and understands that Philip is unaware of this. Had he known and had he also been interested in the length of Lilia’s engagement, he might have used the form, ‘How long HAD she been engaged?’.

Philip is unsatisfied by Miss Abbott's response and restates the question as a request.

Again, his request is in fact a command, and by restating it, he is emphasizing his desire for not only a more specific answer, but also his own awareness of his dominant role in the conversation. Miss Abbott, after some thought, makes a complete breach of the maxim of quality and lies to Philip. Satisfied with her answer and with his dominance reasserted, the conversation continues:

Philip: How long have you been here?

Miss Abbott: Close to three weeks.

Philip: Did you know him before you came?

Miss Abbott: No.

Philip: Oh! Who is he?

Miss Abbott: A native of the place.

As he continues to ask a series of direct questions, she no longer provides ambiguous answers. Her answers are direct and she makes no effort to offer any further details.

She has submitted to his questions and has allowed him to take complete control of the conversation.

Philip: I understood they met at the hotel.

Miss Abbott: It was a mistake of Mrs. Theobald's.

Philip: I also understand that he is a member of the Italian nobility.

Miss Abbott: (no reply)

Philip: May I be told his name?

Miss Abbott: Carella.

Philip: Carella? Conte or Marchese, or what?

Miss Abbott: Signor.

At this point, Philip changes the form of his questions. 'I understood they met at the hotel' in form is a declarative; however, the function of this utterance is to clarify or confirm what he knows. Miss Abbott disconfirms what Philip has said, but does not provide the correct details of how Lilia and Carella met. Again, Philip uses a declarative to serve as a question, 'Is he really a member of the Italian nobility?'. This time Miss Abbott's lack of a response allows her to avoid violating the Gricean maxim of quality; however, her silence also provides Philip with the probable answer to his question. He then proceeds to rephrase the question, 'May I be told his name?'. She answers his question simply by providing only a surname, but does not provide the information Philip is requiring of her. Finally, he restates his question by demanding that she provide his title.

Philip: Perhaps I bore you with these questions. If so, I will stop.

Miss Abbott: Oh, no, please; not at all. I am here – my own idea – to give all information which you very naturally – and to see if somehow – please ask anything you like.

Here Philip makes the offer, 'If I am boring you with these questions, I will stop'; however, Miss Abbott cannot accept the offer and inform Philip that she would like the questioning to stop. The function of Philip's utterance is to reprimand Miss Abbott for her unwillingness and Miss Abbott responds appropriately by reassuring him of his

dominant position. Her utterance then functions as not only a reassurance, but also an apology.

Philip: Then how old is he?

Miss Abbot: Oh, quite young. Twenty-one, I believe.

Philip: Good Lord!

Miss Abbott: One would never believe it. He looks much older.

Philip: And is he good-looking?

Miss Abbott: Very good-looking. All his features are good, and he is well built – though I dare say English standards would find him too short.

This is the first time Miss Abbott uses a speech marker and indicates the beginning of a change in her utterances. In addition, Philip's exclamation, 'Good Lord!' is the first time he expresses surprise rather than disapproval. He does not ask her another question, yet she begins to provide further detail in Carella's defense. Philip then asks her an irrelevant question, 'And is he good-looking?'. She does not seem to notice its irrelevance, proceeds to answer the question in greater detail and becomes emboldened enough to include her own opinion. This breach of the maxim of quantity signals the beginning of Philip's efforts to reinstate his dominance. The conversation continues as such, Miss Abbott becoming more flustered in her attempts to defend Carella and Philip growing more impatient, until Philip decides to end his interrogation and turn to other topics.

Miss Abbott: Stop! I'll tell you no more.

Philip: Really, Miss Abbott, it is a little late for reticence. You have equipped me admirably!

Miss Abbott: I'll tell you not another word!

Although this conversation was mainly transactional,

...human communication is not just a transfer of information like two fax machines connected with a wire; it is a series of alternating displays of behavior by sensitive, scheming, second-guessing, social animals. (Pinker, 1994: 230).

Philip and Miss Abbott illustrate this point admirably as their utterances range from Philip's highly-controlled indirect command, 'Are we to talk it over now?' to Miss Abbott's imperative, 'Stop! I'll tell you no more', which functions as a request or plea, rather than a command. Moreover, had Philip and Miss Abbott viewed each other as equals, this transaction of information would have probably been a discussion rather than an interrogation.

3.4. Background: Final Conversation

In their final conversation at the end of the novel, Philip and Ms. Abbott have developed a great friendship. This time, they are on the train with Monteriano and the tragic resolution left behind. In this conversation, the communication is mainly interactional, and Philip and Miss Abbott are basically equal speakers; although it could be argued that Miss Abbott is perhaps unknowingly the dominant speaker because of Philip's feelings of love towards her. (See Appendix 2 for a reproduction of the entire conversation)

3.5. Examination: Excerpts from the Final Conversation

Philip: ...Certainly I was the only person he had to be kind to; he was so distressed not to make Harriet's acquaintance, and that he scarcely saw anything of you. In his letter he says so again.

Miss Abbott: Thank him, please, when you write and give him my kindest regards.

Philip: Indeed I will.

The conversation begins with Philip raising the topic of Gino Carella and their fiasco in Monteriano, which they had just left behind. Philip is curious as to why Gino 'scarcely saw anything of' Miss Abbott; however, rather than questioning her directly, he only makes mention of it in reference to Gino's letter. She chooses not to offer an explanation and terminates his inquiry by saying, 'Thank him, please, when you write and give him my kindest regards.'. As equal interlocutors, he accepts her response even though he does not understand and does not pursue the topic.

Miss Abbott: When will you see him again?" she asked.

Philip: I hope next spring. Perhaps we shall paint Siena red for a day or two with some of the new wife's money. It was one of the arguments for marrying her.

Miss Abbott: He has no heart. He does not really mind about the child at all.

Philip: No; you're wrong. He does. He is unhappy, like the rest of us. But he doesn't try to keep up appearances as we do. He knows that the things that have made him happy once will probably make him happy again.

Miss Abbott: He said he would never be happy again.

Philip: In his passion. Not when he was calm. We English say it when we are calm—when we do not really believe it any longer. Gino is not ashamed of inconsistency. It is one of the many things I like him for.

Miss Abbott: Yes; I was wrong. That is so.

As equal interlocutors, Miss Abbott also recognizes her right to ask questions and shift the focus of conversation from Gino and Miss Abbott to Gino and Philip. This leads to a discussion of Gino's character where their newly found relationship becomes apparent. To Miss Abbott's statement, 'He does not really mind about the child at all.', Philip openly disagrees with her by issuing an unelicited declarative, 'No; you're wrong.'. He goes on to say, '[Gino] knows that the things that have made him happy once will probably make him happy again.', which Miss Abbott directly and immediately contradicts by saying, 'He said he would never be happy again.'.

Incongruent to their first conversation, Philip is now defending Gino to Miss Abbott and finally, Miss Abbott concedes.

Philip: He's much more honest with himself than I am and he is honest without an effort and without pride. But you, Miss Abbott, what about you? Will you be in Italy next spring?

Miss Abbott: No.

Philip: I'm sorry. When will you come back, do you think?

Miss Abbott: I think never.

Philip: For whatever reason?

Miss Abbott: Because I understand the place. There is no need.

Philip: Understand Italy!

Miss Abbott: Perfectly.

Philip: Well, I don't. And I don't understand you.

Philip abruptly tries to change the topic back to Miss Abbott; however, he is unsuccessful in gaining satisfactory answers to his questions. His question, 'Will you

be in Italy next spring?', although a yes/no interrogative, requires further clarification and necessitates follow-up questions after Miss Abbot responds with a sparing, 'No.'. Throughout this segment of conversation, her brief answers cause Philip greater frustration until he finally mutters, 'I don't understand you.', gives up, and wanders away from her. She is successful in thwarting his efforts to gain a truer understanding of her feelings.

Philip: ...Unless, of course, you talk about Harriet and make a scandal. So that is my plan—London and work. What is yours?

Miss Abbott: Poor Harriet! As if I dare judge Harriet! Or anybody.

After the resumption of their conversation, Philip asks Miss Abbott about her future plans, this time directly; however, this time Miss Abbott completely disregards his question and reacts to Philip's earlier utterance regarding Harriet. She takes offense to his improbable accusation and momentarily excuses herself from the conversation.

Although Miss Abbott continues to deflect Philip's questions, he persists and she finally accepts his topic. As their conversation develops and becomes of a more personal and intimate nature, knowledge of their relationship and shared experiences continues to be an essential part in understanding each particular utterance.

Philip: I'm clear enough about Harriet's future, and about parts of my own. But I ask again, What about yours?

Miss Abbott: Sawston and work.

Philip: No.

Miss Abbot:: Why not?

When Miss Abbott finally informs Philip of her future plans, he replies, 'No.'. She does not ask him for his opinion or his approval, nor does he have the right to deny her plan. She understands his response as disapproval and although she will not alter her plans, she does inquire for clarification.

Miss Abbott: We can write at all events.

Philip: You will write?

Miss Abbott: I will indeed.

The imperative form of Philip's utterance, 'You will write', undoubtedly functions as a question. Aside from the obvious use of punctuation and an assumed rising tone, by considering Miss Abbott's previous inform, it would seem likely for Philip to confirm rather than to follow with an inappropriate command.

Miss Abbott: Yes. I'm terribly lonely, or I wouldn't speak. I think you must know already.

Philip: Perhaps I do. Perhaps I could speak instead. But if you will say the word plainly you'll never be sorry; I will thank you for it all my life.

Miss Abbott: That I love him.

Philip: Rather! I love him too! When I can forget how he hurt me that evening. Though whenever we shake hands—

Miss Abbott: You've upset me. I thought I was past all this. You're taking it wrongly. I'm in love with Gino—don't pass it off—I mean it crudely—you know what I mean. So laugh at me.

Philip: Laugh at love?

Miss Abbott's statement, 'That I love him', is incomplete and cannot be understood without reference to her previous utterance, 'I think you must know already.' Philip misunderstands her declaration of love and also proclaims his platonic love for Gino. From this misinterpretation, their conversation goes awry. Miss Abbott then interprets Philip's response as a joke or teasing and reproaches him for his insensitivity. At this point, Philip understands the devastatingly disappointing meaning of her earlier declaration.

As he listens to the details of her blossoming love, he finds himself to blame for his unfortunate position. Philip is from then certain not to show his true face as he realizes that breaking the Gricean maxim of relevance would serve no purpose. With nothing left to say, Philip closes the conversation by saying, 'Thank you. Thank you for everything.'

4. Discussion/Conclusion

As demonstrated above, a one-to-one form-function match does not exist. In fact, states Brown,

A single sentence or conversation might incorporate many different functions simultaneously. Yet it is the understanding of how to use linguistic forms to achieve these functions of language that comprises the crux of second language learning. (2000: 252).

Many of my students, who have spent much time focusing on language at the level of grammar, exemplify this point as they are not able to accurately distinguish what is said and what is meant, and produce what is appropriate or expected in a particular context. For example, my students often have difficulty with register or style (Richards and Schmidt, 2002: 522) and are too direct. Rutherford notes that the possible reason for this is 'the general tendency for all language learners initially to 'bend' the target language to the extent that form and meaning relationships are rendered as direct as possible.' (Rutherford, 1987: 45); however, this also leads to an inappropriate or unnatural use of language. Moreover, students often do not respond in an appropriate way. For example,

A: Did you have a good weekend?

B: Yes, I did. (Silence)

In this example, the student's answer, although grammatically well formed, is unsatisfactory as the speaker's intention may have been to inquire about the contents and quality of the listener's weekend.

In order to help students become more capable interlocutors, an understanding of how appropriate utterances are created with consideration to form as well as context needs to be gained (Nunan, 1999: 110). One way to raise students' awareness is to utilize the novella.

Literature containing plausible interaction can provide an authentic resource for students to examine. This is because authors of such novels ‘make use of their assumptions about real interactive strategies in order to create their intratextual interactions’ (Caldas-Coulthard, 1994: 297). Moreover, as in speech, because it is not possible to say everything due to practical factors such as time and space, authors must reduce or simplify dialogues by determining what dialogue is necessary or significant and what information should be narrated or implied (Caldas-Coulthard, 1994: 300). In addition, authors aid their readers by providing more details through careful choice of reported speech verbs. By focusing on what authors have chosen to present and eliminating the auditory aspect of intonation and visual paralinguistic features, students are forced to focus on understanding meaning through the selection of lexis and grammar in context as well as the relationship between participants and any other background knowledge implicitly or explicitly influential. Challenging as this may be, students also have the benefit of a text medium where the reading or rereading of discourse can be done at their own pace.

In sum, that there is a lack of predictability of function from form alone and that many or most speech acts are indirect (Coulthard, 1985: 155) emphasize the need for students to be aware of the level of language above grammar. There are many ways to bring discourse to the attention of students; utilizing authentic written dialogues is one means encouraged to my students.

Appendix 1

Reproduction of pages 22-27 in E.M. Forster's *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. First conversation between Philip and Miss Abbott (Forster, 1920: 22-27):

They shook hands without speaking. She made room for Philip and his luggage amidst the loud indignation of the unsuccessful driver, whom it required to combined eloquence of the station-master and the station, beggar to confute. The silence was prolonged until they stated. For three days he had been considering what he should do, and still more what he should say. He had invented a dozen imaginary conversations, in all of which his logic and eloquence procured him certain victory. But how to begin? He was in the enemy's country, and everything—the hot sun, the cold air behind the heat, the endless rows of olive-trees, regular yet mysterious-seemed hostile to the placid atmosphere of Sawston in which his thoughts took birth. At the outset he made one great concession. If the match was really suitable, and Lilia were bent on it, he would give in, and trust to his influence with his mother to set things right. He would not have made the concession in England; but here in Italy, Lilia, however wilful and silly, was at all events growing to be a human being.

“Are we to talk it over now?” he asked.

“Certainly, please,” said Miss Abbott, in great agitation. “If you will be so very kind.”

“Then how long has she been engaged?”

Her face was that of a perfect fool—a fool in terror.

“A short time—quite a short time,” she stammered, as if the shortness of the time would reassure him.

“I should like to know how long, if you can remember.”

She entered into elaborate calculations on her fingers. “Exactly eleven days,” she said at last.

“How long have you been here?”

More calculations, while he tapped irritably with his foot. “Close to three weeks.”

“Did you know him before you came?”

“No.”

“Oh! Who is he?”

“A native of the place.”

The second silence took place. They had left the plain now and were climbing up the outposts of the hills, the olive-trees still accompanying. The driver, a jolly fat man, had got out to ease the horses, and was walking by the side of the carriage.

“I understood they met at the hotel.”

“It was a mistake of Mrs. Theobald’s.”

“I also understand that he is a member of the Italian nobility.”

She did not reply.

“May I be told his name?”

Miss Abbott whispered “Carella.” But the driver heard her, and a grin split over his face. The engagement must be known already.

“Carella? Conte or Marchese, or what?”

“Signor,” said Miss Abbott, and looked helplessly aside.

“Perhaps I bore you with these questions. If so, I will stop.”

“Oh, no, please; not at all. I am here—my own idea—to give all information which you very naturally—and to see if somehow—please ask anything you like.”

“Then how old is he?”

“Oh, quite young. Twenty-one, I believe.”

There burst from Philip the exclamation, “Good Lord!”

“One would never believe it,” said Miss Abbott, flushing. “He looks much older.”

“And is he good-looking?” he asked, with gathering sarcasm.

She became decisive. “Very good-looking. All his features are good, and he is well built – though I dare say English standards would find him too short.”

Philip, whose one physical advantage was his height, felt annoyed at her implied indifference to it.

“May I conclude that you like him?”

She replied decisively again, “As far as I have seen him, I do.”

At that moment the carriage entered a little wood, which lay brown and sombre across the cultivated hill. The trees of the wood were small and leafless, but noticeable for this—that their stems stood in violets as rocks stand in the summer sea.

There are such violets in England, but not so many. Nor are there so many in Art, for no painter has the courage. The cart-ruts were channels, the hollow lagoons; even the dry white margin of the road was splashed, like a causeway soon to be submerged under the advancing tide of spring. Philip paid no attention at the time: he was thinking what to say next. But his eyes had registered the beauty, and next March he did not forget that the road to Monteriano must traverse innumerable flowers.

“As far as I have seen him, I do like him,” repeated Miss Abbott, after a pause.

He thought she sounded a little defiant, and crushed her at once.

“What is he, please? You haven’t told me that. What’s his position?”

She opened her mouth to speak, and no sound came from it. Philip waited patiently. She tried to be audacious, and failed pitifully.

“No position at all. He is kicking his heels, as my father would say. You see, he has only just finished his military service.”

“As a private?”

“I suppose so. There is general conscription. He was in the Bersaglieri, I think. Isn’t that the crack regiment?”

“The men in it must be short and broad. They must also be able to walk six miles an hour.”

She looked at him wildly, not understanding all that he said, but feeling that he was very clever. Then she continued her defence of Signor Carella.

“And now, like most young men, he is looking out for something to do.”

“Meanwhile?”

“Meanwhile, like most young men, he lives with his people—father, mother, two sisters, and a tiny tot of a brother.”

There was a grating sprightliness about her that drove him nearly mad. He determined to silence her at last.

“One more question, and only one more. What is his father?”

“His father,” said Miss Abbott. “Well, I don’t suppose you’ll think it a good match. But that’s not the point. I mean the point is not—I mean that social differences—love, after all—not but what—“

Philip ground his teeth together and said nothing.

“Gentlemen sometimes judge hardly. But I feel that you, and at all events your mother—so really good in every sense, so really unworldly—after all, love—marriages are made in heaven.”

“Yes, Miss Abbott, I know. But I am anxious to hear heaven’s choice. You arouse my curiosity. Is my sister-in-law to marry an angel?”

“Mr. Herriton, don’t—please, Mr. Herriton—a dentist. His father’s a dentist.”

Philip gave a cry of personal disgust and pain. He shuddered all over, and edged away from his companion. A dentist! A dentist at Monteriano. A dentist in fairyland! False teeth and laughing gas and the tilting chair at a place which knew the Etruscan League, and the Pax Romana, and Alaric himself, and the Countess Matilda, and the Middle Ages, all fighting and holiness, and the Renaissance, all fighting and beauty! He thought of Lilia no longer. He was anxious for himself: he feared that Romance might die.

Romance only dies with life. No pair of pincers will ever pull it out of us. But there is a spurious sentiment which cannot resist the unexpected and the incongruous and the grotesque. A touch will loosen it, and the sooner it goes from us the better. It was going from Philip now, and therefore he gave the cry of pain.

“I cannot think what is in the air,” he began. “If Lilia was determined to disgrace us, she might have found a less repulsive way. A boy of medium height with a pretty face, the son of a dentist at Monteriano. Have I put it correctly? May I surmise that he has got not one penny? May I also surmise that his social position is nil? Furthermore—“

“Stop! I’ll tell you no more.”

“Really, Miss Abbott, it is a little late for reticence. You have equipped me admirably!”

“I’ll tell you not another word!” she cried, with a spasm of terror. Then she got out her handkerchief, and seemed as if she would shed tears. After a silence, which he intended to symbolize to her the dropping of a curtain on the scene, he began to talk of other subjects.

Appendix 2

Reproduction of pages 171-181 in E.M. Forster's *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. Final conversation between Philip and Miss Abbott (Forster, 1920: 171-181):

“He will have to marry her,” said Philip. “I heard from him this morning, just as we left Milan. He finds he has gone too far to back out. It would be expensive. I don't know how much he minds—not as much as we suppose, I think. At all events there's not a word of blame in the letter. I don't believe he even feels angry. I never was so completely forgiven. Ever since you stopped him killing me, it has been a vision of perfect friendship. He nursed me, he lied for me at the inquest, and at the funeral, though he was crying, you would have thought it was my son who had died. Certainly I was the only person he had to be kind to; he was so distressed not to make Harriet's acquaintance, and that he scarcely saw anything of you. In his letter he says so again.”

“Thank him, please, when you write,” said Miss Abbott, “and give him my kindest regards.”

“Indeed I will.” He was surprised that she could slide away from the man so easily. For his own part, he was bound by ties of almost alarming intimacy. Gino had the southern knack of friendship. In the intervals of business he would pull out Philip's life, turn it inside out, remodel it, and advise him how to use it for the best. The sensation was pleasant, for he was a kind as well as a skilful operator. But Philip came away feeling that he had not a secret corner left. In that very letter Gino had again implored him, as a refuge from domestic difficulties, “to marry Miss Abbott, even if her dowry is small.” And how Miss Abbott herself, after such tragic intercourse, could resume the conventions and send calm messages of esteem, was more than he could understand.

“When will you see him again?” she asked. They were standing together in the corridor of the train, slowly ascending out of Italy towards the San Gothard tunnel.

“I hope next spring. Perhaps we shall paint Siena red for a day or two with some of the new wife's money. It was one of the arguments for marrying her.”

“He has no heart,” she said severely. “He does not really mind about the child at all.”

“No; you’re wrong. He does. He is unhappy, like the rest of us. But he doesn’t try to keep up appearances as we do. He knows that the things that have made him happy once will probably make him happy again.”

“He said he would never be happy again.”

“In his passion. Not when he was calm. We English say it when we are calm—when we do not really believe it any longer. Gino is not ashamed of inconsistency. It is one of the many things I like him for.”

“Yes; I was wrong. That is so.”

“He’s much more honest with himself than I am,” continued Philip, “and he is honest without an effort and without pride. But you, Miss Abbott, what about you? Will you be in Italy next spring?”

“No.”

“I’m sorry. When will you come back, do you think?”

“I think never.”

“For whatever reason?” He stared at her as if she were some monstrosity.

“Because I understand the place. There is no need.”

“Understand Italy!” he exclaimed.

“Perfectly.”

“Well, I don’t. And I don’t understand you,” he murmured to himself, as he paced away from her up the corridor. By this time he loved her very much, and he could not bear to be puzzled. He had reached love by the spiritual path: her thoughts and her goodness and her nobility had moved him first, and now her whole body and all its gestures had become transfigured by them. The beauties that are called obvious—the beauties of her hair and her voice and her limbs—he had noticed these last; Gino, who never traversed any path at all, had commended them dispassionately to his friend.

Why was she so puzzling? He had known so much about her once—what she thought, how she felt, the reasons for her actions. And now he only know that he loved her, and all the other knowledge seemed passing from him just as he needed it most. Why would she never come to Italy again? Why had she avoided himself and Gino ever since the evening that she had saved their lives? The train was nearly empty. Harriet slumbered in a compartment by herself. He must ask her these questions now, and he returned quickly to her down the corridor.

She greeted him with a question of her own. “Are your plans decided?”

“Yes. I can’t live at Sawston.”

“Have you told Mrs. Herriton?”

“I wrote from Monteriano. I tried to explain things; but she will never understand me. Her view will be that the affair is settled—sadly settled since the baby is dead. Still it’s over; our family circle need be vexed no more. She won’t even be angry with you. You see, you have done us no harm in the long run. Unless, of course, you talk about Harriet and make a scandal. So that is my plan—London and work. What is yours?”

“Poor Harriet!” said Miss Abbott. “As if I dare judge Harriet! Or anybody.” And without replying to Philip’s question she left him to visit the other invalid.

Philip gazed after her mournfully, and then he looked mournfully out of the window at the decreasing streams. All the excitement was over—the inquest, Harriet’s short illness, his own visit to the surgeon. He was convalescent, both in body and spirit, but convalescence brought no joy. In the looking-glass at the end of the corridor he saw his face haggard, and his shoulders pulled forward by the weight of the sling. Life was greater than he had supposed, but it was even less complete. He had seen the need for strenuous work and for righteousness. And now he saw what a very little way those things would go.

“Is Harriet going to be all right?” he asked. Miss Abbott had come back to him.

“She will soon be her old self,” was the reply. For Harriet, after a short paroxysm of illness and remorse, was quickly returning to her normal state. She had been “thoroughly upset” as she phrased it, but she soon ceased to realize that anything was wrong beyond the death of a poor little child. Already she spoke of “this unlucky accident,” and the “mysterious frustration of one’s attempts to make things better.” Miss Abbott had seen that she was comfortable, and had given her a kind kiss. But she returned feeling that Harriet, like her mother, considered the affair as settled.

“I’m clear enough about Harriet’s future, and about parts of my own. But I ask again, What about yours?”

“Sawston and work,” said Miss Abbott.

“No.”

“Why not?” she asked, smiling.

“You’ve seen too much. You’ve seen as much and done more than I have.”

“But it’s so different. Of course I shall go to Sawston. You forget my father; and even if he wasn’t there, I’ve a hundred ties: my district—I’m neglecting it shamefully—my evening classes, the St. James’—“

“Silly nonsense!” he exploded, suddenly moved to have the whole thing out with her. “You’re too good—about a thousand times better than I am. You can’t live in that hole; you must go among people who can hope to understand you. I mind for myself: I want to see you often—again and again.”

“Of course we shall meet whenever you come down; and I hope that it will mean often.”

“It’s not enough; it’ll only be in the old horrible way, each with a dozen relatives round us. No, Miss Abbott; it’s not good enough.”

“We can write at all events.”

“You will write?” he cried, with a flush of pleasure. At times his hopes seemed so solid.

“I will indeed.”

“But I say it’s not enough—you can’t go back to the old life if you wanted to. Too much has happened.”

“I know that,” she said sadly.

“Not only pain and sorrow, but wonderful things: that tower in the sunlight—do you remember it, and all you said to me? The theatre, even. And the next day—in the church; and our times with Gino.”

“All the wonderful things are over,” she said. “That is just where it is.”

“I don’t believe it. At all events not for me. The most wonderful things may be to come—“

“The wonderful things are over,” she repeated, and looked at him so mournfully that he dare not contradict her. The train was crawling up the last ascent towards the Campanile of Airolo and the entrance of the tunnel.

“Miss Abbott,” he murmured, speaking quickly, as if their free intercourse might soon be ended, “what is the matter with you? I thought I understood you, and I don’t. All those two great first days at Monteriano I read you as clearly as you read me still. I saw why you had come, and why you changed sides, and afterwards I saw your wonderful courage and pity. And now you’re frank with me one moment, as you

used to be, and the next moment you shut me up. You see I owe too much to you—my life, and I don't know what besides. I won't stand it. You've gone too far to turn mysterious. I'll quote what you said to me: 'Don't be mysterious; there isn't the time.' I'll quote something else: 'I and my life must be where I live.' You can't live at Sawston."

He had moved her at last. She whispered to herself hurriedly. "It is tempting—" And those three words threw him into a tumult of joy. What was tempting to her? After all was the greatest of things possible? Perhaps, after long estrangement, after much tragedy, the South had brought them together in the end. That laughter in the theatre, those silver stars in the purple sky, even the violets of a departed spring, all had helped, and sorrow had helped also, and so had tenderness to others.

"It is tempting," she repeated, "not to be mysterious. I've wanted often to tell you, and then been afraid. I could never tell any one else, certainly no woman, and I think you're the one man who might understand and not be disgusted."

"Are you lonely?" he whispered. "Is it anything like that?"

"Yes." The train seemed to shake him towards her. He was resolved that though a dozen people were looking, he would yet take her in his arms. "I'm terribly lonely, or I wouldn't speak. I think you must know already." Their faces were crimson, as if the same thought was surging through them both.

"Perhaps I do." He came close to her. "Perhaps I could speak instead. But if you will say the word plainly you'll never be sorry; I will thank you for it all my life."

She said plainly "That I love him." Then she broke down. Her body was shaken with sobs, and lest there should be any doubt she cried between the sobs for Gino! Gino! Gino!

He heard himself remark "Rather! I love him too! When I can forget how he hurt me that evening. Though whenever we shake hands—" One of them must have moved a step or two, for when she spoke again she was already a little way apart.

"You've upset me." She stifled something that was perilously near hysterics. "I thought I was past all this. You're taking it wrongly. I'm in love with Gino—don't pass it off—I mean it crudely—you know what I mean. So laugh at me."

"Laugh at love?" asked Philip.

“Yes. Pull it to pieces. Tell me I’m a fool or worse—that he’s a cad. Say all you said when Lilia fell in love with him. That’s the help I want. I dare tell you this because I like you—and because you’re without passion; you look on life as a spectacle; you don’t enter it; you only find it funny or beautiful. So I can trust you to cure me. Mr. Herriton, isn’t it funny?” She tried to laugh herself, but became frightened and had to stop. “He’s not a gentleman, nor a Christian, nor good in any way. He’s never flattered me nor honoured me. But because he’s handsome, that’s been enough. The son of an Italian dentist, with a pretty face.” She repeated the phrase as if it was a charm against passion. “Oh, Mr. Herriton, isn’t it funny!” Then, to his relief, she began to cry. “I love him, and I’m not ashamed of it. I love him, and I’m going to Sawston, and if I mayn’t speak about him to you sometimes, I shall die.”

In that terrible discovery Philip managed to think not of himself but of her. He did not lament. He did not even speak to her kindly, for he saw that she could not stand it. A flippant reply was what she asked and needed—something flippant and a little cynical. And indeed it was the only reply he could trust himself to make.

“Perhaps it is what the books call ‘a passing fancy’?”

She shook her head. Even this question was too pathetic. For as far as she knew anything about herself, she knew that her passions, once aroused, were sure. “If I saw him often,” she said, “I might remember what he is like. Or he might grow old. But I dare not risk it, so nothing can alter me now.”

“Well, if the fancy does not pass, let me know.” After all, he could say what he wanted.

“Oh, you shall know quick enough.”

“But before you retire to Sawston—are you so mighty sure?”

“What of?” She had stopped crying. He was treating her exactly as she had hoped.

“That you and he—” He smiled bitterly at the thought of them together. Here was the cruel antique malice of the gods, such as they once sent forth against Pasiphae. Centuries of aspiration and culture—and the world could not escape it. “I was going to say—whatever have you got in common?”

“Nothing except the times we have seen each other.” Again her face was crimson. He turned his own face away.

“Which—which times?”

“The time I thought you weak and heedless, and went instead of you to get the baby. That began it, as far as I know the beginning. Or it may have begun when you took us to the theatre, and I saw him mixed up with music and light. But didn’t understand till the morning. Then you opened the door—and I knew why I had been so happy. Afterwards, in the church, I prayed for us all; not for anything new, but that we might just be as we were—he with the child he loved, you and I and Harriet safe out of the place—and that I might never see him or speak to him again. I could have pulled through then—the thing was only coming near, like a wreath of smoke; it hadn’t wrapped me round.”

“But through my fault,” said Philip solemnly, “he is parted from the child he loves. And because my life was in danger you came and saw him and spoke to him again.” For the thing was even greater than she imagined. Nobody but himself would ever see round it now. And to see round it he was standing at an immense distance. He could even be glad that she had once held the beloved in her arms.

“Don’t talk of ‘faults.’ You’re my friend for ever, Mr. Herriton, I think. Only don’t be charitable and shift or take the blame. Get over supposing I’m refined. That’s what puzzles you. Get over that.”

As he spoke she seemed to be transfigured, and to have indeed no part with refinement or unrefinement any longer. Out of this wreck there was revealed to him something indestructible—something which she, who had given it, could never take away.

“I say again, don’t be charitable. If he had asked me, I might have given myself body and soul. That would have been the end of my rescue party. But all through he took me for a superior being—a goddess. I who was worshipping every inch of him, and every word he spoke. And that saved me.”

Philip’s eyes were fixed on the Campanile of Airolo. But he saw instead the fair myth of Endymion. This woman was a goddess to the end. For her no love could be degrading: she stood outside all degradation. This episode, which she thought so sordid, and which was so tragic for him, remained supremely beautiful. To such a height was he lifted, that without regret he could now have told her that he was her worshipper too. But what was the use of telling her? For all the wonderful things had happened.

“Thank you,” was all that he permitted himself. “Thank you for everything.”

She looked at him with great friendliness, for he had made her life endurable. At that moment the train entered the San Gothard tunnel. They hurried back to the carriage to close the windows less the smuts should get into Harriet’s eyes.

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