

Adam Glaz, Associate Professor
Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin,
(Poland); Department of Linguistics and Literary Studies

RESEARCHING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE: DELL HYMES' PROCEDURE OF S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G

At one point Noam Chomsky (1965) proposed the notion of linguistic competence, which he defined as a speaker's underlying ability to produce (and recognize) grammatically correct expressions. This is a useful notion but woefully insufficient and inadequate for studying language in use. Therefore, another American linguist, Dell Hymes (1972), came up with the notion of communicative competence, which he understood as a speaker's ability to speak a language well in a variety of social situations.

But communicative competence is a vague and slippery notion, as well as being notoriously difficult to study. So as to provide some way of analyzing it, Hymes proposed a procedure that he encapsulated in the mnemonic acronym S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G, whose initial elements stand for the following parameters of the speech situation:

Setting/situation (or place)

Participants (i.e., who is involved in an exchange and what is expected of them)

Ends (why the speech event is taking place, what goals people have)

Act sequence (the sequence of what happens in what order, e.g. in greetings: who begins and how)

Key (the mood or spirit in which communication takes place)

Instrumentalities (or channels: speaking, writing, signing; plus varieties of language used: dialect, registers, professional jargon)

Norms (expectations as to the appropriateness of speech)

Genres (different kinds and types of speech events, e.g. conversation, lecture, gossip, sermon, political speech, joke, haiku poetry, etc.)

In this talk we will look at a few samples American English spoken in specific contexts and will try and identify these parameters. Specifically, we will look at the parameter of genre: in some contexts, it is relatively clear that the given performance is a political speech, a religious sermon, etc. However, in some other contexts, the genre distinctions become fuzzy. One specific example that will serve as an illustration is President Barack Obama's eulogy for Rev. Clementa Pinckney delivered at the memorial service at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, in June 2021.

REFERENCES

1. Chomsky, Noam. 1965. *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
2. Hymes, Dell. 1972. On communicative competence. In J. Pride, & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics* (pp. 269-285). Harmondsworth: Penguin Books