

Broadcast Media Analysis

I have chosen two American programmes that are broadcast on Channel 4, to demonstrate my competency with varied text analysis techniques. The first programme is called *Will and Grace* - a comedy. It concentrates on a gay man and a female designer who live together in a city apartment. The second is called *Dawson's Creek* - a teenage drama. A group of four teenagers, two male - two female, are the main characters. They live in a suburban part of America, near a creek. The more recent series have seen the four move away to University in the city.

To analyse these two broadcast texts, based on their use of language, I will be using a number of different techniques. I will start by doing a Conversational Analysis to get an overview of the language structure of each text. The approach of Conversational Analysis was developed by a group of sociologists known as 'ethnomethodologists'. Ethnomethodology is interpretative in approach and focuses upon everyday life, as a skilled accomplishment, and the methods that people use to produce it. Then I will look at Process Types followed by Grice's Maxims, and more so, the flouting of these.

Conversational Analysis of the two texts will include looking at the following:

Turn taking: This is when one participant talks, then stops, and the second participant talks, then stops, and the first participant talks again and so on. The distribution of talk would therefore go as follows A - B - A - B - A - B. There must be less than 5% overlapping speech and gaps between speakers usually only last micro-seconds. There is no limit to the number of speakers in the conversation, as long as they are all taking turns. The participant's utterances can be short or long.

Interruptions: This occurs when one speaker speaks when it is obvious that the other speaker has not finished speaking. Men are more likely to interrupt women than visa versa.

Adjacency pairs: These can come in the form of a question - answer, greeting - greeting, offer - acceptance, apology - minimization. Adjacency pairs must be adjacent, produced by different speakers and ordered as first part and second part.

Local Management System: This idea was put forward first by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson. They had ideas about conversation in terms of 'economy' operating over scarce resources or control of the 'floor'. Minimal units, or turns, are required in the allocation system. The speaker is assigned one *turn-constructive unit* and the end of this unit is a *transition relevance place*, or TRP, where another speaker can speak.

Preferred or dispreferred responses: This is connected to the adjacency pairs idea. If the second part does not answer the first then this is dispreferred. As the second speaker has not participated in the adjacency pair like the first speaker wished them to. Most of the time, however, the adjacency pair ends with a preferred response, thus completing the pair.

There are five kinds of Process Types. **Action:** the process affects somebody, **Event:** the process only affects the doer, **State:** consists of verbs of classifying or identifying, **Mental:** consists of verbs of thinking, perceiving and feeling and **Verbal:** those verbs concerned with saying or speaking.

Grice's Conversational Maxims are categorised into four types. The maxims of:

Quality: This relates to the standard of language being used in speech. This relies on the speaker meaning exactly what they say. When this maxim is flouted, that is to say - gone against and broken, it may result in sarcasm, irony or exaggeration.

Quantity: This related to either the exact amount of speech being used in a particular situation or the accurate use of figures of speech. When this maxim is flouted, it may result in someone saying more or less than was expected of them.

Relevance: This relies on the conversation following a particular path and not straying from it. To flout this maxim, the subject would have to be drastically changed.

Manner: This maxim is demonstrated in conversations when people speak in an extremely polite manner to one another. Obscurity of expression is avoided, as is ambiguity. The emphasis is on being to the point and orderly. To flout this maxim would go against all those points, resulting in one of the speakers being confused, or worse, angry or upset!

Here begins the textual analysis using the above mentioned aspects. I will order them under a sub heading for ease of reading.

Conversational Analysis

Turn taking

In both *Will and Grace* and *Dawson's Creek* there were many instances of turn taking. This is mostly due to the fact they are both scripted. The programmes are made to run smoothly, be easily heard and understood by the audience. The examples in *Will and Grace* were mostly between Karen and Will. Here is an example of this.

KAREN: I don't hear a baby crying. She must still be in labor.

WILL: She's not giving birth, you nitwit. She's taking a pregnancy test. Here.

In *Dawson's Creek* the main turn takers were Pacey and Sadia. Here is an example of this.

Pacey: Generally I tend to prefer the brainy brunettes with brown eyes.

Sadia: Can I ask you something?

Pacey: Feel free.

Sadia: Why did you wait so long to ask me out?

Pacey: Well, for a while there I was otherwise engaged, but I've taken care of that now, I promise.

[The waitress brings his drink]

Interruptions

There was only one occurrence of this in the broadcast texts I decided to analyse. This occurred in the *Will and Grace* episode. Being scripted texts, as afore mentioned, it is not surprising that there was a lack of interruptions, as this would not be easy to listen to on the television. Here is the short example of interruption from *Will and Grace*.

WILL: Jack, if there's somewhere else you need to be...then

JACK: Hey, what could possibly be more important than my best friends creating a new life?

Adjacency pairs

Both broadcast texts had many adjacency pairs. This did not surprise me, as it is necessary to keep the programme going, for the characters to recuperate each other's utterances. The most common type of adjacency pair was the question - answer type. Here are the examples from the *Will and Grace* episode.

1)

GRACE: [SIGHS] The doctor said that it doesn't always work the first time, right?

WILL: That's right, that's right, we'll try again in two weeks. You know, when you're ovulating again.

2)

KEVIN: Oh, yeah, you saw that?

WILL: Yeah.

3)

WILL: Do you realize that in two weeks, that kid could be on his way?

GRACE: Yeah. Two weeks.

The *Dawson's Creek* examples are as follows:

1)

Joey: Where are you going?

Audrey: To negotiate.

Joey: I don't think this is negotiable.

Audrey: Everything is negotiable.

2)

Eddie: You know, I never did get a chance to thank him for his recommendation.

Joey: And you're going to do it now?

Eddie: Yeah. What's the worst that could happen?

Joey: I don't know. He could be incredibly rude and ungracious, say something mean and unforgivable, and you could punch him in the face again.

3)

Hetson: Do you honestly think I'm ever gonna let you into one of my classes again?

Joey: No. Do you honestly think I'm ever gonna sign up for one of your classes again? But I do need an advisor.

Hetson: And you'd like that to be me?

Joey: Yes, I would. Because it is my fondest wish to continue tormenting you until the day I finally leave this institution.

Local Management System

In terms of LMS, all of these adjacency pair examples have the turn-constructive unit (the first speaker's utterance) followed by the transition relevance place (the pause after the utterance), the other person's signal they can talk.

Preferred or dispreferred responses

There were a few examples of dispreferred examples in both broadcast texts. These are the examples from *Will and Grace*.

1)

GRACE: You put that down and-- You just give-- Let me have this!

LEO: No, let-- Give it to me! Hey! I usually don't have to work this hard, you know. I have a nice job. And I'm pretty much gonna have this hair until I'm 80.

2)

ROSARIO: Is Will still gay?

GRACE: Yes.

ROSARIO: Idiot.

GRACE: Hey!

This is the example from *Dawson's Creek*.

1)

Sadia: What does the "J" stand for?

Pacey: Wouldn't you like to know?

There were some occurrences of preferred responses. Here is an example from *Will and Grace*.

LEO: Oh. I'm really sorry.

GRACE: It's okay.

Here is an example from *Dawson's Creek*.

Rich: Why don't you call Roger and congratulate him.

Pacey: Will do, boss.

Process Types

Action

Will and Grace examples: use, put, catch, seeing, met, made and take.

Dawson's Creek examples: meet, leading, use, met, take, seeing, change, catch and keeping.

Event

Will and Grace examples: wait, do it, have, hitting, does, go, happened and get.

Dawson's Creek examples: have, going, working, get, wait, happening, takes and do it.

Mental

Will and Grace examples: hear, love, see, like, know, hate, want, saw, remember and listen.

Dawson's Creek examples: miss, like, listen, saw, think, love, hear, remember, see, wanted,

Verbal

Will and Grace examples: told, talk, mean, say and tell.

Dawson's Creek examples: saying, speak, tell, talk, mean, say and told.

State

Will and Grace examples: make, am, have and feel.

Dawson's Creek examples: is, are, have, get, stay, feel and make.

Grice's Conversational Maxims

There was far more evidence of flouting of the maxims than of them in their true form, so I will be focusing on the flouting aspect of Grice's theory.

Flouting of the maxim of Quality

Will and Grace examples:

- 1) This is an example of the flouted maxim of Quality as the characters are being sarcastic.

WILL: We're in the kitchen now.

KAREN: Ooh, such a long walk!

JACK: So far! All the way.

- 2) This is an example of the flouted maxim of Quality as Jack is exaggerating.

JACK: [INTO THE DOOR] C'mon, Grace! You peed on everything else in that bathroom!

Dawson's Creek examples:

- 1) This is an example of the flouted maxim of Quality as Rich is being sarcastic and Pacey humours him.

Pacey: How do you think it went? I learned from the best, right?

Rich: That's sweet. You wanna make out or...

Pacey: Maybe later. I gotta brush my teeth.

2) This is also sarcastic as Dawson is making Pacey realise it should be plainly obvious that he is nervous.

Pacey: Let me guess. You're nervous, right?

Dawson: Nervous? Who, me? Thousands of dollars at play in the stock market which, from what I understand, can only be described as globally weak? Nah. Who's nervous?

Flouting of the maxim of Quantity

There were no examples of this in *Will and Grace*.

Dawson's Creek example:

This is flouting the maxim of Quantity, as Joey wants more information from Eddie.

Eddie: No, but he escapes in the end, so there's hope.

Joey: Hope for what?

Flouting of the maxim of Relevance

Will and Grace example:

This is flouting the maxim of relevance because Grace drastically changes the subject.

LEO: And... do you see her now?

GRACE: Leo, why are you here?

Dawson's Creek example:

This is flouting the maxim of relevance because Audrey brings up Woody Allen for no particular reason.

Audrey: I know. But all the summer school classes just look so boring, Joey! Who was it that said you should never take a class where Beowulf is required reading?

Joey: Me.

Audrey: Silly me, I thought it was Woody Allen.

Flouting of the maxim of Manner

Will and Grace example:

This is flouting the maxim of Manner, as Will is impolite to Grace about how much she eats.

GRACE: You know, I guess I should stop eating for two.

WILL: Nah. Why stop now? You've been doing it since you were 11.

Dawson's Creek example:

This is flouting the maxim of Manner, as Hetson is not tactful when telling Joey he found her essay bleak.

Hetson: You know, the sad thing is that I almost gave you an "A." I went back and forth about it, and then... ultimately, I found your essay on *Catch-22* a little bleak.

In conclusion, as earlier described, due to the scripted nature of the two programmes, there was a vast amount of turn taking. There was only one interruption in both texts; this comes back to the texts being scripted rather than informal, unplanned conversation. Adjacency pairs featured regularly in both texts. This helps keep the narrative, within the programme flowing. The elements, turn-constructive unit and transition relevance place, that belong to the Local Management System, were at play in all adjacency pairs. I found it easier to pick out dispreferred responses, as opposed to preferred, as these are mostly used for comic effect in the two texts I analysed.

Verbal and State Process Types were the least evident. Both texts seemed to have similar amounts of Mental, Event and Action Process Types. I focused on the flouting of Grice's Conversational Maxims as these, I found, were far more interesting and prevalent in these two texts. The flouting of the Maxim of Quality was mostly due to characters being sarcastic. The flouting of the Maxim of Quantity happened only once when Joey needed more information from Eddie, in *Dawson's Creek*. Eddie, however, may not have deliberately given a lack of information to Joey.

The Maxim of Relevance was flouted in *Will and Grace* as a drastic change in subject occurred in a conversation between Leo and Grace. In *Dawson's Creek* it was flouted when Audrey unnecessarily brought Woody Allen into the conversation. The Manner Maxim was flouted infrequently in *Will and Grace*. Once by Will when he is derogatory about Grace's appetite. It also occurred once in *Dawson's Creek* when Joey's University lecturer is negative about one of her essays.

Overall, these two texts proved abundant with examples to demonstrate Conversational Analysis, Process Types and Grice's Conversational Maxims.