

WHAT EXACTLY IS COOPERATIVE IN GRICE'S COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE? A SOPHISTICATED REARTICULATION OF THE CP¹

by
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This essay draws on a recently-reconceived concept from ancient sophistic rhetoric – Nomos, or generally accepted processes for the making of meaning – to reinterpret the nature of 'cooperation' in H.P. Grice's Cooperative Principle of Discourse and develop a new, descriptive vocabulary for the study of discourse from all possible perspectives (utterance, social interaction, and social context). Synthesizing Grice's CP with the rhetorical concept of Nomos yields a usefully relativistic, Nomos-Informed CP (NCP). According to NCP, what is cooperative in discourse is the relationship between a speaker and Nomos and a hearer and Nomos; to create meaningful discourse in a given context participants cooperate with Personal Nomos Systems specific to that context. The article demonstrates how NCP answers critiques of Grice's CP and uses NCP to generate a multiperspectival description of discourse. In the final section, six tenets of NCP are identified and five forms of cooperation are offered as new terms for descriptive discourse study.

Introduction: Toward a More Sophisticated Understanding of Cooperation

Some critics of Grice's Cooperative Principle of Discourse have claimed that discourse is too haphazard (Kasher 1976, 1977; Sperber and Wilson 1982, 1986; Tannen 1986) or too often disagreeable or oppressive (Cameron 1985; Keenan 1974, 1976; Sampson 1982) to be described accurately as 'cooperative.' These critiques imply that Grice's CP indicates that discourse participants involved in a talk exchange cooperate with *each other*; thus, they believe that what Grice describes as 'cooperative' in discourse is the relationship between speakers and hearers. Thus, they interpret Grice's CP as *advocating* or even *prescribing* cooperation.

Two composition & rhetoric scholars have made such arguments explicitly. Kim Brian Lovejoy (1987) says,

The [Cooperative Principle] operates between writer and reader just as it does between speaker and hearer. It defines ... the relationship between writer and reader (12).

Marilyn Cooper (1982) takes the point further, claiming Grice advocates cooperation because

what enables conversation to proceed is an underlying assumption that we as conversants have purposes for conversing and that we recognize that these purposes are more likely to be fulfilled if we cooperate (112).

Cooper defines cooperation as a benevolence that speakers and hearers should *choose* in order to communicate most effectively.

In contrast, I believe any representation of Grice's CP that prescribes or advocates cooperation between discourse participants imposes on Grice an agenda he never intended and, more importantly, impedes the descriptive potential of Grice's CP. Grice claims neither that cooperation is a *choice* nor that cooperation *makes* communication more effective. In fact, Grice does not address at all *why* people cooperate; he simply claims that conversational contributions are 'cooperative efforts'. If Grice *had* claimed that the relationship between speaker and hearer is 'cooperative', then critiques pointing out that ordinary discourse is too often oppressive, disagreeable, and haphazard to be described accurately as 'cooperative' would be correct.

To realize the full descriptive potential of Grice's CP, a more complex view of exactly what is cooperative in the CP is needed. Rather than describing a 'cooperative' relationship between a speaker and a hearer, I believe Grice's CP usefully describes a 'cooperative' relationship *between a discourse participant and a process for the making of meaning*.

I borrow a term – *Nomos* – from the ancient Greek sophists to designate the processes for the making of meaning with which discourse participants cooperate; hence, the 'sophisticated' understanding of cooperation. For example, when one utters a word from English Language, one is *cooperating with* (that is, *operating according to*) one's understanding of the dictates of English Language (a *Nomos*) to create a meaningful utterance. The same is true of the hearer in a discursive exchange: the hearer cooperates with his or her understanding of the dictates of English Language to process the speaker's utterance in a meaningful way. If the exchange is felicitous, then we can claim the *Nomos* with which the speaker cooperates and the *Nomos* with which the hearer cooperates are *concordant* (that is,

the *Nomoi* each work such that a close enough approximation of the intended meaningful exchange occurs). Note that discourse participants do not cooperate directly with *Nomos*, but rather with their *understandings* of *Nomos*; people do not have direct, unmediated access to *Nomos*. Note also that discourse participants do not cooperate with one *Nomos* at a time, but actually cooperate with an indeterminable number of *Nomoi* at once through what I call their *Personal Nomos Systems*. (I describe these terms fully later in the essay.)

In contrast to what Cooper, Lovejoy, and others state or imply, the cooperative relationship required for meaningful discourse is not a *choice*. If the intended meaningful exchange occurs, then cooperation has occurred. Therefore, to claim that Grice *advocates* or *prescribes* cooperation does not make sense. Other than simply opting out of a conversation, there is no alternative to cooperation.

There are those who may find this version of cooperation problematic. As one reviewer of this essay has pointed out, some believe cooperation requires two discursive agents and therefore the relationship between an agent and a process cannot be cooperative. A process cannot cooperate. While it is true that a process cannot cooperate, I believe the relationship between the agent and the process is cooperative in the sense that the agent *operates in accordance with* the dictates of a process for the making of meaning.

Grice himself has dealt with the criticism that cooperation requires two discursive agents. He outlines several ways in which a speaker may intend to make meaning even with no audience present; such cases include:

- 1) Utterances for which the utterer thinks there may (now or later) be an audience ... for example, himself at a future date in the case of a diary entry ...;
- 2) Utterances which the utterer knows not to be addressed to any actual audience, but which the utterer pretends to address ... (for example, practicing a speech);
- 3) Utterances (including 'internal' utterances) with respect to which the utterer neither thinks it possible that there may be an actual audience nor imagines himself as addressing an audience, but nevertheless intends his utterance to be such that it would induce a certain sort of response in a certain perhaps fairly

indefinite kind of audience were it the case that such an audience was present (1989:113).

Patrick Suppes (1986) claims that trouble over applying Grice's work to an utterance produced with no audience present has caused more concern than is necessary (1986:119), and I tend to agree. Any utterance intentionally produced to create meaning cooperates with a process for the making of meaning and therefore can be considered 'cooperative' even if only one discursive agent is present.

In the following sections of this essay, I explicate in greater detail the 'more sophisticated' understanding of cooperation I have theorized. I begin with a richer account of Nomos, which includes my reasons for borrowing the term from classical rhetoric for contemporary discourse study. I then explain Nomos-informed CP (NCP), my rearticulation of Grice's CP, by using it to describe an example of ordinary discourse from three possible perspectives: utterance, social interaction, and social context.² I conclude the essay with a discussion of new terms I offer for discourse study; I outline six tenets of NCP and identify five forms cooperation may take.

Sophistic and Neo-Sophistic Accounts of Nomos

Traditionally, the ancient Greek term 'Nomos' is defined simply as 'statute' or 'convention' – the human complement to divine or natural law ('Physis'). However, more recently philologists and rhetoricians have drawn on greater numbers of ancient texts to reconceive the term. Now Nomos can stand for the shifting, dynamic forces through which humans interact meaningfully. I have found this more recent conception of Nomos significantly useful to fully realize the descriptive potential of Grice's CP. Specifically, Nomos can usefully complicate our understanding of how people use processes for the making of meaning to make meaning in particular discourse situations.

Philologist Martin Ostwald (1969) claims that Nomos was used generally by the ancient Greeks to designate a sense of order that 'is or ought to be regarded as valid and binding by those who live under it' (1969:20-21). Three closely-related connotations of Nomos that were most common in the second half of the fifth century BCE (the time of the Greek sophists) are particularly useful:

- 1) not the [general] way of life of mankind or of animals as such, but the mores of a particular group of men (ibid.:33);
- 2) those practices 'which are generally observed by those among whom they prevail' (ibid.:36);
- 3) [t]hose social practices which are current among a given group and frequently constitute a typical characteristic which differentiates it from other groups (ibid.:34).

The sophistic connotations of Nomos arise during a democratic period in Greek history, a time at which,

the Athenians were disenchanted with living under laws imposed upon them from above, and decided instead to consider as laws only norms which they had themselves ratified and acknowledged to be valid and binding (ibid.:55).

A Nomos is *an expression from within*, a collection of social practices or processes to which the members of a given society appear to assent.

The sophists have enjoyed a revival in contemporary rhetorical studies. Facing skeptical contemporary attitudes regarding the possibility of absolute, 'platonic' truths, neo-sophistic³ scholars have reconsidered the value of the sophists' largely-unpopular, relativistic views of human knowledge-making activities. Principal among these scholars, Susan Jarratt (1991) has used the sophists' work to elucidate how human communities negotiate their communicative interactions. Jarratt builds upon Ostwald's translations of Nomos, using the term to highlight not just the formal social practices or laws, but also the constant human negotiations implicit in all meaningful communication. For Jarratt, Nomos stands 'as the possibility for reformulating human "truths" in historically and geographically specific contexts' (1991:42). The most significant consequences of this view of truth, as I explain below, are that Nomos constitutes a continuous 'process of articulating codes' (ibid.:42) and that communication is always contingent upon its context (ibid.:53).

In support of this Nomos-informed view of 'truth', Jarratt examines three sophistic fragments that are particularly significant for Gricean analysis: Protagoras's statement of *dissoi logoi*⁴ and his

'human-measure' fragment,⁵ and Gorgias's *On Nature* or *On Non-existence*.⁶

Protagoras understood that *dissoi logoi* (competing versions of 'true' meaning) were 'unavoidable outcomes of any group discourse' (Jarratt 1991:49). Plato's answer to the problem of *dissoi logoi* is to search for correct, divine Truth; however, Protagoras's solution is located in human meaning-making activities. To explain Protagoras's answer to *dissoi logoi*, Jarratt references Plato's *Theatetus* – which most scholars agree presents a mostly fair account of Protagoras's thought (e.g., Kirk and Raven 1983:411 n. 1). In the dialog, Protagoras uses the example of two people standing in the same wind where one feels cold and the other warm (151 Eff). To this conundrum, Protagoras applies his human-measure fragment and determines that the wind must be both cold *and* hot (that is, 'hot' for some and 'cold' for others). For this reason, Jarratt considers Protagoras's human-measure fragment to be the answer to *dissoi logoi*: each human is the measure for what meaning is true for him or herself at any given moment. In contrast to Plato, Protagoras does not seek a fixed, transcendent truth, but instead values 'negotiating useful courses of action for groups of people given their varying perceptions about the world' (1991:50).

In his *On Nature* or *On Nonexistence*, Gorgias sets up a *logos* that 'anticipates the linguistic revolution of Nietzsche, Saussure, and Derrida' (Jarratt 1991:55), as he points to 'the gap between the word and the thing' or the impossibility of communicating the existence or 'beingness' of something. The result of Gorgias's treatise, according to Jarratt, is the notion that people don't communicate the 'being of a thing', but rather they communicate the *logos* of their attempt to communicate the thing (Sprague 1972:46). In other words, people communicate language, not absolute truth. Put yet another way, a speaker communicates not a 'pure, unmediated meaning' but a '*measure* of meaning' created by a speaker. (Just as speakers cooperate not directly with Nomoi, but with their understandings of Nomoi.) Further, Gorgias's concentration on Helen as a subject of rhetoric in his 'Encomium of Helen' shows that he 'recognizes and inquires into the psychological conditions of assent for the individual who participates in the rhetorical scene of democracy' (Jarratt 1991:55). It is this assent, not absolute truth, that makes meaning in any given discourse situation. Willingness and ability to effectively cooperate with appropriate Nomoi is what

enables communication to work as well as it does in any discourse situation.

Nomos is an important part of the sophists' discussions, because the idea of Nomos points to a 'democratic structure whose job is the continual renegotiation of Nomoi through rhetoric' (Jarratt 1991:53). Jarratt extends the use of Nomos for rhetorical/linguistic purposes in that the term 'can be taken to signify a characteristic rhetorical condition of language': that 'language is always contingent upon its context' (ibid.:53). Nomoi are always at least somewhat different because contexts are always at least somewhat different. Nomos, which is continuously in a state of renegotiation, constitutes a 'process of articulating codes' (ibid.:42) and a means to the creation of 'socially and politically significant knowledge' (ibid.:60).

The descriptions of Nomos I borrow from Ostwald and Jarratt resonate with Suppes's articulations of Grice's theory of meaning. In response to what he calls Chomsky's 'platonic' attention to '*the* rules of language'⁷ (1986:115), Suppes claims that

speakers and listeners [are] continually creating new grammatical rules (not to speak of other aspects of language) ... speakers engage in such rule creation all the time. Both as speakers and listeners we are continually creating and learning new rules, engaging, if you will, in new practices (1986:116).

In summary: A Nomos is a dynamic, continuously renegotiated process for the making of meaning according to which members of a particular community (or agents in a particular discourse situation) agree to attempt to make meaning. The concept is democratic in principle (discursive agents may assent to a Nomos or not); it does not depend on an absolute truth to which the discourse participants must have access (in fact, each participant in each discourse situation must create the Nomos with which s/he will cooperate); and, it is entirely relative to the social contexts of each particular participant in each particular discourse situation.

With these points in mind, I provide some specific examples of Nomoi. Nomoi can be formal or informal. Specific examples of formal Nomoi are the United States Constitution, town zoning laws, journal guidelines, scientific method, etiquette books, grammar handbooks. Examples of general, informal Nomoi are more difficult to pinpoint (because they have not been formalized), but some

examples would be: raising one's hands in class to speak, not talking with one's mouth full, wearing suitable clothes for work or play, and using appropriate technical jargon among specialists.

Nomos-Informed Cooperative Principle (NCP): A Multiperspectival View

Synthesizing Grice's CP with sophistic Nomos yields a deceptively simple theory: *People cooperate with Nomoi to communicate meaning.* In earlier work, I have argued that a comprehensive theory of discourse should productively describe discourse from all three possible perspectives: utterance, social interaction, and social context (Lindblom 2001, in press). In the following sections, I use visual representations to illustrate the ways in which a Nomos-informed CP (NCP) can be used to describe discourse from each perspective.

To anchor the descriptions of discourse in ordinary conversation, I use as an example the following strip of classroom discourse from Kleifgen (1990:237; T = Teacher).

- T>Group: Is this a circle?
 Gabriel>T: No. (snickers)
 T>Group: Oh-oh. You boys are playing a trick now. I can tell. Well, I'm going to play a trick on you. Is this a circle? (Holds up a square)
 Gabriel>T: No.
 T>Gabriel: No. You're right.
 Didi>T: Yeah!
 T>Didi: You're being silly. You're telling me the exact opposite.

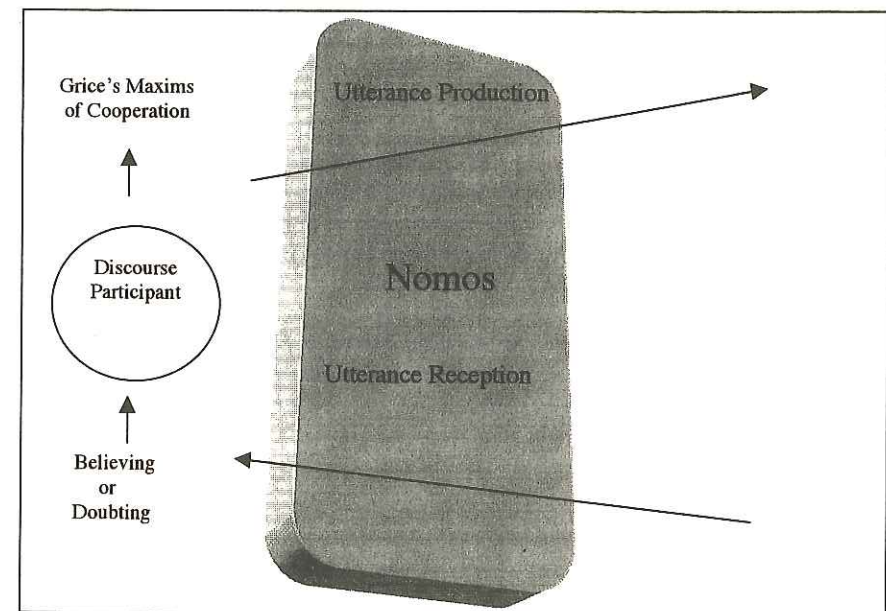
NCP and Utterance: Cooperation with Nomoi

In an intended, meaningful discursive exchange, two separate but related cooperative actions have been undertaken. The first cooperative action is the action taken by the speaker in cooperating with the Nomos according to which s/he is making a sensical (or meaningful) utterance. The second cooperative action is the action taken by the hearer in cooperating with the Nomos according to which s/he is making sense (or meaning) of the utterance s/he

receives. In the exchange, each agent is being cooperative; however, not with each other, but with the Nomos each is employing. The discourse participants' efforts work toward a common aim (meaningful discourse), but this aim is achieved through separate acts of cooperation. Grice, poetic in his explication, says the efforts are 'dovetailed': each participant's cooperation with a Nomos is separate (like a feather), but the result is a meaningful exchange (a flight-worthy tail).

Figure 1 represents one utterance produced and one utterance received in cooperation with a Nomos (the trajectories of the two utterances (one produced and one received) are represented by the arrows). To *produce* a sensical utterance, one cooperates with a Nomos in ways that can be usefully described by Grice's 'maxims of cooperative discourse'. To *receive* a sensical utterance (or rather, to *render* a received utterance sensical), one cooperates with a Nomos in ways that can be usefully described in the fashion of compositionist Peter Elbow's 'believing and doubting games' (see below).

Figure 1. *Utterance: Cooperation with a Nomos*



I believe Grice's maxims of cooperative discourse can be regarded as universal *Nomoi* for utterance. The term 'universal' need not arouse suspicion, because the relativism built into the maxims and into the sophisticated concept of *Nomos* requires that the maxims shift in meaning according to the context of any particular utterance.

Grice claims that discourse participants follow four maxims and their submaxims in order to produce utterances that make sense to another:

Quantity (1. Make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange, 2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.); Quality (1. Do not say what you believe to be false, 2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence); Relation (Be relevant); and Manner (1. Avoid obscurity of expression, 2. Avoid ambiguity, 3. Be brief, 4. Be orderly) (Grice 1989:26-27).

My notion that an utterance operates in accordance with the maxims to make sense according to a particular *Nomos* can be best described through subtle but important revisions in Grice's maxim descriptions. In NCP, a directly cooperative utterance (an utterance without implicature) would follow the maxims of: Quantity (Be as informative as is required by the *Nomos* being cooperated with for the purposes of the current exchange); Quality (Not be false according to the *Nomos* being cooperated with for the purposes of the current exchange); Relation (Be relevant according to the *Nomos* being cooperated with for the purposes of the current exchange); and Manner (Avoid what would be considered obscurity of expression according to the *Nomos* being cooperated with for the purposes of the current exchange).

The relativism of the maxims is significant; they depend on the context within which the utterance is being produced. Reference to the classroom discourse strip helps explain. To answer the teacher's questions, 'Is this a circle?' Gabriel and Didi are expected to follow these maxims: Quantity (give all the information that is required by the *Nomos* of that discourse situation (presumably a 'yes' or 'no'), and not give more information than is required by the *Nomos* of that discourse situation (for example, saying, 'Yes, and it's blue')); Quality (not give information that is believed to be false or that lacks adequate evidence according to the *Nomos* of that discourse

situation (for example, saying 'No' if the shape is a circle – note that Gabriel and Didi did violate this maxim)); Relation (give only answers that are relevant according to the *Nomos* of that discourse situation (for example, not giving additional information like 'and it's blue' (which would also break the maxim of quantity) or saying 'No, it's a mark on a sheet of paper', which is perhaps true, but irrelevant)); Manner (not use expressions considered obscure according to that discourse situation (for example, saying, 'It's a line shaped in a round fashion in which the two ends meet'))).

Similarly to the ways in which Grice's maxims of cooperative discourse can be said to operate as *Nomoi* for utterance production, Peter Elbow's believing and doubting games can be said to operate as *Nomoi* for utterance reception.

Elbow (1973) describes the discursive situation in terms strikingly similar to those of Grice: '[T]here is a real truth about the meaning of an utterance ...: that reading is correct which the speech community builds in or *could build in* without violating its rules'⁸ (1973:159). 'Truth', in Elbow's description is what the community's rules determine it to be. Elbow claims that discourse participants have two ways in which they may respond to an assertion: they may believe it or they may doubt it.

Consider Grice's example of a discourse situation in which a passenger says to a driver, 'You're almost out of gasoline. There's a station around the corner'. If the driver responds to the utterance with an affirmative – 'Okay' – or proceeds to the gas station without comment, we could say that s/he 'believed' the speaker. In fact, Grice argues that in general people tend to believe each other (that is, they believe that discourse participants involved in a cooperative exchange will follow the maxims or deliberately break them to implicate information). If, however, the driver receives A's utterance otherwise, replying perhaps, 'Why should I go there?' or 'I'm not out of gas', we could claim that the driver doubted the other's utterance. It is important to note that in NCP, the reception of an utterance is as active a process of construction as is producing an utterance.

NCP and Social Interaction: Cooperation of Discourse Participants and Concordance of Nomoi

Figure 2. *Social Interaction: Cooperation with Nomos and Concordance of Nomoi*

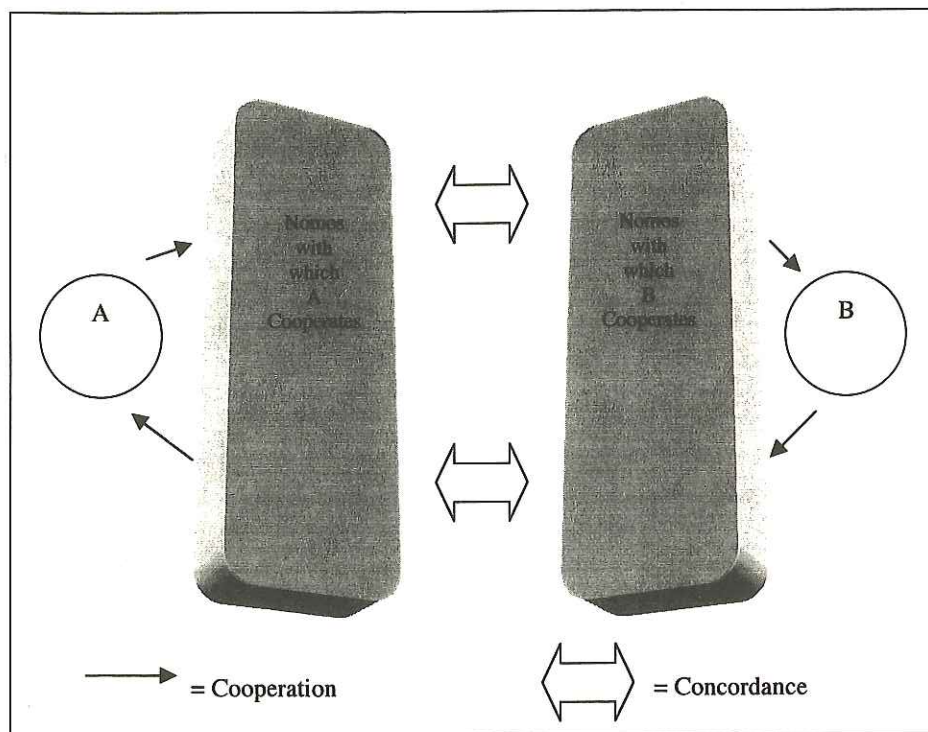


Figure 2 illustrates how NCP accounts for discourse from the perspective of social interaction. In a talk exchange involving two people, two Nomoi are involved. As represented in the figure, when two people communicate successfully, each cooperates with a Nomos and each Nomos is *concordant* with the other Nomos. In a successful communication, the Nomoi are in a state of 'concordance' (that is, they 'sound together', or harmonize, such that information is processed by the speaker and the hearer in fashions that result in each participant understanding at least close enough approximations of the intended meanings).

The classroom discourse strip begins with the teacher's utterance 'Is this a circle?' To create that utterance, the teacher cooperates with her understanding of a particular Nomos (for clarity's sake, let's say 'the specialized language of geometry'). To render this utterance – 'Is this a circle?' – sensible to himself, Gabriel cooperates with his own understanding of a Nomos (let's again say 'the specialized language of geometry'). If Gabriel's understanding of the specialized language of geometry is concordant with the teacher's understanding of the specialized language of geometry, then the meaning he renders from the teacher's utterance will be sufficient for the conversation to continue unimpeded. In this case, it so happens that Gabriel's rendered meaning of the teacher's utterance is so close that in his reply he is able to deliberately exploit maxims for comic effect.

It would be significantly inaccurate to say that in the classroom discourse strip Gabriel is cooperating with the Nomos of his teacher or that either Gabriel or his teachers are cooperating directly with the specialized language of geometry. People simply do not have access to pure, unmediated Nomos. It is far more precise to say that Gabriel and his teacher are each cooperating with their own constructions of the specialized language of geometry.

NCP and Social Context: Continuous Creation of Personal Nomos Systems

Figure 3. Social Context: *Personal Nomos Systems*

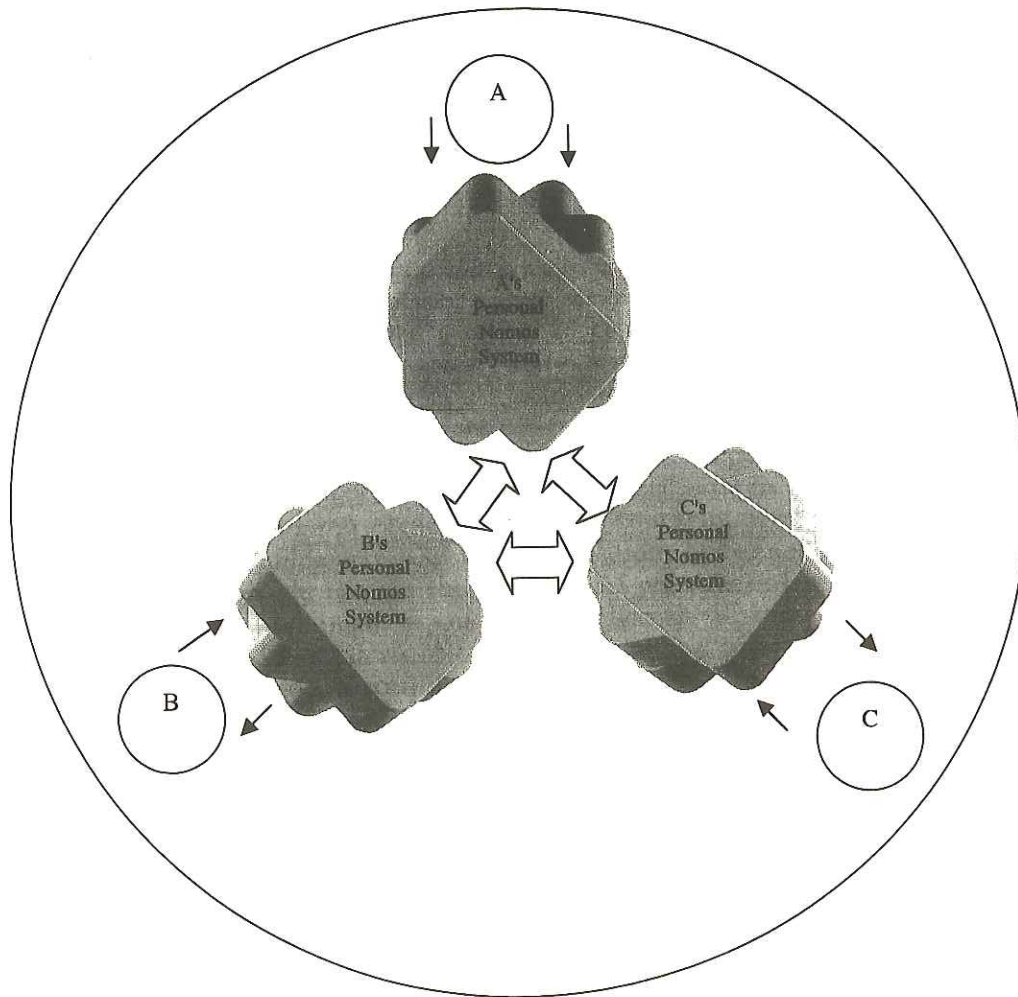


Figure 3 represents NCP in the perspective of social context. In examining discourse as social context, one looks toward the ways in which the discourse is contained, constrained, enabled, and otherwise influenced by the social, political, material and other cultural conditions. Figure 3 represents how NCP highlights for analysis: 1) the ways in which Nomoi affect discourse; and 2) the ways in which Nomoi are influenced by discourse participants and the cultural conditions of larger contexts.

Discourse participants actually engage with many, many different Nomoi simultaneously in each discursive situation. If we were to list all of the Nomoi with which a discourse participant attempts to cooperate in a given utterance in a given discursive context, that list of Nomoi would constitute what I call a 'Personal Nomos System' (PNS) through which the discourse participant makes meaning.

Although in the previous section I stated for the sake of clarity that the teacher in the classroom discourse strip is cooperating with her understanding of one Nomos (the specialized language of geometry), it would be more precise to say she is simultaneously cooperating with her understanding of a multiplicity of Nomoi; for example, Nomoi regarding pedagogical strategies, adult-child relationships, classroom management, the school's and state's curriculum guidelines, English language, her knowledge of the individual students in the class, what last year's teacher has taught these students and what next year's teacher will expect these students to have been taught, her personal feelings regarding the importance of the material, her experiences as a student and teacher, and so on.⁹ As daunting as it may seem, the complete list of Nomoi – the entire PNS – with which the teacher is attempting to cooperate is probably endless and certainly unattainable, as is the list of Nomoi with which each of her students is attempting to cooperate as they participate in the classroom conversation.

The vast number of Nomoi being cooperated with is only one obstacle to our listing the Nomoi in a PNS: PNSs operate so quickly, so personally, and so reflexively, that one could not articulate the entire list even for oneself. And, PNSs exist in time and space; they integrate and shift with each measure of time. How discourse participants negotiate their PNSs is influenced by their mood, health, level of concern, and a host of other psycho-social factors. PNSs are unique not only to each discourse participant (hence, the 'personal'), but are unique to each discourse situation. Indeed, they

are unique to each new utterance within each discourse situation; for with each new utterance, each discourse participant has new experience which is integrated into his or her PNS. As Patrick Suppes suggests, 'Both as speakers and as listeners, we are continually creating and learning new rules, engaging, if you will, in new practices' (1986:116). The personal negotiations that construct a PNS also resonate with the sophist Protagoras's view that each human 'is the measure of all things'. In every discourse situation, each participant's understanding (or 'measure') of a Nomos constitutes for him or her what is meaningful and how. Complicating the matter even further, not all Nomoi are equal: their significance in a particular discourse situation depends on the context and, in many cases, discourse participants are encouraged (or perhaps forced) by outside social, political, or cultural forces to attend to particular Nomoi.

For example, involved in the context of the classroom discourse strip is an institutional authority and institutional responsibility underpinning the teacher's PNSs. There are traditions of schooling and testing that encourage (even enforce) particular assumptions regarding the process of education. There are formally and informally established methodologies for presenting evidence that will be considered effective and appropriate according to different communities. There is an elected school board, a host of administrators, and involved parents and community members. There is a Nomos within which is designated what is called 'circle' and what is called 'square'. There is a Nomos that make sense of what a 'snicker' is versus a 'giggle', 'laugh', or 'guffaw'. All of these and an infinite number of other Nomoi influence (to differing and shifting degrees) the social context of this classroom discourse strip. And each discourse participant constructs again and again a PNS by which s/he makes meaning at any given moment in any given conversation in any given social context.

I do not find the scope or dynamism of PNSs daunting. Rather, I find the concept fosters renewed respect for the complex work people accomplish in their ordinary talk.

Tenets of NCP and Forms of Cooperation: New Terms for Discourse Study

The implications of a Nomos-informed Cooperative Principle of Discourse are significant. Below, I list the tenets of NCP, drawn from the multiperspectival description in the previous section. I believe many fields and disciplines interested in discourse study as utterance, social interaction, and/or social context could benefit from examining any of the activities of discourse highlighted in these tenets.

Tenets of NCP

- 1) Discourse Participants create Nomoi (formal and informal processes for the making of meaning).
- 2) Discourse Participants attempt to cooperate with (that is, operate according to the dictates of) particular Nomoi to produce meaningful utterances and to render meaningful the utterances received in particular discourse situations.
- 3) Discourse Participants do not have direct access to unmediated Nomoi. They have access only to their own understandings, or constructions, of Nomoi.
- 4) Discourse Participants cooperate with their understandings of many Nomoi at once, thereby creating Personal Nomos Systems (PNSs), as they produce or receive meaningful discourse in a particular discursive situation.
- 5) When a speaker's PNS and a listener's PNS enable each of them to produce a close enough approximation of the intended meaning(s) for the communication to be successful, the Nomoi and PNSs are said to be concordant.
- 6) Nomoi and PNSs – and hence discourse participants' cooperations with them – are subject to contextual conditions, including authority, status, mood and experience of discourse participants, and the cultural significance of the

Nomos with which the participants are attempting to cooperate.

Forms of Cooperation

To say that discourse participants 'cooperate with Nomoi' is less precise than is possible; I have identified five different forms 'cooperation with Nomoi' may take. Discourse participants can deliberately and sincerely cooperate in ways they are expected to (*willful cooperation*); deliberately and openly not cooperate in ways they are expected to (*willful noncooperation*); be prevented from cooperating in ways they are expected to (*unwillful noncooperation*); deliberately cooperate to transmit two or more meanings at once (*willful miscooperation*); and, inadvertently cooperate in ways that transmit two or more meanings at once (*unwillful miscooperation*). These concepts from NCP could enable new directions of discourse research from all three perspectives (utterance, social interaction, and social context), and they are especially promising for explicating social, political, psychological, cultural, and other human elements of communication. I offer these terms as descriptive tools for discourse study from any perspective.

Willful cooperation

Willful cooperation describes the discursive action that members of a community of meaning makers take when they accept meaning and produce meaning according to the Nomos with which that community ordinarily cooperates. In fact, the willingness and ability to cooperate effectively with a particular community's Nomos is to a large extent simultaneous with (or mutually dependent upon) membership in that community in the first place; if one does not or cannot generally acknowledge (ac/knowledge, deem as knowledge) meaning produced according to Community X's Nomos, one is likely not a member of Community X.

An example of willful cooperation in the classroom discourse strip is the teacher's second utterance, which begins, 'Oh-oh'. In the turn before, Gabriel has given a 'wrong' answer¹⁰ (presumably on purpose to make a joke – though I explore other possibilities below). In her

reply, the teacher willingly cooperates with her understanding of Gabriel's Nomos – that is, she agrees to make meaning according to the new terms he's just established (giving the teacher the opposite of the answer she expects). In her reply, the teacher says, 'Oh-oh. You boys are playing a trick now. I can tell. Well, I'm going to play a trick on you'. The teacher attempts (successfully) to be willfully cooperative with Gabriel's newly established Nomos by 1) acknowledging (deeming as knowledge) the 'trick' and 2) playing a 'trick' of her own. In answering the teacher's 'trick question' in the affirmative, Gabriel reestablishes his willful cooperating with the teacher's Nomos (in which he gives the answer she will deem correct).

It is significant that 'unwillful cooperation' is not listed among the forms of cooperation I've identified. In fact, unwillful cooperation is not really possible. Participation in a meaningful discourse requires cooperation or assent or agreement. Can one be *forced* to make meaning, be forced to cooperate? One could be threatened, but if one yields to the threat then one is expressing a 'willingness' to cooperate in order to avoid some negative consequence. This certainly constitutes an oppressive situation, but to designate the utterance 'unwillful cooperation' seems inaccurate. The making of meaning requires cooperation from discourse participants. As a result, deliberately withholding cooperation or cooperating in some undesirable way can be a very effective means of stopping or influencing discourse situations, as I explain next.

Willful noncooperation

Willful noncooperation describes the discursive action that members of a community of meaning makers take when they *overtly* challenge specific Nomoi with which that community ordinarily cooperates. Willful noncooperation can challenge Nomoi in two ways: first, a member of Community X could attempt to produce meaning among Community X in a way that does not operate according to specific Nomoi of Community X (this is an attempt to establish a new Nomos for the community); and second, a member of Community X could refuse to acknowledge meaning that has been produced in accordance with the Nomos of Community X (this is an attempt to eradicate a Nomos of the community). Successful willful noncooperation renegotiates Nomos and creates change in the

community's expectations for discursive practice.¹¹ Willful non-cooperation fails if the community does not cooperate with the renegotiated Nomos. Success or failure of willful noncooperation is influenced by several contextual factors including opportune timing (what the sophists called 'Kairos') and the rhetorical skill and status within the community of the willfully noncooperating member.

In the classroom discourse strip, Gabriel's answer 'No' to the teacher's question 'Is this a circle?' can be usefully described as an example of willful noncooperation. Gabriel most likely understands the Nomos he is expected to use well enough to make meaning in the community, but he chooses instead not to make meaning in ways appropriate to the Nomos his teacher expects him to cooperate with. The claim that Gabriel's action is willfully noncooperative could lead to interesting avenues of investigation. One could speculate upon Gabriel's motives for his willfully noncooperative action: we might consider that Gabriel is attempting to assert his own authority, opting out of the teacher's Nomos (and, perhaps drunk with power, he giggles to himself!). Such insights might be useful in child development studies, developmental psychology, personality studies, and others. However, Gabriel's utterance is also usefully and interestingly described as willful miscooperation because it yields a productive interpretation for the purposes of improving pedagogy (see below).

Other examples of willful noncooperation abound in discourse, often in political or social protest. Deliberately using nonsexist language in a community in which sexist language is accepted as the norm is also arguably a form of willful noncooperation in that it constitutes a refusal to accept meaning-making as accomplished according to dominant Nomos systems: producing new words or phrases – such as 'chair' for 'chairman', and 's/he' for 'he' as a 'universal gender' – are willfully noncooperative.

Unwillful noncooperation

Unwillful noncooperation occurs when a discourse participant is prevented from cooperating effectively with a Nomos. This might result from external factors, such as an inability to hear a speaker due to outside noise, a lack of knowledge of the Nomos, lack of access or a policy that forbids participation – for example, before women in the

United States were granted the right to vote in the U.S., they were subjected to unwillful noncooperation. Unwillful cooperation might also result from internal factors, such as deafness, muteness, shyness or fear of public speaking, or fear of another discourse participant. Scholars of discourse are all too familiar with this concept: all of us who have attempted to study a transcribed conversation in which the word 'unintelligible' appears have engaged in unwillful noncooperation. There appears to be no unwillful noncooperation in the classroom discourse strip.

Willful miscooperation

Willful miscooperation occurs when a discourse participant deliberately produces an utterance that cooperates successfully with more than one Nomos simultaneously. Willful miscooperation is useful for describing some kinds of humor (e.g., puns are miscooperations); in these cases the 'mis' in miscooperation is playful (except in the case of painfully bad puns). Willful miscooperation is also useful in describing covert discourse intended to enable secret communication in a discourse situation that includes discourse participants who are not to be 'in' on the secret; in these cases the 'mis' in miscooperation is covert. Willful miscooperation might also be thought of as 'insincere cooperation' or 'manipulative cooperation'.

Gabriel's first utterance – 'No' when the teacher expected 'Yes' – might be interpreted as playful willful miscooperation. Reading the utterance as willfully miscooperative could be used to support that Gabriel is making a joke; that is, he is cooperating with a Nomos opposing the one established by the teacher in order to create humor (albeit, a young child's humor). So his answer cooperates with the teacher's Nomos – but it cooperates in a way that establishes what is for her an incorrect answer – at the same time as it cooperates with another Nomos in a way that establishes humor. His giggle could be his laughter at his own joke (willful cooperation with the Nomos he himself just established). If another student had also laughed, we might be able to claim that Gabriel and the other student each cooperated with a Nomos that others were not privy to.

A particularly rich example of 'covert' miscooperation can be found in enslaved African's spirituals in the United States. Many spirituals were not only hymns but were also directions to safety

communicated to those who had escaped or convenings of secret meetings (Spirituals 1997). The songs themselves, we can claim, cooperated with two Nomoi at once: the Nomos according to which the songs were hymns and the Nomos according to which the songs were directions to safety. The plantation owners only cooperated only with the Nomos according to which the spirituals were hymns, while the passing escapees were able to cooperate with both Nomoi.

Unwillful miscooperation

Unwillful miscooperation occurs when discourse participants inadvertently misunderstand each other's utterances because they are interpreting them according to Nomoi that make sense of the utterance, but not the kind of sense the speaker intends. In daily life, unwillful miscooperations are the root of many quarrels.

In the classroom discourse strip, I see only one possible point at which unwillful miscooperation might have occurred. If Didi does in fact believe that the teacher is holding up a circle even though it's a square, then Didi's utterance is unwillfully miscooperative, because the teacher reads Didi's utterance as if it is attempting to cooperate with Gabriel's trick rather than with the teacher's expectations. If this is true and Didi really does think the square is a circle, then poor Didi would really be put off by the teacher's response, 'You're being silly'.

Conclusion

A Nomos-informed Cooperative Principle can be used to identify and describe particular activities of discourse from all three perspectives (utterance, social interaction, and social context). It is a descriptive theory, not any sort of prescription for 'correct' discourse. Context-specific and relativistic, the tenets of NCP and the five forms of cooperation identified can be useful in describing even the haphazard or oppressive discourses that some researchers have claimed Grice's CP cannot explain. The terms of NCP encourage and enable researchers of utterance, social interaction, and social context to take into account the specific contexts of any discourse situation under

study, particularly the relationships of people to the processes by which they make meaning.

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Notes

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2. For an explanation of these 'perspectives on discourse', please see my essay Lindblom (2001, in press).
3. Edward Schiappa (1999) has coined the phrase 'neo-sophist' to designate those scholars who use sophistic texts for contemporary purposes.
4. '[Protagoras] was the first to say that on every issue there are two arguments opposed to each other' (Sprague 1972:21). This idea becomes known generally in Greek as the expression *dissoi logoi* (Jarratt 1991:49).
5. 'Of all things the measure is man, of things that are, that they are, and of things that are not, that they are not' (Sprague 1972:4).
6. In his *On Nature* or *On Nonexistence*, Gorgias explains that one, 'nothing exists,' and that two, '[i]f anything exists, it is incomprehensible', and that three, '[i]f it is comprehensible, it is incommunicable' (Freeman 1948:128).
7. The emphasis is the author's.
8. The emphasis is the author's.
9. A particularly interesting Nomos the teacher is no doubt cooperating with is her understanding of how her words will be interpreted by the researcher recording her. Would that researchers could eradicate this Nomos from subjects' discourse processes!
10. That is, Gabriel has given an answer that is deemed 'wrong' according to the Nomos with which the teacher is cooperating.
11. A significant enough change in Nomos might constitute what Thomas Kuhn has called a 'paradigm shift'.

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