

Discourse - Deborah Schiffrin

The two excerpts below might seem familiar to you! (A) was an early draft of the first paragraph in the Discourse chapter. One of the editors suggested that I make it “a tad friendlier.” The result was (B). After identifying the linguistic differences between (A) and (B), discuss the impact of the changes on clarity, involvement and ‘friendliness.’ You might also want to assess the two versions in relation to the differences between spoken and written discourse. Then try to make the text sound even friendlier. When would it stop sounding like a textbook?

(A) It would be hard for one to imagine what one’s world would be like without language since almost everything that one does in one’s everyday existence depends on language. Not only would it be difficult for ONE to communicate with ONE ANOTHER, but much of what keeps societies together, and allows for cultures to continue, depends crucially on language. One needs language to make and enforce laws; gain access to, and distribute, valued material and symbolic resources; create and maintain both personal and public relationships; socialize children into one’s ways of ‘being,’ ‘thinking’ and ‘doing’; engage in scholarly inquiry and academic research; preserve one’s past and plan one’s future. Language allows one to make friends (and enemies), joke (and argue with) each other, celebrate happy (and mourn sad) occasions.

(B) Almost everything that we do in our everyday lives depends on language. In fact, it is hard to even imagine what our world would be like without language. So much of what keeps people and societies together depends crucially on language. We need language to make and enforce laws; get and distribute valued resources; create and maintain personal and public relationships; teach children our ways of ‘being,’ ‘thinking’ and ‘doing’; engage in scholarly inquiry; preserve our past and plan our future. Language allows us to make friends (and enemies), joke and argue with each other, celebrate happy occasions and mourn sad ones.