



Crazy Talk: A Study of the Discourse of Schizophrenic Speakers (Cognition and Language: A Series in Psycholinguistics)

By Sherry Rochester

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This book is a study of discourse—the flow of talk of schizophrenic speakers. Our goal is to understand the processes which account for the ordinary flow of talk that happens all the time between speakers and listeners. How do conversations happen? What is needed by a listener to follow a speaker's words and respond appropriately to them? How much can a speaker take for granted and how much must be stated explicitly for the listener to follow the speaker's meanings readily and easily? Each time we ask these questions, we seem to have to go back to some place prior to the "ordinary" adult conversation. This time, we have tried reversing the questions and asking: What happens when conversation fails? Prompted in part by an early paper by Robin Lakoff to the Chicago Linguistics Society and by Herb Clark's studies of listener processes, we wondered what a speaker has to do to make the listener finally stop making allowances and stop trying to adjust the conversational contract to cooperate. This inquiry led us to the schizophrenic speaker. When a listener decides that the speaker's talk is "crazy," he or she is giving up on the normal form of conversation and saying, in effect, this talk is extraordinary and something is wrong. We thought that, if we could specify what makes a conversation fail, we might learn what has to be present for a conversation to succeed.

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- Rank: #3482209 in eBooks
- Published on: 2013-04-17
- Released on: 2013-04-17
- Format: Kindle eBook



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