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Discourse analysis: The state of the art

Discourse understanding bridges the gap between what is said and what is meant.

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Contents

1. Introduction: Approaches to <i>text</i> and <i>discourse</i>	3
2. Communicative dynamism and the chain of reference	5
3. Cooperative interaction, speech acts and inferencing	13
4. The ethnography of communication	18
5. Conversation as an instrument of constituting social reality	21
6. Discourse as a wider conceptual and societal event	23
7. Mental representation approaches	32
8. Conclusion	41
Appendix	44
References	45

1. Introduction: approaches to *text* and *discourse*

Studying the ways people communicate is a very complex matter because it entails various aspects of different disciplines. Verbal elements have to be studied along paralinguistic signs such as loudness, breathing patterns and intonation, which includes tone unit boundaries, nuclei, pitch etc. In addition, non-verbal signs such as gestures, facial expressions, body postures and movements (relative to the interlocutor(s)) etc. have to be taken into account. Aspects of media use may also be involved as well as social and psychological dimensions. The different factors of grounding, the participants of the communication and the setting have to be considered as well as the dimensions of cognitive frames and idealized cognitive models, which language users have internalized. Moreover it is not only the given context of communication which is at stake, e.g. the communicative discourse space, which Langacker (1998: 4) defines as “the mental space comprising those elements and relations construed as being shared by the speaker and the hearer as a basis for communication at a given moment in the flow of discourse“, but also different spaces which may be opened by space building devices such as time adverbials (*in the year 2525*) and counterfactuals (*if I were in your shoes*).¹

These complex phenomena have been the concern of discourse analysis for the past five decades. The different approaches and perspectives adopted to study human communication make it difficult to present an exact definition of discourse analysis. “It would be nice if we could squeeze all we know about discourse into a handy definition. Unfortunately, as is also the case for related concepts as ‘language’, ‘communication’, ‘interaction’, ‘society’ and ‘culture’, the notion of discourse is essentially fuzzy.” (van Dijk, 1997: 1).

The following comparison proves van Dijk’s point that there are terminological inconsistencies. For example, Koch (1965: 16) takes *text* to be the superordinate term:

Any sequence of sentences temporally or spacially arranged in a way to suggest a whole will be considered to be a text. Any text (or parts of a text) having manifestations of a particular theme in common will be considered to be a discourse. Texts without a discourse may be referred to as non-discourse texts. We are therefore confronted with the following dichotomy:

TEXT	
non-discourse text	discourse

Salkie (1995: ix) on the other hand does not differentiate between text and discourse at all: “A text, or discourse is a stretch of language that may be longer than one sentence. Thus text and discourse analysis is about how sentences combine to form texts.“

In some uses the difference between the terms *text* and *discourse* reflects different traditions of how to approach the description of communicative phenomena. In the tradition of German *Textlinguistik* the written text was regarded as the primary unit of investigation, whereas in the British and American tradition *discourse analysis* simply referred to the study of linguistic phenomena beyond the sentence boundary.² Nowadays *text* tends to be regarded as the spoken or written product of a communicative event. Unlike the tradition of textual structuralism non-verbal elements like drawings, film takes or dancing are not considered parts of a text.³

¹ Cf. Fauconnier (1985), Fauconnier and Sweetser (1996) and Fauconnier and Turner (1994a), (1994b), (1996), Langacker (1991a), (1991b) and Lakoff (1987).

² There used to be a predelection for written language in some traditions. Cf. de Beaugrande (1997: 46): “... English has been dominated by written culture, encouraging the belief that the order of language only emerges when written down in neat sentences - a belief shared by many homework linguists.“ Cf. also Harweg (1974).

³ Cf. Koch (1974a) and my analysis of comic strips (Hünig, 1974).

Discourse on the other hand refers to the speaker's or hearer's mental representation of a text. But since it cannot be claimed that there is a terminological consensus about these terms it is important to be aware of the meaning intended. Van Dijk, for example, applies the term *discourse*, if the following criteria are met:⁴ First, it must be language in use, i.e. authentic and not invented language data, second, beliefs must be communicated, which means that the participants share what they think, believe, feel, want etc. and third, an interaction must take place. Interaction and the communication of beliefs equals the exchange of communicative intentions via speech acts.⁵ Thus van Dijk would not consider speeches, sermons, news-bulletins, novels or newspapers as instances of discourse, because they lack turn-taking. That the term *discourse* has other quite specific uses complicates matters even further:⁶

- (i) Units of communication as used in different social situations, e.g. 'legal discourse', 'classroom discourse' etc.
- (ii) Different ways of structuring areas of knowledge or social practice. Thus discourse is seen as social practices which structure social reality in different ways, e.g. by defining social roles and relationships. This approach is derived from ethnomethodology.⁷
- (iii) Historically different ways of formulating social, political or scientific theories, e.g. using different metaphorical frameworks. A well-known example is 'psychological discourse' based on either metaphors from mechanics or computer technology.⁸

The above orientations are particularly important in *Critical Discourse Analysis*, which tries to analyze unconscious biases in the linguistic behavior of individuals, groups of language users or institutions. These biases may have a manipulative and detrimental effect on the addressees, which *Critical Discourse Analysis* tries to make transparent and thus to overcome.⁹ This orientation of discourse analysis follows the functionalist tradition, which investigates the mutual influence of language and its users. The formalist tradition, on the other hand, analyses the internal organization of language as an autonomous system, looking for structural units at the text level.¹⁰

Almost a decade ago, Bublitz (1991) made the following observations with regard to the state of the art of discourse analysis: (i) Since discourse analysis is less than twenty years old there are no "old" research results. (ii) Among researchers there is a certain agreement as to the units which are to be described but there is no agreement that these units form a unified set which has to be described according to linguistic and functional criteria. (iii) There is no standard paradigm of description in discourse analysis. He does not conclude, though, that discourse or discourse analysis is too unsystematic a field to be described in a systematic way. Eight years later the state of the art of discourse analysis has to be assessed differently. In order to give some reference points within the field of discourse analysis, I will take the six approaches to discourse analysis as described by Schiffrin (1994) as a backdrop to my own description:

1. *Speech Act Theory*, 2. *Conversation Analysis*, 3. *Interactional Sociolinguistics*,

⁴ Cf. van Dijk (1997: 2).

⁵ Cf. chapter 3.

⁶ Cf. Fairclough (1992), Foucault (1979), Pêcheux (1982).

⁷ Cf. chapter 5.

⁸ Cf. Halliday and Martin (1993).

⁹ Cf. Gerbig (1993), Jäger (1993), Jäger and Janussek (1992) and Stubbs (1996).

¹⁰ Cf. Harris (1952a, 1952b), Koch (1974b) and Levin (1964).

4. *Ethnography of Communication*, 5. *Pragmatics* and 6. *Variation Analysis*.¹¹ There is a certain degree of overlap between the approaches, but the initial hypotheses vary considerably. They also differ in that they regard meaning differently, either as a linguistic or a social phenomenon. Schiffrin differentiates these approaches according to three criteria:

- (i) The individual participants of an interaction and their intentions, social acts and speech acts, linguistic competence and world knowledge.
- (ii) Linguistic interaction of the participants as a product of cooperation.
- (iii) The type of communication.

Since I have added new aspects and developments in discourse analysis a different presentational order has suggested itself so that they will be dealt with in the following chapters:

1. <i>Speech Act Theory</i>	chapter 3: Cooperative interaction, speech acts and inferencing
2. <i>Conversation Analysis</i>	chapter 5: Conversation as an instrument of constituting social reality
3. <i>Interactional Sociolinguistics</i>	chapter 6: Discourse as a wider conceptual and societal event
4. <i>Ethnography of Communication</i>	chapter 4: The ethnography of communication
5. <i>Pragmatics</i>	chapter 3: Cooperative interaction, speech acts and inferencing
6. <i>Variation Analysis</i>	chapter 6: Discourse as a wider conceptual and societal event

I have also added relevant aspects pertaining to their background. Since *Speech Act Theory* and *Pragmatics* have close links I have treated them in the same chapter in which I also deal with aspects of linguistic politeness. The same applies to *Interactional Sociolinguistics* and *Variation Analysis*. Through this arrangement and their characterization the commonalities and differences of these approaches will become clear. I will begin my description with the tradition of describing the information structure of sentences and texts, which Schiffrin's list does not contain.

2. Communicative dynamism and the chain of reference

There is a long tradition of discussing topic (theme) and comment (rheme) in the context of analyzing the informational structure of discourse but these attempts never really moved beyond the sentence-pair boundary. In other words, they were not properly contextualized. It started in the Prague School tradition of analyzing themes and rhemes in sentences, an approach based on the assessment of the assumed information flow ('communicative dynamism') within them. It is not my purpose here to give a detailed account of the whole tradition of theme-rheme structure or topic-comment links. Moreover, this was done by Esser (1984: 10), who gives an overview of the terminological variety within the so-called functional sentence perspective, which goes back to the 1930s. This variety is due to what he calls *Komplexbegriffe* (complex terms), which have more than a single meaning. The main problem in describing the theme-rheme-structure of sentences lies in the fact that various semantic (ideational) and pragmatic (interpersonal) criteria and the criterion of the linguistic form may be applied. Esser's overview is presented in table 1, in which he lists different authors and their terminological usage of topic and comment or theme and rheme respectively.¹²

¹¹ Schiffrin gives a description of these six approaches to discourse analysis and later tests their efficiency with regard to the analysis of her data.

¹² In table 1 the sign “ / “ occurs between pairs of complementary terms and the sign “≅“ means ‘is equivalent to’.

Autor	Komplexbegriff	Anfangs- element	Rest	´gegeben`	´neu`
(author)	(complex terms)	(first element)	(residue)	(given)	(new)
Mathesius (posthum 1975: 81, 83)	basis of / nucleus of the utterance			known	new
Mathesius 1939 (Firbas 1964: 268)	Thema ¹				
Hockett (1958: 201)	topic ¹				comment
Danes (1960: 45)				thème	propos
Halliday (1967: 204, 212)		theme	rheme	given	new
Danes (1967: 504f.)				theme ≡ topic	rheme ≡ comment
Danes (1970: 72)	Thema/Rhema ²				
Chomsky (1970: 72)				presupposition	focus
Firbas (1971: 141)				theme ³	rheme ³
Quirk <i>et al.</i> (1972: 937, 940, 945)		theme		given	new focus ⁴
Sgall <i>et al.</i> (1973: 56f.) Kuno (1976: 120f., 173)	empathy focus	theme		contextually bound ≡ topic old, predictable information	non- bound ≡ focus new, unpredictable information
Chafe (1976)		topic		givenness definiteness	new information contrastiveness
Clark & Clark (1977: 31)		frame	insert	given	new
Dekeyser <i>et al.</i> (1972: 2f.)	topic ¹			old ≡ given ≡ known	new ≡ focus

Table 1. Terminological variety in functional sentence perspective.

¹ With the meaning: “first element plus ´given` “.

² With the meaning: “two complementary communicative functions“.

³ In the framework of his theory of “communicative dynamism“. The theme has the lowest, the rheme the highest force in pushing communication forward.

⁴ With the meaning: “nucleus“.

Rather than summarizing Esser's work it may be more worthwhile to have a detailed look at the present state of this discussion.¹³ One of the heuristic starting points of the theme-rheme discussion is the fact that sentences in discourse contain some information which the speaker presupposes to be known by the hearer and some information which the speaker asserts. The former is often referred to as 'old' or 'given' information and the latter as 'new'. Thus the theme-rheme contrast hinges on the presence or absence of anaphoric ties to the previous text. With regard to nouns, this means that the difference between definiteness and indefiniteness can serve as an indicator of anaphoricity. Another point of departure is found in what is being spoken about. In English, this is often mentioned as the first element in a sentence and also often serves as the subject. But as Esser's synopsis shows, these different aspects have not been clearly separated and thus this whole area seems rather impenetrable. An excellent synthesis of clause structure, information structure and sentence topics is offered by Langacker (1991a). His statement about the structure of events, meaning and grammar in the framework of Cognitive Grammar can be taken as a starting point for a new analysis and a critical review of the information structure in sentences (Langacker, 1991a: 282):

Meanings are characterized relative to cognitive domains, many of which are idealized cognitive models in the sense of Lakoff 1987. Cognitive models fundamental to our experience and our conception of the world are claimed to underlie the prototypical values of certain grammatical constructs pertaining to clause structure. Grammatically significant as well is the structure of events - or more precisely, the structure of our *conception* of events - in terms of conceptual autonomy and dependence. Clausal organization is in large measure shaped by the interaction of these factors.

Langacker begins his description with two basic models, i.e. the action chain model and the stage model. The action chain model relies on the fundamental conception of causality which in terms of prototypicality means that from an item in the source domain energy flows to an item in the target domain. These conceptualizations are subsumed under the term *force dynamics*. Talmy (1988) metaphorically extends force dynamics to non-physical domains. In sentences like the following an energy source, i.e. the hi-jacker, metaphorically transfers energy to a target, i.e. the pilot:

(1) *The hi-jacker forced the pilot to fly to Beirut.*

In Langacker's action chain model energy is transferred from an initial object, i.e. the head, to an adjacent object and from there to the next and so on until it reaches the final object, i.e. the tail. The simplest action chain contains only a head and a tail. Langacker's second model, the stage model, is used to describe how events are conceptualized in scenes. This happens in a moment-to-moment fashion. On the 'stage' there are participants who act in a certain setting. This model is supposed to describe the construal in which a speaker engages before speaking. The linguistic equivalent is called coding. An interface of construal and coding is given in the thematic relations or semantic 'roles', which Langacker interprets not as *per se* linguistic constructs but as pre-linguistic conceptions grounded in everyday experience. Those which are basic and cognitively salient are called role archetypes (Langacker, 1991a: 285):

<i>agent:</i>	a person who volitionally initiates physical activity resulting, through physical contact, in the transfer of energy to an external object.
<i>patient:</i>	an animate object that absorbs the energy transmitted via externally initiated physical contact and thereby undergoes an internal change of state.
<i>instrument:</i>	a physical object manipulated by an agent to affect a patient; it serves as an intermediary in the transmission of energy.

¹³ A concise summary of Prague School Functionalism is presented in Hanks (1996: 102ff.)

experiencer: a person engaged in mental activity (be it intellectual, perceptual or emotive).
mover: an entity that undergoes a change of location.

It is important to note that this is an open list and that other roles such as animate patient or non-human agent may become both cognitively prominent and linguistically relevant. The action chain model, the stage model and the semantic roles combine to form the canonical event model which represents the normal observation of a prototypical action (Langacker, 1991a: 285):¹⁴

The stage model contributes the notion of an event occurring within a viewer (V) observing it from an external vantage point. Inherited from the billiard-ball model is the minimal conception of an action chain, in which one discrete object transmits energy to another through forceful physical contact. Moreover, the action chain head is characterized as an agent, and its tail as a patient that undergoes a resultant change of state (indicated by the squiggly arrow).

Langacker provides the following figure as a representation of the canonical event model (Langacker 1991a: 285):

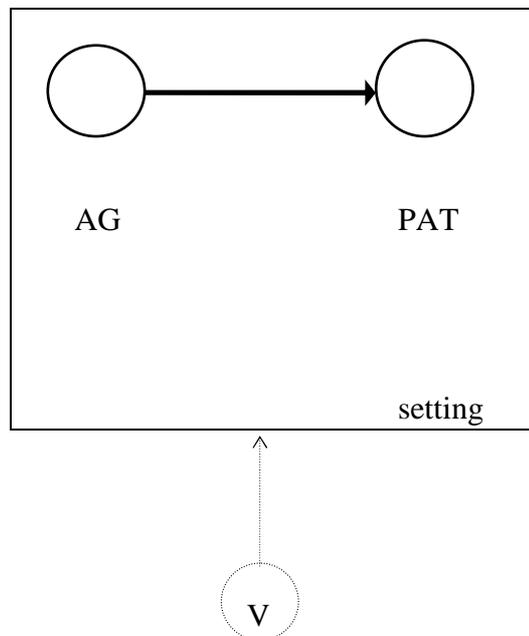


Figure 1.

For the linguistic expressions of events another dichotomy is important, namely the distinction between autonomous and dependent events or subevents. Thus one can conceptualize the bursting of a balloon without the accompanying subevent of the popping sound, but one cannot conceptualize an abstract causing, because causation is conceptually dependent. As the following examples show, an event can be conceptualized with and without expressing the causation ((2) (a) and (b)), but it is difficult to express the causation on its own as in (2) (c) (Langacker, 1991a: 287):

¹⁴ The billiard-ball model is equivalent to the action chain model.

- (2) (a) *The wind caused the tree to fall over.*
 (b) *The tree fell over.*
 (c) *The wind caused.*

An event is also dependent on its participants. Slapping, for example, cannot be conceptualized without an agent and a patient. These considerations lead Langacker to ask what the innermost layer of an event conception is. He claims that this innermost layer is the conception of an autonomous relationship which has just a single participant and which he calls *thematic relationship*. The participant is called *theme* and it may manifest any of several role archetypes. He defines the concepts as follows (Langacker, 1991a: 288):

The most elemental kind of thematic relationship is one in which the participant merely occupies some location or exhibits some static property. *Exist*, *round* and *red* are good examples of expressions that profile such relationships. The semantic role of the participant will be referred to as *zero*, for conceptually it is minimal and non-distinctive. In fact, the zero role is inherent in the others (e.g. something has to be in a place in order to move, or have a property in order to change) and can be thought of as representing the degenerate case to which all of them collapse when a static view precludes the manifestation of their distinctive characteristics. Importantly, the zero role per se is unaltered if the description of a location or property should happen to be complex or incorporate a nominal. Consider *Alice is under the bed*. At the clause level, there is only one participant - Alice - and the thematic relationship is one of being in a certain location. The bed is invoked merely to specify that location; it is not a clausal *participant* (though it could be in other expressions), but rather part of the setting.

Conceptually autonomous thematic relationships can either stand alone or be part of a more complex conception, e.g. in terms of force dynamics. The following examples show a transition from a thematic relationship in which a patient (the ice) undergoes a change of state to one that has several conceptual layers of causation (Langacker, 1991a: 292):

- (3) (a) *The ice cracked.*
 (b) *A rock cracked the ice.*
 (c) *A waiter cracked the ice with a rock.*
 (d) *The manger made a waiter crack the ice with a rock.*
 (e) *The owner had the manager make a waiter crack the ice with a rock.*

In (3) (e) the sentence reflects the mental path that the conceptualizer traces, from the original source of energy (the owner) to the most immediate source of energy (a waiter).¹⁵ The above considerations are part of a conceptual analysis. What is essential for the definition of topic is the relationship between conceptual and linguistic structure, i.e. coding, which is a very complex matter (Langacker, 1991a: 294):

¹⁵ This natural order of the mental path can be reversed, so that the energy flow moves “upstream“.

Conceptually, there are countless ways of construing a given event, and a particular event conception might deviate from the canon in any manner or to any degree. Linguistically, a variety of grammatical devices, each with multiple values clustered around a prototype, are usually available as alternate means of coding a given conception. An event's objective properties are consequently insufficient to predict the grammatical structure of a clause describing it.

The fact that people are able to construe a scene in multiple ways, lies at the foundation of cognitive semantics. Among these alternative construals are archetypes which are linguistically coded as prototypical constructs. Extensions of these are formed to adapt the limited inventory to the need of expressing variations linguistically, as the following examples show (Langacker, 1991a: 296):

- (4) (a) *Floyd's hammer-blow shattered the sides of the glass.*
 (b) *The force of the hammer hitting the glass caused shards to fly in all directions.*
 (c) *Floyd's action generated fragments of glass.*
 (d) *Floyd's arm brought the head of the hammer into contact with the glass.*
 (e) *Floyd's strength overcame the structural integrity of the glass.*

All these coding possibilities are perfectly legitimate, but they deviate from the prototypical coding in that they structure the action chain differently. A significant indication of this can be that no basic-level categories are used.¹⁶ Speakers tend to formulate at this basic level, unless they have a reason to code either at a more specific or a more schematic level. These considerations lead to the term *unmarked coding* which signifies an arrangement in which an archetypical construal is represented by the prototypical linguistic equivalent, which in turn is suggested by the structure of the canonical event model. One clause type which reflects an archetypical construal is the finite transitive clause because subject and object receive focused attention. But there are other clause types which constitute unmarked coding.

Unlike the approaches to the description of topic or theme described above, Langacker (1991a: 306) takes Givon's (1983, 1995) notion of topicality and defines it according to four factors "that pertain to different aspects of the conception of clausal participants. Each factor defines a natural path whose point has a certain measure of cognitive salience by virtue of being the initial element in an ordered sequence. A prototypical subject is the starting point with respect to all of these paths and therefore has maximal topicality and a high degree of prominence." The topicality factors are the following:

- (i) a participant's semantic role, i.e. the nature of its participation in the event
 (ii) a participant's location in the empathy hierarchy
 (iii) definiteness
 (iv) the figure-ground organization

¹⁶ In (4) this is partly the case.

These factors have a diminishing degree of objectivity from (i) to (iv). Since the subject is prototypically an agent, it is seen as the starting point (head) in the energy flow of the action chain.

The empathy hierarchy has the following ranking:

speaker > hearer > human > animal > physical object > abstract entity

This hierarchy is less important than agentivity but nevertheless it has an influence as the following examples show (Langacker, 1991a: 296):

- (5) (a) *The dog chased me.* (a') *I was chased by the dog.*
 (b) *I chased the dog.* (b') ?? *The dog was chased by me.*

(5) (b') is odd because the subject ranks lower in the empathy hierarchy and is also not the agent.

Definiteness is a question of mental contact in the current discourse space by the speaker and hearer and is thus fairly subjective. An indefinite subject (a lake, migraine headaches in the sentences below) often seems awkward and is commonly avoided by means of a special construction (Langacker, 1991a: 308):

- (6) (a) ?? *A lake is in that valley.* (a') *There is a lake in that valley.*
 (b) ? *Migraine headaches plague Sally.* (b') *Sally is plagued by migraine headaches.*

A natural path is thus defined by the following hierarchy: *definite > specific indefinite > non-specific indefinite*, whose starting point implies that the speaker and hearer direct their attention to a particular instance of the type in question. Other facts relevant in this context, are contrasts such as count noun vs. mass noun, singular vs. plural, concrete vs. abstract and pointlike vs. extended. The figure-ground-organization is of special importance in this context. Non-linguistically this means that when human beings look at an object in their environment they tend to focus on it, i.e. single it out and look at it separately against the (back-)ground. The foreground figure tends to be more conspicuous, mobile, better delineated and smaller in size than the background.¹⁷ The lonesome cowboy in a movie, for example, is set off against the prairie as the ground. The principle of figure and ground is also reflected in language, where (7 (a)) is more likely to occur than (7 (b)):

- (7) (a) *The passenger sits in the coach.*
 (b) ? *The coach surrounds the passenger.*

The fact that sentences such as (7 (b)) are used for humorous purposes only underlines the validity of this point. Langacker takes the figure-ground organization of a conceptualized source to be wholly subjective as the following illustrates (Langacker, 1991a: 308):

Although an entity's selection as the figure within a scene is encouraged by certain objective properties (e.g. compactness; being in motion; contrast with surroundings), in the final analysis figure/ground alignment is not inherent in a situation but a matter of construal. The linguistic relevance of figure/ground organization is shown by the semantic contrast between such pairs as *before* vs. *after*, *above* vs. *below*, and *in front of* vs. *in back of* ...

¹⁷ The third and the sixth of the twelve main tenets of gestalt psychology, which Hofstätter (1964: 149ff.) presents, formulate these observation explicitly.

These factors tend to characterize a prototypical subject as (i) being an agent, (ii) having a high ranking in the empathy hierarchy, (iii) being definite and (iv) being the figure in the figure-ground alignment. Since many subjects do not have the first three of these characteristics Langacker concludes that what all subjects have in common is that they represent the figure ('trajector') at the clause level.

By relinquishing the old criteria, i.e. 'given' and 'new' and 'first element', he is able to provide a grid for the description of quite disparate notions such as *topic-comment (theme-rheme)* and *subject*.

The information flow in discourse is the increment of coherent and connected information to the communicative discourse space by the speaker(s). Langacker (1998: 18) mentions three main facets of this process:

- (i) What is being added, i.e. the content.
- (ii) Where it is added, i.e. the conceptual dimension.
- (iii) For what purpose it is added, i.e. the communicative intentions.

The clause is the structural unit that maps the current phase of the communicative discourse space onto the next. It is also responsible for the coherence and connectedness of the incrementing information. In this area there is still a lot of work to be done to be able to deal with normal complex discourse.

The second question pertains to the place within the conceptual framework, i.e. it specifies where a connected discourse structure is to be built or integrated. There are at least five dimensions. First it can be a 'world', i.e. the real world or an imaginary one. The mention of a figure like Ulysses or Mickey Mouse introduces an imaginary world:

(8) *In this comic Mickey Mouse visits Ulysses in his villa.*

The second dimension is instantiated in the opposition of real events vs. generalizations as exemplified in (9):

(9) *Wolves are fierce creatures, but my pet wolf is playful and tame.*

Third, as was mentioned above a 'mental space' may be introduced, i.e. a belief space, a hypothetical space or a counterfactual space. The difference between a world and a space is a matter of degree. A space is often constructed to make a certain point:

(10) *In France Nixon would not have been forced to resign.*

The fourth dimension concerns the spatial and temporal setting. It is a well-known rule that a change of place and time must be made explicit otherwise the hearers will assume that place and time have not changed. Thus it is very awkward to say (11) but mean (12):

- (11) *I had a discussion with Len about force dynamics over breakfast in Amsterdam two years ago and a similar discussion with Fred over lunch.*
- (12) *I had a discussion with Len about force dynamics over breakfast in Amsterdam two years ago and a similar discussion with Fred over lunch in Albuquerque four years ago.*

The fifth *where*-specification concerns the topic which allows the hearers to select the domain of knowledge to which a proposition belongs. It is almost impossible to understand (13) in any satisfactory way because there is no indication of a knowledge domain:¹⁸

- (13) *The procedure is actually quite simple. First you arrange things into different groups. Of course one pile may be sufficient depending on how much there is to do.*

The purpose of what it is added, i.e. speech acts, which represent the communicative intentions of the interlocutors, are dealt with in the following chapter.

3. Cooperative interaction, speech acts and inferencing

Speech Act Theory was introduced by the language philosophers John Austin and John R. Searle, who observed that language is not only used for the functions of reference and descriptions but also to perform social actions. This dimension of language in use is explored by analyzing speech acts, which therefore require a descriptive framework different from the principles of semantic concatenation as shown in the previous chapter. Searle formulated constitutive rules for speech acts and also dealt with indirect speech acts which are characterized by the fact that there is no direct mapping between the linguistic form and the illocutionary meaning.

Speech act theorists look for coherence not at the level of linguistic form and meaning but at the level of expressed interactional moves. Levinson (1983: 289) characterizes the general properties of this approach as follows:

- (i) There are unit acts - *speech acts* or *moves* - that are performed in speaking, which belong to a specifiable, delimited set.
- (ii) Utterances are segmentable into unit parts - *utterance units* - each of which corresponds to (at least) one unit act.
- (iii) There is a *specifiable function*, and hopefully a *procedure*, that will map utterance units into speech acts and vice versa.
- (iv) Conversational sequences are primarily regulated by a set of *sequencing rules* stated over speech act or (move) types.

Levinson expresses serious doubts that such a model is appropriate. The problem with (i) is that there are single-sentence utterances which perform more than one speech act at a time. An even bigger problem is given by the fact that conversational responses can be directed towards the perlocution(s) of an utterance as well as to its illocution(s) (Levinson, 1983: 290):

¹⁸ Cf. the „topicless“ text in chapter 7.

Suppose, for example, that A and his companion B are at a party, and A being bored says to B:

- A: It's getting late, Mildred
 B: a. But I'm having such a good time
 b. Do you want to go?
 c: Aren't you enjoying yourself, dear?

Then B might reply in any of the ways indicated, but none of these addresses the illocutionary force of A's utterance; rather they respond to a number of possible perlocutionary intents that A might have had. But this is highly problematic for the species of model in question: for perlocutions are unlimited in kind and number and any responses based on them will necessarily fall outside the scope of such a model.

The problem of identifying unit parts as stated in (ii) is difficult to solve because the clauses as well as other sub-sentential parts of a sentence may manifest more than one speech act each. In addition, utterance responses may be realized by non-linguistic behavior such as a gesture or a nod of the head.

Since contextual influences may be crucial for the mapping procedures characterized in (iii) there is the necessity of "some immensely complex inferential process that utilizes information of many different kinds." (Levinson, 1983: 291).

Speech Act Theory was developed further by Pragmatic Discourse Analysis, which is based on Grice's cooperative principle. Unlike Austin, Grice (1975, 1978) did not suggest a typology of speech acts or performative verbs. He observed that due to the context, a speaker conveys more information than is encoded in the semantic structure of his or her utterance. He introduced the four maxims of cooperation: quantity, quality, relevance and manner (Grice, 1975: 46).¹⁹ If these maxims are adhered to they provide inferential means of interpreting the speaker's meaning. Consider the following question-answer pair:²⁰

- A: *Did you eat all the biscuits?*
 B: *I ate some of them.*

A will infer that B did not eat all of the biscuits, because it can be expected that speakers will tell as much of the truth as is necessary to put the hearers in a state of knowledge, which renders them sufficiently informed. From a logical point of view B is certainly telling the truth, because eating some of the biscuits is logically implied in eating all of them. What B fails to do is give A all the (relevant) information that s/he has. Therefore B has conversationally implied that s/he did not eat all of the biscuits and thus has misled A.

In the following example A has to assume that B's answer to the question is relevant and work out the appropriate meaning:²¹

- A: *Would you like a chicken salad?*
 B: *I'm a vegetarian.*

¹⁹ For mnemonic reasons Grice's third maxim which he calls *maxim of relation* will here be called *maxim of relevance* because he originally formulated it as: *Be relevant*.

²⁰ The example is taken from Leech (1983).

²¹ Cf. Hünig (1989: 626).

A has to reason as follows: vegetarians do not eat meat and since chicken salad contains meat B is turning down the offer. This information is a conversational implicature because it is independent of the explicated information and context-dependent. It is also cancellable because B might add:

B: (*I'm a vegetarian.*) *But not a very strict one, so I'll try your chicken salad.*

Since it is normal for speakers to say far less than they intend to convey, it is understandable that Grice's cooperative principle has been widely used in discourse analysis. On the other hand he has been critiqued because his principles are derived from the language use which is typical of the academia and the middle class "in England and New England", i.e. in western industrialized societies, but may be less adequate for the linguistic description of other social or ethnic groups.

Apart from the inferences which people draw from each other's statements there is also a more emotional involvement in using language because of the need to be recognized as individuals. A striking example of this aspect is given in the following dilemma. A has a close friend, B, who is very poor. B wears a very ugly jacket and asks A: How do you like my new jacket? Obviously A's answer is not only determined by his truthfulness but also by considerations of tact. Thus speech act logic as described above is not sufficient to explain certain variations and additional communicative strategies used by speakers and hearers. This is so because speakers care about what others think of them, i.e. they care about their social image. Brown and Levinson (1987) saw this deficiency and introduced the term *face* into linguistics, which the sociologist Erving Goffman (1955, 1967) had introduced into sociology, to refer to the interactional identities of speakers and hearers. It is derived from metaphorical phrases such as *to lose one's face* and *to keep one's face*. Goffman (1967) uses the expression *to be in face*, for example, to refer to a role behavior which is in accordance with the expectations accompanying that role and the expression *to be out of face* to behavior which runs counter to such expectations. Brown and Levinson (1987: 13), who wanted to distinguish different degrees of linguistic politeness, coined the terms *positive* and *negative face*, which they describe as follows:

Central to our model is a highly abstract notion of 'face' which consists of two specific desires ('face wants') attributed by interactants to one another: the desire to be unimpeded in one's actions (negative face), and the desire (in some respects) to be improved of (positive face). This is the bare bones of the notion of face which (we argue) is universal, but which in any particular society we would expect to be the subject of much cultural elaboration.

Certain speech acts threaten the positive or negative face wants of the hearer and are therefore called *face-threatening acts (FTA)*. If the speaker criticizes the hearer s/he commits a positive face-threatening act, if s/he wants the hearer to do him or her a favor s/he commits a negative face-threatening act. The seriousness or weightiness of a face-threatening act depends on three factors: the social distance between the speaker and the hearer, the power that the hearer has over the speaker and the degree to which a certain face-threatening act is rated an imposition in a specific culture.²²

Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness is taken up by Leech, who introduces a somewhat simplified *Politeness Principle* (Leech, 1983: 81):

- (i) Minimize (other things being equal) the expression of impolite beliefs!
- (ii) Maximize (other things being equal) the expression of polite beliefs!

The social motivation for it is that unless people are polite to their neighbors the channel of communication will break down. But at times it may be useful to make a point by being ironic, i.e. by saying something which is obviously not true, such as the following:

- (1) *I really like it when you trample on me like that.*

Irony typically takes the form of being too obviously polite for the occasion. The *Irony Principle* reads (Leech, 1983: 82):

If you must cause offense, at least do so in a way which doesn't overtly conflict with the Politeness Principle but allows the hearer to arrive at the offensive point of your remark indirectly, by way of implicature.

Gibbs (1994: 365) goes a step further and claims that irony does not only serve a social goal, directed at an interlocutor, but constitutes a mode of thought. He provides the example of someone saying *What lovely weather* in the midst of a rainstorm and comments as follows:²³

This statement reflects the speaker's conceptualization of the incongruity between certain expectations that the day would be nice and the reality of rain. We judge events as ironic because of an awareness of the incongruity between expectation and reality, even though, in some cases, other participants in the situation appear to be blind to what is really happening. This awareness suggests that irony is not merely a matter of rhetoric or of language but is a fundamental figure in the poetics of mind. We conceptualize events, experiences, and ourselves as ironic and our language reflects this figurative mode of thinking.

This relocation and redefinition of irony as a mind-set suggests that the use of irony similar to the use of conceptual metaphors can and should be studied as an integrated part of *Critical Discourse Analysis*.²⁴

It should be pointed out that Brown and Levinson's views on politeness have also been critiqued. Wierzbicka (1991: 69) attacks their theory because it is based on a misguided universalism and gives the following main ideas as an outline of a new direction in the study of linguistic interaction:

- (i) In different societies, and different communities, people speak differently.

²² *Face*, which refers to the part of the human body with the highest communicative significance (smiling, frowning, blushing, going pale etc.), is used in sociology as a metonymy for the interactional identity of a person relative to a role. In linguistics *face* is used metonymically for the personal values of the participants in communicative interactions.

²³ Cf. also Clark and Gerrig (1984), Gibbs and O'Brien (1991) and Sperber and Wilson (1986).

²⁴ Cf. Hünig (in prep.)

- (ii) These differences in ways of speaking are profound and systematic.
- (iii) These differences reflect different cultural values, or at least different hierarchies of values.
- (iv) Different ways of speaking, different communicative styles, can be explained and made sense of, in terms of independently established cultural values and cultural priorities.

She believes that these points are of particular importance in multi-ethnic societies such as the United States or Australia, because if verbal behavior, which deviates from the mainstream norm, can be explained in terms of different cultural values, serious social and interpersonal misunderstandings can be prevented or at least alleviated.

Her main argument against the universalists is that the ways of speaking in terms of values such as 'directness', 'indirectness', 'solidarity', 'spontaneity', 'sincerity', 'social harmony', 'cordiality', 'self-assertion', 'intimacy' and 'self-expression' are by no means clear, because they are used with quite different and even mutually incompatible meanings. In order to avoid confusion it is necessary that linguists must find descriptive terms which represent universal concepts independent of any specific culture (Wierzbicka, 1991: 10):

I suggest that we can find such concepts in the universal alphabet of human thoughts (...), that is, in the indefinable (i.e. semantically simple) words and morphemes of natural language, such as *I, you, someone, something, this, think, say, want* or *do*), which can be found, it seems, in all the languages of the world.

With regard to different attitudes toward 'self-assertion' by Japanese and mainstream English speakers she points out the difference with the help of the following underlying conceptual structure (Wierzbicka, 1991: 73):

Japanese	<i>don't say: 'I want this', 'I don't want this'</i>
Anglo-American	<i>do say: 'I want this', 'I don't want this'</i>

This means that Japanese speakers are discouraged from saying clearly what they want, whereas Anglo-American speakers are encouraged to do so. On top of this, Japanese culture places a taboo on asking other people directly what they want. A similar contrast between Japanese and Anglo-American culture exists with regard to the clear and unequivocal expression of personal opinions (Wierzbicka, 1991: 74):

Japanese	<i>don't say: 'I think this', 'I don't think this'</i>
Anglo-American	<i>do say: 'I think this', 'I don't think this'</i>

In her opinion it is futile to compare cultural concepts such as English 'self-assertion' and Japanese *enryo* which is usually translated as 'restraint' or 'reserve', because the difference can only be grasped, if these concepts are translated into culture-independent, universal or near-universal concepts. To the semantically simple terms given above she adds *good* and *bad*. Thus *enryo* would be expressed in these terms as follows (Wierzbicka, 1991: 76):

Japanese:

X thinks:

I can say to this person: I want this, I don't want this

I think this, I don't think this

someone can feel something bad because of this

X doesn't say it because of this

X doesn't do it because of this

The difficulties Japanese speakers face in Anglo-American contexts can be read from the above description, because it is opposed to the English speakers' right to self-assertion, which on the other hand is restrained as far as the personal autonomy of others is concerned. A speaker may say 'I want X', but not 'I want you to do X'. The formulation of such a concept reads as follows (Wierzbicka, 1991: 77):

Anglo-American:

I want you to do X

I don't know if you will do it

I want you to say if you will do it

This explains the ubiquity of the so-called whimperatives in English, e.g. *Would you do X?*, *Will you do X?*, *Could you do X?*, *Can you do X?*, *Why don't you do X?*, which is a culture-specific norm for avoiding what Brown and Levinson call face-threatening acts. Even if Wierzbicka's formulations seem simplistic or naive at first sight, it has to be acknowledged that she offers a method of speaking about and analyzing such differences in a non-circular and culture-free 'language'. This is a major step forward in the vast area of cross-cultural semantics and pragmatics. What Wierzbicka does not provide is a framework that takes into account a more global perspective and recognizes that different cultures practice different ways of speaking. Such a wider framework is provided by Dell Hymes, who describes speech acts in a global model of communication, i.e. in the context of their material and psychological setting such as the communicative purpose of the communication, the key how to interpret the acts, the instrumental means available, the norms of interaction and the genres.²⁵

4. The ethnography of communication

Dell Hymes (1986) goes beyond the principles of cooperativeness and politeness, which are two essential aspects of communication, and builds many more components into his model, which is called *Ethnography of Communication*. He aims at describing communications in various cultures comprehensively and in such a way as to allow comparison. His approach is based on the communication model of Jakobson (1960). In contradistinction to Chomsky's term (*linguistic*) *competence*, Hymes coined the term *communicative competence*. For Chomsky the crucial question was: what is human language and on which psychological capacities does it rest, while Hymes asked: what is the (social) purpose of language and how is it used? He interprets language use as a system of socially and culturally specific behavior on a par with other social systems such as economics, politics or kinships. Doing research in these areas requires that linguists (at least for a time) become members of the speech communities which they are studying, in order to be able to describe the meanings 'from inside'. At the very least they must be closely familiar with them. The aim of his approach is

²⁵ Cf. chapter 4.

to describe communication in its particular cultural setting within the framework of universally available possibilities of communicative functions. These functions are numerous and the single speech communities select and implement them in different ways. Thus using a language means that a speaker must be able to handle different cultural concepts reflected in that language. Even the question of what counts as 'communication' is culturally relative, as the following example shows:²⁶

An informant told me that many years before he was sitting in a tent one afternoon during a storm, together with an old man and his wife. There was a clap of thunder after another. Suddenly the old man turned to his wife and asked, "Did you hear what was said?" "No", she replied, "I didn't catch it." My informant, an acculturated [Ojibwa] Indian, told me he did not know at first what the old man and his wife referred to. It was of course the thunder. The old man thought that one of the Thunder Birds had said something to him. He was reacting to this sound in the same way as he would respond to a human being, whose words he did not understand.

Hymes emphasizes the methodological advantage of comparative studies. He also prefers studying speech groups or speech communities to studying a language or a dialect. He defines speech community according to two criteria both of which are regarded as necessary (Hymes, 1986: 54):

(i) the sharing of rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech and (ii) the sharing of rules for the interpretation of at least one linguistic variety. The sharing of grammatical (variety) rules is not sufficient because even if people have a grammatical understanding the whole of the message may escape them. They may not know "what counts as a coherent sequence, request, statement requiring an answer, requisite or forbidden topic, marking of emphasis or irony, normal duration of silence, normal level of voice etc., and have no metacommunicative means or opportunity for discovering such things.

A striking example of the importance of such research emerged when the linguistic behavior of Afro-American speech groups in the urban USA was analyzed. Whereas Afro-American dialects do not show many differences with respect to standard English, the Afro-American speakers differ considerably from their white counterparts because Afro-American speech style makes use of speech acts such as 'signifying', 'sounding' and 'toasting'. For Afro-American these speech acts are very important but in the country at large they are hardly known. Among other factors, this led to a false assessment of the linguistic abilities of black children.

It is important to note that the term *speech act* is defined as a unit relative to its context and that it is not identical with the one introduced by Austin and Searle. Hymes places them in the wider framework of a material and psychological setting. A *speech act* could be a joke which typically occurs within a *speech event*, i.e. a party conversation, which itself is part of a *speech situation*, i.e. the party. "It is of speech events and speech acts that one writes formal rules for their occurrence and characteristics. Notice that the same type of speech act may recur in different types of speech event, and the same type of speech event in different contexts of situation." (Hymes, 1986: 56).

He takes several other components of the communication event into account such as the communicative purpose of the communication (ends), the key (tone, manner) how to interpret the acts, the instrumental means available, the norms of interaction (cooperativeness and politeness are two essential ones, but many more obtain in various cultures) and the genres (jokes, stories, religious services). These are summarized by the mnemonic term

²⁶ Hymes (1986), quoted in Schiffrin (1994: 142).

S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G grid:

S	setting scene	physical circumstances subjective definition of an occasion
P	participants	speaker / sender / addressor / hearer / receiver / audience / addressee
E	ends	purposes and goals, outcomes
A	act sequence	message form and content
K	key	tone, manner
I	instrumentalities	channel (verbal, non-verbal, physical), forms of speech drawn from community repertoire
N	norms	norms of interaction and interpretation, specific properties attached to speaking; interpretation of norms within cultural belief systems
G	genres	textual categories

He was particularly interested in the norms of a speech community, because they make up the cultural value or belief system and because they constitute a wider framework which, as was indicated above, is still lacking in Wierzbicka's approach.

In spite of the broad basis of this approach to discourse analysis; it has some shortcomings:

(i) Because of its complexity, descriptions only achieve a superficial level of observation.
(ii) Rather than study everyday communication; ethnographers prefer to describe forms of ritual communication which does not allow wide-ranging generalizations. (iii) Non-verbal communication is not analyzed. A linguist who tries to compensate for these shortcomings is Martin Pütz (1987b). He adopts Hymes's approach but modifies and extends it into what he calls the *Ethno-Semiotics of Communication*. Through participant observation he studies the service rituals in a church belonging to the *Church of God* denomination. He applies the categories of the S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G grid and also describes these rituals according to paralinguistic categories such as pitch, tempo and rhythm as well as a wide range of non-verbal categories such as facial expressions, gestures, body movements, physical distance and eye contact. Apart from this study there are very few of such a high caliber. Still, this general and broadly based framework seems to be an inescapable condition for serious and 'non-impressionistic' discourse analysis.

5. Conversation as an instrument of constituting social reality

In comparison to all the previous approaches to discourse analysis, the paradigm known as *Conversation Analysis* can be characterized as a typical bottom-up approach focusing on dyadic conversation as one type of discourse and on the rules governing the most prominent aspect, namely turn-taking and the ends or purposes interactants want to achieve in conversing. It is revealing to look at this type of communication in the light of the so-called 'breaching experiments' that Garfinkel (1963) had some of his students carry out. In these informal experiments students went into public or domestic settings and started to behave in an odd way. At home, for example, they would act as if they were boarders or they would demand a background clarification of anything that was said. On another occasion they went into a shop and treated a customer as if s/he were a shop assistant or clerk. Edwards (1997: 66) summarizes the results:

These activities produced from the 'subjects' (victims, or whatever) a range of efforts to correct their ruptured social worlds, to deviations, to restore a normally interpretable order, and/or to treat whatever occurred as something interpretable within that order.

Garfinkel's analysis focused on how the variously evoked normative rules were *constitutive of the sense of conduct*, rather than regulative of conduct. That interpretative, description-dependent, counts-as-an-instance way in which norms were applied included a range of appeals to causal explanations, rational accountability, and the dispositional and mental characteristics of the various actors, both 'subjects' and 'experimenters'. Garfinkel cited a range of cases in which family members 'vigorously sought to make the strange actions intelligible, and to restore the situation to normal appearances'.

The results suggest that people do not only follow and obey social norms, but that they also create social meanings based on well entrenched interactional meanings, which are strongly context-bound. The meaning of what is said depends on what follows, i.e. meanings are established in the course of the interaction. Thus the vantage point of the linguist can neither be a prospective nor a retrospective one, but must observe the process of negotiation in order to study meaning closely.

The paradigm of conversation analysis developed quite independently of any linguistic paradigm. Its discipline of origin was sociology. The sociologist Harold Garfinkel (1967) was the founder of ethnomethodology, a sub-field of sociology, which later developed into conversation analysis. The term *ethnomethodology* was meant to reflect the 'folk-methodology' of interpreting and explaining the social interactions of normal conversational participants. Other members of this group are Harvey Sacks, Emmanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson.

One of the main concerns of conversation analysis is the sequential organization of authentic oral communication and the description of content-free principles of sequential organization in terms of sequencing rules.²⁷ But it would be a mistake to infer from this that the conceptual content of the interaction is completely ignored. An adjacency pair like *question - answer* cannot be identified without content since content occurs within the sequential organization of talk, where it is manifested as a point which participants make, a justification which they put forward or a topic which they introduce or change.

Another scientific objective is to find out which communicative means the members of a social group use in order to create a meaningful social structure. In this context the social role a speaker assumes in an interaction is regarded as highly significant. Another research aspect is the study of the rapid changes occurring during an interaction and which the participants have to keep track of. In that process, a framework of information, i.e. the current discourse space, is created by the participants. It can be accepted, commented on, negotiated and

²⁷ Sequencing rules are derived from *adjacency pairs* such as question - answer, complaint - justification etc.

rejected, which means that the participants monitor their understanding continually. Thus understanding proceeds at two levels, the level of dealing with the world and the level of managing the interaction.

An approach related to conversation analysis but which has a wider socio-cultural scope is *Interactional Sociolinguistics* developed from anthropology, sociology and linguistics. The founder of this approach is John Gumperz (1971, 1982, 1986), who was strongly influenced by Hymes. Gumperz asked how it is to be explained that speakers of the same language possessing an identical set of grammatical rules but with a different cultural background produce very different messages. He answered this question by referring to the fact that these speakers make use of different so-called contextualisation clues which refer to the interrelationship of social and linguistic meaning. He presents the following example:²⁸

Following an informal graduate seminar at a major university, a black student approached the instructor, who was about to leave the room accompanied by several other black and white students, and said:

a Could I talk to you for a minute? I'm gonna apply for a fellowship and I was wondering if I could get a recommendation?

The instructor replied:

b OK. Come along to the office and tell me what you want to do.

As the instructor and the rest of the group left the room, the black student said, turning his head ever so slightly to the other students:

c Ahma git me a gig! (Rough gloss: „I'm going to get myself some support.“)

Apart from the linguistic output, i.e. what was actually said, Gumperz also provides information as to the physical setting (university), the social roles (instructor, graduate students), ethnic information (black student), activities (leaving, approaching, turning his head), the flow of communication (who talks to who) and even the language variety (informal “*ahma*“). The participants are asked about what the speaker meant to say so that both linguistic and social meanings become obvious.

Givón (1995) observes that there are two poles in the coherence of communication, logical tautology, at the one extreme, and contradiction at the other. Coates (1995) points out that her data do not agree with this. Instead they suggest that the meanings which repetitions acquire in interaction are different from simple redundancy. Repetitions between speaker-turns signal active involvement in the ongoing discourse and thereby carry a strong message of support and agreement. Whereas minimal responses such as *mhm* or *yeah* simply signal attentiveness and the acceptance that the speaker is holding the floor, repetitions are much stronger because the speaker demonstrates very careful semantic, syntactic and even intonational monitoring of what was said before. The function of repetitions within a speaker-turn is to draw the listeners' attention to the key issues of what is being said.

The sociologist Erving Goffman (1955, 1967, 1976, 1978, 1979) also describes language use in different social settings. He observes that the simple communication model which only included a speaker and a hearer is insufficient and therefore has to be enlarged. There is more involved than just the role of the speaker if someone reads the letter of another person, or if someone else writes a speech according to the directions of the US President. Therefore the singular role of the speaker was replaced by the so-called production format of an utterance, which entails three roles: (i) the animator, (ii) the author and (iii) the principal. The animator does the talking, the author produces the wording and the principal is responsible for the content of what is expressed. The reader of the letter written by someone else is just the animator, the person writing the presidential speech is the author and the president is both the animator and the principal. Since these roles obviously do not always coincide they have to be distinguished in a model of communication. Goffman also introduced the roles *overhearers*,

²⁸ Gumperz (1986: 30) quoted in Schiffrin (1994: 7).

eavesdroppers and *bystanders*. Overhearers are witnesses of the communication but are not directly involved in the communicative process. Whereas the participants of the interaction are aware of overhearers they are not aware of eavesdroppers. Bystanders are present in a communicative situation but do not participate in the interaction. Without this last role, the following utterance of a mother talking to her little baby with the father present could not reasonably be accounted for: *And now Daddy is going to change your diapers*. It is obvious that by pretending to talk to the baby the mother is really sending a message to the father, who is the bystander in that situation. The humorous aspect lies in the discrepancy of the communicative roles of the father.

Both interactional sociolinguistics and conversation analysts study conversation in order to find rules which regulate social behavior. The role of language in both approaches seems to be twofold: on the one hand language creates a social framework and on the other it is influenced by it and follows its rules and obeys its norms. The social framework also plays an important role in the approaches which are described in the next chapter. But there the focus of attention lies on the text type of narrative and its function in social and psychotherapeutic communication.

6. Discourse as a wider conceptual and societal event

Although William Labov's line of research deals with more global communicative rules and structures that are to be found in everyday life his work in the context of discourse analysis is concerned with story-telling on the one hand and therapeutic discourse on the other. He begins by looking at the realities of turn-taking in everyday conversations and interprets stories as exceptional 'turns' because the story-tellers are allowed to keep the floor much longer than is usually acceptable. The reason for this is that they are expected to have an important point to make. In a similar vein, also in the context of psychotherapy, the stories which patients tell have raised the interest of therapists and also linguists because they can be used to study the psychological problems which are revealed in what happens to the patients and how they interpret this in their stories. It also has to do with the social rights and obligations in the context of their families. The so-called *Variationist Approach to Discourse* deals with aspects of the narrative and a term for the approach dealing with therapeutic discourse is *Comprehensive Discourse Analysis*.²⁹

Stories told in conversations are an ever-present aspect of everyday life from childhood to old age. On the other hand there are certain rules which are essential in guiding our comprehension of what goes on socially. Labov and Waletzky (1967) developed the descriptions of narrative structure introduced by researchers like V. Propp (1968) and A. Dundes (1962) further and postulated a more abstract structure which could also be applied to everyday stories.³⁰ In order to demonstrate their approach, I will present a story related by a participant of a so-called television chat show on *BBC 1* called *Kilroy* after the master of ceremonies, Kilroy-Silk (K.), a man who is very well known in Great Britain. The topic discussed was the safety of citizens and how it can be safeguarded. V., who became the victim of a burglary, tells the following story:

V.: (1) *These guys don't think of the consequences. (2) I told you already they don't think of what's in there. (3) I came home at lunchtime, opened the door, unlocked it, walked inside to find a guy running downstairs at me, hammer and tongs. (4) I'm facing*

²⁹ The best known authors in the Variationist Approach to discourse are William Labov and John Waletzky (1967), the authors who founded Comprehensive Discourse Analysis are William Labov and David Fanshel (1977). Labov and Fanshel primarily deal with aspects of therapeutic discourse but their approach is devised to have a wider scope.

³⁰ Cf. Propp (1968 (1928)), Dundes (1962) and Hünig (1985b, 1974).

him at the doorway trying to stop him getting out. (5) He is hitting me around the head pushing me back. (6) I grab hold of his clothes, rip his clothes off his body to try to apprehend him. (7) He runs away, shoots off across the road. (8) I run across the main street, don't look at the traffic, neither of us do. (9) Two hundred yards up the road he disappears. (10) What do I do? (11) He's attacked me once. (12) I know I've got a bag with me. (13) I always carry a knife, always carry a knife with me. (14) I put a knife out. I unfasten the knife and look for him. (15) I look around the corner and there he is, behind a hedge. (16) I walk towards him. (17) I pull him up. (18) 'Course I recognize him. (19) He's got no top on. (20) So he stands up frightened. (21) He's then frightened because I'm showing him a knife. (22) I pin him up against the wall. ... (23) But the point is ...

K.: (24) OK., you got him there and you ...

V.: (25) Yeah, I pin him up against the wall. (26) I could have killed him. (27) I told him: „I could stick you.“

K.: (28) You mean you felt like that.

V.: (29) I did.

K.: (30) You were angry.

V.: (31) I wanted to ... (32) I was absolutely ... (33) My adrenaline was really hot.

(34) It was flowing. (35) I pinned him up. (36) I stretched his neck up against that wall.

(37) He had a eh a medallion thing around his neck. (38) I found that offensive.

(39) I ripped that off. ... [Short side sequence] ... (40) I could have killed him and there's no doubt about that. (41) All I wanted was to be pushed beyond the edge. (42) I tucked his arm around him. (43) I went out with him to a very very quiet estate, OK? (44) I'm standing there) and I'm shaking like this, holding the guy. (45) And fortunately somebody called the police. (46) D'you know how many arrived? (47) Fifteen!

(48) D'you know why? (49) Because I had a knife! (50) And that was the only reason.

(51) If it was a domestic dispute or something like that they wouldn't have been there.

(52) Because I had a knife they turned up.

V. does not primarily intend to entertain the audience with his story but to make a particular point, namely that burglars do not think of the possible consequences of their crimes, which may affect them in a detrimental way and even kill them. This is expressed in the first two sentences, which therefore constitute the 'abstract' of the story. In sentences (3) - (45), the actual story is told, with a short interruption by the master of ceremonies ((24) - (30)). But obviously, not all the sentences in this section contribute to the course of the story equally. In order to be able to analyze this story in greater detail it is necessary to adopt a model of narrative structure such as was developed by Labov and Waletzky (1967). They propose a general, universal narrative schema in a conversational context. Its units are as partly indicated above: (i) *abstract*, (ii) *orientation*, (iii) *complicating action*, (iv) *evaluation*, (v) *resolution or result* and (vi) *coda*. These can be characterized as follows:³¹

- (i) The *abstract* is the summary of the plot of the story. It indicates the referential domain and also the type of text that is to follow. In terms of conversational interaction it initiates the floor-keeping span of the story teller.
- (ii) Since the *orientation* presents the setting of the story, it marks its background and its actual beginning.
- (iii) The *complicating action* represents the change from a (relatively) satisfactory state to an unsatisfactory state, i.e. the conflict situation.

³¹ Cf. Labov and Waletzky (1967) and Labov (1972). Cf. also Luchjenbroers (1994) who believes that narrative construction involves the formation of a schema. She builds a model of how jurors of criminal court cases accommodate incoming information into a single representation of the crime narrative by generalizing across similar inputs to construct a single template of narrated events.

- (iv) *Evaluation* refers to those parts of a story, in which the story teller expresses an assessment of the events, which s/he relates. In terms of conversational interaction it serves as a justification for holding the floor longer than would normally be expected or allowed.
- (v) The *resolution* or *result* marks the return to a (relatively) satisfactory state. Depending on the length of the story there may be a series of dependent *complicating actions* with or without preliminary *resolutions* at the end of which there may be the dramatic climax.
- (vi) The *coda* is like a bottom line to the story. It can contain the point, a moral or consequence of the related events. Conversationally it signals the end of the story.

As was mentioned before, the first two sentences of the burglar chase story represent the abstract. Sentence (3) is the orientation of the first complicating action which is the situation of finding a burglar in one's house and the wish to apprehend him. This is told in sentences (4) - (9). Sentences (10) - (13) are an evaluation of what has happened and of what might follow. Thus the listeners are again orientated to a second complicating action, i.e. the psychological conflict whether V. should stab and possibly kill the burglar or not. This conflict is dealt within in (14) - (22). In (23) it seems that V. begins to end his story but K. encourages him to carry on with it. But only (25) is another description of what happened in the complicating action. (26) - (34) represent the evaluation of the second complicating action which is continued in (35) - (39). The evaluation is taken up again in (40) - (41) and (44) with the complicating action described in (42) - (43). The resolution is given in sentence (45). The last sentences of the story, (46) - (52), represent the coda. They entail a funny point which has to do with the general topic of burglaries and the efficiency or rather non-efficiency of the police.³² The following synopsis summarizes the structure of the story:

Narrative structure of the burglar chase story:

abstract:	orientation:	complicating action:	evaluation:	resolution or result:	coda:
(1)-(2)	(3)	1st: (4)-(9)	1st: (10)-(13)	(45)	(46)-(52)
		2nd: (14)-(22), (25), (35)-(39) and (42)-(43)	2nd: (26)-(34), (40)-(41) and (44)		

Stories, which are ubiquitous in everyday life, serve various purposes. They are used to entertain other people, to impress them, to exemplify a point etc.³³ This fact has been observed and exploited professionally by psychotherapists in order to study and find solutions for the problems that people grapple with and which they reveal in their stories. In a seminal publication Fanshel and Labov (1977) have developed a method of how to analyze stories which occur in the interaction between therapists and patients. The essential units in studying such interaction are speech acts. But Labov and Fanshel deviate from the more philosophical approach of Austin's and Searle's by focusing on the social meanings of speech acts (Labov and Fanshel, 1977: 58f.):

³² I have dealt with the relational coherence of this text in a study of English intonation in Hünig (1996). There I have also analyzed the humorous point in some detail.

³³ Ochs, Taylor, Rudolph and Smith (1992) study how collaborative storytelling in the family at dinnertime stimulates the critical social, cognitive and linguistic skills of children. Since such stories often contain explanations of events constituting folk theories they are jointly constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed by the family members. What children learn in particular is perspective-taking and critical thinking. Cf. also Norrick (1997) who studies the retelling of familiar stories. Their tellability value does not hinge on their content, which need not be relevant or news-worthy. Instead it relies on three social functions: (i) fostering group rapport, (ii) ratifying group membership and (iii) conveying group values.

We find that the crucial actions in establishing coherence of sequencing in conversation are not such speech acts as requests and assertions, but rather challenges, defenses, and retreats, which have to do with the status of the participants, their rights and obligations, and their changing relationships in terms of social organization. We define *interaction* as action which affects (alters or maintains) the relations of the self and others in face-to-face communication. These relations move along several dimensions, which have been identified most usefully as *power* and *solidarity*.

In order to account for the social effects of communication, i.e. the challenges and defenses of status roles and the rights and obligations attached to them, they introduce a new model of description, which is adapted to their assumption that most utterances represent two or more speech actions at the same time and that the relations between them are hierarchical. It entails the following categories of speech actions: *meta-linguistic actions*, *representations*, *requests and challenges*. Meta-linguistic actions such as *initiate*, *interrupt*, *continue*, *end* etc. regulate the speech itself. In addition they are used to describe the processes involved in turn-taking. Representations of some state of affairs such as *give information*, *demonstrate*, *reinforce* etc. deal with the reality of the interactants. The representations which refer to the biography of the speaker are called A-events, the ones which refer to the biography of the listener are named B-events and the ones that are disputable D-events. A request can be a request for action, information, confirmation, attention or approval. It may be mitigated, unmitigated or aggravated. Since both speaker and listener are equally well aware of them, they are neither A-events, nor B-events, nor D-events but rather AB-events. As a cover term *challenge* is actually used to refer to negative as well as positive speech acts. An act which tends to lower the status of the other person is a challenge, an act which tends to reinforce or raise the status of the other person constitutes a support. Table 2 gives an overview of this model of verbal interaction (Labov and Fanshel, 1977: 61):

SPEECH ACTIONS
(Verbal Interactions)

1. Meta-linguistic

initiate interrupt redirect	continue respond repeat reinforce	end signal completion withdraw
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2. Representations

A-events (in A's biography)

A	B	A
give information express F demonstrate refer	reinforce acknowledge	

D-events (disputable)

A	B	A
assert give evaluation give interpretation give orientation	deny agree support give reinterpretation	contradict support

3. Requests

request X	give X [carry out] X put off	acknowledge reinstate redirect retreat mitigate
	refuse with account refuse without account	renew accept reject withdraw in a huff

4. Challenges

A	B	A
challenge question	defend admit huff	retreat mitigate

X = action, information, confirmation, agreement, evaluation, interpretation, sympathy
F = belief, uncertainty, exasperation, deference

Table 2 . Speech actions referred to in the interactional statements.

This model builds the methodological background to their approach. In analyzing the therapeutic interviews they differentiate between the *text*, i.e. the spoken words, and *cues*, i.e. all the non-verbal cues given by the patient such as hesitation, tempo, self-interruptions, long silences etc. On this basis they produce a so-called *expansion*; i.e. they make explicit the conceptualizations and the social meanings involved. They summarize the principles of expansion as follows (Labov and Fanshel, 1977: 49f.):

- (i) We expand the meaning conveyed by the cues into the nearest equivalent in textual terms, according to our best understanding of it.
- (ii) We expand and make explicit the referents of pronouns to other utterances and events in other time frames.
- (iii) We introduce factual material that is presented before and after this utterance, sometimes from widely separated parts of the interview.
- (iv) We make explicit some of the shared knowledge between participants, which we derive from a study of the therapeutic situation as a whole, other interviews, and the playback with the therapist.

As (iv) shows the method of expansion is not restricted to the interview which is being analyzed but may explore other sources of information as well. The reason for this is that speakers always tend to say much less than they intend to convey. Thus this method has an analogous aim as that of Grice.

Labov and Fanshel also found that in therapeutic interviews different styles are used which are significant and relevant for the interpretation of the interaction. In order to be able to account for these different styles they differentiate four different fields of discourse. The outermost frame is the institution of psychotherapy. This contains the therapeutic interview, which in turn contains the narratives (including the discussions of everyday life) and the family communication. The following figure shows this structure (Labov and Fanshel, 1977: 37):

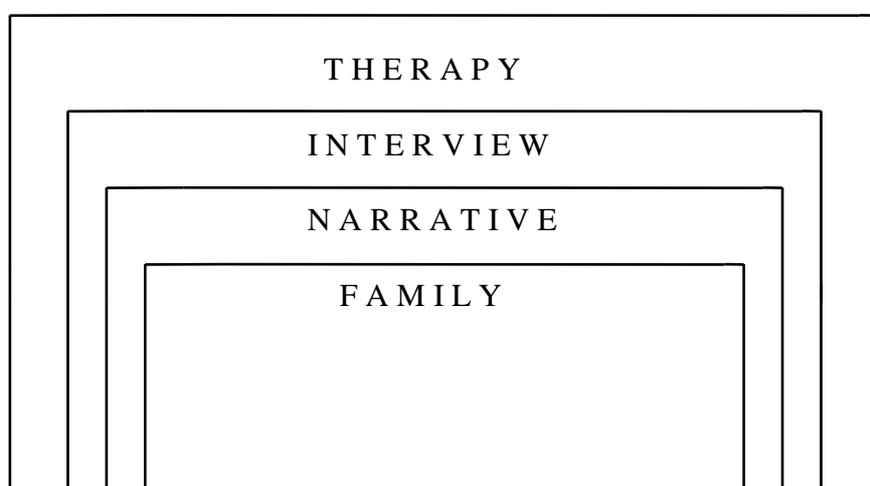


Figure 2. Embedding of fields of discourse within the therapeutic process.

Three of these fields are characterized by particular styles: the first is the interview style, i.e. the metalanguage used in the interviews which exhibits a special vocabulary. Words like *relationship, guilt, to present oneself* etc. occur frequently. Emotions and behavior are evaluated as objects and talked about. The second is the style of everyday life in which the patients talk about their ordinary everyday affairs. It is used in the field of narratives. It is a fairly neutral, objective and colloquial style, the language of which is neither emotionally colored nor therapeutically abstract. The expression of strong emotions is concentrated in a third style, i.e. the family style. This style allows the therapists to assess how the patients behave at home with their family members.

Fanshel and Labov focus their analysis on what they call the *mode of expression*, for which the following two linguistic aspects are responsible: paralinguistic cues and explicit linguistic means such as vocabulary and syntax. The two combine in different ways to form distinguishable speech styles. They seek to analyze these in order to understand the production, interpretation and sequencing of utterances, which they call the text, as the following example of a text *cum* expansion shows (Labov and Fanshel, 1977: 49f.):³⁴

TEXT: R.: (N *An-nd so - when - I called her t'day, I said,* (F "*Well, when do you plan t'come home?*") F) N

EXPANSION: R.: (N When I called my mother today (Thursday), I actually said, (F "*Well, in regard to the subject which we both know is important and is worrying me, when are you leaving my sister's house where {2} your obligations have already been fulfilled and {4} returning as I am asking you to a home where {3} your primary obligations are being neglected, since you should do this as {HEAD-Mo} head of our house-hold?*") F) N

It is important to note that there is no fixed relation between the text and its expansion because there is no limit to explanatory facts which could be added. Such expansions can be deceptive because they magnify and distort social relations due to a loss of the essential dimension of backgrounding. The above expansion contains figures and abbreviations in braces. These refer to so-called *propositions* which represent what is really talked about and they often constitute recurrent communications. Some are specific others are general and appear throughout family life or the therapeutic series. Labov and Fanshel are responsible for their precise and explicit wording of the propositions because they may remain hidden during the therapeutic sessions. There are three such propositions in the above expansion (Labov and Fanshel, 1977: 52):

{2}: Mother has fulfilled her obligations at Household 2 (her married daughter's house).

{3}: Mother has neglected her primary obligations at Household 1 (Rhoda's house).

{4}: Mother should come home now.

These propositions are specific to the episode in which they occur. There are other more general ones which deal with the social rights and obligations which exist between the members of a family and which are used in argumentation and negotiation. Other propositions concern the therapeutic situations, the patients and their emotions, social status, role performance, causes for problems, personal characteristics and lastly general propositions. The propositions do not form a closed set but are very important in therapy because they help understand who the patients are, what the source of their difficulties are, which role other people play etc. What follows are some exemplifications of the above-mentioned types of propositions (Labov and Fanshel, 1977: 54ff.):

³⁴ In all interviews 'F' means family style and 'N' narrative style. A word printed in bold face means that it is emphatically stressed.

- *the therapeutic situations:* {COOP} Role partners should cooperate to solve mutual problems.
 {S} One should express one's needs and emotions to relevant others.
 {AUT} The therapist does not tell the patient what to do.

- *the patients and their emotions:* {INSIGHT} The patient should gain insight into his own emotions.

- *the social status:* {AD} X is an adult member of the household.
 {RSNBL} X is a reasonable person.

- role performance:* {~EAT} X does not eat enough.
 {~CLEAN} X does not help clean the house.
 {STRN} X's obligations are greater than his capacities.
- *cause for problems:* {X:STRN} External circumstances are responsible for role strain.

- *personal characteristics:* {TIRE} X tires (more) easily (than others).
 {THIN} X is thinner than he should be.

- *general:* {S- CARE} One should take care of oneself.

Using the model of verbal interaction and the relevant propositions, the meaning of the short question *When do you plan to come home?* can be summarized in figure 3. (Labov and Fanshel, 1977: 66):

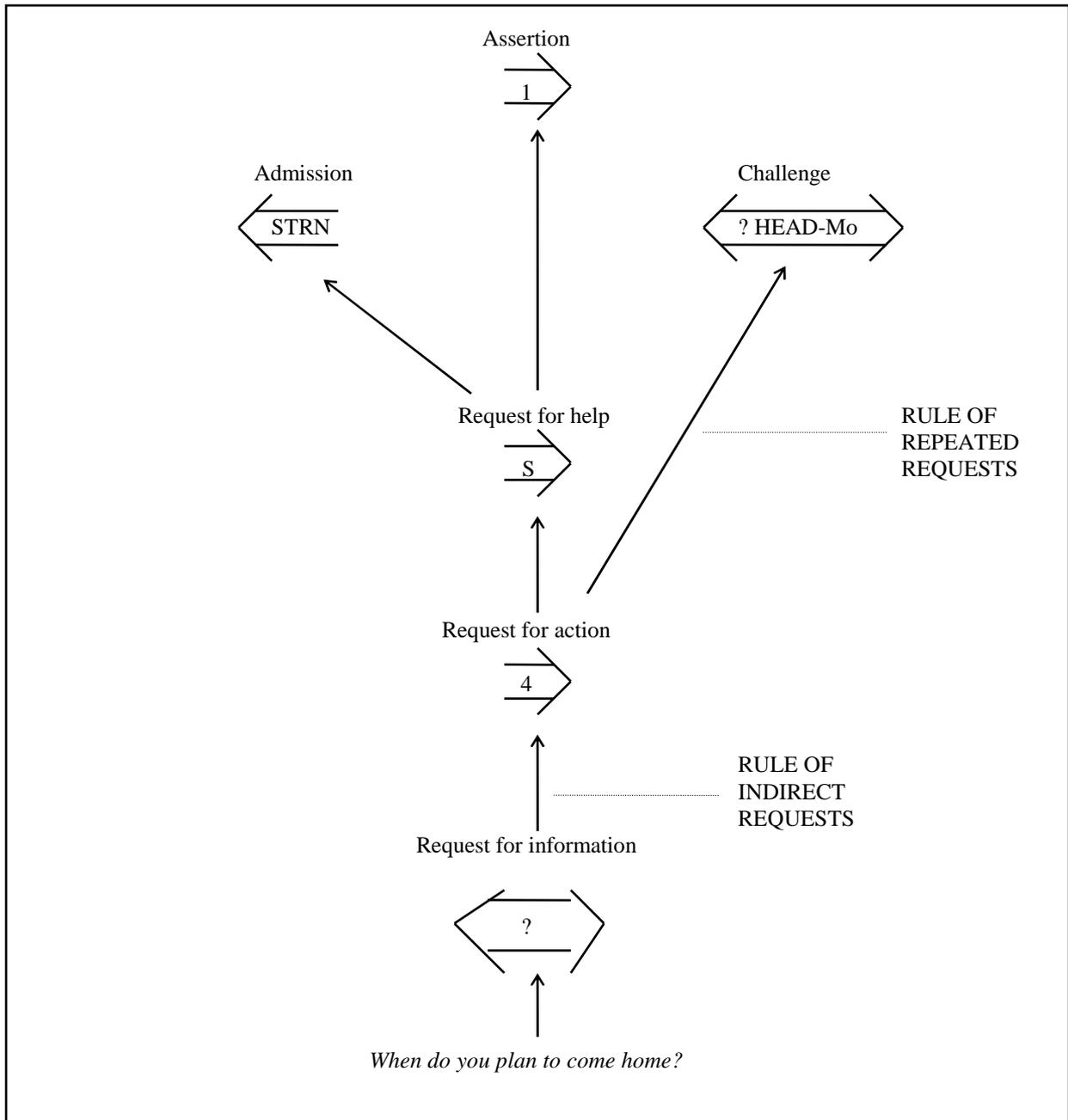


Figure 3. Interactional structure.

The arrows represent the social actions. They contain propositions which are both general and particular. A question mark before the proposition means that it is challenged. An arrowhead pointing to the right indicates that a response is required, an arrowhead to the left means that this action is a response to a previous action. Read from the bottom to the top the figure has the following meaning. By putting her question to the mother Rhoda requests her mother to give her some information. At the same time this is an indirect request for action, i.e. that her mother should come home. By the rule of repeated requests this is also heard as a criticism, i.e. a challenge to the mother's performance in her role as the head of the household of which Rhoda is a member. At a higher level Rhoda also carries out the proposition ($\{S\}$), i.e. that one should express one's needs to relevant others. With her request for help she admits that her obligations are greater than her capacities ($\{STRN\}$). The assertion of $\{1\}$ is from a different part of the interview in which she claims to have done the right thing in asking her mother to come home, because this means that she has expressed her needs adequately. The following figure summarizes this approach neatly (Labov and Fanshel, 1977: 68):

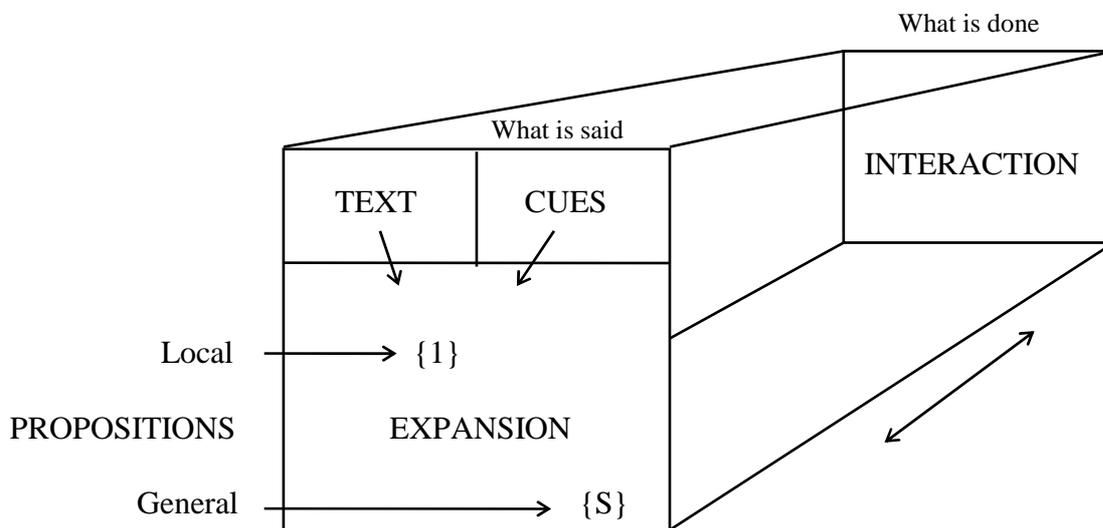


Figure 4. Discourse analysis: Cross section.

7. Mental representation approaches

In comparison to the previous approaches most of which are interaction-oriented, there is a fundamental approach which concentrates on the cognitive processes that take place in the mind of the hearers and which allow them to interpret the things they hear and to see them in relation to all the other elements in the discourse. All this belongs to the mental picture of the discourse as it proceeds and is referred to as *mental text representation*.

Discourse comprehension works in two directions: bottom-up and top-down. The bottom-up process means that the understanding of what is going on, what is being said, what is being implied and which point is made,³⁵ is arrived at by processing one sentence or utterance after

³⁵ Cf. Coulthard (1977), who poses a question typically and continuously accompanying verbal interaction: *why that now and to me?*

the other. The top-down process implies that the recipient works with a framework of expectations and experience, which Brown and Yule (1983) refer to as the *topic framework*. These two processes correspond to the micro- and macro-structure of discourse. The following text can serve as an example of how understanding relies on both bottom-up and top-down processes (Brown and Yule, 1983: 72):³⁶

(1) The procedure is actually quite simple. (2) First you arrange things into different groups. (3) Of course one pile may be sufficient depending on how much there is to do. (4) If you have to go somewhere else due to lack of facilities that is the next step, otherwise you are pretty well set. (5) It is important not to overdo things. (6) That is, it is better to do too few things at once than too many. (7) In the short run this may not seem important but complications can easily arise. (8) A mistake can be expensive as well. (9) At first the whole procedure will seem complicated. (10) Soon, however, it will become just another facet of life. (11) It is difficult to foresee any end to the necessity of this task in the immediate future, but then one never can tell. (12) After the procedure is completed one arranges the materials into different groups again. (13) Then they can be put into their appropriate places (14) Eventually they will be used once more and the whole cycle will then have to be repeated. (15) However, that is part of life.

Readers of this text will not have any difficulty in understanding the single sentences in isolation. Up to a point they will also be able to comprehend relations between the sentences, e.g. sentences (2) and (4) are an elaboration of sentence (1), sentences (9) and (10) form a contrast etc. But what the readers are not able to do is see the referential coherence between *the procedure, the group, the piles* etc. because the domain to which this text belongs has not been specified. Consequently the referents of the following words cannot be identified correctly:³⁷

(1) procedure; (2) things; (3) pile; do; (4) facilities; (5) overdo; things; (6) do; things; (7) complications; (8) mistake; (9) procedure; (10) task; (12) procedure; materials; (13) (appropriate) places; (14) cycle.

Another consequence is that the readers are not capable of forming a mental text representation. For instance, they will have great difficulties in retelling or summarizing what they read or heard. The referents cannot be identified because they mean different things in different domains.³⁸ Some meaning differences can be specified according to whether the textual domain is 'sharpening knives' or 'washing clothes'.

³⁶ Brown and Yule quote Bransford and Johnson (1973: 400). For ease of reference the sentences have been numbered.

³⁷ The number of the sentence in which the item(s) occur(s) precedes the item(s). For a discussion of the conceptual unity of domains cf. Croft (1993).

³⁸ For a discussion of reference-points cf. Langacker (1993) and van Hoek (1995).

`sharpening knives`:

- (1) *procedure* = sharpening knives
- (2) *things* = the knives
- (3) *pile* = pile of knives
do = sharpen (knives)
- (4) *facilities* = facilities for sharpening
- (5) *overdo* = sharpen too much /
knives
things = knives
- (6) *do* = sharpen
things = knives
- (7) *complications* = complications in
sharpening knives
- (8) *mistake* = mistake in sharpening
- (9) *procedure* = sharpening knives
- (10) *task* = sharpening knives
- (12) *procedure* = sharpening knives
materials = knives
- (13) *places* = places where one keeps
knives
- (14) *cycle* = sharpening cycle

`washing clothes`:

- (1) *procedure* = washing clothes
- (2) *things* = the laundry items
- (3) *pile* = pile of laundry
do = wash (clothes)
- (4) *facilities* = facilities for washing
- (5) *overdo* = wash too often / much
laundry
things = laundry items
- (6) *do* = wash
things = laundry items
- (7) *complications* = complications in
washing clothes
- (8) *mistake* = mistake in washing
- (9) *procedure* = washing clothes
- (10) *task* = washing clothes
- (12) *procedure* = washing clothes
materials = laundry items
- (13) *places* = places where one keeps
clothes
- (14) *cycle* = washing cycle

It is obvious that the attribution to either the knife-sharpening or the laundry domain also has an effect on the relative meanings of words. Thus the cycle for washing clothes is a matter of days whereas the cycle for sharpening knives is a matter of months or even years. The same applies to words like *mistake* or *complications*. Since knives are potentially dangerous instruments, a mistake or complications in sharpening them may result in serious injuries. Using a washing machine is not dangerous at all, but a mistake may ruin one's clothing. Other expressions may be quite concrete like *go somewhere else* but they only have a meaning relative to a reference point, which is also not given. On top of that, all the pronouns which refer to the above words cannot be traced either.

This shows that the discourse topic of a given text has a great influence on the process of interpreting it. In the above example the topic was formulated according to two criteria, i.e. the criterion of a purposive activity (*sharpening, washing*) and the domain criterion (*knives, clothes*). Brown and Yule introduce the term *topic framework*, which they characterize in terms of the domain, the participants and their activities, the setting (location and time) and the type of discourse, i.e. whether it has a problem-solution structure, a jocular or a narrative one.³⁹ Therefore it is neither possible nor adequate to define or formulate only a single topic which correctly applies to a discourse or text but several. This reflects the fact that discourse comprehension is quite flexible and operates at three levels:

³⁹ Cf. the S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G grid of Hymes in chapter 4. The last aspect is covered by the category of *key*.

- (i) Global discourse structure: speakers and hearers must be clear about what is meant, i.e. they must be clear about the goals and intentions of the interaction such as the discourse topic, which takes care of referential coherence.
- (ii) Paragraph structure: the discourse topic and subtopics must be clear, which includes frame, discourse spaces⁴⁰ and relational coherence, i.e. the links between clauses, sentences and even larger sections of the discourse.
- (iii) Propositional structure: the referents must be identifiable, i.e. the entities and processes (including actions).⁴¹

If all three demands are met, the recipients or interactants can construct a coherent mental representation of the discourse. New information, which is consistent with the one previously given, will then be integrated.⁴²

The 'domainless text' at the beginning of this chapter (p. 30) showed cohesion and referential coherence only at a superficial level. The reason for this is that quite a few lexical elements were not grounded in a domain or a setting known to the reader. Therefore also the cohesive ties were of a superficial nature and not really traceable.⁴³ Apart from the grounding in a domain and setting, the term *coherence* is meant to cover all those aspects which help a person understand a text. Coherence and text understanding is not an inherent property of a text but is dependent on both the text and the world knowledge of the interactants and enables them to form a mental representation. This is a result of text interpretation, which in turn is based on the utterances, their implicatures and on the cultural and world knowledge of the interactants, i.e. the conceptual links they establish between the various entities referred to in the text and the evoked events.⁴⁴

Two criteria have been used to describe coherence: The first is a referential criterion and pertains to the participants and processes in the succession of utterances in the communication, the second is a relational criterion and pertains to semantic and/or interactional relations between the sentences and other parts of a text. A text is referentially coherent if a topic, i.e. an integrating, higher-order concept, can be detected. In practical terms this means that a given text contains a chain of recurring referents. A text is relationally coherent, if certain more abstract relationships such as cause-effect etc. hold between clauses, sentences and larger parts of the text.

Relational coherence is constituted by conceptual relationships between clauses, sentences or paragraphs such as the relations *cause - consequence*, *evidence*, *contrast* etc. Coherence relations are an addition to the interpretation of these clauses, sentences or paragraphs. They may be expressed explicitly or remain implicit as in the following examples, which express a cause-consequence relation:

⁴⁰ Cf. Fauconnier (1985).

⁴¹ Cf. Levelt (1989).

⁴² Cf. Gernsbacher (1990) and Kintch (1988). This provides a more comprehensive background to the intuitions of the members of the Prague School concerning theme and rheme.

⁴³ Cf. Halliday and Hasan (1976) and Halliday (1985).

⁴⁴ A striking example of different modes of understanding by men and women is provided by Tannen (1990). Whereas men tend to focus their understanding on the ideational level, women tend to focus theirs on the interpersonal level.

- (1) *Sam's got a promotion. He is simply thrilled.*
 (2) *Sam's got a promotion. Therefore he is simply thrilled.*

Below is an example of an analysis of coherence relations in a text taken from the English tabloid *Daily Mail*. It is a report about a British nurse in Saudi-Arabia who faced a prison sentence of up to seven years for her alleged part in the murder of a fellow nurse. She was allowed to marry her fiancé at a ceremony in a police station conducted by a Saudi judge after weeks of delicate behind-the-scenes negotiations involving foreign diplomats and the nurse's legal team. *The family* refers to the family of the bridegroom:

- (3) *The family are just delighted that the Saudi authorities have been good enough to let the marriage take place. In the circumstances it is highly unusual for this to be allowed.* (Consequence - cause and circumstance)

In the first sentence of (3) there is a consequence-cause relation between the first and the second clause. The second sentence specifies the circumstances of the information in the first using the expression *in the circumstances* explicitly. Between the first and the second clause of the first sentence only the neutral *that* is used instead of a causative connector such as *because*. This usage is called *relational underspecification*, which is deployed when enough information is provided to allow a correct interpretation. Thus it lies mid-way between using an explicit connector which expresses the type of relation and leaving a connector out altogether. It is possible because the interactional participants can rely on their cooperativeness, particularly the maxim of relevance. In the following example taken from the same newspaper the mere juxtaposition of the two clauses connected by *and* is rather trivial, what is relevant here is the causal relation:⁴⁵

- (4) *I am a person who doesn't compromise on central beliefs and I do not agree with interfaith worship.* (Cause - consequence)

The relation of simultaneity is used as a metonymy of the causal one. Spooren (in prep.: 222) points out that such metonymic meanings have been grammaticalized diachronically:

The analysis of such a metonymic meaning shift in terms of implicatures is supported by the fact that connectives in a great number of languages show traces of similar meaning changes. What seems to have happened is that pragmatic implicatures gradually have been encoded into the language. ...

- a. Fr. *cependant* (originally meant "during this" and now means "yet"; cooccurrence becomes denied expectation)
- b. Du. *dientengefolge* (originally meant "following this" and now means "as a consequence"; spatial ordering becomes temporal ordering, which becomes causality)
- c. Ge. *weil* (originally meant "so long as" and now means "because"; temporal overlap becomes causality)
- d. En. *still* (originally meant "now as before"; simultaneity becomes denied expectation)

⁴⁵ It is part of a statement by the Archbishop of Canterbury on the question whether the coronation ceremony of Prince Charles would be exclusively Christian or whether it would reflect his wish to be a defender of all faiths. It is taken from the same newspaper.

Apart from finding coherence relations between clauses and sentences they also exist between paragraphs and even whole sections of texts.⁴⁶ They can be expressed by several means, e.g. adverbs (*thus, therefore, still* etc.), adverbial phrases (*as a consequence, in spite of this, in contrast to this* etc.), whole clauses (*having said that, that reminds me, let me give my reasons* etc.) and also intonational means, e.g. contrastive intonation.

Mann and Thompson (1988) present a typology of coherence relations within the framework of their Rhetorical Structure Theory, which has gained wide circulation. It describes a text as composed of a number of text portions. The portions range from single clauses to large sections of the text. Each portion is related to another portion or several portions by one of a list of relations, which serves to describe the organization of the text. The combination of two text portions constitutes a larger text portion with a nucleus and satellite structure. The relations serve the goal the author of the text wishes to achieve. Some examples of such relations are explained and exemplified below:⁴⁷

Circumstance: The satellite gives the framework within which the reader is intended to interpret the situation described in the nucleus.

satellite: *When we released the results of ZPG's [Zero Population Growth] 1985 URBAN STRESS TEST,*

nucleus: *we had no idea we'd get such an overwhelming response.*

Restatement: The satellite gives a reformulation of the information in the nucleus.

nucleus: *When we released the results of ZPG's 1985 URBAN STRESS TEST, we had no idea we'd get such an overwhelming response.*

satellite: *The Media and public reaction has been nothing short of incredible!*

Background: The information in the satellite helps the reader to understand the nucleus.

satellite: *ZPG's 1985 URBAN STRESS TEST, created after months of persistent and exhaustive research, is the nation's first survey of how population-linked pressures affect US cities. It ranks 184 urban areas on 11 different criteria ranging from crowding and birth rates to air quality and toxic wastes.*

nucleus: *The URBAN STRESS TEST translates complex, technical data into an easy-to-use action tool for concerned citizens, elected officials and opinion leaders.*

Concession: There is a potential or apparent incompatibility between the situations in the nucleus and the satellite; the situation in the nucleus is more central to the writer's intentions.

satellite: *Even though our national government continues to ignore the consequences of uncontrolled population growth,*

nucleus: *we can act to take positive action at the local level.*

Solutionhood: The situation described in the nucleus is a solution to the problem described in the satellite.

satellite: *To make sound choices in planning for people,*

nucleus: *both the elected officials and the American public need the population stress data revealed by our study.*

Since such coherence relations typically occur in expository texts they have been turned into elements of teaching in essay writing courses.⁴⁸ It has been demonstrated that these relations influence text comprehension, e.g. if texts contain causal relations they are remembered more easily than if they simply contain a list of unconnected items or events.

⁴⁶ Cf. Lenk (1998), Spooren (in prep.) and Hünig (1980).

⁴⁷ The examples are taken from Fries (1994: 246ff.).

⁴⁸ In research on connectors and paragraph writing I have presented a similar list (Hünig, 1985).

What makes lists like that of Mann and Thompson somewhat less traceable and less satisfactory is the fact that in principle more specific categories could be added. This led Sanders, Spooren and Noordman to seek a solution to this problem in a cognitive linguistics framework.⁴⁹ From prototype semantics they derived the idea to categorize coherence relations into general groups along different dimensions with each group containing more central and more peripheral members. They define coherence relations as conceptual entities which bridge two elementary discourse segments. For reasons of practicality they take clauses as elementary discourse segments. Thus in (5) the two clauses are connected by the coherence relation of *claim-argument*:

(5) *Maggie must be eager for a promotion. She's been working late three days in a row.*

They test their results empirically and they also present a theoretical justification of their taxonomy. Their point of departure are four cognitive primitives, which enable them to differentiate between seventeen different coherence relations. They describe them as follows (Sanders, Spooren and Noordman, 1993: 98): "These primitives are properties of the coherence relations. What distinguishes the primitives from other possible candidates is that they concern the *relational meaning* of the relations. That is, they concern the informational surplus that the coherence relations adds to the interpretation of the discourse segments in isolation." These are the four primitives:

(i) Basic Operation: Additive and causal relations:

This category reflects the intuition that discourse segments either have a weak, additive (logical conjunction: P & Q) or a strong, causal relationship (causality: P → Q) in which P implies Q. (6) is an example of an additive relationship, (7) of a causal one:

(6) *The turnover is about 2.4 billion guilders. In 1988 the profits increased from 75 million to 103 million guilders.*

(7) *The last half hour the drive to the arrivals hall was closed, so that during that period nobody could leave or enter the terminal.*

(ii) Source of coherence: Semantic and pragmatic relations:

A semantic relation is given, if the discourse segments are related because of their propositional content, a pragmatic one if the relationship is based on the illocutionary meaning of one or both parts. In (8) there is a semantic relationship because it is part of everyone's world knowledge that running causes exhaustion. In (9) the causal clause contains the interactional reason why the speaker makes the statement in the main clause:

(8) *Theo was exhausted because he had run to the university.*

(9) *Theo was exhausted because he told me so.*

(iii) Order of segments: Basic and non-basic order

An order is basic if the natural order of events is iconically reflected in the language, e.g. if the cause is mentioned before the effect. A non-basic order is given in (10) because the antecedent follows the consequent:

⁴⁹ Cf. Sanders (1992) and Sanders, Spooren and Noordman (1992, 1993).

- (10) *The black-headed gull is assigned to the Aves class, because, like all other birds, it has feathers.*

The order criterion does not apply to additive relations. The authors do not differentiate linguistic presentation according to the natural order of temporal or local processes.⁵⁰ But also causal relations present themselves as more complex than it seems. In a justification for instance the order in (11 (a)) seems more natural than the one in (11 (b)):

- (11) (a) *I took the car because I didn't know you needed it.*
 (b) *I didn't know you needed the car, so I took it.*

But this very much depends on the context and the figure-ground alignment the speaker chooses.⁵¹ Of course logically the assumption that noone else needs the car lies before taking it. On the other hand this assumption is certainly not the cause for using the car, it is rather an item in a set of circumstances which make a certain behavior feasible or not feasible. Thus even if there is a different kind of causality involved, the order of the clauses is determined by other factors than the natural order of a cause which is followed by its consequence. A similar case is given in an evaluation as in (12):

- (12) *I'll read this book because I like thrillers.*

The love of thrillers lies prior to the decision to read a specific book, i.e. 'logically' precedes it. Still it is equally natural to give the reason after stating the intention. This shows that the idea of prototypes with their central and peripheral cases applies also here.

(iv) Polarity: Positive and negative relations.

Whereas a cause-consequence relation is seen as a positive relation so-called concessions are regarded as negative relations.

- (13) *An ostrich is classified as a bird, although it cannot fly.*

The two clauses in this sentence represent an opposition. Not being able to fly would normally be a sufficient reason not to classify a creature as a bird but in the case of an ostrich this expectation is not met, i.e. the first clause expresses the negation of the expected consequent raised in the second clause.

The taxonomy of coherence relations, which Sanders (1992: 52) presents, contains ten types of relations, of which five are subcategorized into two each. It is meant to establish a psychologically plausible theory of discourse representation, but not to be used as an instrument of description.

⁵⁰ Cf. what Langacker (1991a) calls *sequential scanning*.

⁵¹ Cf. chapter 3.

Basic Operation	Source of Coherence	Order	Polarity	Class	Relation
Causal	Semantic	Basic	Positive	1.	Cause-Consequence
Causal	Semantic	Basic	Negative	2.	Contrastive Cause-Consequence
Causal	Semantic	Non-basic	Positive	3.	Consequence-Cause
Causal	Semantic	Non-basic	Negative	4.	Contrastive Consequence-Cause
Causal	Pragmatic	Basic	Positive	5.a	Argument-Claim
				5.b	Instrument-Goal
				5.c	Condition-Consequence
Causal	Pragmatic	Basic	Negative	6.	Contrastive Argument-Claim
Causal	Pragmatic	Non-basic	Positive	7.a	Claim-Argument
				7.b	Goal-Instrument
				7.c	Consequence-Condition
Causal	Pragmatic	Non-basic	Negative	8.	Contrastive Claim-Argument
Additive	Semantic	-	Positive	9.	List
Additive	Semantic	-	Negative	10.a	Exception
		-		10.b	Opposition
Additive	Pragmatic	-	Positive	11.	Enumeration
Additive	Pragmatic	-	Negative	12.	Concession

Table 3. Overview of the taxonomy of prototypical coherence relations.

An investigation into the relational coherence of spontaneously spoken language is carried out by Lenk (1998). She studies discourse markers, i.e. elements which make the referential relations between discourse parts explicit. She defines discourse as a form of interaction and she assumes that coherence is established in the interaction process by the language participants.⁵² Accordingly she tries to account for the fact that the participants of an interaction develop a feeling of coherence even if there are stretches of discourse where apparently it is lacking.

Like Redeker (1990), Lenk (1998: 19) doubts that coherence relations such as the one described above, can be used in analyzing spontaneously spoken language: "The question remains ... whether on-line production of spoken discourse leaves the participants in conversation enough time to process incoming information according to such an elaborate taxonomy. ... Coherence relations pay no attention to situational circumstances such as e.g. extralinguistic events, or the particularities of on-line production of spoken discourse." This assumption is questionable because it would mean that the production of spontaneously spoken language requires a different cognitive set up from the production of written language. Even in ball games like basketball, handball or football where quick reaction is required and where the players often are out of breath, normal coherence relations apply. In a situation where the attackers outnumber the defenders the complaint: 'Idiot (you should have passed the ball)!' of an attacker to a teammate who failed to pass the ball in such a context is to be understood as *contrastive cause - consequence*. The semantic relations can be explained as follows: Because you did not pass the ball, we did not score. The backing of this argument is given in the tactical rule that the ball has to be passed to take advantage of a situation in which the attackers outnumber the defense. These coherence relations also apply to small talk topics such as *the weather, holidays, cinema, children* etc. It would be very surprising if this was not

⁵² 'Text' is the result of a process of interaction. Cf. chapter 1.

the case because even small children learn to use these relations in an order from the more concrete to the more abstract ones.

Lenk's research is based on a corpus of American English and one of British English and focuses on discourse markers, which operate independent of the level on which propositional content is expressed, i.e. on the structural text level. The use of a coherence marker is an interactional move driven by the maxim of relevance, because a speaker must constantly be aware of the challenging question: *why this now?* (Lenk, 1998: 23):

... a speaker must indicate how she conceives of the structural organization of her turn and its integration into the overall structure of the ongoing topic, or its relation to the previous topic(s), and its relevance in the particular context. The signaling of the relevance of an utterance by, e.g. discourse markers thus contributes towards the hearer's understanding of the coherence of the conversation. It will ensure the hearer's continuous cooperative participation by enabling him to follow the flow of conversation more easily. Recognition of the relevance of an utterance is functional in establishing a hearer's understanding of how segments of the conversation 'fit together well and form a united whole'.

For an adequate analysis the local coherence level is as important as the global one. The former covers the coherence of neighboring elements, the latter the coherence of elements which lie further apart. The more hints a listener receives the easier it is to comprehend the coherence intended by the speaker. She regards coherence as a processual phenomenon which has to be established and ascertained again and again. In order to achieve an adequate description of the different uses of discourse markers she regards their scope, directional orientation, pragmatic meaning, their position within the discourse and their form. In order to establish the scope of a discourse marker she analyzes its function with regard to its semantic, rhetorical and sequential relations. The criterion of orientation results in the distinction between retrospective and prospective discourse markers. Retrospective markers are oriented towards the prior discourse and exhibit relations between the upcoming utterance and earlier segments of discourse. The prospective markers point out relations to intended upcoming contributions. *Anyway, however* and *still* are predominantly retrospective, *actually* and *incidentally* are predominantly prospective discourse markers and *what else* can have both functions. She summarizes her results according to the criteria of (i) meaning within the discourse, (ii) orientation, (iii) collocations and (iv) differences between American and British English. It is particularly remarkable that Lenk does not only present her results traditionally in a theoretical way, but also adopts an Applied Linguistics perspective and formulates the meaning of the discourse markers, which she has analyzed, in terms of model entries for dictionaries. The functions of the above discourse markers are particularly interesting because their use shows that the speaker and also the other participants have to develop their own understanding of the progress of the interaction. But they also have to construct a mental representation of the comprehension of the others. In the course of the interaction both the mental representation of their own comprehension and that of the others have to be adapted to new information and other changes. Coherence is established if one or more participants believe that the mental representations coincide. Repairs and other processes like the use of discourse markers are used for this purpose.

8. Conclusion

This overview of approaches to discourse analysis does not allot the same amount of attention and space to each of the different approaches. I have treated some of them in more detail because I wanted to point out interesting new perspectives on the one hand and older research methods which, I feel, have not received the recognition they deserve on the other. Thus in chapter 2 my description began with communicative dynamism and the chain of reference which looks back at a long tradition of studying topic and comment or theme and rheme. For

decades a problem has troubled linguists which they were not able to overcome. As long as they tried to deal with aspects of information flow, i.e. 'given', 'new' or 'recoverable' information, of syntax, i.e. subject vs. object, of semantics, i.e. agent vs. instrument, of perspectivization and figure-ground alignment in an implicit and undifferentiated way, the results were bound to be muddled or at least questionable. This was the reason why I gave a rather detailed account of Langacker's fresh look at these phenomena with the help of several new and interesting criteria and models. The work of Fanshel, Labov and Waletzki which I treated in chapter 6 belongs to the second category of approaches that deserve a higher degree of awareness and acknowledgement.

The development in the area of cooperative interaction, speech acts and inferencing (chapter 3) is of an incremental nature. The combination of philosophical ideas and sociological perspectives has paved the way toward promising practical applications such as cross-cultural and cross-social studies, studies of child development, language teaching and even aviation communication.⁵³ Nevertheless, a word of caution should be added: The concepts of facework and politeness have become pervasively influential in discourse analysis and in anthropology. The reason for this is that facework lies at the heart of cultural premises such as a person's rights and responsibilities in a certain situation, social power and cooperation, gender differences etc. But the sociological categories such as social role, power (status) and distance on which the description of facework and politeness hinges still have to be developed further and refined in order to make them a useful scientific tool for discourse analysts. Studying the psychological and especially the emotional implications seems to me very promising, because the conception of face implies the fundamental emotional dimensions such as pride, shame and anxiety and possibly anger and love as well.⁵⁴

On the face of it, it may appear counter-intuitive or even paradoxical that I have treated ethnography of communication in the shortest fashion. But this approach is so complex that it would take a much longer paper to describe all the relevant facets of it in detail. This approach is widely used in fieldwork studies and this is evidence of the fact that adopting this methodology of participant observation is very valuable, indeed. But it is very time-consuming and also requires a fair amount of money which not every discourse analyst can afford to spend.

Conversation, which I dealt with in chapter 5, is a field that is gaining ground. Numerous new articles have appeared lately. It can be assumed that one of the reasons for this is that whereas written communication has a long research history, this is not the case for spontaneously spoken language in interaction so that new research results can be expected. Studying conversation means studying utterances in social interaction, where the meanings are created and negotiated. What comes to light in such studies is the importance of interpersonal meanings of solidarity of group members and social feedback.

In chapter 6 I have dealt with narratological and psychotherapeutic aspects of story-telling. It became evident that there is a deeper social and psychological dimension to this ordinary everyday activity. The relatedness to conversation analysis is obvious: Stories allow speakers to hold the floor longer than usual. They use this opportunity to make their points by often implicitly referring to social rights and obligations. The structures and the rules that Fanshel, Labov and Waletzki found and the methodology that they developed are very impressive and I find it deplorable that they are not to be found in every introduction to discourse analysis.

The mental representation approach which I have described in chapter 7 deals with the cognitive processes that take place in the mind of the hearers and which allow them to interpret the discourse elements contextually and produce a mental text representation. It has

⁵³ Cf. Ervin-Tripp (1976), Ervin-Tripp *et al.* (1990) and Linde (1988).

⁵⁴ Cf. Kövecses (1986).

been positively influenced by the upsurge of *Cognitive Linguistics*. But as Lenk (1998) has shown, it is not only restricted to the “static“ description of referential and relational coherence. It also deals with the question of what interactants do in order to safeguard communicational success. This is work done at the intersection of the mental and the interactional processes which are involved in communication.

The diversity of the discussed approaches shows that there is still no singular methodology accepted by all or at least most discourse analysts.⁵⁵ But such a consensus cannot realistically be expected. What discourse analysts should agree upon is that all these approaches treat valid and relevant aspects of human communication. The approaches are diverse and multifaceted because human communication is diverse and multifaceted. This assessment is not meant to suggest that the approaches are basically equivalent. Their description has shown that they focus on different aspects of communication and/or interaction and that they assign different importance to the structure or the function of discourse. For discourse analysis, I believe that the latter aspect is of particular relevance because studying discourse means studying utterances embedded in social interaction. In other words, discourse is a social activity and the way an utterance constitutes a particular form of action emerges from its placement within a larger social activity. Therefore in order to understand the language of social interaction it is important to understand its socio-cultural and psychological background as well. This means that discourse analysis is not restricted to a single discipline but is essentially interdisciplinary. Its main source disciplines are linguistics, sociology, anthropology, psychology and philosophy. Theology, jurisdiction and literary criticism have also contributed to it.⁵⁶ This interdisciplinary nature should be regarded as a challenge and an opportunity.

My aim in this paper was to clarify the viewpoints and research activities in this vast and varied research area. A coherent theory of discourse analysis requires a clear differentiation of the methodologies adopted. Perhaps at this point in time it is not possible to study all the aspects that have been described above and that are usefully employed in discourse analysis at the same time, but any selection should be located in the overall framework and must be made explicit.

Since this essay should also aid novices in their orientation to this field it is important that they become aware of the different research questions that are asked and the various methods which are employed. I hope that this overview will contribute to the achievement of this goal and also that it will provide some motivational aid by pointing out the interesting and relevant research activities in this field.

⁵⁵ Cf. Bublitz (1991).

⁵⁶ Cf. Koch (1974b) and Lakoff (1990).

Appendix

The meanings of some discourse markers in abbreviated form (Lenk, 1998):

Anyway:

- (i) Meaning within the discourse: end of a digression and return to a prior topic or introduction of a new topic.
- (ii) Orientation: predominantly retrospective.
- (iii) Collocations: *So anyway*: strongly expresses the speaker's intention to move on in the line of narration after closing a digression. *Well anyway*: the digression and the following utterance do not exactly adhere to the same expectations of coherence.
- (iv) Differences between American (AE) and British English (BE): *But anyway* can function as a *turn-holding device* in AE. *And anyway* signals a certain way of reasoning in a situation where personal reasons given for a situation or behavior seem inadequate to the speaker, who then adds more general or universal reasons to back a claim.

However:

- (i) Meaning within the discourse: end of a digression which was relevant to the development of topic and return to the main topic or shift to a topic.
- (ii) Orientation: predominantly retrospective.
- (iii) Collocations: none mentioned.
- (iv) Differences between AE and BE: rare in BE, extremely rare in AE.

Still:

- (i) Meaning: return to the main topic of an impersonal or quasi-objective narration after a short subjective comment or conversational aside.
- (ii) Orientation: predominantly retrospective.
- (iii) Collocations: *But still* indicates non-coherence with the on-going topic or a deviation from local coherence expectations.
- (iv) Differences between AE and BE: rare in BE as well as in AE.

Actually:

- (i) Meaning: stating something in an unexpected way, manner or position.
- (ii) Orientation: predominantly prospective.
- (iii) Collocations: none mentioned.
- (iv) Differences between AE and BE: none mentioned.

Incidentally

- (i) Meaning: topic shift or introduction of a new piece of information into the conversation.
- (ii) Orientation: predominantly prospective.
- (iii) Collocations: none mentioned.
- (iv) Differences between AE and BE: none mentioned.

What else

- (i) Meaning: eliciting another contribution to a list that is in progress.
- (ii) Orientation: prospective and retrospective.
- (iii) Collocations: none mentioned.
- (iv) Differences between AE and BE: due to lack of data no clear statement possible.

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