# 9 Approaches to discourse

What I want to do in this paper is to consider some of the proposals that have been made in recent years concerning the study of the communicative functioning of language in use. These proposals, though all concerned with the description of discourse in one way or another, have come from a number of different disciplines. Linguistics is one, but others, including sociology and philosophy, have laid a legitimate claim to a professional interest in what people do with their language. The proposals of different disciplines naturally embody different theoretical and methodological principles and find expression in different terminology and in consequence the field of discourse study is rather a confused one. It is easy to lose one's way. I have accordingly attempted to discover how differently oriented approaches to the study of discourse might be ordered into a general scheme. My aim is to sketch, in rather rough and ready fashion, a conceptual map of how I see this field of activity so far as it has been explored at present, and to indicate the problems which seem to me to be involved in its further exploration.

But first I want to set the linguistic scene, the background against which these proposals appear.

## 1 The scope of linguistic description

The orthodox view of the domain of linguistic description, which dates from de Saussure and represents the definition of linguistics as an autonomous discipline, is expressed by Chomsky in the following familiar quotation:

> Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions of memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance. This seems to me to have been the position of the founders of modern general linguistics, and no cogent reason for modifying it has been offered.
> *Chomsky 1965: 3f.*

Since 1965, however, a number of reasons, of varying cogency, have been put forward for modifying this position and, in effect, for redefining the scope of linguistic description. Even before that date, such a definition of linguistics did not receive universal sanction: a more humanistic tradition of language study has persisted throughout the period of what Chomsky conceives of as 'modern general linguistics' and it finds expression in the following (perhaps less familiar) quotation from Jakobson:

> Linguistics is concerned with language in all its aspects—language in operation, language in drift, language in the nascent state, and language in dissolution.
> *Jakobson and Halle 1956: 55.*

Whereas Chomsky uses the term *language* to refer to the Saussurean *langue*, a well-defined system arrested in time, Jakobson uses the term to refer to the Saussurean *langage*, a complex duality of both system and process operating in a social context and subject to variation and change. Since 1965, a number of reasons have been proposed for modifying the Chomskyan position in the direction of that adopted by Jakobson.

The narrow definition of the domain of linguistic inquiry has been justified by its proponents on the grounds that it isolates the essential aspects of language-as-a-whole upon which all other aspects in some sense depend, or from which they in some sense derive. Thus, de Saussure says that *langue* is a norm underlying 'toutes les autres manifestations du language' and Chomsky:

> There seems to be little reason to question the traditional view that investigation of performance will proceed only so far as understanding of underlying competence permits.
> *Chomsky 1965: 10.*

But *langue* is conceived of as a static system and competence is conceived of as the ideal speaker-listener's knowledge of such a system, so that neither notion can be said to incorporate those aspects of language as a whole which relate to the processes of variation and change which are a natural and essential feature of linguistic behaviour. The postulation of an ideal speech-community immediately rules out of court any consideration of these defining features of natural language. As Hockett points out, what the narrow definition in effect does is to reduce natural language to a well-defined derived system, an artificial language. He concludes:

> Since languages are ill-defined, mathematical linguistics in the form of algebraic grammar is mistaken.
> *Hockett 1968: 61.*

Hockett acknowledges that this restriction of the scope of linguistic description may provide a useful approximation for certain purposes, but, he adds:

> . . . an approximation is always made possible by leaving some things out of account, and I believe the things left out of account to achieve an approximation of this particular sort *are just the most important properties of human language*, in that they are the source of its openness.
> *Hockett 1968: 62.*

Hockett's objection to Chomsky's approach to linguistic description is reminiscent of Firth's objection to de Saussure's concept of *langue*:

> The multiplicity of social roles we have to play as members of a race, nation, class, family, school, club, as sons, brothers, lovers, fathers, workers, churchgoers, golfers, newspaper readers, public speakers, involves also a certain degree of linguistic specialization. Unity of language is the most fugitive of all unities, whether it be historical, geographical, national, or personal. There is no such thing as *une langue une* and there never has been.
> *Firth 1957: 29.*

Both Firth and Hockett reject the narrow definition of the scope of linguistics on the grounds that it misrepresents the nature of language as an adaptable instrument of human interaction. Language has been removed from a social context and stripped of its significance as a means of communication between people. Such a definition leads to an abstract methodological exercise in formalization which has no ultimate validation by reference to actual behaviour. As Labov puts it:

> It is difficult to avoid the common-sense conclusion that the object of linguistics must ultimately be the instrument of communication used by the speech community; and if we are not talking about *that* language, there is something trivial in our proceedings.
> *Labov 1970: 33.*

*That* language relates to de Saussure's *language* rather than to his *langue* and Labov's conception of linguistics approximates more closely to Jakobson's than to Chomsky's. Its concern is not the study of a static and well-defined system assumed to be known, in some rather ill-defined sense, by ideal speaker-listeners in homogeneous speech communities, but the study of the dynamic operation of language in actual, and therefore heterogeneous, speech communities and the way actual, and therefore non-ideal, speaker-listeners use their knowledge in the business of

communication. In brief, Labov's linguistics, like Firth's before him, focuses attention on 'the study of language in its social context'.

## 2 The study of language in its social context

What does the study of language in its social context actually involve and what exactly is its scope of inquiry compared with that of linguistics in a narrow sense as defined by Chomsky and de Saussure? The most straightforward way of drawing the distinction is by consideration of the kinds of idealization procedure which are employed in delimiting the domain of study. In his discussion of idealization, which he sees as the process whereby the sentence is abstracted from primary linguistic data, Lyons (1972) mentions three kinds of procedure of which two, standardization and decontextualization, are of particular relevance to the present discussion.

Standardization is the imposition of unity or homogeneity on language data. de Saussure's postulation of *une langue une* and Chomsky's notion of a completely homogeneous speech community both derive from a concept of language from which all variation has been excluded. This kind of idealization involves the disregarding of dialectal differences and such phenomena as code switching and style shifting—in short, the whole dynamic relationship between linguistic forms and social factors. It assumes that there is no need to inquire into the nature of the speech community since there is a central invariant system to be discovered which underlies all the variation of actual linguistic behaviour. This variation is consequently seen as a relatively trivial phenomenon, a distraction to be removed. One aspect of the study of language in social context is that which concerns itself with language which has not been standardized in this way, with variable *language*, we might say, rather than invariant *langue*. It concerns itself with the study not of the individual linguist's intuition as in the kind of formal linguistics practised by generative grammarians, but with actually occurring linguistic behaviour. It seeks to establish rules which account for regularity without assuming homogeneity, and which provide a systematic description of language variation. Labov's work (see, for example, Labov 1966, 1972a) has provided the impetus for a considerable and increasing development in this field (see Bailey and Shuy 1973; Fasold and Shuy 1975) which has also resulted in a resurgence of interest in the related question of language change, particularly as exemplified in pidgin and creole languages (see Hymes 1971, De Camp and Hancock 1974).

The investigation of variation and change in language necessarily implies a rejection of standardization as a means of cutting data down to methodological size. Its aim is the scrutiny of actual linguistic behaviour in social contexts in contrast to the narcissistic introspection of intuition which marks recent formal linguistic inquiry. In this respect, this kind of

work on non-standardized data might be considered a kind of discourse analysis. But the discourse is being studied as variable linguistic *manifestations*. By this I mean that the central issue is the problem of accounting for different forms of speaking by means of rules which relate them to the same or different systems. The interest is in language *usage* and how its variability can be accounted for, on what codes people use and how these codes are structured. If we now turn to the second idealization procedure mentioned earlier, we can distinguish another aspect of the study of language in its social context, one which looks at discourse from a rather different point of view.

Whereas standardization is the procedure whereby a single and invariant system is abstracted from the complex variability which exists in actual speech communities, decontextualization is the procedure whereby the sentence is abstracted as an isolate from its natural surroundings in discourse. Sentences as abstract linguistic objects can be inferred from discourse but they do not actually occur in language behaviour. Normal language behaviour involves the production of discourse and this derives from the speaker-listener's *realization* of the communicative potential of the rules of his language system. Discourse consists of utterances, with which sentences can be put into correspondence, and these combine in complex ways to relate to extra-linguistic reality to achieve a communicative effect. The decontextualization of language data yields the isolated sentence whose meaning is self-contained. If we reject this idealization, then we are obliged to consider how meanings are conveyed by interrelationship of utterances in contexts of *use*. We are involved in discourse analysis in the more conventional sense of that term: the study of how social interaction is effected by reference not only to rules of usage, which provide for the way the language is manifested, but also to rules or procedures of use, which provide for the way language is realized as a means of communicative activity.

An extension of the scope of linguistics to include non-standardized and contextualized language data, then, yields two areas of inquiry: the study of language variation on the one hand and the study of communicative activity on the other. The first of these looks at linguistic manifestations, investigates different usages, and attempts to set up models of description which will account for the differences in a systematic way. Its focus of attention is on the code or codes available to speakers, on the structure of the instrument of communication. The second of these looks at the communicative properties of language and investigates the uses to which speakers put their knowledge of linguistic codes in order to interact with each other. Its focus of attention is on the functioning of the instrument of communication, on the manner in which it is actually put into operation in the expression of messages. The analysis of variation leads to a revision of the notion of language as a well-defined system of

rules, but although it necessarily rejects standardization, it retains decontextualization as a way of idealizing away those aspects of language which are not its direct concern. Its descriptive limit, like that of formal linguistics, is still the sentence. The analysis of communicative activity, however, deals with contextualized language data and takes us beyond the sentence into discourse. Whereas in the study of variation, discourse, actual linguistic behaviour occurring in contexts of normal social interaction, is studied as evidence for underlying regularities which can be incorporated into rules which determine various manifestations, in the study of communicative activity, discourse is studied as an end in itself. It is concerned not with the more exact description of grammatical rules but with their communicative potential and with how language users put their knowledge of such rules to communicative effect, how they negotiate meanings with each other, how they structure an ongoing interaction, and so on. It is with this latter area, the study of discourse as communicative use, that I will concern myself with in this paper.

## 3 Points of departure

I think it is useful to make a broad distinction between two general methodological approaches to the description of discourse. One takes instances of discourse as the starting point and makes statements about how they are structured as units of communication of one sort or another. The other takes the sentence as its starting point and investigates its potential for generating discourse. The direction of the first approach is from communicative function to linguistic form, and the direction of the second is from linguistic form to communicative function. Both are perfectly legitimate ways of studying language. The difficulty is in knowing how they may be related.

The first of these approaches has a long and honourable history. It is exemplified in literary criticism, in studies of the structure of myth (see, for example, Levi-Strauss 1958) and of folktales (see, for example, Propp 1972). What distinguishes the work done in accordance with this general discourse-based approach is the extent to which the analysis relates its findings to actual linguistic expression: in other words, how close they get to common ground with the sentence-based approach. Sometimes, the gap is very wide. To take an example, Propp (1972) discusses certain thematic constants in fairy stories and isolates the following motif: A sends B on a search and B departs. This underlying theme can be realized in different stories in a variety of different ways, as, for example, in the following variants:

> The king sends Ivan to find the princess. Ivan leaves.
> The blacksmith sends his apprentice to find the cow. The apprentice leaves.

Propp is essentially interested in the events recorded in different tales and tells how they can be linked to a general theme, but the linguistic expression of these events is not his concern. The analysis in Powlison (1965), on the other hand, moves much closer to common ground with the sentence-based approach. He considers how the theme of a particular folktale is expressed through paragraph organization and how different linguistic forms take on particular value as elements of discourse structure.

One may say that what distinguishes literary stylistics from literary criticism of a conventional kind is that although both are discourse-based, the former attempts to extend the study of literature to a consideration of the specific features of linguistic expression, to move from discourse towards the sentence, whereas the latter tends to use linguistic expression as evidence of something else, character, plot, theme, and so on, and focuses attention on the message which the language is used to convey (for a discussion, see Widdowson 1975). In a similar way, the degree of concern with how elements of discourse structure are linguistically realized distinguishes the work of Sinclair and Coulthard on classroom interaction from that of other investigators, as they themselves make clear (see Sinclair and Coulthard 1975: 8–18).

One general approach to discourse analysis, then, begins with instances of discourse, with actual data, and moves towards linguistic units to the extent that this appears to be necessary for the purpose of the description. The second approach moves outwards, as it were, from the sentence, and deals not with linguistic expressions as realized in discourse but with the abstract potential of linguistic forms. For example, in more recent work in sociolinguistics, there is a close examination of the function in discourse structure of specific constituent utterances (see Sinclair and Coulthard 1975, Labov 1972b, Dundes *et al* 1972, Turner 1974), but these are studied from the point of view of their contextually determined function in the discourse. The second approach, on the other hand, begins with the sentence as an abstracted isolate and represents discourse function as in some sense realizable from a meaning potential within the sentence itself. So whereas in the first approach the focus of attention is on the context in which linguistic forms occur and which provides them with communicative value as utterances, in the second approach the focus of attention is on the meanings of linguistic forms as elements of the language system, having implication of utterance.

To illustrate this difference of approach, we might consider the following instance of language:

Is someone laughing?

If we consider this as a sentence, we will note that it is interrogative in form and suggest that its meaning potential is that it can function in

discourse as a question, a request for information. If, on the other hand, we consider this as an utterance in a particular context, then we need to take into account the circumstances under which it was produced in order to interpret its realized meaning as an element of discourse. Thus, Sinclair and Coulthard (from whose data this utterance is taken) point out that in the context of the classroom, there is a procedure for interpretation which can be expressed as follows:

> Any declarative or interrogative is to be interpreted as a *command to stop* if it refers to an action or activity which is proscribed at the time of utterance.
> *Sinclair and Coulthard 1975: 32.*

An application of this procedure has the effect of neutralizing the meaning potential of the interrogative sentence and of realizing the value of this utterance as a command. The utterance would have exactly the same value, according to this interpretative procedure, if it had taken the form:

> Someone is laughing.

The point here is, then, that there is no one-to-one correspondence between the signification of linguistic forms and their communicative value as utterances in context. Discourse meanings are to some degree unpredictable. At the same time they cannot be *entirely* unpredictable: the relationship between form and function is not purely arbitrary, or otherwise there would be no linguistic basis for communication at all. A sentence-based approach to discourse would investigate what it is about this example as a sentence which allows for variable interpretation, and would go beyond the straightforward interrogative-form/question-function correspondence in search of more subtle features of meaning potential. The fact that context may override the meaning associated with sentences does not mean that one cannot fruitfully explore this meaning, which, though overridden in particular cases, can be said to constitute the essential potential for meaning which is *realizable* in context, even if not actually realized on every occasion.

Whether one looks at discourse from the point of view of the potential value of sentences or of the realized value of utterances, one has to go beyond the superficial appearance of linguistic form. One needs to recognize that linguistic structures are expressive of certain propositions on the one hand and that they count as performances of certain illocutionary acts on the other (see Searle 1969). Let us suppose, for example, that during a conversation A makes the following remark to B:

> My son will return the umbrella tomorrow.

B can report this utterance in one of three ways. He may report the occurrence of the actual linguistic form and repeat the sentence that A uses by direct speech:

She said: 'My son will return the umbrella tomorrow.'

Alternatively, he may use indirect speech and report A's proposition and then he has a number of sentences at his disposal. For example:

She said that her son would return the umbrella tomorrow.
She said that the umbrella would be returned by her son tomorrow.

And also, depending on the relative situational settings of the original remark and the report:

She said that her son would take/bring the umbrella back tomorrow/today.

As we shall see in the following section, this by no means exhausts the possibilities. The third way in which B can report A's utterance is by reporting what he understands to be its illocutionary force. In expressing a proposition A also necessarily *does* something with it: promises, undertakes, warns, and so on. Consequently, B may report what A says in one of the following ways:

She promised me that her son would return the umbrella tomorrow.
She warned me that her son would return the umbrella tomorrow.
She predicted that her son would return the umbrella tomorrow.

In these cases, B reports the illocutionary act which he interprets A as performing in expressing this particular proposition.

## 4 The sentence as the point of departure

I want in this section to look at discourse analysis from the sentence-based point of view and consider a number of proposals that have been made for extending the scope of sentence grammars so as to incorporate information in deep structure about propositional content and illocutionary force.

With certain kinds of sentence, the overtly expressed proposition carries with it an additional covert proposition as a necessary concomitant. This second, covert proposition is said to be presupposed. All wh-interrogative sentences, for example, have this peculiarity. The following sentence:

When did Arthur arrive?

presupposes that Arthur arrived. This fact lends force to the proposal to represent this sentence by an underlying structure like:

Q Arthur arrived at some time.

Here the presupposed proposition is made explicit in the deep structure formulation. The relevance of presuppositions of this kind to discourse analysis is clear when we consider exchanges like the following:

A When did Arthur arrive?
B At ten.

A How did Arthur arrive?
B By car.

The utterances of A and B are cohesive because a formal linguistic link can be established between them by invoking the presupposed proposition *Arthur arrived* in each case:

A When did Arthur arrive?
B (Arthur arrived) at ten.

Presuppositions can be seen as relating also to certain sentence constituents. Kiparsky and Kiparsky (1971), for example, discuss what they call factive and non-factive predicates. Consider the following sentences:

It is significant that he has been found guilty.
It is likely that he has been found guilty.

These would appear on the surface to have exactly the same structure, but in the first there is a covert proposition (which we would presumably wish in some way to indicate in deep structure) that the person referred to has been found guilty. Thus, it is possible to devise a short discourse by representing this single sentence as two sentences:

He has been found guilty. That is significant.

No presupposed proposition of this kind attaches to the second of these sentences, however. We cannot derive from it a discourse of the form:

He has been found guilty. That is likely.

The same sort of observation is made in Fillmore (1971) about what he refers to as verbs of judging. Speaking of the verbs *criticize* and *accuse*, Fillmore makes the following comments:

> Uses of the verb *criticize* presuppose the factuality of the situation; but not so for *accuse* . . . Consider the two sentences:

> I accused Harry of writing an obscene letter to my mother.
> I criticized Harry for writing an obscene letter to my mother.
> With *accuse*, there is no presupposition that such a letter was ever written; with *criticize* there is.
> *Fillmore 1971: 283.*

In other words, *accuse* is non-factive and *criticize* is factive. If Fillmore is right, then this again has implications for discourse. The following, for example, would be adjudged to form a cohesive sequence:

> I criticized Harry for writing an obscene letter to my mother. He sent it last week by express delivery.

But if we replace *criticize* with *accuse*, the sequence of sentences would, according to Fillmore's criteria, be unacceptable as discourse:

> I accused Harry of writing an obscene letter to my mother. He sent it last week by express delivery.

In factive sentences the presupposed covert proposition which derives from the embedded sentence is not effected by the negation of the verb in the main sentence. Thus, if the sentences we have cited are negated, the presuppositions remain as before. Karttunen (1971) discusses presuppositions attaching to a different type of verb—which he calls 'implicative verbs'—in which the assertion of a main statement with one of these verbs in the predicate commits the speaker to the proposition expressed in the embedded sentence, so long as this is a positive assertion. An example of an implicative verb is *condescend* and of a non-implicative verb *decide*. Thus the sentence:

> Arthur condescended to mow the lawn yesterday.

is said to carry with it the presupposition:

> Arthur mowed the lawn yesterday.

But the sentence:

> Arthur decided to mow the lawn yesterday.

does not, according to Karttunen, carry with it any such implication. If this is the case, it means that the presupposition attaching to the first sentence constrains the choice of any sentence which might follow it in discourse. So we cannot have:

> Arthur condescended to mow the lawn yesterday. But he watched television instead.

If we replace *condescended* by *decided*, however, then the discourse becomes quite acceptable.

In the cases we have just considered (and many others could be cited: see Harder and Kock 1976 for a detailed review), the presupposition might be said to attach to the propositional content of the sentence. It remains the same even if an alternative surface form is used. Thus, the following can be said to be 'stylistic' variants of the same underlying structure:

> Arthur condescended to mow the lawn yesterday.
> It was Arthur who condescended to mow the lawn yesterday.

In both cases (assuming for the sake of argument that Karttunen is correct), there is a presupposition that Arthur mowed the lawn yesterday. There are different presuppositions, however, attaching to the different linguistic forms whereby this proposition is expressed. Thus the second but not the first presupposes that someone condescended to mow the lawn and that the someone in question is not Arthur. Whereas the first of these variants could be used to initiate a discourse, therefore, since it presupposes no previous interaction, the second could not since it presupposes that the subject of lawn mowing has already been introduced in some way into the preceding conversation.

Halliday (1967/1968) discusses presuppositions of this kind under the general heading of what he calls 'theme'. He points out that a sentence like:

> The one who discovered the cave was John.

is associated with the covert proposition that somebody discovered the cave, but that a thematic or 'stylistic' variant like:

> What John discovered was the cave.

is associated with the covert proposition that John discovered something. As before, we can see that it is these covert, presupposed, propositions which control whether or not a sequence of sentences makes cohesive discourse. Halliday points out, for example, that the following pair of sentences does not form cohesive links:

> Nobody else had known where the entrance to the cave was situated.
> What John discovered was the cave.

If we select the other variant, however, the two sentences do constitute a cohesive combination:

> No one else had known where the entrance to the cave was situated.
> The one who discovered the cave was John.

It is because these different forms carry different presuppositions of this kind that Halliday rejects the notion, common among grammarians of the transformational-generative persuasion, that the variation in meaning among surface forms is in some sense less 'important' than meaning distinctions that can be accounted for in deep structure. In standard (or 'classical') transformational-generative grammar, such as is exemplified in Chomsky (1965), the two sentences we have been considering would be represented as ultimately relatable (by means of transformational operations) to the same deep structure, roughly paraphrasable as:

John discovered the cave.

In this respect, they would be held to have the same meaning, that meaning being conveyed unchanged from deep structure by different transformational rules. In this view, transformations are devices which can be employed to demonstrate that two structurally different forms are 'really', in the last (or deepest) analysis, expressions of the same meaning and their surface differences are relatively insignificant and superficial (surface and superficial are often used interchangeably in discussions on this matter). If we adopt Halliday's view, however, transformations appear in a different light. They can be seen as devices whereby propositions, expressible in their simplest form as sentences of the kind just cited, can be structurally organized so as to acquire the presuppositions which are appropriate for particular contexts of use. They are conceived of as the means for differentiating rather than preserving meanings, as a way of 'preparing' deep structure propositions for actual communicative operation.

Halliday's discussion of theme relates to those transformations which transpose sentence constituents. But other kinds of transformation can also be considered as ways of preparing sentences to function as elements in discourse. We might briefly consider embedding transformations. The following pair of sentences can be regarded as alternative transformational outputs from the same deep structure source:

Arthur went to the table and picked up the book that was open.
Arthur went to the table and picked up the open book.

Both of these can be related to a deep structure, the relevant part of which we might roughly show as follows:

Arthur picked up the book the book was open.

But although both sentences can therefore be said to express the same proposition, they clearly carry different presuppositions. The first, for example, presupposes that there was more than one book on the table,

whereas the second carries no such presupposition. Thus, if the first were to be followed by a sentence which related to the covert proposition, we would be able to infer a cohesive connection:

> Arthur went to the table and picked up the book that was open. He paid no attention to the others.

Here, we are able to provide the expression *the others* with the reading 'the other books'. We cannot do the same, however, with the following:

> Arthur went to the table and picked up the open book. He paid no attention to the others.

In this case, we have no way of realizing the value of the expression *the others* as referring to books. We would most likely assume that it referred to other people who happened to be near the table at the time.

A good deal more could be said about the 'rhetorical' functions of transformational rules (for a detailed discussion see Widdowson 1973) but perhaps enough has been said to justify regarding them as devices for preparing propositions for discourse function by creating appropriate presuppositions.

Both the proposition itself, then, and the manner in which this is fashioned, the different sentential forms which may be used to express it, may carry presuppositions, covert propositions which can serve to project meaning from one sentence to another so as to establish a cohesive relation. As we shall see presently (in Section 5), one of the difficulties about using presuppositions to understand how discourse works is that they are not always reliable: other factors may intervene. Before considering this matter, however, we must turn from the propositional elements of sentences to the question of their possible illocutionary force.

Proposals have been made to extend the modal component of the deep structure of sentences to incorporate an indicator of their illocutionary force. Thus, if we recognize that the sentence:

> Shut the door.

has the illocutionary force of an order, we might wish to postulate a deep structure for it in which the performative verb were made explicit, roughly parapharaseable as:

> I order you you shut the door.

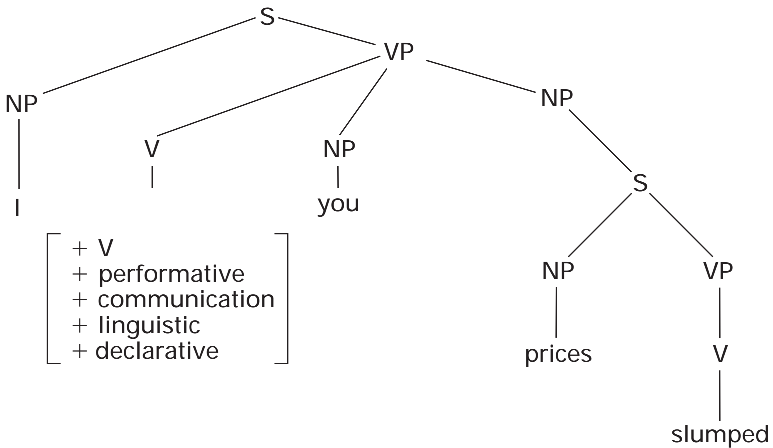
In the same way, Ross (1970) suggests that underlying the surface form:

> Prices slumped.

There is a deep structure paraphraseable as:

> I inform you prices slumped.

This, Ross suggests, may be formalized in something like the following manner:




The features specified for the verb could be extended to include the kind of conditions discussed in detail in Searle (1969). That is to say, one might have entries in the lexicon for performative verbs which spelled out the conditions which have to be met for their use. These specifications might take something of the form proposed by Fillmore for his verbs of judging (Fillmore 1971).

As expressed in Searle, these conditions are independent of the linguistic form which the sentence takes. But as Fillmore observes:

> An important fact that is typically omitted from a philosopher's record of the set of happiness conditions of a sentence is that the various conditions are separately related to different specific facts about the grammatical structure of the sentence. For example, from the fact that the form of the sentence is imperative, we infer those conditions that relate to the speaker-addressee relationship; from the presence of the definite article, we infer the understanding that there is some mutually identifiable door, to which the speaker is referring; the others are inferrable from the ways in which we understand the verb *shut*.
> *Fillmore 1971: 276.*

From this point of view, illocutionary force is not, as it were, a separate feature of an utterance to be associated with the proposition expressed, but derives from the proposition itself, as the realization of its 'meaning potential'.

The expression 'meaning potential' is taken from Halliday, who has consistently taken the view (which derives ultimately from Firth) that understanding of the social function of language is a prerequisite for an understanding of linguistic structure. In this view, one does not first isolate the abstract system for detached study and then, if one feels inclined, see how it works in a social context for the purposes of communication: rather, one looks to purposes of communication to explain the system. The central question posed by Chomsky and his associates is *how* language is structured: for Halliday, an equally significant question is *why* it is structured in the way that it is. As he puts it:

> But what is the nature and origin of the grammatical system? Grammar is the level of formal organization in language; it is a purely internal level of organization, and is in fact the main defining characteristic of language. But it is not arbitrary. Grammar evolved as 'content form': as a representative of the meaning potential through which language serves its various social functions. The grammar itself has a functional basis.
> *Halliday 1973: 98.*

In Halliday's work we find an attempt to formalize the kind of conditions which Searle talks about into semantic networks which represent sets of options available to the language user. These networks mediate between social situations and sets of linguistic expressions derivable from systems within the grammar. Thus the illocutionary force of a particular utterance is seen to be a functional reflection of its intrinsic linguistic form.

Proceeding towards discourse from the starting point of the sentence, then, involves a consideration of: firstly what is presupposed by the proposition expressed by the sentence, which can be accounted for in the formulation of its deep structure; secondly what is presupposed by the manner in which the proposition is organized as a surface form by different transformational operations; and thirdly what illocutionary act the proposition or a particular manner of expressing it is used to perform, which can be accounted for specifying different conditions or semantic networks and seeing how these are realized by the elements in the proposition, or by the particular form of the sentence that expresses it. A study of these factors, of the 'meaning potential' of sentences, treating these not simply as abstract linguistic forms but as a communicative resource, leads us towards the study of language in its social context from a linguistic base. We have now to consider the second orientation to discourse analysis that was mentioned: that which takes actually attested language use as its starting point.

## 5 Discourse as the point of departure

The sentence based approach to discourse described in the previous section does not typically deal in actual data: it essentially concerns itself with the potential residing in the language system itself for the realization of discourse, with what might be called the communicative capacity of the system. It extends from the sentence outwards and, to date at least, this extension has not gone much beyond relationships between contiguous sentences. The discourse based approach, on the other hand, confronts the data, actual and not potential instances of communicative behaviour.

To adopt this orientation is immediately to become involved in the problem of what might be called contextual conditioning. By this I mean that although one might associate a particular meaning potential with a particular linguistic form, this potential might not be realized, or the form might take on a different and unpredictable communicative value because of what has preceded in the discourse or because of the circumstances of utterance. An example of such conditioning from the work of Sinclair and Coulthard was briefly discussed in Section 3 in this paper. To illustrate the problem further we can first refer to the so-called implicative verbs which were discussed in Section 2. If we consider the sentence:

> Arthur condescended to mow the lawn yesterday.

out of context, we may readily agree that there is a presupposition here that Arthur did in fact mow the lawn. But this presupposition can be neutralized by what follows in the discourse:

> Arthur condescended to mow the lawn yesterday. But just as he was about to begin the Browns arrived.

Here the presupposition latent in the first sentence is cancelled out by the second sentence: we take it that Arthur did not mow the lawn after all. In similar fashion, we might agree that the following sentence:

> Arthur and Agnes decided to get married.

carries no presupposition, in isolation from a context, that they actually did get married. But this presupposition can be created if the sentence were extended into discourse in the following manner:

> Arthur and Agnes decided to get married. They have two children now.

The interpretation of discourse, then, is not simply a matter of recovering the presuppositions attaching to individual sentences as they appear in sequence. The linguistic context in which they occur, and the extralinguistic context of utterance, create presuppositions of a pragmatic kind or 'implicatures' which can override those which are associated with

linguistic forms. As I pointed out earlier (in Section 3), this does not mean that it is not legitimate to investigate the latter: they represent part of the essential knowledge that the language user brings to his understanding of language use. What it does mean, however, is that we cannot assume that meanings, whether explicit or implicit, are carried unchanged into discourse. Discourse is not simply a patchwork of preordained sentential meanings; it is a dynamic process of meaning creation. Misunderstanding of this fact leads to the kind of error made by van Dijk (1972). He cites the following sentences:

> We will have guests for lunch. Calderon was a great Spanish writer.

and says that this combination is 'definitely ungrammatical'. He adds:

> That is, any native speaker of English will consider this sequence, when presented in one utterance, as nonsense. This, of course, does not prevent the assignment of semantic representations to the individual sentences, but it is impossible to establish any semantic relation between them, that is, one cannot assign a semantic representation to the sequence as a whole.
> *Van Dijk 1972: 40.*

It is true that if we consider these items of language as sentences, there is no way in which we can establish semantic links of cohesion between them. If, however, we consider them as utterances, as actual instances of language use, there is no difficulty at all in conceiving of a context in which they would make perfectly good sense, where they would combine to form a coherent discourse. Imagine a situation, for example, in which a group of people were in the habit of inviting guests for lunch to discuss the work of great writers. A lunch has been set aside to discuss Calderon, but then there is some dispute among the organizers as to whether Calderon merits the title of 'great' and after some debate it is concluded that he does, so the lunch can go forward as arranged. In this context of situation, the sentences cited could be used with complete good sense. In this case, contextual conditioning creates a relationship which is absent from the sequence of sentences considered in detachment from a context.

It would seem, then, that how elements of a discourse relate is only partially dependent on what is stated and presupposed in the individual sentences that comprise it. It is quite possible, as we have seen, for two items of language to be completely unrelated as sentences and therefore to exhibit no cohesion, but to be very closely related as utterances in context and therefore to exhibit coherence as discourse. In Krzeszowski (1975) there is a convincing demonstration of this. He puts forward the hypothesis that

> any two sentences representing the same grammatical type, for example any two declarative sentences . . . could be connected by any of the sentence connectives and result in a well-formed sequence. The well-formedness of such a sequence depends on extra-linguistic circumstances attending the uttering of such texts.
> *Krzeszowski 1975: 41.*

He considers two sentences taken at random from a textbook of English:

> The men and women eat breakfast together.
> The nomads become restless in the big town.

As Krzeszowski points out, these can be quite appropriately related by use of the connective *therefore* under certain extra-linguistic circumstances: for example, we have a socio-cultural situation in which it is offensive to the nomads to have men and women eating together since in their own culture this violates notions of common decency. Other extra-linguistic circumstances can easily be imagined in which the two utterances would be related in the following ways:

> The men and women eat breakfast together. Nevertheless, the nomads become restless in the big town.
> The men and women eat breakfast together. Moreover, the nomads become restless in the big town.

At the same time, examples could be cited where it would surely be perverse to maintain that *any* two sentences linked with *therefore* constituted a well-formed combination. Consider the following:

> John has stopped beating his wife. Therefore he is a brute.

We would be inclined to say here that although one could envisage a world in which beating one's wife were regarded as a kindness and so render this as a well-formed sequence, there is nevertheless something within the language which makes it strange and which would *normally* lead us to see it as deviant. The deviance relates to the presupposition contained in the first sentence and which activates what Ducrot (1972) calls a 'loi d'enchaînement'. In considering this matter, Harder and Kock (1975) made the following comment:

> In order to single out the presupposition of a sentence among the components of its meaning, Ducrot formulates the 'loi d'enchaînement' which says, in effect: when one uses the sentence as a step in a chain of reasoning, for example by appending to it a conclusion beginning with *therefore*, then this conclusion cannot base itself on the presupposition of the sentence. If this is attempted, then the

> resulting chain of reasoning will appear odd or even invalid. For example, if one has *John has stopped beating his wife*, then the assumption *John once beat his wife* is a presupposition . . . for we can only have *John has stopped beating his wife. Therefore they are getting on better now*, but not *John has stopped beating his wife. Therefore he is a brute*, where the conclusion is based on the presupposition.
> *Harder and Kock 1975: 33.*

A number of other chaining rules, where presuppositions can be said to constrain sentence sequence (and so to be a potential projection of discourse development) were implied in some of the examples discussed in Section 4. It is clear that we have to allow for contextual conditioning, that what is meant on a particular occasion is not simply a function of what is asserted and presupposed by the sentence, but at the same time, meanings do not just spring unheralded from the context. What is conditioned is normal expectation based on the language user's knowledge of what sentences mean by virtue of linguistic rules of one sort or another.

Although I have spoken of the way context may condition meanings, providing a relationship between utterances which is not derivable from the meanings of the individual sentences, it is important to note that the context itself does not create this relationship. It is the language user who makes sense of the language by reference to those features of the circumstances of utterance which he judges to be relevant. He does this by recognizing what it is in the sentence and in the linguistic and extra-linguistic context in which it occurs that realizes the conditions whereby it takes on a particular communicative value. Confronted with an instance of language, we immediately engage certain interpretative procedures which enable us to make sense of it. Some of these procedures like those for ritual insults (Labov 1972b) or classroom interaction (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975) are specific to particular kinds of situation. Some of them, however, are of a quite general kind and fall under the heading of what Grice refers to as 'maxims of conversation', and what Ducrot (1972) refers to as 'laws of exhaustivité, informativité and interêt'.

One of these general procedures takes the form of an assumption that when somebody says something, what he says is meant to be informative and relevant. Thus, when we are presented with two apparently quite disconnected sentences, as in the example about the nomads we have just been considering, we proceed on the assumption that the information expressed in the second sentence must be relevant in some way to the information expressed in the first. This relevance is not signalled by linguistic clues, so we create an extra-linguistic situation which will supply the deficiency.

To consider another example: I am in a room with someone and he says to me:

The door is open.

The fact that I can see quite well for myself that the door is open makes his remark redundant as information. In consequence I seek what relevance it might have in the circumstances in which it was spoken, and I might find that this lies in the fact that the utterance can be understood as realizing one of the conditions attendant upon the act of ordering or requesting. Since the utterance is not informative as a statement, I assume that it must be relevant as another illocutionary act and I investigate whether the situation of utterance provides for the realization of the necessary conditions. If, for example, the conditions for an order are recoverable from the situation, then my likely reaction will be to close the door; if the situation can be seen as realizing the conditions for, let us say, a warning, then my likely reaction will be to lower my voice or stop talking. If I cannot find the relevant conditions, I might say:

So what?

If I see that my interlocutor might regard the conditions for an order obtain in the situation but I do not, then I might respond by deliberately misinterpreting his intent and treating his remark as simply informative:

So I see.

Or by making it clear that I do not accept his reading of the situation:

Close it yourself!

I have already (in Section 4) referred to the kinds of conditions which might be specified in a Searlean type analysis of illocutionary acts. These can be said to represent the language user's knowledge of rules of use in the abstract. What Searle does not concern himself with is the manner in which such rules are put into operation for the production and interpretation of actual discourse by means of the kind of procedure we have been discussing. Labov (1969a, 1972a) specifies conditions of a similar kind but also considers how they are realized in contexts of actual use. He takes an attested instance of discourse as his starting point:

A Well, when do you plan to come home?
B Oh why-y?

As with the cases we have been considering, there is no formally signalled relationship between these two linguistic units as sentences. To understand what is going on here, we have to know about the extra-linguistic circumstances. These are as follows:

> We must be aware that A is a college student, and that B is her mother; that B has been away for four days helping a married daughter; that A and B both know that A wants B to come home; and that B has said many times in the past that A cannot take care of herself, which A denies.
> *Labov 1972a: 255.*

Our interpretation of this interaction depends on us seeing how this situation realizes the conditions which have to be met for a particular illocutionary act to be performed. Labov formulates these conditions as follows:

> If A requests B to perform an action X at a time T, A's utterance will be heard as a valid command only if the following preconditions hold: B believes that A believes that:
>
> 1 X needs to be done for a purpose Y.
> 2 B has the ability to do X.
> 3 B has the obligation to do X.
> 4 A has the right to tell B to do X.

Given these conditions, our task now is to see whether the situation can be seen as one which can realize them. If so, then A's question is interpretable as a request for action, a kind of mitigated command, which might be alternatively phrased as something like:

A Come home, please.

The question is: does B interpret A's remark in this way? According to Labov, she does, and her question is directed to the first of the conditions specified above: she assumes for the moment that the other conditions hold but wants clarification of the first condition. Her question might be rephrasable as:

B Why do I need to come home?

B's interpretation derives from a procedure whereby she realizes the value of A's utterance in relation to the conditions in the following way:

> If A makes a request for information of B about whether an action X has been performed, or at what time T X will be performed, and the four preconditions hold, then A will be heard as making a request for action with the underlying form *B: do X*.
> *Labov 1972a: 256.*

If this interpretation is correct, then A's next utterance should provide the information that B is covertly requesting: it should also focus on the first

of the conditions. In fact, in the data which Labov is considering, this is exactly what happens:

A Well, things are getting just a little too much. (laugh). This is—it's just getting too hard.

What has to be noted is that A is not simply providing information: her utterance is not only informative but relevant in respect to the request she is making. Her remark is both a response to B's request for information and at the same time a repetition of the request by a focusing on one of its defining conditions. She makes use of the following procedure:

> If A has made a request, and B responds with a request for information, A reinstates the original request by supplying that information.

What is B's next move? She could, of course, accept that the first condition is now clarified and accede to the request in something like the following manner:

B I'll try and get home tomorrow.

In fact, in the data, B's next remark is:

B Well, why don't you tell Helen that?

We might infer that the suggestion that B is making here is that Helen might more appropriately be asked to help. In other words, she now shifts the focus of attention either to condition 2 or to condition 3: she is questioning her ability or her obligation to assist A in her predicament.

Throughout this exchange we can see a kind of negotiation whereby the two participants employ a variety of procedures to interpret each other's utterances by reference to their common knowledge of the situation and the rule of use associated with making a request for action. The investigation of procedures of this kind has been the particular concern of the ethnomethodologists (for a representative selection of their work, see Sudnow 1972, Turner 1974). Thus, Garfinkel (1972) points out the importance of understanding what he calls the 'practical reasoning' which language users employ in making sense of linguistic activity, the process which 'consists of various methods whereby something that a person says or does is recognized to accord with a rule, (Garfinkel 1972: 315). According to Garfinkel, it is not enough simply to specify rules, one has also to explain how the rules are actually used. As he puts it:

> In order to describe how actual investigative procedures are accomplished as recognizedly rational actions *in actual occasions*, it is not satisfactory to say that members invoke some rule with which to define

> the coherent or consistent or planful, i.e. rational character of their actual activities.
> *Garfinkel 1972: 322.*

To illustrate the distinction between the linguistic and ethnomethodological perspectives on discourse analysis, and to clarify the discussion in this and the preceding section, we might consider some remarks made in Dressler (1970) concerning what he calls the 'semantic deep structure of discourse grammar'. Dressler begins by presenting an example of his own invented data:

> I walked through a park. The trees were already green. In a beech there was a beautiful woodpecker.

He then comments on it as follows:

> This is well-formed discourse because of semantic coherence or more precisely because of semantic anaphora which holds between the semantic components of the lexical items 'park', 'tree' and 'beech'.
> *Dressler 1970: 205.*

What Dressler is doing here is simply (to use Garfinkel's terms) invoking, in a rather vague way, some rule with which to define the coherent character of this example. The implication is that coherence is a quality of the discourse itself which the reader simply has to recognize by reference to the rules at his disposal. From the ethnomethodologist's point of view, the discourse is well-formed because the reader makes it so by working out the relationships between the parts, by realizing how the semantic links which exist between the lexical items mentioned are relevant to the interpretation of this particular discourse. This can be a very complicated matter and it is interesting to compare Dressler's analysis here with that of Sacks (1972). Sacks also begins with a very short piece of discourse, but it is not invented for illustrative purposes but actually attested data. It is a story told by a child which consists of just two 'sentences'.

> The baby cried. The mommy picked it up.

Dressler would probably make very short work of this by referring to the anaphoric use of the pronoun and the definite article in the second sentence. Sacks, however, in the typical manner of the ethnomethodologists, investigates in detail what kinds of procedures are involved in realizing the value of these linguistic elements in the creative endeavour of making sense. (For a closer comparison between the approaches exemplified by Dressler and Sacks, see Widdowson 1973: Chapter 9).

The difference between the linguistic and ethnomethodological perspectives on the analysis of discourse, the first examining the meaning potential of sentences as a capacity for generating discourse structures and the second examining procedures whereby discourse is actually realized, is expressed by Cicourel in the following way:

> Linguistic and ethnomethodological approaches to the problem of meaning differ markedly. The former has stressed formal properties of language which would be relevant for the development of logical relationships and rules to describe the association between sound patterns and the objects, events or experiences to which they refer. The latter approach has been concerned with the process whereby rules said to cover interactional settings are constructed, as well as with the assessment of claimed measurement of the actual implementation of rules in specific circumstances. Ethnomethodology emphasizes the interpretative work required to recognize that an abstract rule exists which could fit a particular occasion, while linguists minimize the relevance of interactional context-sensitive features when stressing the importance of syntactic rules for semantic analysis.
> *Cicourel 1973: 100.*

What Cicourel says here can, of course, be referred to the two points of departure for discourse analysis which were outlined in Section 3. But as we have seen, the linguistic, sentence-based approach can be extended so as to be of relevance to 'interactional context-sensitive features' of language in use. It is less evident whether the ethnomethodological approach to analysis can be adapted to take more account of the properties of the language system. A good deal of ethnomethodological work is strongly reminiscent of literary criticism: perceptive and enlightening things are said about how meanings are created but there is little precise statement about the linguistic resources that are brought to bear in the task. In Sacks' analysis of the child's story, which was referred to earlier (Sacks 1972), for example, the knowledge of semantic rules which is applied in the interpretation is transposed from a linguistic to a sociological key, and there is no attempt to relate the analysis to work done in linguistics at all. We may agree with Cicourel that the two approaches 'differ markedly' but advances in the understanding of discourse depend on the two approaches reconciling their differences.

## 6 Current problems

In this last section I want to try to draw together the threads of what has been a somewhat discursive discussion by considering in outline some of the major problems in discourse analysis that seem to me to emerge from it. These are problems which I think have to be resolved if discourse

analysis is to develop from its present rather tentative and unco-ordinated beginnings.

The first of these problems concerns the reconciliation of the different approaches that I have discussed in the preceding sections. From this discussion has emerged a distinction between the rules that people can be said to know in the abstract and the procedures which they employ in applying these rules in the production and interpretation of actual instances of discourse. Broadly speaking, a sentence-based approach will tend towards an account of discourse which focuses on rules to the relative neglect of procedures, whereas a discourse-based approach will tend towards an account which focuses on procedures to the relative neglect of rules. I have argued here that a satisfactory approach will have to take both rules and procedures into account and devise a model which establishes a relationship between them. To consider just one example. In the system of analysis proposed in Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), a number of 'acts' are defined, of which the following are examples:

| | |
|---|---|
| **directive** | Realized by imperative. Its function is to request a non linguistic response. |
| **clue** | Realized by statement, question, command, or moodless item . . . It functions by providing additional information which helps the pupil to answer the elicitation or comply with the directive.<br>*Sinclair and Coulthard 1975: 41.* |

In the case of the directive, there is a correspondence between the meaning potential of the imperative sentence and its realization in discourse as a directive act. Thus the rule specifying meaning potential can be directly drawn upon in the procedure for interpreting an utterance as a directive. In the case of the clue, however, there is no similar linguistic rule that the language user can refer to: he has to make sense of the utterance by relying entirely on the context of its occurrence, to work out whether what is said can be seen as counting as additional information or not. Does this mean that *any* sentence can be used as a clue, that there is in effect no connection between what the sentences mean by virtue of linguistic rules and what its use can be made to mean by virtue of interpretative procedures?

These two definitions of different acts point to another problem. It will be noticed that the directive is said to be realized by a kind of sentence, the imperative, whereas the clue is said to be realized by a number of illocutionary acts, including a command. But how can an act be realized by another act? Do we have to say that on a particular occasion, for example, a clue is realized by a command which is realized in turn by an imperative sentence? If so, then it would appear to be the case that the utterance

functions as two acts at the same time. How, then, are these two simultaneous acts, clue and command, to be distinguished?

I think it is necessary to make a distinction between two types of communicative activity. The first relates to the way in which the propositions which are expressed in a discourse are organized and managed, how the interaction is negotiated between participants. This activity is carried out by the performance of what we might call *interactive acts* (a term coined by my colleague Hugh Trappes-Lomax). Thus, the initiation of an exchange, the prompting of a reply, the introduction of a topic for discussion, and the giving of a clue, are all interactive acts: they create discourse structure by organizing its propositional content, and they are defined internally as it were by reference to their structural function. The acts discussed by Sinclair and Coulthard are, it seems to me, essentially of this type. But illocutionary acts of the kind discussed in Searle (1969) and, from another point of view, in Labov (1972a) are rather different. They are defined independently of their structural function in context, although the context must provide for the realization of the conditions which must be met for them to be effectively performed. Thus, I may perform the interactive act of, let us say, introducing a topic for discussion while at the same time performing the illocutionary act of definition or description. Illocutionary acts are essentially social activities which relate to the world outside the discourse, whereas interactive acts are essentially ways of organizing the discourse itself and are defined by their internal function. To clarify the distinction, we might consider the following short exchange:

A Doorbell!
B I'm in the bath.
A OK.

Now if we consider this from an interactive point of view, we might wish to say (in the manner of Sinclair and Coulthard) that here we have an exchange consisting of three moves, opening, answering, and follow-up respectively, and that the first of these moves is expounded by a single act, let us say a directive, the second by another single act, let us say a reply, and the third by yet another single act, let us say, an accept. In describing the exchange in this way we have given an account of its interactive structure. But this is only a partial account of what is going on here. If we assume that A and B (her husband, let us say) know that the ringing of the doorbell is audible to both of them, then in accordance with general interpretative procedures discussed in Section 5, B will recognize that A's utterance is not informative. He will then proceed to look for its relevance and will note that the situation is such as to lead A to suppose that the conditions obtain for her utterance to count as a request for action. B's utterance can now be interpreted as an indication to A that one of these

conditions (condition 2 in Labov's rule, cited in Section 5) does not in fact obtain. The illocutionary force of his utterance, therefore, is that of offering an excuse for not complying with what he understands to be A's request. Now A's next remark can be seen as an acceptance of B's excuse and therefore as a cancellation of the original request but at the same time it is an undertaking to carry out the action herself. The situation is not unlike that between mother and daughter which is discussed by Labov and which was referred to earlier. Thus B's utterance can be interpreted as having both the interactive value of reply and the illocutionary value of excuse, and A's second utterance can be interpreted as having both the interactive value of accept and the illocutionary value of undertaking. What about A's first utterance? Here it would seem that interactive and illocutionary function converge, and that the term *directive* is equally applicable to one type of act as to the other. The question is whether there are other acts which have similar dual function and in general whether we can find some principled way of associating interactive and illocutionary functions and of accommodating them both within the same model of discourse.

One major problem in discourse analysis, then, has to do with the relationship between the meaning potential of sentences and the realized meaning of utterances in context. A second has to do with the relationship between interactive and illocutionary function. I want, now, to mention a third problem: the relationship between procedures which result in what I will call immediate interpretation and those which result in what I will call selective interpretation.

The procedures which have been discussed in this paper have been those concerned with immediate interpretation. That is to say, they have to do with the processing of meaning, utterance by utterance, as it emerges sequentially in the discourse. But interpretation also works on a more selective level. Some of the meanings we take in as we listen or read are almost immediately discarded as not having a longer term relevance: their function is to facilitate communication, to provide a setting for the main information which is to be conveyed. Some are restructured into conceptual patterns which may bear very little relationship with the patterns of discourse structure within which they were originally presented. The procedures which are employed for immediate intake of meanings and which probably relate to the functioning of short term memory, are not the same as those employed for the selective organization of meanings whereby they are related to existing conceptual patterns and are, as it were, prepared for storage in long term memory. Let me illustrate what I mean by immediate and selective interpretation by considering the following passage (cited and discussed in Nyyssonen 1977).

> Pliny the Elder in his highly unreliable Natural History gives directions for distinguishing a genuine diamond. It should be put, he says, on a blacksmith's anvil and smitten with a heavy hammer as hard as possible: if it breaks it is not a true diamond. It is likely that a good many valuable stones were destroyed in this way because Pliny was muddling up hardness and toughness. Diamond is the hardest of all substances, but it is quite brittle so that, even if one could get it cheaply in large pieces, it would not be a very useful structural substance.

By using procedures of immediate interpretation we would go through this passage and work out the value of the propositions and their interactive and illocutionary function as they appeared in sequence as elements in the ongoing development of the discourse. But not all of the information here is of equal importance. At a selective level we might recognize that the essential function of the passage as a whole is that it in the first place explains what is meant by a useful material and secondly distinguishes between the concepts of hardness and toughness. All of the business about Pliny and his Natural History is unnecessary at this level: it is only required as a facilitating device to introduce the main topic at the immediate level of interpretation.

The question of the relationship between immediate and selective interpretation procedures leads us to another problem, and one which has particularly exercised the minds of the ethnomethodologists. This has to do with the status of the analyst's description of discourse from the vantage point of the detached third person observer vis-à-vis the participants' actual experience of the interaction as first and second persons. And if we decide to adopt the latter perspective, do we assume the role of the first person producer or the second person receiver? This question raises the difficulty of establishing correspondence between the first person's intention and the second person's interpretation, which is perhaps especially evident in written discourse where there is interactivity without interaction and where, therefore, there is no possibility of arriving at mutually acceptable meanings by open negotiation.

All of these problems raise issues of a complex kind beyond the competence of any single discipline and well beyond the scope of this present paper.

## Notes

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