

Conversation as Discourse

- ❖ Since *discourse* analysis is said to apply to written *texts* , it seems there is no clear distinction between the terms text and discourse. These terms are 'often ambiguous and confusing'.
- ❖ The spoken text of a conversational interaction is the direct reflex of the discourse enacted between two, or among several, parties. The discourse may be prepared, pre-scripted in different degrees.
- ❖ Interviews, for example, may be structured in advance, though the actual wording of the participants cannot be entirely predicted.
- ❖

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- ❖ Casual conversation is, of course, much less structured, but even here the participants have some expectation as to how the discourse is likely to proceed, the relative informality of the engagement, the kind of topics which would count as normal, and so on. As Firth put it, conversation is a **'roughly prescribed social ritual'**.
- ❖ What is most immediately striking about the transcribed record of unscripted conversation is its non-linearity.

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- ❖ Though the interacting parties in the conversation may make satisfactory sense of what is going on, and feel that they are co-constructing their discourse in a reasonably orderly fashion, the transcription of their actual text usually records it as being fragmentary and discontinuous.
- ❖ The textual record of speech is a poor representation of the discourse.

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- ❖ The more precise the analytic account, the further removed it is from the actual experience of the speakers.
- ❖ Making sense of a spoken interaction from the insider point of view of the participants is very different from making sense of it as an outsider third person transcribing it.
- ❖ We have here an observer's paradox, but not that which Labov points out, and resolves, whereby a non-participant third-person presence impinges on the participation process itself (Labov 1972).

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- ❖ Transcriptions can reveal a great deal about the textual reflex of spoken discourse by focusing attention on specific linguistic features.
- ❖ They can record the occurrence of certain speech sounds, lexical items, grammatical structures and so on, and these are clearly relevant to the analysis of text as such, and indeed it may be possible to infer from them something of the significance they might have had for the discourse process which gave rise to them.

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Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) may be summarized:

| | |
|------------------|-----------|
| Initiation _____ | Opening |
| Response _____ | Answering |
| Follow-up _____ | Follow Up |

In Coulthard and Montgomery (1981) this is reformulated as:

| | |
|------------------|---------------|
| Initiation _____ | Eliciting |
| Response _____ | Informing |
| Follow-up _____ | Acknowledging |

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- The explanation given in this section will begin from the rank of Act and proceed upwards, again in accordance with the layout of Sinclair and Coulthard (1975).

- **Acts**

Acts are the units at the lowest rank of the *discourse level of language patterning, and are realized at the level of grammar and lexis.*

1. They are necessary to an intonational paradigm. For example, *terminate, receive and react* are realized respectively by low, mid and high key repetitions and 'yes' items, so we include *react* although it does not occur in our data sample.

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2. They are essential to a description of the basic functions of language, one of which is asking others to do things. We have no example of a *directive in our data, but we nevertheless include it and the other act uniquely associated with this function, behave.*

Moves

Acts combine to form moves: each act realizes one element of move structure. There are eight moves: *framing, opening, answering, eliciting, informing, acknowledging, directing and behaving; the first three realize elements of structure of Organizational exchanges, and the other five of Conversational exchanges.*

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- **Exchanges**

Moves combine to form exchanges: each move realizes one element of exchange structure. There are two major classes of exchange: Organizational and Conversational.

- **Transactions**

Exchanges combine to form transactions: each exchange realizes one element of transaction structure.

- **Interactions**

Transactions combine to form the highest unit on the rank scale, the interaction. Again, however, little can be said about the internal structure of an interaction.

Conversation as Discourse

- **Primary Resources**

- Angermuller, Johannes, Dominique Maingueneau and Ruth Wodak (2014). *The Discourse Studies Reader: main currents in theory and analysis*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
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- Bhatia, V. K. (2004), *Worlds of Written Discourse: A Genre-Based View*. London: Continuum.
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- Cameron, D. (2001), *Working with Spoken Discourse*. London: Sage.
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- Van Dijk, Teun A. (2009). *Society and Discourse: How Social Contexts Influence Text and Talk*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
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- _____ (2007). *Discourse Analysis*. Oxford: OUP.