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# 1 Towards an analysis of discourse

*John Sinclair and Malcolm Coulthard*

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SYSTEM OF ANALYSIS

When we began to investigate the structure of classroom interaction we had no preconceptions about the organization or extent of linguistic patterning in long texts. Obviously lessons are highly structured but our problem was to discover how much of this structure was pedagogical and how much linguistic. It seemed possible that the presence of a linguistic introduction was a clue to the boundary of a linguistic unit, but we quickly realized that this is not a useful criterion. On the first morning of the academic year a headmaster may welcome the new pupils with

'Good morning, children, Welcome to Waseley School. This is an important day for you . . .'

thereby introducing them to several years of schooling. When the children then meet their new class teacher she will also welcome them and explain their timetable. They go to their first subject lesson. Here the teacher may introduce the subject and go on to delimit part of it;

'This year we are going to study world geography, starting with the continent of Africa. . . . Today I want to look at the rivers of Africa. Let's start with the map. Can you tell us the name of one river, any one?'

Everything the headmaster and teachers have said so far could be considered as introductions to a series of hierarchically ordered units: the whole of the child's secondary education; a year's work; one academic subject; a section of that subject area; a lesson; a part of that lesson; a small interactive episode with one pupil. However, while the language of the introduction to each unit is potentially distinctive, despite overlap, we would not want to suggest that for instance 'a year's work' has any linguistic structure.

The majority of the units we referred to above are pedagogic ones. In order to avoid the danger of confusing pedagogic with linguistic structure we determined to work upwards from the smallest to the largest linguistic

ADVANCES IN  
SPOKEN  
DISCOURSE  
ANALYSIS

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units. The research problem with contiguous utterances is primarily a descriptive one; major theoretical problems arise when more extensive units are postulated.

We decided to use a *rank scale* for our descriptive model because of its flexibility. The major advantage of describing new data with a rank scale is that no rank has more importance than any other and thus if, as we did, one discovers new patterning, it is a fairly simple process to create a new rank to handle it.

The basic assumption of a rank scale is that a unit at a given rank, for example, *word*, is made up of one or more units of the rank below, *morpheme*, and combines with other units at the same rank to make one unit at the rank above, *group* (Halliday 1961). The unit at the lowest rank has no structure. For example in grammar 'morpheme' is the smallest unit, and cannot be subdivided into smaller grammatical units. However, if one moves from the *level* of grammar to the level of phonology, morphemes can be shown to be composed of a series of phonemes. Similarly, the smallest unit at the level of discourse will have no structure, although it is composed of words, groups or clauses at the level of grammar.

Each rank above the lowest has a structure which can be expressed in terms of the units next below. Thus, the structure of a clause can be expressed in terms of nominal, verbal, adverbial and prepositional groups. The unit at the highest rank is one which has a structure that can be expressed in terms of lower units, but does not itself form part of the structure of any higher unit. It is for this reason that 'sentence' is regarded as the highest unit of grammar. Paragraphs have no grammatical structure; they consist of a series of sentences of any type in any order. Where there are no grammatical constraints on what an individual can do, variations are usually regarded as 'stylistic'.

We assumed that when, from a linguistic point of view, classroom discourse became an unconstrained string of units, the organization would be fundamentally pedagogic. While we could then make observations on teacher style, further analysis of structure would require another change of level not rank.

We began by looking at adjacent utterances, trying to discover what constituted an appropriate reply to a teacher's question, and how the teacher signalled whether the reply was appropriate or inappropriate.

Initially we felt the need for only two ranks, *utterance* and *exchange*; utterance was defined as everything said by one speaker before another began to speak, and exchange as two or more utterances. However, we quickly experienced difficulties with these categories. The following example has three utterances, but how many exchanges?

- T: Can you tell me why do you eat all that food?  
Yes.  
P: To keep you strong.



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T: To keep you strong. Yes. To keep you strong. Why do you want to be strong?

An obvious boundary occurs in the middle of the teacher's second utterance, which suggests that there is a unit smaller than utterance. Following Bellack *et al.* (1966) we labelled this unit *move*, and wondered for a while whether moves combined to form utterances which in turn combined to form exchanges.

However, the example above is not an isolated one; the vast majority of exchanges have their boundaries within utterances. Thus, although utterance had many points to recommend it as a unit of discourse, not least ease of definition, we reluctantly abandoned it. We now express the structure of exchanges in terms of moves. A typical exchange in the classroom consists of an *initiation* by the teacher, followed by a *response* from the pupil, followed by *feedback*, to the pupil's response from the teacher, as in the above example.

While we were looking at exchanges we noticed that a small set of words – 'right', 'well', 'good', 'OK', 'now', recurred frequently in the speech of all teachers. We realized that these words functioned to indicate boundaries in the lesson, the end of one stage and the beginning of the next. Silverman (personal communication) noted their occurrence in job interviews and Pearce (1973) in broadcast interviews where the function is exactly the same. We labelled them *frame*. Teachers vary in the particular word they favour but a frame occurs invariably at the beginning of a lesson, marking off the settling-down time.

*Now,*

I want to tell you about a King who lived a long time ago in Ancient Egypt.

An example of a frame within a lesson is:

Energy. Yes.

When you put petrol in the car you're putting another kind of energy in the car from the petrol. So we get energy from petrol and we get energy from food. Two kinds of energy.

*Now then,*

I want you to take your pen and rub it as hard as you can on something woollen.

We then observed that frames, especially those at the beginning of a lesson, are frequently followed by a special kind of statement, the function of which is to tell the class what is going to happen, see the examples above. These items are not strictly part of the discourse, but rather metastatements about the discourse – we called them *focus*. The boundary elements, frame and focus, were the first positive evidence of the existence of a unit above exchange, which we later labelled *transaction*.

Exchanges combine to form transactions and it seems probable that



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there will be a number of transaction types, distinguished according to their interactive function, but we cannot isolate them as yet. The unanswered question is whether we will be able to provide structures for transactions or whether the ways in which exchanges are combined to form transactions will prove to be purely a feature of teacher style.

The highest unit of classroom discourse, consisting of one or more transactions, we call *lesson*. This unit may frequently be coextensive with the pedagogical unit *period*, but need not be.

For several months we continued using these four ranks – move, exchange, transaction, lesson – but found that we were experiencing difficulty coding at the lowest rank. For example, to code the following as simply an initiation seemed inadequate.

Now I'm going to show you a word and I want you – anyone who can – to tell me if they can tell me what the word says.  
Now it's a bit difficult.  
It's upside down for some of you isn't it?  
Anyone think they know what it says?  
(Hands raised)  
Two people. Three people.  
Let's see what you think, Martin, what do you think it says?

We then realized that moves too can have a structure and so we needed another rank with which we could describe this structure. This we labelled *act*.

Moves and acts in discourse are very similar to words and morphemes in grammar. By definition, move is the smallest free unit although it has a structure in terms of acts. Just as there are bound morphemes which cannot alone realize words, so there are bound acts which cannot alone realize moves.

We needed to distinguish discourse acts from grammatical structures, or there would be no point in proposing a new level of language description – we would simply be analysing the higher ranks of grammar. Of course if acts did turn out to be arrangements of clauses in a consistent and hierarchical fashion, then they would replace (in speech) our confusing notions of 'sentence' and the higher ranks of what we now call discourse would arrange themselves on top.

The evidence is not conclusive and we need comparative data from other types of discourse. We would argue, however, for a separate level of discourse because, as we show in detail later, grammatical structure is not sufficient to determine which discourse act a particular grammatical unit realizes – one needs to take account of both relevant situational information and position in the discourse.

The lowest rank of the discourse scale overlaps with the top of the grammar scale (see table below). Discourse acts are typically one free

clause, plus any subordinate clauses, but there are certain closed classes where we can specify almost all the possible realizations which consist of single words or groups.

There is a similar overlap at the top of the discourse scale with pedagogical structures and we have been constantly aware of the danger of creating a rank for which there is only pedagogical evidence. We have deliberately chosen *lesson*, a word specific to the particular language situation we are investigating, as the label for the top rank. We feel fairly certain that the four lower ranks will be present in other discourses; the fifth may also be, in which case, once we have studied comparative data, we will use the more general label *interaction*.

We see the level of discourse as lying between the levels of *grammar* and *non-linguistic organization*. There is no need to suppose a one-to-one correspondence of units between levels; the levels of phonology and grammar overlap considerably, but have only broad general correspondence. We see the top of our discourse scale, *lesson*, corresponding roughly to the rank *period* in the non-linguistic level, and the bottom of our scale, *act*, corresponding roughly to the clause complex in grammar.

#### Levels and ranks

| <i>Non-linguistic organization</i> | <i>Discourse</i>                                 | <i>Grammar</i>                                  |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| course                             |  |   |
| period<br>topic                    | LESSON<br>TRANSACTION<br>EXCHANGE<br>MOVE<br>ACT | sentence<br>clause<br>group<br>word<br>morpheme |

#### SUMMARY OF THE SYSTEM OF ANALYSIS

This research has been very much text-based. We began with very few preconceptions and the descriptive system has grown and been modified to cope with problems thrown up by the data. The system we have produced is hierarchical and our method of presentation is closely modelled on Halliday's 'Categories of a theory of grammar'. All the terms used, *structure*, *system*, *rank*, *level*, *delicacy*, *realization*, *marked*, *unmarked*, are Halliday's. To permit readers to gain an overall impression, the whole system is first presented at primary delicacy and then given a much more discursive treatment.

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Working downwards, each rank is first labelled. Then the elements of structure are named, and the structure is stated in a general way, using shortened forms of the names of elements. Brackets indicate structural options.

The link between one rank and the next below is through *classes*. A class realizes an element of structure, and in this summary classes are both numbered and named. Let us look at one of the tables as an example:

### RANK II: Transaction

| <i>Elements of structure</i>                  | <i>Structures</i>          | <i>Classes of exchange</i>                  |
|---|----------------------------|---|
| Preliminary (P)<br>Medial (M)<br>Terminal (T) | PM ( $M^2 \dots M^n$ ) (T) | P, T: Boundary (II.1)<br>M: Teaching (II.2) |

This table identifies the rank as second from the top of the scale, i.e. transaction. It states that there are three elements of structure, called Preliminary (symbol P), Medial (M), and Terminal (T). In the next column is given a composite statement of the possible structures of this transaction: PM ( $M^2 \dots M^n$ ) (T). Anything within brackets is optional, so this formula states:

- (a) there must be a preliminary move in each transaction,
- (b) there must be one medial move, but there may be any number of them,
- (c) there can be a terminal move, but not necessarily.

In the third column the elements of transaction structure are associated with the classes of the rank next below, exchange, because each element is realized by a particular class of exchange. Preliminary and terminal exchanges, it is claimed, are selected from the same class of move called Boundary moves, and this is numbered for ease of reference. The element medial is realized by a class of exchange called Teaching. Later tables develop the structure of these exchanges at rank III. There now follows the presentation of the whole rank scale.

### RANK I: Lesson

| <i>Elements of structure</i> | <i>Structures</i>                      | <i>Classes</i> |
|------------------------------|--|----------------|
|                              | an unordered series<br>of transactions |                |



## RANK II: Transaction

| <i>Elements of structure</i>                  | <i>Structures</i>                             | <i>Classes of exchange</i>                  |
|---|---|---|
| Preliminary (P)<br>Medial (M)<br>Terminal (T) | PM (M <sup>2</sup> . . . M <sup>n</sup> ) (T) | P, T: Boundary (II.1)<br>M: Teaching (II.2) |

## RANK III: Exchange (Boundary)

| <i>Elements of structure</i> | <i>Structures</i> | <i>Classes of move</i>                      |
|------------------------------|-------------------|---|
| Frame (Fr)<br>Focus (Fo)     | (Fr)(Fo)          | Fr: Framing (III.1)<br>Fo: Focusing (III.2) |

## RANK III: Exchange (Teaching)

| <i>Elements of structure</i>                   | <i>Structures</i> | <i>Classes of move</i>   |
|--|-------------------|--|
| Initiation (I)<br>Response (R)<br>Feedback (F) | I(R)(F)           | I: Opening (III.3)<br>R: Answering (III.4)<br>F: Follow-up (III.5) |

## RANK IV: Move (Opening)

| <i>Elements of structure</i>   | <i>Structures</i>                                  | <i>Classes of act</i>   |
|--|--|---|
| signal (s)<br>pre-head (pre-h)<br>head (h)<br>post-head (post-h)<br>select (sel) | (s) (pre-h) h (post-h)<br>(sel)<br>(sel) (pre-h) h | s: marker (IV.1)<br>pre-h: starter (IV.2)<br>h: system operating at h;<br>choice of elicitation,<br>directive, informative,<br>check (IV.3)<br>post-h: system operating<br>at post-h; choice<br>from prompt and<br>clue (IV.4)<br>sel: ((cue) bid)<br>nomination (IV.5) |

## RANK IV: Move (Answering)

| <i>Elements of structure</i>                       | <i>Structures</i>  | <i>Classes of act</i>  |
|--|--------------------|--|
| pre-head (pre-h)<br>head (h)<br>post-head (post-h) | (pre-h) h (post-h) | pre-h: acknowledge (IV.6)<br>h: system operating at h;<br>choice of reply, react<br>acknowledge (IV.7)<br>post-h: comment (IV.8) |

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### RANK IV: Move (Follow-up)

| <i>Elements of structure</i>                       | <i>Structures</i>  | <i>Classes of act</i>   |
|--|--------------------|---|
| pre-head (pre-h)<br>head (h)<br>post-head (post-h) | (pre-h)(h)(post-h) | pre-h: accept (IV.9)<br>h: evaluate (IV.10)<br>post-h: comment (IV.8) |

### RANK IV: Move (Framing)

| <i>Elements of structure</i> | <i>Structures</i> | <i>Classes of act</i>                        |
|------------------------------|-------------------|--|
| head (h)<br>qualifier (q)    | hq                | h; marker (IV.1)<br>q: silent stress (IV.11) |

### RANK IV: Move (Focusing)

| <i>Elements of structure</i>                                     | <i>Structures</i>      | <i>Classes of act</i>  |
|--|------------------------|--|
| signal (s)<br>pre head (pre-h)<br>head (h)<br>post-head (post-h) | (s) (pre-h) h (post-h) | s: marker (IV.1)<br>pre-h: starter (IV.2)<br>h: system at h; choice<br>from metastatement or<br>conclusion (IV.12)<br>post-h: comment (IV.8) |

## EXPLANATION OF THE SYSTEM OF ANALYSIS

The previous section presented a downward view showing how units at each rank had structures realized by units at the rank below. The following section begins at the lowest rank and discusses the realization and recognition of acts; succeeding sections then discuss the structures of moves, exchanges, transactions and lessons.

### ACTS

The units at the lowest rank of discourse are *acts* and correspond most nearly to the grammatical unit *clause*, but when we describe an item as an act we are doing something very different from when we describe it as a clause. Grammar is concerned with the *formal* properties of an item, discourse with the *functional* properties, with what the speaker is using the item for. The four sentence types, declarative, interrogative, imperative, and moodless, realize twenty-one discourse acts, many of them specialized and some quite probably classroom-specific.

There are three major acts which probably occur in all forms of spoken

discourse – *elicitation*, *directive*, and *informative* – and they appear in classroom discourse as the heads of Initiating moves. An elicitation is an act whose function is to request a linguistic response – linguistic, although the response may be a non-verbal surrogate such as a nod or raised hand. A directive is an act whose function is to request a non-linguistic response; within the classroom this means opening books, looking at the blackboard, writing, listening. An informative is, as the name suggests, an act which functions to pass on ideas, facts, opinions, information and to which the appropriate response is simply an acknowledgement that one is listening.

Elicitations, directives and informatives are very frequently realized by interrogatives, imperatives, and declaratives respectively, but there are occasions when this is not so. A native speaker who interpreted 'Is that the mint sauce over there?' or 'Can you tell me the time?' as yes/no questions, 'Have a drink' as a command, or 'I wish you'd go away' as requiring just a murmur of agreement, would find the world a bewildering place full of irritable people. These are examples of the lack of fit which can occur between form and function.

The opportunity for variety arises from the relationship between grammar and discourse. The unmarked form of a directive may be imperative, 'Shut the door', but there are many marked versions, using interrogative, declarative and moodless structures.

|                        |                   |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| can you                | shut the door     |
| I wonder if you could  | shut the door     |
| would you mind         | shutting the door |
| the door is still open |                   |
| the door               |                   |

To handle this lack of fit between grammar and discourse we suggest two intermediate areas where distinctive choices can be postulated: *situation* and *tactics*. Both of these terms already have various meanings in linguistics, but still seem appropriate to our purpose. *Situation* here includes all relevant factors in the environment, social conventions, and the shared experience of the participants. The criterion of relevance is obviously vague and ill-defined at the moment, though some dignity can be attached to it on the grounds that anyone who considers such factors irrelevant must arrive at a different interpretation of the discourse. Examples of situational features 'considered relevant' and the use to which they are put in the analysis of classroom language will be detailed below.

The other area of distinctive choice, *tactics*, handles the syntagmatic patterns of discourse: the way in which items precede, follow and are related to each other. It is place in the structure of the discourse which finally determines which act a particular grammatical item is realizing, though classification can only be made of items already tagged with features from grammar and situation.

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 : (IV.10)  
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 act
 

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**Situation**

In situation we use, at present in an *ad hoc* and unsystematized way, knowledge about schools, classrooms, one particular moment in a lesson, to reclassify items already labelled by the grammar. Usually the grammatical types declarative, interrogative, imperative, realize the situational categories *statement*, *question*, *command*, but this is not always so. Of the nine possible combinations – declarative statement, declarative question, declarative command, and so on – there is only one we cannot instance: imperative statement. For ease of reference the situational and grammatical categories are listed in the table below, together with their discourse category equivalents.

| <i>Grammatical categories</i> | <i>Situational categories</i> | <i>Discourse categories</i> |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| declarative                   | statement                     | informative                 |
| interrogative                 | question                      | elicitation                 |
| imperative                    | command                       | directive                   |

The interrogative, 'What are you laughing at?', can be interpreted either as a question, or as a command to stop laughing. Inside the classroom it is usually the latter. In one of our tapes a teacher plays a recording of a television programme in which there is a psychologist with a 'posh' accent. The teacher wants to explore the children's attitude to accent and the value judgements they base on it. When the recording is finished the teacher begins,

T: What kind of a person do you think he is? Do you – what are you laughing at?

P: Nothing.

The pupil interpreted the teacher's interrogative as a directive to stop laughing, but that was not the teacher's intention. He had rejected his first question because he realized that the pupil's laughter was an indication of her attitude, and if he could get her to explain why she was laughing he would have an excellent opening to the topic. He continues and the pupil realizes her mistake.

T: Pardon?

P: Nothing.

T: You're laughing at nothing, nothing at all?

P: No.

It's funny really 'cos they don't think as though they were there they might not like it. And it sounds rather a pompous attitude.

The girl's mistake lay in misunderstanding the situation not the sentence,

and the example demonstrates the crucial role of situation in the analysis of discourse. We can at the moment make only a rudimentary attempt to deal with situation. We suggest four questions one can ask about the situation and depending on the answers to these questions and the grammatical form of the clause, propose three rules which predict the correct interpretation of teacher utterances most of the time. The questions we ask are

- 1 If the clause is interrogative is the addressee also the subject of the clause?
- 2 What actions or activities are physically possible at the time of utterance?
- 3 What actions or activities are proscribed at the time of utterance?
- 4 What actions or activities have been proscribed up to the time of utterance?

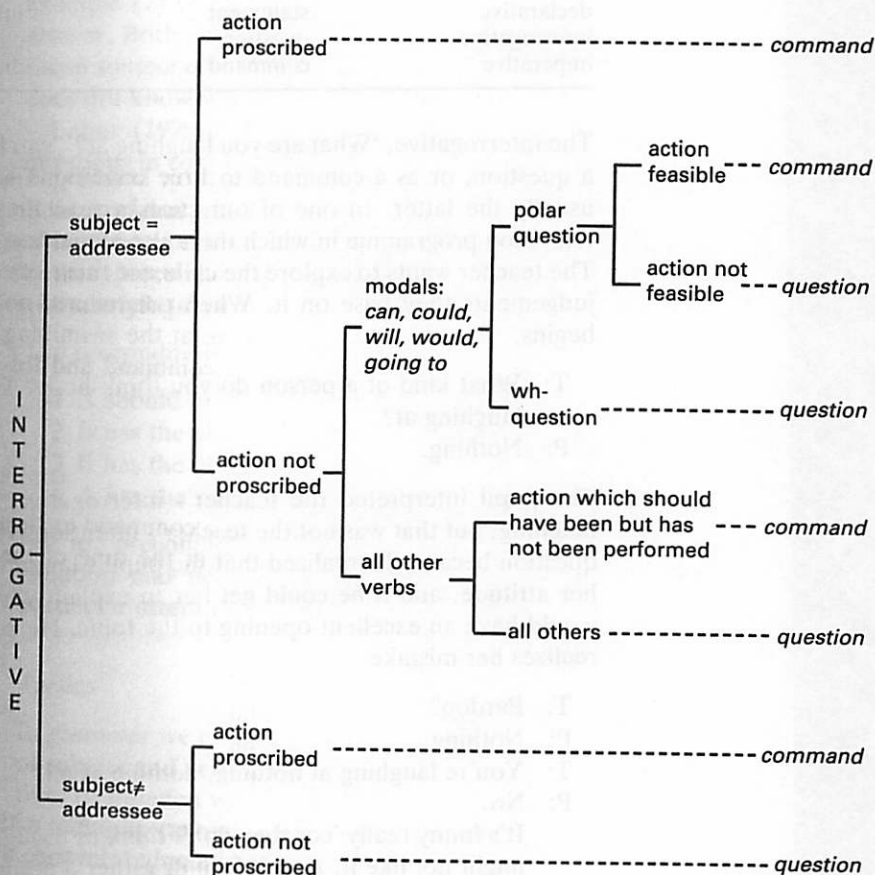


Figure 1: The classification of an interrogative by situation

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Using the answers to these questions we can formulate three rules to predict when a declarative or interrogative will be realizing something other than a statement or question. See Figure 1 (p. 11) for a systemic treatment of the classification of interrogatives by means of these rules.

### *Rule 1*

An interrogative clause is to be interpreted as a command to do if it fulfils all the following conditions:

- (i) it contains one of the modals 'can', 'could', 'will', 'would' (and sometimes 'going to');
- (ii) the subject of the clause is also the addressee;
- (iii) the predicate describes an action which is physically possible at the time of the utterance.

Examples:

- |                                |          |
|--------------------------------|----------|
| 1 can you play the piano, John | command  |
| 2 can John play the piano      | question |
| 3 can you swim a length, John  | question |

The first example is a command because it fulfils the three conditions – assuming there is a piano in the room. The second is a question because the subject and addressee are not the same person. The third is also a question because the children are in the classroom and the activity is not therefore possible at the time of utterance. However, as we have so far discovered no exceptions to this rule, we predict that if the class were at the swimming baths, example (3) would instead be interpreted as a command and followed by a splash.

### *Rule 2*

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 the utterance.

Examples:

- |                               |          |
|-------------------------------|----------|
| 1 I can hear someone laughing | command  |
| 2 is someone laughing         | command  |
| 3 what are you laughing at    | command  |
| 4 what are you laughing at    | question |

The declarative command, as in the first example, is very popular with some teachers. It is superficially an observation, but its only relevance at the time of utterance is that it draws the attention of 'someone' to their laughter, so that they will stop laughing. Examples (2) and (3), though



interrogative in form, work in exactly the same way. Example (4) is only interpreted as a question when laughter is not regarded as a forbidden activity.

### Rule 3

Any declarative or interrogative is to be interpreted as command to do if it refers to an action or activity which teacher and pupil(s) know ought to have been performed or completed and hasn't been.

Examples:

- |                          |          |
|--------------------------|----------|
| 1 the door is still open | command  |
| 2 did you shut the door  | command  |
| 3 did you shut the door  | question |

Example (1) states a fact which all relevant participants already know; example (2) is apparently a question to which all participants know the answer. Both serve to draw attention to what hasn't been done in order to cause someone to do it. Example (3) is a question only when the teacher does not know whether the action has been performed or not.

Labov (1970) independently proposed a rule for the interpretation of questions in conversation which is very close to Rule 3 above.

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 below hold, then A will be heard as making an underlying form 'B: do X!'

The preconditions are, that A believes that B believes:

- 1 X should 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.

For us, preconditions (1), (3), and (4) are part of the general teaching situation and do not need to be invoked for the interpretation of a particular utterance.

### Tactics

In *grammar* we classify an item by its structure; from the relative position of subject and verb we label a clause declarative, interrogative or imperative. In *situation* we use information about the non-linguistic environment to reclassify items as statement, question or command. We need to know what has happened so far in the classroom, what the classroom contains, what the atmosphere is like, but then, given such detailed information, we can make a situational classification of even an isolated clause. However,

the *discourse* value of an item depends on what linguistic items have preceded it, what are expected to follow and what do follow. We handle such sequence relationships in *tactics*.

The definitions of the discourse acts, informative, elicitation and directive, make them sound remarkably similar to statement, question, and command but there are major differences. While elicitations are always realized by questions, directives by commands, and informatives by statements, the relationship is not reciprocal: questions can realize many other acts; indeed, the expression 'rhetorical question' is a recognition of this fact. Statements, questions and commands only realize informatives, elicitations and directives when they are initiating; an elicitation is an initiating question whose function is to gain a verbal response from another speaker. Questions occur at many other places in discourse but then their function is different, and this must be stressed. A question which is not intended to get a reply is realizing a different act from one which is; the speaker is using the question for a different purpose and we must recognize this in our description.

Spoken discourse is produced in real time and our descriptive system attempts to deal with the 'now-coding' aspect of speech. Speakers inevitably make mistakes, or realize that they could have expressed what they intended much better. A teacher may produce a question which he fully intends as an elicitation and then change his mind. Obviously he can't erase what he has said, and he doesn't tell the children to ignore it, but he does signal that the children are not expected to respond as if it were an elicitation. In the 'what are you laughing at' example discussed above, the teacher abruptly changes course in the middle of a question. This is rare and signals to the class that what has gone before should be regarded as if it had never been said, should be deleted completely.

More frequently, as in the example below, the teacher follows one potential informative, directive or elicitation with another, usually more explicit one, signalling paralinguistically, by intonation, absence of pausing or speeding up his speech rate, that he now considers what he has just said to be a *starter*, and thus the pupils are not intended to respond. Starters are acts whose function is to provide information about, or direct attention or thought towards an area, in order to make a correct response to the initiation more likely. Some starters are intended initiations which have been down-graded when the teacher perceived their inadequacy for his purpose:

T: *What about this one?* This I think is a super one.

Isobel, can you think what it means?

P: Does it mean there's been an accident further along the road?

The teacher begins with a question which appears to have been intended as an elicitation. She changes her mind and relegates it to a starter. The

following statement is in turn relegated by a second question which then functions as the elicitation.

To recapitulate: while speaking the teacher produces a series of clauses classifiable as statements, questions and commands in *situation*. If the teacher then allows a pupil to respond, these items are seen as initiating, and have the discourse value of informative, elicitation and directive respectively; if the teacher immediately follows one of these clauses with another the first is 'pushed down' to act as a starter.

Thus in any succession of statements, questions, and commands the pupil knows that he usually has only to respond to the final one which alone has an initiating function. This can lead to an incorrect response if the pupil doesn't fully understand what the teacher is saying. In the following example a quoted question is understood as an elicitation.

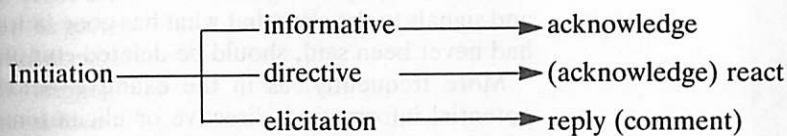
P: Well, he should take some look at what the man's point of view is.

T: Yes, yes.

But he wasn't asked that question don't forget. He was merely asked the question 'Why, why are they reacting like this?'

P: Well, maybe its the way they've been brought up.

At the head of each initiating move by the teacher is one elicitation, directive, or informative. That is to say, a move constitutes a coherent contribution to the interaction which essentially serves one purpose. The purpose is selected from a very small set of available choices. Where a move is made up of more than one act, the other acts are subsidiary to the head, and optional in the structure. The teacher's initiation is typically followed by a responding move from a pupil:



*Acknowledge*, a verbal or non-verbal signal which confirms that the pupil is listening and understanding; *react* is the performance of whatever action is required by the directive. Acknowledge is also an optional part of the response to a directive, when it serves to let the teacher know that the pupil has heard.

T: John, I wonder if you could open that window.

P: Yes/mm/sure.

The response to an elicitation is a *reply*. Replies are all too often one word moodless items, but they can also be realized by *statements*, as in the example above, 'Well, he should take some look at what the man's point of view is.'; or *questions* like, 'Does it mean there's been an accident?' in the earlier example. A reply can optionally be followed by *comment*.



Comments serve to exemplify, expand, justify, provide additional information about the head of the move, and can occur in Follow-up and Focusing moves as well as Answering moves. Comments are almost always realized by statements or tag questions:

P: Are the number for le – for the letters?

T: Yes.

*They're – that's the order, one, two, three, four.*

A special feature of the classroom situation is that a number of individuals have (been) gathered together for the specific purpose of learning something. They answer questions and follow instructions and they need to know whether they are performing adequately. A teacher rarely asks a question because he wants to know the answer; he asks a question because he wants to know whether the pupil knows. In such a situation the pupils need to know whether their answer was judged correct and thus an act we label *evaluate* is of vital importance. If we think of the following exchange

T: What time is it, Susan?

P: Three o'clock.

The closing item outside the classroom could well be 'Thanks'; inside the classroom, 'Good girl'. In *evaluate*, the teacher presents his estimation of the pupil's response and creates a basis for proceeding. *Evaluate* is usually realized by a statement, sometimes by a tag question.

*Evaluate* is often preceded by *accept*, an act which confirms that the teacher has heard or seen the response and that it was appropriate. It is frequently used when a child's reply is wrong but the teacher wants to encourage him. There is always the problem that in rejecting a reply one might reject the child. *Accept* is realized by a closed set consisting of 'yes', 'no', 'fine', 'good', or by a repetition of the reply, which has either a falling intonation, tone 1, or a low rising intonation, tone 3, which suggests that there is another answer. (A succinct account of the description of intonation used here is given in Halliday 1970.) Alternatively, following a pupil's wrong answer, one can get an accepting 'yes' with a fall-rise intonation, tone 4, which leads on to a negative evaluation or a *clue* (see below).

In all forms of spoken discourse there are rules about who speaks when (Schegloff and Sacks 1973). Within the classroom the teacher has the right to speak whenever she wants to, and children contribute to the discourse when she allows them to. Teachers differ in the degree of formality they impose on children's contributions, and the rigidity with which they stick to the rule of 'no shouting out'. As noted above, a typical structure as a classroom exchange is a teacher elicitation followed by a pupil reply. However, a teacher elicitation followed by thirty replies would be useless and most teachers have a way of selecting which pupil will reply.

Sometimes teachers *nominate* a child to answer; sometimes children raise their hands or shout 'Miss, Miss', *bidding* to be nominated, to be



given permission to speak, and sometimes the teacher gives the children a *cue* to bid, 'hands up'. Cue is a command but not a directive. It is addressed to the class but they do not all raise their hands because the command is to be interpreted as 'Put your hands up if you know.' We can compare this with a real directive, when the whole class is expected to react. In the following extract there are examples of both.

Directive: *All eyes on me.* Put your pencils down. Fold your arms. Hands on your heads. Hands on your shoulders. Hands on your knees. Fold your arms. Look at me.

Cue: *Hands up.* What's that.

Nomination, bid, and cue are all subordinate elements of the teacher's initiating move, and there are two other acts which occur in initiating moves, *clue* and *prompt*. Clue is a statement, question, command, or moodless item, subordinate to the head of the initiation which provides additional information to help the pupil answer the elicitation or comply with the directive. 'Look at the car', in the example below is a clue.

T: What about this one? This I think is a super one. Isobel, can you think what it means?

P: Does it mean there's been an accident further along the road?

T: No.

P: Does it mean double bend ahead?

T: No.

*Look at the car* (tilts the picture)

It does not have the status of a directive because its function is not to cause a pupil reaction. If the whole class simply looked at the car the teacher would be very annoyed; the children are to look at the car in the light of the elicitation 'can you think what it means?'

Sometimes elicitations or directives are reinforced by a *prompt*. We said above that elicitations and directives request a response; a prompt suggests that the teacher is not requesting but expecting or even demanding. Prompts are always realized by commands, and a closed set at that. The ones we have discovered so far are 'go on', 'come on', 'hurry up', 'quickly', 'have a guess'.

There are four more acts to introduce: *marker*, *metastatement*, *conclusion*, *loop*. Marker is an item whose sole function is to indicate a boundary in the discourse. It is realized by a very small set of words, 'well', 'OK', 'right', 'now', 'good', 'all right', and can occur at the beginning of opening, focusing and framing moves.

Metastatement is an act occurring in a focusing move, whose function is to state what the discourse is going to be about. In other words it is technically not part of the discourse but a commentary on the discourse.

Such items are not informatives because the teacher is not telling the children something, he is telling them what he is going to tell them. Thus:

Now,  
*I want to tell you about a king who lived a long time ago . . .*

Conclusion is a special kind of statement which occurs at the end of some transactions and summarizes what has been done. In a way it is the converse of metastatement. Conclusions are marked by 'so' or 'then', and often also a noticeable slowing down in rate of speech.

*So that then is why the Pharaohs built their pyramids.  
So that's the first quiz.*

Sometimes the channel of communication is too noisy and the teacher needs the child to repeat what he has just said. The act he uses we call *loop*; it is realized by 'pardon', 'you what', 'eh', 'again', and functions to take the discourse back to the stage it was at before the pupil spoke. The channel noise cannot be only one-way, but it is significant that no child in any of our tapes ever admits to not having heard something the teacher has said. Thus, we only have examples of teacher loops. Loop can of course be used tactically to draw the attention of the class to something one child has said.

T: You told me before.

P: Energy.

T: *Again.*

P: Energy.

Finally, at times teachers produce speech acts that are not specifically part of the discourse. We refer to these as *asides*. They include remarks which are unrelated to the discourse, though not to the situation. Often they are muttered under the breath.

T: *It's freezing in here.*

T: The Egyptians, and –  
*when I can find my chart. Here it is –*  
Here are some of the symbols they used.

### **The classes of acts**

There now follows a summary description of all the acts, each numbered as they were in the summary of analysis on pp. 6–8. First the label, then the symbol used in coding, and finally the functional definition and characteristic formal features. For the closed class items there is a list of all the examples so far discovered.

| <i>Reference Number</i>   | <i>Label</i> | <i>Symbol</i> |
|---|--------------|---------------|
| IV.1  | marker       | m             |
| Realized by a closed class of items – 'well', 'OK', 'now', 'good', 'right', 'alright'. When a marker is acting as the head of a framing move it has a falling intonation, [1] or [1+], as well as a silent stress. Its function is to mark boundaries in the discourse.   |              |               |
| IV.2  | starter      | s             |
| Realized by a statement, question or command. Its function is to provide information about or direct attention to or thought towards an area in order to make a correct response to the initiation more likely.   |              |               |
| IV.3.1  | elicitation  | el            |
| Realized by a question. Its function is to request a linguistic response.   |              |               |
| IV.3.2  | check        | ch            |
| Realized by a closed class of polar questions concerned with being 'finished' or 'ready', having 'problems' or 'difficulties', being able to 'see' or 'hear'. They are 'real' questions, in that for once the teacher doesn't know the answer. If he does know the answer to, for example, 'have you finished', it is a directive, not a check. The function of checks is to enable the teacher to ascertain whether there are any problems preventing the successful progress of the lesson. |              |               |
| IV.3.3  | directive    | d             |
| Realized by a command. Its function is to request a non-linguistic response.  |              |               |
| IV.3.4  | informative  | i             |
| Realized by a statement. It differs from other uses of statement in that its sole function is to provide information. The only response is an acknowledgement of attention and understanding.   |              |               |
| IV.4.1  | prompt       | p             |
| Realized by a closed class of items – 'go on', 'come on', 'hurry up', 'quickly', 'have a guess'. Its function is to reinforce a directive or elicitation by suggesting that the teacher is no longer requesting a response but expecting or even demanding one.   |              |               |
| IV.4.2  | clue         | cl            |
| Realized by a statement, question, command, or moodless item. It is subordinate to the head of the initiation and functions by providing additional information which helps the pupil to answer the elicitation or comply with the directive.   |              |               |

IV.5.1 cue cu

Realized by a closed class of which we so far have only three exponents, 'hands up', 'don't call out', 'is John the only one'. Its sole function is to evoke an (appropriate) bid.

IV.5.2 bid b

Realized by a closed class of verbal and non-verbal items – 'Sir', 'Miss', teacher's name, raised hand, heavy breathing, finger clicking. Its function is to signal a desire to contribute to the discourse.

IV.5.3 nomination n

Realized by a closed class consisting of the names of all the pupils, 'you' with contrastive stress, 'anybody', 'yes', and one or two idiosyncratic items such as 'who hasn't said anything yet'. The function of nomination is to call on or give permission to a pupil to contribute to the discourse.

IV.6 acknowledge ack

Realized by 'yes', 'OK', 'cor', 'mm', 'wow', and certain non-verbal gestures and expressions. Its function is simply to show that the initiation has been understood, and, if the head was a directive, that the pupil intends to react.

IV.7.1 reply rep

Realized by a statement, question or moodless item and non-verbal surrogates such as nods. Its function is to provide a linguistic response which is appropriate to the elicitation.

IV.7.2 react rea

Realized by a non-linguistic action. Its function is to provide the appropriate non-linguistic response defined by the preceding directive.

IV.8 comment com

Realized by a statement or tag question. It is subordinate to the head of the move and its function is to exemplify, expand, justify, provide additional information. On the written page it is difficult to distinguish from an informative because the outsider's ideas of relevance are not always the same. However, teachers signal paralinguistically, by a pause, when they are beginning a new initiation with an informative as a head; otherwise they see themselves as commenting.

IV.9 accept acc

Realized by a closed class of items – 'yes', 'no', 'good', 'fine', and repetition of pupil's reply, all with neutral low fall intonation. Its function is to indicate that the teacher has heard or seen and that the informative, reply or react was appropriate.



three exponents,  
the function is to

IV.10 evaluate e  
Realized by statements and tag questions, including words and phrases such as 'good', 'interesting', 'team point', commenting on the quality of the reply, react or initiation, also by 'yes', 'no', 'good', 'fine', with a high-fall intonation, and repetition of the pupil's reply with either high-fall (positive), or a rise of any kind (negative evaluation).

– 'Sir', 'Miss',  
ng. Its function

IV.11 silent stress ^  
Realized by a pause, of the duration of one or more beats, following a marker. It functions to highlight the marker when it is serving as the head of a boundary exchange indicating a transaction boundary.

the pupils, 'you'  
asynchronic items  
nation is to call  
rse.

IV.12.1 metastatement ms  
Realized by a statement which refers to some future time when what is described will occur. Its function is to help the pupils to see the structure of the lesson, to help them understand the purpose of the subsequent exchange, and see where they are going.

non-verbal ges-  
tural initiation has  
pupil intends to

IV.12.2 conclusion con  
Realized by an anaphoric statement, sometimes marked by slowing of speech rate and usually the lexical items 'so' or 'then'. In a way it is the converse of metastatement. Its function is again to help the pupils understand the structure of the lesson but this time by summarizing what the preceding chunk of discourse was about.

non-verbal surro-  
gates which is

IV.13 loop l  
Realized by a closed class of items – 'pardon', 'you what', 'eh', 'again', with rising intonation and a few questions like 'did you say', 'do you mean'. Its function is to return the discourse to the stage it was at before the pupil spoke, from where it can proceed normally.

the appropri-  
ve.

IV.14 aside z  
Realized by statement, question, command, moodless, usually marked by lowering the tone of the voice, and not really addressed to the class. As we noted above, this category covers items we have difficulty in dealing with. It really instances of the teacher talking to himself: 'It's freezing in here', 'Where did I put my chalk?'

the head of the  
vide additional  
guish from an  
not always the  
use, when they  
ead; otherwise

## THE STRUCTURE AND CLASSES OF MOVES

Moves are made up of acts, and moves themselves occupy places in the structure of exchanges. In this account the structure of moves is described class by class. As is evident from the tables on pp. 7–8 there are five classes of move which realize two classes of exchange: Boundary exchanges are realized by Framing and Focusing and Teaching exchanges by Opening, Answering, and Follow-up moves.

Each of these moves has a different function. Framing moves are probably a feature of all spoken discourse, but they occur more frequently

ie', and repeti-  
s function is to  
ormative, reply

in classroom discourse because it is carefully structured by one participant. Framing moves are realized by a marker followed by silent stress, 'Right<sup>^</sup>', 'now<sup>^</sup>', 'OK<sup>^</sup>'.

Framing moves are frequently, though not always, followed by focusing moves whose function is to talk about the discourse. Focusing moves represent a change of 'plane'. The teacher stands for a moment outside the discourse and says 'We are going to communicate/have been communicating; this is what our communication was/will be about.' Focusing moves have an optional marker and starter, a compulsory head, realized by a metastatement or a conclusion, and an optional comment. In the examples which follow, the third column contains the structural label of the item, the fourth column the label of the act which occurs at that place in the structure.

| <i>Classes of move</i> | <i>Example</i>   | <i>Structure of move</i> | <i>Classes of act</i>   |
|------------------------|--|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Framing                | Right <sup>^</sup>   | h<br>q                   | marker<br>silent stress |
| Focusing               | Now,<br>what we've just done, what we've<br>just done is given some energy<br>to this pen. | s<br>h                   | marker<br>conclusion    |

With focusing moves, as with many units in discourse, there are possible ambiguities, and the teacher who focuses 'Today we are going to play rounders' must be careful to continue quickly 'but first we must finish our sums', or the children might interpret his focus as an opening move and rush out of the classroom.

The function of an opening move is to cause others to participate in an exchange. Opening and answering are complementary moves. The purpose of a given opening may be passing on information or directing an action or eliciting a fact. The type of answering move is predetermined because its function is to be an appropriate response in the terms laid down by the opening move.

The structure we provide for opening moves is complicated. Much of this complexity arises from the element *select* which is where the teacher chooses which pupil he wants to respond. Select can be realized by a simple teacher nomination, or by a pupil bid followed by a nomination, or by a teacher cue followed by a bid and a nomination.

It would be possible to suggest that teaching exchanges actually have a structure of five moves, with both bid and nomination as separate moves. The argument for this would be that a new move should begin every time there is a change of speaker. We rejected this alternative, because it would have created as many difficulties as it solved. When a teacher nominated without waiting for a bid, we would have had to regard this as

two moves, one consisting of a single word, and at times even embedded inside the other move. Such a solution would also have devalued the concept of move. We prefer to say that a move boundary signals a change in the speaker who is composing/creating the discourse, and therefore that a move boundary is a potential change in the direction of the discourse, whereas a child making a bid must choose from a very limited set of choices. Thus we regard the function of an opening move, with elicitation or directive as head, as not only requesting a reply or reaction but as also deciding who should respond. An opening move ends after the responder has been selected.

Prompt and clue can also occur in a post-head position in opening moves. This means that the structure of a teacher's opening move is,

(signal) (pre-head) head (post-head) (select)

with brackets showing that all elements except head are optional. The example below has all the elements except signal.

| <i>Classes of act</i>   | <i>Classes of move</i> | <i>Example</i>  | <i>Structure of move</i> | <i>Classes of act</i> |
|-------------------------|------------------------|---|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| marker<br>silent stress | Opening                | A group of people used symbols to do their writing. They used pictures instead of as we write in words. | pre-h                    | starter               |
| marker<br>conclusion    |                        | Do you know who those people were?  | h                        | elicitation           |
|                         |                        | I'm sure you do.<br>Joan.   | post-h<br>sel            | prompt<br>nomination  |

Pupil opening moves have a simpler structure. There are no examples of signal; pre-heads can, but rarely do, occur; post-heads, realized by prompt and clue, by their very nature are not the sort of acts used by pupils. As the pupil must indicate that he wants to speak, select occurs before the head. Sometimes the teacher will allow the pupil to follow his bid with an elicitation or informative, sometimes he/she insists on the nomination. We must emphasize that the pupil has no right to contribute to the discourse, and the teacher can ignore him. In the first example on p. 24 the pupil thinks he has been ignored and goes on bidding.

Answering moves have a simpler structure; a maximum of three elements, pre-head, head, and post-head, and very often only the head occurs. There are three types of head appropriate to the three heads of opening moves. The response appropriate to an informative is simply an acknowledgement that one is listening, and this can be, and usually is in the classroom, non-verbal. Following a directive the head of an answering move is realized by react, but the pupil may also acknowledge verbally that he has heard. Following an elicitation there is a reply, and sometimes a comment as well as we can see in the second example on p. 24.

| <i>Classes of move</i>             | <i>Example</i>                                  | <i>Structure of move</i> | <i>Classes of act</i>     |
|------------------------------------|---|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Opening (pupil)                    | Sir,<br>Sir.<br>Can I go to the toilet?         | sel<br>sel<br>h          | bid<br>bid<br>elicitation |
| Answering                          | Yes.  | h                        | reply                     |
| Opening (teacher to another child) | If you've got a printed one you shouldn't have. | h                        | comment                   |
| Opening (pupil)                    | Sir.<br>Can I go to the toilet?                 | sel<br>h                 | bid<br>elicitation        |
| Opening (pupil)                    | Sir.<br>Please can I go to the toilet?          | sel<br>h                 | bid<br>elicitation        |
| Opening                            | Climb over that way.                            | h                        | directive                 |

| <i>Classes of move</i> | <i>Example</i>   | <i>Structure of move</i> | <i>Classes of act</i> |
|------------------------|--|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Opening                | Well,<br>what leads you to believe he's like that?   | s<br>h                   | marker<br>elicitation |
| Answering              | He's rather free to – rather free in criticizing somebody else yet he might not like to be criticized himself.<br>Criticizing the local councillor, it's not right really. | h<br>post-h              | reply<br>comment      |

Follow-up, the third class of move in teaching exchanges, is an interesting category. Its function is to let the pupil know how well he/she has performed. It is very significant that follow-up occurs not only after a pupil answering move, but also after a pupil opening move when the head is realized by an informative. In other words the teacher often indicates the value of an unelicited contribution from a pupil, usually in terms of relevance to the discourse.

Follow-up has a three-term structure, pre-head, head, post-head, realized by accept, evaluate, and comment respectively.

The act evaluate is seen by all participants as a compulsory element. A teacher can produce a follow-up move which overtly consists of only accept or comment, but evaluation is then implicit (and usually unfavourable).



| <i>Classes of move</i> | <i>Example</i>                                    | <i>Structure of move</i> | <i>Classes of act</i> |
|------------------------|---|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Opening                | Do you know what we mean by accent?               | h                        | Elicitation           |
| Answering              | It's the way you talk.                            | h                        | reply                 |
| Follow-up              | The way we talk.<br>This is a very broad comment. | pre-h<br>h               | accept<br>evaluate    |

Very frequently, if the teacher accepts a reply without evaluating, the class offers another reply without any prompting.

### THE STRUCTURE AND CLASSES OF EXCHANGES

There are two major classes of exchange, Boundary and Teaching. The function of boundary exchange is, as the name suggests, to signal the beginning or end of what the teacher considers to be a stage in the lesson; teaching exchanges are the individual steps by which the lesson progresses. Boundary exchanges consist of two moves, framing and focusing; often the two occur together, the framing move frequently occurs on its own, the focusing move does so only rarely. A typical boundary exchange is:

| <i>Classes of move</i> | <i>Example</i> | <i>Structure of move</i> |
|------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| Framing                | Well, ^        | marker, silent stress    |
| Focusing               | Today . . .    | metastatement            |

The definition of teaching exchange given above is vague, but there are eleven subcategories with specific functions and unique structures. Of the eleven subcategories six are Free exchanges and five are Bound. The function of bound exchanges is fixed because they either have no initiating move, or have an initiating move without a head, which simply serves to reiterate the head of the preceding free initiation.

#### Free exchanges

The six free exchanges are divided into four groups according to function, and two of the groups are further subdivided according to whether teacher or pupil initiates, because there are different structural possibilities. The four main functions of exchanges are informing, directing, eliciting, and checking, and they are distinguished by the type of act which realizes the head of the initiating move, informative, directive, elicitation and check

respectively. The structure of each of these exchanges will now be exemplified.

Each exchange type is given a number and a functional label and the characteristic structure is noted. The structure is expressed in terms of Initiation (I), Response (R) and Feedback (F); moves are coded across the page with three main columns for Opening, Answering and Follow-up, while the narrow columns give the move structure in terms of acts. A single line across the page signifies an exchange boundary, so one reads down the first column until the boundary line, then down the second column and then down the third. Each act begins on a separate line.

### *I Teacher inform*

This exchange is used when the teacher is passing on facts, opinions, ideas, new information to the pupil. Pupils may, but usually do not, make a verbal response to the teacher's initiation. Thus the structure is I(R); there is no feedback.

| <i>Opening</i>                                | <i>Answering</i> | <i>Follow-up</i> |
|---|------------------|------------------|
| Now,<br>luckily, the French could read Greek. | m<br>i           |                  |

### *II Teacher direct*

This category covers all exchanges designed to get the pupil to do but not to say something. Because of the nature of the classroom the response is a compulsory element of structure. This is not to suggest that children always do what they are told to do, but it does imply that the teacher has a right to expect the pupil to do so. Just as anyone can produce an ungrammatical sentence when he feels like it, so a pupil can break the rules of discourse. Feedback is not an essential element of this structure although it frequently occurs. The structure is IR(F).

| <i>Opening</i>  | <i>Answering</i> | <i>Follow-up</i> |
|---|------------------|------------------|
| I want you to take your pen and<br>I want you to rub it as hard as<br>you can on something woollen. | d<br>Activity    | rea              |

### *III Teacher elicit*

This category includes all exchanges designed to obtain verbal contributions from pupils. Very frequently a teacher will use a series of elicit

exchanges to move the class step by step to a conclusion. Sometimes an elicit is used in isolation in the middle of a series of informs to check that the pupils have remembered a fact. The elicit exchanges which occur inside the classroom have a different function from most occurring outside it. Usually when we ask a question we don't know the answer; very frequently the teacher does know the answer, indeed the pupils may get quite annoyed if he doesn't – after all that is his job!

This fact enables us to explain why feedback is an essential element in an eliciting exchange inside the classroom. Having given their reply the pupils want to know if it was correct. So important is feedback that if it does not occur we feel confident in saying that the teacher has deliberately withheld it for some strategic purpose. It is deviant to withhold feedback continually – we have a tape of one lesson where a teacher, new to the class, and trying to suggest to them that there aren't always right answers, does withhold feedback and eventually reduces the children to silence – they cannot see the point of his questioning. Thus the structure of elicits differs from that of directs in that F is a compulsory element.

| <i>Opening</i>                  |    | <i>Answering</i> |     | <i>Follow-up</i>                             |        |
|---------------------------------|----|------------------|-----|--|--------|
| What's the name of this cutter? | el | Hacksaw.         | rep | The hacksaw.<br>And I'll put that one there. | e<br>z |
| Hands up.                       | cu |                  |     |  |        |
| Non-verbal bid                  | b  |                  |     |  |        |
| Janet.                          | n  |                  |     |  |        |

#### IV Pupil elicit

In many classrooms children rarely ask questions and when they do they are mainly of the order 'Do we put the date' or 'Can I go to the lavatory'. Usually the child has to catch the teacher's attention and get permission to speak. (See Sacks 1972 on the ways children get into ordinary conversation.) This permission may not be granted. The initial bid may be countered with a 'not now' or 'just a minute' and the exchange never get off the ground. The crucial difference between teacher and pupil elicits is that the pupil provides no feedback – an evaluation of a teacher reply would be cheeky. Thus the structure is IR.

| <i>Opening</i>   |        | <i>Answering</i>   |            | <i>Follow-up</i> |  |
|--|--------|--|------------|------------------|--|
| Mrs H.<br>Yes.<br>Are the numbers for le –<br>for the letters? | b<br>n | Yes.<br>They're –<br>that's the<br>order, one,<br>two, three,<br>four. | rep<br>com |                  |  |

*V Pupil inform*

Occasionally pupils offer information which they think is relevant, or interesting – they usually receive an evaluation of its worth and often a comment as well. Thus the structure is IF not I(R) as for teacher informs.

| <i>Opening</i>   |   | <i>Answering</i> |  | <i>Follow-up</i>                    |     |
|--|---|------------------|--|-------------------------------------|-----|
| Miss P.  | b |                  |  | Oh yes.                             | acc |
| There's some – there's a letter's missing from that up and down one. | i |                  |  | You're right.                       |     |
|  |   |                  |  | It is. I can't remember what it is. | e   |
|  |   |                  |  |                                     | com |

This example has been simplified by the omission of a *repeat* bound exchange, which will be described below on pp. 30–3.

*VI Check*

At some time in most lessons teachers feel the need to discover how well the children are getting on, whether they can follow what is going on, whether they can hear. To do this they use a checking move which could be regarded as a subcategory of elicit, except that feedback is not essential, because these are real questions to which the teacher does not know the answer. Any evaluation is an evaluation of an activity or state not the response. Thus the structure is IR(F). A broken line between exchanges signifies that the second is bound to the first.

| <i>Opening</i> |       | <i>Answering</i> |     | <i>Follow-up</i> |    |
|----------------|-------|------------------|-----|------------------|----|
| Finished Joan? | ch<n> | NV               | rep | Good girl.       | e  |
| And Miri?      | n     | Yes              | rep | Good.            | re |
| Finished?      | ch    | Yes              | rep |                  |    |

**Bound exchanges**

Of the five types of bound exchange, four are bound to teacher elicits and one to a teacher direct. As we said above, an exchange is bound either if it has no initiating move, or if the initiating move it does have has no head, but simply consists of nomination, prompt, or clue.



## VII Re-initiation (i)

When the teacher gets no response to an elicitation he can start again using the same or a rephrased question, or he can use one or more of the acts prompt, nomination, clue to re-initiate. The original elicitation stands and these items are used as a second attempt to get a reply. This gives a structure of IRI<sup>b</sup>RF, where I<sup>b</sup> is a bound initiation.

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repeat bound

| Opening   |    | Answering |     | Follow-up    |   |
|---|----|-----------|-----|--------------|---|
| What is 'comprehend'?                           | el | ∅         |     |              |   |
| Nicola?   | n  | ∅         |     |              |   |
| In fact if you get this word you'll comprehend. | c  | Find out. | rep | Yes find out | e |
| NV  | b  |           |     |              |   |
| David again.                                    | n  |           |     |              |   |

## VIII Re-initiation (ii)

When a teacher gets a wrong answer there are two major routes open to him: he can stay with the same child and try by Socratic method to work him round to the right answer or he can stay with the question and move on to another child. This type of re-initiation differs from the previous one in that feedback does occur. It is usually realized by 'Yes', 'No' or a repetition of what the pupil has just said, with a tone 3 intonation indicating incompleteness or a tone 4 intonation indicating reservation. An initiating move is not essential for the bound exchange, but if it does occur it is realized by prompt, nomination, or clue. This gives a structure of IRF(I<sup>b</sup>)RF.

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| Opening                      |    | Answering     |     | Follow-up   |   |
|------------------------------|----|---------------|-----|-------------|---|
| This I think is a super one. | s  | Does it mean  | rep | No[3]       | e |
| Isobel.                      | n  | there's been  |     |             |   |
| Can you think what it means? | el | an accident   |     |             |   |
|                              |    | further down  |     |             |   |
|                              |    | the road?     |     |             |   |
|                              |    | Does it mean  | rep | No[3]       | e |
|                              |    | a double bend |     |             |   |
|                              |    | ahead?        |     |             |   |
| Look at the car.             | cl | Slippery      | rep | Yes         | e |
|                              |    | roads?        |     | It means    |   |
|                              |    |               |     | Be careful  |   |
|                              |    |               |     | because the |   |
|                              |    |               |     | road's very |   |
|                              |    |               |     | slippery    |   |

*IX Listing*

Occasionally teachers withhold evaluation until they get two or three answers. Sometimes they are making sure that more than one person knows the answer, sometimes they have asked a multiple question. In this case the structure is exactly the same as for Re-initiation (ii), IRF(I<sup>b</sup>)RF(I<sup>b</sup>)RF, but the realization of two of the elements is different. I<sup>b</sup> is only realized by nomination and the F preceding I<sup>b</sup> contains no evaluation.

| <i>Opening</i>                        | <i>Answering</i> | <i>Follow-up</i>        |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| What's the name of each one of those? | Paper clip.      | rep Paper clip. acc     |
|                                       | Nail.            | rep Nail. acc           |
|                                       | Nut and bolt.    | rep Nut and bolt [1+] e |

*X Reinforce*

Very occasionally in the tapes there is a bound exchange following a teacher direct. Bound exchanges occur when the teacher has told the class to do something and one child is slow or reluctant or hasn't fully understood. The structure is IRI<sup>b</sup>R, with the I<sup>b</sup> realized by a clue, prompt or nomination. In the following example a West Indian boy has misunderstood the directive.

| <i>Opening</i>  | <i>Answering</i> | <i>Follow-up</i> |
|---|------------------|------------------|
| I want you to take your pen and I want you to rub it as hard as you can on something woollen. | d ACTIVITY       | rea              |
| Not in your hair, on your jumper.   | cl ACTIVITY      | rea              |

*XI Repeat*

In every communicative situation there will be times when someone does not hear. There are no examples in our tapes of a child admitting to not hearing but teachers do so quite frequently. Thus instead of feedback

following the pupil response we get a bound initiation. Of course teachers can and do use this exchange when they have heard but want a reply repeated for other reasons. The structure is IRI<sup>b</sup>RF.

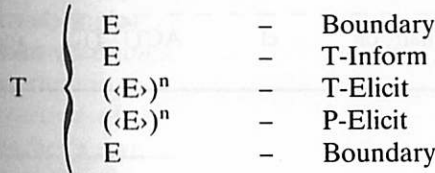
| Opening                           |        | Answering | Follow-up                           |
|-----------------------------------|--------|-----------|-------------------------------------|
| What are you laughing at Rebecca? | el {n} | Nothing   | rep                                 |
| Pardon                            | loop   | Nothing   | rep You're laughing at nothing. acc |

**THE STRUCTURE OF TRANSACTIONS**

Transactions normally begin with a Preliminary exchange and end with a Final exchange. Within these boundaries a series of medial exchanges occur. Although we have identified eleven types of medial exchanges we cannot yet specify in detail how they are ordered within transactions. We can specify that the first medial exchange in a transaction will normally be selected from the three major teacher-initiated free exchange types – Inform, Direct and Elicit. Following a selection of one of these types, characteristic options occur in the rest of the transaction.

From now on what we say will be much more speculative and we will be talking about ideal types of transaction. We have not yet done sufficient work on transactions to be sure that what we suggest here will stand up to detailed investigation. We provisionally identify three major transaction types, informing, directing, and eliciting. Their basic structures will be outlined below. We do not, however, in an analysis of texts yet feel sufficiently confident in the identification of these structures to make the labelling of these transaction types a major element of coding.

**Informing transactions**



(The round brackets indicate that an item is optional, the diamond brackets that it occurs inside the previous item.) During a lengthy informing exchange from the teacher, the pupils do little but acknowledge. However,

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embedded within an informing transaction may be brief teacher elicitions, used to keep attention or to check that pupils are understanding, and also pupil elicitions on some point raised by the teacher.

#### Directing transactions

|   |   |                  |   |          |
|---|---|------------------|---|----------|
| T | } | E                | - | Boundary |
|   |   | E                | - | T-Direct |
|   |   | (E) <sup>n</sup> | - | P-Elicit |
|   |   | (E) <sup>n</sup> | - | P-Inform |
|   |   | E                | - | T-Elicit |
|   |   | E                | - | Boundary |

This structure occurs where a T-Direct exchange stands at the head of a transaction, rather than in a subordinate position. The directive will usually be one requesting pupils to engage in some work on their own, for example working out some cartouches, or writing a sentence in hieroglyphs. When pupils are working separately, they have most opportunity for initiating exchanges. They can make comments on, or ask questions about their task, and ask for evaluation of their work. Characteristically the teacher ends such a transaction with an elicitation asking for the pupils' answers or results.

#### Eliciting transactions

|   |   |                |   |          |
|---|---|----------------|---|----------|
| T | } | E              | - | Boundary |
|   |   | E <sup>n</sup> | - | T-Elicit |
|   |   | E              | - | Boundary |

When the teacher is asking questions, the pupils contribute continually to the discourse by making verbal responses, but they have little opportunity to initiate exchanges. When a pupil does break out of the usual structure with an elicitation, and this is rare, it does not lead to a series of pupil elicitions. The teacher quickly resumes the initiating role either by refusing an adequate answer as in the first example below, or by taking over the pupil's topic as in the second.

|          |   |     |
|----------|---|-----|
| P-Elicit | Sir,<br>how did this man manage to work out the<br>names of the people? | b   |
| T-Reply  | Because he was clever, that's how.                                      | rep |



|            |   |     |
|------------|---|-----|
| P-Elicit   | What were Popes?  | el  |
| T-Reply    | Still have Popes. The Pope's the head of the Catholic Church. | rep |
| P-Feedback | mm oh.  | acc |
| T-Elicit   | Where does he live?   | el  |
| P-Reply    | Rome.   | rep |
| T-Feedback | Rome yes.   | e   |
| T-Elicit   | Do you know which part of Rome . . .                          | el  |

We have so far mentioned only the characteristic places in the structure of transactions at which three teacher-initiated, and two pupil-initiated exchanges can occur. Even more tentatively we can suggest that the teacher-initiated check exchange typically occurs in a directing transaction before the final elicit exchange. The teacher here is usually checking on pupils' progress with the task he directed them to do at the beginning of the transaction.

We can specify no ordering for the bound exchanges. They occur after a T-Direct or T-Elicit exchange, but whether any or all occur, and in what order, is dependent on unpredictable reactions to and involvement with the teacher's presentation of the topic.

### THE STRUCTURE OF LESSONS

The lesson is the highest unit of classroom discourse, made up of a series of transactions. If the pupils are responsive and co-operative, the discourse unit 'lesson' may approximate closely to any plan the teacher may have formulated for presenting his chosen topic. He may have decided, for example, to start off by presenting some information, to continue by discovering whether that information has been assimilated, and then to get the pupils to use that information he has presented in their own work. Alternatively a teacher might begin with a series of elicit exchanges, attempting to move the pupils towards conclusions which will later be elaborated in an informing transaction. However, a variety of things can interfere in the working-out of the teacher's plan in actual discourse. The structure of the lesson is affected by such performance features as the teacher's own memory capacity for ordering speech, and, more importantly the need to respond to unpredicted reactions, misunderstandings or contributions on the part of the pupils.

We cannot specify any ordering of transactions into lessons. To do this would require a much larger sample of classroom discourse. We might find, for example, that there are characteristic lesson structures for differ-

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ent subjects, or for different teachers. At the moment, however, we must think of the lesson as a stylistic type, which means that actually there is little point in labelling the lesson as a unit. We could describe the ordering of transactions into lessons in the texts we have, but that ordering varies for each teacher and we can identify no restrictions on the occurrence of different types.

'Towards an analysis of discourse' is a slightly modified version of Chapter 3 of Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) *Towards an Analysis of Discourse*, 14-60.