3

KNOWLEDGE AREAS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

All conversations are based on an assumption of common sociocultural background knowledge. The anthropological linguist, Malinowski (1923) saw the sociocultural context of utterances as central to meaning and action. As Clark says, "The participants in a conversation work together against a background of shared information" (1993: 4). This chapter reviews the literature on the relationship between background knowledge and levels of intimacy, and between topics and language. It then describes the part of the study that examines the way that the background knowledge assumed changes with interaction over time. This book is based on the assumption that accumulated interaction and knowledge as well as the topic itself affect the way that the language used.

The Literature On Knowledge And Context

Linguists have long attempted to define the context of background knowledge; the debate continues. Clark observes that mutual knowledge is based on community membership (1993: 37). Carlson (1993: 60) says that the source of common ground is linguistic co-presence and physical co-presence as well as community membership. Goodwin and Duranti (1992: 10) list the dimensions of context: setting (the social and spatial framework), behavioural environment (the

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way speakers use their bodies and behaviour to organise the space), language as context (contextualisation cues - how talk provides context for other talk) and extrasituational context (how understanding of an exchange requires background knowledge beyond local talk and immediate setting). They lament "the very small amount of research that has focused explicitly on the organisation of context". This book deals with the organisation of language as context and the extrasituational context of the community, and explores the relation between the two. Chapter 2 described the setting. This chapter focuses explicitly on the organisation of the extrasituational context.

Linguists have discussed the extent to which knowledge of the extrasituational context is relevant in conversation. Sperber and Wilson (1986: 64) say that if interlocutors "establish that they belong to the same community or group, they can reasonably assume mutual knowledge of all propositions normally known by group members." Few would dispute this, but they go on to say that interlocutors interpret knowledge that is intended and manifest without assuming wider knowledge and beliefs. Clark's (1993) mutual knowledge hypothesis on the other hand, posits that knowledge of context and speaker are not always sufficient for successful comprehension, and that interlocutors do use wider knowledge and beliefs that they assume they mutually share in order to make conversational inferences and interpret utterances. This chapter examines both common knowledge known by all group members and shared interpersonal knowledge of individual members, and it describes the difference between the two.

The extrasituational context of conversation in institutions has been studied; the way the institutional context and conversation change over time has not. Drew and Heritage stress the role of conversation in institutions:

> "talk-in-interaction is the principal means through which lay persons pursue various practical goals and the central medium through which the daily working activities of many professionals and organizational representatives are conducted." (1992: 3)

Ochs *et al.* (1996: 3-7) have investigated "ways in which talk and interaction both organize and are organized by institutions, relationships and culturally specified environments", and ways of "relating strategies for engaging in verbal interaction to the socialisation, maintenance and transformation of social realities such as family, the school, work or community political structures". Firth (1994), analysing the discourse of the workplace, says that it is the individual's competent social membership accomplished interactionally through locally ordered discourse practices, that is of interest. Boden (1994: 84-99) notes that "it is through corridor chat, quick lunches, and hanging out in office doorways that the essential flux of information and mood is conveyed" and that the "conditions created in and through interaction thus have consequences far beyond the immediate interactional setting, embedding actors and activities in a very real world *of their own making*". Bell (in Firth 1994: 54) says, "Each workplace has in some respects a distinctive "normative order", and /.../ this will affect the nature of conflict, constrain the type of cooperation, and have an impact on the process of negotiation itself". This chapter examines the extent to which the MSc common room dictates a norm as concerns the knowledge areas that must be referred to in discussion.

Those linguists, sociologists and psychologists who *have* commented on the fact that knowledge changes with interaction over time and that language must be analysed in this changing context, have not gone further than a superficial analysis of this phenomenon. Heritage says that conversation analysis studies the utterance embedded in a context: "A speaker's action is context-

shaped in that its contribution to an on-going sequence of actions cannot adequately be understood except by reference to the context - including, especially, the immediately preceding configuration of actions - in which it participates." (1984: 242). It also shapes a new context for the action that will follow. Coulthard (1977) refers to knowledge as part of an ongoing process:

> "Common ground is not restricted to shared experiences of a particular linguistic interaction up to the moment of utterance; rather it is a product of the interpenetrating biographies of the participants, of which common involvement in a particular ongoing interaction constitutes only a part." (p.106)

but he does not study the development of "interpenetrating biographies". Sigman (1983: 181-2) states that the analyst of discourse "must be able to make reference to conversations engaged in over time, that is to discourse embedded in a continuous social relationship" in order to analyse conversations, since "the significance of any one interactional engagement is regulated by the larger ongoing social process", but he does not analyse exactly what knowledge is involved in the "continuous social relationship" and how it changes. Clark says, "As the discourse proceeds, the participants accumulate shared information by adding to it with each utterance" (1993: 4-37). He observes that mutual knowledge based on community membership is generally preserved over long periods of time and it is constantly being renewed. Schiffrin (1994: 360) observes that "the function of an utterance (and hence its identity) must be defined in relation to (and as appropriate to) a context that is not static, but dynamic, and even more critically, a context that is still in the process of being interactively formed".

The accumulation of background knowledge has been approached from the point of view of information structure. As Cook says, "communication might be defined as the conversion of new information into given information" (1989: 64). Once a speaker is sure that his hearer has the necessary background knowledge for what he is going to say, he can introduce something new, and then this new information becomes part of the background knowledge for the next utterance and all that follows. The accumulation of given, and new converted into given, builds up to form a presupposition pool (Venneman, 1975). The assumed knowledge may be "given" and "in the consciousness of the addressee at the time of utterance" (Chafe, 1976), or "known" but "unused" (Prince, 1981), in the sense that it was not in the hearer's consciousness. This book does not examine language from the point of view of information structure, or theme and rheme; it examines it in terms of endophoric reference, or textually given, and exophoric reference, or textually new (see Chapter 4).

Change in common knowledge has been dealt with in terms of topics discussed at different levels of intimacy, but what abound again are descriptions of product, or knowledge at a given time, rather than ones of process, or how knowledge changes from one time to another. Sacks (1992) examined the conversations of strangers and found that in "getting-to-know-you" conversations, speakers seek knowledge of their interlocutors' membership (eg: sex, age, race), and then class them as representative of that category (eg: "She's 48" or "He's a Negro"). Wardhaugh states: "Opening up a conversation with a complete stranger is obviously a somewhat risky endeavour - there are so many unknown quantities." (1985: 118). He explains that if speakers are virtual strangers, unsure of each others' background, they must proceed cautiously and attempt to find some common ground on which to manoeuvre. Brown and Levinson say that strangers' common ground may be reduced to "an assumption of common interest in good weather or other such safe topic", whereas for close friends "it may extend to close identity of interests and desires" (1978: 64). "The more the speaker knows about the hearer, the more close to home will be the safe

topics he can pursue." (ibid: 112). Planalp and Benson (1992) found "mutual knowledge" to be the most common parameter that subjects used in order to distinguish between friends' (defined people known for at least a year) and acquaintances' (defined as people not talked with more than once) conversations.

This book explores how the type of knowledge assumed affects the language used to refer to it. The effect of the topic area on the language used and way of talking has been examined in the literature, but the studies offer a specific description of only one particular aspect. Giles and Powesland (1975: 122) have found that "the topic of conversation in social interaction can be influential in determining speech modifications when the subject matter is high on one or more of the following dimensions; salience, emotionality, technicality, abstraction and humorousness". The dimension of salience was examined by Matarazzo (1970), who found that students increased their mean utterance duration when discussing education or their studies. Kanfer (1960) investigated the aspect of emotionality and discovered that anxiety topics affected his subjects' speech rate and accent. The dimension of technicality was researched by Moscovici (1967) who found that a car specialist discussing cars with another specialist used a greater variety of words and more technical terms than with a non-specialist. Ratner and Rice (1963) found that speakers talking to poorly informed listeners on a technical topic used more words, repetitions and complete descriptions than they did with well-informed listeners. Familiarity with topic was investigated by Goldman-Eisler (1968) who showed that if a speaker was more familiar with a topic, his speech contained fewer pauses and a quicker articulation rate. Work on the dimension of abstraction was carried out by Lawton (1965) who found that the more abstract the topic, the more complex the grammatical structure. Exploring the dimension of humorousness, Giles (1977) found that with a humorous topic, speakers were less hesitant, and used a non-standard accent, less precise enunciation and varied tempo and pitch more than with a non-humorous topic. This book includes a more complete description of the relationship between topic and language: the model contains the grammatical and lexical elements mentioned here, adds interactional and functional features, and shows how they all relate to each other.

The Categorisation Of Knowledge

Linguists have suggested various categories of knowledge. Knowledge has been found to have three types of status: private, common or shared interpersonal knowledge (Kreckel, 1981). This book examines only the common and the shared interpersonal knowledge. Private knowledge is that which interlocutors have about themselves and which they are most likely right in assuming that few others know. This cannot be analysed as background knowledge but only observed, if it is revealed, as new knowledge which will consequently become shared interpersonal knowledge. Common knowledge is "knowledge acquired separately" (Kreckel, 1981), knowledge of the world, of which every speaker has different amounts. As Wardhaugh (1985: 18) rightly says, "in any conversation the participants will have different kinds of knowledge about almost any topic that is likely to be mentioned". Some of the knowledge that the students bring to the course is common to them, since they are linguists and/or language teachers, and then once they have started the course, they all gain background knowledge of the course itself, common to them all. Shared interpersonal knowledge is "knowledge acquired in mutual interaction" (Kreckel, 1981), acquired through previous verbal interactions or joint activities and experiences, and including privileged knowledge about the interlocutor. According to Kreckel, it is the speakers' knowledge

of interactions in the past and the perspective of continued interactions in the future, that leads to group cohesion.

Shared interpersonal knowledge about the interlocutor has been discovered to have three levels (Berger and Bradac, 1982). The lowest level is the descriptive level: knowledge about physical details and past history of the person. This is what Planalp and Benson (1992: 497) call mutual knowledge or "basic demographic information about each other" and "each other's habits and dispositions", "each other's activities, schedules and plans" and "people, events or places". The next level is the predictive: knowledge about what a person's beliefs and attitudes are that allow the interlocutor to predict how he would react in a given situation. The highest level is the explanatory level at which the interactor is able to explain why a person reacts the way he does. The analysis described in this book does not follow the Berger and Bradac model because such micro divisions of shared interpersonal knowledge were not considered necessary, given that knowledge itself is not the main focus of attention.

Clark (1993: 37) differentiates between "generic" knowledge, or knowledge about kinds of things, and "particular" knowledge, or knowledge about individual or particular things. The study of knowledge described in this chapter is not based on the Graesser and Clark (1985: 30-1) model of "Generic Knowledge Structures" (GKS), or world knowledge "housed in semi-autonomous packages", which they say, "provide the background world knowledge that is needed for constructing bridging inferences (those which fill gaps between explicit statements in order to establish conceptual connectivity) and projection inferences (those which elaborate and expand a coherent passage structure but do not fill gaps), and consist of animate beings (eg: manager, sister, dragon), inanimate concrete entities (tree, palace, new York), abstract concepts (eg: goodness, happiness, noise), cause-oriented event structures (eg: seeing, fearing, rushing), and goal-oriented activities (eg: giving, fighting, eating). The study of particular entities, concepts and events is described in Chapter 5, which is about the in-group lexis.

The researcher, observing the students in the common room in the spring and summer terms in the MSc course, had the impression that, as time passed, course-members seemed to talk more and more about the course to the exclusion of all else. She was interested in discovering if in fact over time, topics drawing on knowledge of the MSc course did increase. It may be that when the pressure of work, in the form of exams and projects, increases, as it does in the spring and summer terms, the in-group members need to show solidarity with and seek support from each other by talking more about the situation and events that unite them. She also felt that over time, sections of conversations assuming personal knowledge of interlocutors increase, and wanted to discover whether this was also the case.

Knowledge can be seen as an indivisible whole; it can also be divided up and categorised in as many different ways as there are analysts to divide it up. The construction of the common knowledge area (K area) model is necessarily an arbitrary, subjective and artificial way of dividing up the complexity of "real-life" casual conversations; the K area categories used are dictated by the researcher's vision of the data. It was, however, necessary to build an analysable model of knowledge, in order to test the hypotheses that topics based on MSc course knowledge and on interpersonal knowledge increase. Above all, a model was needed in order to analyse the relationship between K areas and language, to study the in-group code and its function, and to observe changes in these elements within each K area over time. The non-course K areas are

labelled K1, K2, K3, and the course K area is labelled K4 (see Figure 1). Figure 2 is a list o examples of topics in the data in the K areas. Numbers identify dialogues.

Figure 1: Knowledge areas

Non course K areas

K1 the world

K2 language teaching and learning
- university study in general, computing as an aid, etc.

K3 the University of Edinburgh (EU)
- the Department of Applied Linguistics (DAL); The Institute for Applied Language Studies (IALS), university buildings and what they contain, the physical here and now, scholarships and teaching, etc.

The course K area

K4 1991-92 EU Applied Linguistics MSc
- programme deadlines, specific tasks, specific study groups, particular books and articles, special ways of referring to courses, students, etc.

Figure 2: Examples of topics in each K area

K1 : The World

World and TV

11 What happened in a TV serial.

19 What the sea pollution is like in the Mediterranean and Japan.

Edinburgh and Scottish traditions

4 What happens on Edinburgh buses.

8 How BF spent her Hogmanay in Edinburgh.

Speakers' homes and habits

15 What CM's budgie does in the living-room.

21 How AF wastes time in the evening at home.

Speakers' families

21 Why AF's social life is limited by her son and why he is growing so fast.

23 How DM's wife and BF's husband affect their financial situation.

Speakers' trips, outings and entertainment

11 Why AM did not go for a meal after the pub; where BF went after the meal.

14 Why DM did not climb a mountain in Pitlochry.

Meanings of words

7 What "thingamajig" means.

9 What the origin of AM's name is.

K2: Language Teaching and Learning

Language teaching

1 Where AM, BM, and CM have taught English before coming to Edinburgh.

22 Why DM and BF had difficulty introducing innovations in language schools abroad.

Studying at university

10 What the exam questions were like in CM and DM's undergraduate courses.

18 What the mnemonics for MSc and PhD are.

Computers for study

9 How CM uses the tabling feature on Microsoft Word.

26 How BM can solve his layout problem by changing software.

K3: Edinburgh University (EU)

EU buildings and life

4 Whether BF's house is convenient for the department and King's Buildings.

28 Why BF's husband did not apply for the PhD

IALS/DAL here and now

3 Whether AM has time to go to the DAL common room and get a coffee.

15 Why BM and DM are shutting out the sunshine, in DAL common room, and where the key to the DAL photocopier is.

Doing a PhD in DAL / working for IALS

23 Why BF will not do a PhD in AL, and what happened to DM's application for IALS summer teaching.

28 Why BF is not interested in the IALS scholarship, whether she should apply, and what CM did about his proposal and interview for it.

K4 : The 1991-1992 MSc

Core and option courses

13 Why understanding syntax is easier than it seemed in the core course.

15 What AM and DM think about the Psycholinguistics courses, and what options BM and DM are doing.

Lectures and tutorials

4 How much BF and BM read for the tutorial, whether they completed the task, and why BF did not copy down the examples in the lecture.

27 How many lectures CM is going to miss, whether DM could get him notes, and whether some lectures could be missed.

Exam and portfolio

10 What subjects CM and DM are studying for the exam, why, what CM was doing in the library, and how to study for the Linguistics question.

13 When and how long the portfolio is.

Projects and dissertation

15 How far on CM and DM are with their projects, whether CM has filled in DM's project questionnaire, and what DM's tutor said about his project.

21 What DM should write his dissertation on.

Books and articles

15 What CM and DM think about certain articles.

18 What reading shows about changing fashions in linguistics and teaching approaches.

In the coding of the data, the K area was established for the duration of a whole sub-topic, wherever possible, and all discourse units within that sub-topic were coded in the same way. That is to say, each discourse unit was not analysed individually and coded one by one. If there was only one discourse unit that drew from a K area that was different from the K area of the preceding and following discourse units, it was not indicated as different. In example (1), students are preparing to discuss a tutorial task sheet (K4). BM refers to his "free time" presumably at home, in the world outside the course (K1) to explain the present situation in the course. This one K1 unit (03054) is not coded K1 but K4, because of the surrounding units:

(1) 03052 BM I wrote some- some lines here. ((1))
03053 NM That's fairly lengthy.

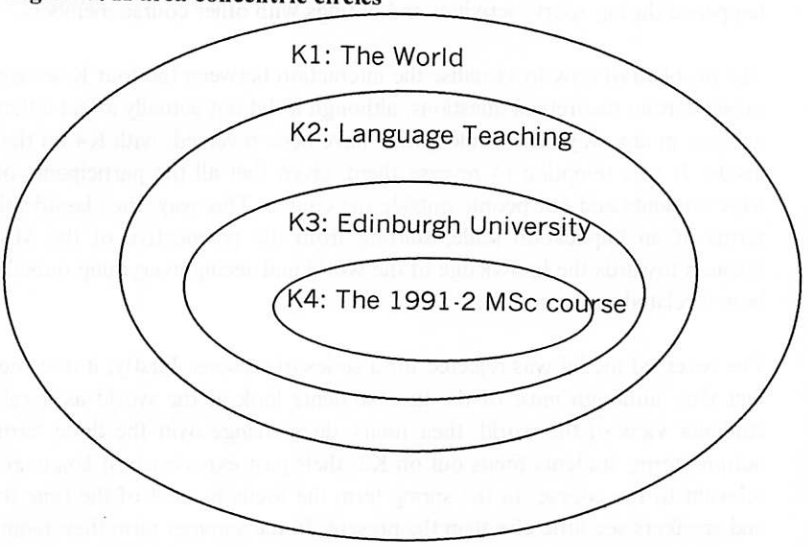
→ 03054 BM **Ah but well I had I had a lot of free time! (2)**
03055 BM Um. (3)
03056 BM Oh yeah. (2)
03057 BM Where's my pen?

If an exchange appeared to draw from more than one K area at a time, the predominant one was selected. Excerpt (2) illustrates this: BM is typing up his project, and the excerpt was coded as K2 and not K4 because the discussion focuses principally on the technical computer aspect of his problem:

(2) 26032 CM Oh you want a table basically. (2)
26033 CM With lines.
26034 CM On one side of the table you have teacher's interaction and on the other side you have a description // of it
26035 BM // I want a table that has.
26036 CM You want a table.
26037 CM Can't get those on Works.
26038 CM You'd have to use Word for that.

The four K areas relate to each other as concentric circles (see Figure 3). Bell (in Firth 1994: 54) says that "In studying the extra-institutional context, we begin with the recognition that each workplace is situated in a wider societal context. It is surrounded, in other words, by a series of larger settings within which it is 'nested'". K4 is nested in, and is part of, K3, which is in turn included in K2, which is included in K1. To put it another way, the course itself (K4) takes place in the context of DAL and IALS (K3); DAL and IALS are part of the language teaching and university study world (K2); language teaching and university life are but a small part of the whole world (K1).

Figure 3: K area concentric circles



This relationship in concentric circles can be demonstrated by looking at each of the K areas and their distance from K4, knowledge of the course. Starting with K3 topics, these are closest to K4

because K3 is knowledge about the university probably acquired since the students joined the MSc course. Even within K3 some topics are closer to K4 than others. The category of the "Here and now of IALS/DAL" topics is closer than that of EU since it requires knowledge of facilities and characteristics of the DAL MSc common room itself. The category of "Doing a PhD in AL and Working in IALS" is the closest since topics assume knowledge of IALS staff and the co-ordination between DAL and IALS to organise the scholarship selection process, and they assume knowledge of MSc option course subjects that can be developed to make an MLitt study. This cannot be included within K4 because it is not about the course itself, but about an extension of the course after it finishes.

Moving on now to K2 topics, these are not as close to K4 as K3 ones because K2 contains knowledge that students had before the course: their past experiences of "Language Teaching" such as introducing innovations in English schools abroad, their memories of "Studying at University" such as answering exam questions in previous university courses, and general knowledge about using "Computers for Study" such as the best software for text processing. K2 is closer to K4 than K1, however, because it is knowledge of those parts of the outside world that are directly related to theory acquired in the course about linguistics and language teaching, and related to course components and activities such as sitting exams and writing projects.

K1 is the furthest from the course, although again some categories are closer to K4 than others. Topics in the category of the "World and TV" such as current events and world pollution, and topics in the "Edinburgh and Scottish Traditions" category such as what Edinburgh buses are like and how the Scots celebrate Hogmanay have very little to do with the MSc course. Topics in the categories "Speakers' Homes and Habits", their "Families" and their "Trips, Outings and Entertainment" are closer to the course, in that they are about out-of-course situations that centre round course members, such as where they went with their spouses and children, and what happened during sports activities and outings with other course members.

The problem of how to visualise the interaction between the four K areas using concentric circles raised certain theoretical questions, although it did not actually affect either the coding or the data analysis in any way. The circles could have been reversed, with K4 on the outside and K1 on the inside. It was tempting to reverse them, given that all the participants of the dialogues are the MSc students and not people outside the course. This way, the classification would have been in terms of an implication scale, starting from the perspective of the MSc student and looking inwards towards the knowledge of the world and seeing everything outside the course in terms of how it related to the course.

The reversed model was rejected for a series of reasons. Firstly, it does not take into account the fact that, although *most* of the time students look at the world as it relates to the course, the students' view of the world, their focus, does change over the three terms of the course. In the autumn term, students focus out on K2, their past experience of language teaching and how it is relevant to the course. In the spring term the focus is most of the time on K4, the course itself, and speakers see little else than the present. In the summer term they again focus out but this time to the future and K3, whether to continue to a higher degree after the course and whether to work in the Institute. The reversed model resists this change of focus, treating *all* subjects as emerging through the focus on K4. The second reason for rejecting the reversed model was that the concentric circles as they stand in Figure 3 do demonstrate the fact that most conversations

depend to a certain extent on K4, or in-group knowledge. Each concentric circle is one stage away from the in-groupness, showing that in-group knowledge is gradable. The model used also accommodates the notion of inaccessibility from non-course members. The outsiders or "overhearers", who do not share common ground, (Schober in Clark, 1993; Clark, 1997) are in the different circles outside the course. The quality of outsiderness is gradable.

Each K area was examined separately in these concentric circles in order to reflect the gradability of course-relatedness, but they were also grouped in the two macro-categories, non-course K area and course K area (see Figure 1), in order to make a broad statement about K4. If the only analysis had been of only the four K areas in isolation, the picture might not have been so clear. The question of where to put the dividing line between non-course and course topics was not a simple one, because everything is course-related in some way. The line could have come between K1 and K2/K3/K4; between K1/K2 and K3/K4; or between K1/K2/K3 and K4. The K1/K2/K3 - K4 divide was used because it was considered that a topic is either about the course itself (projects, classes, books, etc.) or it is not about the course itself. This division is most suitable for testing the hypothesis that topics based on MSc course knowledge increases, because it isolates course knowledge more clearly than the models that have a gradability of course-relatedness within the category of course knowledge itself.

Shared interpersonal knowledge was easier to define, and it was not broken own into mini-categories. Whereas common knowledge is that public knowledge that one would expect most people to have about Edinburgh, language teaching or the course, shared knowledge is the privileged, interpersonal knowledge about the interlocutor, that which speakers would not expect most people on the course to know - knowledge about the interlocutor's home and family set-up, out-of-course activities and particular in-course activities. Shared knowledge is the descriptive, predictive and explanatory interpersonal knowledge. Figure 4 lists examples of topics. Sections of dialogue based on shared knowledge occurred throughout the data in all K areas. This category can be incorporated into the concentric circles theory and diagram, if shared knowledge is represented as lines radiating out from the centre like spokes of a wheel, to indicate that it is all pervasive, running through the K areas.

Figure 4: Examples of topics in shared knowledge

Home and family (descriptive):

Where they live/have lived/have visited.

What their immediate family consists of and what their names are.

Activities (descriptive):

What their particular past, present and future activities are outside the course - both social and work-related.

What their particular past, present and future activities are within the course - options, tutorial groups, tutors, projects, books, and study progress.

Personality and attitudes (predictive and explanatory):

What their personalities are like, how they usually behave and why.

What their attitude towards and feelings about each other, certain aspects and components of the course, the world outside are.

What their aspirations and objectives are.

The one area of interpersonal knowledge missing from the recordings is that of extremely intimate personal details revealed in self-disclosure. This may be partly explained by the fact that recordees monitor what they talk about because of it going down on permanent record, it is also partly explained by the fact that, even without the cassette-recorder, self disclosure is rarely DAL "common room talk" because the room itself dictates more public topics. Self disclosure is more likely to be "pub talk" or "coffee at someone's flat" talk.

Shared interpersonal knowledge differs from K4, in that whereas K4 contains information that almost any MSc member could have about the course, shared interpersonal contains information that only a limited number of members could have about all matters, including the course. To take an example, excerpt (3) was from K4, and not coded as shared: the speakers appear to be referring to a misprint in one of their text books:

(3)
13001 AM It's a real text book.
13002 AM It's not like Brown and Miller.
13003 CM Figure thirteen.
13004 CM See figure thirteen.
13005 AM (heh heh heh)
13006 CM Figure twelve.
13007 CM Fi- figure fourteen.
13008 AM // (heh eh heh)
13009 CM // No figure thirteen. (7)

It seems probable that any student could have understood this oblique reference to the problem, since the book was set for discussion in tutorials in a compulsory core course. The distinction between K4 and shared interpersonal knowledge was not made on the grounds of impenetrability: both could make a dialogue impenetrable to an outsider. Shared interpersonal knowledge is usually exclusive to a small group within the MSc group, and possibly exclusive to only the speaker and listener, but K4 can exclude all those who are not in-group members.

Once all the data had been categorised and coded, the analysis went through four stages. A Kappa intercoder reliability test (the number of right answers minus the estimated score divided by total number of questions minus the estimated score) was carried out with two coders and produced a result of 46% for one coder and 75% for the other. The second was satisfactory, and discussion with the first coder revealed that he had made errors of interpretation of the code because he had not read the descriptions of each K area closely enough. Then, the percentage of discourse units in each K area was calculated in all the data, in order to discover which area occupied most space in the whole course. Next, the percentage of discourse units in each K area was calculated in each term, in order to find the changes over time in each K area. Finally, to investigate whether shared interpersonal knowledge increases over time, the percentage of shared interpersonal knowledge discourse units in each K area was found in each term. Shared interpersonal knowledge in non-course K areas was compared with that of K4.

3.2 CHANGES IN KNOWLEDGE

The Common K Areas

Throughout the whole course, most conversations centre around the course itself; that is to say K4 occupies most discourse units (see Figure 5). The three non-course K areas may not have been the same size by definition, in the first place. Thus the proportions K1, K2 and K3 might have been different if they had been defined differently. However, since K4 is defined in such a watertight way as knowledge of components of the course, the proportion of 42% seen here could not be different.

Figure 5: Proportion of each K area in the whole course

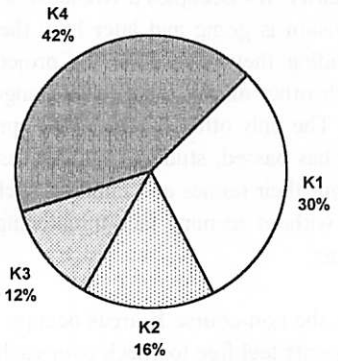
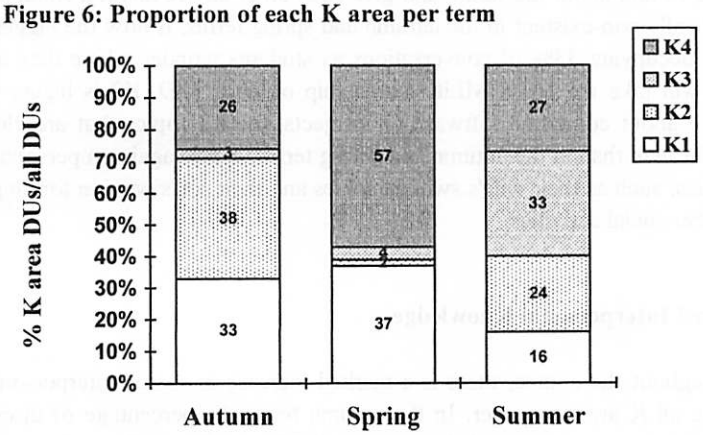


Figure 6: Proportion of each K area per term



The main topic type of conversations seems to be determined by the term in which it occurs (see Figure 6). The autumn and summer terms are similar in that non-course K areas predominate; the spring term is the one with the highest proportion of time spent talking on K4 topics. In the autumn term, K2 is more frequent; in the summer term all K areas occur but K3 topics predominate. The hypothesis that topics based on MSc course knowledge increases was not therefore confirmed. It would seem that the cause of change in knowledge assumed is not so

much the fact of interacting over time but quite simply the change of concern and focus of attention, reflecting the stage in the course and events on the timetable.

In the autumn term, the students are more likely to discuss the past than the present, K1 being the knowledge of the world that they bring with them from the past and K2 being the experience of previous teaching and study that they have had. The students know that keeping to safe topics, such as amusing narratives and anecdotes and personal history about where they live and where they have taught, will observe non-face-threatening politeness principles. The K4 topics are practical organisational ones about "who is in whose tutorial group" and "how the tutorial task was divided up." The conversations consist of presentations of self and exploration of others.

In the spring term, the students come back from their Christmas recess discussing their holidays (K1) but stressed and eager to talk about the course itself, K4, about the present, to compare notes and seek solidarity. K4 occupies a whole 57% of conversations, while students check how their colleagues' revision is going and later how they answered their exam questions, and then later how much reading they have done for projects and tutorials. Their study and growing confidence with each other allows them to exchange evaluative opinions about articles and the courses themselves. The only other K area in the spring term that features with any frequency is K1. Once the exam has passed, students can discuss TV serials, the news and world situations, and offer details about their homes and families, such as their budgie's poop and their weekends in with friends, etc. without seeming face-threatening. In addition they discuss evenings out that they have had together.

In the summer term, the non-course K areas occupy more time than K4; K4 is less than it was in the spring term. Students feel free to check over each other's projects and comment, and they are prone to talk about the future and give each other advice about a suitable dissertation topic. K3, practically non-existent in the autumn and spring terms, is now the biggest non-course-related K area, occupying 33% of conversations as students wonder where they are going next, whether they will take the IALS MLitt scholarship or do a PhD. K2 is bigger than K1: students give advice about computer software for projects, the K2 topics that are closest to K4. K1 topics, smaller here than in the autumn and spring terms, centre again on personal details about speakers' families, such as their wife's swollen ankles and their son's passion for chips, and plans for course member social activities.

Shared Interpersonal Knowledge

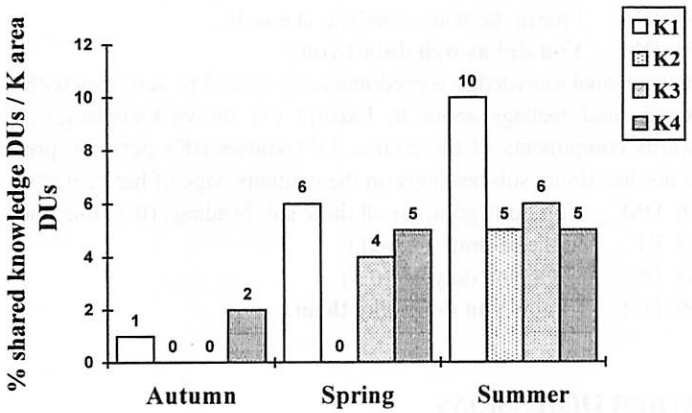
Throughout the course, there is a marked increase in shared interpersonal knowledge assumed, taking all K areas together. In the autumn term, the percentage of discourse units (DUs) with shared interpersonal knowledge out of all DUs is 1%; in the spring term it is 7%, and in the summer term it is 8%. Figure 7 contains the raw data of shared interpersonal knowledge for each term. The value of χ^2 was 41.251, significant at the 0.005 level, and shows that, taking all four K areas together, the difference between the proportions of DUs containing an assumption of shared interpersonal knowledge and those not containing one in each of the three terms is significant. This confirms the hypothesis that topics based on interpersonal knowledge increase. The more experiences they share, and the more the students know of each other, the more students can and do refer to this.

Figure 7: Frequencies of DUs with shared interpersonal knowledge and those without in each of the three terms, taking all K areas together.

		Term		
		Autumn	Spring	Summer
DUs with shared interpersonal knowledge	yes	5	111	77
	no	735	1,674	1,005

The density of shared interpersonal knowledge DUs depends not only on how much interaction there has been over time; it also varies according to what is being talked about (see Figure 8). K1 has the highest density of shared interpersonal knowledge throughout the course. This is not very surprising: conversations about speakers' homes and habits, families, trips, outings and entertainment are bound to contain personal references the participants. K1 shared interpersonal knowledge increases dramatically, reaching double the average of the other areas by the summer term. K2 shared interpersonal knowledge sections are smallest probably because themes about methodology and technology tend to be impersonal. Shared knowledge in K4 dialogues is very much less than that in K1 dialogues and the density does not grow so dramatically, maybe because K4 is in itself more privileged by definition and because K4 is group rather than individual knowledge.

Figure 8: Percentage of shared interpersonal knowledge out of each K area



A few examples will demonstrate the different types of shared interpersonal knowledge that occur in each K area. In K1 dialogues, most shared interpersonal sections are about home and family, and social out-of-course activities. Excerpt (4) shows knowledge of what the immediate family consists of. DM shows surprise that AF does not go out as much as he does at the weekend:

(4) → 21014 AF **Yes but you don't have to find a baby-sitter.**
21015 DM Mm.
21016 DM Mm.
→ 21017 AF **And you've got somebody there to go out with straight away.**

They both know that AF is a single parent and DM is a childless married man whose wife has come to stay with him in Edinburgh. Excerpt (5) demonstrates how speakers show a knowledge of each other's attitudes and can explain each others' behaviour. In the part of the conversation immediately preceding this, a student had been talking about a weekend climbing in Pitlochry.

(5) 14021 DM More than I did this weekend I'm telling you.
→ 14022 BF **You had friends didn't you?**
→ 14023 BF **I can imagine why you wouldn't want to.**
14024 DM Resting.
14025 BF Yeah.
14026 BF Sure. (heh heh)

BF apparently knows who the friends are and why DM would lack the motivation to go out climbing; she also knows that he is joking when he says that he was resting. Most shared interpersonal knowledge sections in K3 relate to personality and attitudes or to activities outside the course. Excerpt (6) illustrates knowledge of past and present activities outside the course, yet related to the Institute. Both BF and DM know that they have both talked of applying for summer teaching with the Institute:

(6) → 23051 BF **Did you apply for work in IALS?**
→ 23052 BF No.
→ 23053 DM **I did in the end yeah.**
23054 BF You did. (2)
23055 BF Have you heard?
23056 DM Yeah.
23057 DM I mean he said something like well...
→ 23058 DM **You did as well didn't you?**

K4 shared interpersonal knowledge is predominantly related to activities within the course and to attitudes towards and feelings about it. Excerpt (7) shows knowledge of the interlocutor's attitudes towards components of the course. DM knows BF's personal preferences: he knows that she does not like doing sub-headings on the contents page of her projects.

(7) 22056 DM You don't go in for all these sub-headings (0.5) one one =
22057 BF In the re-draft // well I
22058 DM // Oh you do yeah (0.5)
→ 22059 DM **I know you don't like them.**

3.3 FURTHER DIMENSIONS

The triangulation questionnaire and informal discussion with the six recordees themselves revealed a relatively low degree of awareness of the predominance of K4 topics or the changes from term to term. As they listened to themselves on the cassette recorder, they were amused at what they saw as the spinning-out of conversation on what seemed to them, looking back, irrelevant and uninteresting topics. Although some of them said that they felt the common room did dictate chat about course topics, they insisted that it did not matter much what they actually said about them. AM claimed that in his talk with in-group course members the topic was "of NO consequence" [his underlining and capitals]. In the questionnaire, most of the recordees said that they would not risk talking about the staff and other students (K4) with all in-group course members, reserving such topics for special friends. The male recordees said that they never spoke to *any* of their colleagues about their personal life and feelings, and the female recordees said that

this topic was reserved for special friends. Analysis showed that talk about staff and other students took place with everyone. It also showed that, by spring term, all six of them were mentioning aspects of their personal life and could not help showing feelings, attitudes and opinions in what they said to everyone.

A brief analysis was made of the K areas assumed in each recordee's talk, in order to confirm that the findings described in this chapter were not skewed by individuals and their preferred topics. The percentage of each recordee's discourse units out of each K area total was calculated. Figure 9 shows that K1 and K4 topics are divided almost equally amongst all recordees, as are sections of dialogue depending on shared interpersonal knowledge. The fact that K1 and K4 take up 72% of all the data and that they contain very similar proportions of contributions from all recordees suggests that the study's findings are typical of the six and generalisable to all members of the 1991-92 MSc.

Figure 9: Percentage of DUs in each K area for each recordee

K area	AM	BM	CM	DM	AF	BF
K1	16	12	17	19	16	20
K2	13	33	32	6	8	8
K3	2	4	49	38	7	0
K4	23	13	23	24	10	7
Shared knowledge sections	16	12	9	27	12	24

This is not to deny that individual differences exist. K2 topics are mainly BM and CM's domain (they like talking about computers, for example), and K3 topics are CM's and DM's (they like discussing higher degrees), but these K areas are the smaller ones, so this difference is not felt overall. Moreover, K2 and K3 topics are less frequent in the spring (see Figure 6) and BM, CM and DM do not speak less in the spring (see Figure 4 of Chapter 2), so the K area changes over time are not a result of this difference either. The women, AF and BF, speak more on K1 topics than they do on K4 (they like talking about evenings out and what members of their families are doing), whereas for the men, it is the reverse. The fact that BF speaks very slightly less in the spring and AM speaks a little more then may have contributed marginally to the overall increase in K4 topics in the spring. However, the spring term is the one in which all recordees speak for about the same time, and BF, AM and DM are not talking in isolation: they are taking part in conversations with other members of the six, on K4 topics. Another difference is that DM refers three times as much to shared interpersonal knowledge than CM does (see Figure 9), but DM can not be held responsible for the increase in these sections in the spring because CM speaks more and more over time. In conclusion, the findings about the predominance of K4 and its increase in the spring and the increase in shared interpersonal knowledge sections throughout the year can be taken as typical of the six and generalisable to all.

3.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown that knowledge about the course itself is the background to nearly half of the dialogues throughout the year, but that course dialogues do not increase over time as they seemed on casual observation. The chapter has suggested that course events dictate the choice of topic more than interaction over time does, course topics being twice as likely to occur than any other topic in the stressful spring term when the pressure of exams and project deadlines increases. What do increase with interaction over time are dialogues assuming shared interpersonal knowledge. This is especially the case in topics assuming general knowledge of the world outside the course, such as home and family situation and activities.

As for the function of referring to common knowledge, Brown and Levinson (1978) state that to claim opinions, attitudes and knowledge in common with the hearer, the speaker may assert common ground, and that this is a positive politeness strategy. It would appear, therefore, that the students choose K4 and shared interpersonal topics for discussion with their colleagues in order to establish and maintain in-group membership, by pointing to the knowledge that they as a group share, to the context that binds them.