3   Exchange structure

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DESCRIPTIVE PROBLEMS

Introduction

Following any piece of research one is faced with the problem of demonstrating the validity and generality of one's findings and of showing that an explanation, based of necessity on a fairly small sample of data, is applicable to similar data collected by other investigators. During the past thirty years this problem has been elegantly solved within traditional linguistics by the development of generative grammars. A linguist can now present and exemplify his findings quite briefly and then encapsulate them in a few abstract rules which will generate all and only acceptable instances of the phenomena. The reader is then able to insert his own lexical items and check the outcomes against his own data or, more usually, his own intuitions and thereby evaluate the description for himself.

By contrast most of the descriptive problems in the analysis of spoken discourse remain to be solved. There has, so far, been no detailed theoretical discussion of the peculiar nature of verbal interaction nor of the components and categories appropriate to describing it – there is no *Discourse Structures* or *Aspects of the Theory of Discourse*. Indeed, it is by no means certain that the kind of generative description that grammarians have used so successfully is an appropriate tool for handling interaction. As a result there are virtually no commonly agreed descriptive categories; it is still not even clear what is the largest structural unit in discourse and descriptions tend to concentrate on fragments.

One notable obstacle to the development of a description of interaction is that speakers seem to have weaker intuitions about permissible sequences of interactive units than they do about permissible sequences of grammatical units. Of course it may be that this is only the case because relatively little work has so far been undertaken on the structure of interaction, but, nevertheless, we have found the safest working assumption to be that, in the co-operatively produced object we call *discourse*, there is no direct equivalent to the concept of *grammaticality*. Indeed, the concept of *com-*

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ROUTLEDGE

petence, as it has been understood since Chomsky set it in sharp contrast to *performance*, may ultimately be unhelpful in our field.

Utterances do, of course, place constraints upon what will be considered a relevant or related utterance, but a next speaker always has the option of producing an *unrelated* utterance. If he does so, even in so conspicuous a way as by failing to respond to a greeting or by producing a whole string of apparently inconsequential utterances, it seems more appropriate to characterize his behaviour as socially deviant than as linguistically so. This is not to say that interaction has no structure, or even that the researcher will be unable to find it. It is rather to assert that the structural framework operates by classifying each successive discourse event in the light of the immediately preceding one and, to state the matter in the broadest possible terms, irrelevance is always one of the speaker-options. A consequence of all this is that research in the area of spoken discourse will, for a long time, be data-based out of necessity: the difficulty of arguing by appeal to intuition is a fact that has to be lived with.

Conversational analysis

Currently, many of our insights into the structure of interaction come from the work of the Conversational Analysts, in particular Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson. However, although many of their findings are fascinating and although Schenkein (1978:3) describes work by them and their colleagues as a 'promising movement towards an empirically based grammar of natural conversation', their descriptive methods create problems for others hoping to use their results, particularly for linguists accustomed to tightly defined categories.

Conversational Analysts were originally fugitives from a sociology they regarded as based on simplistic classification and they are well aware of Garfinkel's (1967) observation that you can never 'say in so many words' what you mean. Perhaps for these reasons they do not attempt to define their descriptive categories but instead use 'transparent' labels like *misapprehension sequence, clarification, complaint, continuation, pre-closing*. It will be instructive to look at some of their analyses to see the problems inherent in this type of description.

Sacks (n.d.) begins with the observation that a conversation is a string of at least two *turns*. Some turns are more closely related than others and he isolates a class of sequences of turns called *adjacency pairs* which have the following features: they are two utterances long; the utterances are produced successively by different speakers; the utterances are ordered – the first must belong to the class of *first pair parts*, the second to the class of *second pair parts*; the utterances are related and thus not any second part can follow any first part, but only an appropriate one; the first pair part often selects next speaker and always selects next action – it thus sets up a *transition relevance*, an expectation which the next speaker fulfils, in other

words the first part of a pair predicts the occurrence of the second; 'Given a question, regularly enough an answer will follow'.

It is, however, no difficult matter to discover a question not followed by an answer and this raises a question about the status of the pair. Sacks argues that, whereas the absence of a particular item in conversation has initially no importance because there is any number of things that are similarly absent, in the case of an adjacency pair the first part provides specifically for the second and therefore the absence of the second is noticeable and noticed. Sometimes, either because he doesn't understand, or because he doesn't want to commit himself until he knows more or because he's simply stalling, a next speaker may produce not a second pair part but another first pair part. The suggestion is 'if you answer this one, I will answer yours'.

1 A: I don't know where the – wh – this address is   Q
   B: Well where do – which part of town do [you] live   Qi
   A: I live four ten East Lowden   Ai
   B: Well you don't live very far from me   A

Schegloff (1972) labels the embedded pair an *insertion sequence*, but one question which immediately arises is in what sense is the pair QiAi inserted into the pair QA; surely this is treating conversation as an accomplished product rather than a developing process, because A may never occur. In justification Schegloff argues that

> The Q utterance makes an A utterance conditionally relevant. The action the Q does (here, direction asking) makes some other action sequentially relevant (here, giving directions by answering the Q). Which is to say, after the Q, the next speaker has that action specifically chosen for him to do, and can show attention to, and grasp of, the preceding utterance by doing the chosen action then and there. If he does not, that will be a notable omission.

In other words, during the inserted sequence the original question retains its transition relevance, and if the second speaker does not then produce an answer it is noticeably absent in exactly the same way as it would be if there were no intervening sequence, and the questioner can complain about the lack of an answer in exactly the same way. Thus the argument is that adjacency pairs are normative structures, the second part ought to occur, and for this reason the other sequences can be regarded as being inserted between the first pair part that has occurred and the second pair part that is anticipated.

Jefferson (1972) proposes a second type of embedded sequence, the *side sequence*. She observes that the general drift of conversation is sometimes halted at an unpredictable point by a request for clarification and then the conversation picks up again where it left off. The following example is of children preparing for a game of 'tag':

2 Steven: One, two, three, (pause) four, five, six,
            (pause) eleven, eight, nine, ten
   Susan: Eleven? – eight, nine, ten
   Steven: Eleven, eight, nine, ten
   Nancy: Eleven?
   Steven: Seven, eight, nine, ten
   Susan: That's better

Whereupon the game resumes.

In Jefferson's analysis this side sequence, which she labels a *misapprehension sequence*, begins with a *questioning repeat* – an interrogative item which indicates that there is a problem in what has just been said, whose function is 'to generate further talk directed to remedying the problem'. Questioning repeats occur typically after the questioned utterance has been completed, because only then can one be sure that the speaker is not going to correct himself or explain the unclear item. An interrupting questioning repeat is liable to attract a *complaint* not a *clarification*, 'if you'd just let me finish'.

Jefferson suggests initially that the misapprehension sequence has a three-part structure, consisting of 'a statement of sorts, a misapprehension of sorts and a clarification of sorts'. The example above is in fact more complex, consisting of a statement followed by two misapprehension and clarification pairs. So far Jefferson's side sequence looks rather like Schegloff's insertion sequence. There are, however, two major differences: firstly, because the first item, the statement, is not a first pair part, the other items are in no sense inserted and thus there is no expectation of who should speak at the end of the sequence or of what type of utterance should follow; secondly, while the sequence misapprehension–clarification looks like a pair, there is actually a compulsory third element in the sequence, an indication by the misapprehender that he now understands and that the sequence is now terminated – 'That's better' in the example above, or 'yeah' in the example below.

3 Statement: If Percy goes with – Nixon I'd sure like that
   Misapprehension: Who
   Clarification: Percy. That young fella that wh – his daughter was murdered (1.0)
   Termination: Oh yea:h Yeah

In addition, because the first item, the *statement*, is not a first pair part, the conversation cannot resume with the second pair part as happens after an insertion sequence, so there remains the problem of a *return*. Jefferson observes that:

It is not merely that there [occurs] a return to the on-going sequence,

but that to return to the on-going sequence . . . is a task performed by participants.

She suggests that the return can be effected either as a *resumption* or as a *continuation* – a resumption is achieved by attention getters such as 'listen' or 'hey you know', which mark that there is a problem in accomplishing a return, while continuations, attempted by 'so' or 'and' are directed to 'covering-up' the problem, to proposing that there is no trouble. Thus the full structure is

4   Statement: A: And a goodlooking girl comes to
                                   you and [asks] you, y'know
   Side   Misapprehension: B: Gi(hh)rl asks you to –
   Sequence Clarification: C: Wella its happened a lotta times
           Termination: B: Okay okay go ahead
           Continuation: B: So he says 'no' . . .

In trying to understand and use the descriptive categories outlined above the intending analyst has several problems. Firstly, *pair* is the only technical term which is defined, but pairs are also at times referred to as *sequences*; secondly, *sequence* is not defined but appears to be a structurally coherent collection of not necessarily successive utterances or utterance parts, up to four in number; thirdly, the exact status of *misapprehension sequence* is not clear but it is apparently a subclass of *side sequence*, although we have no idea what other types of side sequence there are.

From the way the authors describe and exemplify their categories it would appear that the real difference between Schegloff's insertion sequence and Jefferson's side sequence is that the former has a ready-made *return*, the second part of the question/answer pair, while for the latter it has to be 'worked at'. However, one could surely insert a misapprehension sequence inside Schegloff's Question/Answer pair – example (5) below looks unexceptional; would it, could it, then be classified as an insertion sequence?

5   A: I don't know where the – wh – this address is   Question
    B: Which one   Misapprehension
    A: The one you just gave me   Clarification
    B: Oh yeah, yeah   Termination
    B: Well you don't live very far from me   Answer

Perhaps it was a mistake to assume that insertion and side sequences necessarily have different distributions; perhaps the main difference between them is the fact that they have different internal structures. As it is difficult to see how misapprehension and clarification differ in any fundamental way from question and answer respectively, one must assume that the structural difference lies in the *termination* element which completes the

side sequence. However, there seems to be no reason why Schegloff's insertion sequence couldn't also have a termination.

1a	A:	I don't know where the – wh – this address is	Q
	B:	Which part of the town do you live	Qi
	A:	I live four ten East Lowden	Ai
	B:	Ah yeah	Termination
	:	Well you don't live very far from me	A

Thus one must conclude that in fact these two sequences only have different labels because they have been labelled from different perspectives – *insertion sequence* is a structural label, while *misapprehension sequence* is a semantic label which attempts to capture the relationship of the first item in the sequence to the preceding utterance.

There is a similar confusion in the labelling of the component units of the misapprehension sequence. Following an item labelled clarification one might expect an item which indicates that the addressee now understands (this is the apparent function of 'oh yeah, yeah' in example 3), and therefore labelled something like *acknowledgement*. In fact, the label given is *termination*, a structural not a semantic label and one which leads the reader to question why in that case the first item is not an *opener* or *initiator*.

In setting out to find misapprehension sequences in his own data the intending analyst faces a difficulty; to help him he has only Jefferson's observation that the sequences begin with a 'misapprehension of sorts' and the three analysed examples, (2), (3), (4) above. While it is easy to accept 'who' in example (3) as a misapprehension, the items in examples (2) and (4) look as if they would be more satisfactorily labelled as *challenge*, followed by a *correction* and a *justification* respectively.

As this brief discussion makes abundantly clear the descriptions of the Conversational Analysts with their transparent categories are deceptively attractive and apparently allow very delicate analyses. However, just as Katz and Fodor (1963) produced a sketch of an elegant way of describing the meaning of nouns in terms of distinctive features only to see Bolinger (1965) demonstrate that it was an illusion, so Conversational Analysts working with no overall descriptive framework run the risk of creating data-specific descriptive categories for each new piece of text to the last syllable of recorded conversation.

Linguistic description

In order to avoid the dangers inherent in a purely data-based description we have from the beginning attempted to locate our work within the theory of linguistic description presented in Halliday (1961), 'Categories of the theory of grammar'. Despite its title, and although based upon experience in describing phonological and grammatical structure, the paper is in fact

an explicit, abstract discussion of the nature of linguistic description. Thus for anyone seeking, as we are, to describe a new kind of data following well-tried linguistic principles, it is a perfect starting-point.

The first questions one asks of a linguistic description are what are the descriptive units and how are they related to each other – as we have already seen these are not questions that are easy to answer for the units proposed by the Conversational Analysts. For any unit one must provide two kinds of information: what position or function it has in the structure of other larger units and what its own internal structure is.

Such information, about the interrelationships between units, can be presented very simply in terms of a rank scale, whose basic assumption is that a unit at a given *rank* – to take an example from grammar, *word* – is made up of one or more units at the rank below, in this case *morpheme*, and combines with other units at the same rank, that is other words, to make up one unit at the rank above, *group* or *phrase*.

Organizing descriptive units into a rank scale can be part of the heuristic process; as Labov observes (1972:121),

formalisation is a fruitful procedure even when it is wrong:
it sharpens our questions and promotes the search for answers.

It was their attempt to fit *utterance* into a rank scale which made Sinclair *et al.* (1972) realize that it was not in fact a structural unit and if we try to create a rank scale from the Conversational Analysts' descriptive units discussed above we get similarly enlightening results. One criterion for placing units at a particular point on a rank scale is relative size and thus we would expect the following:

> sequence
> pair
> turn

However, in a rank scale, larger units are, by definition, related to smaller ones in a 'consists of' relationship, and we can in no way pretend that the Conversational Analysts' sequence consists of one or more pairs; rather both consist of two or more turns and thus we realize that structurally, sequence and pair are varieties or classes of the *same unit*, with pair being a label for one *subclass* of sequence just as transitive is a label for one kind of clause.

Distinguishing analytic units is only a first step; a description must then set out to isolate the different kinds or *classes* of unit at each rank, and these classes must be distinguished in terms of their *structure*, the way in which they are composed of particular units from the rank below in a particular sequence. For example at the rank of *clause* one can distinguish four major or primary classes *declarative*, *imperative*, *interrogative* and *moodless* according to the occurrence and relationship between two *elements of structure*, Subject and Predicator.

Declarative	S+P	He is writing
Interrogative	P⟨S⟩	Is he writing/Where is he writing
Imperative	P	Write
Moodless	−P	Him

This is a very powerful description which can classify all free or main clauses into one of four classes. For the same reason it has disadvantages because there is an enormous number of relevant differences between clauses with which it does not cope: transitivity, polarity, voice, presence of adjuncts, and so on. However, all scientific description has the same problem, that of attempting to handle an infinite number of unique events by the simplest possible description. Halliday builds the solution into the theory; while remaining at the same *rank* one can take successive steps in *delicacy*, producing structures more and more finely distinguished, until every structural difference has been handled.

It will be evident from the example above that the structure of a unit is not, in fact, presented directly in terms of the units next below but rather in terms of *elements of structure* which are then related to the smaller units. Thus, clause structure is described in terms of the elements of structure S(ubject), P(redicator), O(bject), C(omplement), A(djunct) which are then in turn related to the classes of group, nominal, verbal, adverbial and prepositional, which realize them at the rank below. This apparently unnecessary double-labelling is in fact a crucial step, particularly when dealing with new data, as we shall soon see.

It is instructive to reconsider some of Schegloff and Jefferson's categories in these terms. From their articles discussed above we are led to assume, firstly, that there are at least two kinds of *sequence*, main and subordinate or major and minor; secondly, that at secondary delicacy there are at least two classes of subordinate sequence, insertion and side sequence, while at tertiary delicacy, it is implied, side sequences can be separated into misapprehension and other(s).

We noted that there are two ways in which side and insertion sequences are said to differ: they have a different structure and they occur in different environments. However, as we now realize, only the former is a statement about sequences, the latter is a statement about the structure of whatever is the unit above sequence. In other words, just as at clause rank in grammar the group realizing Subject may be embedded inside the group realizing Predicator, so in interaction, it is being suggested, there is a unit whose elements of structure are realized by sequences and which has at least the following possible realizations: AA, A⟨B⟩, where B is recognized as an insertion sequence, and ABA where B is recognized as a side sequence. However, precisely because they do not have the technique of double labelling for units and elements of structure, Schegloff and Jefferson have conflated an observation about positional occurrence with one about internal structure. It is this confusion which allowed us to suggest earlier

(p. 55) that a misapprehension sequence could apparently occur in the same environment as an insertion sequence and to question what its status then was.

Initially, as we observed above, it looks as if there is no great problem in demonstrating that the two sequences are *structurally* distinct – one has a two-part structure, consisting of *question* and *answer*, the other a three-part structure consisting of *misapprehension*, *clarification* and *termination*. But misapprehension is a 'question of sorts' and clarification an 'answer of sorts' while, as we have seen, a termination is quite likely to follow a question/answer sequence. This time we see that we have a triple confusion between elements of structure, the units realizing them and degree of delicacy. Termination is a suitable label for an element of structure and would be most likely to combine with others like *initiation* and *response*. *Question* and *answer* are in fact classes of turn which are most likely to occur as realizations of the elements of structure initiation and response, while misapprehension along with *correction solicitor* and *appeal* (Jefferson and Schenkein 1978) are, if accepted as justifiable categories, almost certainly subdivisions of question at tertiary delicacy.

For Halliday 'shunting' backwards and forwards between and within ranks is an integral part of the heuristic process. What we have just attempted to do is redistribute the information presented in the labels and structural descriptions of side and insertion sequences in a way that will be both more enlightening and of more generality. We have ended up with the observation that at primary delicacy the two sequences are virtually identical – side sequence has the structure IRT, insertion sequence IR(T) – the other differences reported are now handled in the structure of the unit next above, whose existence has been deduced from theirs, and at tertiary delicacy in classes of the unit next below, *turn*. In so doing we have created the beginnings of a rigorous, generalizable description of discourse structure.

Ranks and levels

The lowest unit in a rank scale has, by definition, no structure, (otherwise it wouldn't be the lowest), but this doesn't mean that description necessarily stops there. Morpheme is the smallest unit of grammar and thus has no structure although, in a very real sense, morphemes do consist of phonemes or phonic substance. It is now one of the basic tenets of linguistics that there are two separate kinds of language patterning or *levels* – the phonological and the grammatical – each with its own rank scale, and the descriptive problem is to show how units at the level of grammar are *realized* by units at the level of phonology.

The unit at the highest rank in a particular level is one which has a structure that can be expressed in terms of smaller units, but which does not itself form part of the structure of any larger unit. Any attempt to

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describe structure assumes implicitly that there are certain combinations of units which either do not occur or, if they do occur, are unacceptable; such structures are classified as ungrammatical.

The corollary is that a potential unit upon whose structure one can discover no constraints in terms of combinations of the unit next below has no structure and is therefore not a unit in the rank scale. It is for this reason that sentence must be regarded as the highest unit of grammar, for, despite many attempts to describe paragraph structure and despite the obvious *cohesive* links between sentences, it is impossible to characterize paragraphs in terms of permissible and non-permissible combinations of classes of sentence. All combinations are possible and thus the actual sequence of sentence types within a paragraph depends upon topical and stylistic, but not grammatical considerations.

There are three possible outcomes to a search for linguistic patterning in spoken interaction: we may discover that all linguistic constraints end with the largest grammatical unit, the spoken sentence; we may discover that there is further grammatical patterning whose organizing principles have so far escaped discovery – this is not impossible because, although the tone group had generally been thought to be the largest unit of phonological patterning, we are now able to present evidence for the existence of one if not two larger units in the phonological rank scale (see Chapter 2). The third possibility, and the one we will attempt to justify, is that in order to describe further patterning in spoken discourse it is necessary to change *level*.

The reasons for postulating a new level, which we call *discourse*, are directly analogous to the ones given for separating phonology and grammar. Halliday (1961:243) argued that

> linguistic events should be accounted for at a number of different levels . . . because of the difference in kind of the processes of abstraction,

but he himself only considered the levels of form and substance. To these we add the level of discourse to handle language function.

In a complete analysis each level and its descriptive units handle part of the linguistic organization of a stretch of language, but there is no necessary correspondence between either the size or the boundaries of analytic units in different levels. As Halliday (ibid.:282–3) stressed, whereas

> [all] formal distinctions presuppose [some] distinction in substance . . . no relation whatsoever is presupposed between the *categories* required to state the distinction in form (grammar and lexis) and the *categories* required to state phonologically the distinction in substance which carries it.

A simple example of this fundamental principle is the plural morpheme, which, even in regular cases, is sometimes realized at the level of phonology by the unit *syllable*, horse/horses and sometimes by the unit *phoneme*,

cat/cat*s*. There are, of course, much more complex cases and it is a similar lack of fit between units that provides strong support for postulating the existence of the new level, discourse.

Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) point out that not only can one of the smallest discourse units, the act *directive*, be realized by all the primary classes of the grammatical unit clause, but also that in many cases, as the following examples illustrate, the 'directiveness' appears to derive from the occurrence of the base form of the verb irrespective of whatever other grammatical items precede it. In other words the boundary of the discourse unit directive cuts right through the grammatical unit 'verbal group' assigning 'shut' to a different category from 'can', 'could' and 'to'.

6   (i)   shut the door
    (ii) can you   shut the door
    (iii) I wonder if you could shut the door
    (iv) I want you to   shut the door
    (v)   please   shut the door
    (vi) lets   shut the door

In discussing the separation of phonology and grammar as descriptive levels Halliday argues that conflation causes added complexity and also weakens the power of the description. It would now appear that grammatical description is suffering similar problems because grammarians are unwilling to acknowledge the existence of a further descriptive level. Sinclair and Coulthard (ibid.:121) suggest that

> a reasonable symptom of the need to establish a further level [is] the clustering of descriptive features in the larger structures of the upper-most level

and observe that the clause or sentence is currently being forced to cope with most of the newly discovered linguistic complexity:

> it now has to manage intricacies of intonation selection, information organization, semantic structuring, sociolinguistic sensitivity, illocution and presupposition, in addition to its traditional concerns.

All this suggests strongly that an artificial ceiling has been reached. However, it is one thing to perceive the problem, quite another to detail the solution, and so far we can do little more than offer interesting examples rather than fully worked out solutions of how the new level can help. One area of great importance in spoken interaction is the linguistic realization of interpersonal relationships. Intonational correlates of some aspects are discussed in detail in Brazil (1978a,b, 1985/1992) and thus we will concentrate here on grammatical ones.

In the example above it is fairly evident that relative 'status' and degree of 'politeness' (see Brown and Levinson 1978) affect the choice of clause type, but it may not be as obvious that the same factors can similarly affect the choice of tense, as in examples 7(iii) and (iv) below:

7 erm I'm organizing the departmental Christmas party this year

  (i)   will you both be coming?
  (ii) could you tell me whether you and your wife will be coming?
  (iii) and I was wondering whether you and your wife will be coming?
  (iv) and I just wanted to know whether you and your wife would be coming?

There are massive problems facing any attempt to explain in grammatical terms both the inappropriateness of past time adverbs and the appropriateness and instanced occurrence of 'now' in examples like (iiia) and (iva):

  (iiia) and *now* I was wondering whether you and . . .
  (iva) and *now* I just wanted to know whether you and . . .

In coping with examples like this a description which sees tense selection as potentially a realization of a functional feature such as politeness, has considerable attraction.

From what has been said above it will be evident that we see the units of discourse as being realized by units of grammar in exactly the same way that grammatical units are realized by phonological ones, although at the moment we can do little more than discuss the nature of these discourse units; work on discovering the realization rules, or, looked at from the decoder's point of view, the interpretative rules, has hardly begun.

Meanwhile, we must show how, by adopting a three-level model, we are led to rethink the notion of *competence*. We have already suggested that the extension of a linguistic description to take in interactive discourse seems to make this rather radical step necessary.

Since 1957, competence has been related conceptually to the ability to discriminate between well-formed and deviant sentences. The application of the criterion of well-formedness has never been unproblematic, and developments in transformational/generative theory have tended to make its application more difficult rather than less so. If we consider it in relation to each of our postulated three levels in turn, we can throw some light on the problem.

Beginning with the phonological level, we note that any deviance can be recognized fairly easily, perhaps unequivocally. Initial /ŋ/, for instance, excludes any sequence of phonemes from the set of well-formed English words, as does final /h/, and sequences having certain specifiable combinations of phonemes medially are similarly excluded. Whatever the basis on which we classify the segments that enter into the phonological structures of a given dialect of English, the membership of those classes does not vary. We may, perhaps, relate this to the fact that there are physiological and physical aspects to the classification and thus the distinction between allowable and proscribed sequences is not entirely 'arbitrary' in the sense that it is observing distributional privileges.

When, however, we move to the formal level, the situation is not so simple. Admittedly, structure enables us to reject certain sequences as ungrammatical: 'cat the . . .' contravenes the rule that words of the word class [determiner] always precede the head of the nominal group. However, in the groups 'the cuddly black cat' and 'the black cuddly cat' the situation is somewhat different. 'Cuddly' is one of a large group of adjectives which belong to two separate subclasses of adjectives and it is the sequential position, before or after the colour adjective 'black' which determines the differential classification of 'cuddly' as a qualitative or classifying adjective. Here, it is his knowledge of nominal group structure that provides the hearer/reader with information about how to interpret a particular item. In fact the way in which the predictive power of the structural frame can be exploited to allocate words to classes quite different from those to which they are normally interpreted as belonging is a commonplace of literary commentary. A particularly vivid example is:

8   Thank me no thanking, nor proud me no prouds (*Romeo and Juliet*, III. v.)

but the phenomenon itself is very common. The point we are trying to make is that although the semantics of such a sentence may present difficulties, there is no real problem in providing a grammatical analysis. To recall the comparison with phonology, we may note that such exploitation is possible because items like 'cuddly', 'thank' and 'proud', as they are used conversationally, do not have a necessarily stable relationship with anything that can be objectively specified on an extra-linguistic basis. Exploitability would seem to be in inverse proportion to the stability of the relationship that is commonly assumed to hold for the word in question, a fact we can relate to the improbability of a closed-class item like 'the' being reclassified.

The intermediate position given to the formal level in our description accords with the observation that there structure sometimes separates the possible from the impossible (or perhaps more accurately, the probable from the highly improbable), but sometimes provides the basis for interpreting whatever elements actually do occur. Crossing the watershed between form and function we find a situation that complements the situation at the phonological level in an interesting way. In discourse we are concerned with an object created by the combined efforts of more than one speaker, and under these circumstances it is difficult to see how *anything* can be ruled out as 'not discourse'. To set out with the expectation that such a ruling will be possible, might, indeed, seem counter-intuitive. One speaker cannot place absolute constraints upon another speaker in any sense comparable with the way his apprehension of grammatical rules will block the production of certain sequences of elements within his own utterance. When 'mistakes' occur, and are remarked upon, they are usually of the type:

9 A: So the meeting is on Friday
   B: Thanks
   A: No, I'm asking you

where B wrongly classifies A's contribution, and rectification requires help of a metalinguistic kind from A. There is no way in which B can come to recognize the wrongness of his response by simply reflecting upon it in the way he might become aware of – and spontaneously correct – a grammatical mistake. The most promising theoretical assumption seems to be that a speaker can do anything he likes at any time, but that *what* he does will be classified as a contribution to the discourse in the light of whatever structural predictions the previous contribution, his own or another's, may have set up. To take an obvious and over-simplified example, an elicitation may get the response it predicts, or it may be followed by a totally irrelevant new initiation.

Reflection upon the latter possibility forces us to focus upon two important facts. The first is that, because of the predictive power of the structural frame, the first speaker would be likely to treat anything as a non-response only after he had failed to discern any possible relevance. Utterance pairs like

10 A: So the meeting is on Friday
    B: Tom will be back in town

where A hears B as meaning unambiguously either 'yes' or 'no' are common enough in most kinds of conversation. The absence of a deterministic relationship between form and function makes it possible for virtually any rejoinder to have coherence given the shared background of understanding of the participants. In our example, B's classification of A's utterance as an elicitation could itself have been made only on the basis of assumptions arrived at intersubjectively. It is partly because a quality of relevance, accessible only to participants, and valid only at the time and place of utterance, can attach to any utterance regardless of its form, that no generalized judgements about well-formedness in discourse can be made.

The problem of interpreting apparent non-sequiturs like (10) frequently confronts conversationalists and analysts alike. The satisfactory progress of interactive discourse depends upon participants seeing eye to eye about the classifying power of each contribution. In the case of (9) we can reasonably say that things went wrong because A's initiation is ambiguous, and because of this the misapprehension is easily rectified. Example (10) isn't so simple. B's contribution may, as we have said, fully meet the expectations of the initiation and so be seen from both participants' viewpoints as a response. There are other possibilities, however. B may have misunderstood the implications of A's initiation and so said something which, according to his own view of the state of convergence, could be a response but which A is unable to interpret as such because his view is different. Or

B may have interpreted A's comment in the way A intended but then responded on the basis of some assumed understanding which in fact was not accessible to A. Yet a further possibility is that B has exercised his option not to reply to the initiation. In a situation where both participants were fully aware of the structural implications of their own and each other's actions, B could simply have decided that, before pursuing the matter of Friday's meeting, there were other matters to consider. His re-initiation which ignores A's initiation might under some circumstances be considered rude, but his would depend on their relationship.

This brings us to the second point: if a speaker's behaviour *is* heard as deviant the deviance can be most satisfactorily characterized as deviance from a social norm. This is popularly recognized in the use of labels such as 'rude', 'evasive' and 'eccentric'. It is worth noting that, when speaker A fails to recover any coherent relationship between the two components of a pair like

11   A: Will you come for a drink?
     B: My brother's just left for the States

his analysis will reflect, among other things, his knowledge of B's manners, his drinking habits, even his state of mental health. As a linguistic event the latter's contribution simply represents one of the set of options open to him at this point in the discourse. What a competence/performance dichotomy might separate out as an 'error' must be regarded at the level of discourse as an event which has its own meaning, the latter being characterized not in terms of whatever judgements A may be induced to make of B but in terms of the prospective constraints that now apply to any rejoinder A might make.

Thus we are not arguing that interaction has no structure, but rather that the structural framework operates by classifying each successive discourse event in the light of the immediately preceding one.

FURTHER OBSERVATIONS ON EXCHANGE STRUCTURE

The definition of the exchange

Sinclair *et al.* (1972) defined the exchange as 'the basic unit of interaction' and we see no reason to disagree with this. It is basic because it consists minimally of contributions by two participants and because it combines to form the largest unit of interaction, the *transaction*. Sinclair *et al.* further suggested that there were three major classes of exchange, *eliciting*, *directing* and *informing*, whose initial moves function respectively to request a verbal response, to require a non-verbal response and to provide new information (in the most general sense of information).

This description obviously makes a very powerful claim about the nature of interaction, that there are only three basic types of exchange, a claim

which may seem all the more surprising in the light of current work in speech act theory, pragmatics and ethnomethodology where large numbers of different exchange initiators have been isolated. However, to see these descriptions as necessarily in conflict is to misunderstand the nature of the original description which, as we discussed above, spreads out complexity along the scales of rank and delicacy.

For example the category *inform* includes what in many descriptions would be distinguished as *promise*, *prediction*, *statement*, to name but three. However, in order to demonstrate that these are structurally distinct units at secondary delicacy, and not merely different semantic labels for members of the same class, it would be necessary to demonstrate that, as well as sharing many possible realizations for next move as is evident in (12) below, there is also a set of possible next moves which follow them alone; it is this crucial criterion that no one has yet been able to meet.

12	I'll be there by eight		Great
	He'll be there by eight		Are you sure
	I know he'll be there by eight		Just in time to eat

Eliciting exchanges

Sinclair *et al.* observed that in the classroom the typical eliciting exchange was not *initiation–response*, IR, but rather *initiation–response–feedback*, IRF, where the third part functions to evaluate and/or comment upon the second. It is not difficult to explain the occurrence of this structure – most teacher questions are in some sense bizarre in that the questioner usually knows the answer already, while the answerer is himself often unsure and thus genuinely needs to be told whether the answer he has offered is the answer required. In many classrooms this structure is so powerful that if there is no evaluative third part it is 'noticeably absent', and its absence a clue that the answer is wrong:

13	T, I:	Can you think why I changed 'mat' to 'rug'?
	P, R:	Mat's got two vowels in it.
	T, F:	Ø
	T, I:	Which are they? What are they?
	P, R:	'a' and 't'.
	T, F:	Ø
	T, I:	Is 't' a vowel?
	P, R:	No.
	T, F:	No.

While such three part exchanges typify, more than anything else, classroom discourse, they do occur in other situations as well:

14 M: Have you brushed your teeth yet?
    C: Yes
    M: No you haven't

though, as here, they normally presuppose an asymmetrical status relationship. For this reason such exchanges in adult–adult interaction tend to be heard as aggressive:

15 A: What time did you come in last night?
    B: About midnight
    A: No, you didn't . . .

Other descriptions of interaction appear not to have recognized a similar three-part eliciting exchange, even though our discussion of misapprehension and insertion sequences above suggests that they certainly do occur. Nevertheless we want to argue that *all* eliciting exchanges have the potential of a three-part structure, while accepting that a two-part realization may, and in the case of polar responses often does, occur. As we can see in the following General Practitioner consultation, three-part exchanges are in fact by no means uncommon, though the third move is very different in kind from that in classroom discourse:

16 Doctor, I: And what's been the matter recently
    Patient, R: Well I've had pains around the heart
    Doctor, I: Pains – in your chest then
    Patient, R: Yes
    Doctor, I: Whereabouts in your chest
    Patient, R: On the – heart side, here
    Doctor, F: Yes
    Doctor, I: And how long have you had these for
    Patient, R: Well I had 'em a – week last Wednesday
    Doctor, F: A week last Wednesday

Follow-up

At this point we will start to draw on the description of intonation outlined in Coulthard (this volume, Chapter 2) and presented in detail in Brazil (1985/1992) in order to look in more detail at the options for the third part of the exchange.

One of the teacher's major functions in responding to pupil replies is that of distinguishing right from wrong; so, and as we would expect, occurrences of high key 'yes' are frequent:

17 T: Would you say then that   P: Yes sir   T: //p ^{YES} //
      your pen was doing some work

18 T: Would you say then you're   P: energy sir   T: //p ^{YES} //
      using something

A teacher of course has more difficulty when responding to answers which are incorrect or only partially correct. Obviously he has the option of high key 'no' but seems only to use it at times of annoyance or exasperation:

19 T: What are three twos   P: eight sir   T: //p NO //

If at all possible he will use a mid key 'yes' which carries the meaning of agreement, and co-select referring tone to indicate incompleteness. Thus the move can be glossed as 'OK so far but . . .'.

20 T: can you tell me why do   P: to keep   T: //r YES //
        you eat all that food   you strong

21 T: and why would you want   P: to make   T: //r YES //
        to be strong   muscles

It is noticeable how rarely teachers use even mid key 'no' and it is instructive to look at the following occasion when it does occur.

22 T: Can you think what it means
    P: Does it mean there's been an accident further along the road
    T: //r NO //
    P: Does it mean double bend ahead
    T: //r NO //
    T: Look at the car
    P: Slippery roads
    T: //p YES //

Both teacher and pupils work hard to create a situation in which 'no' is a non-threatening, socially acceptable follow-up move. First the teacher implies that the question is a difficult one by changing from her earlier 'what is x' formulation to 'can you think what x means'; then the children respond with interrogatives which simultaneously mark the tentativeness of their answers and overtly request a 'yes/no' follow-up; finally the teacher does not select evaluative high key, but mid key and referring tone which together indicate that she is agreeing with their implied expectation that their answer is incorrect.

We have so far discussed 'yes' and 'no' co-occurring with high and mid key as options for the third move in an exchange; much more frequent, in fact, is a repetition or reformulation of the response. Teachers very often highlight part or the whole of a pupil's response by first repeating in high key, and thus marking it as important by contrast with whatever else might have been said, and then going on to produce a mid key, agreeing item:

23 T: How do you use your muscles
    P: By working
    T: //p by WOrking//p YES //

Reformulations in mid-key, where the key choice marks the item as

additional information or as a suggested, contextually meaningful, paraphrase are quite common:

24　A: What time is it
　　B: Ten o'clock
　　A: // TIME to $_{GO}$ //

and we can see the teacher in the following example exploiting the option after a high key evaluative repetition:

25　T: Why do you put petrol in
　　P: To keep it going
　　T: //p ^{to} KEEP it $_{GOing}$ //p so that is will GO on the $_{ROAD}$ //

A common option in non-classroom discourse is low key which, when co-selected with 'yes' or a pure repetition, indicates that the move is doing little more than acknowledge receipt of information.

26　D: Whereabouts in your chest
　　P: on the heart side
　　D: //p $_{YES}$ //

27　A: What's the time
　　B: ten o'clock
　　A: //p ten o'$_{CLOCK}$ //

If the speaker reformulates in low key he is indicating that he doesn't feel he is adding any new information but simply verbalizing an agreement that the two versions are situationally equivalent in meaning:

28　A: What's the time
　　B: ten o'clock
　　A: //p $_{BED}$ time //

A REVISED DESCRIPTION OF EXCHANGE STRUCTURE

The theoretical discussion presented in the first section of this chapter and the new, intonation based, analytical insights presented on pages 66–8 above have prepared the ground for a critical re-evaluation of the account of exchange structure presented in Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) and a subsequent modification of the descriptive apparatus.

In identifying formal categories for the original analysis much reliance was necessarily placed on assumed contextual meanings which derived from apprehensions about what goes on in classrooms. In so far as the categories were labelled on a semantic basis it was hardly to be expected that they would always be appropriate for other types of discourse. Moreover, it was unlikely that discourse generated in the highly institutionalized setting of the classroom would exemplify the full range of options open to interactants in other situations.

However, perhaps the most important modifications we now propose arise from a more rigorous application of the principles underlying the formulation of rank-scale descriptions. In the original description the structure of exchanges was expressed in terms of three elements I(nitiation), R(esponse) and F(eedback) and the summary formula for all exchanges I(R)(F) indicated that all well-formed exchanges consisted minimally of two and maximally of three elements.

In addition, fully aware of Halliday's arguments in favour of 'double labelling', which we rehearsed above (p. 57), Sinclair and Coulthard set up three classes of move, *opening*, *answering* and *follow-up*, to label those units which realized the elements of structure IRF.

Sinclair and Coulthard proposed five major classes of exchange and labelled them, for ease of reference, according to the class of act realizing the head of the opening move and according to whether it was a teacher or a pupil who uttered it. We present below the structure and then an analysed example of each of five classes of exchange.

1 Teacher eliciting exchange: Structure

I	with elicit as head
R	with reply as head
F	with evaluation as head

Example:
I: What's the name of this cutter?
R: Hacksaw
F: The hacksaw

2 Teacher directing exchange: Structure

I	with directive as head
R	with react as head
(F)	with evaluation as head

Example:
I: I want you to take your pen and I want you to rub it as hard as you can on something woollen
R: Activity
F: None

3 Teacher informing exchange: Structure

| I | with inform as head |
| R | with acknowledge as head |

Example:
I: Luckily, the French could read Greek
R: Non-verbal Acknowledgement

4 Pupil eliciting exchange: Structure

| I | with elicit as head |
| R | with reply as head |

Example:
I: Are the numbers for le – for the letters?
R: Yes

5 *Pupil informing exchange:*   Structure

I   with inform as head.

F   with evaluation as head

Example:

I: There's a letter missing from that up and down one
F: Oh yes, you're right, it is

A number of features of this description caused misgivings even when it was first proposed, and they have continued to be sources of trouble in subsequent work. Firstly, there seemed to be too many classes of act at primary delicacy but no obvious way of reducing them. Secondly, it was disturbing to discover that each class of move was appropriate for only one place in structure, a phenomenon for which grammatical parallels are rare. Finally, the structure proposed for pupil informing exchanges, IF, was not satisfactory, while the alternative IR seemed no better. It could have been that all three features appeared to be problems only because the descriptive task was being viewed in the light of (possibly inappropriate) expectations carried over from the study of grammar. We can, however, derive some satisfaction from the fact that the alternative description presented below, which removes these problems, seems to be more satisfactory in other respects as well.

Elements of structure

In the original description initiation and response were conceived of as complementary elements of structure; a given realization of initiation was seen as prospectively constraining the next move, while a given realization of response was thought of as retrospective in focus and an attempt to be 'appropriate . . . [to the initiation] in the terms laid down' (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975: 45). The third element of structure, labelled *feedback*, was seen as an additional element in the exchange, not structurally required or predicted by the preceding response move, but nevertheless related to it.

The category label 'feedback' turns out, in retrospect, to have been an unfortunate choice. Not only did it imply that this element, unlike initiation and response, was defined semantically; it also led, at times, to conceptualization, and even definition, in highly specific semantic terms, as an item whose function it is 'to let the pupil know how well he has performed'.

We can now see that it was this very confusion that led to the problems with pupil informing exchanges. The pupil's informing move filling the initiation slot should, by definition, require a complementary move in the response slot. However, as the item which occurred in the slot tended to be one which in fact 'let the pupil know how well he/she had performed', it was categorized semantically, not structurally, and therefore labelled as feedback. In reality, the difference between teacher and pupil informing

exchanges, which was handled in terms of exchange structure, IR as opposed to IF, should instead have been described as a difference in terms of the range of possible realizations in the response slot.

In reconsidering the three elements of exchange structure and their definitions we will now use the structural label *follow-up* for the third element. Two criteria will be used to define an element of exchange structure:

1 does the element generate constraints which amount to a prediction that a particular element will follow; and
2 has a preceding element predicted the occurrence of the element in question?

Using these criteria we can see that an initiation begins anew but sets up an expectation of a response, a response is predicted but itself sets up no expectations, while a follow-up is neither predicted nor predicting in this particular sense.

Predicting	Predicted	Move type
Yes	No	Initiation
No	Yes	Response
No	No	Follow-up
Yes	Yes	?

When we set out the definitional criteria in the form of a matrix like this, we discover a gap, and this prompts us to ask whether there is not also an element of exchange structure which is at the same time both predicted and predicting. Once we begin to search we discover that it is not in fact difficult to find pupil responses which appear to be actually looking for an evaluatory follow-up from the teacher:

T: Can anyone tell me what this means?
P: Does it mean 'danger men at work'
T: Yes

We have here, in the pupil's contribution, an element which partakes of the predictive characteristics of both response and initiation: to put it another way, we may say that it functions as a response with respect to the preceding element and as an initiation with respect to the following one. We can here make an interesting comparison with grammar, where phased predicators are frequently separated by an element of clause structure that 'faces both ways', standing as object to the first predicator and as subject to the second, for example: 'Let him go'. For much the same reason that Sinclair (1972) labels 'him' O/S, object/subject, we shall use the category R/I, response/initiation, to capture a similar double function.

It is probable that structures involving R/I are theoretically recursive, but examples seem to be rare, outside *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, and we can, by overlooking this complication, now propose an

exchange structure consisting minimally of two structural elements, always I and R, and maximally of four:

I (R/I) R (F)

Move classes

After defining the elements of exchange structure we are now in a position to demonstrate that the second worry – that it was odd for there to be three major classes of move, opening, answering and follow-up, each appropriate to one and only one position in structure – was also well founded.

When we again look to grammar for comparison we notice that at the rank of group the class *nominal* can act at four of the five places in clause structure, S, O, C, A. We also notice, relevantly, that group classes are labelled according to their most important constituent unit, noun, verb, adjective, and not according to their position in the structure of the unit above, as was done for exchange structure. We therefore propose to abandon the labels *opening*, *answering*, *feedback*, and talk instead in terms of *eliciting*, *informing*, *acknowledging* moves. The labels are, of course, merely mnemonics and had the original analysis been correct this relabelling would have made no difference. The source of confusion we wish to avoid is that labelling classes of moves according to the elements of exchange structure they realize tends powerfully to reinforce the very expectation of a one-to-one relationship that the device of 'double labelling' was intended to avoid.

Part of the earlier difficulty in analysing classroom exchanges derived from the fact that pupil informs (opening moves with an informative as head) and pupil replies (answering moves with a reply as head) both tended to be followed by the same kind of item, a move with evaluation as head. However, when we look at other forms of interaction we discover that the situation is very similar – the set of items following informs is again very similar to that following replies – and the reason is not too difficult to discover: from a lexico-grammatical point of view the items realizing informs are very similar to those realizing replies.

It is this observation which leads us to argue that the majority of exchanges are basically concerned with the transmission of information and thus must contain one informing move, which can occur either in the Initiating or in the Responding slot. In some cases one participant offers a piece of information and then wants to know, minimally, that it has been understood and hopefully accepted and agreed with – in such cases, as the IR structure makes clear, the acknowledging move is socially required. In other cases the information is elicited and then the reason for its occurrence and its interpretation should not be problematic, so an acknowledging move is not essential though it often occurs – a fact captured by the observation that in such cases it occupies the Follow-up slot.

As soon as we conceptualize the exchange in these terms, with the initiating slot being used either to elicit or to provide information and the responding slot to provide an appropriate next contribution, an inform if the I was an elicit and an acknowledge if the I was an inform, we achieve the differential relationship between slots and fillers that we have been looking for:

I ── eliciting move

R ── informing move

F ── acknowledging move
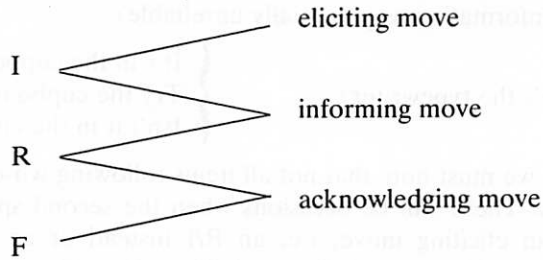
This simple representation also captures structurally the intuition that an initiating inform requires an acknowledgement whereas a responding inform does not.

It will be evident, even though this description has only been partially presented, that there will be more, though not many more, than the three move classes suggested in the original description, but this increase in complexity at move rank will be more than compensated for by a marked reduction in the number of primary classes of act.

Prospective classification

The powerful structural relationship between I and R means that any move occurring in the I slot will be heard as setting up a prediction that there will be an appropriate move in the R slot. The result is, as we briefly discussed on p. 63 above, that a speaker will make every effort to hear what follows his initiation as an appropriate response, and only in the last resort will he admit that it may be an unrelated new initiation. Thus, to take the simple case of an eliciting move in the I slot looking for information about polarity, it will classify *whatever* comes next as conveying polar (yes/no) information, if at all possible:

29 Can you come round tonight? { No
  I've got an essay to finish
  Thanks

The joke in the following example from Labov (1972) derives from the fact that Linus either fails to interpret Violet's informing move as an adequate response, or deliberately rejects the underlying assumption that age is important.

30 Linus: Do you want to play with me Violet?
   Violet: You're younger than me. (Shuts door)
   Linus: She didn't answer my question.

The same interpretative strategy is used with wh-elicitations: all the items in the response slot are interpreted as attempts to provide the required information (although in selecting an interrogative version the speaker can mark his information as potentially unreliable).

31 Where's the typewriter?
$$\left\{\begin{array}{l}\text{It's in the cupboard}\\ \text{Try the cupboard}\\ \text{Isn't it in the cupboard}\end{array}\right.$$

However, we must note that not all items following wh-elicits are informing moves. There will be occasions when the second speaker chooses to produce an eliciting move, i.e. an R/I instead of an R, which simultaneously provides potentially unreliable information, and asks, through the meaning carried by high termination, the original questioner to confirm whether the offered information is in fact correct or not:

32 A: Where's the typewriter?
   B: //p ISN'T it in the $^{\text{CUP}}$board //
   A: //p $^{\text{NO}}$ //

The limits of the exchange

In the earlier Sinclair and Coulthard version of exchange structure each move class could only occur once and thus exchange boundaries were rarely problematic. However, it has now been claimed that two eliciting moves can occur in the same exchange and it will soon be suggested that two informing moves can also co-occur. How then can one recognize an exchange boundary?

We argued earlier that the exchange is the unit concerned with negotiating the transmission of information and that it will contain an informing move at I or R. We now want to argue that the exchange only carries one (potentially complex) piece of information and its polarity, and that the information and the polarity can only be questioned and asserted once. As just presented it looks as if we are using semantic and not structural criteria, but in fact we can support and exemplify our claims structurally, for the power of the exchange is that as one progresses the available options decrease rapidly.

Before we go any further we must subdivide both eliciting and informing moves into two subclasses:

    e_1 eliciting moves which seek major information
    e_2 eliciting moves which see polarity information
    i_1 informing moves which assert major information
    i_2 informing moves which assert polarity information

We will now show that each of these moves can occur only once in a single exchange and also that they must occur in the sequence $e_1i_1e_2i_2$. We shall then have a very strong structural criterion which accounts for our intuition that when the same type of move occurs twice in succession we have an exchange boundary. Thus we recognize exchange boundaries between the following pairs of utterances even though the first exchange is structurally incomplete:

33 e_1 A: Where are you going?
    e_1 B: Why do you ask

34 i_1 A: Well, I've applied to fairly selective big, biggish civil engineering contractors
    i_1 B: Most of the people I'm applying to aren't pre-selective . . .

35 e_2 A: Would you like to come round for coffee tonight?
    e_2 B: Are you being serious

We must of course always be careful not to mis-analyse a particular linguistic realization; in (35a) below each of the alternatives offered for B could in other contexts be realizing respectively e_1, i_1, and e_2 moves, but here they are all interpretable as paraphrases of the basic i_2 realization 'yes'.

35a e_2 A: Would you like to come round for coffee tonight?
               { Who wouldn't
    i_2 B: { I'll be there by nine
               { Are you kidding

Although the most frequently occurring exchanges are the ones with the sequence e_1i_1 or e_2i_2 it is, as we mentioned above, possible to have the sequence $e_1e_2i_2$ as in example (32) above, and also i_1i_2 as in:

36 i_1 A: I think its raining
    i_2 B: //p YES//p it IS //

where, in a structure typical of classroom interaction, B proclaims the polarity of A's utterance without A suggesting it was ever in doubt. More typical, of course, following an informing move is a move indicating acceptance or understanding of the information:

36a i_1 A: I think its raining
    ack B: //p YES //p it IS //
    ack A: //p YES //

Whereas all the other moves can only occur once in a given exchange, acknowledge can, though it rarely does, occur twice, but in such cases it is almost invariably lexicalized, as in (36a) above, as a mid key 'yes' and is used by a speaker to 'pass' when it is his turn to speak and to allow the other speaker to select the next topic.

Residual problems

This new analysis of exchange structure while being intuitively more acceptable, obviously leaves several problems unresolved and creates others that apparently didn't exist before.

Informing moves

In what has gone before we have assumed and indeed implied that the distinction between class 1 informing moves and class 2 eliciting moves is unproblematic. However, there are times when it is unclear to which category an item belongs, because it is difficult to describe/delimit the boundary. For example, a high termination choice at the end of an informing move certainly constrains the other speaker to make a contribution, as in (37) and (38):

37 //r and so THEN // p i went to the ^{MARket} //   } //p REally//
38 //p its ALready ^{FREEzing} //   } //p GOSH //

and it is instructive to compare (37) and (38) with (37a) and (38a) which are unproblematically heard as elicitations.

37a //r and so THEN // p you went to the ^{MARket} //   } //p YES //
38a //p you're ALready ^{FREEzing} //   } //p SURE //

We are obviously on the borderline here – is it better to see utterances like (37) and (38), which appear to constrain the next speaker to verbalize his reaction to the information, as the most extreme type of inform, or the mildest of elicit? As the class of items which follow high termination items like (37) and (38) can also follow unproblematic informs and cannot follow class 2 elicits, it does appear more sensible to categorize (37) and (38) as informs, but there are still doubts.

Directing moves

We have so far not mentioned directing moves. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) proposed a basic two-move structure for directing exchanges in the classroom, the initiating move realized minimally by a *directive*, the responding move minimally by a react defined as the performing of the required non-verbal action. The structure allowed for the occurrence, additionally, of an acknowledgement of the directive, like 'yes sir', though actual instances are rare and confined to exchanges between a teacher and a single pupil. Indeed the following hypothetical example could only occur in a class taunting its teacher:

39 Teacher: Open your books at page 39
   Class together: //p CERtainly, sir //

In other forms of interaction, between more equal participants, acknowledgement is much more common if not absolutely compulsory and one of the ways a child can, irreproachably, indicate his annoyance at being asked/told to do something, is by performing the action in silence with no acknowledgement. Indeed, the verbal acknowledgement is overtly requested in the most frequently occurring grammatical realizations of directives – the interrogative ones:

40 could you open the window
       open the window, will you

Here the interrogative simultaneously fulfils a double role: it provides for the verbal acknowledgement and also realizes 'politeness' by allowing the directive to masquerade as an elicitation – an exploitable masquerade as children know only too well:

41 Could you just $\left\{\begin{array}{l}\text{Yes I could, but I'm a bit busy just now}\\ \text{No, I'm a bit busy just now}\end{array}\right.$

As philosophers have frequently pointed out the two major assumptions underlying directives are that the speaker has the right to ask the listener to do x and that the listener is, in the most general sense, agreeable or willing to do x. From what we know about termination, the key concord it predicts and the meanings of the choices in the key system, one would expect directives to end with a mid termination choice, looking for a mid key agreeing //p YES //, //p SUREly //, //p CERtainly //. It is thus quite fascinating to discover that most classroom directives, even those in a series and to the whole class, when no acknowledgement is possible or expected, also end with mid termination, symbolically predicting the absent agreement:

42 // FOLD your ARMS // LOOK at the WINdow // LOOK at the CEILing // LOOK at the FLOOR // LOOK at the DOOR //

Despite these interesting observations it is not clear whether it is better to regard directing moves as a separate primary class of move, or whether to regard them as a subclass of informing moves concerned with what the speaker wants B to do – certainly in terms of linguistic structure and realization the options following a directing move are remarkably similar to those following an informing move. Thus the final decision must depend on the significance attached to the non-verbal action.

Act classes

While we have argued that this new description will enable a marked reduction in the number of primary act classes, we have not yet fully worked out the new act classes, nor the way in which the primary classes will, or perhaps will not, make contact at secondary or tertiary delicacy

with the apparently more delicate, though, as we have argued above, less rigorously defined, categories proposed by other analysts.

'Exchange structure' is a revised version of Coulthard and Brazil (1979) *Exchange Structure*. The first and third sections appear very much in their original form but the second section, 'Further observations on exchange structure', has been quite radically modified because it was concerned with introducing the Brazil description of intonation, which is now presented in detail in Chapter 2 above.