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The pragmatics of communicative competence.
The case of interactions between university professors and
students.
Volume I

Tesi de doctorat dirigida per la Doctora Amparo Tusón Valls.

A la Montserrat des d'ara i per sempre

CHAPTER 0. INTRODUCTION

The present research constitutes a quest for an approach to describing language use capable of integrating the findings of disciplines such as linguistics, anthropology, sociology and philosophy within a pedagogical framework based on the concept of communicative competence. This concept is defined as the different kinds of knowledge and skills that an individual must have in order to be considered a fully integrated member of a social group.

From a theoretical point of view, the concepts and methods that are used must be considered in the light of a fairly recent tradition in language research which is known as *discourse analysis* or *conversational analysis*, the main concerns of which are (i) to discover some kind of structure in verbal interaction beyond the level of the sentence, and (ii) to establish a relationship between language and its speakers and hearers. From a methodological point of view, this tradition of scholarly research favours an inductive vs. a deductive method based on data obtained from real performance rather than from the intuitions of the linguist. This means that the language to be

analyzed will be neither regularized, nor standarized, nor decontextualised (Lyons 1968).

The interest of studies like this lies in the fact that although the concept of communicative competence is at the base of the functional-notional approach to language teaching, there have hardly been any attempts from the point of view of applied linguistics [1], to study systematically the kind of verbal moves that a speaker has to make in the course of a verbal interaction in order to produce the impression of being communicatively competent.

The idea suggested by discourse analysts such as Coulthard and Montgomery (1981), for example, according to which a verbal interaction consists of a series of moves which succeed one another following a series of rules, seems to be able to account only for some of the frequent communicative routines in which speakers become involved in their daily life. However, it cannot explain the high degree of creativity and inferencing that speakers show when interacting. Another concept that is absent from this type of description of conversational discourse is that of *context*, which must be understood not only as the

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[1]   See, for instance, Gumperz, J. et al. (1979). *Cross-talk: A study of cross-cultural communication*. England: National Centre of Industrial Language Training.

succession of moves that precede and follow a specific linguistic ___
segment, but also as all those physical and socio-cultural
constraints that affect the production of speech.

In general, when looking at foreign language textbooks one
has the impression that the Chomskyan division between
linguistic competence and *linguistic performance* has not been
overcome and that what we find in these books are samples of
communicative competence rather than *communicative
performance*, obtained through role-play sessions with a clear
pedagogical purpose and no real social outcome. What I mean
by this is that, in general both the specific pedagogical purpose
of the activity and the artificiality of the situation seem to force
the subjects to behave according to their intuitions about what
verbal interaction *should be* like rather than what it actually *is*.
The reason for the absence of natural performance data may be
that there is no well-defined methodological framework which
will allow the language pedagogue to approach natural verbal
performance on a systematic basis, while accepting the speakers'
capacity for constantly negotiating the meanings they exchange.

The idea underlying the whole research is that the verbal
means available to the competent speaker of a language are
strategically deployed following a series of requirements
having to do with social and communicative principles which are
not necessarily universal. It is through this strategic deployment
of verbal, as well as non-verbal means, that the individual will

satisfy his/her needs as a social human being.

The research will, therefore, be structured around two main concepts: interactional requirement and strategy. Through a flexible enough definition of the concept of interactional requirement and the many strategies that can be used by an individual to cope with it, the analyst and the language pedagogue should be able to effect the transition from context to actual linguistic segments. The framework proposed confronts an idea that all too often seems to be communicated to the foreign language learner, namely, that just as there are rules for establishing a one-to-one realtionship between form and grammatical and lexical meaning, there are also rules for linking form and function/notion on a one-to-one basis, thereby ignoring the capacity for inferencing and negotiation of meaning.

Besides the applied objective of providing a methodological support to the language teacher, the present research is also intended as contribution to a theory of discourse strategies within which it is possible to specify the linguistic and cultural knowledge that participants in an interaction must share in order to maintain conversational involvement and, thereby, achieve their goals. The relevance of communicative situations between university professors and students in Western societies cannot be ignored, especially if we take into consideration that the social function of the university is to train and ultimately

select certain individuals for specific social roles. By analyzing verbal interactions between individuals with a clear social role the present study must also acknowledge the influence of and its adscription to sociolinguistic approaches to language variation, style and discourse. Therefore, from this point of view, the results of the analysis can be contrasted with those obtained from other types of interactions with a similar or different structure of social roles: doctor-patient, employer-employee, shop-assistant-customer, friends, strangers, etc.

Finally, it is also important to remember that the type of analysis of language use proposed is addressed to speakers of a more or less distant culture, whose own social and communicative principles can be used as a spring-board to understand the principles that guide the use of language in the target culture. It is because of this third interest that chapter VII is dedicated to analysing the same type of speech event in a different culture. It becomes clear, in the first place, that the concepts of interactional requirement and strategy can be used to provide a rational basis for certain differences which would otherwise be considered as anecdotic or simply as fuzzy impressions. In the second place, I show how different cultures may have different definitions of the social and communicative requirements their interactions abide by. Therefore, it is also possible to claim an adscription of this research to the subdiscipline of contrastive analysis, the ultimate aim being that of providing an explanation for the specificity of certain

linguistic features which have be taught.

The study is clearly divided into two parts. The first one, including chapters I to IV, offers a review of previous research and basic concepts which leads to the proposal of an analytic framework. Chapter I is a reflection upon the two concepts which appear in the title: *pragmatics* and *communicative competence*. Chapter II reviews the main systematic approaches to the analysis of verbal interaction: sociolinguistics, conversation analysis, discourse analysis and the ethnography of speaking. In chapter III the basic concepts which will be used for the analysis are discussed and defined Chapter IV proposes the framework for analysis which will be applied in the second part of the study.

The chapters included in the second part, chapters V to IX, are devoted to the analysis of the data according to the framework proposed in the first part. Chapter V introduces the data analyzed as well as the techniques used for their collection. Chapters VI and VII deal with the English and Catalan speech events respectively. Chapter VIII takes one of the English encounters and analyzes it as a whole. Chapter IX presents, in the first place, some theoretical and methodological conclusions for the study of language use. In the second place, a series of contrasts between the two groups of encounters are pointed out. Finally, some suggestions are made about the pedagogical usefulness of the type of analysis presented.

In the next few pages of this chapter I am going to try to present in a framework of linguistic phenomena something which at first I could only define as a 'taste'. A taste is always easily perceived but not so easily defined or explained. This metaphor seems very appropriate to talk about some of the phenomena of social interaction that we all sense, but which we do not know how to define.

Before starting the kind of research I present in the coming chapters, I always had the impression that there was something 'mysterious' in my conversations with native speakers of English. It was something I could not identify, but which somehow made the interactions in which I participated different from those I could witness among native speakers of the language. My training in structural linguistics was not enough to help me identify what was happening. Of course, I made mistakes at the phonological, morphological, syntactic and lexical levels of the language, but there was still some 'residual difference' between my interactive speech and that of native speakers.

For a while I could only diagnose my speech as missing that kind of dressing that makes verbal interactions sound natural. Later on, I came to the conclusion that through my speech I was unable to do two basic things. In the first place, readings such as Goffman (1967, 1981), Gumperz and Hymes

(1972), and Brown and Levinson (1978), among others, made me aware of the fact that I was not showing myself as a member of the social group. I had very few expressions to 'work on' different degrees of politeness, for example. In general I had a hard time finding the appropriate expressions, that is those suitable to the specific situation (formal-informal, distant-affective, etc.). My second inability, I could diagnose it thanks to readings such as those by the ethnomethodological school (e.g. Schegloff 1982, Jefferson 1984, Sacks 1984). I realized that verbal interactions have a 'mechanics' of their own, that they must be understood as a 'joint venture' in the construction of textual meaning, and that every single particle can be explained in terms of strategic needs of the interactants.

In the following paragraphs, I will attempt to show how native speakers succeed in doing the kind of things I have mentioned in the previous paragraph. The analysis is intended to point out a series of linguistic strategies which are seldom made explicit and practised in the foreign language classroom. In sum, I will attempt to show the measure of detailed analysis which real speech requires if we are to capture those subtleties that make language usage sound natural or native-like.

The interactions presented below are organized into three different sets according to the task intended in each of them. The first group (1a, 1b, 1c, and 1d) have the act of *thanking* as

their central object, the second group (2a, 2b, 2c, and 2d) develop around the act of *requesting*, and the third group (3a, 3b, 3c, and 3d) takes the act of *disagreement* as the reason for the verbal encounter.

Encounters labelled a, b, and c were elicited through a series of role-play sessions which took place among native speakers of American English and native speakers of peninsular and Puerto-Rican Spanish. The participants in encounters a are both native speakers of American English. Encounters b and c involve interactions between a native speaker of American English and a non-native speaker with different levels of competence. The conversations of the d group have been taken from textbooks of current use among teachers and learners of English. The reason for such a selection was, in the first place, to show some relevant features of interactional speech, and secondly to be able to emphasize the contrasts between the way native speakers take part in an interaction and the way non-native speakers participate depending on their degree of communicative competence in American English. Finally, the inclusion of conversations from textbooks is intended to show the gaps between what really happens in an interaction and what books say happens. Only in 3d can we see some efforts made towards a more 'faithful' representation of actual speech. The possible differences in register are not an obstacle for the comparison among the four communicative activities. The reason for this is that the phenomena to be analyzed are present

in any interaction, and what changes is the participants' interpretations.

A total of four subjects took part in the role-play sessions. They were all females, aged between twenty and twenty-five. Two of them (Janice and Jana) were native speakers of American English. The other two had Spanish as their native language. Paloma was a native from Spain who had been living in the U.S. for about five years when the experiment took place. Maritza was from Puerto Rico. At the time of the experiment she had been in the U.S. for about two months, attending a special programme of English for Foreign Students. Back in her country English is the second official language. She studied it through primary and secondary education. During her higher education about 70% of the courses were taught and used textbooks in English. Janice, Jana and Paloma were enrolled in a graduate course in Linguistics together with the researcher.

Special care was taken that the task the subjects were asked to develop was one with which they were familiar, and, consequently, could not place them out of their ordinary role. Both participants were given a role-play card with some contextual information, but there was only one clear 'initiator' or participant who initiated the interaction (Janice, Paloma and Maritza). The cards contained the following information:

(a) Situation 1 (expected reaction: thanking)

"There was a change in the regular schedule for this class. Of all the people in the class nobody thought of calling you but the person in front of you."

(b) Situation 2 (expected reaction: request)

"You could not come to class last week, and you would like to have the notes from that class "

(c) Situation 3 (expected reaction: disagreement)

"Last week the person in front of you proposed the class to have only one final exam, without a mid-term. You think that it would be better to have both a mid-term and a final."

1a. Janice (J) – Jana (I) (thanking)

I- how are you doing Janice
J- where is everybody
I- oh they're not here yet
J- ____ time yet di(h)d th(h)ey
I- | [laughter]
J- oh thanks for calling me letting me
   know really I would've been sitting at home>
I- |—
>J and you would've been going on without
   me
I- yeah well I thought you had to know
   about that because I know what is like
   to come into class and then kind of be
   out of touch with everybody
J- oh God [laughter]

1b. Paloma-Jana (thanking)

P- oh hi Jana
I- hi Paloma how are you
P- fine thanks to you that I could
   get in time to class today
I- oh yeah I thought you should
   know it since you weren't here
   last week
P- oh yeah that is true – why did you
   call me ?
I- why just uh since you weren't here
   I wanted you to know that we were
   gonna be ____ to come into
   class half-hour late
P- |—
P- who who told you about my phone
   number ?
I- [laughter] I got it from the teacher
P- ah ____

1c. Maritza-Jana (thanking)

M- hi Jana how are you
J- good how are you doing
M- fine and you
J- good real good
M- thank you for for telling me
   that the class begin will begin
   ehm - oh early
J- early yeah yeah I wanted
   you to know because I didn't want
   you walk in a half-hour late since
   you know it was decided last week
   and you weren't here -
M- ok what themes that the professor
   do did

1d. Textbook (thanking)

R- Here are your coats.
K- Thanks... it's been a marvellous
   evening. It was very kind of you
   to invite us.
R- Don't mention it ... it was nice
   to see you again.
K- Well, we enjoyed ourselves very
   much
R- I'm glad ... you must come again
K- Goodnight ... and thanks again.
R- Goodnight ... and drive carefully.
   it's a very wet night.

(From: Hartley, B. and P. Viney.
1983. *Connections*. Oxford: Oxford
University Press)

2a. Janice (J) - Jana (I) (request)

J- Jana were you here last week ?
I- yeah
J- yeah uh I didn't make it last week
[laughter] do you think I could -
take a look at your notes from
them ?
I- oh sure, I don't know that I took
a whole ... uh
J- it's alright, your _____ is
more legible than mine
I- [laughter] we just went over a few
of the chapters uhm I dont know if
you've been keeping up with some of
these, it's hard to
J- not too bad (marked inton.: fall-rise)
I- keep up with them as much as we
should _____ but yeah you can take>
J- | _____
>I a look at them and copy it down
you know the information if you>
J- | ok
>I want_____
J- yeah would you rather I do that
or would it be easier if I took them
and xerox them or something
I- uhm that'd be ok too and you can just
give them back to me next week _____>
J- | c>___>
>I _____then
>J no problem
J- ok
I- ok ?
J- great, thanks

2b. Paloma-Jana (request)

P- Jana you know something ? I wasn't
here last time so uh could I borrow
your notes?
I- oh sure no problem you can just you>
P-   because
>I know I'll give them to you and you
can just give them back to me next
week
P- you don't mind don't you
I- oh no not at all, that's fine
P- | ok because I know
some people do, you know
I- [chuckles] no problem
P- thanks

2c. Maritza-Jana (request)

M- Jana I need the notes of the
- the class last week if you can
J- class last week? | ok
yeah I've got them here uh do you
want just to take them on tonight
and copy them and give them back
to me next week ?
M- do you need the notebuk notebook ?
J- uh I just you know I don't have it
in a binder. I can just give you
the notes from last week and you
can just give them _____
M- | I can I can copy if you want
if you need the notebuk, the notes
J- ok no uh just give them back to me
next week _____
M- ok thank you
J- | ok ?

2d. Textbook (request)

X- Debby, I want to ask you a big
favor. I was wondering if I could
borrow your car Saturday night, I
have to go to my cousin's wedding
and it's twenty miles from here.
D- What time do you need it ?
X- Around 7:00.
D- That's fine. I won't be using it
Saturday night.
X- Thanks a lot I really appreciate.

(From: Reinhart, S.M. and I. Fisher.
1985. Speaking and Social Interaction.
Englewood Cliffs, NJ.: Prentice Hall)

3a. Jens (I) - Jens (I) (disagreement)

J- Jens were you the person last last week who said that they just wanna have a final exam?

I- yeah I did uh I don't know I'm just really not that excited about doing a mid-term and a final you know I mean the mid-term doing it on that what was it the Gung-Ho? uh - I'm not really sure that the I know enough to really analyse it =

J- = yeah well it's maybe not the greatest subject in the world but it shouldn't be that hard and it would kind of spread out the grade a lot more

I- well that's true but uh - and I I guess it would help us to know how she you know tests and all that but - I don't know just was a little apprehensive about it I I kind of like to have just one final ...

J- | I don't know I hate leaving everything build up at the very end because there are so many tests then....that

I- well that's true but you know we've got our projects too that will be taking some of the grade and and being a large>

J- | yeah

>I part of .....

J- | yeah I guess we'll probably take a vote I don't know

I- yeah

3b. Poluma-Jens (disagreement)

P- were you the one that said the other day that we shouldn't have a mid-term or something?

I- yeah I I brought that up when we were talking about it in class last week because uh ....

P- |___ [w]hy do why do you think so?

I - well I prefer just have one final uh I think with our projects and then a final that that's enough to be graded on I really don't have the time to study right now for mid-terms because I got so many others in my other classes

P- you know I ___talk about that sort of term like mid-term and final so that is not something new for me you know so I thought we

I- |yeah

P- were gonna have two terms instead of one

I - yeah well that's you know I mean it's ___ something new for me >

P- |yeah

>I but I just I just prefer not to have it that's one last thing I have to say for it [chuckles]

P- yeah anyway

3c. Maritza-Jens (disagreement)

M- Jens I am not I am not according with the idea that our class-mates ch propo proposed ch the last the last week because I want - have one mid-term and one final test i think that is better to have two oh two tests oh because the material will>

I- |mhm

>Maecenas accumulated

I- | accumulated yeah yeah

M- what do you think?

I- well uh yeah you weren't here last week when we discussed that were you? I I asked to have just one final b e c a u s e uh I felt that with the project that we are doing and the participation and stuff that I prefer just one and I'm I'm just so overloaded now with studies and stuff that I don't have time to study for you know and prepare for a mid-term - and then a final too [chuckles]

M- but do you think that the f[in the] final test will be -

I- too much?

M- ___ too much or

I- uhm

M- ...

I- well that is a - concern you know I understand what you're saying it'd be better to find out - how the term and what kind of things she's looking for - from us but - I don't know uhm I'm just - kind of thought that it would be nice just to go through it once [chuckles]

M- | oh the teacher will tells us if

I- |yea

3d. Textbook (disagreement)

S- (...) most of the people in the country have got a far better standard of living and we're just coming to terms with it .. um , it's ..

M- Well, yes I , I agree .. I mean you've got a point that, that people have got a better standard of living, but you're living in a fool's paradise, if you think that that can continue

S- Oh, really ?

R- Come off it, Mike. I, I disagree I think that if (...) people

(From: Jones, L. (1977) 1978. *Functions of English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)

Taking part in a conversation is one of our daily tasks which we seldom stop and consider in detail. We rarely think of it as the result of learned knowledge and skills. Nevertheless, this unawareness can become uncovered when we are faced with the need to participate in a conversation taking place in a culture other than our own, abiding by a different set of beliefs, conventions and expectations, developing in different circumstances, and using a different linguistic code.

Conversations have their own 'mechanics', susceptible to being adapted to the specific socio-cultural context. The decision to analyze how a 'successful' conversation is attained is a basic requirement if we want to train people not just to be able to convey messages but also to behave in a specific society causing the least disrupture in it.

What happens during a verbal encounter can be expressed by means of three tasks each of the participants is responsible for: (i) **cooperate**, (ii) **play the game**, and (iii) **get the message through**.

In the first place entering a conversation means starting or continuing a relationship with another person. It also means behaving according to certain social, ethical principles such as solidarity and politeness, and, finally, assuming that the other person(s) expect(s) to live a life as happy as possible. **Cooperation** is the key concept which summarizes all the participants' efforts made around those principles and

assumptions. Secondly, conversations take place between two or more people, under certain circumstances and limitations of the people themselves and of the surroundings. Because of this, the participants must follow certain basic rules to achieve an orderly and efficiently organized task. This is what I define as **playing the game**, alluding to Wittgenstein's notion of language-game, which must be understood as the indefinite variety of speech events that humans can invent (Wittgenstein, 1958). Finally, every conversation has a purpose even though sometimes this purpose may just be 'passing the time'. In order to achieve that purpose messages must be exchanged and negotiated and this requires the participant to concentrate some of his/her efforts on expressing the message(s) in a clear and coherent way. This is the task defined as **getting the message through**.

COOPERATING

Participants in an interaction are required to ensure that the physical act of conveying and receiving information takes place in favourable circumstances of receptiveness and willingness to contribute. They must acknowledge, more or less explicitly, both the social reality surrounding the interaction and, in the end, the social nature of the human beings with their need to be part of a community.

Cooperation imposes certain restrictions on how a subject should be treated, mainly because of the possible danger of giving an image of self contradictory with the principle. In encounters 3a and 3b we can see that even though Janice and Paloma knew for sure that Jana had suggested having just one final exam, they still introduce the topic with a tentative question, thus avoiding an excessively aggressive tone:

(3a) J—   Jana were you the person last last
week who said that they just wanna
have a final exam ?

(3b) P—   were you the one that said the
other day that we shouldn't have
a mid-term or something ?

We see, on the other hand, how Maritza, the less competent speaker, does not realize the need of providing a preface either in set 3 (3c) or in set 2 (2c).

There is a constant effort on both parts to avoid direct confrontation. This is done by prefacing the turn with expressions which seem to support the previous speaker's argument. Examples of this phenomenon appear especially in set 3, where what is at stake is the expression of opposite opinions.

> (3a) J– yeah well it's maybe not the greatest
> subject in the world but

> (3a) I– well that's true but uh – and I I
> guess it would help us to know how she
> you know tests and all that but

> (3b) I– yeah well that's you know

> (3c) I– (...) I understand what you're saying it'd be

This is not the case, however, with the non-native speakers. In 3c Paloma's response to Jana's confirmation that it was her who proposed to have just one final exam could be interpreted as highly confrontational, in the sense that it may be understood as questioning Jana's capacity of decision

> (3b) I– yeah I I brought that up when we
> were talking about it in class
> last week because uh .. ....
> P. |.... |why do why
> do you think so

The confrontational nature of 3c is established very explicitly from the very beginning of the encounter,

> (3c) M- Jana I am not I am not according
> with the idea that our classmates
> eh propo proposed (...)

The fact that Maritza is attributing the proposal to the classmates instead of to her addressee (and the role-card is very clear in that Jana was the one who made the proposal!) shows that she is aware of the potential danger of direct confrontation but she is just unable to find other expressions which, without breaking the maxim of sincerity, would be useful for the goal intended.

The favoured image of self is one that accepts and respects other people's opinions and allows for a rectification whenever necessary. Reducing the degree of assertiveness is one very efficient way of showing this attitude. This can be done by showing some insecurity in the assertion or by prefacing it with a parenthetical expression indicating that what is said is not a general statement but rather a personal point of view

(3a) I-   yeah I did uh *I don't know* I'm just

(3a) I-   (...) I I *kind of* like to have just
           one final

(3b) I-   (.) uh *I think* with our projects and then
           a final that that's enough

(3c) I-   (...) I don't know uhm
           I'm just–*kind of thought* that it
           would be nice

Hesitations and insecurities are a characteristic part of natural speech. Examples such as those presented above should not be considered as unconscious reactions but, on the contrary, as part of the set of devices the competent speaker has available to give a not-excessively assertive presentation of self. Curiously enough, of the three dialogues selected from textbooks only 3d sho vs this kind of phenomena.

Another aspect involved in cooperation is that of reducing the demands placed on the other(s), that is to say, taking into consideration their negative face (i.e. the right not to be imposed). Requests can certainly be made, but special care must be taken so that they are not seen as an arbitrary imposition. This is done by (i) expressing them in an indirect way and (ii) by providing a justification. In the example below we can see both strategies being used at the same time:

(2a) J-   yeah uh I didn't make it last week
           [laughter] do you think i could
           take a look at your notes from
           then ?

(2b) P-   Juna you know something? i wasn't
           here last time so uh could I borrow
           your notes ?

When we compare the two previous ways of requesting with the way Maritza realizes the speech act (2c), the difference

in directness is clear. In spite of the fact that she later becomes aware of it, we cannot help interpreting her request as arbitrary (not providing a justification) and imposing (a statement about her needs instead of a question),

(2c) M-   Jana I need the notes of the
       - class last week if you can

One last aspect of cooperation consists of knowing how and when to close a possibly conflicting line of argumentation:

(3a) J-   yeah I guess we'll
       probably take a vote I don't know

(3b) P-   yeah anyway

(3c) M   ok the teacher will tell us if

PLAYING THE GAME

Apart from the fact that conversation is the most common way of exchanging information, it is also necessary to consider it as a special kind of activity, successfully developing thanks to the participants' knowledge and skill in following a series of rules which ensure the game-like nature of the activity.

One of these rules is participating. What is meant by this is that the conversionalist must constantly make explicit his/her attention and willingness to contribute. In the following example Janice has already accomplished her goal of expressing a request, nevertheless she must still 'fill out' her corresponding turns, in spite of the fact that she is not being asked to contribute:

(2a) I-   oh sure, I don't know that I took
           a whole lot uh
      J-   it's alright, you .... is
           more legible than mine
      I-   [laughter] we just went over a few
           of the chapters uhm I don't know if
           you've been keeping up with some of
           those, it's hard to
      J-   not too bad

Very often this same task is reduced to providing just some feedback signals to keep the channel open:

(3b) P-   (...) for me you know so I thought we >
      I-   [yeah
      >P   were gonna have two terms

(3c) M-   midterm and one final test I think
           that is better to have two eh two
           tests eh: because the material will >
      I-   mhm
      >M   be accumulate accum accumulated

This is another feature which is absent from most of the dialogues presented in textbooks (see 1d and 2d). We see the participants investing their tu as exclusively with an informative function destined to contribute directly to the achievement of their own goals. The function of these back-channel signals is not goal-directed but means-directed, that is, they are not loaded with pragmatic meaning but rather they serve to maintain the dialogic nature of the interaction.

In general, conversationalists must avoid inactivity, a term which in conversation must be translated as silence. In cultures such as the one the language of which we are analyzing (mainstream American), fluency of speech is one index of presentation of self. This is the reason why the use of 'fillers', with very little pragmatic force, can be appreciated not only at the level of the encounter but also at the level of the turn. These particles help to avoid periods of apparent verbal (and mental) inability, maintaining at the same time the rhythmic nature of the discourse,

(2a) J- *yeah uh* I didn't make it last week

(3b) I- yeah well that's *you know I mean*

Expressions such as those emphasized should be very useful to non-native speakers when they are faced with problems of lack of knowledge of the system. The immediate provision of the

correct version of the form or the appearance of a pause can undermine the impression of fluency which native-speakers may sometimes expect even of non-native speakers.

> (3c) M-   Jana i am not I am not according
>   with the idea that our classmates
>   eh propo proposed eh the last the
>   last week because I want - have one
>   midterm and one final test I think
>   (...)

Lack of the required information at a certain stage in the encounter may also be a cause of disrupture in the smooth development of the activity. We realize that the expert language user has some devices available to avoid the occurrence of these situations. Sometimes a 'generalizing expression' is used (allowing for some ambiguity). In some other cases the lack of information is explicited but the development of the conversation is not halted. Of the examples below the first two refer to the former solution (i.e. 'generalizing expression') and the third one refers to the latter solution (lack of information is made explicit).

> (3a) I-   (...) it would help us to know how she
>   you know tests *and all that* but

> (3c) I-   (...) I felt that with
>   the project that we're doing and
>   the participation *and stuff* that I

(3a) I-   (...)I mean the mid-term doing it on
            that *what was it the Gung-Ho* ? uh –

Any activity has an opening stage and a closing stage, and
the participants must know how to behave during those stages.
The opening stage is usually characterised by some introductory
work in which one of the participants demands the attention of
the other(s) and presents the topic. In encounters 1a and 1b the
opening phase consists of the usual exchange of greetings. In 2a,
2b, 2d, 3a, and 3b we can appreciate clearly how this
'introductory work' is done by looking at the first turn in each
of them. Closing the encounter requires some explicit marking.
In interactions where one of the participants has a specific goal
to accomplish, it is generally that same participant the one who
initiates and closes the conversation. In the case of the request
(set 2) the four encounters are closed with the expression of
gratefulness from the person requesting. In the disagreement
(set 3) it is always the initiator who stops the
argument–counterargument progression by appealing to some
external source of decision (i.e. voting, the teacher).

GETTING THE MESSAGE THROUGH

The first and perhaps most important element in an encounter is the fact that there is a message to communicate. Conveying a message does not only require a knowledge of the linguistic code at the grammar level but also at the level of discourse. What is mainly at stake is constructing a 'text' as coherent as possible. This can be achieved basically by progressively developing a topic or a point of view and marking any movements away from and back to that topic. This is how Schiffrin (987) explains the use of "well" at the beginning of non-preferred turns, that is turns which do not support what the previous speaker said but rather oppose it. We can see this very clearly in set 3 where the main task is disagreement. The contrast between a supportive and a non-supportive act can be seen very well in the following example, where I begins the turn with a non-supportive act and then switches into a supportive one the first act is preceded by "well" together with a conjunction with an adversative meaning, the second one by "and":

> (3c) I- *well* that's true *but* uh - *and* I I
>   guess it would help us to know how she

The expert language-user has some other tools available to manage topic. Sometimes a message needs to be rephrased

either because the addressee is giving signs of lack of understanding or because the relevance of what has been said requires certain insistence. "I mean" is the marker signalling that what is coming next is a variation on the same message.

(3a) I-   (...) I'm just
            really not · that · excited about
            doing a mid-term and a final you
            know *I mean* the mid-term doing it on

(3b) I-   yeah well that's you know *I mean*
            it's ..... something new for me

The participants also run the danger of entering into digression and then having to go back to the main topic of the encounter:

(2a) I-   keep up with them as as much as we
            should .... *but yeah* you >
     J- |.......
     >I   can take a look at them and copy it

Part of the ability to convey a message consists of knowing how to emphasize certain aspects of it and attitudes of the speaker. This can be done by altering the syntactic structure of the sentence. In 3a and 3b we have two initial questions phrased in a indirect way which could be perfectly expressed by means of

a direct question (i.e. 'did you say you didn't want a mid-term exam?'). The question as it appears in the encounter implies a absence of planned intentionality which helps avoid confrontation.

Another way of emphasizing specific aspects is the addition of words such as "just" and "really":

(2a) i-   (...) you can *just*
            give them back to me next week

(3a) I-   (...) I'm *just*
            really not that excited about

Some of the expressions we use, because of their common appearance in speech have become somehow devoid of their original semantic force. This is the reason why "emphasizers" such as those mentioned above are needed. One more example is the use of "sure" instead of "yes" (or "yeah") (2a). Jana in this case wants to show her positive disposition towards fulfilling Janice's request, 1at is why she uses "sure", a more expressive word than "yeah".

The absence from the speech of Maritza (especially) and Paloma of particles and expressions such as those emphasized in this section also contributes to making their speech sound 'non-native'.

The analysis has shown some conversational phenomena which are rarely dealt with in the language classroom. The complete transcription of the conversations should allow the reader to evaluate the relevance of the features mentioned and see them in relation to the whole discourse context. The fact that most of these characteristics cannot be found in either the dialogues belonging to two of the textbooks (1d, 2d) or in the speech of the speaker with least exposure to real interactions makes one think of the possibility that the former circumstance is responsible for the latter. Maritza, after so many years of studying English as a second language, is still missing many of the features that constitute communicative competence. One reason for this could be the fact that at no stage of her learning process was she made aware of them.

PART A

CHAPTER I. PRAGMATICS AND COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

1.0. Introduction

This chapter is intended to define as well as explain the relationship existing between the two concepts included in the title of this dissertation. In the first section I will review two different ways of understanding the concept *pragmatics*, and I will reflect upon the consequences of adopting a pragmatic approach to language. In the second section I will introduce the concept of communicative competence and its connection with spoken interaction and strategies of language usage The third section will deal with the implications of taking into account spoken interaction in a general theory of language and in language pedagogy.

1.1. The notion of "pragmatics"

In the first place, in order to reach a clear enough definition of pragmatics to enable the study of specific aspects of language, it is necessary first to delimit in a way as precise as possible the scope of the concept as used in the present research. The term *pragmatics* has its etymological origin in the Greek word *pragma*, which means *acting, action, activity*. In this sense, the phenomena studied by this discipline have to do with human action in general. However, the present research will be circumscribed to those human actions in which language is the main instrument. In this sense our understanding of the notion fits in with the philosophical tradition of Wittgenstein, Austin and Searle and Habermas rather than with the tradition of the first scholars who used the concept, i.e. Peirce and Morris, for whom the field of study of *pragmatics* included any aspect of the many possible semiotic systems that had to do with context and use.

The second point to be made is that following Chomsky (1980: 224) we conceive the notion of linguistic competence as involving two different kinds of knowledge. On the one hand, there is the knowledge of the potential forms, combinations and meanings of the different components of the linguistic system, which is known as *grammatical competence*. On the other hand, there is the "knowledge of the conditions and manner of

appropriate use, in conformity with various purposes"; this would be the area covered by *pragmatic competence*. Chomsky's definition of *pragmatic competence* succeeds in capturing two of the "most promising" aspects for a definition of pragmatics (Levinson 1983: 32): (i) the study of those aspects of meaning not captured in a semantic theory based on truth-conditions; (ii) the study of the relations between language and context that are essential to explain the process of verbal communication.

In spite of Chomsky's dichotomy between grammatical and pragmatic competence, it is important to clarify that when we talk of two different types of competence we do not want to suggest that language acquisition, and language use in general, involves the learning and handling of two discrete systems of rules, one independent from the other. On the contrary, since language is never acquired detached from a specific context of use, grammatical competence and pragmatic competence should be viewed as two different perspectives from which to approach the study of language (Verschueren 1987). On the one hand, there is a purely descriptive, structural approach based on a concept of language as an innate biological function of the mind. The aim of this approach is to provide a description of language based on a series of rules with the lowest degree of complexity and the highest explanatory power. On the other hand, there is what Verschueren calls the pragmatic perspective. According to this author, pragmatics must not be considered as the upper level of linguistic competence which is to account for

all those aspects of grammatical competence that have been left unexplained. Rather, it involves conceiving language use in terms of the role of language in the lives of human beings (cognition, society, culture). Using language, for Verschueren, involves making linguistic choices, (i) more or less consciously, (ii) for linguistic or extralinguistic reasons, (iii) at every level of linguistic structure, and (iv) from variety-internal options or from options arising from socially, geographically, and/or functionally distributed types of variation. This is the definiton of pragmatics which must be assigned to the title of this dissertation: a study of language use from the point of view of the options available to the speaker at the moment of uttering a segment of talk, and bearing in mind the motivations and the consequences of making a specific choice. It is worth pointing out that the two perspectives are not incompatible as ways of describing the same sort of product: language. Thus, the same stretch of language is susceptible to being described in two different ways: (i) as the product of an underlying innate mental rule organising sounds to convey certain information; and (ii) as the product of the speaker's efforts to adapt to context, understood from a very inclusive point of view.

In the fourth place, this notion of pragmatics is based on an idea of context which incorporates (i) the spatial and temporal parameters of the speech event, (ii) the identities, beliefs, intentions, states and knowledge of the participants and of the rest of the members of the speech community in which

the speech event takes place, and (iii) the linguistic or discourse environment.

1.2. Communicative competence

1.2.1. Communicative competence and spoken interaction

The concept of communicative competence has been very often associated with spoken interaction. D. Hymes, the anthropologist who first introduced this concept in response to the notions of linguistic *competence* and *performance* proposed by Chomsky, uses the following words to justify the need to explain language in a different framework to Chomsky's *linguistic competence*:

> We have then to account for the fact that a child acquires knowledge of sentences, not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate. He or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner. In short, a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishment by others. (1971: 277; my emphasis)

The same emphasis on spoken interaction is found in Gumperz (1982a: 209), a sociolinguist who worked very closely with Hymes, when he defines communicative competence as "the knowledge of linguistic and related communicative conventions that speakers must have to create and sustain conversational cooperation" (my emphasis).

It is necessary to mention, however, that whenever applied linguists have become interested in the process of learning a language, they adopt the more general concept of *use* or *communication* instead of concentrating exclusively on spoken interaction. Thus, we find definitions of communicative competence like the following two: (i) "the underlying systems of knowledge and skills required for communication" (Canale and Swain 1980, cited in Canale 1983: 5); (ii) "It [communicative competence] is now the recognized goal of language instruction for students to acquire not only the lexicon, syntax, and phonology of the target language but also the rules for the appropriate use of these linguistic resources." (Wolfson 1983: 82).

The reason for the study of spoken interaction as one of the best means to uncover the kind of tacit knowledge social members possess in order to communicate is that it is in the everyday encounters where the social and cultural premises ruling a social group become more apparent. This is a fact that was already pointed out in 1932 by the anthropological linguist E. Sapir (1932: 151):

> The true locus of culture is in the interaction of specific individuals and, on the subjective side, in the world of meanings which each one of these individuals may unconsciously abstract for himself from his participation in these interactions.

Apart from the theoretical grounds for taking verbal interaction as the basis for the description of communicative

competence, there is still a methodological reason which justifies the relevance of this type of communication. This has to do with the nature of the knowledge involved in communicative competence and the ways in which it is implemented, both of which are not readily accessible to our own introspection. This knowledge has to be inferred through the analysis of the outcomes of actual communicative events. It is only through the detailed study of the structures and patterns in a conversation that the analyst is able to corroborate the felicity of his/her inferences about their function (Schiffrin 1988: 251).

1.2.2. Communicative competence as learned strategies

The term conversational strategies has been frequently used in the interlanguage literature referring to the devices second-language learners develop in order to avoid breakdowns in communicating in the target language (Corder 1967, Nemser 1971, Selinker 1972). Our use of the term will place special emphasis on the goal, that is, on the devices used to make communication as smooth and effective as possible. Miscommunication does not only appear when the rules of the language system have not been completely internalized (cf. Tarone, Frauenfelder and Selinker 1976). Very often miscommunication takes place when the speaker, in spite of using the code correctly, does not succeed in conveying his/her

attitude and/or purpose, or the addressee does not understand the message the way it was intended. Since communication is a cooperative enterprise, one must suppose that speakers need to adopt both productive and receptive strategies in their first and second or third language

> "It is now fairly clear that all language users adopt strategies to convey their meaning, but we are only able more or less rapidly to perceive these when the speaker is not a native speaker." (Corder 1978:15)

In talking about speakers planning certain actions to be undertaken in order to reach a goal, it may also be useful to draw a distinction between knowledge about appropriate actions and knowledge about the appropriate ways of linguistically encoding those actions. This is the distinction that Edmonson (1981a) establishes between 'social' and 'communicative' competence respectively. Communicative competence, for Edmonson, is concerned with the encoding, decoding and sequencing of central communicative acts. This includes mastery of the linguistic code (phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon) together with the function (speech act) expressed. However, the use of this communicative competence depends on the individual's social competence. What we mean by this is that social competence conditions the decisions as to which rules of communicative competence should be used in every specific situation. The rules of social competence are as rigid, if not more so, as those of communicative competence. They are fixed by the norms of social behaviour operating in a particular

speech community, which ..ative speakers learn through the process of education. People differ in the degree of social competence they possess, and in this hierarchy the non-native speakers of the language with little exposure to the life of the community are the most defenceless, since their norms of social behavior are those of the community where they were educated. The way he understands language use can be schematically represented in the following way:

```
┌─────────────────┐        ┌─────────────────┐
│ COMMUNICATIVE   │        │ SOCIAL          │
│ COMPETENCE      │        │ COMPETENCE      │
└────────┬────────┘        └────────┬────────┘
         │                          │
┌──────────────┐   ┌─────────────┐   ┌─────────────┐
│ LINGUISTIC   │───│ FUNCTIONS   │───│ SITUATION   │
│ CODE         │   │ (language   │   │ (language   │
│              │   │ pragmatically│   │ situationally│
│              │   │ adequate)   │   │ appropriate)│
└──────────────┘   └─────────────┘   └─────────────┘
```
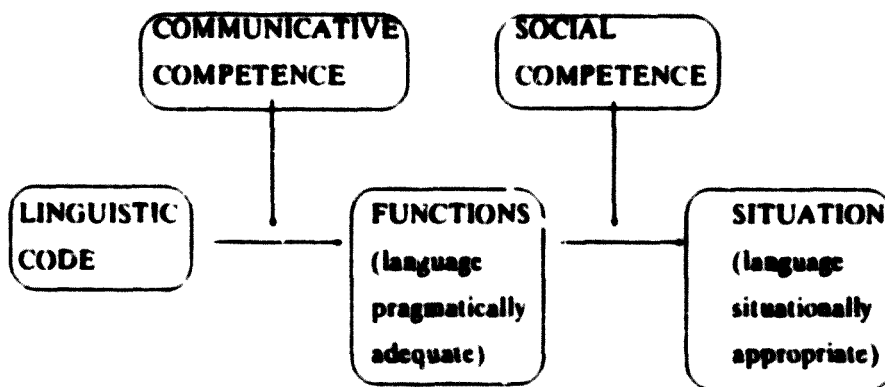
The same distinction between communicative and social competence is emphasized by Romaine (1984: 3):

> Since there are some aspects of competence which are more purely linguistic than others, it is important not to conflate a sociolinguistic theory of communicative competence and a more general sociopsychological theory of action or human behaviour, of which the former is part.

Although these norms of social behavior in some cases seem of a purely ritualistic nature in the sense that they convey

very little referential meaning, their absence may be 'catastrophic' in terms of the outcome of the conversational event (Ferguson 1976). It might be seen by the members of the community as an attempt to break the social harmony.

1.3. The linguistic interest in spoken interaction

1.3.1. Sociolinguistics and spoken interaction

Sociolinguistics as a field in the science of language is probably as old as linguistics itself (I am thinking of linguistics as an independent discipline, and of Ferdinand de Saussure as its founder). One only needs to think of the numerous dialectologists in the XIXth century to realize that there has always been a preoccupation to describe a language as it is actually used and in terms of the community of speakers using it. In the mid-60s and early 70s people like Labov in the U.S. and Trudgill in Great Britain started to look at language variation and how it related to social rather than geographical variables (Labov 1967, 1973; Trudgill 1972,1974). At present, there seems to be a great deal of emphasis on the relationship between language and gender as a social variable (McConnel-Ginet et al. 1980).

In spite of efforts like those mentioned above, it was mainly through the work of anthropologists like Hymes and

sociologists like Garfinkel that the fact that "language is not simply a means of communicating information but also a means of establishing and maintaining relationships with other people" (Trudgill 1986:13) was seen as a key area of systematic analysis for all those who wanted to understand the nature of language. They also postulated that it is mainly through spoken interaction that this aspect of language can best be appreciated.

The main effort of most of the research on spoken interaction in the area of sociolinguistics has been concentrated on finding regularities in conversation which would allow the formulation of a 'theory of language variation'. The linguistic output by two or more people in a social encounter is seen as the product of their individual characteristics together with the respective goals they expect to achieve through the interaction, and all this taking place in a specific context/situation. These three components (i.e. individual characteristics, goals and context/situation of the speaker) are the variables according to which the speaker will adopt one set of strategies or another, that is, strategies which will make his/her contributions effective and socially acceptable as well.

Among the speaker's individual characteristics we can distinguish between ascribed and acquired features. Ascribed features are those over which the individual has the least control because they are assigned by birth (e.g. age, sex, ethnicity and region). Acquired characteristics depend on the individual's

process of socialization (e.g. role, status, personality features and experiential knowledge). The variable 'function' refers to the purpose of the speaker in approaching the other person (e.g. to ask for something, to appear sociable, etc.) and, also, to the outcomes of the interaction. By context/situation we mean the physical reality in which the speech event is taking place. The components of this variable are (i) 'the setting' (spatial and temporal parameters), (ii) 'the addressee' (the other participants in the interaction, with all their ascribed and acquired individual characteristics), (iii) 'the medium' (the discursive context and the channel of communication), and (iv) the socio-cultural context in which the interaction is taking place.

```
┌─ SITUATION ─┐ ┌─ SPEAKER ────┐
│ - setting   │ │ - ascribed features │
│ - addressee │ │ - acquired features │
│ - medium    │ │              │
│ - society/culture │ │          │
└─────────────┘ └──────────────┘

(SPEAKER) → ( LANGUAGE ) ──── ( CONVERSATIONAL ) → (OUTPUT)
            ( SYSTEM   )      ( STRATEGIES      )
                            │
                      ( FUNCTION )
```
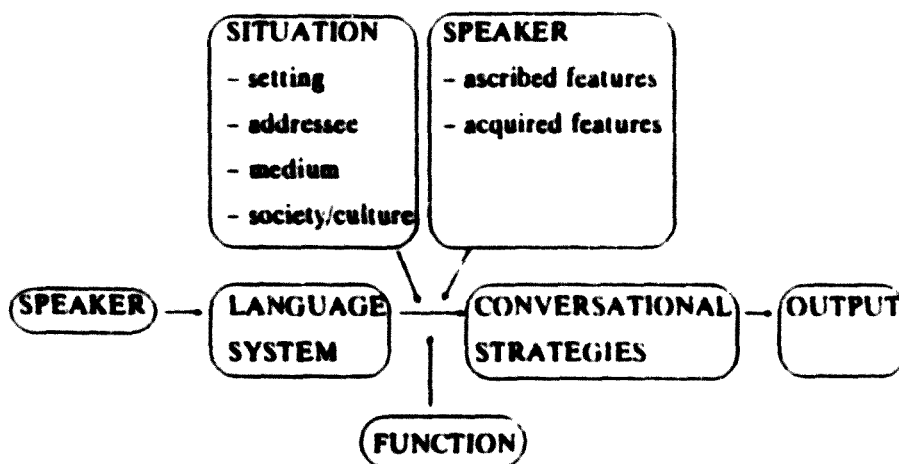
The variables affecting the choice of strategies are not independent of each other and, as will be seen in the analysis of

the data, they may influence one another. Thus, we might have the case where the status of the addressee has 'forced' a change of topic or purpose, or viceversa, a case where the addressee is chosen in terms of the purpose of the speaker.

1.3.2. Spoken interaction in a general theory of language

The interest in spoken interaction in the field of linguistics appears as a reaction to the sentence-unit model used in Generative Grammar. There is a progressive awareness that in order to achieve a valid explanation for certain linguistic phenomena the notion of context must be incorporated into a theory of language (Bernárdez 1982). *Context* includes both the linguistic and extralinguistic reality surrounding the unit of speech which is the object of study.

The division between linguistic and extralinguistic context seems to be very significant when defining and evaluating different approaches to language use. Ethnography of communication and pragmatics study the relationship between language and socio-cultural patterns and situational features respectively, whereas discourse analysis and textual linguistics tend to concentrate on the mechanisms through which a segment of speech (larger than the sentence) becomes a unit in itself with a characteristic structure.

In making a distinction between textual analysis and discourse analysis, Bernárdez (1982) states the fact that textual analysis is confined mainly to continental Europe and in most cases constitutes an extension of the T-G theoretical framework to account for larger units of language. Discourse analysis, on the other hand, has developed an empirical approach to the study of the spoken text rather than a theoretical one. Furthermore, there is a shift from deductive to inductive explanation.

Conversation is nothing but text, in which structure and unity appear as clearly as in written text. The difference in the case of conversation is that it allows for the opportunity to check the effectiveness of the attempts of both speaker and listener to organize their communication. The outcome of the conversation will depend on how successful they are in carrying out this organizing task. Communication can fail for several reasons – lack of mastery of the linguistic code, non-shared social background, deficiencies of channel, etc. – but one very important cause of miscommunication is the inability to implement structure on a text. Widdowson (1979) remarks the importance of structure in discourse by resorting to the distinction between cohesion and coherence.

RULES OF USAGE
(linguistic competence
in the Chomskyan sense)

RULES
(the speaker's knowledge
of the language code)

RULES OF USE
(knowledge of speech acts)

COHESION
(related to rules of usage)

PROCEDURES
(use of rules in actual
communication)

COHERENCE
(related to rules of use;
illocutionary development
of discourse)
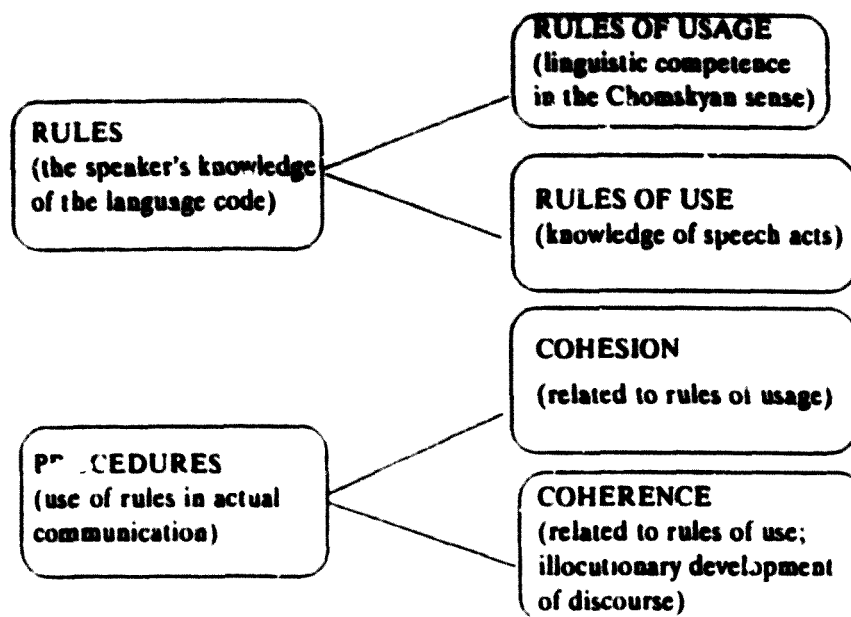
The study of conversation in discourse analysis emphasizes the set of devices the individual has available to impose structure on language, thereby facilitating or enhancing the effectiveness of communication. As a final observation on the pertinence of conversational analysis in a general theory of language, it might be interesting to see what a linguist like Charles C. Fillmore (1979) says about this issue:

> "It is obvious, I think, that a theory of grammar must be informed by a theory of conversation. (...) a theory of conversation must necessarily take into account the functions of utterances." (p.4)

and he goes on to say:

> "I think of the grammarian's job as that of discovering and describing the elements, the structures, the processes, and the constraints which are somehow made available to the language user as instruments for communicating, but I find myself more

and more tending toward the study of how and for what purposes and in what settings people 'use' their grammars." (p.11)

1.3.3. Spoken interaction in language teaching

So far we have seen that for someone to be conversationally competent he/she needs to have three kinds of knowledge:

(i) The grammar of the language (linguistic competence).

(ii) The functions that can be expressed with that grammar (communicative competence).

(iii) The appropriate situation for each function and its possible expressions (social competence).

One last component of conversational competence is the 'skill' to make conversation flow smoothly without any uncomfortable periods and, at the same time, cause a positive outcome. Some of the aspects involved in this last component are studied by the discourse analyst, but others must be approached from disciplines like social psychology or speech and communication. The most important aspects covered at this level are: (i) coherence devices, (ii) turn distribution, (iii) genre distribution (e.g. joking, story telling, teaching...), (iv) stage transition (e.g. from the discussion stage to the leave-taking stage), (v) silence/communication-breakdown avoidance, and (vi) enhancing of effectiveness.

A very simple way of summarizing what conversational competence consists of is Scarcella's definition (Scarcella 1983: 175): "the ability to participate in conversation". The importance of the word *participate* in this defintion is better understood if verbal interaction is considered as a ritual (Goffman 1981), stressing the fact that what speaker and listener do are specialized acts with very definite meaning for others.

> "The movements, looks, and vocal sounds we make as an unintended by-product of speaking and listening never seem to remain innocent " (Goffman 1981:2)

A central question in conversational analysis and sociolinguistics is to what extent rules and norms are universal. Ervin-Tripp (1972) and Grice (1975) propose that certain aspects of conversation are universal. Fraser, Rinter and Walters (1980) go so far as to say that besides the fact that every language makes available to the user the same basic set of speech acts, every language makes available the same set of strategies, and the only significant difference is as to when a particular speech act is used and with what strategies. Contrary to these assumptions we have studies such as Scollon and Scollon (1981) which show that interaction may change dramatically from one ethnic group to another; examples are given of the difference in which interaction is approached by Anglo-Saxon and Athabaskan cultures, including aspects such as presentation of self, distribution ˙ talk, information structure and organization of content. Stu centered around the speech

act model (Blum-kulka 1983, Wierzbicka 1985) also point the fact that there is a specific 'cultural logic' for every community of speakers and that languages might differ both in the expectations of their speakers (i.e. the existence of certain speech acts) and in the actual realization of a speech act (i.e. semantic formula, linguistic realization, and potential illocutionary force).

After a review of the studies done in this direction it seems safe to conclude that while universal tendencies undoubtedly exist for many aspects of conversation (for example, it is often said that all languages have procedures for entering into and sustaining conversation) the conventions underlying these procedures may vary greatly from one society to another.

If we agree that conversational competence has different characteristics in every culture we need to think about the possibility of transfer[1] of some of these features into another culture. Although the phenomenon of language transfer in second language acquisition has been rejected by some scholars (Burt and Dulay 1983), it becomes very cumbersome to analyze and explain the learner's interlanguage without taking language

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1   See Odlin (1989) for a review of the different aspects of language transfer to be taken into account in language teaching.

transfer into consideration, especially when it comes to communicative and social competence. The idea of cultural interference was already pointed out by Lado (1957) and is presently the focus of attention of a great deal of research under the name of 'cross-cultural communication'[2].

In their attempts to come up with a taxonomy of errors at the level of what they call pragmatics, Riley (1984) and Thomas (1983) clearly show the importance of transfer. Actually, all the errors they mention can be traced back to the speaker's native culture. I conducted some preliminary observations on this subject by means of asking native and non-native speakers about problems they have noticed when interacting. I include below three of the answers obtained:

> He notado que cuando saludo a un norteamericano se queda un poco sorprendido por mi manera caiurosa de hacerlo. (Teresita, an Argentinian who had been in the U S. for two months)

> A native speaker of Arabic came to the office to ask me to do something and all the time he kept saying "It is your duty to...". That made me very upset. Later I realized that the expression in Arabic is a lot less imposing than in English (Richard, Director of Office of International Students)

> I went to a restaurant with one of my students and when the waitress came he said "I'm so hungry I could eat you". He was just trying to be nice to her but the waitress got very mad. (Ivy, American teacher of English to foreign students in the U.S.)

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2 See Valdes (ed.) 1986 .

It should be clear by now that each culture imposes its general sociological patterns on interaction and that these are very easily transferred into another language (and culture). The questions that arise at this point are: (i) do language educators need to worry about this? and, if so, (ii) does the analysis of actual conversations among native speakers take us any further toward the goal of learning and understanding their language and their culture?

The fact that communication involves more than the mere mastery of new vocabulary, syntax and phonology was already recognized and applied to teaching methodology by Stevick in 1971 (Stevick 1971) when he postulated his socio-topical matrix in which speaker, role and subject were added to the usual linguistic components of the language lesson. Paulston and Bruder (1976) suggest that in second-language instruction proficiency in social usage is equally important as proficiency in linguistic usage. Studies in first-language acquisition have proved that children's pragmatic competence develops with language and that one is not separate from the other (Loveday 1982, Romaine 1984, Schieffeling and Ochs 1987). As Thomas (1983) points out, we cannot expect the adult learner of a second language to absorb pragmatic norms just by being exposed to the target language as in first-language acquisition. In order to provide the learner with the potential to make the appropriate choice in another culture we need to make explicit the communicative and social rules of the community. The

answer to the first question in the previous paragraph is, then, affirmative.

The idea that conversation is possibly the best tool to teach communicative rules and social norms affecting verbal communication can be explained summarizing the arguments that have been mentioned above:

(i) Each conversational event takes places in a situation occurring within the everyday life of the community, with participants who are representative of several social roles.

(ii) Since conversation is nothing but a social encounter, it must follow some socially agreed principles or conventions that make it efficient and effective.

(iii) Conversation provides the best means to check both illocutionary intent and appropriacy by looking at the reactions of the addressee.

(iv) The fact that conversation is nothing but a text created by the joint cooperation of two or more people allows us to go into the analysis of the ways in which one person's utterances succeed or fail in the construction of meaning.

The relevance of these arguments can be seen in the theoretical framework proposed by Munby (1978: 21-27), one of the first who attempted to apply the communicative approach to language teaching methodology. He distinguishes the following parameters:

1. Sociocultural orientation: In this parameter he includes the following considerations: (i) there is not a perfect, ideal language competence but different and relative competences in heterogenous speech communities; (ii) to know when something is systemically possible is not enough, it is necessary to know the rules of use and language features appropriate to the relevant social context; and (iii) the teaching must be based on the learner's requirements in terms of communicative mode and activities and the relationships between him/her and his/her interlocutors.

2. Sociosemantic orientation: The basis of linguistic knowledge consists of translating options of behaviour into options of linguistic form.

3. Discourse orientation: The performance of communicative acts takes place at the level of discourse, and, therefore, the learner must know the rhetorical rules of use that govern the patterning of such acts.

It is not difficult to realize at this point that real verbal interactions provide an excellent source of data for the three orientations mentioned above.

CHAPTER II: THE STUDY OF SPOKEN INTERACTION

2.0. Introduction

In this chapter I will review the most significant attempts to describe and explain verbal interaction which have emerged in the second half of the present century. The common characteristic of these approaches, and what distinguishes them from other antecedents, is that for the first time they undertake the task of describing whole natural interactions rather than fragments of them.

At the same time, however, one must reckon the importance of works dealing with language and communication previous to those studied in the present chapter. Classical rhetorics[1] is probably the first example of the preoccupation to understand the ways in which language becomes human action

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[1]   See Cots et al. (1990) for a more complete review of the antecedents in the study of verbal interaction.

and is capable of triggering different reactions on human beings. In the XVIIIth century, linguists like Herder and Humboldt suggest the intimate connection between a language and its users' way of thinking, culture, and conception of the world. Humboldt's ideas will be later taken up by anthropological linguists like Boas, Sapir and Whorf in the first half of the XXth century. The dialectologists of the second half of the XIXth century contribute to the study of natural language by showing the complexity of linguistic variation.

Despite the dominant structural approach to language in the first half of the XXth century, it is necessary to mention the work of structural linguists like the Russians Bakhtin and Jakobson and the French Benveniste, who already saw that a proper description of language would need to take into account its basic communicative function. In Great Britain it is worth mentioning the work of the anthropologist Malinowski, who had a great influence on the British linguist Firth and his formulation of a contextual theory of meaning. Wittgenstein and Austin in the discipline of philosophy also produce their main body of work in this first half of the century, proposing an analysis of language as human action. This point of view will be inherited by other philosophers such as Searle and Grice.

The first approach to the study of verbal interaction that I will consider in this chapter is that of sociolinguistics, placing special emphasis on an approach known as

functional/interactional sociolinguistics, which is represented mainly by the work of Gumperz. His analysis of language use is based on the concept of inference, understood as a process involving "hypothesis-like tentative assessments of communicative intent" assigned to different levels of speech production: prosody, paralinguistic signs, code choice, and lexical forms and formulaic expressions (Gumperz 1989: 1-2).

The second approach to be examined is known as conversation analysis. Its proponents are a group of sociologists known as ethnomethodologists. Their goal is to describe the "methods persons use in doing social life" (Sacks 1984b: 21). They reject any *a priori* theorizing and categorization about interaction, and the descriptive categories they use are those of the participants in the interaction.

Discourse analysis is the third perspective from which verbal interaction has been analysed. It is usually associated with a group of linguists known as the Birmingham school. They are the direct inheritors of the structural approach applied to the analysis of isolated sentences, and their task may be summarized as an attempt to construct a grammar of talk based on a basic set of categories and concatenation rules which are used to generate a large number of structures (Coulthard 1981).

The fourth attempt to describe and explain verbal interaction is known as the ethnography of speaking, with its practitioners coming mainly from the field of anthropology.

Their focus of research is the discovery of "patterns of variation across socio-cultural contexts" as well as "the knowledge that participants in verbal interaction need and display in order to communicate successfully with one another" in a given culture (Duranti 1988: 210-213). The numerous points of contact between the anthropological approach to verbal interaction and that of interactional sociolinguistics can be seen in volumes such as Gumperz and Hymes 1972 or Pride and Holmes 1972; despite the inclusion of the terms 'sociolinguistics' in their titles we find articles by anthropologists working within the framework of the ethnography of speaking. The difference between the two approaches seems to be connected more with the academic adscription of the respective scholars than with their basic conceptions of verbal interaction. From a chronological point of view, the anthropologists were the first to pay attention to verbal interaction, and the sociolinguists borrowed their method of analysis.

To sum up, verbal interaction has been studied from different perspectives, each pursuing an understanding of different aspects of human reality. Whereas sociolinguists and anthropologists are interested in those aspects that contribute to defining a speech community as different from others, sociologists and linguists seek a description of a structure (with a social or linguistic basis) which can account for the way everyday interactions are organized.

2.1. Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistic studies can be classified into two different groups depending on the sociological conceptions of the analyst. On the one hand, we have a group known as *correlative studies*, which conceive social organization as a set of values, norms, roles, etc. which have an external reality (Turner 1974), and these are determined by categories such as socio-economic status, place of birth, membership of groups, age, sex, etc. An alternative approach to social theory is offered by a group of works classified as *functional studies*. For the sociolinguists working in this direction it is less important to look at objective social reality (if this exists at all) than to the methods and efforts that people use to actively and continually create and sustain for each other the 'presumption' that the social world has a real character (Turner 1974).

2.1.1. Correlative studies

The object of correlative studies is to seek the correlation between 'facts' of social order and features of talk described as rules which determine normal or deviant verbal behaviour. In this correlation the social categories are treated as the independent variables (i.e. their presence or absence does not depend on other factors) and the linguistic ones as dependent

(i.e. as the effect or result of the presence or absence of certain social variables).

This basic assumption has very important consequences in the choice of data to be analyzed, the methodology to be used and the results to be obtained. Usually a great deal of attention is paid to phonological and grammatical features and how they display constant patterns of stylistic and social stratification. These patterns reflect socially determined differences in the speech behaviour of speakers, particularly in regard to age, sex, social class and ethnic membership. The notation of these differences in variable rules makes it possible to describe speech variation and linguistic change formally.

It is obvious that in order to attain those goals any means of eliciting language from a speaker will be valid as long as the language reflects the 'vernacular' way of speaking (Labov 1984). Methods of eliciting speech go from the written questionnaire to the tape-recording of actual conversation. Other methods of obtaining sociolinguistic data are tests to discover the social attitudes to certain codes (Lambert 1967), a technique borrowed from social psychology in which informants are made to react to the same output by different speakers, interviews, participant/non-participant observation, role-play, etc. Of all these methods, however, the questionnaire and the interview are those used more thoroughly than others for two main reasons. The questionnaire offers a high statistical validity due to its

mass character. The interview, on the other hand, while providing a systematic and controlled framework of analysis, provides the opportunity of collecting first hand data, thereby increasing the reliability factor (Shveitser 1986).

Most of the correlative studies have been done using these two techniques. Thus, Labov's programme of studying the stratification of English in New York City (Labov 1967) was carried out by means of interviewing and tape-recording a total of 122 subjects previously classified systematically in terms of ethnic group and social class. In his study of social class differentiation in the use of English in Norwich Trudgill used very similar techniques (Trudgill 1974). Other examples of the use of interviewing techniques are evident in Wolfram (1969), Fishman (1971), and Milroy (1981). Questionnaires, on the other hand, have been widely used in dialectological studies with the aim of preparing linguistic atlases. An example of this kind of work is Shuy's investigation of American dialects (Shuy 1967). Krysin and his associates (e.g. Krysin 1974) employed the same technique to investigate forms of standard Russian different in their stylistic connotation and in their relative frequency.

Turell (1988) offers an excellent review of the sociolinguistic studies in Catalonia. Apart from its thoroughness in terms of works cited, the interest of the article lies mainly in the fact that she includes and comments on the only two studies

proposing a correlation between linguistic variables and social categories from the point of view of the *variable rule* (Labov 1966, 1972), which allows the incorporation of probabilistic information about the presence of a linguistic feature. . A different approach to variation is offered in Turell (1985a, b), in which the author concentrates on the usage of self-reference pronouns in Catalan and Spanish to exercise social power and control.

2.1.2. Functional studies

A different way of approaching social theory can be found in the writings of Gumperz. In the introduction to a volume edited by Hymes and himself (1972), he acknowledges the influence of sociologists like Goffman, Garfinkel and Cicourel. His basic point is that sociological variables such as status and role are not permanent qualities of the speaker. Rather they are constantly created and destroyed by means of linguistically encoded meanings. He identifies concepts like status and role with those of phonemes and morphemes in the sense that they can be isolated in the analyst's decription of language use, i.e. they are encoded linguistically, and they are always perceived in specific contexts. Gumperz's point of view can be appreciated in the following quotation in which the two main points of his conception are mentioned: (i) linguistic variability must be

analyzed in terms of speakers' goals and not in terms of their sociological adscription; (ii) interaction must be the starting point of sociolinguistic analysis.

> There is a need for a sociolinguistic theory which accounts for the communicative functions of linguistic variability and for its relation to speaker's goals without reference to untestable functionalist assumptions about conformity or non-conformance to closed systems of norms. Since speaking is interacting, such a theory must ultimately draw its basic postulates from what we know about interaction. (Gumperz 1982a: 29)

A basic methodological tool in functional studies is that of the *linguistic repertoire*, which refers to all the linguistic resources available to the members of a speech community. The concept is useful to account for the selection speakers make of all the possible options in particular situations. Through this concept sociolinguists are also able to describe the way in which the selection of a variable is not only dependent on the connotations it has by itself (paradigmatic selection) but also on the previous selection of variables (syntagmatic selection). It is because of this fact that we can speak of different codes, styles, varieties, dialects or languages.

The work by Gumperz in bilingualism and interethnic communication is probably the best example of the applications of the functional approach in sociolinguistics (Gumperz 1966, 1982a, 1982b; Gumperz and Hernández-Chavez 1971). In all these investigations the researcher observes the interactions

directly without taking part in them. In other cases the researcher takes an active role in the event, whether as interviewer (Ervin-Tripp 1964) or as just another member of the social group around which the interaction is organised (Tannen 1984). In Catalonia it is necessary to mention the studies of Calsamiglia and Tusón (1980, 1984), Tusón (1986) and Boix (1990), studying the communicative norms which govern the choice of Catalan and Spanish in interactions among youngsters from the metropolitan area of Barcelona, and Nussbaum (1990), a study of French-Catalan-Spanish code-switching among language educators in a training session.

The common feature in all these studies is the unstructured way of collecting the data and the absence of *a priori* variables, because it is precisely through the analysis of language variation in terms of the participant's goals that structure will emerge.

2.2. Conversation analysis[2]

The main objective of Conversation Analysis (CA, henceforth) is the study of tape-recordings and transcripts of natural conversations with the aim of discovering how members of society achieve the ordinary tasks of everyday life. One of the main differences between 'conversation analysts' and sociolinguists or social psychologists, for example, is the exclusion of contextual factors as a source of explanation if they are not explicitly evoked by the participants in the conversation.

The basis of this approach to interaction must be found in the ethnomethodological model of social interaction. Schematically, we could say that the three most important statements of this model are: (i) every action by a societal member is meaningful; (ii) actors follow interactional rules because to do otherwise may give rise to negative interactional consequences; and (iii) rules do not determine conduct but shape the actors' expectations of what is 'normal'.

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2   Fol   ng works such as Levinson (1983) and Taylor and Cameron (1987) , I am basically referring to the work of a group of sociologists known as ethnomethodologists (see, for instance, Atkinson and Heritage 1984). See also Heritage (1984) for a review of the theoretical basis of the approach.

In connection with the analysis of actual verbal interaction, the work of CA practitioners is characterized by three other assumptions: (i) interaction is structurally organized in terms of action-reaction; (ii) contributions to interaction are contextually oriented; and (iii) these two properties are inherent in the details of interaction so that no order of detail can be dismissed *a priori*, as disorderly, accidental or irrelevant (Atkinson and Heritage 1984). It is through the study of the very specific 'practices' individuals use in conversation that one can discover the abstract resources and constraints bearing on the organization of conversation. As Schenkein (1978: 3) puts it, the main emphasis is on the "interactional unfolding of the conversation". As was said above, CA claims the independence of the sequential organization of the interaction from the immediate and socio-cultural context, arguing that these facts should only be taken into account when the participants explicitly refer to them.

In CA, conversational units are not defined *a priori* as is the case with other approaches to interaction. They are "dependent on the specification of the conversational rules to which speakers 'orient' in constructing sequences of such units" (Talbot and Cameron 1987: 117). This is what is known as the principle of *sequential accountability*. Thus, for instance, we can only speak of a segment of talk being analyzed as a request if it appears in a sequential context where the utterance is explicitly

acknowledged by the participants as being a request. Schegloff (1972: 34) summarizes the issue in the following words:

> (...) one trouble with such a view [i.e. the primacy of linguistic form in the interpretation of the function of utterances] is that it treats an utterance's syntactic form as a 'first' feature about it, hence *prima facie*. And in the traditional practice of linguists, as well as of traditional language philosophers, in which single sentences are (the) normal units of analysis, this may well be the case. But in the real world of conversation, it is not. Most centrally an utterance will occur some place sequentially. Most obviously, except for initial utterances, it will occur after some other utterance or sequence of utterances with which it will have, in some fashion, to deal and which will be relevant to its analysis for coparticipants. Less obviously, but more importantly, it (and here initial utterances are not excepted) may occur in a structurally defined place in conversation, in which case its structural location can have attached to its slot a set of features that may overwhelm its syntactic or prosodic structure in primacy.

The second principle on which CA methodology is founded is that of the *sequential architecture of intersubjectivity*. According to this principle, through a turn of speech a participant in the conversation displays his/her understanding of the previous turn and, at the same time, allows the addressee to check whether his/her previous turn was correctly interpreted or not. This is the sense in which conversation, as opposed to monologue, can be said to "offer the analyst an invaluable analytical resource: as each turn is responded to by a second, we find displayed in that second an *analysis* of the first by its recipients" (Levinson 1983: 321). The alternative of basing the analyst's description on the orientations of the participants is defended by Schegloff in a fairly recent article (Schegloff 1988) as a possible non-arbitrary

solution to avoid the influence of the investigator's values, ideology or presupposition in the domain of the social sciences. In the same article as well, Schegloff states that only by joining a description of what people do with language to a description of how they do i can we obtain an analysis of interaction.

2.3. Discourse analysis

Among the best-known representatives of this approach are not only the members of the 'Birmingham school' (Coulthard, Sinclair, Montgomery, Stubbs, McTear) but also American (e.g. Labov, Fanshel, Longacre) as well as European scholars (e.g. Cosnier, Roulet, Cnaraudeau). Discourse analysis (DA, henceforth) combines a functional with a structural approach as the theoretical basis of their task. On the one hand, the units that constitute conversation are defined by their function in the discourse, and in this sense the model is influenced by the work of Halliday. Function is defined as the product of the constraints of (i) situation and of (ii) 'tactics' imposed upon a grammatical structure. Situation includes "all relevant factors in the environment, social conventions and the shared experience of the participants" (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975: 28). Tactics can be defined as the way in which the syntagmatic patterns of discourse are handled and how items precede, follow and are related to each other. In order to exemplify this we can take the

interrogative utterance "Can you open the door?", which can have two different functions depending on the specific linguistic and extralinguistic context:

Situation 1: Father and son watching T.' The doorbell rings.

Father: Can you open the door?
Son : Ok

Situation 2: Father and son going into the house. The son is complaining about a pain in his arm.

Father: Can you move it?
Son: A little bit.
Father: Let's see, can you open the door?
Son: No, I can't.
*Father:* I think we should go to see the doctor.

We see in these examples how the same grammatical construction has two different functions. In the first case it is a directive and the verb "can" is not used in its literal sense of ability. In the second example, the construction is not a directive but a real question aimed at evaluating the physical state of the addressee.

The DA framework is a clear descendant of structuralism or distributionalism (Harris, Pike), since discourse is conceived as a hierarchical organization of units belonging to different ranks, in which units of a given rank combine in predictable structures to make a unit of the next rank in the organization. This distributional criterion can be seen in Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), one of the most popular models used by

discourse analysts which set out to describe the linguistic dynamics in the classroom. Initially, the model included only two ranks, *utterance* (or *move*) and *exchange*. The former is defined as everything said by one speaker before another begins to speak. The latter is defined as consisting of at least two utterances (when the interaction involves two participants). As discourse analysts struggled to show the relationship between utterance and sentence, they were forced to recognize the existence of an intermediate rank which they labelled *act*, using Austin's notion of verbal action. The next unit immediately below act falls into a different level of linguistic description which is that of syntax. At the other end of the scale we have next to the exchange a unit called *transaction*, which consists of a set of exchanges and which seems to be co-terminous with topic boundaries. This unit is typically marked by the use of linguistic segments indicating a change in the subject of the conversation (these signals are known as 'frame', e.g. well, right, and 'focus', e.g. I need to ask you a favour). The largest unit is the *lesson* (or *interaction*), which, though not definable in terms of a predictable structure, is distinguishable owing to its initial and final transactions (e.g. greeting and leave-taking). A schematic representation of the hierarchical organization of discourse as conceived by DA practitioners would be as follows:
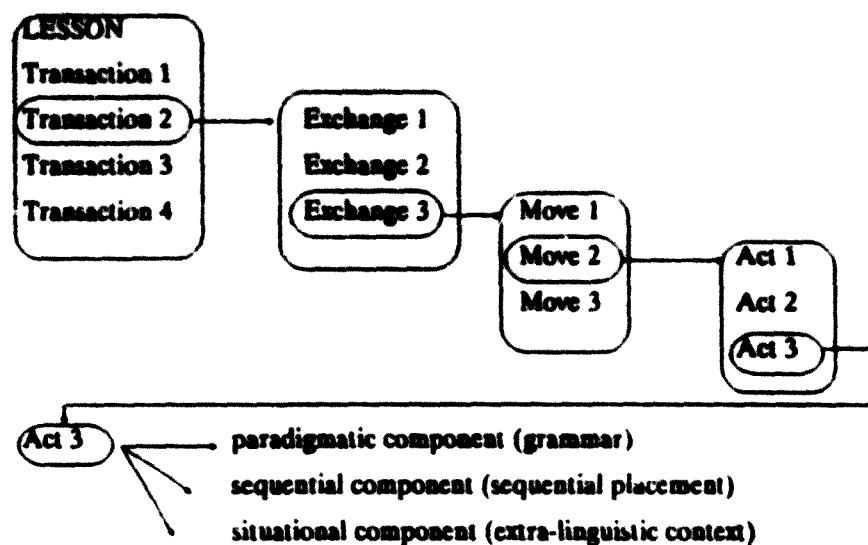
Since the basic aim of DA is to construct a grammar of talk by means of hypotheses about rules of discourse, a necessary concept of this approach is that of *well-formedness*. This concept is borrowed from generative grammar in order to recognize sequences of moves in discourse which do not respond to speakers' expectations, and which, therefore, should be labelled as ill-formed (Stubbs 1983). The analyst takes for granted that speakers have clear intuitions about well-formed discourse sequences in the same way as they have clear intuitions about well-formed sentences. The notion underlying the concept of well-formedness is that not every combination of symbols is possible. Therefore, it becomes necessary to formulate a series of rules constraining the distribution of units. These rules should describe the speakers' tacit knowledge about discourse and what they consider to be deviant behaviour.

DA has received many criticisms because of (a) its lack of flexibility to account for other types of interactions outside the classroom (Edmonson 1981, Burton 1981), (b) the danger of describing use in terms of precise rules, thereby giving an inaccurate picture of how people use language (Widdowson 1984), or (c) its premature categorization of linguistic segments as 'functioning' in a specific way, and its tendency to generalize by constructing axiomatic rules of interaction (Levinson 1981, 1983).

2.4. The ethnography of speaking

The basic concept of the ethnography of speaking (henceforth ES) is that of *communicative competence*, that is the knowledge and skills a speaker needs in order to communicate appropriately within a particular speech community. The concept was proposed by Hymes in order to call attention to a series of facts not taken into account in the Chomskyan definition of *linguistic competence* (Hymes 1971):

(i) Language is one of a number of aspects in which the particular characteristics of a speech community are manifested.

(ii) Since language is the basic means of the members of a speech community to organize social life there must be certain rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless .

Hymes suggests that a linguistic theory must have an answer to the following four questions if it is to be integrated with a theory of communication and culture:

(i) Whether (and to what degree) something is formally *possible*;
(ii) Whether (and to what degree) something is *feasible* in virtue of the means of implementation available;
(iii) Whether and to what degree something is *appropriate* (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated;
(iv) Whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done, actually *performed*, and what its doing entails. (1971: 281)

In order to account for these four aspects, Hymes proposes three units of analysis: *speech situation*, *speech event* and *speech act*. Speech situation refers to the non-verbal context within which communication occurs. Speech event is the basic unit for descriptive purposes and refers to "activities, or aspects of activities, that are directly governed by rules or norms for the use of speech" (Hymes 1972b: 56). The speech act is the third unit of analysis, and it is generally co-terminous with a single interactional function such as request, command, etc. It may take a verbal or a non-verbal form.

Once the ethnographer has identified the different speech events that occur in a certain speech community, he/she must discover the structure of each of them. The analysis is based on a description of the relevant components of any speech event suggested by Hymes (1972b), and which, for mnemonical convenience, he groups together in relation to the eight letters of the word SPEAKING:

(i) **Setting and scene.** Setting refers to the physical circumstances in which speech is produced. Scene has to do with the way the members of the speech community conceive an occasion of use.

(ii) **Participants.** A description of the participants must include information such as age, sex, social background, life experience, and role relationships. It is important to mention that besides the *addressor* and the *addressee* this component includes a potential *audience*.

(iii) **Ends.** Purposes are defined, on the one hand, in terms of the conventionally recognized and expected *outcomes* of the speech event by the members of the speech community. On the other hand, the private goals of the individuals taking part in the speech event are also included in the definition.

(iv) **Act sequence.** Under this label Hymes includes two subcomponents: *message form* and *message content*. With the former we pay attention to the grammatical and lexical composition of individual utterances. Message content involves mainly the concept of *topic* or 'what is being talked about'.

(v) **Key.** It refers to the "tone, manner, or spirit" (Hymes 1972b: 62) in which a communicative act or event is performed (e.g. formal/informal, mock/serious).

(vi) **Instrumentalities.** The concept refers to two types of choice that the speakers can make in terms of means of speaking. The first choice has to do with the *channel* (e.g. oral, written, visual).

The second choice refers to the decision the speakers have to make among the different languages/dialects/registers which they can handle.

(vii) **Norms of interaction and interpretation.** In order to achieve successful communication, the participants in a speech event must follow a series of norms that attach to speaking in general or in that specific event (e.g. not interrupt). Norms of interpretation involve the belief system of a community and it has to do with the idiosyncratic meanings attached to specific moves (e.g. use of filler = hesitating behaviour).

(viii) **Genre.** With the concept of genre Hymes refers to ways of speaking recognized by the speech community and which are characterized by the co-occurrence of lexical, grammatical, prosodic and paralinguistic features, and which convey a social meaning (e.g. sermon, lecture, gossip).

Ethnographers of speaking concentrate on the patterns of variation across socio-cultural contexts, placing special emphasis on the degree to which verbal perfomance can be culturally predicted (Duranti 1988: 211). Their starting point of analysis is not necessarily a group of people who share the same language, since this fact does not imply that they share the same rules of use and interpretation. It is because of this that the notions of *speech community* and *linguistic repertoire* are introduced to refer to a group of speakers sharing certain 'rules of speaking' (i.e. the rules for interpreting and using one or more than one

language/linguistic variety) through which they integrate and, at the same time, display their membership to a social group.

Another contribution of ES to the analysis of verbal interaction is the incorporation of the idea of *context*. For the ethnographers context includes much more than the immediate physical environment of the interaction. The participants' knowledge and conception of the communicative event and of social life in general constitute an important aspect of context which is known as *cognitive context*. But, most importantly, they also consider as part of context the institutional role of the interaction within the social group, and in relation to the rest of encounters which make up what is known as social life. It is in this sense that they resort to Malinowski's concept of "context of situation" (Malinowski 1923).

In ES, as in CA, there is no *a priori* categorization of units of talk. For this task the ethnographer relies on the labels used by the members of the speech community. One of the reasons for this is that through folk categorization the analyst is capable of obtaining a clear idea about the relevance of the interaction in the life of the speech community. The other reason is to pay tribute to the basic conception of cultural relativism and the shaping force of cultural values and beliefs on the different distribution of verbal resources and social meanings.

ES has also provided a great deal of information on how children acquire language. This has been possible through

adequate methods and techniques to analyse the process of language acquisition within its immediate social and cultural setting (see, for example, Romaine 1984; Schieffelin and Ochs 1987). As Saville-Troike points out the ethnographers working on this topic "ask questions about the nature of linguistic input and sociolinguistic training, how and for what purposes children acquire particular communicative strategies, and how language relates to the definition of stages in the life cycle and to recognized role-relationships in the society" (1982: 205).

ΓS has had a most important influence in the development of the communicative approach to language teaching. Communicative competence has replaced linguistic competence as the goal to be achieved. Concepts such as *appropriacy, situation,* and *rules of use* have become essential guidelines along which to prepare teaching materials (see, for example, Harmer 1983: 13-15). Littlewood (1981: 6) states the four basic goals of a communicative approach to language teaching:

(i) To develop skill in manipulating the linguistic system.

(ii) To distinguish between the linguistic forms and the communicative functions that they perform.

(iii) To develop skills and strategies for communicating meanings as effectively as possible in concrete situations.

(iv) To become aware of the social meaning of language forms.