

## The differences between spoken and written interaction

- The basic difference is in transmission of the message, speech is transmitted by means of voice and sounds, while writing is transmitted by graphic means - letters (spelling and grammar, of course, play a big role).
- Spoken language is sparse, written language is dense, yet both kinds of interaction are organized, but follow different rules.
- Spoken language is a process, speech is produced and received almost instantaneously and is an on-line process, the recipients can follow its production from the beginning to the end. With written language more time is needed to produce a message, needs to be polished, the receiver does not know how long it took for the message to be written, the speaker can forget parts of the message s/he wished to convey– written message can be revised.
- Speech is gone immediately after we have stopped speaking/listening, it is stored in short-term memory for a very short time (a few seconds), which is why we can tolerate false starts, pauses, gaps and the like - we forget them quickly. Only a very small portion of an instance of spoken interaction is stored into long-term memory. (We only become aware of the false starts, pauses etc. when we transcribe speech for the purpose of analysis.)
- In speech we use everyday words, written language uses complex lexicon.
- The choice of some lexical items (synonyms, antonyms) are usually repeated in speech but they vary in writing.
- In speech sentences are longer.
- Speech includes verbal and non-verbal fillers, which are used to avoid silence, which in speech usually means that one has finished talking.
- Lexical density (the ratio between the words that carry message and words that carry no semantic meaning) is usually much higher in writing than in speech. Lexical density varies from language to language.
- In writing, punctuation is used to separate the message into units, in speech pauses and prosody performs this function (this also varies from language to language - Slovene punctuation is governed by strict rules, English punctuation is governed by what we wish to say - the rules are more lax).

Maxims of spoken discourse:

Quantity: make your contribution as informative as required.

Quality: do not say what you believe is false

Relation: be relevant

Manner: Be, brief and to the point; avoid obscurity.

Analysis of spoken interaction

- Interaction presupposes at least two participants
- The participants take turns (one of them talks while the other listens), although they can speak at the same time as well.
- Sometimes we wait for pauses (either silent pauses or fillers – “Umm, Mmmm”) or we interrupt the speaker with signals and signs or wait for certain prosodic features (decreased volume, slowing down the rhythm). Real linguistic clues are grammatical

clues (e.g. a question requires an answer, a command may require an action such clues are transparent).

- Turn-taking (change of speakers) can take place in two ways: the speaker finishes and lets other people speak, or the speaker selects the next speaker.
- Interruption in the middle of speech may require high tones, so that the current speaker can hear us. In some cases the speaker might not let us take the turn.
- We must be aware of cross-cultural differences e.g. Brits like their space, they shake hands by touching just the tips of the fingers etc.). According to Hymes, the father of ethnography of speaking, the speakers who behave the same may during speech interaction belong into the same linguistic group.

Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson recorded several hours of spoken interaction and came up with a few rules in how the speaker and the listener interact:

- Turn-taking (speaker shifts):
  - in the idealised conversation the listener (B) always lets the speaker (A) finish and vice versa. This is a **smooth shift**.
  - (B) does not let (A) finish before taking the turn and vice versa. This is an **unsmooth shift**
  - A stops short when B starts to speak and vice versa. This is a **cut-off**
- Turn is everything that the speakers says, before someone else takes over. It can be a short answer (Yes) or a long monologue.
- The listener can and sometimes must acknowledge that he understands the speaker or is paying attention. This is usually done using short words /(Yes) or non-verbal acknowledgements (M, Mhm). These acknowledgements are called **backchannels**. They are important in e.g. phone conversations. A backchannel does not constitute as a separate turn.
- Sometimes more than one speaker may speak (**overlapping sequence**). In that case if something important is said, it may need to be repeated.

For a conversation, at least two people are needed, each producing two turns.

Some turns are more closely related than others – production of the first turn presupposes the second one. These closely related turns are called **adjacency pairs**:

- Apology  $\leftrightarrow$  Smoother
- Greeting  $\leftrightarrow$  Greeting
- Invitation  $\leftrightarrow$  Accept/Decline
- Question  $\leftrightarrow$  Answer
- Request  $\leftrightarrow$  Accept/Decline

### British Tradition of Discourse Analysis

It was started in the middle 70's by John Sinclair and Malcolm Coulthard, both work at the University of Birmingham. They recorded class-room conversation between teacher and their pupils and then tried to come up with a model of spoken interaction:

1. Units of spoken interaction can be arranged on a rank scale

2. Units are interconnected: one unit higher in the hierarchy consists of one or more units lower in the hierarchy.
3. The hierarchy:
  - Lesson or interview is the highest unit (synonymous to conversation)
  - Transaction is the next unit: it deals with 1 topic (can be subdivided into several subtopics. Transactions are divided into 2 types: boundary (ends one topic and starts another) and teaching transaction)
    - Exchanges divide topics into subtopics
    - Exchanges consist of one more moves
    - Moves consist of acts

If a unit higher in the hierarchy consists of more than one unit lower in the hierarchy, it is called complex, otherwise simple.

### **American Model (Stenström)**

Stenström decided to expand the Sinclair-Coulthard model in order to make it more useful outside the classroom and to make it more generic.

Her model is as follows

- Conversation (synonymous to lesson or interview)
- Transaction
- Exchange
- Turn (not present in the Sinclair-Coulthard model)
- Move
- Act

Definitions:

- The transaction consists of one more exchanges dealing with one single topic; one or more transactions make up a conversation.
- The Exchange is the smallest interactive unit consisting, minimally, of two turns produced by two speakers.
- The turn is everything that the current speaker says before the next speaker takes over; it consists of one or more moves.
- The move is what the speaker does in a turn to start, carry on, and finish a turn, i.e. the way s/he interacts. It consists of one or more acts.
- The act signals what the speaker, what s/he wants to communicate; it is the smallest interactive unit.

Again, if a unit higher in the hierarchy consists of more than one unit lower in the hierarchy, it is called complex, otherwise simple.

Stenström has also identified many 8 types of moves and a host of acts. Since we do not need to name the acts, here are just the definitions of move types:

- Summons: calls the listeners attention. Example: Look here!
- Focus: introduces the initiate: Example: [What do you mean by this?] Do you mean...
- Initiate: Opens the exchange. Example: What is yo' name?

- Response: continues or terminates the exchange. Example: Nun'ya damn business!
- Repair: holds up the exchange. Ex.: What you say, boy?
- Re-open: delays the termination of the exchange. Ex. A: Shall we go? B: Sure **A: Right**
- Follow-up: terminates the exchange. Ex. A: Shall I come at noon? No, I'll come at two o'clock. **A: Right**
- Backchannel: signals the listener's attention: Ex. A: So was talking to \*Mary and\* she said that... B: \*Mhm\*

Types and patterns of exchanges:

The following patterns are used for stating exchanges:

Chaining:	Supporting:
A: statement 1	A: statement 1
B: response 1	B: backchannel 1
A: statement 2	A: statement 2
B: response 2	B: backchannel 2

The following patterns are used for questioning exchanges:

Chaining:	embedding:	coupling:	(answering with a question) elliptical coupling
A: q1	A: q1	A: q1	A: q1
B: a1	B: q2	B: a1 + q2	B: (a1) q2
A: q2	A: a2	A: a1	A: a2
B: a2	B: a1		

The following patterns are used for requesting exchanges:

Chaining:	Embedding:
A: q1 These two are pre-sequence	A: <request>
B: a1	B: q1
A: <request>	A: a1
B: <accept/reject> ,	B: <accept>/<reject>

### Form and function

EXAMPLES	SENTENCE FORM	SENTENCE TYPE	COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION
The door is open	S V C	Declarative	Statement
Is the door open	V S C	Interrogative	Question
Open the door	V O	Imperative	Command

Unmarked exchange:

Form and function overlap: e.g. function of question is to ask about something.

Ex. What is he doing with that platypus?

Marked exchange:

Form and function do not overlap.

Imperative can be used to ask a question: Could you shut the window

Declarative can be used to give commands: The window. The window is open

- Marked exchanges are not always easy to interpret but there are rules that help us.
- We can work things out through context (exophoric and endophoric references) although some things are not explicitly expressed.
- We have to implement certain tactics to achieve a goal. E.g. if we are in the subordinate position, we give commands using questions.

### **Interactional signals and discourse markers**

Some lexical items and phrases such as **Right, I see, I think, OK, quite** etc. are important elements of discourse because they can perform different function depending on their position in discourse. They are most frequently used at the beginning or at the end of the turn.

**Interactional signals** are used to start, carry on, and terminate the conversation.

A: I'd like to order 12 uzis.

B: 12, Mr. Heston?

A: Yeah.

B: Right. (a move of its own, which ends the conversation)

**Discourse markers** are used to organize and hold the turn and to mark boundaries in the discourse.

A: **So**, let me recap, Mr. Heston: 12 uzis, 20 kalashnikovs 5 bazookas and a mini H-bomb.

**Right**. Where should we deliver that for you?

The discourse marker is used here to bridge the enumeration and the question and as a starter.

A: You're not gonna shoot him, **right** (question within statement functioning as a marker)

B: I sure am.

### **Types of starts:**

Clean start: sometimes preceded by a word like "Well"-

A: Well, I think I'm gonna shoot me a deer

B: Heston, that's your wife.

Hesitant start: often introduced by a simple fonem or an adverb.

A: Eeeeeee, actually, what I wanted to say...

B: No, Heston, I'm not giving you my gun.

### **Different types/structures of conversation**

Consist of:

- Opening

- The main message
- Closing

Opening usually consists of at least one of the following three elements:

- Greetings
- Polite remarks –How are you
- Small talk and phatic talk (Lovely weather today. Makes me wanna reach for the gun.)

Opening usually consists of at least one of the following three elements:

- Winding up (avoiding the end)
- Polite remarks (Beautiful shot, Mr. Heston.
- Farewell

The structure depends on a number of things:

- It can be a face-to-face or a phone conversation (the latter usually requires an introduction but not if you know the person you're calling.
- Depends on the degree of formality
- The function of polite remarks and small talk is to establish a pleasant atmosphere

### **Dealing with topics:**

- Whatever you're saying must be appropriately introduced and we use different metacomments to do this.
- We can change from one topic to another abruptly (shift) or drift from one topic to another.
- Frames are used to shift between topics.
- Shifting is straightforward, we can easily see where the old topic ends and a new one starts.

A: **Well, that's it.** Now, let's talk about A-bombs.

B: Heston, Shut the hell up.

- Drifting is less straightforward, sometimes we're not sure where one topic ends and another starts, as the change is not linguistically marked.

A: I love guns!

B: I can see that, Heston, I understand you sleep with it, too.

A: Which reminds me, I gotta grease up my bed, the noise is driving me crazy.

B: Heston, you are crazy.

### **Digressions**

- Moving to one topic temporarily and then coming back to the previous topic
- Digressions are either deliberate or spontaneous
- Some digressions are related to the topic, some not.

**ASIDE** is an utterance that has nothing to do with the conversation. It is not integrated into the topic, but is related to it none of the less. (See p. 161)

**SPEECH-IN-ACTION** is extra-topical talk embedded in the conversation.

For example, at a meeting an issue is discussed and someone asks if the attendees would like some tea.