7 Discourse Analysis and Stylistics

Discourse Analysis (DA) and Conversation Analysis (CA) have evolved as two broad avenues of research which aspire after the description of conversation (i.e., how it is organized and through what procedures its coherence is established); they attempt to do so, however, from largely different perspectives: while linguistically based DA tries to extend descriptive apparatus of traditional linguistics to analyse spontaneous talk, the sociologically based CA studies conversation as a part of everyday social practice (for the critique of the two approaches see Levinson (1983)).

The methodology of DA (the term was first used by Zelig Harris in the early 1950s) is chiefly associated with the *Birmingham model of DA* which, applying the principles of Halliday´s systemic grammar, developed a *rank-and-scale* model of the description of classroom interaction. In their model they relate three organizational levels of school interaction, viz. pedagogic (non-linguistic), discourse and grammatical levels, and suggest the areas of overlap of their structural units (cf. Sinclair and Coulthard 1975):

Levels:	Pedagogic	Discourse	Grammatical
Units:	course		
	period	**lesson**	
	topic	**transaction**	
		exchange	
	move		**sentence**
	act		**clause**
			group
			word
			morpheme

On the discourse level, the bottom unit of **act** represents the smallest types of classroom activity (e.g., elicitation realized by question, reply by statement, evaluation, etc.), **move** stands for a participant´s uninterrupted turn, **exchange** as a basic constructional unit of interaction consists of related pairs of moves, e.g., question and answer (see also Adjacency pair, 8.2), **transaction** is made up of sequences of exchanges united by a single task (e.g., teacher´s explanation) and **lesson** is the highest unit of classroom discourse.

The applicability of the model, which casts light on the pedagogical process, has proved fruitful in analyses of various other standardized types of intearction such as doctor-patient consultations, shopkeeper-customer encounters, courtroom interaction (in these, the term *interaction* is used instead of the term *lesson*). Its suitability to approach talk in less constrained (informal) settings characterized by fewer restrictive rules (cf. the pre-defined distribution and sequencing of turns between teacher and pupil, prosecutor and defendant), i.e., ordinary conversation, has been challenged (see Levinson 1983). The concepts of **initiation** (I) and **response** (R) were suggested to signal the structural relatedness of successive utterances; the simplest structure for an exchange being **IR** (e.g., question-answer, bid-nomination pairs). The specificity of classroom interaction, however, lies in a typical recurrence of three-part exchanges of the type **IRF** in which teacher initiates as well as closes the exchange by providing **feedback** (F) or evaluation (e.g., a teacher comments on the quality of pupil´s answer: T(I): *What´s the capital of Britain?* P(R): *London* T(F): *Correct, London*). IRF exchanges are not so common outside the rule-bound or information-oriented settings – in casual conversation participants

normally do not evaluate each other´s responses. For example, in the exchange A(I): *Is it raining outside?* B(R): *Yes, it is. *A(F) Correct, it´s raining* the feedback is semantically anomalous (see Negative face, 10.5).

The model of DA provides a useful insight into the nature of talk in organized settings and points out some of its subtle internal workings, such as who is in control of discourse, how roles of speaker and listener are passed over, how new topics are introduced, etc. All these factors provide a wide space for stylistically motivated options, e.g., individual teaching styles are marked by idiosyncracies in structuring exchanges, marking the boudaries of topics, providing metacommunication statements (which help pupils see the structure, understand the purpose, etc.), providing or withdrawing the feedback, balancing the dialogical vs. monological format, etc.