TOPICS AND PROBLEMS IN 'DIALOGUE-LINGUISTICS'[1]

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With the ever-increasing number of new disciplines cropping up in the field of general linguistics it may seem unwise to introduce yet another branch of linguistics called 'dialogue-linguistics'. In fact, I do not want to propagate a new and independent branch of linguistics — I simply want to draw the reader's attention to some problems that arise in linguistic description when one tries to investigate stretches of speech uttered by two or more persons. Many of these problems have been well known for a very long time and some of them have recently been discussed within the framework of a 'linguistics beyond the sentence', or as some scholars prefer to say, a text-grammar[2]. On the whole, however, they have only been of minor concern to linguists discussing texts or intersentential relationships for the very simple and obvious reason that it seemed more important for a start in this particular field of research to discuss textual relations in utterances spoken or written by one speaker only.

This approach was at the same time both easier and more promising: with the investigation of texts spoken or preferably written by one person only one could without much hesitation disregard the pragmatic component of the text under investigation. One could feel both at home and on new territory; at home because of the purely syntactic-semantic analysis, and on new territory because of the analysis of stretches of speech extending beyond the usual sentence boundary.

It is therefore not surprising that the first attempts at a definition of a unit called 'text' and the first works on cohesion centered on questions of syntax and semantics[3]. Among these early works one could mention the

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[1] This is a revised version of a paper read at the 8th Annual Meeting of the Societas Linguistica Europaea at Jyväskylä, Finland, 30th May 1974.

[2] As is typical for almost all fields of linguistics, there is no agreement on terminology.

[3] This again is clearly reflected in the terminology used: "Textsyntax, Textsemantik, supra-syntax, hyper-syntax ..."

paper of R. Hasan (1968) on cohesion, R. Harweg's book (1968) on pronominal reference, or the earlier attempts of Horst Isenberg (1968a), who set up a list of 12 semantic and syntactic ways of linking sentences together[4].

The same situation applies for the first steps in the investigation of dialogues, in particular of the question-answer type. Isenberg (1971), e.g., speaks of a question-answer-correspondence in sentence pairs of the type

(1) Was hast du gestern abends gemacht? — Ich bin ins Kino gegangen.
Dressler (1972) discusses the syntactic form answers to particular questions must have, especially the possibility of elliptic answers as in (2):

(2) Warum ist Peter nicht gekommen? — Er ist krank.
When we consider, however, sentence pairs as in (1) and (2) it will soon become obvious that we must not limit our discussion to purely syntactic and semantic questions, provided that we aim at a full description or explanation of the relationship between questions and answers[5].

First, we have to include a component taking account of the speaker and the hearer (who in turn becomes the speaker) — thus we are sooner or later forced to abandon the traditional concept of linguistics with only an ideal speaker/listener. In particular, we will be bound to include into our grammatical model the communicative intention of the various speakers and the situational context in which an utterance is produced.

Secondly, an investigation of appropriate answers to particular types of questions will only be possible if we are in a position to account for the pre-suppositions in the questions — and possibly in the answers. Many features in the answers to questions are unaccountable if the presuppositions in the questions are disregarded[6].

As I have tried to show elsewhere (Fries 1971), all this does not mean that we leave the linguistics of competence and finally turn towards a linguistics of performance — but it does necessitate a new concept of competence, most likely in the way Wunderlich, Brekle and others have worked out[7].

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[4] Isenberg's paper has many times since been reprinted (cf. Isenberg 1968b, 1971, Petöfi 1971). Brief surveys of 'text-linguistics' are provided in Fries 1971, Brinker 1971, and Hendricks 1973. Extensive treatment of most aspects of the subject can be found in Dressler 1972, van Dijk 1972, S. J. Schmidt 1973 and W. Kallmeyer et al. 1974. The most comprehensive bibliography is Dressler and Schmidt 1973.

[5] Among the works on question-answer relationships most papers centre on the syntactic and logical relationship of *yes/no*-questions and their appropriate answers. Cf. in particular Moravcsik 1971, Pope 1971, Rohrer 1971.

[6] Cf. the typology of question-answer relationships worked out in Fries 1973a. Earlier studies include Rohrer 1971, Dressler 1972, Maas 1972. A very precise survey of the role of presuppositions in general is given in Schmidt 1973. There is a large amount of work on presuppositions currently on the market, cf. in particular Kiefer 1972, Petöfi and Frank 1973.

[7] Wunderlich 1970, 1971, Brekle 1972, Habermas 1971, Schmidt 1973.

This approach would lead us to a threefold investigation into texts: on a pragmatic, on a syntactic and on a semantic level. Whereas the latter two are those levels best known to us, there is even doubt as to what should and what must be included on the first level (cf. Römer 1972).

If we leave theoretical linguistic speculation aside for a moment and approach the whole range of problems from a more pragmatic point of view, we could argue, e.g. within the particular problem of the question-answer relationship, that we have to postulate on some deep level (in whatever model we want to adopt) some kind of a performative element in both question and answer. In a question this performative element would make sure that what we are going to hear (or generate, or whatever the terminology will be) is indeed a question, i.e., a quest for a particular type of information and not an exclamation, a report, a statement, a supposition or the like in disguise. Even more important for our discussion of dialogues, as soon as we have posited some sort of pragmatic level including a performative element (in questions, say, of the type *I ask you to tell me* (cf. Moravcsik 1971)), we can explain those features in a dialogue (with regard to our present problem: those features in the answer to a question) that correspond to this pragmatic level with its performative element. In straightforward answers this could simply be of the form *I answer you (by saying)*, which, however, is usually deleted in the surface structure just as the question performative is deleted but may occasionally be present in one form or another (cf. Fries 1973a):

(3) a. How did they know? — I'll tell you.
    b. Tell me, how are you liking Cambridge?

It is this performative element that guarantees on a very essential level the close connection between questions and answers. In addition, such a procedure enables us to account for other elements in an answer that would otherwise be difficult to explain; some of these facts have been discussed by Robin Lakoff (1971). Consider for example[8]:

(4) a. [agitation] Where do we sleep? — There's no need to get so worked up over it.
    b. [desperately] Then where do we look for our new visions? — Don't moan at me about visions.
    c. Where would you recommend us all to eat first night in Amsterdam? — It depends on what you have in mind.
    d. Where did you come from? — What?
    e. Where did these crisps come from? — Where did you find them?
    f. Where's the money from the bank-job? — What bank-job?

In all these cases the second speaker is aware that he has been asked a question but is not prepared to give an answer that has a direct (semantic) rela-

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[8] Examples from modern English plays (cf. Fries 1973a).

tionship to the question asked. He is not prepared to do so for a great variety of reasons, not yet catalogued. Often he wants to make sure whether he has understood the question correctly before giving an answer to the contents of the question. In other cases he may simply say that he is unable to answer a question:

(5) Where are you going for a drink? — I don't know.

Which may be derived from (6):

(6) I ask you to tell me: Where are you going for a drink? —
I answer you by saying I don't know the answer to the question: Where are you going for a drink.

On the whole, this group of answers which bear a direct relationship to the pragmatic component of the question consists of cases that give a comment on the question or the situational context in which the question is embedded and of cases that ask for further information before an adequate answer is attempted[9].

It might prove useful to remember at this point the work done by Grice, especially what he has to say about conversations: his 'cooperative principle' will play a major role in dialogue linguistics. He says (Grice 1968:7):

Make your conversational contribution such as is required at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk-exchange in which you are engaged.

This is specified with regard to features of quantity, quality, relation and manner, e.g.: "make your contribution as informative as is required", "do not make your contribution more informative than is required" — but who will define the degrees of 'requiredness'? In everyday speech many answers tender more information than has been asked for — "try to make your contribution one that is true", "be relevant", "be perspicuous", "avoid ambiguity", "be brief", "be orderly".

It has not yet, on any larger scale, been investigated whether one could relate these postulates to actual utterances; one would, no doubt, have to define what is to be understood by such terms as *brief, orderly* or *relevant*.

What all this amounts to is that a speaker reacting in a conversation, e.g. when he gives an answer, does not only refer to the surface-contents of his partner's utterance but also, and often at the same time, to the situational context provoked by a speech-act or — even more interesting to us — the communicative intention inherent in the utterances of his partners in a conversation. It will be the job of the linguist to distinguish between these various layers of a given utterance and see whether he can find any syntactic and/or semantic correlations to the pragmatic intentions.

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[9] For further details see Fries 1973a.

On a very simple level G. Lakoff has related in a well-known passage of his *Linguistics and natural logic*[10] a pragmatic component (PRED) to the arguments (ARG) of a sentence. This PRED stands for *order, ask*, or *state* or *say*, the three performatives which correspond to surface commands, questions and statements. From a purely syntactical point of view these distinctions seem to be sufficient; we know, however, that very often we cannot relate the communicative intentions expressed by *order, ask* or *state* to the syntactical forms of commands, questions or statements. We need only think of the more common cases of commands in the polite form of questions or the so-called rhetorical questions with no question-intention, i.e., with no quest for new information at all. The number of communicative intentions will be difficult to determine and may never be established; a complete grammar must, however, include such common notions as *answer, advise, inform* and the like (cf. Fries 1973b). It has been a common mistake to identify answers with statements. Not only do they very often not have an identical form, as has been assumed before, but in many cases answers do not have the form of statements at all (cf. Dressler 1972).

Already in a discussion of those parts of a conversation that consist only of the surface-syntactical structures 'question and answer', we need more than two corresponding units on the pragmatic level. Much more so if we want to deal with all aspects of a conversation, which does not usually consist of only adequate questions and answers.

Some items to be included in a list of communicative intentions have been enumerated by Isenberg (1972:55), who mentions *informieren, appellieren, korrigieren, explizieren, konstatieren, kundgeben, urteilen, antizipieren, manifestieren, fragen, partizipieren, argumentieren, fordern* and *motivieren*. First, this list is not regarded as exhaustive (note that, e.g., there is no *antworten (to answer)* which may be subsumed under *informieren*, although not every information is an answer) and secondly, this is a language-specific list of which it is most unlikely that it could be used in an identical way for any other language than German. This becomes immediately clear when one tries to translate these terms into English. This is even more true for a similar though much longer list set up by Habermas (1971:111 ff.), who distinguishes between *Kommunikativa, Konstativa, Repräsentativa* and *Regulativa*[11]. Though a native speaker will know exactly what is meant, e.g., by *erwidern, widersprechen* and *ein-*

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[10] Lakoff 1970, German translation Lakoff 1971 : 24.

[11] Kommunikativa: sagen, sich äußern, sprechen, reden; fragen, antworten, erwidern, entgegnen, zustimmen, widersprechen, einwenden, zugeben; erwähnen, widergeben, zitieren.

Konstativa: beschreiben, berichten, mitteilen, erzählen, erläutern, bemerken, dartun; erklären, voraussagen; deuten; versichern, beteuern, bejahen; verneinen, bestreiten, bezweifeln.

Repräsentativa: offenbaren, enthüllen, preisgeben, gestehen, zum Ausdruck bringen;

wenden, it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to exactly define the meaning of each, because, no doubt, the closely related features of each overlap. In addition to this it seems unlikely that any one of the communicative intentions will come up independently of all the others. In other words, the communicative intention of a speech-act may be composed of several units at the same time. During a conversation any unit of this complex communicative intention of a speaker may dominate at one time and be itself dominated at another. Thus it may be wise to posit for each individual sentence a specific 'communicative intention' on the pragmatic level. On the other hand, one must also take into consideration that there may be a single type of communicative intention which dominates a whole conversation or at least a long stretch of a dialogue, and is thus often holding a dialogue together much more closely than it could be achieved by syntactic or semantic means alone. Here it would be unnecessary to repeat this communicative feature for each individual sentence or smaller unit, and it would suffice to mark the end of a specific communicative unit. At these points of change the syntactic structure of the passages concerned will be of special interest to the linguist who wants to find out what the syntactic and semantic correlations to the features of the pragmatic level look like. It must be said, however, that even the introduction of a single performative verb, as e.g. *say*, does posit considerable problems (cf. Kac 1972).

Whereas in a longer text spoken or written only by one person it is often fairly easy to find the points where different communicative intentions meet and pinpoint syntactic and semantic changes, with a dialogue and its two or more speakers this is much more problematic. Of course, there will be fairly straightforward cases with one speaker dominating a dialogue and all the others answering or commenting on his utterances. Here all sorts of examinations, in school and otherwise, would belong. From the thematic point of view only one topic will be discussed at a time with a strictly regulated communicative intention for each participant. But these are special cases — very welcome to the linguist because they provide an ideal starting-point for further investigations. The more usual cases, however, do not show any thematic consistency nor any clear-cut divisions between the communicative intentions of the individual speakers. Not even in panel-discussions on a topic that has been agreed upon beforehand will we find thematic consistency or static communicative intentions.

verbergen, verhüllen, vorspielen, verdunkeln, verschweigen, verheimlichen, verleugnen. Regulativa: befehlen, auffordern, bitten, verlangen, ermahnen, verbieten, erlauben, nahelegen, sich weigern, sich widersetzen; sich verpflichten, versprechen, vereinbaren, verantworten, bestätigen, bekräftigen, sich verbürgen, aufkündigen; entschuldigen, verzeihen; vorschlagen, ablehnen, empfehlen, annehmen; raten, warnen, ermuntern, einräumen, zugestehen.

In everyday conversations the communicative intentions may change just as rapidly as the themes discussed do. The purpose of such conversations is often only to enjoy oneself by talking about whatever comes to one's mind. B. Sandig (1973:20) has discussed such a type of dialogue recently and has come to the conclusion that the "übergreifende Handlungsintention" consists of

das ungezwungene Sich-Unterhalten und dem Austausch von Neuigkeiten unter wechselnden Kommunikationspartnern... Die Intention der Kommunikationspartner geht hier gerade auf die Uneinheitlichkeit der Kommunikation.

The main features that hold such communications together are the "Zeitfolge, die Identität des Ortes und die Identität des Personenkreises", time, place, and speakers rather than syntactic or semantic features. It is particularly this type of dialogue that is difficult to place in a theory of communication because of its — seemingly — lack of a communicative function. Remember that one of the features a 'text' must have is — according to S. J. Schmidt (1973) — the "erkennbare kommunikative Funktion".

Here one of the major practical problems of a linguistics investigating the language of dialogues becomes apparent. As we all know, it is fairly difficult to get at items of ordinary spoken prose for our purposes. The moment the investigator is observed in his recording a passage of a conversation many features of a dialogue will automatically be changed by the speakers; we all know that radio or TV recordings are no adequate substitute for everyday conversations. They are all texts that are to a greater or lesser degree prepared beforehand and the communicative situation is a very specific one: the speakers pretend (or believe) that they talk to one another but at the same time want to address and impress an invisible public. But even if we are happy enough to have ordinary conversations recorded (which is in spite of all possible — and one need not resort to telephone conversations interesting though they may be), this is not enough. We need a detailed record of the situational context, of the behaviour of the speakers, their gestures, the expression on their faces and the like; all these facts have to be set in relation to the linguistic expressions of the speakers.

It will be the task of the linguist to analyse those aspects that are relevant for the linguistic form of an utterance, for a discussion of dialogues, that is, those features that could influence the choice of words, constructions, sentences and complete texts. Wunderlich (1970) and later S. J. Schmidt (1973: 111ff.), e.g., distinguish between some general points: the general knowledge of the speaker, including his knowledge of the topic under discussion, social norms and the knowledge about his partner; the general abilities of both speaker and hearer, their abilities to remember, to learn, to concentrate on a topic; the general motivation of the speakers, their wishes, interests and

desires; and finally, a group of special factors to be established for each individual dialogue, including the knowledge of preceding texts, dialogues and their implications, the knowledge of the speaker's own position and role in a discourse, the emotional situation of the speaker, and the like.

It is, of course, fairly easy and it has become popular to make long lists enumerating any number of such features. More important, however, will once again be the work of the linguist who finds ways and means to relate all these features to those fields of linguistics already well covered.

This is, in my opinion, the point where the general linguist and the linguist investigating the problems of a specific language have to meet. Although it is necessary and indispensable for the student of a particular language to have a frame of reference, to have a theory of speech-acts against which he can measure his findings, he will, I believe, for a long time be concerned with the structure of particular texts and their environments, and the results of these investigations will, no doubt, influence the theories set up by students of general linguistics. These theories will have to be measured not only for their degrees of formalization but they will be measured whether they can stand the test against the reality of language as it is used, e.g. in dialogues.

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