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

\(^1\) 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 ...'
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 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 question or the like in disguise. Even more important for our discussion of dialogues, as soon as we have postulated some sort of pragmatic level including a performative element (in questions, say, of the type I ask you to tell me (cf. Moravesik 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):

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

(4a) [agitation] Where do we sleep? — There’s no need to get so worked up over it.
   b. [desperately] Then where do you 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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* Examples from modern English plays (cf. Fries 1973a).
On a very simple level, G. Lakoff has related in a well-known passage of his *Linguistics and natural logic* 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, advice, inform* and the like (cf. Fries 1972b). It has been a common mistake to identify answers with statements. Not only do they very often not have an identical form, 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 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 (1972:56), who mentions *informieren, appellieren, korrigieren, etipieren, konstatieren, kündigen, verweisen, antizipieren, manifestieren, fragen, partizipieren, argumentieren, fordern* and motivieren. First, this list is not regarded as exhaustive (note that, e.g., there is no *antworten* in 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, Konstatativa, Repräsentativa* and *Regulative*. Though a native speaker will know exactly what is meant, e.g., by *erwähnen, widersprechen* and *ein-\footnote{Lakoff 1970, German translation, Lakoff 1971: 24.}

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\footnote{Kommunikativa: sagen, sich äußern, sprechen, reden; fragen, antworten, erzählen, entgegensehen, zustimmen, widersprechen, einwenden; zugewiesen, erwähnen, widersprechen, zitieren.

Konstatativa: beobachten, berichten, mittelbar, erwähnen, erklären, bemerken, erläutern, voraussagen; deuten; vernehmen; beobachten, bejahen, verweisen, bestreiten, bezeichnen.

Repräsentativa: offenbaren, enthalten, preisgeben, gestehen, zum Ausdruck bringen;
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 Handlungselement" consists of das unverzügliche Sich-Unterhalten und dem Austausch von Neugkeiten 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 degree 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.

REFERENCES


