

STRATEGIC INDETERMINACY AND FACE-WORK

RAINER SCHULZE

University of Essen

1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS*

Langue and *parole* are rule-governed. This assumption does not solely pertain to the description of the written language in a grammar; even language in performance is largely rule-governed, the term 'rule' being understood as 'social rule' as defined by Wittgenstein and Searle. An interesting attempt to interpret language in performance as rule-governed verbal behaviour was made by the philosopher Grice (1975): His four basic maxims of conversation (i.e. the maxims of quality, quantity, relevance, and manner) jointly express a general co-operative principle. Underlying this principle, the maxims specify what interactants have to do in order to sustain everyday conversation: they should speak sincerely, relevantly, clearly, but always providing that they give sufficient and adequate information. All those who devote themselves to the description and analysis of everyday talk (cf. e.g. Schulze 1985) are likely to admit that interactants in general do not comply with the maxims. At first sight, the validity of the Gricean maxims seems to be highly questionable; a closer look, however, reveals that the framework of maxims may positively serve as a basis for the description of verbal behaviour: if the interactants do not comply with these maxims, then they signal that their utterances must be decoded in a specific way. If the interactants behave in the way just described, their utterances may be seen as indirect (speech-)acts. We have to assume direct (speech-)acts, if the interactants comply with the

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Gricean maxims. All indirect (speech-)acts are characterized by the rather low degree of obligation with regard to the force of their single intentions, the feature of strategic indeterminacy is constitutive for all of them (Lecch 1980: 87ff.). The reduced degree of obligation and the implied indeterminate character of indirect (speech-)acts offer the possibility of handling these verbal patterns as instances of interactive behaviour in everyday conversations (Müller 1979).

2. TERMINOLOGY, SUBJECT, ASSUMPTION, GOAL

2.1. Strategic indeterminacy

Strategic indeterminacy is not a characteristic property of all verbal texts: whereas, for example, in legal or scientific texts the degree of indeterminacy is likely to be rather low, a high degree of indeterminacy is almost to be expected in poetic texts (cf. e.g. Ingarden (1965^a), Iser (1970) and Plett (1977) or everyday conversations (cf. e.g. Neustupný (1966), Altmann (1972), Pinkal (1980)). The phenomenon of indeterminacy becomes evident when pointing out two different properties of a text:

- (i) A text is indeterminate if it consists of semantically redundant text elements. In the following considerations, such a text is supposed to be 'overdetermined'. On the morpho-syntactic level, verbal indicators of overdetermined texts are communicative particles and 'discourse lubricants' (gambits) (Edmondson/House 1981). On the purely syntactic level, generally paraphrases, repetitions, exemplifications, comments, etc. can be found (Rath 1975).
- (ii) A text is indeterminate if the information is conveyed in a defective way. Disturbances caused by the channel or elements of the information which convey an indeterminate character *qua* their respective referents can be made responsible for this text property. Such a text is supposed to be 'underdetermined'.

These text properties reveal a close relationship to the basic assumptions of information theory. If we are going to employ these assumptions for the explication of *strategic* indeterminacy in everyday talk, they have to be supplemented by some additional, pragmatics-based considerations. Communicative-pragmatic indeterminacy (under- or overdeterminacy) is present when interactants refer to speech-events and to information conveyed during these events. 'Communicative-pragmatic indeterminacy' is a gradual term, since the question as to whether an utterance is communicatively under- or overdetermined is only appropriate in those contexts where the interactants (and analyst) refer to a situation-dependent norm. Thus, the above introduced characterization of different text properties has to be expanded as follows:

an utterance is communicatively under- or overdetermined if this utterance conveys too little or too much information with regard to the specific expectations of the hearer (and of the analyst) or with regard to a situation-dependent norm. If, for example, an utterance is overdetermined, then (so the basic assumption of this paper) the speaker presupposes interpersonal difficulties of communication and understanding, at the same time, the speaker, by 'translation' of his/her intentions, signals to reduce or to completely exclude these difficulties. Thus, the implied communicative overdeterminacy on the part of the speaker has to be read as the reflexion of the self from the point of view of the generalized other. Such a type of overdeterminacy is recipient-designed and serves as an offer to form an opinion about the text on the basis of preceding utterances (Hörmann 1976).

The reader, however, must keep in mind that the speaker does not always presuppose communicative underdeterminacy in order to ensure the hearer's understanding; rather, presupposed communicative underdeterminacy may also function as a support of the comprehension-forming process on the part of the speaker. By signalling the inadequate character of a preceding utterance and by rephrasing his/her intentions, the speaker may present his/her efforts for clarification as individual problem-solving strategies (Miller/Galanter/Pribram 1973). This explanation, however, is not going to be investigated within this paper in any detail. For the ongoing investigation it is important to note that the phenomenon of indeterminacy is not only a speaker-oriented product of primarily tentative statements, but rather the result of the reciprocity of roles and interactants' perspectives in everyday talk.

2.2. Amplification

In behaving in an indeterminate way, the speaker may attempt

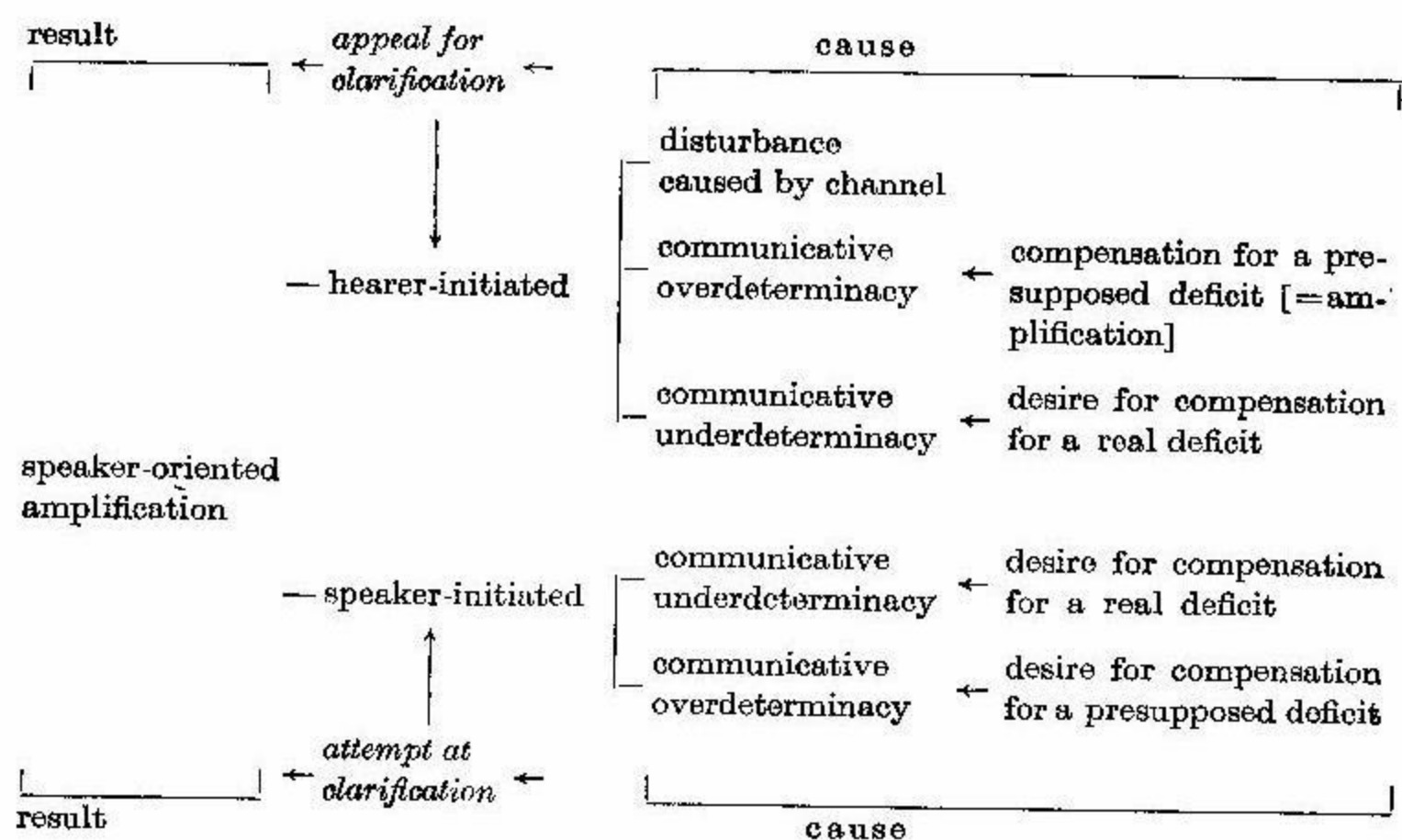
- (i) to compensate for a real deficit of information and intention (communicative underdeterminacy) or
- (ii) to compensate for a presupposed deficit of information and intention (communicative overdeterminacy).

Both verbal and behavioural dispositions with which the hearer in general is faced as speaker-oriented rephrasings may be defined as 'amplification'. This term is already an essential part of traditional rhetoric and is to be seen as a figure of quantity belonging to various stylistic categories. 'Amplification' in this sense is equivalent to the highly artistic shaping of sentences (*ars bene dicendi*), which exceeds the necessary comprehension of verbal actions (Plett 1979⁴). This traditional description of amplification, at least to linguists working within the vast field of pragmatics, lacks an essential component for the analysis of everyday interaction; i.e. the description neglects one aspect

which is going to be emphasized in our considerations: 'amplification' is going to be understood as a speaker-oriented method, which, among other strategies, by incorporating additive rephrasings, takes account of

- (i) real or
- (ii) presupposed deficits with regard to information and intention and also takes into account the concomitance of the speaker and hearer (Müller 1979).

Speaker-oriented amplifications are initiated in various ways, the production of these amplifications may be attributed to different causes. The following diagram may elucidate the facts in question:



Speaker-oriented amplifications, on the one hand, may be seen as instances and processes of rephrasings, on the other hand, they function as the verbal results of these rephrasings. Utterances and parts of utterances which serve as a point of departure for speaker-oriented amplifications may be called 'matrix utterances'. The function of speaker-oriented amplifications will be represented with the help of the well-known terminology of Bühler (1934). Bühler emphasizes the threefold aspect of our language: from the speaker's point of view, a speech act may function as a symptom, an indication of what is in his/her mind; from the hearer's point of view a speech act may function as a signal, calling on him/her to take some kind of action; from the point of view of the communication itself, a speech act may function as a symbol, a sign standing for whatever the speaker intends to convey. This last aspect will be neglected in our investigation.

2.3 Face

Verbal and behavioural patterns which comprise greeting and leave-taking sequences, apologies, thanks, etc. can be defined as components of a verbal repertoire, which again can be paraphrased as 'politeness'. The term 'politeness' resembles strongly Goffman's notion of face (1967). In his considerations, 'face' is seen as the social value an interactant claims for himself/herself by the line communication partners assume he/she has taken during the ongoing everyday talk. Thus, 'face' is an "image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes — albeit an image that others may share" (Goffman 1967: 5).

Brown and Levinson (1978) present an approach which derives from the reflexions of Goffman. Using his notion of face, the authors set up the following typology:

- (i) *negative face* is the want of every individual and competent interactant to be unimpeded in the performance of his/her individual actions by the persons opposite;
- (ii) *positive face* is the want of every individual and competent interactant to have his/her personal wants and desires displayed as favourable, socially acceptable and agreeable to the persons opposite (Brown/Levinson 1978: 66).

The observation of impromptu speech demonstrates that each face runs the risk of being threatened or even violated. Because of this, the face of the speaker or the hearer or of both may be involved. The performance of verbal action patterns always involves the face wants of participating interactants. The achievement of one's own objectives and the concomitant face-threatening of the person opposite create a situation of tension which can be alleviated by the use of mitigating verbal strategies. These strategies may reduce the hearer's feeling of face-loss, the use of these strategies may be called *polite behaviour*. Brown and Levinson (1978) establish four different types of politeness strategies (*bald on record*, *positive politeness*, *negative politeness*, *off record*) which may be summarized as follows:

- (i) the strategy *bald on record* is used if the speaker behaves according to the Gricean maxims; verbal tokens of this pattern may be *listen, watch out, look, etc.*;
- (ii) the strategy *positive politeness* is used if the speaker refers to the positive face want of the hearer; verbal tokens of this pattern comprise expressions like *what a fantastic garden you have, help me with this bag here, will you lov?, this was a lovely party*, and many more;
- (iii) the strategy *negative politeness* is used if the speaker takes account of the hearer's want to maintain claims of territory and self-determination;

verbal tokens of this pattern include most indirect speech acts, which are characterized verbally by the use of modal structures, hedges, tag-questions, etc.;

(iv) the strategy *off record* is used if the speaker wants to hide his/her 'genuine' intention and offers ambiguous readings of his/her utterances to the hearer; verbal tokens comprise utterances like *John's a real genius* or *Harry's a real fish*, which overtly invite the recipient to draw his/her conclusions.

All verbal actions may be identified with the help of these four major politeness strategies. For our investigation, those actions are worth describing and analyzing to which the indirect character is ascribable; the feature 'strategic indeterminacy' is inherent in nearly all of them¹.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Speaker-oriented amplification: Hearer-initiated

The starting-point of the following considerations is that any communicative indeterminacy may be interpreted as a source of potential communicative misunderstanding and that such a type of indeterminacy may be repaired by the participants in the ongoing talk. The hearer, for example, may initiate a speaker-oriented amplification by identifying the trouble source or repairable (Schegloff/Jefferson/Sacks 1977) within everyday talk and by prompting the speaker to rephrase his/her utterance (Shimanoff/Brunak 1977).

3.1.1 Disturbance caused by the channel

Those speaker-oriented amplifications, which can be traced back to disturbances caused by the channel, are necessarily hearer-initiated. It is only the hearer who can signal at this very moment whether it is possible to ascribe a

¹ In formulating our description and analysis of strategic indeterminate behaviour in everyday talk, we rely primarily upon a corpus of two buying and selling exchanges (recorded surreptitiously), produced by a timber- and coal-merchant and a native English speaker respectively in Llangaffo on Anglesey (Wales) in 1980. What is going to be described and analyzed are extracts from these exchanges. Major notational conventions comprise

- i. the intonational nucleus, which is marked by an *Umlaut* sign,
- ii. the intonational contour, which is marked by / for rise, \ for fall, / \ for rise-fall, and \ / for fall-rise;
- iii. the pauses which are differentiated as small, medium . . . and long . . . ones;
- iv. the interactants of everyday exchanges marked by S1, S2, . . . Sn;
- v. simultaneous parts of these exchanges marked by [.

functional quality to the interactively meant contribution of the speaker or not. This phenomenon may be clarified by the presentation of conversational data² in Texts I and II.

		Text I
utterance		1 (S1) <i>seen the coïlman hàve yóu.</i> 2 (S2) <i>sòrrý</i> 1 (S1) HAVE YOU SEEN THE COÁLMAN AROÚND.
politeness strategy		'negative politeness'
function	symptom	I realize that you cannot decode the preceding utterance. Since you remind me implicitly of the necessary behaviour according to the Gricean maxims, I will <i>repeat</i> my contribution.
	signal	I appeal for information.

		Text II
utterance		1 (S1) <i>hèlló . how are yòu . . 've you got any cóal tòdáy . .</i> 2 (S2) <i>beg you pàrdón.</i> 3 (S1) HAVE YOU ANY COÁL TODAY.
politeness strategy		'positive politeness'
function	symptom	I realize that you cannot decode the preceding utterance. Since you remind me implicitly of the necessary behaviour according to the Gricean maxims, I. will <i>repeat</i> my contribution.
	signal	I appeal for the opening of the buying and selling exchange.

As exemplified by the preceding texts, communicative indeterminacy is the result of extra-linguistic circumstances. The repairs in question must be seen against the background of extended Gricean maxims, the adequate performance of which are required by the hearer implicitly.³

² In the following charts, speaker-oriented amplifications are represented by capital letters; the politeness strategy indicates the very utterance with which the speaker-oriented amplification is being performed. The matrix utterances as sources of speaker-oriented amplifications are set in italics.

³ In general, the Gricean maxims refer to semantic-informative aspects of utterances; they do not refer to speaker-oriented considerations of disturbances caused by the channel. Thus, the maxim of modality may be read as follows: *Make your contribution as acoustically distinct as is required for the current purposes of the exchange.* If the reader chooses this maxim as a basis for analysis, he/she realizes that the speaker violates the maxims in at least these two texts.

Again, the speaker has the opportunity of amplifying his/her utterance by way of repetition. His/her amplification has a primarily *reparative* character.

3.1.2 Real communicative underdeterminacy

Real communicative underdeterminacy on the part of the speaker is met by the hearer's desire for compensation for the real informative and intentional deficit. Thus, the following speaker-oriented amplifications are largely hearer-initiated. The examples from Texts III and IV elucidate the point in question:

Text III

utterance		22 (S3) <i>could you tell me where the er sāleyard is please</i> 22 (S2) <i>it depends what you want</i> 22 (S3) THE SĀLEYĀRD. MALCOLM EVĀNS.
politeness strategy		'negative politeness'
function	symptom	I realize that you can decode my intention in the preceding utterance only partially. Since you remind me implicitly of the necessary behaviour according to the Gricean maxims, I will <i>specify</i> my contribution.
	signal	I appeal for information.

Text IV

utterance		8 (S1) <i>yèah. I want coal for Rhòsyr. you know down at Nèwboròugh.</i> 13 (S2) <i>ordinary còal</i> 14 (S1) CÓAL 15 (S2) <i>yèah</i> 16 (S1) GOOD CÓAL
politeness strategy		'positive politeness'
function	symptom	I realize that you can decode my intention in the preceding utterance only partially. Since you remind me implicitly of the necessary behaviour according to the Gricean maxims, I will <i>specify</i> my contribution.
	signal	I appeal for your consideration of my buying desire.

According to the different maxims against the background of the Gricean co-operative principle, the interactants are obliged to exclude the vagueness of their information and intention. By *specifying*, in the above mentioned examples, his/her preceding utterance after the hearer-initiated interference, the speaker misjudges the extent of the background knowledge of the hearer. In these cases, too, the speaker-oriented amplification has a primarily *reparative* character.

3.1.3 Presupposed underdeterminacy

Presupposed underdeterminacy, preceded by a hearer-initiated interference, is, in the literal sense of the word, to be interpreted as 'communicative overdeterminacy', since the production of the former type is the result of an already performed amplification on the part of the speaker: the deficit with regard to the quantity and quality of the information, presupposed by the speaker in his utterance, has already been made up; the hearer signals that he/she has no problems of comprehension and understanding with regard to the first speaker-oriented amplification. The following example from the corpus may be given.

Text V

utterance		50 (S2) <i>so. erm I'll try and do it tonight</i> 51 (S1) <i>mhá</i> 50 (S2) OR POSSIBLY I'LL DO IT TONIGHT FOR YOU. 52 (S1) <i>yèah.</i> 50 (S2) IF NÓT WELL I SAY NINETY-FIVE PER CENT CERTAIN TONIGHT IF NOT I'LL 53 (S1) <i>that's right</i> 50 (S2) BE THERE EARLY TOMORROW MORNING
politeness strategy		'positive politeness'/'negative politeness'
function	symptom	I realize that you have decoded my intention in the preceding utterance in an adequate way. Since you signal this fact to me, I will <i>expand</i> my contribution with further details.
	signal	I appeal for the agreement and acknowledgement of my suggestions in order to satisfy your wants.

While speaker-oriented amplifications, at least so far, functioned as repairs of preceding deficitary utterances which were successively completed by a (stronger?) consideration of Gricean maxims, they are now responsible for the establishment of speaker-oriented trustworthiness and authenticity. This strategy has the sole purpose of supporting the speaker-oriented desire for his/her own face-preservation: the speaker purposefully avoids being questioned by the hearer with regard to the authenticity of the utterance(s); the speaker attempts to escape from possible different points of view or situational descriptions by the offer of specific types of amplification. In order to increase the degree of authenticity, the speaker in general attempts to support his/her offer by the use of well-grounded arguments. The speaker presupposes and hopes that his/her type of conversational strategy increases the degree of probability with regard to the hearer's agreement. By suggesting agreement with the hearer as regards the speaker-oriented amplifications, the speaker attempts to preserve his/her own face. All those amplifications which correspond to this pattern of strategy have a primarily *confirmative* character. Confirmative speaker-oriented amplifications therefore possibly guarantee the establishment and confirmation of impromptu speech. Both are dominated by mutual esteem (appreciation); they mainly help to preserve the speaker's face.

3.2 Speaker-oriented amplification: Speaker-initiated

In everyday talk, it is not only the hearer who may object to instances of communicative indeterminacy; rather, the speaker himself/herself inquires into real or presupposed deficits with regard to the transmission of information and intention. Contrary to the interactive strategy of 'self-repair', initiated by back-channel behaviour, the speaker may perform a non-other-initiated repair, bringing to his/her mind the perspective of the generalized other.

3.2.1 Real communicative underdeterminacy

Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks have found that corrective patterns in everyday talk are well-organized (1977). In general, the interactants prefer self-initiated repairs to other-initiated ones. We have to note, however, that self-initiated and other-initiated repairs as speaker-oriented and/or hearer-initiated amplifications are only in some ways related to the notion of repair within the field of American conversational analysis. In the latter type of analysis, the hearer introduces an alternative suggestion into the ongoing talk, which has to be ratified by the speaker (Jefferson 1983). *Qua*

speaker-oriented amplification, however, the speaker himself/herself presents an alternative to his/her utterance(s). The exchanges in Texts VI and VII exemplify the point in question.

Text VI

utterance		17 (S1) <i>well listèn could you et'm...</i> <i>HOW HOW MANY DOES THIS WÄGGON HÖLD.</i>
politeness strategy		'negative politeness'
function	symptom	I realize that I cannot encode my contribution in an adequate way. By speaking according to the Gricean maxims, I will <i>rephrase</i> my contribution.
	signal	Please be lenient towards my encoding difficulties.

Text VII

utterance		59 (S1) <i>et'm I would säy sort of téléphone mé you knów. and if.</i> <i>BUT THE PHONE'S NOT WÖRKING.</i>
politeness strategy		'off record'
function	symptom	I realize that I cannot encode my contribution in an adequate way. By speaking according to the Gricean maxims, I will <i>rephrase</i> my contribution.
	signal	Please be lenient towards my encoding difficulties.

Communicative indeterminacy in these cases is mainly the result of non-terminated and topicalized speaker-oriented problem-solving plans, which enter into the speaker-oriented amplification and are solved within these amplifications. By *rephrasing* the contribution, the speaker conveys an amplification with a primarily *reparative* character.

3.2.2 Presupposed underdeterminacy

It is one major result of this investigation that the speaker may *presuppose* communicative indeterminacy. In the literal sense of the word, this type of indeterminacy can be renamed 'communicative overdeterminacy' and is realized by the speaker tentatively and spontaneously in his/her successive

amplification. (Even the hearer, we may assume, very likely expects this type of amplification as a highly ritualized sequence of everyday talk.) The examples from the corpus given in Text VIII elucidate the point at issue.

Text VIII

utterance		10 (S1) <i>how many tons have you got</i> 11 (S2) <i>ER. AT THE MOMENT THEY'RE STILL CUTTING AT THE MOMENT YOU KNOW.</i> <i>erm you can have as many as you want. we've got a few to. you know that. we've GOT TWO OR MORE TREES TO COME DOWN THIS AFTERNÓON YÓU KNÓW.</i>
politeness strategy		'positive politeness'
function	symptom	To ensure that you have adequate information, I will <i>paraphrase</i> my contribution.
	signal	I appeal for your agreement.

As was already pointed out in 3.1.3, this type of amplification aims at the achievement of trustworthiness and authenticity, conveyed by the speaker, by supporting one's own positive face. The speaker attempts to anticipate possible objections on the part of the hearer by *paraphrasing* his/her information and intention.⁴ This type of amplification, again, displays a *confirmative* character.

In our transcribed buying and selling exchanges, we can point out an additional but similar character of speaker-oriented amplifications which is different from the one mentioned above. Concerning this matter we can present Text IX.

⁴ The phenomenon of paraphrase has been largely investigated under its syntactic and semantic aspects (Ungeheuer 1969, Fuchs 1982). It is very difficult, however, to present conclusive evidence of the phenomenon of syntactic and semantic equivalence within the sequence of at least two utterances. A pragmatic point of view with regard to paraphrase suggests taking the speaker's attitude towards his/her utterance as a criterion for the decision whether sequences of utterances are synonymous or not; sequences of utterances are synonymous if the speaker re regards parts of his/her utterance(s) as being replaced by others. This point of view is emphasized in our investigation.

Text IX

utterance		39 (S2) <i>I don't know like... I DON'T KNOW WHÉN. 'COS AS I SAY I HELP ONE OF MY BRÒTHÉRS WHO'S. ER. HE'S A TRÁVELLÈR AND. ÉR. I'M JUST HELPING HIM OUT SORT OF THING TODAY WITH A COUPLE OF DÉ-LIVERIES.</i>
politeness strategy		'negative politeness'
function	symptom	I know that I did not come up to your expectations with regard to this buying and selling exchange. To ensure that you are confronted with only partial face-loss I will <i>comment</i> on my contribution.
	signal	I appeal for your co-operation.

With the help of this amplification, the speaker attempts to preserve a minimum of authenticity in his/her preceding utterances. Additionally, it is shown that the face of the person opposite is to be preserved. This balancing act, taking into consideration the preservation of one's own face *and* the face of the communication partner, necessarily displays a *corrective* character. In general, this phenomenon may be termed 'account' (Scott/Lyman 1968). According to this reading, speaker-oriented amplifications are used to avert the occurrence of imminent conflicts within everyday talk. By *commenting* on a previous utterance, the speaker makes use of an amplification with a *corrective* character.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, let us restate the most important points of our analysis. The purpose of our paper is to present a functional explanation for the existence of strategic indeterminacy in impromptu speech. It has been shown in some detail that spoken texts are indeterminate with regard to semantically and pragmatically used elements. Strategic indeterminacy (under- and/or overdeterminacy) can be analysed when interactants refer to speech events and to information generated within these speech events. Strategic indeterminacy is a gradual phenomenon since it is only sensible to talk about under- and/or overdetermined utterances in relation to situation-dependent norms. Thus, utterances are communicatively under- and/or overdetermined if they are or are presupposed to be not adequately informative with regard to the specific expectations of the hearer.

This interpretation takes into account constitutive elements of human interaction, i.e. human needs and wants. These are wants which can either be accepted and confirmed or which leave one's own symbolic territory untraversed upon by others. These wants are identified as positive or negative face wants, respectively. The major aim of this paper is to outline the close relationship between strategic indeterminacy and face-work.

Strategic under- and/or overdeterminacy is realized verbally by means of speaker-oriented amplifications which can display a reparative, confirmative or corrective character. Admittedly, these features may be seen as the conceptual result of a description and analysis on the surface structure level; thus, future research work has to prove whether a description and analysis on a different level offers more options and leads to a 'theory' which is descriptively and/or explanatorily adequate.

The amplifications at issue are used, among other functions, to signal to the other person the credibility and authenticity of the utterances. Syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic features of these amplifications may be summarized as follows:⁵

speaker-oriented amplifications:		
type of initiation	syntactic-semantic feature	pragmatic function
hearer-initiated	repetition specification expansion	reparative reparative confirmative
speaker-initiated	rephrasing paraphrasing comment	reparative confirmative corrective

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⁵ It is to note, however, that some researchers prefer slightly different readings of the terms in the diagram: cf. e.g. Persson (1974) for 'repetition', e.g. Rehbein (1979) for 'rephrasing', and e.g. Posner (1982) for 'comment'.

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