CHAPTER

6 Spoken Genres: Conversations and Classrooms

The first half of this book considered the nature of language comprehension, the nature of discourse and the nature of genre in principle. It surveyed the literature and the state of thinking in the field of discourse and genre, and on that basis it elaborated a set of working definitions of the main concepts. In the previous chapter, on the basis of the discussion in the first four, I then set out a broad approach to the analysis of discourse, proposing that we start with *what* those texts are doing, that is, the impact or function of the text or texts as understood in their context, then examine *how* they do it, by looking at the various features of those texts to see in general terms how they achieve those effects, and also considering *why* those texts are operating in this way. This is the heuristic on the basis of which we can now proceed.

Although efforts were made throughout those chapters to illustrate the discussion through authentic examples of actual texts, and to work inductively as far as possible in line with the aims set out in the introduction, the first half of the book was, of necessity, relatively theoretical. The second half will offer a contrast, since now the focus of attention will be on an array of (I believe) interesting and varied texts, with a view to analysing them in accordance with the heuristic.

The range of texts is deliberately broad, covering conversation, legal texts, classroom discourse, lonely hearts ads, advertisements, newspaper reports, sports reports, political speeches and more besides. The sheer variety of examples might mean that in places I have sacrificed analytical depth for the sake of breadth, but my aim is not to offer full analyses of any of the texts discussed, even if that were possible. Instead the aim is to examine each text only to the extent that it illustrates my approach, and raises for discussion issues central to discourse analysis as a way of enriching the heuristic set out in Chapter 5.

For example, in this chapter the discussion begins with a sample of conversation, but the aim is not exhaustively to analyse one conversational text in all its details, but rather to use the examination of that text in order to set out some of the possible approaches to conversations of this type, and to draw out some useful lessons for anyone wanting to analyse such texts in future. For a fuller analysis of each type of text the reader will then be able to go to the specialist literature, for example the vast literature on Conversation Analysis, since here the main purpose is instead to prepare the toolkit, in other words to establish, chapter by chapter, a set of *approaches, tools and techniques* which can potentially be used in future analyses. Chapter 10 will then set out a summary of the approaches and tools which have been discussed throughout the book, and will discuss, in conclusion, two case studies of fuller analyses and how they were carried out in practice.

6.1 Conversation

Turning to conversation, not everything which is commonly understood by the term would be classified by linguists as such. Cook considers that talk can be termed 'conversation' only if it has these features:

1. It is not primarily necessitated by a practical task
2. Any unequal power of participants is partially suspended
3. The number of the participants is small
4. Turns are quite short
5. Talk is primarily for the participants not for an outside audience

(Cook 1989: 51)

By this definition, the discourse on a TV chat show would not be classed as conversation as it does not meet the last criterion (Cutting, 2002). Let us look at an example of genuine conversation.

Buying dress material

In the text below two young women are discussing some material which they have recently bought in the market. I will present it almost exactly as it appeared in the original (Cheepen, 1988:102–3), the aim being to show some of the complexities of authentic transcript data and also to offer a flavour of real analysis. There is little punctuation, reflecting the speed of the flow of conversation, and only a few markings such as <.> and <+> to indicate short and long pauses, <* *> around a word to show when it overlaps with another

word or words from the next speaker's turn (also surrounded by <* *>), and the abbreviation *inaud.* to indicate an inaudible part. I have given only the first part of Cheepen's text, and I have also given the women invented names to make the discussion easier.

Turns

1. *Clare: I've got some stuff to show you. I went and bought this this morning cause my mum said she'd treat me she wants me to do a couple for her she's going to America (inaud.)*
2. *Karen: yeh I've just made one yeh*
3. *Clare: I was rather pleased with that*
4. *Karen: yeh have you made it already*
5. *Clare: no no I've just bought it this morning*
6. *Karen: haven't you got the straps*
7. *Clare: come off the bottom*
8. *Karen: oh which one d'you get it on*
9. *Clare: I got it on the one opposite Woolworth's*
10. *Karen: yeh yeh if you get it from the other one he gives you the straps as well*
11. *Clare: yeh but that other one wasn't there today I saw it Wednesday*
12. *Karen: oh mind you I've just made one and I don't need the straps*

(Cheepen, 1988:102)

Following the procedure set out in Chapter 5, an initial question to ask (the *what* question) concerns the *function* of this text. However, it is immediately apparent that in the case of interactions such as this one each participant might well have a different aim and intention, and each utterance might have a slightly different function. This means that although we could talk generally about the function of this text as a whole (like most conversations it is arguably mostly *phatic*, that is, it concerns social relations between the two speakers) it is often more appropriate in texts which involve more than one participant to think about *each speaker's particular aim* in the discourse, and how they all manage the interaction towards achieving their aims. This means that a useful initial strategy when dealing with texts which include more than one participant is to consider not only the *function of the text as a whole*, but the aims and intentions of each participant and how those interconnect through the discourse. In our approach to discourse, in other words, initial consideration of *text function* might be complemented, when considering texts with several participants, by careful attention to *participant intentions and aims*.

The next question is the *how* question: how does the text achieve its function? This now needs to be framed in terms of each participant, to give the

questions: how does each participant achieve or seek to achieve his or her aim? What *features* of the discourse contribute to the fulfilment (or failure) of these aims or intentions?

We have already seen, in relation to the text in which Gilbey was conducting a job interview (p. 86), that genuine spoken discourse is often more complex than we imagine, when we are not participants and when we do not have paralinguistic clues (such as gestures and facial expressions) or contextual clues to help us. As we read what the two women say here we need to draw on all the types of knowledge we identified in Figure 1.1, and even then we might not find the exchange fully coherent. One problem is that the participants are operating quickly and flexibly, and drawing on knowledge of each other and of the context in sometimes opaque ways. Take lines 8 and 9 when Karen asks:

Karen: oh which one d'you get it on
Clare: I got it on the one opposite Woolworth's

I suspect from my own knowledge of such shopping situations that she is referring to a market stall in the street, opposite the shop called Woolworth's. I assume this partly because in my home town there are just such stalls in the street in very similar situations, so I can draw on personal knowledge. This is also plausible because it fits with a later utterance in line 11, since when Karen has said in line 10 that the 'other one' is better, Clare replies: *'yeh but that other one wasn't there today I saw it Wednesday'* which suggests that she bought it not in a normal shop, but on a temporary stall which is there some days and not others. Whether or not this is true, what is clear is that the participants *themselves* have enough shared knowledge so as to be able to operate with it quickly and telegraphically, without needing to be specific – a behaviour which gives spoken interaction a speed and flow which is remarkably effective for participants, but which can cause problems for the analyst.

Topic placement and manipulation

The special point of interest in this exchange, however, is the way in which the participants manipulate and manage *topic* in order to achieve their own ends. This is the kind of area which Conversation Analysis considers particularly important, along with adjacency pair and repair analysis. A superficial view of the exchange up to this point might consider that Karen has been cooperative and even offered to give Clare some straps, but closer analysis suggests that this is not an adequate explanation of the

exchange. As Cheepen notes when analysing the text, 'It is clear, just from this extract, that potential trouble has arisen here between the interactants' (Cheepen, 1988:103). Because both participants make efforts to appear friendly and positive, however, and relatively casual, this 'trouble' is not immediately apparent. Nevertheless, if we look more closely, an analysis of the adjacency pairs reveals not only the tension between them but also the strategies which each woman – very rapidly and probably only half consciously – adopts, in a kind of elaborate dance or game, to achieve certain social ends.

Clare starts the conversation with what we can call a 'fishing for compliments' strategy. This strategy appears to have received scant discussion in the CA literature, but is nonetheless quite common in real life – when I buy a new shirt I want my friends and family to admire it, so the *preferred response* to an utterance such as 'I bought this shirt today' is typically a compliment of some sort. In this case Clare has bought some dress material to make 'a couple' of dresses for her mother, and probably her mother has paid for it as a treat (though this is not very clear). The key point is that she is angling for Karen to congratulate her – the preferred response would be something like 'Wow, that is great! It's lovely, and so much of it! What a bargain! You are a genius in the material buying department!' However, Karen does not offer any such compliments. In a move reminiscent of grumpy Brian in the 'Window' dialogue (see p. 6), she withholds consent except in the briefest word 'yeh', almost as if she has not heard what Clare said. Furthermore she even tries to change the topic to talk about her own activities: *'yeh I've just made one yeh'*. Clare, rather like Ann in the 'Window' dialogue, seems not to be affected by this apparent diversionary tactic but persists, still trying to get the compliment she wants. For her part, Karen appears to refuse it, and assumes an apparently casual and relaxed air in doing so, as we can gauge from her frequent use of 'yeh' and 'oh' at the start of her responses. We could set out one partial analysis of this part of the conversation like this:

Turns	Text	Analysis
1.	*Clare: I've got some stuff to show you. I went and bought this this morning cause my mum said she'd treat me she wants me to do a couple for her she's going to America (inaud.)*	*Adjacency opener:* fishing for a compliment, praise or appreciation
2.	*Karen: yeh I've just made one yeh*	*Displacement (or Dispreferred response?):* withholds praise and attempts topic switch
3.	*Clare: I was rather pleased with that*	Repeats opener, still fishing!
4.	*Karen: yeh have you made it already*	*Displacement (or Dispreferred response?):* still withholds praise and attempts another topic switch with an *Adjacency opener:* information question
5.	*Clare: no no I've just bought it this morning*	Karen's topic switch has been successful. Clare cooperates with a *dispreferred response (no, instead of yes)* and justification
6.	*Karen: haven't you got the straps*	Presses her advantage with yet another topic adjustment. *Adjacency opener:* information question
7.	*Clare: come off the bottom*	*Preferred response*: explains that the straps can be made from surplus material at the bottom of the cloth
8.	*Karen: oh which one d'you get it on*	Continues to press her advantage with another enquiry. *Adjacency opener:* information request
9.	*Clare: I got it on the one opposite Woolworth's*	*Preferred response:* gives information
10.	*Karen: yeh yeh if you get it from the other one he gives you the straps as well*	*Adjacency opener:* statement of fact, but also an implied *criticism*
11.	*Clare: yeh but that other one wasn't there today I saw it Wednesday*	*Preferred response:* accepts criticism but explains
12.	*Karen: oh mind you I've just made one and I don't need the straps*	*Adjacency opener:* Offer to give the straps

In lines 2 and 4, how could we analyse Karen's responses? Clare wants a compliment or some affirmation; however, Karen does not give it, but offers another adjacency opener in each case. Some analysts would treat this as a dispreferred response; for example Schulze-Wenke suggests that 'Counter-suggestions clearly constitute a dispreferred response to a first speaker's suggestion, as they do not go along with the suggestion, but instead propose a different course of action' (Schulze-Wenke, 2005:343). Cutting also considers it a dispreferred response in cases where 'the second part does not follow

on from the first' (Cutting, 2002:30), as is the case in lines 2 and 4. By contrast, other analysts would say that there is no dispreferred response here, but rather a behaviour which we could term 'displacement' (Schegloff, 2007), since rather than actually criticising the material, Karen merely avoids any response at all. The upshot of this is that Clare's 'fishing' for a compliment or support has in effect been completely bypassed by Karen's refusal to give it, or rather by Karen's successful move to sidetrack the discussion down different paths. Karen appears to have successfully used a number of discourse strategies so as to withhold the praise or support which Clare was seeking, and has then succeeded in turning the conversation to other areas. Clare, by contrast, comes across as rather more cooperative and perhaps less forceful, offering *preferred responses* and/or apologies at each stage.

The power relation appears clear – Karen is dominating the discourse and doing so by clever, subtle management of the *adjacency pairs* and of *topic placement* and adjustment. Such is the nature of natural conversation, however, generally carried out without conscious awareness, that Clare is probably only vaguely aware of what exactly is happening, and of why she is not quite getting the responses she want.

Validity and warranting

It might be thought that this analysis is extreme. Does Karen really do this? Perhaps it is unfair to suggest that Karen is so devious? This is a central question for any discourse analyst: how do we know that our interpretation is valid?

One of the central precepts of the Conversation Analysis (CA) group of researchers is that we should avoid reading into any exchange our own preconceptions of what is happening, but should be sure to *warrant* everything we deduce about any text by reference to actual elements of the exchange itself. As Heritage puts it, 'there is a strong bias [in CA] against a priori speculation about the orientations and motives of speakers and in favour of detailed examination of conversationalists' actual actions. Thus the empirical conduct of speakers is treated as the central resource out of which analysis may develop' (Heritage, 1984:243). Although this is a view typical of the CA approach in particular, and not shared by all discourse analysts, it can be a useful principle, worth remembering whenever we analyse discourse, since it prevents us from inserting our own preconceptions, or reading into texts aspects which may not be valid. So before examining Clare and Karen's interaction further, it is worth considering what exactly this 'warranting principle' means for our analysis here, and for discourse analysis in general.

When Karen made her first comment in the exchange, in line 2, we could understand it in several ways. Depending on her intonation, her facial signals, and so on she might have been understood as being very supportive or else (as I have suggested) withholding her praise and therefore being rather unsupportive. Which is correct? The important point which CA researchers would emphasise is that the only way of interpreting the exchange correctly is by seeing how the actual participants themselves responded and behaved, in other words, we must ground our interpretation solidly in what the participants themselves do and say. This means, amongst other things, looking closely at how Clare answered Karen.

Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998:15), in their discussion of the principles of CA, term this approach the 'next-turn proof procedure', and consider it to be 'the most basic tool used in CA to ensure that analyses explicate the orderly properties of talk as oriented-to accomplishments of participants, rather than being based merely on the assumptions of the analyst.' This means that we need to look at how the talk is managed by the participants themselves as a way of interpreting it in a valid way. In short, for any analysis to be considered valid and credible in the CA tradition it must demonstrate that its conclusions are drawn closely from various features of the exchange itself: it needs to be *warranted* by the data. If we want to interpret Karen's behaviour as being potentially disruptive (as Cheepen concluded) then we need to show *from evidence in the text* that the other participant, Clare, showed signs of feeling that way. In this particular case we see that in line 3 Clare in fact responds: 'I was rather pleased with that'. If she was not very concerned with getting any praise or a compliment, she could instead have followed Karen's new lead and started talking about Karen's dress, and *never returned* to her own topic at all, so the fact that she persists, albeit rather timidly, is significant.

As Hutchby and Wooffitt point out, what they call the 'next-turn proof procedure' is therefore important for determining how to analyse any utterance in interaction. However, we must be aware that this alone may not be enough – and I suggest that a better name for it might be a 'next turns proof procedure' in the plural, since in some cases in conversation it is only much later in the exchange that we can say for certain how the participants have understood an earlier comment. In this dialogue, for example, it is only after seeing Clare try several times to get the compliment she wants that we can say for certain that a conflict is apparent.

This demonstrates two important points about analysing conversation in the CA tradition, or indeed any written or spoken discourse which uses the *interacting* discourse mode. The first point is that we need to withhold our personal interpretation of any particular utterance or turn and instead focus on the evidence from the wider exchange as a whole. In a well-known

passage, Sacks *et al.* point out that participants in talk themselves signal their intentions to a great extent:

> while understandings of other turns' talk are displayed to co-participants, they are available as well to professional analysts who are thereby afforded a proof criterion (and a search procedure) for the analysis of what a turn's talk is occupied with. (Sacks *et al.*,1974: 729)

They continue to explain that it is participants' understandings and not analysts' understandings which are to be given priority: *'Since it is the parties' understandings of prior turns' talk that is relevant to the construction of next turns, it is <u>their</u> understandings that are wanted for analysis'* (Sacks *et al.*, 1974: 729, original emphasis).

It is useful to keep in mind, therefore, that in general when analysing discourse it is not *'our* understandings' that matter but *'their, the participants'* understandings', and it is worth making efforts to unearth the latter. Not all approaches to conversation or to discourse in general would insist on this as strongly as CA does, but it is nonetheless a useful general precept. A second important point is that in our analysis we need to look not only at the utterance in question, nor even at the next utterance, but at all later (and even earlier) utterances, since these might significantly alter our understanding of the turn we are seeking to interpret. We need to make use of a 'next turns proof procedure', as well as a 'later turns proof procedure' and even at times a 'previous turns proof procedure' to warrant our interpretation of any exchange.

If we now look at the second part of the dressmaking exchange we can see how valuable it can be to follow this kind of approach if we are to interpret discourse in a valid and convincing way. Will Clare succeed in getting her compliment? Will she insist? Will Karen praise her, or change the topic completely? We can see from the next stage that Clare does indeed try repeatedly to extract the response she wants, but Karen is unyielding.

Turns

13. *Clare: well I mean look how much*
14. *Karen: yeh*
15. *Clare: see there's tons*
16. *Karen: I know they're ever so good*
17. *Clare: I'm ever so pleased*
18. *Karen: yeh I made one for Shirley and one for me and Shirley doesn't it's a bit too small I didn't quite have enough material four ninety nine*
19. *Clare: four four ninety*
20. *Karen: oh well mine was four *ninety**

21. *Clare: *yeh* yeh*
22. *Karen: and +nine p+*
23. *Clare: +yeh+*
24. *Karen: for the *straps**
25. *Clare: *yeh**
26. *Karen: there you are*
27. *Clare: I was really pleased*

In line 14 Karen offers the minimal 'yeh', and in line 16 she praises not Clare but something or someone else (it is not clear who – perhaps the market stalls or stallholders, or the rolls of cloth themselves), and then in line 18 succeeds in switching topic again. Clare follows this topic thread but still at the end (line 27) she is persisting politely but doggedly in her attempt to get some form of compliment. Our interpretation of the behaviour of the two participants seems therefore to be warranted by the weight of evidence from various parts of the exchange.

This is all the text we have, so it is not clear how it continues or if they come to blows. It is interesting partly because it is unusual – as Heritage (1984:249) notes, it is often from such 'deviant' cases rather than from samples of 'smooth' discourse that we find the most illumination. In a fuller analysis, for each utterance, '[the] CA researcher would examine what comes before and what follows [the utterance], together with attention to pauses, hesitations, false starts, intakes of breath, intonation, and similar clues, to help interpret what is going on' (Holmes 2008:387).

As a general policy within a CA framework, ten Have (following Schegloff) recommends that the analyst do the following:

1. Check the episode carefully in terms of *turn-taking:* the construction of turns, pauses, overlaps, etc.; make notes of any remarkable phenomena, especially on any 'disturbances' in the fluent working of the turn-taking system.
2. Then look for sequences in the episode under review, especially *adjacency pairs* and their sequels.
3. And finally, note any phenomena of *repair,* such as repair initiators, actual repairs, etc.

(ten Have, 1999:104)

This affords a useful set of approaches to analysing conversation within the CA tradition, as well as some pointers as to what an analyst might focus on when examining such texts. However, other types of spoken discourse might lend themselves to different approaches, as can be demonstrated by examining a more formal example, namely Classroom discourse.

6.2 Classroom discourse

Conversation was once thought to be chaotic and mostly unstructured, and difficult to analyse. In 1975 Sinclair and Coulthard noted that they had left off the attempt to study what they saw as 'desultory conversation' (1975:4), because from their standpoint at the time it simply appeared rather random, chaotic and not amenable to clear analysis. We can now see, with hindsight, that this was perhaps overly pessimistic, since CA and other approaches have since made headway in explicating the mechanics of conversational interaction.

Sinclair and Coulthard, for the reasons they stated, then turned instead to analyse what they considered a more structured area of discourse, namely the discourse of the classroom, and the result was a now well-known and often-cited study, sometimes considered the first significant discourse analysis on any large scale. They looked initially at a relatively small number of transcripts of primary school classroom lessons, and here is part of one of them:

1. Teacher: What are Pyramids?
2. Pupils: (no answer)
3. T: Why did they build Pyramids?
4. T: Paul.
5. Pupil: When they were dead they put all their riches and everything they owned in their Pyramid.
6. T: Yes they did, yes.

(adapted from Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975:82–3)

In terms of the first step of the heuristic mapped out in Chapter 5, it is obvious that the *function* or purpose of this text is educational. The next step in the analysis is to consider *how* it achieves that function or purpose, and which *features* of the text assist in that overarching aim.

This educational function may be the main reason why this sample of classroom discourse is apparently far more structured and organised than the 'Dressmaking' conversation we saw above. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975:6) went on to examine a wider variety of lessons in different schools, and their approach is characterised by an analysis of what is called the *exchange structure* of discourse, since they looked at how participants were managing the exchanges they made with each other.

One significant finding which Sinclair and Coulthard made was precisely how regular the patterns and structures of classroom interaction and lessons are. If we consider classrooms uncritically we might think that every one is quite different owing to the subject matter and the different behaviour of individual teachers and students. However, what Sinclair and Coulthard demonstrated through close analysis of their classroom discourse data was a surprisingly consistent set of patterns in teacher and student behaviour, whose 'well-ordered nature' surprised even the researchers themselves (p.112).

The patterning of classroom discourse

The 'Pyramid' lesson was offered by Sinclair and Coulthard as an extended example of their analysis. I reproduce it more fully here below, slightly rearranged and divided up for ease of analysis. Their transcript did not include the intonation and other useful features of the context, but it still gives a sense of the original lesson. As we read it, it is useful to reflect on how we could *analyse* and *explain* the precise function of what is happening at each point – in particular at lines 4, 6 and 12, in bold.

1. Teacher: What are Pyramids?
2. Pupils: *(no answer)*
3. T: Why did they build Pyramids?
4. **T: Paul.**
5. Pupil: When they were dead they put all their riches and everything they owned in their Pyramid.
6. **T: Yes they did, yes.**
7. T: Right in the depth, in the heart of the Pyramid there was a special little room where they had their personal belongings. Precious special things that belonged to them.
8. T: Can you suggest the sort of things that might be with them?
9. Pupil: *(Pupil puts hand up)*
10. T: Yes.
11. Pupil: Jewels.
12. **T: Their own special jewels.**
13. T: The ones that they liked the best.
14. Pupil: Their robes.
15. T: Clothes.
16. T: Yes
17. Pupil: The couch they liked best.
18. T: Yes, their favourite chair or throne or couch.

(adapted from Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975:82–3, emphasis added)

If we look at the teacher's strategies here, we see that the first question goes unanswered, so she tries a slightly different approach in line 3. This too seems at first to fail, so she then uses a name (nomination) 'Paul' and this time does

Table 6.1 Nested hierarchy of categories

Lesson															
Transaction						Transaction									
Exchange						Exchange						Exchange			
Move			Move			Move			Move			Move			
Act	Act	Act	Act	Act	Act	Act	Act	Act	Act	Act	Act	Act	Act	Act	Act

Source: adapted from Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975

get a response from a pupil (line 5). She then gives the simple feedback: 'Yes they did, yes', some more information (line 7), and so the lesson continues.

This is the beginning of a section which Sinclair and Coulthard class as a Transaction. In their scheme Lessons and Transactions are the two highest levels in the 'nested hierarchy' as illustrated in Table 6.1. In this table the Lesson happens to contain only two Transactions (for reasons of space), but it could well include more in practice. For example, the 'Pyramid' lesson above is about two thirds of a transaction, and in that lesson as a whole there are a total of 12 transactions in Sinclair and Coulthard's analysis.

From Table 6.1 we can further see that each transaction can be divided in their scheme into smaller pieces, which are called Exchanges. These in turn are divided in their analysis into even smaller units called Moves, and these in turn are divided into smaller units called Acts. Acts are the smallest unit, and could include a single word, a gesture or even 'heavy breathing' and 'clicking' (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975:41).

Sinclair and Coulthard found that the lessons they analysed could be divided up satisfactorily into these units, each one nested inside each other. However, how clear are these units in practice? We can answer this by looking back at the transcript to see if we ourselves can identify the parts of the lesson which they identified, namely the Exchanges, Moves and Acts. A clue is that Exchanges typically consist of one, two or three Moves, called Opening, Answering and (if they exist) Follow-up moves, reminiscent of the adjacency pairs we discussed in Chapter 4. In particular recall the IRF sequence which we called an *adjacency trio* (p.82, which also involves three parts, an Initiation, a Response and Follow-up – a *pattern* identified as a 'Teaching Cycle' as long ago as 1966 (Bellack *et al.*, 1966). In essence this IRF pattern (see p.82), is identical to Sinclair and Coulthard's *Teaching Exchange*, and not surprisingly, the Opening Move of an Exchange (or the *initiation* in IRF terms) often consists of a question.

This is the case in the 'Pyramid' lesson, in fact, as the Opening Move in this case is the question in line 1. However, because this time the teacher does not

get any Answering Move (*response* in IRF), she does not give any Follow-up Move – and so the Exchange is ended rather abruptly:

1. Teacher: What are Pyramids?
2. Pupils: *(no answer)*

Since the whole Exchange has failed it stops at that point. (As Sinclair and Coulthard would put it, only the Opening Move is *obligatory* in an Exchange – whereas the Answering Move and the Follow-up Move are *optional*.) For this reason the teacher starts on a second Exchange of this transaction, again with an Opening Move which is again a question. This time, after she resorts to a Nomination Act by saying the pupil's name (line 4), she is more successful:

3. T: Why did they build Pyramids?
4. T: Paul.
5. Pupil: When they were dead they put all their riches and everything they owned in their Pyramid.
6. T: Yes they did, yes.
7. T: Right in the depth, in the heart of the Pyramid there was a special little room where they had their personal belongings. Precious special things that belonged to them.

So this time the Exchange does include a clear Answering Move (line 5) and also a Follow-Up Move, which is when the teacher accepts the answer (line 6). She then emphasises the point she wishes to make by adding a *comment* in line 7 – still part of the Follow-Up Move, but an additional, optional part. Her next step is to start the third Exchange with another question, and again she is successful, this time getting several Answering Moves and giving several Follow-up Moves:

8. T: Can you suggest the sort of things that might be with them?
9. Pupil: *(Pupil puts hand up)*
10. T: Yes.
11. Pupil: Jewels.
12. T: Their own special jewels.
13. T: The ones that they liked the best.
14. Pupil: Their robes.
15. T: Clothes.
16. T: Yes
17. Pupil: The couch they liked best.
18. T: Yes, their favourite chair or throne or couch.

In short, this example offers us three clear Exchanges, the first one very short, as it included only the obligatory Opening Move and nothing else, and the second and third being rather longer and more developed, with all three Moves observable.

This is at the level of Exchanges and of Moves, but it was noted above that Sinclair and Coulthard's scheme used the term Acts for the lowest level of units in their scheme, and they identified more than twenty of these in their data, each of which was given a code such as 'ch' for a 'check'. We do not need to look at all the Acts they identified, but the commonest are things like *starter* (coded as 's'), *elicitation* (el), *prompt* (p), *clue* (cl) and *nomination* (when a pupil is named – n). We can see how this operated by looking in greater detail in Table 6.2 at how they coded the second of the three exchanges we have seen above. (I have explained the codes for each Act in the last column, to make the analysis easier to follow.)

Table 6.2 Analysis of the 'Pyramid' Teaching Exchange

Line			*MOVES*	*ACTS*
3.	T:	Why did they build Pyramids?	Opening	el = elicitation
4.	T:	Paul.		n = nomination
	Pupil:	When they were dead they put all their riches and everything they owned in their Pyramid.	Answering	rep = reply
5.	T:	Yes they did, yes.	Follow-up	e = evaluate
6.	T:	Right in the depth, in the heart of the Pyramid there was a special little room where they had their personal belongings. Precious special things that belonged to them.		com = comment

Source: adapted from Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975:82–3.

This does not do justice to the detail of analysis which Sinclair and Coulthard offered, but it is perhaps sufficient to show the way in which their analysis operated. Here we have a good illustration of an Exchange, in this case what they call a Teaching Exchange, and we have seen already that this is identical to the IRF pattern we discussed in Chapter 4 (see p. 82). This means that the Exchange has three Moves, the Opening, the Answering and the Follow-up, which correspond exactly with the IRF pattern. Within each of the Moves we then have one or several Acts in their analysis; for example the Follow-up Move can have an *evaluating act* and also a *comment act*, in which the teacher gives more information to make the point clear.

It might seem at first sight as if this is describing something quite straightforward, an everyday lesson activity. However, the key contribution

of Sinclair and Coulthard's analysis is that it demonstrated the remarkable extent to which the discourse is *rule-governed* – far more than we might expect. This includes the insight that only a small number of the possible range of events can actually occur in each level, and certain acts, and combinations of acts, seem never to happen. Sinclair and Coulthard saw this as similar to the way in which grammar operates. In grammar some combinations of words are possible and common while others are apparently impossible – for example, among structures which seem to be 'illegal' in English is the invented combination 'Ate cat the big mouse the.' Likewise Sinclair and Coulthard demonstrated that in the classroom discourse they studied, only certain patterns of Acts seemed to occur in certain places within Moves, and so on, and other combinations seemed not to occur, as if the participants were following various discourse rules without conscious awareness of their behaviour.

Sinclair and Coulthard's work also demonstrates the value of the close study of discourse in laying bare patterns which may not be obvious, but which are nonetheless intrinsic parts of our social and linguistic behaviour. For education, of course, seeing such underlying patterns in classroom discourse can be of great value, since it might show up, for example, ways in which one teacher succeeds while another does not, or ways in which teachers in a certain setting might change their questioning or naming strategies, and so on.

Incidentally, Sinclair and Coulthard's analysis also raises the question of how discourse relates to power. As was noted above when discussing conversation, researching discourse in more formal settings can offer insights into the broader ways in which people wield power and influence through discourse strategies. The teacher in their example, for instance, is the one in control of the turn-taking and turn-giving, and the transcripts suggest that pupils 'agree' tacitly with this power dynamic.

In this case the wielding of power-through-discourse perhaps serves some social good, namely education. However, this might not always be the case; in other contexts this power relation might lead to disadvantage for some participants. By analysing such discourse in a variety of settings, we can therefore learn how power and control can be manipulated and used for good or evil through discourse techniques – and we can therefore be better equipped to deal with such discourse strategies in our own lives. This relation between discourse and power will be considered in greater depth in later chapters.

6.3 Approaches to analysis

Sinclair and Coulthard were based at the University of Birmingham in England, and what is therefore known as the Birmingham School's approach to

classroom discourse has been influential both in demonstrating the value of analysing discourse carefully and systematically, and also in demonstrating important regularities about classroom discourse in particular. This approach to discourse – now sometimes called an *exchange structure* approach, since it focuses on the structure of the exchanges which participants carried out – has, however, been criticised by some analysts who point unfavourably to the practice of taking a pre-determined set of categories and then analysing the data to see to what extent it fitted those categories. This approach is sometimes then contrasted unfavourably with a CA (conversation analysis) approach which tends to *prioritise the data,* refusing to set up predetermined categories but seeking to draw them from actual authentic examples. For example one critic discusses Sinclair and Coulthard's approach as follows:

> The exchange structure approach looked at discourse as a predetermined sequence. It started with the theory of a patterning of units, and showed how what people say fits the model, thus viewing conversation as a product. Conversation analysis (CA), on the other hand, takes a 'bottom-up' approach: starting with the conversation itself, it lets the data dictates its own structure. (Cutting, 2002:27–8)

This criticism revolves around a central point of principle, since it concerns the approach we should take whenever we carry out any discourse analysis. Should we start with a clear idea of fixed categories, perhaps taken from linguistics, and then see if the real discourse fits into those categories? For example, could we take a checklist of genres perhaps and then test that checklist against a set of texts to see if they fit? Is that a valuable and proper way of proceeding? This is in essence a *deductive* research approach, as Chapman explains in some detail (Chapman, 2006:16–23), since it considers it important to offer a general theoretical framework and then evaluate the data in that light. It could be called a 'top-down' approach as it starts with pre-set ideas and them imposes them as if 'from above'.

Or should we take the opposite approach and *start with the texts themselves* and then try with an open mind to see if there are any patterns we can observe, for example any observable groups of genres? The second approach would be called a 'bottom-up' approach – as Cutting said in the quotation above – as it starts with the data sets themselves, and then works upwards from them to try and establish patterns and categories. The difference in approach seems to be fundamental. This is what would be termed an *inductive* research approach, collecting data – again in ways discussed by Chapman (2006) – and then drawing a theory from that accumulated evidence.

In her comment quoted above Cutting suggested rather critically that Sinclair and Coulthard's approach, which she calls the *exchange structure* approach, is 'top-down' as she considers that it applies [illegible] or hypothetical categories rather than letting the data speak for itself. This kind of criticism may derive from the fact that Sinclair and Coulthard themselves stated that they were trying to align the presentation of their analysis to other linguistic work on grammar (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975:24), even borrowing their terminology from such work. This might certainly suggest at first sight that they were trying to squeeze their analysis into preset frameworks in the way which Cutting implies in her critique.

However, although their terminology and presentation certainly seem to follow previous work on grammar, the evidence from their actual analysis suggests that Sinclair and Coulthard are perhaps not as 'guilty' as they might appear. In the first place they were not intending their work to be applied to conversation but to classroom discourse, and secondly they explicitly wrote that '[w]hen we began we had no preconceptions about the organization or extent of linguistic patterning' of the data (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975:19). If we then look closely at how they proceeded, it is clear that they did indeed attempt to derive their scheme carefully from the data as they worked through the lessons. For this reason it is perhaps unfair to suggest that their approach was 'top-down', imposing categories on the data in advance. Furthermore, there is in any case nothing inherently better or worse in a deductive approach as opposed to an inductive one. As Chapman notes in her discussion of deductive and inductive approaches to language study:

> it is not a case of one being necessarily right and the other wrong, or of deciding conclusively which is better... The important thing is to be aware of what type of method an individual linguist is using, and to remember the limitations of this method and its possible implications for the resultant account of language. (Chapman, 2006:23)

It is true, however, that Sinclair and Coulthard's resulting scheme of Transactions, Exchanges and so on does come across as rather restrictive and closed. This is perhaps because classroom language is different from conversation in tending to be relatively controlled in its topic switching and in the power relations of the speakers. In a classroom, unlike in conversation when any participant can take the topic in almost any direction, within understood boundaries, the teacher generally has power over the planning of the discourse and is generally in control of the topics and themes. This was apparent in the 'Pyramid' examples from the way the teacher handled the discourse, exercising clear control over the taking and giving of turns and the management of topics.

For these reasons of power and of topic management then, amongst others, it seems that the broad approach to analysis used in the Birmingham

work is perhaps most usefully applied in relatively formal situations where one person exercises power over topic switching and over the planning and management of the discourse, such as in formal meetings, in the law courts and so on. However, it is probably true to say that in more informal discourse situations, any such attempt to identify clear-cut categories for chunks of the discourse data might be less straightforward.

6.4 Conversation versus classroom discourse

Both Conversation and Classroom lesson genres use the *interacting* discourse mode, which means that both show adjacency pairs, turn-taking and so on. However, the patterning of these features is very different in the two, for reasons just mentioned. In terms of *adjacency pairs*, *topic management* and *turn-taking* Classroom discourse shows far greater apparent regularity than Conversation, probably owing to the fact that one participant (a teacher) has been granted greater power to control these elements, and the other participants acquiesce and (usually) cooperate in that control.

One further and significant difference between the two genres is that Classroom discourse contains as a central feature the IRF pattern. In recent years, although the concept of IRF in education has been re-examined, so that it is accepted that its functions can vary more widely than was once thought, it is nonetheless 'constant across instructional settings' (Hicks, 2003:17). The pattern may be relatively infrequent in other genres, as it can appear impolite if we give feedback on what someone says to us in situations when they do not want it or see any need for it, but it does exist in other genres where there is a situation of unequal power, such as certain business meetings and doctor–patient encounters (Berry, 1981) or in parent–child discourse (Seedhouse, 1996).

6.5 Summary

This chapter has examined two examples of important spoken genres which involve the *interacting* discourse mode, and has also identified a number of techniques and approaches for analysis.

The first part of the chapter addressed Conversation, and showed how a conversation can be approached in practice by examining patterns of *turn-taking*, *topic management* and patterns of *adjacency pairs*. The analysis of the transcript of conversation, as well as the line-by-line analysis of parts of it, exemplified one approach to this kind of discourse. A full analysis in the CA tradition would also examine *repair* and would take account of a wider range

of features, including intonation, gestures and so on, as can be seen in the literature specialising in CA (see, for example, Hutchby and Wooffitt,1998).

The second part of the chapter considered, by way of comparison, a more formal spoken genre. This was the genre of Classroom lessons, distinguished from Conversation in part by formality and more formalised power relations. Here also we looked at *turn-taking and turn-giving* (for example, through questions), and at an example of *exchange analysis* which involved categorising classes of Move and Act and then identifying them in subsequent discourse. A particular feature of classroom discourse, related to the power dynamic, is the use of the three-part IRF pattern, which was considered as part of the broader examination of classroom turn-taking patterns.

Discussion of these two areas of discourse led to a comparison of two different approaches to analysing discourse, broadly characterised as a CA or Conversation Analysis approach ('bottom-up') as opposed to a DA or Discourse Analysis approach ('top-down'). The point was made, with reference to Chapman (2006) that neither is inherently better than the other, but that it is important to be aware of which is being used in any analysis, and of the limitations of both.