
**LANGUAGE AS INTERACTION**

Gordon Wells

'Not to let a word get in the way of its sentence  
Nor to let a sentence get in the way of its intention,  
But to send your mind out to meet the intention as a guest;  
THAT is understanding.'

Chinese proverb, fourth century B.C

Most people, if asked what a language is, would almost certainly answer in terms of 'sounds', 'words' and 'sentences'. They would probably also refer to something less clearly defined which they might call 'meaning'. And they might just possibly add something about the purposes that language - both spoken and written - serve in the interpersonal transactions that constitute so large a part of everyday life. Such an ordering of priorities no doubt owes much to the way in which 'language' is encountered during the process of education: in dictionaries, in the form of comprehension exercises and in lessons on grammar and spelling. It also corresponds quite closely to the relative emphasis that has been given to the various aspects of language in the long tradition of serious study that goes back as far as Aristotle and even earlier.

The same emphasis on sounds, words and sentences, treated as units within a formal system, has also characterised the greater part of the work carried out in the present century by linguists and others who have attempted to study language 'scientifically'. Two characteristics of language in particular have provided the main focus of attention: firstly, that within any language only certain combinations of sounds and words are permitted, and that these permitted combinations can be expressed in the form of a limited number of general principles of construction or structural rules; and secondly that, although the number of rules and the items to which they apply, is finite, the number of sentences that can be formed from them is potentially infinite. Much effort has been devoted, therefore, to the attempt to specify very precisely the rules of phonology and grammar that account for the structural organisation of sounds within syllables and words within phrases, clauses and sentences, and to do so in a way which will generate all and only the sentences recognised as grammatical within a particular language.

The result is that, although we now know a considerable amount about the organisation of the formal systems of language in isolation from the contexts in which they are used, we are still largely ignorant about the principles that underlie the orderliness of conversation and about the ways in which language in use is sensitive to subtle differences in the social context and in the purposes of the participants. That is to say we are still far from being able to give satisfactory answers to such questions as 'Why do people say what they do?' or 'How do we know what a speaker means by what he says?'

Fortunately, these latter questions have begun to be investigated more intensively in the last decade or so, and it is being increasingly recognised that the ancient Chinese proverb, quoted above, applies not only to successful communication but also to the study of the means by which that communication is achieved. Understanding language involves more than attending to the words and sentences that are spoken or written: unless we look beyond the forms to the intentions that they realise - the experiences that are referred to, the purposes that give rise to them and the situations in which they occur - we shall not achieve a full understanding, either of the sentences themselves or of language as a human phenomenon. Neither shall we be in a position to discover how it is
that the human infant, initially uninformed as to what a language is or what it is for, rather rapidly masters sounds, words and sentences through interacting with his' immediate family in the furtherance of various types of collaborative activity. The emphasis in this chapter, therefore, will be on language as a medium of interaction, and on the way in which meanings are communicated through talk.

Conversation: the negotiation of meaning
In order to focus on the situated and functional nature of language in use and on the interactional context in which language learning takes place, it may be helpful to consider an excerpt from a conversation between a child and his mother that was recorded during the course of an ordinary morning at home (see table 1.1). Mark, aged 28 months, is trying to persuade his mother to break off from her household tasks in order to play with him. She, in her turn, tries to get him to carry out a small task for her and a large part of the conversation is given over to ensuring that Mark correctly interprets her intention and successfully carries out the task. When this has finally been achieved, Mark reissues his original request, to which his mother finally accedes.

Table 1.1. A conversation between a child and his mother
1 Mark: Play Mummy(v)
2 Mother: All right
3 Mark: [JtJ] wash up Mummy(v)? (=have you finished washing up?)
4 Mother: Pardon?
5 Mark: [JtJ] wash up?
6 Mother: Yes
7 Mark: Oh
8 Mother: Let me just dry my hands
9 Mark: Alright [Mark looks for towel]
10 In there [Mark looks for towel]
11 Mother: Here [Mark gives towel to Mother]
12 Mark: [taQ] (=here you are) [Mark gives towel to Mother]
13 Mother: Just a minute
14 Will you put the top back on the washing basket please
15 Mark: Uh?
16 Uh?
17 Mother: Put the top back on the washing basket
18 Mark: On there Mummy(v)?
19 On there?
20 Mother: Yes
21 No not the towel in there
22 The top of the basket on it
23 Mark: Alright
24 Mark: On there
25 Uh?
26 Uh?
27 Mother: Put the lid. . on top of the basket
28 Mark: On er-on there?
29 Mother: Yes please
30 Mark: Alright
31 You dry hands
32 Mother: I've dried my hands now
33 Mark: Put towel in there
34 Mother: No it's not dirty
In spite of the relative linguistic immaturity of one of the participants, this interchange clearly illustrates many of the features that characterise any successful conversational interaction. And it is, in fact, typical of a great deal of talk between parents and young children.

The first point to note is that the two participants in the conversation alternate in taking turns to speak, each listening while the other speaks and waiting for the other to finish before starting his or her turn. Secondly, we can see that, on the whole, what is said in each turn is coherently related to what was said by the previous speaker, and so it is reasonable to infer that both participants are understanding each other's messages and framing their subsequent messages in the light of that understanding. Thirdly, the talk seems to be systematically related to the physical situation in which it occurs and to the intentions of the speakers in relation to that situation. Indeed, in this particular case it appears that both participants implicitly recognise that a 'contract' has been negotiated: if Mark puts the lid on the basket for his mother, she will be under some obligation to meet his request for her to play with him.

We can see, therefore, that Mark and his mother, like any successful conversationalists, are engaging in a collaborative activity. Collaborative, firstly, in the orderly sequencing of speaking and listening turns; collaborative, secondly, in relating the meanings expressed in each turn to those in the turns that precede and follow; collaborative, finally, in agreeing on the objects and actions in the shared situation to which these meanings are intended to apply.

However, the fact that such successful collaboration is typical of conversation, even where young children are concerned, should not lead us to treat it as unworthy of attention, or to take it for granted. Indeed, we shall argue below that collaboration in the negotiation of conversational meaning is both a major part of what the child has to learn and also a necessary condition for that learning to take place. But first let us look more closely at how this collaboration is achieved.

**The sequential structure of discourse**

As we have seen, one of the most noticeable characteristics of conversation is the orderliness with which participants take turns in speaking, rarely overlapping or leaving long periods of silence. In almost all forms of conversation, in fact, there seems to be a generally observed convention that, at any time, one - but only one - participant should speak, and that he or she should have the right to decide when there should be a change of speaker and, in multi-participant talk, who the next speaker should be.

Ensuring a smooth transition from one speaking turn to the next is thus fundamental to the sequential structuring of conversation, and it depends upon several forms of behaviour. These include the speaker looking away from the listener for most of his turn.
and looking back again when he is ready to cede the floor; the use of pause-fillers to signal that a period of silence is not to be taken as the end of the turn; and, where a multi-clause turn is intended, planning it in such a way as to minimise the danger of interruption, by the use of appropriate intonation, by announcing in advance the proposed structure of the turn with such devices as 'on the one hand', 'for the following reasons' and so on. Such procedures do not invariably result in the speaker keeping the floor but, when interruptions do occur, they are nearly always at points at which the speaker might have decided to complete his turn.

It is, of course, important to realise that the listener, as well as the speaker, contributes to the successful management of turn-taking in discourse. The signals given by the speaker can only be effective if the listener is carefully monitoring the changes of gaze and facial and bodily gestures of the speaker and attending to the way in which his utterance is constructed and delivered in order to know when it is appropriate for him to 'take over the floor'. Indeed, as Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson (1974) point out, the fact that the speaker plans his turn with the needs of the listener in mind provides a strong motivation for the listener to pay continuous attention to the way in which the message is expressed as well as to its content, so that he is able to judge when and how to continue the discourse. Even a brief lapse of attention by the listener can lead to a temporary breakdown of the conversation.

Although providing an essential basic framework, however, the management of the temporal sequencing of turns is only one aspect of the organisation of discourse. Conversations occur because the participants have interactional purposes of various kinds to fulfil, and it is the negotiation of these purposes which creates the structure of particular conversations within the turn-taking framework. In order to understand the principles that account for this more 'delicate' level of organisation, it will be helpful to think of discourse as having two interrelated dimensions: the sequential chaining in which one turn follows another (the syntagmatic dimension), and the choice as to what is done at each link in the chain (the paradigmatic dimension) (see figure 1.1). We shall be considering the paradigmatic dimension in greater detail below, but for the moment it will be sufficient to think of a choice being made in each turn from options such as asking and answering questions, offering and accepting or refusing services, greeting, and so on.

It will already be apparent from these examples, though, that the options on the paradigmatic dimension from which choice is made at each turn are not entirely independent and unrelated. A question expects, and usually receives, an answer; one greeting tends to be followed by another. And so the expectation that one option sets up for a particular sequel provides a structural link between the turns that contain these options, when these are considered on the syntagmatic dimension. In fact, conversations usually consist of groups of turns linked together by both syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations between adjacent turns, and a full understanding of the organisation of discourse requires both these dimensions to be considered together. For the sake of simplicity of exposition, however, we shall continue to concentrate on the syntagmatic dimension of sequential structure here, moving on to the paradigmatic dimension in the next section.

Consider first the simple case of patterns such as: A asks a question and B provides an answer; or A makes a request and B agrees to the request. In such reciprocally related pairs of single-utterance turns called adjacency pairs by Sacks et al. (1974) - there is a strong expectation that, following the first of the pair, the next utterance will be the second part of the appropriate pair. In fact this expectation is so strong, they suggest, that the omission of the second part will be worthy of remark, and failure to supply it may be treated as a breach of convention for which the offender is held accountable. With this in mind, Mark's insistence to 'come on' (45) may perhaps be heard as just such an implicit reprimand to his mother for not responding to his immediately preceding request.
Useful though the idea of adjacency pairs is, it is of only limited explanatory value, because not all adjacent turns that are heard as related form pairs of this kind. However, the more basic idea that a turn may either prospectively set up expectations about the sort of turn that will follow or retrospectively meet expectations set up by a previous turn does provide us with a structural principle of very general application. Labelled exchange, such a two-part structure is considered by a number of researchers to be the basic unit of discourse (e.g. Halliday, 1977; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975), and the two moves of which an exchange is constituted are labelled initiate and respond.

Several examples of this basic structural pattern can be seen in the extract involving Mark and his mother:

1 Mark:  Play Mummy (v)  Initiate ]
2 Mother: Alright  Respond ]
Whilst the first two of these examples may appropriately be described as adjacency pairs, this is less clearly the case with the third example. Yet all three have in common the basic exchange structure of initiate-respond.

However, conversations are not usually limited to single exchanges, as is clear from our illustrative extract. By what principles, then, are minimal exchanges extended to form longer stretches of discourse, whilst still retaining internal coherence?

**Devices for sustaining discourse**

One very obvious device for sustaining a sequence of discourse is maintaining continuity of topic, that is, talking in successive exchanges about the same, or a relevantly related, topic. However, this notion is not as simple as it might appear, and a distinction needs to be drawn between talking 'to a topic' and 'talking topically'. Talking to a topic typically occurs in rather formal settings, where there is an agenda or some other means of controlling the topic over successive turns. In casual conversation, on the other hand, the topic tends to shift and change as the discourse develops. Thus, as Sacks remarks, 'when one presents a topic, except under rather exceptional circumstances, one may be assured that others will try to talk topically with what you've talked about, but you can't be assured that the topic you intended is the topic they will talk to' (Sacks, 1968: 11).

Compare, for example, the way in which a plan to demolish a block of flats in order to build a ring road would be discussed (a) at a Council meeting and (b) by two or three occupants of the flats who happened to meet by chance in the local pub. Nevertheless, in spite of the lack of straightforward topical continuity, most casual conversation is not incoherent, nor do conversational participants on the whole fail to follow the drift of each other's contributions.

The reason for this, it has been suggested, is that participants in general observe, and expect other to observe, a cooperative principle of something like the following form:

'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.' (Grice, 1975: 45)

If participants observe this tacitly agreed principle, even when 'talking topically', hearers can expect that a speaker's contribution will somehow be relevant, and can search for appropriate implicatures (see below, p. 53) that will enable them to discover that relevance by bridging the gap between the topic of one turn and that of the following turn. In the last resort, therefore, almost all pairs of adjacent turns can be interpreted as in some relevantly related, since there are indefinitely many implicatures, of varying degrees of indirectness, that can be found to provide possible links.

However, there are many cases in casual, as well as in more formal, conversation where the connections between exchanges are made explicit. In the following examples, the device used is the making of cohesive ties through repetition and pronominal reference (see below, p. 57).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother:</th>
<th>What are you going to <em>play</em> with now?</th>
<th>Initiate</th>
<th>Exch. 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mark:</td>
<td>I'm going to <em>play toys</em></td>
<td>Respond</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother:</th>
<th>They're in the corner</th>
<th>Initiate</th>
<th>Exch. 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mark:</td>
<td>Oh</td>
<td>Respond</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mark: Can I have other piece of meat Mummy(v)? Initiate | Exch. 1
Mother: Yes. Respond | Exch. 1
Mark: May I have a piece for Helen please? Initiate | Exch. 2
Mark: Mm Respond | Exch. 2

And in the following example, in addition to the cohesive tie of pronominal reference, the two exchanges are linked by the feature contrast - although the contrast here depends upon the implicit assumption that one doesn't put towels that are not dirty in the washing basket:

33 Mark: Put towel in there Initiate | Exch. 1
34 Mother: No Respond | Exch. 1
   it's not dirty Initiate | Exch. 2
35 Mark: 'Tis. Respond | Exch. 2

A third device for sustaining a sequence of conversation, and one which often accompanies topical continuity, is seen in the last example (and also in the immediately preceding one). Mother's turn (34) contains two moves, the first move providing a response in one exchange and the second move initiating the next.* A more condensed version of this linking device occurs when the second, responding, move of the first exchange is omitted altogether, but is implied by the initiating move of the next exchange, as in this sequence of linked exchanges from an earlier point in the same recording of Mark:

Mark: Mark play in Mark's car Initiate | Exch. 1
   (Respond) | Exch. 1
Mother: Shall I bring it down? Initiate | Exch. 2
Mark: No Respond | Exch. 2
   I ride it up there Initiate | Exch. 3
   (Respond) | Exch. 3
Mother: We'll have to close Vickie's door Initiate | Exch. 4
Mark: No Respond | Exch. 4

[*Of course, turns are not limited to two moves, but it may still be appropriate to think of the beginning and some subsequent part of a multi-clause turn realising these two moves, whilst the remainder is left unanalysed with respect to discourse move. Alternatively, it may be better to think of some turns including a complex move which itself can be analysed in terms of constituent acts (d. Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). Our own adult-child conversational data contain very few turns involving more than two moves, so we have not had to reach a decision on this issue.]

In order to understand the principles that underlie this and other structural devices for linking exchanges, we need to look again at the basic organisation. So far, it is the sequential dimension that has been emphasised, as the description of moves in terms of their initiating or responding position in the syntagmatic structure of the exchange makes clear. Now we need to consider the paradigmatic dimension: the options from which selections are made to fill the positions that have been syntagmatically defined.

**Linking exchanges: the main move types**
Considered from this point of view, the many different types of conversational contribution through which participants' interactional purposes are realised can be grouped together into three rather abstract types of move. These arise from the basic dynamics of any social interaction, whether it is expressed verbally or carried out by non-
verbal means. That is, in initiating any social interchange, a participant either (a) **gives** something to the other participant or (b) solicits something from him. Then, in response, the second participant completes the exchange by respectively (c) **acknowledging** what was given or giving what was solicited.

* This gives rise to two basic types of exchange:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiate</th>
<th>Respond</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Solicit</td>
<td>Give</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Give</td>
<td>Acknowledge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Understanding of how participants jointly construct quite long sequences of conversation by linking exchanges of these two types is still very limited, so the following paragraphs must be seen as extremely tentative. Nevertheless it does seem that several linking devices depend upon the different degrees of expectation for a following response set up by the three types of move just described. From this point of view, the three move types can be thought of as occupying different segments on a scale of **prospectiveness**.

[*Although couched in slightly different terms, these distinctions are found in Halliday (1977).]

At one end of the scale are solicits, which are strongly prospective in their expectation of a response; at the other end of the scale, acknowledges have little or no prospective force at all. Solicits always initiate a new exchange; acknowledges hardly ever do so. Give moves, on the other hand, occupy an intermediate position, having a prospective potential which may or may not be realised, depending upon the type of exchange in which they occur. In addition, any move type may be increased in prospectiveness by the addition of a tag or the selection of the intonational option of higher than usual pitch. Since the basic organising principle of the exchange is that the two sequentially defined moves should be arranged in terms of decreasing prospectiveness, the selection of a move type to fill the response position which has a greater degree of prospectiveness than that predicted by the move in first position provides a variety of ways of linking exchanges into longer sequences (Wells, MacLure & Montgomery, 1979).

One such possibility has already been illustrated (pp. 31-2), where the acknowledging response was made only implicitly, its place being taken by a move type with a greater degree of prospectiveness. This is just one of the devices that can be used to link two exchanges together. Rather similar is the addition of a tag to a give or acknowledge move, which has the effect of increasing the prospectiveness of that move (shown by the addition of '+' to the move type), as in the following example:

| Mark: Where's Pappa's pen . draw on there? | I Solicit |
| (= that I want to use to draw on there) |   |
| Mother: You left it at Clifton didn't you? | { R } Give + |
| Mark: No | R Give |

The use of higher than usual pitch can also have the same effect:

| Stella: 'Zat/. . . Daddy(v)? | I Solicit |
| Father: 'Paddling pool | ( R } |
| Stella: 'Paddling pool | { R } Give |
imitation in response to his own utterance.

Another device for linking exchanges, which is also frequently used with a didactic purpose, is following up a responding give with an evaluative acknowledgment.

Teacher: What did the first tiger take off
Little Black Sambo?
Children: His coat
Teacher: That's right
Here it is the double potential of the give move that is being exploited. Although the children's give is made solely in response to the teacher's solicit, the teacher goes on to treat this give as itself the initiation of a further exchange, to which an acknowledge is an appropriate response. The fact that the initiating function is imposed, after the event, by the teacher is shown by the ( ) round the symbol for initiate.

This particular pattern has been treated by some analysts (e.g. Mehan, 1978; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975) as a three-part exchange, with the follow-up having equal status with the initiate and respond moves in the structure of the exchange. However, since this pattern is only one of several in which two or more exchanges are linked together to form a longer sequence, there seems no reason to give it a special status. Perhaps the original reason for treating this sequence as a basic exchange type was its frequency in classroom interaction, which was the type of data studied by both Sinclair & Coulthard and Mehan. However, we have found this particular pattern to occur quite frequently in the home as well, and not always with the adult as the initiator and evaluator, as the following example shows:

Thomas: What's [-]) down there?
Adult: That's the tape recorder
Thomas: 'corder
It seems most satisfactory, therefore, to treat this pattern as a sequence of two linked exchanges, recognising that when it occurs in a didactic context, the acknowledging move will almost invariably be of an evaluative kind.

One further pattern of linked exchanges is worthy of mention, since it is so frequent in an adult-child interaction. The following is a typical example (the symbols are explained below):

3 Mark: (flJ] wash up Mummy (v)?
4 Mother: Pardon?
Mark: [flf] wash up?
Mother: Yes
Such sequences have been described as involving 'contingent queries' (Garvey, 1977), since the second move solicits a reiteration or clarification of the previous utterance. Whilst this move is clearly a form of reply to the opening solicit, as well as initiating a new exchange, it does not meet in full the expectations set up by the previous move. Rather, it replies only to the fact that there was an initiation, and not at all to its function. For this reason, it can be seen as a return, rather than as a full response. The following move also plays a part in two exchanges: in repeating his original question, Mark both responds to his mother's initiation, giving the repetition that was solicited, but at the same
time he also re-initiates his original exchange with a solicit, to which, in the subsequent response, his mother gives the information that was requested.

We can summarise the discussion so far by recalling the short dialogue presented in figure 1.1. The five turns of that sequence of discourse can now be seen to make up three exchanges. The first exchange opens up the channel and functions as what might be called a presequence exchange. The next two turns constitute a second exchange organised around the request to borrow the bike. The third exchange is linked to the second by the follow-up device, and acknowledges the offer that was implied in the second part of the second exchange.

Before leaving the structural description of the exchange, one further point needs to be made, and that concerns the relation between verbal and nonverbal behaviour. As we have already noted, social exchanges may be performed either verbally or nonverbally. Since our concern is with language and its development, we have naturally concentrated on verbal exchanges and shall continue to do so. However, we should not forget that communication can take place through other channels than the verbal. Gesture, as we shall see in the following chapter, is one such channel, and it is particularly important as a precursor of verbal communication. Gesture can also play a part in predominantly verbal exchanges, either as an accompaniment to the verbal message or, on occasions, instead of it. This can take the form of conventional gestures, such as an affirmative nod of the head or a shrug of the shoulders or, in responding to a solicit that requests an action of some sort, the actual performance of the action. In conversation between adults, it is common for the performance of the action to be accompanied by some form of verbal response as well, but this is not obligatory; children, however, very frequently merely perform the requested action without any verbal response. We must be prepared, therefore, to recognise that some moves in discourse may be realised entirely nonverbally.

**The repertoire of speech acts**

So far we have been chiefly concerned with the sequential organisation of discourse. Nevertheless, as we have seen, this cannot be fully understood independently of a consideration of the way in which the positions in the sequential structure are filled by move types (defined in terms of the broad type of function that they perform in the dynamics of interpersonal interaction).

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**Figure 2. An illustration of move and exchange structure**

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SYNTAGMATIC

A

SYNTACTIC

Turn 1

‘Jane”
(Call)
‘Could I borrow
your bike please?”
(Request)
‘Sure, it’s in the
garage”

‘Thanks very
much”
(Thank)

Turn 2

(Available)
‘Yes”

Turn 4

(Comply)

Exchange 1

Exchange 2

Exchange 3

← Exchange 1 → ← Exchange 2 ← Exchange 3 →
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In this section we shall be looking in more detail at the repertoire of functions from which a choice is made at each sequential position, and at the factors which influence which option is chosen. However this section, too, must be treated as exploratory, as there are still many problems to be resolved. In particular, in the investigation of the different functions, particular categories have tended to be considered in isolation from their conversational context, and little attention has so far been given to the ways in which different functions tend to be sequentially related. Nevertheless, the potential contribution of this line of investigation to an understanding of conversational organisation is sufficiently important to make it worth considering in some detail.

Viewed from a functional perspective, moves in discourse have been described as **speech acts**, and Austin (1962), who was one of the first writers to stress this action orientation of utterances, aptly entitled his book *How to Do Things with Words*. Austin started from the observation that certain utterances, such as 'I declare this fête open' or 'I bet you five pounds Blue Fizz wins the Derby', actually perform the actions of opening or betting by virtue of the successful making of the utterance. However, after further investigation, he came to the conclusion that a speech act of some kind is performed in the making of every utterance. In some cases, such as 'I command you to open this door', the type of act is overtly marked by the presence of an **illocutionary verb** in the utterance. However, even without 'I command you', 'Open this door' is still a command. Either form of utterance, therefore, performs the same speech act - in this case that of 'commanding'.

If every utterance performs one or more speech acts, an important question is: How many different types of speech act are there? Austin (1962) listed many more than a hundred, and indeed it seemed that the only limit to the number that might be proposed was the number of illocutionary verbs in the language. However, since this is a matter that is specific to the lexicon of a particular language, or even of a particular dialect (which could change overnight with the addition of a new lexical item), it does not seem that the existence of an illocutionary verb is, in itself, evidence of a corresponding distinct act. Secondly, there seem to be several clusters of verbs, such as 'command', 'direct', 'order', 'bid', 'request', etc., which are synonymous on one very important dimension and different from each other only with respect to less essential dimensions. If we could identify these dimensions and place them in order of importance, perhaps we should be able to define the major classes of speech act and construct an ordered taxonomy. Adopting just such an approach, Searle (1977), identified twelve dimensions, of which the most important are:

(i) The purpose of the act: whether the act is, for example, an attempt to get the hearer to do something, or a representation (which may be true or false) of a state of affairs, or an undertaking by the speaker to do something, etc.

(ii) The direction of fit between words and world: for some acts, part of the purpose is to formulate the proposition to match a state of affairs in the world; for others, the purpose is to bring the world to a state that matches the proposition; in still others, successful performance guarantees the fit between world and words.

(iii) Expressed psychological state: this may be believing, wanting, intending, etc.

On the basis of these three dimensions, Searle proposed five major classes of speech act, which he defines as follows:

**Representatives.** This class has as its purpose to commit the speaker (in varying
degrees) to something being the case. The direction of fit is that the proposition match the world, and the psychological state is that of belief.

**Directives.** The purpose of this class is to attempt (with varying degrees of force) to get the hearer to do something. The direction of fit is to bring the world to match the proposition, and the psychological state is that of want.

**Commissives.** The purpose is to commit the speaker to some future action. The direction of fit is, as for directives, bringing the world to match the proposition, and the psychological state is that of intention.

**Expressives.** The purpose of this class is to express the psychological state of the speaker with respect to the proposition, e.g. 'thank', 'apologise', 'deplore', etc. There is no direction of fit and the psychological state is that which is expressed

**Declarations.** The defining characteristic of this class is that in successfully performing one of these acts, the speaker brings about a correspondence between proposition and state of affairs in the world. (Searle, 1977: 10-15)

This classification is summarised in table 1.2.

Table 1.2. A classification of types of speech act (after Searle, 1977)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Direction of fit</th>
<th>Psychological state</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Representatives</td>
<td>Words match world</td>
<td>Belief</td>
<td>'I've dried my hands now'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directives</td>
<td>World match words</td>
<td>Want</td>
<td>'Put the top back on the washing basket'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissives</td>
<td>World match words</td>
<td>Intention</td>
<td>'Well I will play if you put the top on the basket'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressives</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>As expressed</td>
<td>'Thank goodness'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declaratives</td>
<td>Words create state in world</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>'I declare the fete open'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other dimensions, which permit a sub-categorisation of types of act within these classes, include the strength with which the purpose is presented, the relative status of the participants, the way the utterance relates to the interests of speaker and hearer, and so on.

However, although this is a useful attempt to provide explicit criteria for constructing a finite taxonomy, it is open to a number of criticisms. One of these concerns the allocation of information-seeking questions to the class of directives. It is true, as Searle argues, that a question has as part of its purpose the attempt to get the hearer to do something, namely answer; but from another point of view, one could equally argue that a question is concerned either to discover whether something is the case (yes/no question) or to obtain a fuller representation of what is the case (wh-question). On these grounds, questions could be argued to form a sub-class of representatives, and this position receives further support from the fact that the attempt is to get the hearer to produce an utterance in which the proposition will match a state of affairs in the world. On the other hand, it is equally true that the psychological state underlying a question is that of wanting information. Since both these arguments have some force, perhaps the best solution would be to treat questions as a separate class of acts, related on one dimension to representatives and on another dimension to directives.

A second problem concerns the classes of act that have been omitted: The taxonomoy, as it stands, seems to be chiefly concerned with acts that would typically
initiate an exchange, and no mention is made specifically of responses. One solution would be to assign responses to the classes to which their respective initiating acts belonged but, as we have already seen in the case of questions and answers, this may also be problematic. A further group of acts that is not mentioned includes the various types of contingent query (e.g. 'Pardon?') and their appropriate responses. Arguments could no doubt be advanced for treating them, like questions, as directives but, for the same sorts of reasons, these are not entirely convincing.

The relationship between form and function

However, even if a modified taxonomy could be agreed upon that overcame these difficulties, another very difficult problem would remain: that of knowing which of the possible acts is being performed by a particular utterance. For, in general, there is no simple one-to-one correspondence between the form of an utterance and the speech act it is intended to perform. Here too Searle (1969) has attempted to provide a solution, by the precise specification of the conditions that have to be met for an utterance to count as a satisfactory performance of a particular kind of act. For example, he gives the following conditions for a request:

For a speaker (S) appropriately to make a request the propositional content of his utterance must refer to an act (A) to be carried out in the future by the hearer (H), and it must also be the case that:

(i) H is able to do A and S believes H is able to do A.
(ii) It is not obvious to both Sand H that H will do A in the normal course of events of his own accord.
(iii) S wants H to do A.
(iv) The utterance counts as an attempt to get H to do A.

Equally, for the utterance to be successful as a request, it is necessary that H should recognise that, in uttering it, S intends H to do A.

From the hearer’s point of view, however, it still remains a problem in many cases to know, from the form of the utterance, which act the utterance is intended to perform. As we have seen, this is sometimes overtly marked, as in ‘I promise to repay you next week,’ and in other cases one of a number of locutions which are conventionally associated with particular kinds of speech act may be used, such as, ‘Would you mind Xing …’ But in many cases the form of utterance does not mark the function overtly. Such utterances, therefore, when considered in isolation, are functionally ambiguous.

Of course there are advantages to be gained from fuzziness of this kind, since participants can exploit it in order to achieve a variety of interactional purposes. Consider, for example, a wife at a party who considers that her husband is drinking too much. If, as he seems about to accept the offer of another glass, she says, 'It's getting very late, dear,' she may intend, and be heard as intending, to request him to take her home and therefore not to have the proffered drink. However, if he takes issue with this interpretation and accuses her of interfering, her retreat is secure, for she can justly argue that she had only remarked that it was getting late. However, what may be exploited to advantage by participants remains a serious problem for those who attempt to give a systematic and determinate account of how participants succeed in understanding which acts particular utterances are intended to perform.

There seem to be at least two major areas of difficulty. The first is illustrated by the preceding anecdote, in which the wife's utterances can be heard as realising several different acts simultaneously. Is there any way in which one of these can be identified as the 'essential' meaning, the rest being merely subsidiary? Or do we have to allow that all the possibly intended acts have equal status? One solution proposed by Davies (1979) is to make a distinction between first-order significance and the higher-order levels of
significance that are implied by the communication of that first-order significance in the particular context that obtains at the time of utterance. On these grounds, we might argue that, in the above example, it is the representative act concerning the lateness of the hour which is primary.

Just how complex a set of higher-order levels of significance can be judged to be intended by a particular utterance in context can be illustrated from a psychiatric interview studied by Labov & Fanshel (1977). In the course of the interview, the patient Rhoda explained how she had telephoned her mother, who had been staying away from home with her married daughter for some time:

And so - when - I called her t'day, I said 'Well when do you plan to come home?'

In analysing this utterance, Labov & Fanshel find that, on the basis of the first-level significance, five higher-order levels of significance are implied in this context:

R. continues the narrative and gives information (1) to support her assertion that she carried out the therapist's suggestion that she should ask relevant others for help. R. requests information (2) on the time that her mother intends to come home, and thereby requests indirectly (3) that her mother come home, thereby carrying out the therapist's suggestion and thereby challenging (4) her mother indirectly for not performing her role as head of the household properly, simultaneously admitting (5) her own limitations and simultaneously asserting (6) again that she carried out the therapist's suggestion. (adapted from Labov & Fanshel, 1977: 160)

Not all problems can be resolved by appeal to higher-order levels of significance, however, since some utterances remain resolutely pluri-functional, or at least ambivalent in function. One particularly large area of interaction in which this is the case concerns the making of requests. The most direct form of request is expressed through the imperative mood, but whilst this may be appropriate for a superior addressing an inferior within a sharply defined social hierarchy, it is less frequently used between equals. Instead, the indirectness of the relationship between form and function is systematically exploited in order to soften acts which, because they involve the speaker in attempting to control the listener, may cause offence. A considerable number of forms, more or less conventional, is available by means of which a request may be made more indirectly, for example:

(1) Can you shut the door?
(2) Are you going to shut the door?
(3) Would you mind shutting the door?
(4) The door is still open
(5) Ooh! It's cold in here etc.
(6) Some of these forms ((1)-(3)), as Searle (1975) has pointed out, make appeal to one or other of the conditions that have to be met in the making of a request and so the grounds for treating them as requests, although indirectly put, are clear. However, this is not the case for (4) and (5). Out of context, there is no way of telling from their form whether they are intended as requests, very indirectly expressed, or whether they are intended, respectively, as statement and exclamation. Similarly, when Mark is asked by his mother, who is holding two differently coloured Easter eggs, 'Which one do you like best?', it is impossible to tell from the form of the utterance alone whether she is asking for information about his preference or offering him whichever he prefers.

As participants, however, we are rarely at a loss, since in arriving at an interpretation of an utterance we can draw upon a wide variety of nonlinguistic cues in the situational context in order to resolve such ambiguities. In addition, there seems to be
a general predisposition to treat any utterance as action-oriented, if such an interpretation can be heard as appropriate in context. Certainly, young children behave in this way: both Ervin-Trip (in press) and Shatz (1978a) report that children as young as 3 years of age are as likely to respond appropriately to indirectly expressed requests as they are to direct requests.

Such a predisposition could be expressed in the form of general principles for conversational interaction such as the following:

(i) If the propositional content can be heard as having implications for action in the context in which it is uttered, it should be so heard.

and

(ii) If that action is one which the speaker might wish to have carried out and it is within the hearer's capability to carry out, then the hearer should treat the utterance as a request that he carry out the action.

or

(iv) If the action is one that the hearer might wish to have carried out and it is within the speaker's capability to carry it out, then the utterance should be treated as an offer by the speaker to carry out that action.

There is, however, another dimension to the form-function relationship which applies particularly to requests. As already suggested by Searle's analysis, a direct request, if uttered under the appropriate conditions, leaves little or no discretion to the hearer as to whether to carry out the requested action or not. An indirect request, on the other hand, by raising one of these conditions or some relevant aspect of the context as a matter of information, allows the hearer the option of responding to that information rather than to the implicit request, and thus of refusing the request without causing serious loss of face on either side. Because direct requests assume compliance, they are only socially appropriate where the speaker has the right to make such an assumption, either because of higher status in a power hierarchy, such as the armed forces, or because of the reciprocal expectation of support that exists between friends. Indirectness, by contrast, is an expression of the speaker's unwillingness to make such an assumption and is thus an appropriately polite mode for a request made by an inferior to his superior or by one who does not wish, or is not able, to claim familiarity.

Dictates relating to relative power may not always be in agreement with those relating to familiarity and politeness, however, and so, in context, more than one message may be transmitted. For example, when the managing director says to one of his employees 'I wonder whether you could manage to start work on time' or a teacher asks 'Who's whistling?' they are choosing to express their purposes in indirect forms which play down their power to control. At the same time, however, there is usually little doubt that, because of their status, they expect their requests to be complied with. Ervin-Tripp (in press) cites an interesting example where misunderstanding occurred: a foreign student who said to her landlady 'Can we move the rubbish bins over here?' was surprised to receive the reply, 'I didn't know you had a room-mate.' The landlady clearly did not expect to be requested to assist in carrying out the action and so interpreted the 'Can we . . .' as a request for permission by more than one person; the student either was not aware of her inferior status, and so of the inappropriateness of asking the landlady to help, or she mistakenly used 'we' in an attempt to be polite. But whichever explanation is correct, it points up the need to consider social features of the situation, as well as the form of the utterance, in arriving at an interpretation.

However, whilst principles for the interpretation of utterances, such as those that have been considered in relation to requests, may quite accurately reflect, in general terms, some of the procedures that participants make use of in relating form to speech act
function, they still leave largely unexplained the particular criteria that are appealed to in specific instances. It must be concluded, therefore, that we are still far from an adequate understanding of this aspect of the organisation of discourse.

Articulating the two dimensions of discourse

Given the unresolved problems encountered in the attempt to provide defining criteria for the recognition of speech acts, it is obviously not yet possible to give a detailed account of the way in which the syntagmatic and paradigmatic dimensions of discourse are related. Yet there can be little doubt that they are systematically related. One possibility, tentatively advanced by Wells, MacLure & Montgomery (1979), is that the three move types, solicit, give and acknowledge, provide the link, mapping onto the various classes of speech act (however defined) on the one hand, and entering into the sequential structure of the exchange and longer stretches of discourse on the other. At the same time, certain formal features of utterances, such as the mood system and the intonational systems of tone and pitch height can also be shown to be systematically associated with choice of move type.

Whatever the merits of this particular proposal, however, it is clear that there are quite strong constraints on the options, both formal and functional, that can be appropriately selected by a speaker at different points in the syntagmatic structure of any exchange or sequence of linked exchanges. Likewise there are constraints on the possible interpretations that a hearer can put upon particular utterances, depending on their sequential position. Certain writers have likened these constraints to the syntactic rules which define the regularities in the structure of sentences, but that is surely too strong. A better analogy might be to the principles that influence the strokes that players successively make in a ball game such as tennis.

Even this analogy is less than satisfactory, however, as it implies a more strictly goal-oriented activity than is the case in the majority of conversations, where, as much as to win points, the object is to keep the ball in play. To this end, conversational participants are willing to ignore 'faults in service', to return balls that have gone 'out' and even, if necessary, to redefine the rules. The way in which a rally proceeds thus bears only a probabilistic relation to the predetermined, rule-governed sequences that might be prescribed by theory. However what the analogy does serve to highlight is the essentially collaborative way in which discourse is constructed, each participant in turn setting up opportunities and constraints for the move to follow as well as responding to the opportunities and constraints set up by the previous move.

Conversation: the triangle of communication

In the first part of this chapter we have looked at linguistic interaction almost exclusively in terms of the way in which utterances by different speakers sequentially contribute to the meaning that is jointly and collaboratively constructed. In so doing, we have concentrated on the moves that are made and the relationships between those moves, ignoring almost completely the psycholinguistic processes that individual participants engage in as they make and interpret those moves. In the remainder of this chapter we shall attempt to complete the picture by examining these processes in more detail, trying to establish the main components involved in the production and comprehension of a single utterance. For this purpose we shall concentrate on utterance 27 from the original extract given in table 1.1:

Mother: Put the lid. . . on top of the basket

As has already been argued with respect to the organisation of discourse, linguistic interaction is a collaborative activity, and this applies just as much to the production and interpretation of individual utterances as it does to longer stretches of discourse. Any act of linguistic communication involves the establishment of a triangular relationship
between the sender, the receiver and the context of situation. The sender intends that, as a result of his communication, the receiver should come to attend to the same situation as himself and construe it in the same way.* For the communication to be successful, therefore, it is necessary (a) that the receiver should come to attend to the situation as intended by the sender; (b) that the sender should know that the receiver is so doing; and (c) that the receiver should know that the sender knows that this is the case. That is to say they need to establish **intersubjectivity** about the situation to which the communication refers.

[*This formulation is based upon the more precise account of sufficient conditions for meaning proposed by Grice (1957). In an extended discussion of linguistic behaviour from a philosophical point of view, Bennett (1976) offers the following version: 'U (utterer) did x meaning that P if there is someone A (audience) such that U did x intending (i) that A should come to believe P, (ii) that A should be aware of intention (i), and (iii) that the awareness mentioned in (ii) should be part of A's reason for believing P.' (p. 124)]

Not all communications concern a shared, immediately perceptible situation, as in the example concerning the washing basket; nor do they always involve a speaker and a hearer. The paragraph that you are reading now involves a writer and a reader, and the situation that is the focus of our intersubjective attention is a generalised abstraction from our individual experience as communicators. In both cases, however, collaboration is required: the sender attempting to make his interpretation of the situation, and his intention within that situation, intelligible to the receiver; and the receiver using a variety of cues derived from the linguistic signal, his past experience and his own interpretation of the situation, in order to arrive at the meaning he judges to be intended by the sender.

In using the term 'situation' for the third point of the triangle, however, there is a certain ambiguity: at one and the same time it refers both to the context and to the content of the communication. This is not accidental. Although the physical setting of a communication - the context of market, classroom or club - may influence the way in which the participants relate to each other, and thus what they say, the more important situation is the one that is created by means of their communication. It is precisely because words, and the sentences in which they occur, are symbols, separate from, but conventionally related to, the objects and events of our experience, that they enable us to create the intersubjectively agreed situations of our communication, whether the objects and events focused on are immediately present or not.

**Constructing the message**
The first stage in the production of an utterance is the construction of the message to be communicated. But this involves processes of interpretation and organisation that are not restricted to language. Almost all human behaviour is goal-directed, organised by plans which are nested one inside another, with higher-level plans requiring sequences of plans at lower levels for their implementation (Miller, Galanter & Pribram, 1960). In our example, the plan is to bring about a state of affairs in which the lid is on the washing basket - a plan which could clearly be carried out in a number of ways, one of which would involve the mother carrying out the action herself. An alternative - and one which is almost essential where the goal is some form of collaborative activity - is to make use of communication as a means of carrying out a higher-level plan. This is what Mark's mother does when she asks him to carry out the action for her.

Where the plan is complex, its communication may require a whole series of messages, as for example when instructing someone to carry out an intricate task such as assembling a kit or when telling a story. But whether part of a series or standing alone, each message can itself be, for convenience, theoretically separated into a number of components. The first of these concerns the purpose of the communication.

As we saw in the earlier discussion of speech acts, an important part of the speaker's intention in communicating is to bring about some effect - to carry out a verbal
action. There, we were looking at speech acts from the point of view of the relationships between moves in the sequential structure of discourse, but the categories that were distinguished can equally be taken to describe the sorts of purposes that speakers may have in the implementation of higher-level plans: purposes such as directing (influencing the listener to act), representing (adding to or modifying the listener's knowledge), expressing feeling and so on. In most cases the effect that is intended involves the listener in some way, and Halliday (1970) refers to this component as the interpersonal function. In the case of our example the message clearly has a directive purpose: to get Mark to carry out an action.

Closely linked to purpose is the second component: the topic of the message. This concerns the events or states of affairs - the situation - to which the plan that has given rise to the message applies. Constructing the topic of the message involves selecting and organising the relevant present and past experience.

For experience to be available to be drawn upon in carrying out a plan, whether through communication or by some other means, it must be internally represented in some form. Psychologists are not entirely in agreement about the form in which experience is stored in memory, but clearly it must be systematically organised with numerous cross-references so that it can be readily accessed either for the interpretation of incoming sensory information or for the various types of mental process that can be gathered together under the general label 'thinking'. As well as integrating information received through different sensory modalities, this internal representation of experience also makes use of typical episode structures or 'scripts' (Schank & Abelson, 1977) in order to integrate experiences over time, and project future outcomes and possibilities.

Whilst the organisation of language - its grammar and vocabulary - must be closely matched to this internal representation and almost certainly comes to influence the way in which experience is represented, the internal representation of experience itself clearly does not consist of a set of sentences ready-made to fit the constantly changing detail of moment-by-moment experience. Even the recognition of individual objects does not involve a direct link between percept and lexical item; rather both are linked through some form of conceptual organisation which is brought into play when the object has to be referred to verbally (Miller & Johnson-Laird, 1976). Language and experience, therefore, are not in any simple one-to-one correspondence.

There are two further reasons for recognising a separation between language and the way in which experience is internally represented, which were pointed out by Vygotsky (1962) in his discussion of language and thought. Firstly, experience is personal and particular, whereas the categories of language, whether lexical or grammatical, are public and general; secondly, experience is multidimensional and simultaneous, whereas the act of speaking or writing requires this to be converted into an ordered arrangement of constituents that can ultimately be expressed through a temporarily organised sequence of sounds or marks on a page. If these arguments are correct, it follows that, in order to communicate through language, a speaker first has to identify and organise conceptually those elements of present or past experience that are relevant to his current plan, and then to reorganise, or 'translate', this personal and particular configuration into the categories of meaning that are publicly available in the semantic structure of his native language.

What is involved in this stage of topic construction has only recently begun to be investigated (e.g. Chafe, 1977; Schank & Abelson, 1977), as linguists and psychologists have started to explore the semantic interface between personal experience and the organisation of meaning in particular languages. Learning to manage this interface thus represents a major part of what is involved in language acquisition. This topic will be more fully discussed in chapters 2 and 3; for the moment, it is sufficient to emphasise the general point that speaking (and listening) require the manipulation of more than one form of representation, and a process of translation between them that involves substantial reorganisation (Fodor, Bever & Garrett, 1974).
If we attempt to apply these ideas to the construction of the topic in the utterance that we are focusing upon, we might arrive at a sketch such as the following: In order to formulate the topic relevant to her plan of getting Mark to replace the lid on the basket, his mother first has to interpret certain patterns of visual stimulation as evidence of the presence of two particular objects located in a certain relation to each other and to herself and Mark (also, of course, other patterns as evidence of the presence of Mark apparently disposed to listen to her request); she then has to conceptualise the desired end state and how it might be achieved; and finally she has to match this with a particular semantic structure, which might be stated in terms such as 'Agent Cause Object to Move to be in a specified ("on") Relation with respect to a Location', with the various roles in this event being taken by the particular entities: Mark, the lid and the basket, respectively.

Thirdly, messages frequently also have an attitudinal component, involving one or more of the following: the speaker's affective response to the situation and his or her involvement in the topic being discussed (realised, for example, as 'I really am very worried that George will be unable to get a job'); his estimate, in the case of an informing message, of the probability of the information being correct (e.g. 'It is probable that/Perhaps he is at home'); his attitude to the hearer on such dimensions as friendliness, familiarity, etc. (shown, for example, in the form chosen to realise a request, e.g. 'Would you mind putting the book back on the shelf when you've finished with it'). There are no obvious realisations of attitude in the extract from which our example is taken, except perhaps the addition of the politeness term 'please' in the mother's utterance (14). This is not surprising, as the means for expressing attitudinal qualifications are relatively late to emerge and, probably for this reason, are relatively rare in speech to young children.

The attitudinal component is usually congruent with the purpose and topic components of the message, but it can happen that, without the speaker necessarily being conscious of it, his 'real' attitude is expressed in a way which conflicts with the rest of the message. When this happens, the realisation of the conflicting attitude is typically paralinguistic (for example, the tremor in the voice or the averted gaze which belies the claim to certainty in 'I know I gave it back to you', or the peremptory tone of voice which belies the indirectness of the request 'I wonder if it is possible for you to do this immediately'). Where this occurs, there are in effect two contradictory messages being transmitted simultaneously and, perhaps not surprisingly, it has been shown that it is the apparently unintentional one that is most likely to be attended to (Argyle, 1969).

Taking account of the context
The discussion so far has treated the construction of the message as if it occurred in an interactional vacuum. But, as we saw in the earlier discussion of the organisation of discourse, there are quite strong constraints on what moves a speaker can appropriately make at each successive point in the unfolding of a conversational sequence; and the selection and organisation of the purpose and topic of the message must take these constraints into account in a number of ways. Since there does not seem to be any agreed way of referring to this aspect of the message, let us introduce the term orientation. We can think of orientation, therefore, as the adjustment of purpose, topic and attitude to take account of the particular context in which the message is to be communicated.

One aspect of orientation that has already been considered in relation to discourse, is the selection of a speech act which will simultaneously realise the speaker's intended purpose and be capable of being mapped on to a move type that is appropriate to that point in a sequence. Even more fundamentally, the decision to produce an utterance at all, as well as its purpose and topic, may be almost entirely a matter of orientation to the expectations set up by the previous speaker's utterance. Our example utterance is a case in point; for it seems highly unlikely that the mother would have repeated her earlier instruction if Mark had not solicited the repetition.

With respect to topic, orientation influences both what information is included and
how it is organised. One of the most important decisions a speaker has to make concerns the amount of information relevant to his topic that he can assume to be already shared with his intended hearer. To underestimate what his hearer already knows will lead him to appear to be 'talking down', which may cause his hearer to feel insulted; on the other hand, to overestimate is to risk failing to communicate effectively altogether, as the hearer searches his representation of past experience in vain to find relevant information to which he can relate what he hears.

There are at least three levels at which such judgments about what is shared knowledge have to be made. The most general concerns cultural assumptions - what is taken to be 'common knowledge' amongst members of a particular culture, by virtue of their membership of that culture. Secondly, there is knowledge known to be shared as a result of personal experience; and thirdly there is knowledge which has already been established as shared during the course of the present conversation. In some respects it is this last level which is the most important, since it is by successfully managing the introduction, foregrounding and linking of items of information from one utterance to the next that conversational participants create coherence in their joint production of discourse and reassure each other that mutual understanding is taking place.

One of the ways in which speakers organise their utterances to achieve this effect depends on a distinction between information which is given and information which is new. Each utterance can be expected to contain some information which is presented as already belonging to the intersubjective pool of shared knowledge, as a result of earlier mention in the conversation, or at least as being easily assimilable to that pool by inspection of the situational context or by appeal to past experience. This information can therefore be treated as given. The remainder of the utterance offers new information relevant to that which was given. One aspect of orientation, therefore, is the construction of the message so that the hearer is able to recognise which part of the information is to be taken as given and which is new.

As we saw earlier, however, what is presented as given information is not always directly recognisable as such by the hearer, and indeed conversation would be rather tedious if all connections between utterances were spelt out in full. Nevertheless, as Clark & Haviland (1977) point out, mutual understanding is only possible if participants behave as if they were parties to an agreement to the effect that the speaker will construct his message so that his hearer is able to discover the unique referent identified by each item of information that is introduced. This they call the given-new contract. The speaker has to make sure, therefore, that, if what he offers as given has not already been specifically mentioned, the hearer will be able easily to make the implicature that allows him to locate the intended referent in memory or in the situation.

In the case of the utterance concerning the washing basket, both the intended referents are clear, since there is only one lid and one basket, both visible to speaker and hearer and both having already been mentioned in the immediately preceding conversation. However, it is easy to imagine a slightly different conversation in which the link between utterances is not so obvious. For example,

Child: This towel needs to go to the wash
Mother: The basket is behind the door

Here, 'The basket' is treated as given information in the mother's utterance, although it had not been previously mentioned. However, if the child as hearer were aware that articles in his household needing to be washed were placed in a particular basket, he to was the basket for dirty washing and he would then understand the relevance of the new information that it was behind the door.

The orientation of the speaker's message is also responsive to other aspects of the context, particularly the social setting or event of which the communication is a part. In the particular example we are focusing upon there is little evidence of adjustment to the
context as such, but the form of the mother's utterance certainly seems to be adjusted to the gap in skill between herself and Mark and, if we were to examine extracts from other contexts, we should find evidence of both child and mother adjusting their messages when speaking to Mark's baby sister, to Mark's father, or to unfamiliar visitors. We should also find examples of utterances by Mark which showed some ability to orient his meaning to take account of the perceived or anticipated attitude of his mother to his intended or current activities. Perhaps, indeed, this is what we are seeing in his solicitous offering of the towel to his mother.

These various kinds of orientation to the anticipated needs of the hearer are thus an important part of the selecting and organising of meaning which, it has been suggested, constitute the first stage in the production of an utterance. It is also in making these adjustments that the speaker most obviously engages in a collaborative activity and observes the Cooperative Principle in conversation that was discussed above (p. 30).

Before going further, let us recapitulate the discussion so far. Communication, it has been argued, brings into being within the context of situation a triangular relationship between sender, receiver and the field of intersubjective attention, where this field may concern some aspect of the situational context or may be created from the participants' representation of experience by means of the communication itself. In the construction of a particular message to further his current plan, the speaker selects the relevant aspects of his internally represented personal and particular experience and formulates them in terms of categories of meaning within the shared and public language that he speaks. For convenience, these meanings can be described in terms of a purpose the utterance is intended to achieve, a topic which provides its propositional content and an attitudinal component. At the same time, the organisation of the message is given an orientation to the requirements of the specific interactional context in which it is to be communicated. The result of this process of construction we shall call a meaning intention, which is what the sender wants the receiver to understand as the result of his communication.

**Encoding the meaning intention**

The next stage in the production of the utterance is the encoding of this meaning intention. As we have already seen, linguistic communication involves a translation between the form of representation in which cognitive operations are carried out and the temporal sequence of linguistic items which constitute the speech event. As Fodor et al. (1974) remark in discussing comprehension, utterances can transmit thoughts only because hearers know how to translate them into the language in which thinking is done. Clearly, the reverse of this procedure is equally necessary in the production of utterances, although the detail of how 'thoughts' are converted into the form that the utterance will take is still, as we have seen, a matter of considerable theoretical discussion. One part of this procedure is carried out, we have suggested, in the formulation of a meaning intention in terms of categories of purpose, topic and attitude. However, there must also be a second stage at which the meaning intention is encoded in terms of the formal resources of the language: lexical items, syntactic structures, intonation patterns and gestures. Finally, in a third stage, the resulting pattern of items in structure is given physical expression through patterns of sound or some form of visual representation.

For many linguists, the resources involved in these latter two stages and their systematic organisation are what constitute the essence of language; how people use the sentences that are constructed from these resources being considered outside the province of linguistic investigation. This is particularly true of Chomsky and other transformational-generative grammarians, who also make a sharp distinction between competence (the knowledge that a native speaker/hearer has about the formal organisation of his language, which can be expressed in the form of rules of various kinds) and performance (the processes of speaking, listening, making linguistic judgments, etc., which draw upon competence, but which also involve memory, heuristic processing strategies and so on) (Chomsky, 1965). Other linguists and sociolinguists, on
the other hand, have argued that what a native speaker knows also includes how to use language appropriately to make reference to objects and events in the world, how to engage effectively in linguistic interaction and so on. The term communicative competence has been coined, in opposition to the 'grammatical competence' of transformational grammar, in order to emphasise this broader conception of what constitutes linguistic knowledge (Campbell&Wales, 1970; Hymes, 1972).

Like Halliday (1970, 1977), however, we find it more helpful to think in terms of what a speaker/hearer is able to do rather than in terms of what he knows. This view is also shared by certain psycholinguists. Miller & Johnson-Laird (1976), for example, have suggested that the rules of syntax, such as those proposed in transformational grammar, are not so much components of the language user's competence, playing an important role in performance, as generalisations that the language user may eventually come to derive from the procedures that he uses. We see the formal organisation of language, therefore, as a resource: systems of options of lexis, syntax and intonation, through which meaning intentions are encoded, or realised.

Rather like translation from one language to another, however, realisation is not a straightforward matter of one-to-one correspondence between units of meaning and units of form. On the one hand, a particular meaning may be realised simultaneously by options from more than one of the formal systems (e.g. 'politeness' may be realised in making a request by the selection of interrogative rather than imperative mood, with associated past as opposed to nonpast tense, and the addition of the lexical items 'mind' and 'please', as in 'Would you mind shutting the door please?'). On the other hand, one formal item may simultaneously realise more than one aspect of meaning (e.g. in 'Did he go out?', 'did' both encodes the reference to past time, and functions, in inversion with the subject 'he', to mark the sentence as interrogative, thus realising in this context the purpose 'request information').

Nevertheless, although many-to-one relationships in both directions are the rule rather than the exception, it is fairly accurate to say that the different aspects of meaning tend to be more closely linked to some rather than others of the formal systems of realisation. Thus topic tends to be most strongly associated with the selection of the lexical verb and the lexical content of the noun phrases associated with it in the case roles of agent, patient, location, etc., and with the syntactic organisation of these noun phrases as subject, object, adjunct, etc., of the clause. Topic is also associated with the syntactic systems of tense and aspect. Purpose, as we have seen, is strongly associated with the syntactic system of mood, and thus with the relationship between subject and the first element of the verb. Attitude is clearly associated with the selection of lexical items according to their affective associations, as opposed to their referential meaning; it is also associated with a number of lexical items or phrases such as 'think', 'in my opinion', 'possibly', etc. and with the system of modal verbs (e.g. 'might', 'could', etc.) as the realisation of tentativeness and uncertainty.

The realisations of orientation are less easy to characterise, however. Just as each of the other aspects of meaning is adjusted to fit the message to the conversational and situational context in which it is to be communicated, so the formal realisations of these adjustments are to be found in lexical selection, syntactic organisation and intonational patterning.

One particularly important aspect of the realisation of orientation is the organisation of the structure of the utterance to signal the given-new distinction discussed above. Information which is presented as given, it will be recalled, is assumed to be already available to the hearer from the preceding conversation, either directly or by means of 'implicature' (d. p. 53). Given information typically occurs in the early part of the sentence, whilst new information tends to follow in the latter part* and whilst new information is presented in full, given information is typically presented in a more allusive fashion with links back to the earlier mention being made through some form of cohesion.
This is not always the case as, for reasons of emphasis, new information can be put at the beginning of the sentence by means of various types of thematisation (d. Halliday, 1967b), for example, 'A page of the thesis was what William was chewing.'

This can be illustrated by means of a version of the washing basket extract which might have, but did not actually, occur:

1 Child: Look here's the lid
2 Mother: Put it on the basket
3 Child: I have [Child has put the lid into the basket]
4 Mother: I don't think so
5 No put it on it

In this short extract, information is carried forward from one utterance to the next using several of the different types of cohesion (d. Halliday & Hasan, 1976). In 2, 'the lid' is the given information, and here it is realised by means of anaphoric reference: 'it' refers the hearer back to a previous occurrence of 'the lid' in 1. In 3 there is an example of ellipsis: in the context, 'put it on the basket' can be supplied from the previous utterance to complete the meaning of the elliptical 'I have'. 4 involves the substitution of 'so' for the whole clause 'you have put it on the basket' elliptically contained in 3. Finally, the two anaphoric pronouns in 5 refer back, respectively to 'the lid' in 1 and 'the basket' in 2.

Another way of looking at the realisation of the information structure here is in terms of relative emphasis. Werth (forthcoming) suggests that items of information are assigned one of three possible levels of emphasis. New information, as might be expected, is brought into focus; given information, on the other hand, is given a reduced status. The third possibility, illustrated in 5 above, is that of contrast. An item of given information, 'in the basket' in this case, which is directly available from the situation, is used as the point of comparison for a contrasting item, 'on the basket'. As we have already seen, reduced emphasis tends to be associated with cohesive options such as pronominal reference, substitution and ellipsis. Focus, on the other hand, is associated with full lexical specification.

Also associated with all the categories of emphasis, and with the orientation of the message more generally, are the systems of intonation. In discussing intonation, however, we first have to consider the division of the utterance into tone units, for it is to tone units, rather than to clauses or utterances, that the systems of intonational contrast apply. Not all utterances are divided into more than one tone unit, but where such a segmentation is made, it has the effect of presenting the 'matter' contained in the utterance in a number of chunks, each one involving choices with respect to the various systems of intonational contrast.

In order to illustrate what is meant by tone unit, consider the following invented examples, where / marks a boundary between tone units:

(1) John gave the 'apple and the 'pear to his 'sister / but the ...... ba'nanas he kept for him'self

(2) John gave the 'apple / and the. 'pear / to his 'sister / but the ba'nanas / he 'kept for him'self

In the first case the message is presented as just two tone units, corresponding to the two opposed sets of fruit. In the second, by contrast, each entity mentioned, except John, is presented in a separate tone unit. The larger the number of tone units, the greater the number of opportunities for choices of emphasis, and the smaller the amount of information to be processed in each chunk. Not surprisingly, therefore, a high ratio of tone units per utterance tends to be found in contexts where dramatic effect is intended.
and also in speech addressed to young children. As we shall see below, the repeated request addressed to Mark is divided into two tone-units.

Each tone unit contains at least one syllable which is acoustically prominent (marked I in the examples above) and this syllable, or the last such syllable where there is more than one, is the tonic syllable, on which choices are made with respect to two systems involving pitch: tone (direction of pitch movement), which has three basic options: **rising**, **falling** and **level**; and **pitch height**, which may be **high**, **mid** or **low**.

Two meaning contrasts seem to be associated with choice of tone; in the first, rising tone (shown as J) indicates that the 'matter' of the tone unit is being presented by the speaker as knowledge assumed to be shared, whilst falling tone (\ ) indicates that the matter is not assumed to be shared (Brazil, 1975). The other contrast associated with tone is whether the matter which is presented is complete or incomplete, with rising tone indicating that, at this point, the sequence is incomplete and that there is at least one tone unit to follow. This contrast is particularly frequent in lectures and in reading aloud, where tone units not occurring at the end of a sentence tend to be uttered with rising tone. In conversation, utterances ending on rising tone are likely to be heard as expecting a response. (However, it does not follow that those ending on a falling tone are heard as not expecting a response, since the expectation of a response is also related to mood choice and, more generally, to move type and exchange structure (d. pp. 32-4).) Level tone, which is relatively rare in Standard English, is neutral with respect to both these oppositions.

The opposition between complete and incomplete is also associated with the choice of pitch height on the tonic syllable, with high pitch being heard as expecting a continuation and low pitch as offering an opportunity to close the sequence. In addition, high pitch on a prominent syllable may also indicate that a contrast is intended (e.g. 'Mother: No put it 'on it', p. 57 above), whilst low pitch indicates that the matter of the tone unit can be taken as essentially equivalent to that contributed in a previous tone unit (Brazil, 1978). As will be clear from the brief sketch, however, the role of intonation in the realisation of the different aspects of orientation is complex, and, as yet, not very well understood.

Nevertheless, if we return to Mark and the washing basket, we can now see that its form realises a number of options of orientation:

'Put the 'lid / . . on 'top of the 'basket

Firstly, by breaking the utterance into two tone units, separated by a brief pause, his mother organises the message as two chunks, corresponding to the two objects that Mark is to act upon. Secondly, by selecting rising tone in the first tone unit, she indicates that she is assuming that the fact that it is the lid that is to be moved is already a matter on which they are agreed; what is new (or being treated as new) is where he has to put it. Thirdly, the use of the definite article in referring to both lid and basket indicates that she assumes that Mark already knows which particular objects are being referred to. Finally, in contrast to her initial request (14), which was indirect, the present request is direct, though this is probably more in the interests of formal simplification to ensure understanding than as an expression of any change in the actual or desired status or authority relationship between them.

Following this brief account of some of the formal systems taken one by one, we can look again at his mother's utterance to Mark and note how the different aspects of meaning are simultaneously realised in the various options that are selected in the formal organisation of the utterance.

The purpose of the message, to request action of the hearer, is realised by the selection of imperative mood, that is to say by the omission of the grammatical subject and the selection of the nonfinite form of the verb. The topic of the message, that an agent (the hearer) cause a change of location (put on) of the patient (the lid) with respect
to the goal location (the basket) at the time (now), is realised through the selection of the lexical items in brackets and their allocation to the grammatical constituents subject, main verb, object and adjunct in the unmarked order VOA. (Note that, as a result of the imperative mood, the subject is omitted and the verb is unmarked for tense.) As no option is selected in the attitudinal component, there is no realisation of attitude in this utterance.

In the realisation of orientation, there are two tone units: the first, which takes rising tone and high pitch, contains the given information, and the second, which takes falling tone and high pitch, contains the new information. Because the objects referred to in this utterance both are perceptually present and have already been referred to, they are treated as definite. In what is a relatively simple utterance, all the main formal characteristics can be accounted for in terms of the systems described above. This is represented diagrammatically in figure 1.3.

The final stages in the production process take this plan for an utterance, recode it in terms of phonological structure (i.e. as a temporally organised sequence of segments of sound) and execute the resulting programme by activating the muscles that control the lungs, vocal cords, throat, tongue, jaws and lips to produce an integrated sequence of movements that modify the outgoing breath to produce the characteristic sound that we recognise as speech.

Of necessity, this account of the production of an utterance has been highly schematic; parts of it too, are in need of much more empirical validation before they can be accepted as proven fact. One qualification, in particular, needs to be made, and that concerns the uni-directionality of the processes implied by the above account. Although there is evidence in rather general terms for the temporal succession of the stages that have been outlined, it is clear that the message does not have to be constructed in full before a start can be made on putting it into execution. Evidence from the study of errors and the location and duration of pauses in speech (From kin, 1973), for example, indicates that pauses tend to occur just before items with high informational value,
suggesting that although the general organisation of his meaning intention is sufficiently well developed for the first part of his utterance to be executed, a choice with respect to some subordinate part is causing the speaker a momentary difficulty. There is also a feedback effect in the opposite direction, as the speaker monitors the encoding and transmission of his utterance, leading on some occasions to self-corrections of various kinds. A more important consequence of feedback is that by comparing the verbal formulation actually transmitted with the initial meaning intention, a speaker has the opportunity to become more aware of his own thoughts and to modify and develop them. This is even more true of writing, where there is greater opportunity for correction and revision (d. chapter 7).

**Comprehension: understanding what is intended**

Now let us turn to the other side of the communication process - the reception and interpretation of the signal transmitted by the sender, whether it be spoken or written. In the previous sections we considered the major components involved in the production of an utterance and sketched the relationships between them. When we come to consider the receiver, we can see that he too requires the same components but, as will become clear, the relationship between the components in the comprehension of an utterance is rather different. In particular, comprehension differs from production in the way in which the non-linguistic representation of experience is related to the linguistic encoding of the message.

As we have already seen, the task of the speaker is to translate the representation of particular and personal experience into a linguistically oriented meaning intention, which can be encoded by selecting and organising appropriate options from his repertoire of vocabulary, grammar and intonation to create a plan for an utterance, which is finally articulated as speech. At each stage in this task the speaker is guided by the plan that his communication is to serve and, throughout the process, as a template against which to check the result, he has available a representation of the situation to which his message applies, either derived through direct perception or in the form of an already activated area of internally represented experience.

The hearer, on the other hand, does not have such a representation available; indeed his task is precisely to create such a representation on the basis of the information that is made available to him in the incoming speech signal. It might seem, therefore, as if the processes involved in comprehension could be represented as a simple inversion of the sequence of production: auditory discrimination and segmentation of the speech signal yielding a sequence of words in syntactic structure from which the meaning could be decoded, leading to an amplification or modification of the listener's representation of experience and current plan.

In broad outline, of course, processes of this sort must take place, if the speech signal is to lead to the listener understanding the meaning intended by the speaker. However, on the basis of research carried out to date, it seems unlikely that such a simple, unidirectional model accurately describes what typically occurs.

In the first place, just as nonverbal perception involves an interaction between information received by the senses and expectations derived from past experience, so the perception of linguistic information involves a similar interaction between the actual speech signal and expectations derived from various sources, including redundancy within the formal structure of the message itself, accompanying paralinguistic signals and information from the conversational and cultural contexts within which the message occurs (Clark, 1978; Marslen-Wilson, Tyler & Seidenberg, 1978).

Secondly, even when the speech signal has been decoded as a semantic structure, the linguistic units of which it is constructed only label abstract classes and entities and the relations between them. They do not, in themselves, fully specify how they are to be integrated into the particular framework of meanings that have been established as shared knowledge in the preceding interaction, nor how they are to be related to the particular
objects and events that they refer to in the field of intersubjective attention. The interpretation of the message can only be achieved, therefore, by the listener drawing upon information from sources other than the signal itself, and in particular from his interpretation of the total context (Bransford & McCarrell, 1974).

Much of this information is already available to him, however. For, like the speaker, the hearer is actively engaged in construing the situational context in the light of his own past experience and current plan, and this information includes the actions of the speaker, his gestures, facial expression and direction of gaze. So, even before the speaker begins to produce his utterance, the listener will have formed certain general expectations about the speaker’s intentions, which will dispose him to treat certain messages as more probable than others. The greater the amount of ‘common ground’ that has already been established, either in the preceding conversation or as the result of shared experience, the more detailed and accurate these expectations are likely to be.

Expectations about complete messages can rarely be very precise, however, given the wide range of things a person may say, even in well-defined situations. But once the speaker has begun to produce, and the listener to process, the utterance, progressively stronger expectations are aroused as the utterance proceeds in an almost inverse relation to the difficulty of choice experienced by the speaker. These expectations are of three general kinds, corresponding to the types of redundancy mentioned above: relationships between lexical items, corresponding to the relationships that hold with varying degrees of likelihood between objects and events in the world of experience; relationships between items within semantic/syntactic structures; and relationships between units of speech sound. In the following invented example, involving two parents discussing how they spent the weekend, all three types of redundancy converge in predicting the completion of the second utterance:

A: John and I went to Weston at the weekend and the children rode the ponies on the sands.
B: That must have been fun. We went to Bristol and ours saw the white tigers at the z-.

In arriving at this completion, experience narrows down the locations in Britain where one can see white tigers to a small set; such locations are referred to by nouns and, following a spatial preposition and the definite article, a noun is the most probable sequel; nouns with initial consonant ’z’, which refer to such locations, can be reduced to the single possibility: ‘zoo’.

This is no doubt an extreme case, for not every word in an utterance can be predicted with such certainty. Nevertheless, evidence from a variety of sources all leads to an account in terms of bringing information to the task of understanding as well as extracting it from the speech signal.

From this point of view, consider the cloze procedure, in which written texts have words removed at regular intervals. Subjects in experiments involving this procedure have little difficulty in suggesting words that make sense in the gaps and, if they are given additional information about the length of the word or its initial letters, can frequently provide correct solutions, particularly if the subject matter is familiar (Heatlie & Ramsey, 1971). A second, and rather compelling, source of evidence of the role of expectations is found in the misreadings we can be led into by our familiarity with the most frequent structural patterns in the language. The following text caused the present writer to puzzle for some considerable time before the intended meaning became clear:

‘The wild Ginseng men sought and found with considerable difficulty could not begin to meet the great demand for the magic root.’*
[*Commas after 'Ginseng' and 'difficulty' make the task considerably easier. They were not present in the advertisement in which this sentence was found.]

Perhaps the most convincing evidence, however, is to be found in the skill with which parents seem to arrive, more often than not, at satisfactory interpretations of their children's utterances even when these are, to varying degrees, inadequate in specificity of reference, completeness of expression, pronunciation, or a combination of these. However, by drawing upon their interpretation of the situation and their experience of the child's characteristic interests and desires, parents are able to arrive at the child's probable meaning intentions, making use of whatever linguistic cues are available and supplying the remaining information from other sources. In just this way, it appears, Mark's mother succeeds in understanding his question '[fif] wash up Mummy?'

However, the problems faced by parents, or by subjects in 'cloze' experiments, and the strategies they use to resolve them, differ only in degree from those in which any conversational participant is involved. For the achievement of comprehension always involves a complex interaction of informational cues from a variety of sources. It must be stressed, however, that the relative weight that is given to the different types of cue is not constant across all situations, but depends upon a variety of factors, such as the purpose for which the participants are communicating, the relationship between them, the familiarity of the topic, the availability of nonlinguistic behavioural and situational cues, and the form and quality of the actual signal.

Awareness of the constructive, multi-cued nature of the comprehension process helps us to understand how listeners can overcome inadequacies in the message or noise in the communication channel. It also helps us to see how strategies that give particular emphasis to one sort of cue may be successful in some situations yet lead to error in others. This seems to be the explanation of many of the miscues produced by beginning readers, and of the systematic but erroneous responses that young children produce on tests of comprehension (d. chapter 5). At the same time, it can help us to see the appropriateness of the utterance whose production we have examined in such detail, and indeed of the whole sequence of conversation in which it occurred.

From Mark's point of view, the purpose of this conversation is to get his mother to play, and so his motivation to understand and perform the action requested by his mother is high, once he has understood that her compliance is conditional upon his performance of the task. The objects on which the action is to be performed are also present in the situation, and it is a task which is well within Mark's capabilities. However, since the performance of the task is dependent upon his correctly understanding the linguistic instruction, it is important that it should be made as easy as possible for him to relate the formal organisation of the utterance to other cues available in the situation, and to use the resulting meaning intention to create and direct a plan of action. And this is what his mother's total communication seems intuitively designed to achieve:

'Put the 'lid / . . on 'top of the 'basket

By separating the utterance into two tone units, she helps to define the sequence in which the action is to be performed; at the same time, by pointing to the lid by gesture and gaze and by giving prominent stress and rising tone to the corresponding word in her utterance, she maximises the chances of his correctly identifying her intended referent. Then, having assured herself that he has understood that much, she moves her gaze to the basket as she produces the second tone unit, once again giving prominent stress to the words in her utterance that specify the location where the lid is to be put. In this way she organises the verbal and nonverbal cues in her communication to match the cues available from the disposition of the referent objects in the shared situation. That Mark finally carries out the request is evidence that he has comprehended the message and, although less directly, this in turn provides an indication of the success of his mother's
Having charted at great length the progress of a single utterance through the reciprocal processes of production and comprehension (as summarised diagrammatically in figure 1.4), we can now see why Grice stresses the importance of conversational cooperativeness and why other writers have used terms such as 'intersubjectivity' and 'negotiation of meaning'. For conversation is only possible through collaboration: the speaker constructing and encoding his message in a form that he judges will make his meaning intention readily available to the listener, and the listener making use of all the relevant cues to construct and interpret the meaning that he judges to match that intended by the speaker.

Conclusion
In this chapter we have attempted to provide a brief sketch of what is involved in communicating through language by examining one particular sequence of parent-child interaction, and then by considering how a single utterance is constructed and interpreted in its context of socially situated interaction.

It has been assumed throughout that linguistic communication is only possible because individual participants share a tacit agreement as to the way in which utterances are related to the situations in which they are used. It has also been assumed that such relationships are systematic and amenable to description in generalised terms. At the same time, it has to be admitted that, in some areas, linguists and other students of linguistic communication have not as yet been able to offer such a generalised account in
terms that accord with participants' intuitions. What, then, is the relationship between the
descriptions of language use that are offered by analysts and the actual production and
interpretation of utterances by participants in particular situated contexts of
communication?

Most analysts take it as axiomatic that this relationship should be as close as
possible, as is suggested by the following quotation:

'Contextualisation can be looked at from two points of view. ' We can think of it as
the process whereby the native speaker of a language produces contextually
appropriate and internally coherent utterances - a process which. . . involves a lot
more than knowledge of the language system. We can also think of it as a process
which the linguist carries out in his description of particular languages. In so far as
the semantic analysis of a particular language is descriptively adequate. . . there
must be some correspondence between these two kinds of contextualisation: the
factors identified by the linguist as contextual must be the factors that determine the
native speaker's production and interpretation of utterances in actual situations of
use.' (Lyons, 1977: 610)

In practice, however, the achievement of this correspondence is proving very
difficult to attain. At the heart of the problem is the difference between the goals of
analysts and participants. The participant is always concerned to convey or interpret a
particular meaning intention that arises out of an interaction in the here-and-now of a
unique situational context. In order to achieve this objective, he is prepared to take short-
cuts and to trade upon shared, and often unexpressed, knowledge of the particular
situation. He also makes use of communicative resources that include more than those
that are purely linguistic.

The analyst, on the other hand, seeks to go beyond the details of the particular
utterance, and of the context in which it occurs, in order to arrive at statements and rules
about categories, and relationships between categories, that are true for whole classes of
utterances and contexts. In order to attain this goal, he is prepared to 'standardise' the data
that he has observed and recorded, concentrating on what is common in the data and
ignoring all but the major systematic variations in the language behaviour of the
community whose language he is describing. As a strategy for arriving at an account of
the internal organisation of the language system itself this has been highly successful, as
is demonstrated by the very great progress that has been made in describing the grammar
of hundreds of languages during the last half-century. At this level of description, too, the
correspondence between analyst's and participant's categories has been shown to be fairly
close (Levelt, 1978; Massaro, 1975).

However, the attempt to apply this strategy to the study of the way in which the
system is used in communication is much more problematic. For the analyst, it is
important that the categories he utilises should be discrete, clearly defined and finite in
number, so that the observed instances of language use can be unambiguously assigned to
category types prior to the study of their interrelationships. In addition, if his description
is to correspond with the factors that determine the native speaker's production and
interpretation of utterances in actual situations of use, warrant for the categories he
proposes must be sought in participants' behaviour. From both these points of view, the
description of utterance meaning is proving extremely difficult. As we have seen, there is
as yet no agreement on the number of speech act categories that should be recognised
and, although the generalised conditions that have to be met for an utterance to count as a
successful performance of a type of act have been specified for a limited number of acts,
the decision as to which act or acts a particular utterance is performing in context is
frequently problematic.

So fundamental do these difficulties appear to analysts working in the
Ethnomethodological tradition, that they have abandoned the attempt to arrive at
generalisable categories altogether, arguing that, since no exhaustive account can be given, in terms of the features of the analytic categories themselves, as to how the meaning of an utterance is recognised as an instance of a particular category, it is simply not possible to specify the meaning of an utterance independently of its actual occasion of use. As a result, Conversational Analysts, as this group is called, have shifted their focus of attention to the study of the methods and procedures that participants employ in order to decide what is meant and to 'remedy the essential indexicality and opaqueness of speech' (Wooton, 1975: 61-2).

Given the fact that one of the essential features of language is that it allows the uniqueness of individual experience to be encoded in terms of a finite system of publicly available, generalised resources, it is inevitable that some aspects of the intended and received meaning of particular utterances will escape a description of language use which is made from the point of view of the system. It may also be the case that, although the formal categories of phonology, lexis and grammar have been found to be discrete and mutually exclusive, this will prove to be much less true of the categories of meaning, and particularly of functional meaning. Nevertheless, as Wootton himself argues, it is also true that 'people do operate with a sense that what they see and hear is of a specific, definite kind' (in press: 100-1), and this is further attested by the existence, already noted, of a rich array of lexical verbs for talking about the functions that utterances perform.

The position adopted here, therefore, is that it is certainly worth continuing with the attempt to arrive at a systematic account of the categories that operate in linguistic interaction, whilst recognising that such an approach cannot provide an exhaustive account of the way in which meaning is negotiated in particular conversations. As has been repeatedly stressed throughout this chapter, the exchange of conversational meaning is essentially a cooperative enterprise: participants collaborating in adapting the shared code of symbolic representation to the particular requirements of their interactional intentions. Not surprisingly, therefore, other strategies of investigation will be required, including those that focus on the procedures that participants use to determine the intended meaning in context of particular utterances and sequences of utterances. As Vygotsky observed half a century ago, in order to understand a person's utterance,

'It is not sufficient to understand his words - we must also understand his thought. But even that is not enough - we must also know its motivation. No analysis of an utterance is complete until that plane is reached.' (1962: 151)

There are still many gaps in our understanding of the total process, and these will only be filled by further cross-disciplinary investigation. Nevertheless, the outline is clear enough for us to approach the study of children's acquisition and development of linguistic communication with a general idea of what it is that they have to learn and of the context of interaction within which that learning takes place. It is to these questions that we shall turn in the remaining chapters of this book.