Unit III

Before plunging into our third unit, let’s refresh our minds; let us activate our prior knowledge as regards Pragmatics. What do you remember about it? What is pragmatics? What does pragmatics take into account? What is the relationship between Discourse and Pragmatics?

According to what we have studied in the previous unit, Cook states that Pragmatics provides us with means of relating stretches of language to the physical, social, and psychological world in which they take place. That is, every aspect of context. Do you understand what he means by physical, social and psychological world?

Moreover, he gives Discourse a very broad definition, he defines it as the totality of all these elements interacting with each other. In this sense, Pragmatics tends only to examine how meaning develops at a given point. He even compares Pragmatics with a snapshot, a snapshot of meaning. Now, what can be discourse compared to? Discourse is more like a moving film, revelling itself in time-sometimes over long periods.

(taken from Language Teaching- Discourse, Guy Cook ;OUP, 1996, page 44)

How can we relate all this with our future teaching career? How important are these two points of view for teachers and their students? Cook puts it very clearly: Foreign language learners need to enter into long stretches of communication, in real and complex situations. That is why, we need to build further on the ideas we have covered in the first two units, we need to consider
longer stretches of discourse, to form a picture of discourses in totalities rather than in extracts.

Does it sound as Discourse is too broad to be studied? It really does. What is necessary to do is to find a way to represent the relationship between the whole and its parts. One way of doing so is by means of a rank structure, in which each rank is made up of one or more of the rank below. This type of analysis is used in linguistics, to describe the grammar of sentences. The ranks of grammar are:

Sentence
  Clause
  Phrase
  Word

Let us consider the following sentence as an example:

Lucy arrived home, and she found the radio on.

Its structure can be represented as:

Sentence
  Clause
    Phrase
      Word
      Word
      Word
  Clause
    Phrase
      Word
      Word
      Word

This is known as Tree Diagram. This idea of using tree diagrams or rank structure in grammar can also be applied to Discourse.

At the University of Birmingham, Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), carried out an influential study in this field. It is really interesting to teachers since it provides a model which might be applied with some modifications to discourse in general, and
also because the discourse type chosen to be analysed was primary school lessons.

Can you imagine the way they structured the discourse of a lesson? Let me give you the different ranks and see if you can predict its structure, from the whole to its smaller parts.

![Diagram of discourse ranks](image)

How did you go? The actual rank structure proposed by Sinclair and Coulthard for school lessons is as follows:

Lesson
Transaction
Exchange
Move
Act

But let us go deeper on this model....

**THE DISCOURSE ANALYSIS MODEL**

The Discourse Analysis model (DA), it’s another name given to the Birmingham model or it is also called (IRF), if you continue reading you'll understand why. It was developed by Sinclair and Coulthard, as we said before, from research concerning the structural description of discourse found in the classroom. Since its original description in 1975, it has evolved and expanded to allow the application of less-structured discourse, through the works of Coulthard and Montgomery (1981), Sinclair and Brazil (1982), and Sinclair and Coulthard...
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(1992). Other researchers have focused on aspects of the DA model, including the use of questions (Tsui 1992) and the function of intonation. (Coulthard and Brazil 1979, Brazil 1985, Hewings 1992). As you can see, this model is very popular among discourse analysts. But let us go back to Sinclair and Coulthard, from their research, Sinclair and Coulthard discovered that language in the classroom followed a very rigid sequence, and that speaking patterns were highly structured. Can you imagine that? Think about a common dialogue between a teacher and her class and see if you can find a common pattern. In creating a structural description of discourse, speech acts found in the classroom could be defined according to their function, and therefore categorized. We can expand this advantage by saying that the distinctive feature of a structural description is that the elements in the description and their possible combinations must be rigorously defined. This means that descriptions which are based on the same structural criteria are directly comparable. This may sound difficult to grasp, but think about it this way: if elements belong to the same criteria, or if you are using the same criteria, then elements can be easily compared with each other.

Do you remember the ranking scale we mentioned before? We said that this ranking scale of the DA model contains 4 components. They are, in descending order of hierarchy: transaction, exchange, move and act. There exists a structure in every rank (above the lowest) which can be expressed in terms of the units next below it. Thus, the structure of transaction consists of units of exchanges, exchange units of moves, and move units of acts.

Most discourse research through the DA model is done at the level of exchange, comparably as grammar concentrates on the clause. Exchange is like the unit of analysis for this model. There exist two types of exchanges, Boundary and Teaching. Boundary exchanges mark an end or a beginning to a stage of the lesson, and can be implemented either with a framing move or a focusing move. Typical framing and focusing moves are indicated by acts such as ‘well’, ‘good’, ‘okay’, in addition to an extended pause, and/or comments by the teacher which summarize the preceding or following discourse. Teaching exchanges concern the actual progression of the lesson, and depending on the teacher’s intent, can be actualized through informing, directing, eliciting or checking. There are eleven subcategories of teaching exchanges. Six are free exchanges and are defined by their function and by the type of head act in the initiating move. Whether the
teacher or student initiates the exchange also affects categorization. The five remaining exchanges are bound exchanges, in that they normally contain no initiation and thus are bound to the previous exchange’s function in some way.

Teaching exchanges consist of initiation moves (called the opening move in Sinclair and Coulthard’s original model), response moves (the answering move), and follow-up moves. This three-move structure of an exchange (IRF) is commonly cited, this is also another name given to the model. IRF structure is characteristic of teacher-led discourse, in which the teacher asks a question or provides information, the student responds or reacts, and the teacher provides some degree of comment or evaluation. The teacher knows what he or she wants to tell the class but chooses to do it by setting up situations in which they are steered- more or less successfully- into telling it themselves. This can be seen in the following example, taken from personal data:

**Teacher:** We have the fisherman. What is he saying to himself?
**Student:** He is saying…“I got it.”
**Teacher:** Okay. Sure. He is saying, “I got it.”

Moves are composed of acts, which are the smallest units in the DA model, and define the function of utterances made by the teacher and students. Sinclair and Coulthard list 22 available acts (see the table below) let’s find some examples in the preceding example:

The teacher’s initiation move consists of two acts, informative and elicit. The student’s response move contains a reply act, while the teacher’s follow-up move includes an accept, which indicates to the student that the response was appropriate, and an evaluate, which comments on the quality of the response. In this case the evaluate is a repetition of the response with high-fall intonation.

The structured, planned discourse of classroom interaction fits well with the DA model, yet critics claim problems lie with the immediacy of the discourse approach. Let us try to understand this by reading what Francis and Hunston (1992) say about speech acts. They state that in the DA model speech acts are labelled as they relate to the following and previous utterances, ‘on a moment-by-moment basis’,
not as they contribute to the discourse as a whole. In addition, the model codes utterances in terms of their effect on the discourse only, not taking into account the participants of that discourse. With analysis concerned only with the product of discourse, the issue of how participants interact and negotiate in the speaking activity cannot be addressed. So we could say that this model is somehow not complete, that is it leaves outside some important elements of the context in which the dialogue takes place. That a speech act can only be identified as a single move type is another criticism of the DA model. Rather, an act may perform more than one function of the 'network of available choices simultaneously.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Act</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Realisation(e.g.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acc</td>
<td>Accept</td>
<td>Shows T has heard correct information</td>
<td>Yes, good, fine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ack</td>
<td>Acknowledge</td>
<td>Shows P has understood</td>
<td>Yes, ok, mmmhm, wow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>Aside</td>
<td>T talking to himself</td>
<td>Statement, question command</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Bid</td>
<td>Signal, desire to continue</td>
<td>Miss!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ch</td>
<td>Check</td>
<td>Checks progress</td>
<td>Finished? Ready?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Cue</td>
<td>Evokes bid</td>
<td>Hands up!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cl</td>
<td>Clue</td>
<td>Gives extra information</td>
<td>Statement, question command</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Com</td>
<td>Comment</td>
<td>Exemplifies/expands/ justifies</td>
<td>Statement, tag-question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>Summarizes</td>
<td>So, what we’ve doing is ......</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Directive</td>
<td>Request action</td>
<td>imperative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El</td>
<td>Elicitation</td>
<td>Request answer</td>
<td>Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>Evaluates</td>
<td>Good, interesting, yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Provides information</td>
<td>Statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Loop</td>
<td>Returns to point before P answers</td>
<td>Pardon? Again?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Marker</td>
<td>Marks boundaries in discourse</td>
<td>Well, ok, right,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms</td>
<td>Metastatement</td>
<td>Explicitly refers to development of the</td>
<td>Statement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Now, let us try to analyse the following tape script of an English lesson in a British secondary school. Let’s try to code the acts according to the Sinclair and Coulthard system and show how they combine into moves and exchanges. What problems do you encounter?

T: Two things to establish for the writer at the beginning of the story one the situation what is the situation at the beginning of the story anybody what’s the situation Douglas have you read the story Douglas
S: No sir
T: Ah that won’t help then will it who’s read the story what is the situation at the beginning Michael is it Michael
SS (laughter)
T: Is it Michael
S: Carl
T: What’s the situation at the beginning simple detail situation what where what is the story about at the beginning have you read it
S: No sir
T: Right who’s read it sarah

(Taken from Language Teaching- Discourse, Guy Cook ;OUP, 1996, page 48)
We have been saying that this model ‘was born’ in school lessons, but it is also true that The Birmingham School approach has since been applied to many different discourse types: for example, medical consultations and TV quiz shows. The importance of such approaches for the language learner is that if people involved in communication know, even subconsciously, of the structures of various discourse types and the way they develop, then this tacit knowledge may enable them to communicate successfully. The primary school pupils studied by Sinclair and Coulthard had acquired such knowledge of the way lessons develop; the participants in a trial know what stage it is in and can organize their behaviour accordingly. Because such structures are ‘conventional, and hence culturally variable’ the language learner, in order to be able to operate effectively as a participant in discourse, needs to be able both to identify what type of discourse he or she is involved in, and to predict how it will typically be structured. Again, this may explain that phenomenon which is central to the relevance of discourse analysis to language teaching: how is it that a student with an advanced proficiency in pronunciation, grammar, and lexis somehow fails to use these language skills to communicate successfully? Have you ever felt like this when you were learning English? Have you ever felt that you had some language but you just couldn’t make yourself at ease in the communicative situation you were in?

The discourse types to which this approach is most easily applied tend to have certain features in common. They are all rather formal and ritualistic, and feature one participant with the institutionalized power to direct the discourse. This person may well plan the development of the discourse in advance (as is hopefully the case with lessons) within the fairly narrow limits of the social conventions for that discourse type. There are cases where participants depart from the plans and conventions, of course. This is sometimes interpreted as insubordination, crime, madness, immaturity, or ignorance; sometimes as a sign that the speaker is foreign- and sometimes as creativity!
Mandatory assignment 1 (deadline: October 3rd)

Which elements do we find in the rank structure proposed by Sinclair and Coulthard for school lessons? Mention them and find instances of them in the following dialogue.

Teacher: Well. Marion, look at picture A. What can you see?
Student 1: There is a couple in a church. They’re getting married.
Teacher: Very good Marion!
Teacher: Ok, Lucas. Can you tell me how do they feel?
Student 2: Yes, I think they aren’t happy.
Teacher: Fine, you’re right. They aren’t happy.
Teacher: Why do you think they look sad?
Student 3: Me! Me!
Teacher: Yes, Juan
Student 2: Because they are not in love and they were forced to get married.
Teacher: Good! So, in this picture we can see a couple that is about to get married but they seem to dislike the idea, maybe because they’re not in love and they were forced to do it.
Teacher: Now let’s listen to the story and find out what the situation is!

Discourse typology:

Spoken and Written Discourse

Let us refresh or better to say, put it in more simpler words, what we have just been saying: The Birmingham School approach examines spoken discourse, seeking to interpret it in terms of a rank structure and showing that when it is analysed after the event, there is more order and form in it than might at first be apparent. We also said that we needed to assess the validity of this approach, to see whether it can be extended to other kinds of discourse, and to examine alternative approaches
too. We shall begin to examine the problem of how different kinds of discourse can be categorised, and the parameters which are the best used to distinguish them.

What do you think are the two most used categories when speaking about a language?
I’m sure you are thinking about spoken and written, right? Now, how do you think they differ? What are the differences between them? Make your own list of differences and then check the ones in common with the chart below. How many did you come up with?

Traditionally, language teaching has divided languages into two major categories, the spoken and the written, as you have probably thought before, and at the same time these two big and broad categories are further divided into the four skills of speaking and listening, writing and reading. Some courses try to provide a balanced coverage, but sometimes most of them fail in doing so. If you are already teaching English you may have noticed this before, if you are not......which areas or skills do you think tend to be more neglected? Why do you think they are?

Ok, let’s continue with the difference between spoken and written discourse...
Spoken discourse is often considered to be less planned and orderly, more open to intervention by the receiver. There are some kinds of spoken discourse however, like lessons, lectures, interviews, and trials- which have significant features in common with typical written discourse. Can you think of any other?
As we have seen, in the kind of analysis done with the Birmingham School approach, these kinds of spoken discourse are also planned, and the possibility for subordinate participants can be severely limited. It is clear that in reading a novel one cannot influence its development, but it could also be equally hard for a criminal to influence the direction of a trial, don’t you think? or for a primary school pupil to prevent the lesson progressing as the teacher intends....... though sometimes they try hard! Conversely, there are times when readers do have rights to affect written discourse. Writers respond to the market. Teachers send essays back to be re-written, and so on and so forth.....
Why do all differences take place if we are all the same communicating, using the language in both aspects to send a message? Well, we all agree with Cook when he says that the traditional division of language into spoken and written is clearly and sensibly based on a difference in production and reception: we use our mouth and ears for one, and our hands and eyes for the other. How much do YOU agree with this?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Similarities Between Spoken and Written Language.</th>
<th>Differences Between Spoken and Written Language.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Both spoken and written language use a student’s knowledge of the five components of language. For example, just as we adjust our speech and language style to our listener, so do writers adjust their compositions to their readers. Thus, pragmatic skills are involved in both modes of communication. Semantic skills also are used in spoken and written language. When we are conversing with another or reading a text, we relate concepts to what we already know and often use our background and world knowledge to help us understand less familiar words. We also may use our morphological knowledge of specific root words and common prefixes and suffixes to comprehend words that, as a whole, are unfamiliar (e.g., anti-, establish, -ment). Thus, we use all of the language components for both spoken and written forms of language.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Although the same knowledge bases are used for spoken and literate language, there are differences between these two modes in how these knowledge bases are used. Most notably, reading, writing, and spelling require a level of active awareness and thought about language that spoken language generally does not. Unlike spoken language, written language is removed from the present, thus requiring a greater focus on the linguistic information being written or read because of minimal, if any, nonlinguistic cues. The syntax contained in written language tends to be more formalized and complex compared to spoken language. Information across spoken utterances may be linked by intonation and phrasing, whereas the same information in written language is interconnected via specific linguistic cohesive devices. Written language also differs from spoken language in that it taps into students’ orthographic representations, or the mental images of words, morphemes, and letters stored in memory. This information is used in reading and spelling, but not in spoken language. The application of the different language components, then, varies in style and level of metalinguistic awareness between spoken and written language.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Taken from: http://www.asha.org/about/publications/leaderonline/archives/2002/q1/020122_e.htm

Formal and informal

Yet, as far as discourse structure is concerned, a more fundamental distinction seems to be between formal and, planned discourse, which may be either written or spoken, and less formal, unplanned discourse which, though it may also be
either written or spoken, is usually associated with speech. Informal spoken discourse is something in which the modern foreign language learner, with all the opportunities for travel and social contact, is most likely to wish to succeed, but also the discourse type he or she is likely to find hardest, precisely because it is so informal and unpredictable. It is a common and enormously frustrating experience for foreign language learners, presented with the opportunity to participate in authentic conversation with native speakers, to fail to join in successfully, despite having a high level of proficiency in the classroom. Conversation is fast, and to some extent this failure of the foreign language learner can be attributed to the slow processing of language knowledge. By the time the learner has formulated something to say, the conversation has moved on. Yet there are other reasons too. Can you think of any?

If we have to present a definition of what conversation is we can say that Conversation is the verbalization of concepts involving abstractions and concrete objects which make up the world we live in. I think the idea here is clear, but if you try to put it in your own words, then you will see if it is clear to you too. Can you?

Ok, let us try together: A conversation is communication by two or more people, or by oneself. Conversations are the ideal form of communication in some respects, since they allow people with different views of a topic to learn from each other. A speech, on the other hand, is an oral presentation by one person directed at a group.

Those engaging in conversation naturally relate the other speaker’s statements to themselves, and insert themselves (or some degree of relation to themselves, ranging from the replier’s opinions or points to actual stories about themselves) into their replies. For a successful conversation, the partners must achieve a workable balance of contributions. A successful conversation includes mutually interesting connections between the speakers or things that the speakers know. For this to happen, those engaging in conversation must find a topic on which they both can relate to in some sense. This reminds us of the cooperative principle studied in unit 2, if you don’t remember I advise you to pay a look at it before we continue.
Conversation analysis is a branch of sociology which studies the structure and organization of human interaction, with a more specific focus on conversational interaction.

Broadly speaking, conversation, which is not difficult for most individuals, can be divided into four categories according to its major content: conversations about ideas, conversations about concrete objects and facts, conversations about other people (usually absent) and conversations about "me". Each of these types of conversation has its own cluster of purposes and expectations attached, and each serves a different social purpose. Conversation about ideas serves to extend understanding and awareness, conversation about concrete objects and facts primarily serves to consolidate a group world view, conversation about others not present (gossip) serves to boost self esteem, and conversation about "me" is a means of attracting attention from others. What do you think about these correlations? Do they have sense to you? In the real world no conversation falls exclusively into one category.

What does Cook say about conversation? He considers the term conversation widely used in a non-technical sense, people seem capable of distinguishing it from other kinds of talk. They mean, broadly speaking, that the talk is less formal. Discourse analysts are rather vague about what they mean by “conversation” too, and some seem to use the term to describe any kind of oral interaction. We shall define the term as follows. Talk may be classed as conversation when:

- It is not primarily necessitated by a practical task.
- Any unequal power of participants is partially suspended.
- The number of participants is small.
- Turns are quiet short.
- Talk is quite for the participants and not for an outside audience.

How precise do these characteristics sound to you? If we consider number 3 for example, about the number of participants, is there a fixed number of participants in which conversation becomes impossible? What do you think? Well, it is true that a conversation can take place without any problem between 5 or 6 people, but not with 20, or at least it can be quite confusing. Now, let’s consider 4, do you think that turns are always short? You will probably agree with us on that there is no fixed length for turns in conversation. Nevertheless, these definitions or characteristics are useful despite their imprecision.
Now, let us consider the following task suggested by Cook: read the dialogue below and think about the conventions of radio conversations like this one, and why are they different from those of face-to-face conversation?

B. Yes, I can hear you. What’s the weather like up there? Over.
A. Fine. Over.

So, as you can see, Conversation analysis (commonly abbreviated as CA) is the study of talk in interaction. CA generally attempts to describe the orderliness, structure and sequential patterns of interaction, whether this is institutional (in the school, doctor’s surgery, courts or elsewhere) or casual conversation. The ethno methodologists' starting point is the very basic observation that conversation involves turn-taking and that the end of one speaker’s turn and the beginning of the next’s frequently latch on to each other with almost perfect precision and split-second timing. Let us go deeper into turn-takings and their organisation.

**Turn-taking Organization**

As we have just said, the set of practices by which a conversation is done is in and through turns. Turn-taking is one of the fundamental organizations of conversation. According to CA, the turn-taking system consists of two components: the turn constructional component and the turn allocational component.

While CA does not explicitly claim that turn-taking is universal, as research is conducted on more languages, it is possible that if there were any basis for a claim to universality in language, turn-taking is a good candidate. The turn-taking model for conversation was arrived at inductively through empirical investigation of field
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recordings of conversation and fitted to such observationally arrived at fact as overwhelmingly, participants in conversation talk one at a time, while managing to minimize gaps between turns at talk, and overlapping turns.

Turn Constructional Component

The turn constructional component describes basic units out of which turns are fashioned. These basic units are known as turn constructional units or TCUs. Unit types include: lexical, clausal, phrasal, and sentential. These are grammatically and pragmatically complete units, meaning that in a particular context they accomplish recognizable social actions.

Note that not all unit types may exist in all languages. Further, it is possible that there are units in other languages, such as particles in Asian languages, that may not exist in English. Can you find any example between English and Spanish?

Turn Allocational Component

The turn allocational component describes how turns are allocated among participants in a conversation. The three ordered options are: Current Speaker selects Next Speaker; Next Speaker Self-selects as Next; or Current Speaker Continues.

Sequence Organization

This concerns how actions are ordered in conversation.

Adjacency pairs

An adjacency pair, used in conversational analysis, is a pair of conversational turns by two different speakers such that the production of the first turn (called a first-pair part) makes a response (a second-pair part) of a particular kind relevant. For example, a question, such as “what's your name?”, requires the addressee to provide an answer in the next conversational turn. A failure to give an immediate response is noticeable and accountable. Many actions in conversation are accomplished through adjacency pair sequences, for example:

1. offer-acceptance/rejection
2. greeting-greeting
3. complaint-excuse/remedy
4. request-acceptance/denial

Talk tends to occur in responsive pairs; however, the pairs may be split over a sequence of turns.

Pre-sequences

A pair of turns understood as a preliminary to the main course of action. For example, "guess what"-"what" (as a preliminary to an announcement of some sort) or "what are you doing"-"nothing" (as a preliminary to an invitation or a request).

Preference organisation

There are structural (i.e. practice-underwritten) preferences for some types of actions (within sequences of action) in conversation over other actions. For example, responsive actions which agree with, or accept, positions taken by a first action tend to be performed more straightforwardly and faster than actions that disagree with, or decline, those positions. One consequence of this is that agreement and acceptance are promoted over their alternatives, and are more likely to be the outcome of the sequence. Pre-sequences are also a component of preference organization and contribute to this outcome.

Repair

Repair organization describes how parties in conversation deal with problems in speaking, hearing, or understanding. Repair is classified by who initiates repair (self or other) and by who resolves the problem (self or other) as well as by how it unfolds within a turn or a sequence of turns.

Action Formation

This concerns the description of the practices by which turns at talk are composed and positioned so as to realize one or another actions.

Discourse as process

Let us go back to our initial problem: what is it that gives stretches of language in use their meaning and unity? We have looked at the devices which create formal links between sentences; at pragmatics interpretations which link literal meaning
to function and social meaning; and finally at the conventional mechanisms which enable people to construct informal discourse together and make sense of what is happening as they do so.

We have just been dealing with everything related to conversational analysis. But conversational analysis seems to be only applicable to discourse of a particular type: spoken, informal interaction. Some of the devices observed by conversational analysts (pausing overlapping, drawing in breath) are of their nature limited to spoken discourse; yet, what they effect, the alternation of one point of view with another, and thus the mutual construction of a discourse, is far more widely applicable. Here we shall argue that dialogue is one of the fundamental structuring principles of all discourse, written and spoken alike. Paradoxically, this is as true in discourse which appears to be created by one person alone (monologue) as in discourse which is created by two or more (dialogue).

Reciprocity

In discourse analysis it has been fairly common to distinguish between two fundamental types of discourse: reciprocal and non-reciprocal. Discourse is reciprocal when there is at least a potential for interaction, when the sender can monitor reception and adjust to it- or to put it another way, where the receiver can influence the development of what is being said. In non-reciprocal discourse, sender and receiver may have no opportunity for interaction. The prototype of reciprocal discourse is face-to-face conversation. The prototype of non-reciprocal discourse is a book by a dead author. The distinction, however, is misleading.

According to Cook, using a cline we can place reciprocal and non-reciprocal discourse at opposite poles:
Reciprocal -------------------------------------------------Non-reciprocal

(Taken from Language Teaching - Discourse, Guy Cook ;OUP, 1996, page 60)

He continues explaining that if we assign positions to particular instances of discourse we find firstly that there are many intermediate cases, and secondly that absolutely non-reciprocal discourse is unlikely. Even writers working in solitude try to form some idea of the receiver of their work and adjust to it- the meaningfulness of what they say can be viewed as a measure of the success of that prediction and adjustment. People on television often behave as though they are interacting with us; they look at the camera and address themselves to us, and though this seems to be a fiction, because we cannot interrupt or contradict, still we can switch off or over, and TV programmes are influenced by viewers' letters and ratings.

What it should be clear to us is that reciprocity is a question of degree. All discourse is more or less reciprocal, if only because it is based upon assumptions about receivers. It should also be clear that although there is a general tendency for speech to be more reciprocal and writing to be less so, this is by no means necessarily true, and the cline cuts across the distinction between speech and writing. A monarch’s speech at a state opening of parliament, though spoken, is far from the reciprocal end of the scale, but a scribbled memo from one teacher to another, though written, may trigger off a series of replies and counter replies, and is thus highly reciprocal.

Information structure in discourse

There are in fact many interpretations and explanations of this strange aspect of communication, just as there are many names given to the phenomenon itself. Yet all interpretations, despite differences of terminology, agree that a prerequisite of the explanation is to divide each sentence (or, more accurately, each clause) into two. There are various technical terms for these two parts, and also differences of opinion as to where a particular clause divides, but still, this much seems agreed: the clause has a bi-partite structure, and the function of the choice as to what information we put
in which part is to enable us to bring different bits of information into differing degrees of prominence.

One widely accepted explanation is that the ordering of information is determined by the sender’s hypotheses about what the receiver does and does not know. With this interpretation we might divide information into two types— that which the sender thinks the receiver already knows, and that which the sender thinks the receiver does not already know—and label these two types given information and new information respectively. Any unit of information may of course change status as the discourse proceeds, and what was new in one sentence becomes given in the next, precisely because it has just been said. Indeed, communication might be defined as the conversion of new information into given information, and a successful communicator as a person who correctly assesses the state of knowledge of his or her interlocutor. If we misjudge, and treat what is given, we will be incomprehensible.

A typical discourse, then, proceeds roughly as follows:

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Given..........New.
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Each given unit being already known by the receiver, or deriving from a preceding piece of new information. A boundary between the two types of information may well coincide with, or indeed define, the boundary of a language unit: a sentence, a clause, or a phrase. We can analyse our biographical sketch of Ernest Hemingway in this way, and explain why the second version ‘felt right’ and the first version ‘felt wrong’. The first clause can be divided as follows:

```
Given

Ernest Hemingway was born in 1899 at Oak Park, a highly respectable suburb of Chicago.
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The writer may well have assumed that most book buyers already know of the existence of a writer called Ernest Hemingway, and even if they did not before they picked up the book, they would already have seen his name on the cover before turning to read this biographical sketch inside. Even without previous knowledge or the sight of a cover or title, people often have to process new information at the very
beginning of a discourse, though this is often mediated by a kind of meaningless dummy, like ‘there was’ in the given slot at the beginning:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Given</th>
<th>New</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There was</td>
<td>a man called Ernest Hemingway.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fact that Hemingway was born can be treated as part of the given information because all human beings are born. The next part might reasonably be treated as new. The ordering of given and new information is not always as straightforward as this, however.

### Given and New Information Notes

Examine the pairs of sentences below. Decide whether what is apparently given information might be difficult to identify.

1. Joel loves to discover abandoned logging camps.
   
   He uses only the best aerial photographs.

2. Jason went to the hardware store.
   
   She walked to the city park.

3. Becky and Cindy are going to chaperone students on the trip to Glacier.
   
   They are eager to leave.

To conclude, these are not the only interpretations of the information structure of discourse. The two-part structure of each clause may reflect the way the sender has organized the information in her own mind, more than the way she guesses it is being
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received in another. Alternatively, the sender may wish to make certain parts of the message the Topic of what she is saying – the focus of attention- and others simply comments. There may also be purely formal grammatical restrictions on what can go first. In fact, all these explanations may be true, and interact with each other to produce an incredibly complex, elusive, but very suggestive effect. (pay attention to TV commercials and see) so far, we have dealt with only the ordering of information in writing. In speech the situation is further complicated by the way stress and intonation can draw attention to any part of an utterance, and indeed this whole subject has traditionally been dealt with as an issue in the study of spoken language. No one fully understands the workings of these interlocking systems and we may forgive ourselves for having a sensation of something slipping through our fingers when we try to grasp them- but one thing is certain: the choices we make about the order of the information in discourse reveal our own assumptions about the world and about the people we are trying to communicate with. The truth of those assumptions gives unity to our discourse and success to our communication. Their falsehood puts it in danger of collapse.

Mandatory assignment 2 (deadline: October 14th)

1- Place the following on the cline of reciprocal- non-reciprocal discourse from the most to the least reciprocal. Then, add two more examples of your own.

a- A TV news broadcast
b- A church sermon.
c- A message beamed into outer space in search of intelligent life
d- A letter
e- Testimony in court
f- A TV phone-in
g- Hamlet
h- An inaugural addressed by a head of State
i- A chat with your next door neighbour
j- A lecture
2- Given and new information: Which of the pairs of sentences following the first appears to assume the appropriate amount of given and new information? Explain why.

1. *He tried to turn the microwave on.*
   a. *But it was broken.*
   b. *But the microwave was broken.*

2. *I went to the airport to see my mother off.*
   a. *But when I arrived to the airport, my mother had already gone.*
   b. *But when I arrived there, she had already gone.*

END OF UNIT 3