

A MULTILEVEL APPROACH IN THE STUDY OF TALK-IN-INTERACTION¹

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Introduction

The beginning of research on the functioning of conversations and other forms of talk-in-interaction can be dated back to the late 60's, a period where this subject became a more or less autonomous field of research. This research has now reached maturity (provided that one accepts this anthropomorphic metaphor...). Although I do not intend to give a 'state of the art' survey, I would like to consider here some of the recent developments in interactional linguistics.

A preliminary question is: given a definition of this field as covering any study approaching whatever form of talk-in-interaction on whatever perspective, what conventional term should be used for labelling this field? French literature commonly uses 'analyse des interactions verbales'² (in English: 'verbal interactions analysis', that is 'VIA'). It is doubtless, anyhow, that in our perspective 'conversation analysis' is too restrictive, for two reasons:

- considering the object of investigation, 'conversations' are only one of the numerous different types of verbal interactions (even though one can admit it to be prototypical)³;
- considering the methodological aspects, 'CA' refers to a particular approach which is well defined from both a historical and methodological point of view; but interaction analyses are also based on other descriptive traditions than ethnomethodology — let us quote, among others: symbolic interactionism (Goffman), the ethnography of communication (Hymes), interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz), discourse analysis as represented by Labov & Fanshel, or Sinclair & Coulthard ('school of Birmingham'), and more recently by the 'school of Geneva' (the so called 'hierarchical model' elaborated by E. Roulet)...

Verbal interactions analysis, when considered extensively, has been characterized from the very beginning by an extreme variety of the recommended approaches. This variety was later both reduced (since CA soon became the 'hard core' of this field in

¹ This is a revised version of my paper presented at the 5th International Pragmatics Conference organized by IPRA (Mexico City, July 4th-9th 1996). Some criticisms were voiced at this lecture. I have taken these observations into account for this second version. I am very thankful to E. Schegloff for his remarks which made me aware of the misunderstandings which some formulations in my original paper could lead to.

Some of these misunderstandings were the result of imprecise translation. This present version of my work has been entirely corrected by Giuseppe Manno, whose kind and thorough collaboration I am sincerely thankful for.

² By *verbal interaction* I refer to any form of communicative exchange which is produced *mainly* by linguistic means.

³ Initially, specialists of CA used 'conversation' in an inclusive way for designating any type of verbal interaction (Schegloff 1968: 1075-6, Goodwin 1981: 1, etc.). They prefer now as a generic term 'talk-in-interaction', which in effect is preferable in all respects.

strengthening and refining its analytical tools), and increased — particularly since interactionism, having crossed the borders of the USA where it was born, became progressively implanted in other countries, where it was exposed to local influences. Thus, whereas in the USA the analysis of verbal interactions has developed mainly in the field of sociology, in France, it was adopted principally by linguists, where, as a result, there is a strong link between conversation analysis and discourse analysis.

In the present article, I would like to emphasize the following two aspects occurring within the said variety on the interactionist scene:

1. the variety concerning the interactional genres that are submitted to investigation
 2. the variety concerning the explored levels of analysis,
- and I shall be dealing more specifically with:
- the mechanism of three-party conversations concerning 1.
 - and the question of face-work and politeness concerning 2.

1. Interactional genres

1.1. The concerns of CA are above all 'general'. The aim in the first place is to identify from among a large variety of natural data the mechanisms underlying the functioning of any form of talk-in-interaction. As far as the turn-taking system is concerned, for example, Sacks & al. consider that the main question is:

"What might be extracted as ordered phenomena from our conversational material which would not turn out to require reference to one or another aspect of situatedness, identities and particularities of content or context." (1978:10)

This objective is without doubt eminently justified. However, one can also be interested in some particular type of interaction or other and try to make out the *specificity* of its functioning with respect to contextual features. In this sense, we note that interactionists initially privileged some communicative genres, such as interactions in classrooms, in medical settings or in courtroom settings. Subsequently however, there was considerable diversification of the subjects submitted to analysis, and today, one can hardly find any type of speech event which has not been given attention by specialists — both informal interactions and the most institutionalized ones⁴. Let us mention at random: the big family of interactions in media or service encounters (shops of any kind, banks, post offices, ticket offices at the subway station, etc.); interactions in working situations (at the office, in companies, in factories, in garages)⁵; interactions in air-traffic control, in job interviews, in parliamentary debates, in academic or diplomatic settings; at open-air markets, at auction sales, at the fortuneteller's...; alongside certain communication forms related to new technologies like person-machine dialogue or computer-mediated-communication, about which abundant literature is developing at the moment.

⁴ See for example Vincent 1995, for the analysis of a 'forgotten' type of communicative situation, and yet a frequent one: the most ordinary oral activity which accompanies the most trivial domestic activities — Vincent shows that it represents a sort of challenge to the conversational rules which are generally assumed, such as the principle of conditional relevance (although they are not soliloques, some moves are actually not made in order to solicit any reaction from the other participants who are present in the communicative space).

⁵ The analyst's task here is to see how discourse which is exchanged in different situations of this kind facilitates the circulation of knowledge and know-how, the coordination of everyone's activity, and the solution of the problems that one comes across during the execution of the task — cf. in France, the research of the team 'Langage et travail', which brings to light the complexity of the functioning of those communicative situations which are characterized by an entanglement of the semiotic practices (mixture sometimes of written and spoken language, and also mixture in this 'action language' of gestures and words).

The variational factors which are likely to contribute to the foundation of a typology of the interactional genres are numerous and various (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1990: 111-133). We shall be dealing here with one of these factors, that is to say, the number of participants. In fact, although Sacks had envisaged the possibility of studying multi-party conversations *per se* (1992-I, 533: "attention has to be paid directly, independently, to multi-party conversations"), this project has not yet been carried out, as far as I know. In particular, the case of three-party conversations (from now on *trilogue*) has unjustly been neglected up to now, compared with the case of tête-à-tête conversations (and even in comparison with multi-party conversations)⁶.

In fact, one could provide many pieces of evidence for the general tendency, which is more often unconscious, to identify communication (as in the Jakobsonian perspective) with interaction between two persons. Let us consider for instance the fact that *despite its etymology*⁷, 'dialogue' is often understood as two-party interaction: there is no doubt that this is owing to the confusion between the paronymic prefixes 'dia-' and 'di-', but also to this tendency to unduly assimilate interaction to dual interaction, considered as the prototype of any kind of interaction — and yet triadic organizations do not play an insignificant role in our societies (let us think, for example, about the family trio and many other types of ordinary situations; about television debates with a moderator, interactions with an interpreter or with any other type of mediator...). Admittedly, the basis of the communicative experience of a speaker (or of 'intersubjectivity', as Benveniste terms it) is the discovery of 'the other', and at this level it does not really matter if this 'other' is singular or plural. But as soon as one is interested in "the technical organization of talk in interaction", it is clear that this organization "is sensitive to the number of participants" (Schegloff 1995: 31) and that 'trilogues' function in many respects differently from 'dilogues'⁸.

Starting from this point, we began in 1993 to investigate trilogues⁹. Our aim was to determine the properties which govern the way a trilogue proceeds in comparison with a dilogue, with the help of the different instruments available within the 'VIA'. These specificities have been studied at all levels in these types of conversational organization. The following generalizations were made through the observation of a large range of data.

1.2. Specificities of trilogues

1.2.1. The different hearer's roles

Let us recall with Goffman (1981) that the trilogue forces us to distinguish between 'hearer' and 'addressed' — notions which are often confused with one another in pragmatic literature, whose implicit communication model is essentially dyadic¹⁰. In fact, as soon as three ratified participants are co-present (from now on: P1, P2, P3), there are by definition at any moment T during the course of conversation two non-speakers¹¹, who do not necessarily have, as hearers of the same message, the same status: one of them can be 'addressed' and the other 'non-addressed' — which generates

⁶ Not forgetting the interest of K. L. Pike in triadic configurations at the end of the 1960's (Pike & Lowe 1969, Pike 1975).

⁷ In Greek, *dia-* actually means 'through' (cf. *dialyse*, *diaspora*, *diachrony*), not 'two'.

⁸ In order to avoid ambiguity, we shall be speaking of 'dilogues', 'trilogues', 'quadrilogues' and other 'polylogues', and leave to 'dialogue' its original generic meaning.

⁹ 'We' here means the 'GRIC', or *Groupe de Recherches sur les Interactions Communicatives* (CNRS-Université Lyon 2). This research led to a collective publication (Kerbrat-Orecchioni & Plantin eds, 1995), but that does not mean of course that we consider this investigation as being completed.

¹⁰ Cf. Clark & Carlson 1982: 332, n. 1.

¹¹ Of course, the case of simultaneous talk is excepted.

nine theoretically possible interlocutive situations in the trilogue, as opposed to the two in the dialogue:

P1 → P2, P1 → P3, P1 → P2+P3,
 P2 → P1, P2 → P3, P2 → P1+P3,
 P3 → P1, P3 → P2, P3 → P1+P2.

However, it is important to add that not only does the configuration of these pattern *fluctuate* in the course of the same utterance (as Goodwin well demonstrated¹²), but it is also sometimes *fuzzy*. In other words, it is not always possible to determine whether the different hearers stay in a hierarchical relationship or not, and in which way, since:

– among the allocution cues, some are clear and discrete, but they are not systematically present (like terms of address¹³), whereas others (like gaze direction in face-to-face interaction) are, on the contrary, constant but sometimes difficult to interpret;
 – these cues do not necessarily converge.

Let us imagine, for instance, the ‘real’ scene (it happens to be in this case a quadrilogue and not a trilogue) that the following extract in Proust’s novel *Le Côté de Guermantes* is supposed to evoke¹⁴:

— “*Ta grand-mère pourrait peut-être aller s’asseoir, si le docteur le lui permet, dans une allée calme des Champs-Élysées, près de ce massif de lauriers devant laquelle tu jouais autrefois*”, me dit ma mère consultant ainsi indirectement du Boulbon et de laquelle la voix prenait à cause de cela quelque chose de timide et de déférent qu’elle n’aurait pas eu si elle s’était adressée à moi seul. Le docteur se tourna vers ma grand-mère et (...)

— “Perhaps your grandmother could go and sit down, if the doctor allows, in a quiet pathway on the Champs-Élysées, near that group of laurel bushes that you once used to play in front of”, said my mother to me whilst consulting du Boulbon indirectly; and her voice became rather shy and deferent because of this, which it would not have done if she had addressed only me. The doctor turned towards my mother and (...)

We see how the hierarchy of cues allows us to organize a correlative hierarchy of the hearers:

1. Marcel (cues: “your grandmother”, and obviously the gaze, which is not mentioned by the narrator)
2. The doctor du Boulbon (cue: the tone of the voice, which is analyzed by the narrator)
3. The grandmother (cue: the content of the sentence, which ‘concerns’ her directly).

But are things really so clear? We realize that in fact, it is the doctor who takes over the utterance, without producing any effect of intrusion at all. It seems, therefore, that there is in the mother’s utterance a clash between the hearer to whom it is apparently addressed (in accordance with the principal cues of allocution, verbal and non-verbal), and the hearer whom it is principally meant for — i. e., this kind of enunciative mechanism (well attested in literature as well as in ordinary life) which I personally term ‘communicative trope’ (in French *trope communicationnel*)¹⁵.

¹² See for instance the analysis he proposes (1981: 160-166) of the utterance “I gave up smoking cigarettes one week ago today, actually”, delivered to three successive recipients, and correlatively ‘redesigned’ (however the main aim of Goodwin is to account for the progressive construction of turn depending on the recipient’s receptivity and on what he supposes to be his state of knowledge, whereas our perspective is rather interpretative).

¹³ Terms of address in French are used rather rarely (significantly more rarely than in English, for example).

¹⁴ Folio 1988: 293.

¹⁵ Cf. Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1990: 92-8). In general, it is the application of the principle of relevance which allows us to identify the ‘communicative trope’. The production/interpretation of the trope is also usually influenced by considerations of face-work (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1992: 212-3).

In all events, instead of opposing, as Goffman does, 'addressed' and 'non-addressed', it is preferable to speak, more cautiously, of 'principal' vs 'secondary' addressee¹⁶. Let us add two more points:

– If P2 and P3 are the two non-speakers, all degrees can be found concerning their hierarchy as addressees of the utterance of P1, the two extreme cases being represented, on the one hand, by their equality of status (it is the collective address) and, on the other hand, by the total exclusion of P2 (or P3) from the interlocutive circuit (his/her 'ex-communication').

– As for the utterance's value as a speech act: the same utterance may not only change its value during the conversation according to the fluctuations of its addressee (an initial information being for example reconverted into a demand for confirmation; cf. Goodwin 1981), but it may also simultaneously convey different pragmatic values for its different hearers. This idea has already been expressed by Sacks (*Lectures* vol. I: 530-4 and vol. II: 99-101): an utterance directed at B may well "do something" to C, and something different from what it does to B (for instance, if A flirts with B, "then she may be teasing C"). The same idea has also been developed by Clark and Carlson (1982)¹⁷, within a perspective close to the 'standard' speech acts theory, but also critical of this theory, which 'forgets' that when a statement has several addressees, "speakers perform illocutionary acts not only toward addressees, but also toward certain other hearers" (p. 333): for these 'lateral' hearers, such acts always have at least the value of an informative act, and often some additional values. Thus, in the last example from Proust, the mother's utterance simultaneously has the following pragmatic values :

1. Concerning Marcel, it is a suggestion, and an indirect request.
2. Concerning du Boulbon, it is a request for permission.
3. Concerning the grandmother, it is a piece of information, perhaps coupled with a request for agreement.

As Clark and Carlson show, the existence of parallel circuits dramatically complicates the description of speech acts, in particular of indirect speech acts:

"With ordinary linear indirectness, utterances can become very complicated; but with lateral indirectness, the possibilities almost defy imagination" (p. 364)

1.2.2. Turn-taking organization

Let us recall the main specificities of trilogues in this respect — by referring first to the works of CA and to the framework they developed, which is conceived for an unspecified number of participants but also allows us to account for variation depending on the number of the parties (concerning the particular case of three parties, see the seminal article of Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1978: 23).

– As for the alternating pattern, the famous *ababab* formula only works for dialogues, whereas for trilogues the alternation does not respect any kind of fixed rules: we are dealing with an infinite number of possibilities, the *abcabcabc* model being very exceptional (Sacks 1992-II: 523.4, Speier 1972: 400, Schegloff 1995: 32).

Likewise, whereas for dialogues the inequality of participants stems only (as far as this organizational level is concerned) from the length of turns, in trilogues this inequality consists also in the number of turns which are produced by each participant.

– In regard to the selection of the next speaker: as soon as there are more than two participants, there are two possibilities, called in the SSJ model 'other-selection' vs 'self-selection' respectively. Now, in the first case, P1 may select P2, whereas it is P3 who takes over the floor (these attempts to cause interference in the interlocutive relation are constant, for instance, when a juvenile magistrate questions a charged child in the presence of his or her mother, cf. de Fornel 1986: 177-8). We are then dealing with a kind of violation of the turn system which is unknown in dialogue. I call this

¹⁶ Similarly, Goodwin speaks of 'focal address' (1981: 163).

¹⁷ Refined in Clark (1996).

phenomenon *intrusion*¹⁸, and it must be added to the other types of 'failures', intentional or not, which are already familiar to dialogues, but which are more likely to occur in trilogues, that is to say, interruption and overlap¹⁹ (as for lapse — i. e. abnormally prolonged gap between two turns — this case is more delicate: its occurrence seems to be both reduced, since the number of the potential speakers is higher, and increased, since everyone may rely, sometimes mistakenly, on the other to resume).

In conclusion: *trilogues are potentially more conflicting organizations than dialogues* (since there are numerous more opportunities to struggle for the floor), *and at the same time less compelling for each participant* as the obligation to co-operate, being somehow shared out within the group, is weaker for each speaker taken individually — cf. Goffman (1974: 540):

"Numbers themselves reduce the communication obligation of any one recipient".

Goffman echoing here Jean-Jacques Rousseau who mentioned the obligations of dialogues in the following terms (*Confessions*, 3rd book):

"Dans le tête à tête il y a un autre inconvénient, c'est la nécessité de parler toujours: quand on vous parle il faut répondre, et si l'on ne dit mot il faut relever la conversation. Cette insupportable contrainte m'eût seule dégoûté de la société: c'est assez qu'il faille absolument que je parle pour que je dise une sottise infailliblement".

"In tête-à-tête conversations there is another disadvantage, which is the necessity to constantly speak: when someone talks to you, you have to answer, and if the other one does not say a word, you have to sustain conversation. Only this unbearable constraint would have filled me with disgust for society: I only have to be under the obligation to speak and I inevitably say silly things".

1.2.3. The structuring of dialogue

N.B. For us, this structuring is a specific organizational level compared with turn. It is the level where semantic and pragmatic coherence is established, which is generally described in terms of hierarchical 'ranks' of pragmatic units²⁰. The inferior unit is the speech act (more or less revised and corrected in a conversational perspective), and the superior unit is conversation as a whole. In this perspective, the key-unit is the 'exchange' (smallest dialogal unit), which is constituted by 'interventions' or 'moves' (an intervention being a contribution of a given speaker to a given exchange). As intervention does not coincide with turn (which can consist of several interventions), similarly the exchange is not a sequence of turns: it is a group of units whose definition is pragmatic and whose relationship is both one of sequentiality and complementarity, whereas the relationship between turns is purely and simply a relationship of order.

After this preliminary remark, what are at this level the main features of trilogues compared with dialogues?

¹⁸ For more information about this phenomenon, see Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1990: 180-2.

¹⁹ For simultaneous talk and the different patterns of overlap (some of which involve at least three participants), see Schegloff (1995: 35-40). I would just like to stress that a line of research that we have just begun on certain types of polylogues (radio debates about cinema with an average of six participants) contradicts Schegloff's statement according to whom "it is empirically the case that more than one speaker is almost always two speakers at a time" (p. 40): in our data, overlaps of three or even four voices are not rare — it is, however, likely that this variation is due to the difference of cultural context. In any case, this question begs further investigation.

²⁰ See for this organization Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1990: chap. 4), and Roulet & al. (1985), who present two conceptions which are slightly different. The Geneva model is characterized by its power in accounting for a subordinative relationship which is established even at a distance between the constituents of dialogue.

1. The most salient fact is that *in trilogues the function of both initiative and reactive move is often accomplished by two constituents*²¹. This gives rise, for example, to the following patterns:

"P1's question to P3 - P2's question to P3 / P3's answer", or else:
 "P1's question to P2 and P3 / P2's answer - P3's answer".

In the last case, the two reactions can be independent:

- (1) (A *vient de téléphoner à une amie qui n'est pas chez elle*)
 A *c'est invraisemblable les gens sont pas chez eux*
 B *ah ouais l'dimanche*
 C *ben c'est l'temps... i fait tellement beau... c'est vrai ça donne envie d'aller s'prom'ner*
- (A has just called a friend who is not at home)
 A it is incredible that people are not at home
 B oh well on a sunday
 C well it's the weather... it's such beautiful weather... yes you feel like going for a stroll

or dependent (according to different modalities)²²:

- (2)
- | | |
|---|---|
| A | <i>voulez... rien boire... vous partez tout d'suite là↑</i> |
| B | <i>ben non faut qu'on passe [chez... moi récupérer [</i> |
| C | <i>[ouais [on va déménager</i> |
-
- | | |
|---|---|
| A | <i>wanna... drink something... are you leaving at once↑</i> |
| B | <i>well no we must go [to... my house and fetch [</i> |
| C | <i>[yeah [we're gonna move out</i> |

This gives rise to the theoretical and descriptive problem of deciding whether in these cases we are dealing with two different *contributions* within the same move, or with two different *moves* having the same structural part within the exchange, and which may have extremely different relationships.

This problem will not be discussed here in detail; suffice it to say yet again that, as soon as there are three participants, things become considerably more complicated.

2. The question of *completeness or incompleteness of exchanges*, a delicate matter even in dialogues (for conversational grammar is often fuzzy and the correlative expectations

²¹ This phenomenon has often been mentioned — for instance, by Jeanneret (1991, 1996) by the name of 'co-énonciation'; or by conversation analysts by the name of 'joint production' or 'collaborative utterance' (there are in particular a certain number of studies on 'co-tellership' in the storytelling activity). However, in all these studies it does not appear clearly which is the status of the jointly constructed units: utterances, turns or moves? (in Lerner 1991, for instance, the author uses alternatively 'sentence', 'utterance' and 'turn'...)

Similarly it is not clear, either, how 'parties' are defined in Schegloff's (1995: 40) statement: "turn-taking organizes the distribution of talk among *parties*, but not among the persons who compose a party" — which allows him to reduce the number of participants, and thereby re-establish order into "this potentially chaotic circumstance" represented by multi-party conversations. As for us, we consider that turns are assumed by speakers (persons of flesh and blood), even if these speakers may sometimes associate themselves in adopting some or other conversational role or task — but this pertains to another level of functioning.

²² See in our collective work *Le trilogue* the study of Traverso, from whom these examples are taken, and who proposes a detailed typology of the different organizations of the exchanges in trilogues.

are rather vague)²³, turns out to be still more complex in trilogues, particularly when the initial move is bi-addressed. In this case, it can theoretically be supposed that the move requires two reactions and that the organizational norm of the exchange is actually a triplet (rather than an adjacency pair). But in fact where there is only one reaction, the absence of the second one is not always 'noticeable', and it may even be quite normal. It all depends on a number of factors such as:

– the nature of the initiative move: as for offer, for instance, this absence produces an effect of something missing — we shall say that the exchange is 'truncated':

- (3)
- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| A | <i>vous voulez boire quoi</i> ↑ |
| B | <i>moi j'prendrai un porto</i> |
| C | <i>(ne répond pas)</i> |
-
- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| A | what do you wanna drink↑ |
| B | I'll have some port wine |
| C | (does not answer) |

The same remark applies to 'personal' questions. On the contrary, after a question for information ("What's the time?") one answer is sufficient for meeting the expectations created by the question, the silence of C being interpreted as the confirmation of the first answer — in this regard Traverso speaks of a 'law of economy', but she adds that the two cases are not always clear-cut, as is shown by this excerpt:

- (4)
- | | |
|---|---|
| A | <i>il fait froid dehors</i> ↑ |
| B | <i>ben moi ça fait un moment que j'ai pas chaud</i> |
| C | <i>(ne répond pas)</i> |
-
- | | |
|---|--|
| A | it's cold outside↑ |
| B | well I haven't been warm for quite a while |
| C | (does not answer) |

– We see that the effect of truncation or not also depends on the enunciative attitude of the first answerer: if he or she speaks in his/her own name, a second answer is expected; but the exchange appears to be complete if P2 presents himself/herself as a *spokesperson* of the concerned duo (and if P3 accepts to be represented in this way by P2):

- (5)
- | | |
|---|---|
| A | <i>vous êtes bientôt en vacances</i> ↑ |
| B | <i>oh ben nous tu sais on est toujours en vacances on est des grands vacanciers</i> |
-
- | | |
|---|--|
| A | won't you be taking your vacations soon?↑ |
| B | well you know we are always on vacations we're full-time vacationers |

The question of completeness or incompleteness of the triadic exchange refers therefore to the idea of spokesperson, a delicate notion to deal with since this function is not always denoted by a 'we' as in the preceding example²⁴. This notion itself refers to the final level of the mechanics of conversations that I shall be considering: the interpersonal relationship.

1.2.4. Construction of the interpersonal relationship

Any verbal interaction may be viewed as a succession of events whose set constitutes a 'text', jointly produced, and governed by some rules of internal cohesion. But it is also

²³ See Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1990: 255-263.

²⁴ See Traverso (1995: 38-40), and Marcoccia's article in the same volume.

the place where a particular relationship between interactors is set up — of distance or familiarity, of dominance or equality, of complicity or conflict...

Viewed from this angle, and with regard to dialogues, trilogues present a certain number of specific features. I shall only consider one of them here: the possibility for the members of the triad to make up **coalitions** and at the same time to modify the relations of dominance.

In his own perspective as a social psychologist, Caplow (1968) demonstrated how a coalition of two elements against a third one may “transform strength into weakness and weakness into strength”. From a linguistic point of view, one can attempt to describe, for example, how these coalitions form and break up (for in ordinary conversations, coalitions are usually moving and the reversals of alliances are very common); one can also describe how they take shape and what the main markers of a coalition in the studied trilogue are — personal pronouns *we* and *you*, demonstrations of agreement, operations of prompting the partner (by which the allied speaker assists his or her partner when he or she gets lexically stuck), or else argumentative assistance (the ally supplies his partner with co-oriented statements), etc. One may be interested too in cases in which the constitution of a coalition is subjected to a *negotiation* between participants: P1 may offer his or her services to P2 who declines them (which seriously threatens P1's face). There may also be a *misunderstanding* between the involved parties; example — a discussion between three students, two girls (G1, G2) and a boy (B), about the topic of what are called ‘grandes écoles’ in France)²⁵:

- (6)
- | | |
|----|---|
| H | <i>ils en bavent pendant quatre-cinq ans mais j'veux dire ils ont toute une vie après pour se la couler douce</i> |
| F1 | <i>il faut voir si tu vis l'instant présent ou si tu veux vivre à trente ans hein... parce que ces quatre années-là ils verront jamais rien ces [ces jeunes</i> |
| H | <i>[non mais est-ce [que t'as</i> |
| F2 | <i>[il faut quand même</i> |
| | <i>une certaine volonté [pour faire des- il faut j'sais pas il faut- il faut se sacrifier</i> |
| H | <i>[oui</i> |
| F2 | <i>[pour ses études et ça va plus là... la personne perd sa personnalité</i> |
| H | <i>[il faut se sacrifier bien sûr</i> |
| F1 | <i>ça va plus là</i> |
| B | They have a rough time for four or five years but I mean they're gonna have it easy later the rest of their lives |
| G1 | you have to know if you wanna live for the present moment or if you wanna live at the age of 30 right... 'cos during those four years they're gonna see nothing these [these young people |
| B | [no but do you [have |
| G2 | [you sure have to have a certain will [to make some- you have to |
| B | <i>[yes</i> |
| G2 | sacrifice [yourself for these studies and that's not right... you lose your |
| B | <i>[you have to sacrifice yourself of course</i> |
| G2 | personality |
| F1 | and that's not right |

The debate takes place between B (who defends the idea that the sacrifice required for preparing the competitive entrance examination for the ‘grandes écoles’ is worth making, since it allows afterwards to “have it easy” throughout one's life), and G1 (who defends the opposing idea of *carpe diem*: there is nothing which justifies the sacrifice of one's beautiful youth). G2, who had remained silent until this point, finally enters into the discussion and gives her opinion — but in which way? B interprets first (and so does the analyst) “you have to sacrifice yourself” as an echo of his own discourse, and

²⁵ Data collected by Zamouri (whose contribution to the volume on trilogues focuses on this notion of coalition).

he immediately outbids (too early!) by overlapping ("you have to sacrifice yourself of course"), but G2 continues: "and that's not right". With astonishment we discover that in fact G2 has just constituted an argumentative coalition with G1, and G1 takes immediate advantage of it by agreeing through echoing: "and that's not right".

After having noted the high intricacy of the different levels of conversations, since the interpretation made by speakers of what is going on at the level of the constitution of coalitions may determine their taking the floor, we shall propose some conclusive elements concerning the general mechanics of trilogues:

1. For the analyst, trilogues have an organization which is more difficult to describe than dialogues. This reflects the fact that for the participants themselves, coping with trilogues is more delicate than with dialogues, purely and simply because in trilogues, *the reception party is essentially heterogeneous*. In particular, the various participants do not generally share the same 'conversational history': if we call (following Golopentia 1988) 'CH' the ordered set of conversations which has taken place between two or several speakers, it appears that trilogues are set within four CH's: CH (P1-P2), CH (P1-P3), CH (P2-P3) and CH (P1-P2-P3). In trilogues, the main work a speaker has to do is coping as best he can with that heterogeneity, sometimes at the cost of some contortions—for example, to apply Gricean maxims, since doing so depends entirely on what the speaker supposes his two addressees know, and they do not necessarily both have the same state of knowledge (a classical example: P1 telling P2 a story or a joke in the presence of P3 who already knows it). Trilogues require thus *a superior know-how* to the one that tête-à-tête situations require for the same task. But at the same time, trilogues provide them with *additional available resources*: for instance, when the main addressee is not paying attention, the speaker may make use of some technique available in dialogues too (like self-interruption), but he may also look for a more receptive addressee in reshaping the utterance to make it more appropriate for him or her, following a mechanism which has been brought to light by Goodwin (1981: chap. 5).

2. The number of participants in a conversation strongly affects the way it functions:

- in dialogues, both parties are supposed to remain actively involved in the exchange throughout its process;
- four-party conversations (and *a fortiori* conversations which include even more participants) are characterized by the possibility of a 'schism', that is to say the constitution of two separate conversational groups;
- the trilogue is an *intermediary* structure which is characterized by the fact that the triad may be divided into an active duo + a 'third party', who stays out of the conversation and may play different roles: a completely passive witness, or an arbitrator, or more perversely, the part of the 'tertius gaudens' (to use Caplow's term), who derives benefit from conflicts which are likely to arise within the triad; or else a destabilizing part, like in Jean-Paul Sartre's play *Huis Clos* which depicts an infernal triad where each party in turn plays the executioner to the other two.

As a matter of fact, it seems that this splitting mechanism is extremely frequent and that trilogues mostly resemble *a succession of turning dialogues — but which take place right under the watchful eyes of a third party*; and that makes all the difference. In other words, 'real' trilogues are exceptional, if by it one means an organization in which each participant speaks in turn also taking his or her two interlocutors into consideration,

- i. e.: P1—> P2 + P3
- then P2—> P1 + P3
- then P3—> P1 + P2, etc.

Such an arrangement is rare in natural conversations and never lasts long: very quickly, the triangle comes apart, either because of the expulsion of a third party temporarily put

on the sidelines, or because of the merging of two participants in a single discursive role.

The main feature of trilogues is their instability, their flexibility and their unpredictability. They are therefore more difficult to describe than dialogues which are "much blander" according to Sacks, but they could also be "much more interesting" (1992-I: 533)²⁶.

3. These few considerations have allowed us to also see that conversations may be considered at different levels of functioning, which are both autonomous and connected.

2. Politeness in interaction

The works carried out within the framework of CA mainly deals with the levels of conversation which may be called *organizational*²⁷ (turn-system, repair activities, sequential organization, etc.). Some researchers, however, were more interested in exploring the *relational* level, that is, the way the interpersonal relation (distance, power, etc.) is constructed and negotiated during the course of interaction. Abundant literature about this question can be found²⁸, and these studies were enriched in the late 70's with a new range of studies, that is to say, all research on politeness phenomena, which has been said to be "one of the most important and productive areas of research in pragmatics and sociolinguistics" (Preisler & Haberland 1984: 227). Thus, in the second part of my article, I should like to deal with politeness — after having mentioned the recent arousal of interest in still another dimension of interaction: the *emotional* constituent (see for instance the numerous studies on interjections and exclamations, Wierzbicka's work on the conceptualization of emotions in different languages and cultures, Tannen's or Blum-Kulka's on the notion of 'involvement', Auchlin's on 'conversational happiness', etc.: emotions are obviously fashionable nowadays).

But let's return to the question of politeness. As is well-known, it is impossible to talk about it without referring to Brown and Levinson's theory²⁹. This theory is extremely famous, abundantly applied, and correlatively, sometimes criticized. I would like to say the following on this topic.

2.1. To begin with, I think *B-L's theory is relevant in its principle*: politeness is actually and fundamentally a matter of faces, of face-want and of face-work — face-work consisting of a set of strategies which help to reconcile face-want with the fact that most of the acts that we are induced to perform during interaction are 'face-threatening'. That does not necessarily mean that everything in interaction amounts to a question of face (many other 'wants' are involved), but that as soon as one wonders about the degree of politeness or impoliteness of any statement, one comes across the idea of face or something similar.

So, for me, this point of view on politeness is consistent with the intuition that one has of the phenomenon, with the ordinary use of the word 'politeness', and also with all the various reflections which can be found in pre-scientific literature on the topic (handbooks on good manners in particular). It has proved, at any rate, to be more

²⁶ In fact here, Sacks compares dialogues with all kinds of multi-party conversations, and not only trilogues.

²⁷ Or else, quoting Sacks' terms (1984: 413-4), levels which pertain to "technology of conversation".

²⁸ Cf. *Les interactions verbales*, vol. 2: First Part. For a recent contribution on the study of the power dimension in interaction, see Diamond 1996.

²⁹ Other pragmatics have contributed to the constitution of this area of research, like R. Lakoff or G. Leech.

satisfying than the alternative models that have been recently put forward — I shall mention two of them:

– Fraser and Nolen's model (1981), according to which politeness corresponds to the respect for the 'conversational contract' within the terms of which speakers operate in a given communication situation: if they abide by that contract, they are polite, if they transgress one or more of the contractual terms, they become impolite; but no utterance can be said to be inherently polite or impolite.

However, I think that thanks are *intrinsically* more polite than orders, and that apologies are intrinsically more polite than insults. Admittedly, in order to become a reality, this potential value needs some appropriate contextual conditions: the most exquisite thanks may spoil their effect if they are out of place, and, conversely, a shouted order may lose its impolite value (without becoming polite in the process!) in certain circumstances where it is not out of place (like military training). The politeness-effect (or impoliteness-effect) is highly *context-dependent*, but that is not a reason for assimilating politeness to adjustment to the context: Fraser's definition is too general.

– On the other hand, Arndt and Janney's definition (1985) is far too restrictive, since it assimilates politeness to emotional communication, and to demonstrations of 'supportiveness'. But all emotional demonstrations are not polite, and all polite behavior does not imply a particular emotional involvement: consequently, both phenomena can in no way be considered as being the same.

2.2. So, for the time being, B-L's theory has no other serious competitors on the 'politeness market'. However, to become still more effective and, in particular, to be able to achieve its universal ambitions, it seems to me that *the model must undergo a certain number of revisions*.³⁰

The main impediment to the correct working of B-L's model is *the extreme fuzziness that surrounds the negative/positive notions*. In fact, these predicates apply to two different objects: 'face' and 'politeness'.

1. As far as *face* is concerned:

– 'negative face' corresponds more or less to Goffman's and ethology specialists' notion of 'territory';

– 'positive face' roughly corresponds to the ordinary language 'face' that can be lost or saved: it is pride, sense of honor, narcissism and so on.

So, why then rename 'territory' and 'face' as 'negative face' and 'positive face' respectively, expressions that could imply that there might be a relation of opposition between those two entities, when they are, in fact, two complementary constituents of any social subject? The answer is: in order to correlate them (unduly I think) with two forms of politeness, positive politeness and negative politeness.

2. As far as *politeness* is concerned:

– Negative politeness is first oriented towards the satisfaction of the negative face needs; but Brown and Levinson add that this form of politeness is mainly 'avoidance-based', and that is where we discover the motivation for their terminological choice: when it concerns territory, face-want exclusively amounts to a preservation desire, and correlatively, face-work exclusively amounts to avoidance or redressive action (cf. 1987, 129: "Negative politeness is redressing action addressed to the addressee's negative face").

Therefore, there is a kind of terminological take-over by force whereby the notion of territory (negative face) is assimilated to negative politeness, in the sense certain anthropologists or sociologists like Durkheim understand it, that is to say the carrying out of avoidance rituals. But this assimilation is excessive since, if territory actually is an object of preservation desire, it can also lend itself to an expansion desire (that the

³⁰ The following criticisms and propositions are in part coherent with those made by other scholars, like Craig & al. 1986 or Penman 1990.

gift, for instance, is out to satisfy, by making a *positive* ritual to the addressee's *negative* face).

– The same argument can be applied to the positive face, which is the scene of both a preservation and gratification desire, whereas Brown and Levinson put the stress particularly on its propensity to be enhanced, assimilating positive face and positive politeness this time — whereas I think we can have:

- negative politeness towards the addressee's negative face (e.g. softening of an order),
- positive politeness towards his/her negative face (e.g. a gift),
- negative politeness towards his/her positive face (e.g. softening of a criticism or disagreement),
- positive politeness towards his/her positive face (e.g. compliment, expression of agreement, etc.).

Let us mention that Brown and Levinson have made another shift which consists in assimilating positive politeness to distance reduction, that is to say, to an ethos of warmth and solidarity, and negative politeness to a distance keeping and a stand-offishness ethos. So that in the end, negative politeness and positive politeness may be dishd up in every shape, and that is what characterizes the Brown-Levinson inheritance: from the same theoretical model, different authors happen to say totally different things about the same fact (as Meier 1995 has shown with regard to apology, and many other examples of confusions and contradictions could be taken into account; for example, for some researchers, in keeping with Brown and Levinson, deference is a matter of negative politeness, when others consider that, since it enables us to enhance other people's faces by using 'honorific' formulas, deference is, on the contrary, a matter of positive politeness...). The original model is obviously in part responsible for such inconsistency in its applications.

To conclude with these criticisms, I shall say that Brown and Levinson's way of looking at politeness is far too restrictive. In their diagram of the five 'super-strategies' available to perform FTAs, only the 2nd and the 3rd cases are considered to pertain to politeness, that is to say only cases of 'on-record, with redressive action' accomplishments. However I think that some cases have wrongly been excluded:

- avoidance of a possible FTA
- off-record performing (let us remember how vague the boundary between on- and off-record is, since for those researchers it coincides with the one that divides the conventional and non-conventional indirect formulations of speech acts)
- and the cases in which politeness practice is based on the performance of acts which are *not* FTAs: fortunately enough, politeness cannot confine itself to keeping everyone's aggressiveness within reasonable limits!

That is the heart of the matter: the view that B-L's model gives of politeness and of the mechanics of interactions in general, is very negative, pessimistic and even – as it has been said – 'paranoid' since interactors are presented as being individuals under the permanent threat of all kinds of FTAs, and spending their time mounting guard over their territories and their faces. In this respect, it is revealing that, in their intent to recycle the notion of speech act into the perspective of a linguistic politeness theory, Brown and Levinson have only considered acts which potentially *threaten* the addressee's faces, and omitted the acts that are used to *enhance* these faces, like wishes, thanks or compliments — compliments which are only viewed by them as a threat for the addressee's negative face insofar as they express desire for the praised object... But without denying that this act may sometimes have that tinge, a compliment constitutes *first and foremost* flattering behavior towards the other person, that is, an *anti-threat*.

For this reason I think that it is essential to introduce an additional term into the theoretical model to refer to these acts which are in a way the positive counterparts of FTAs. At first, I had referred to these acts as 'anti-FTAs', but that designation inconveniently maintains a certain dissymmetry in the system, still giving FTAs the

privilege to be the unmarked elements of the opposition. So, I have finally named them **FEAs** (i.e. **Face Enhancing Acts**).

2.3. It is now time to briefly present my own propositions of revisions of B-L's model: they essentially consist in accurately *dissociating negative/positive face and negative/positive politeness*.

2.3.1. *Negative vs positive faces*

– Negative face is then all the 'territories of the self' (Goffman) — bodily, spatial or temporal territories, any kind of 'reserves', material or cognitive...
 – Positive face is all the enhancing images that speakers try to make up of themselves in interaction.

The acts that participants are induced to perform in the course of conversation may have negative (FTAs) or positive (FEAs) effects on the faces. The same act may of course come under several categories at the same time; if we take for example the act of the *declaration of love*³¹:

- for the 'declarer', it is a double FTA: for his/her negative face, since the speaker reveals something that until then he had kept secret, and in doing so, is compelled to a certain number of obligations; and for his/her positive face, since the confession of having 'fallen in love' sets the declarer in a 'lower position', and makes him/her run the dreadfully mortifying risk of a refusal from the loved one;
- for the 'declaree', it is a FTA for his/her negative face (an 'incursive' and 'impositive' act), but also a FEA for his/her positive face (since, in general, it is fairly flattering to hear that someone loves you).

As anyone can see, the number of speech act categories that can be made up on such basis is considerable. Let us add that:

- the different constituents of a given act may receive a variable 'weighting' (in the case of a compliment for instance, it seems obvious to me that the constituent 'addressee's positive face FEA' is generally heavier than the constituent 'addressee's negative face FTA');
- the composition of a given act may be modulated in the context, which may change the proportion of the ingredients of the act, and even sometimes reverse its prevailing value.

But as a linguist, what is essential for me on this matter is that *the formulation of a speech act totally depends on its FTA/FEA status* (which depends itself on both the context and the intrinsic features of the act), a status which explains for instance the very general disposition of FTAs to be softened and minimized — example of criticism — vs the very general disposition of FEAs to be hardened and maximized — example of thanks:

"Thanks a lot/ thank you very much/ (ever) so much/ a million/ I can't thank you enough"³²,

but the ungrammaticality of *"*a few thanks*" is unexplained without any reference to the politeness system:

(as for offers, the very fact that they may be both hardened and softened: "*Come on, have a little more!*" can easily be explained by their basically hybrid nature, since they associate FTA and FEA equally).

2.3.2. *Negative vs positive politeness*

Furthermore, the FTA/FEA distinction enables us to shed light on negative vs positive politeness notions, which are somewhat confused in B-L theory:

³¹ Cf. the conference we organized on this subject in Urbino (Italy) in July 1996 (acts forthcoming in 1997, Genova: Erga).

³² On the role of maximization in verbal politeness, and in particular in the use of thanks, see Held (1989).

– Negative politeness is *abstentionist* or *compensatory* in nature: it consists in avoiding FTA occurrence, or in softening its formulation by any means.

– Positive politeness has, on the contrary, a *productionist* character: it consists in performing any flattering act for one or the other face of the addressee.

I would like to add that, unlike Brown and Levinson, I consider that, in the global system, positive politeness legitimately holds as important a position as that of negative politeness: being polite in interaction means producing FEAs as much as softening the expression of FTAs — and even more so: in fact, negative politeness is basically a restricted impoliteness, more or less neutralized by some redressive action; but positive politeness is ‘genuine politeness’ (praise is *even more* polite than softened criticism; the expression of agreement is *even more* polite than a mitigated disagreement, etc.).

It is finally worth noting that this redefinition of negative/positive could also apply to impoliteness, ‘negative impoliteness’ consisting in not producing an expected FEA (greetings, apologies, thanks...), and ‘positive impoliteness’ consisting in producing an unsoftened FTA that could even be strengthened by some kind of ‘hardener’.

2.4. Starting from these distinctions, it is possible to lay down *a system of politeness rules* somewhat different from B-L’s system, which I think enables us to account coherently and efficiently for the functioning of politeness in different types of communicative exchanges. I cannot present this system in detail (cf. Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1992: 183-320). I shall simply say in this regard that:

– these rules integrate both Brown and Levinson’s propositions and Leech’s (these two systems, which are sometimes presented as rivals, are in my opinion perfectly compatible);

– the whole system is based on the distinctions established previously between negative/positive politeness and negative/positive face, but also on another preliminary distinction: the distinction between *other-oriented* and *self-oriented* principles.

As a matter of fact, politeness is first a set of instructions about the behavior that the speaker must comply with towards his or her addressee (saving and flattering his faces). But these ‘other-oriented’ principles, that constitute politeness strictly speaking, correlatively imply other principles that concern the behavior that the speaker must adopt towards himself; thus, ‘self-oriented’ principles (among which there is, for instance, Leech’s ‘Modesty Maxim’).

However, there is, at the same time, a striking dissymmetry between these two sets of rules since:

– other-oriented principles are all favorable to the other person, who must be either treated tactfully (negative politeness) or be enhanced (positive politeness);

– among the principles belonging to the second type (self-directed principles), some are favorable to the self, but uniquely in the defensive form; and some are even unfavorable: if one is allowed during interaction to protect one’s faces, it is not recommended to enhance them in an ostensive way; furthermore, it may be recommended in certain circumstances to deprecate them (to damage one’s own territory, or to belittle oneself by any self-criticism).

Polite communication consists above all in putting forward other people’s interests before one’s own. I shall illustrate this general principle with two examples:

1. *The ‘we’ of solidarity*, that associates a common predicate to ‘I’ and ‘you’: its use is polite provided that the predicate in question has somehow an enhancing feature; for example:

“people of our height” is polite only if the addressee has the same or an inferior height than speaker’s height;

“people of our age” is polite only if the addressee is as old as, or older than the speaker.

If these conditions are not fulfilled, the sentences will produce, on the contrary, a boorishness effect (at least, in our society which ascribes a positive value to youth and tallness).

2. *The comparative mechanics of thanks and apologies.*

These are two exchanges that have many analogies (Coulmas 1981), being generally composed of three constituents: the first one is a preliminary act (gift or offense) that triggers the actual ritual exchange, itself made of a polite act (thanks or apologies) and of its acceptance which often takes the shape of minimizing/denial of the gift or offense (in French 'de rien', 'ce n'est rien', cf. in English 'not at all', 'don't mention it'). But the differences between these two exchanges are as interesting as their similarities, for they excellently sum up the essence of linguistic politeness:

Thanks-centered exchange:

Constituents:	gift	thanks	'de rien'
Participants:	P1	P2	P1
Relative status to the (other-)face system:	FEA	FEA	

Apology-centered exchange:

Constituents:	offense	apology	'de rien'
Participants:	P1	P1	P2
Relative status to the (other-)face system:	FTA	FEA	

The organization of these two exchanges logically ensues from the nature of the initial event that sets off the ritual process:

– As far as the central constituent of the exchange is concerned (in both cases a FEA since it proceeds from a politeness concern):

- Thanks follow a FEA, they must then be uttered by the second interactor (P2), who seeks in this way to offset the gift by that kind of symbolic payment represented by thanks.

- The apology, on the contrary, follows a FTA, it must then be uttered by the author of the original offense himself/herself (P1), who tries in this way to neutralize, in part at least, this offense by an act of 'repairing' behavior.

– As far as the third constituent of the exchange is concerned:

- In the first case, the gift is a positively-considered act (under the standards in effect in the society concerned); therefore, its minimization falls under its author (P1: 'modesty rule' application);

- In the second case, the offense is a negatively-considered act, and its minimization falls under its victim (P2).

As always, politeness consists in minimizing one's own merits and the other's shortcomings.

To conclude on this question of politeness, I would say that a politeness theory like the one that Brown and Levinson recommend, although its foundations are completely external to linguistics (face and territory notions are imported ones), may be extremely useful to linguistic description. In fact, it enables us to give an account of a considerable mass of facts, which until now had been described in a disorganized manner (as a part of classical rhetoric or contemporary pragmatics), but which suddenly appear as a *system* if we look on them in the perspective of face-work. We have just seen a few examples, and so many others could be mentioned — indirect speech acts to begin with: why don't people always speak directly (it would be so much simpler for everyone)? The answer is: to save the other's face and to protect one's own. When we want to give an order, why do we generally prefer overcomplicated expressions rather than the simplicity and clarity of ready-made imperatives? The answer is: because it is more polite; in other words: *the cognitive cost those formulations involve for both*

parties is greatly made up for by the psychological profit they both derive from it, given that politeness is, according to Roland Barthes:

"un état d'équilibre très subtil et très fin pour se protéger sans blesser l'autre"

("a very subtle and very fine state of equilibrium allowing one to protect oneself without hurting the other").

Obviously, the way that balance is achieved differs from one communication situation to another and from one society to another. However, my final remark shall be that a model like the one we have just presented is general and subtle enough to aspire to universality — and all the studies that I have read on the topic, even the most critical ones, like Matsumoto's (1988) on Japanese or Mao's (1994) on Chinese, have not changed my opinion: they validate the model rather than the contrary.

Of course, territory and face notions are not conceptualized identically in all languages and cultures. Nevertheless, they are 'ethological primitives' (as international conflicts demonstrate every day).

Of course, face-work does not always occur everywhere in the same way. Nevertheless, it is always covertly at work in speech: respecting the rules of politeness is to ensure that the interaction works well, and it is in all participants' interest for the interaction to proceed under the best conditions. On the contrary, no civilities means civil war: noticing the minor frustrations and the great angers triggered off by the slightest breach of the basic rules of politeness ("At least, he could have said thanks", "She didn't even apologize") is enough to assess "the tremendous destructive power of systematized impoliteness" mentioned by Goffman, and to realize how unbearable a world without 'manners' would be.

Consequently, respecting the rules of politeness proceeds more from a rationality principle (it is more sensible to foster the feasibility of the exchange than to spend one's time rushing towards its end) than from basically altruistic ethics: *one proves to be altruistic in interaction mainly out of intelligently thought-out personal interest.*

Trilogues, and politeness: we could finally try to articulate these two questions which have been treated here separately, by showing how the presence of a third party P3 can affect the value of politeness or impoliteness of an utterance addressed by P1 to P2 — for instance, how this presence can add weight to an FTA (Brown and Levinson 1987: 12); how a criticism which is addressed to P2 (FTA) can indirectly enhance P3 (FEA), or, on the contrary, how a compliment concerning P2 (FEA) can belittle P3 (FTA)³³.

However, my aim was essentially to illustrate with these two examples the extreme diversity of the approaches which are attested today in the study of talk-in-interaction. This diversity, which goes hand in hand with the diversity of the object of investigation itself, is deplored by some researchers (in the name of descriptive coherence); some others, on the contrary, are delighted about it (in the name of descriptive richness); and yet even others try to construct a kind of unifying theory of conversations — like Roulet's 'modular' theory, whose aim is to group together in an integrated system the different dimensions which are constitutive of dialogues ³⁴.

³³ This last case is mentioned by Sacks in a lecture focusing on 'safe compliments' (1992-II: 278): "if you're engaged in building a compliment to some party present, in the presence of others, then a problem you face is how to build a compliment to that one without thereby doing something like a denigration to the others. If, e.g., you say to one person out of four of five who are present, 'You're the smartest person I know', then you're saying to the others they're not as smart. There are ways of designing 'safe compliments' which involve, e.g., finding a characteristic that no one else present has, so that in seeing what's been done to them they don't find that they've been put down by the compliment to another."

³⁴ More precisely, apart from the modules belonging to the linguistic component, there are the following modules: 'referential', 'social', 'interactional' and 'psychological' modules for the 'situational'

Today, the analysis of talk-in-interaction is the scene of animated debates (for example, about the existence and the nature of conversational rules, or of pragmatic universals). It nourishes certain fashions (notions like 'negotiation', or 'strategy'), it follows certain others (notions like 'prototype'³⁵, and of course, cognitivist concerns): in short, in its maturity, the analysis of talk-in-interaction shows a flourishing vitality.

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component; and the 'hierarchical', 'relational', 'periodical', 'topical', 'compositional' and 'enunciative' modules for the 'textual' component.

³⁵ This notion has recently been applied, within the field we are concerned with, to the description of speech acts (de Fornel 1989, 1990) and of communicative genres (Glover 1995).

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