

Assessing the Applicability of Francis and Hunston's Framework for Speech Discourse Analysis Through its Application to a Broadcast Interview

Tim DOWLING

Francis and Hunston's "Analysing everyday conversation" (1987) outlined a framework for analysing speech discourse. It was an extension of the original Sinclair-Coulthard model (1975), which focused on teacher/pupil interaction, and it was hoped that the revised model would encompass a wider range of speech discourse genres such as casual conversations, commercial transactions, professional interviews, and air-traffic controllers' talk. However, it is questionable whether one model, especially one that was proposed a number of years ago, can account for all types of such discourse in a contemporary context. To assess the applicability of Francis and Hunston's framework to professional interviews in particular, and spoken discourse in general, a BBC broadcast was transcribed and analysed according to the prescribed categories of the framework. The findings were that although the overall framework was still relevant and revealing of spoken discourse within a broadcast interview situation, there were a number of problems with some applications and these issues are discussed with tentative solutions given in order for the framework to be refined to better accommodate its application to contemporary public broadcast interviews.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Significance of the Problem

In 1970 an SSRC (Social Science Research Council) project, "The English used by teachers and pupils," was set up to examine teacher-pupil interaction in the classroom (Coulthard & Montgomery, 1981, p. 1). The focus of the project was to see how successive utterances in a classroom situation form a coherent dialogue and a model of classroom discourse was devised based upon Halliday's (1961) rank scale framework of grammar. This model was gradually developed to take account of various other kinds of spoken discourse culminating in Francis and Hunston's model (1987). In what follows the year/page references to the article will be given as it was reprinted in M. Coulthard, (1992), (Ed.), *Advances in Spoken Discourse Analysis*. Francis and Hunston attempted to produce a model that would accommodate a wider range of discourse situations including "casual conversations between friends and family members, child-adult talk, commercial transactions, professional interviews, radio phone-ins, and even air-traffic controllers' talk" (Francis & Hunston, 1992, p. 123). However, can one model of speech discourse analysis, especially one proposed a long time ago, have the requisite framework to

continue to provide an adequate account of a variety of situations where spoken discourse occurs within a contemporary context?

1.2. Objectives of the Paper

To fully answer the above question it would be necessary to analyse multiple examples of each type of spoken interaction to discern whether or not Francis and Hunston's single model is sufficient to account for the varieties of spoken discourse. This is not possible in a short paper. The objectives of this investigation are therefore more modest. An investigation of only one of the highlighted varieties of spoken discourse, a professional interview, was analysed in order to ascertain how far Francis and Hunston's model of spoken discourse is applicable to this particular genre of discourse and offer recommendations on how the model can be refined in order for the framework to provide a better description of speech discourse with regards to applying it to contemporary public broadcast interviews. This will be accomplished as follows:

Part: 1

(1) Transcribe an interview and analyse it according to the categories proposed by Francis and Hunston (See Appendix A).

Part: 2

(2) Comment upon the ease with which the proposed categories fit the transcribed data.

(3) Comment upon the usefulness of this type of analysis to understanding professional interviews.

In what follows an outline of the model used for spoken discourse analysis will be given, which will then be followed by a discussion on the selection of a professional interview before analysing the interview and commenting on the categories and usefulness of such an analysis.

2. PART 1 – ANALYSIS

2.1. The System of Analysis

Francis and Hunston's (1987) system of spoken discourse analysis is an attempt to present a coherent, reformulated version of Sinclair and Coulthard's model (1975) by integrating and systemizing various proposed adaptations to cope with identified problems in fitting the model to the data in recordings of conversations. The system analyses spoken discourse in terms of a hierarchical five-rank-scale: Interaction, Transaction, Exchange, Move and Act. The highest unit of the scale is Rank I: Interaction, which is formed by the combination of elements in the immediate lower rank, Rank II: Transactions. The lowest unit of the scale is Rank V: Act, which is an ultimate, atomic element that is compositional of the next higher level in the rank scale, Rank IV: Move. The three middle ranks, on the other hand, are each compositional of the immediate rank above and are formed by the combination of the elements in the descending ranks below.

Rank I: Interaction can be treated as the discourse in its entirety. The problem is that this is a vague, ethereal rank as there are no identifiable internal

linguistic discourse structures (Francis and Hunston, 1992, p. 141). Rank II: Transaction has three structural elements: Preliminary (P), Medial (M) and Terminal (T), of which Preliminary and Terminal are Organisational exchanges while Medial is a Conversational exchange. However, there is also an issue of vagueness as, ‘while we can identify its boundaries, we can say little about its internal structure’ (Francis and Hunston, 1992, p. 140). From Rank III: Exchange to Rank V: Act, the elements of structure become more defined and consequently are better at providing a description of the discourse taking place. Rank III: Exchange is divided into two Organisational structures: (i) Boundary and (ii) Structuring, Greet, and Summon. Rank IV: Move is divided into eight structures: Framing, Opening, Answering, Eliciting, Informing, Acknowledging, Directing, and Behaving. Lastly, Francis and Hunston list thirty-two structures in Rank V: Act, which can be placed in three structural positions: pre-head, head, and post-head. It should be noted that Francis and Hunston (1992, p. 125) admit that they have omitted certain categories, such as the element of move structure ‘select’ and the acts which realize it, which are more typical of ‘formal’ situations such as chaired meetings where the chairperson has control over who speaks and when, and they also note that the revised system they are presenting applies particularly to everyday conversations. The above ranks and how they are subdivided according to their structures are listed in Appendix B.

An important aspect of this system of analysis is giving an account of the structural relationships of the permissible moves between the participants at the rank level of Exchange. Francis and Hunston (1992, p. 124) note that Sinclair and Coulthard’s original model (1975), based on classroom interactions, realised a one-to-one correspondence, which they diagrammatically portray as:

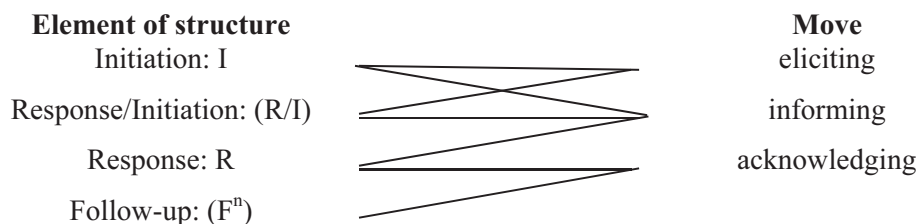
| Element of structure | | Move |
|-----------------------------|-------|-------------|
| Initiation (I) | _____ | opening |
| Response (R) | _____ | answering |
| Follow-up (F) | _____ | follow-up |

It should be noted that from this model any complete person to person exchange must minimally have the two elements I and R. Although F is an optional move it is common to classroom discourse as well as professional interviews. However, with reference to the reevaluations given by Coulthard and Brazil (1981, pp. 82-106) and Stubbs (1981, pp. 107-119) the model was refigured to accommodate the proposed legitimate exchanges in any given discourse as:

I (R/I) R (Fn)

Here I and R are fundamental for any coherent discourse according to the model. I is predictive of R and R is predicted by I (Coulthard and Brazil, 1981, p. 97). The terms in parentheses are optional – (R/I) representing a response that also initiates a response, and (Fn) representing any number of follow-ups. A representation

(Francis and Hunston, 1992, p. 141) of the various moves can be depicted as follows:



From this it transpires that in a simple exchange an Initiation (an eliciting or informing move) must necessarily result in a Response (an informing or acknowledging move), which may then in turn result in a Follow-up (acknowledging). However, an Initiation may result in a Response/Initiation (informing or eliciting) that requires a Response (an informing or acknowledging move), which may then in turn result in a Follow-up (acknowledging move). Can this reformulated model of spoken discourse analysis be applied to professional interviews as Francis and Hunston (1992, p. 123) had hoped? To test their revised model and ascertain the extent to which it is applicable, a professional BBC interview was selected. This is described in the following section.

2.2. Data Source and Selection

The spoken discourse chosen to be analysed according to Francis and Hunston's revised model was an interview taken from the BBC's HARDtalk programme, the podcast being dated Monday 1st April 2013, while the televised broadcast is dated Tuesday 2nd April 2013, between the presenter Stephen Sackur and the American philosopher Daniel Dennett on his views on religion. This was accessed as a podcast and a transcription of the entire 23-minute interview (see Appendix A) was made in order to identify key sections with which to highlight areas where Francis and Hunston's model can be applied to the transcription and where it fails to adequately give a description of the discourse.

The selection of the interview was made for a number of reasons. First was the interest in how the revised model of Francis and Hunston could account for the variables in professional interviews. Second is that the podcast is publically available and can be independently checked by anybody. Third is the fact that it is a dialogue with only two people, which keeps the analysis simple, and is similar, in this respect, to the two-person telephone conversation that Francis and Hunston use as an example in their article.

However, the main points of contrast are that it is a professional interview discussing a topic that is relevant to society where the interviewer will dig and tease out points that, in their opinion, need to be addressed, which can be highly critical and confrontational at times. It should also be noted that there is an asymmetrical relationship in that the presenter has control over the direction of the discourse yet has to be respectful, to a certain extent, to the invited guest and their opinions.

Being an interview it is expected that the exchange will be more structured than a casual conversation between friends, with the interviewer having prepared questions to ask the guest and having a fixed time-frame in which to conduct the interview. Further, a conversation between two friends is a private two-dimensional relationship but a broadcast interview between the presenter and the guest is a public three-dimensional relationship, one that includes the passive audience as the third element. Thus although the presenter and guest are exchanging views, there is always the implicit awareness that they are discussing in front of and for the audience. In the data the presenter acknowledges this relationship in the introduction, lines 001-036; in the greeting, 038-040; in the discussion, 185-199; and in the final thanking, 889-890. In addition, whereas a standard telephone conversation has no transmitted visual information, a televised interview does. Body language is an immensely powerful means of communication and without incorporating it into discourse analysis the findings will be impoverished. This article fails in this matter as it is based purely on the transcription from the audio-only podcast.

2.3. Analysis of the Data

In this section the discourse functions identified in the HARDtalk interview will be analysed. Issues will be raised in Part 2: Comment.

2.3.1. Interaction and Transactions

The entire interview constitutes Rank I: Interaction and has 4112 words approximately (this figure treats contractions as a single word and also includes elements coded as engage). Of these, 2050 (49.8%) were spoken by the presenter and 2061 (50.1%) by the guest (1 was the audience's silent answering at line 037). This holistic rank was found to be composed of 14 Rank II: Transactions (see Appendix C). As Francis and Hunston (1992, p. 140) note, a Transaction is fundamentally a topic-unit, "which must remain a pre-theoretical and intuitive notion." Thus defining what constitutes a legitimate Transaction and demarcating its boundaries is vague and can be controversial especially when topics merge. Certainly the inclusion of the two Preliminary Transactions, 1 (Interview Introduction – 165 words, 4% of the interview) and 2 (Greeting – 14 words, 0.34%), and the Terminal Transaction 14 (Leave-taking – 16 words, 0.38%) may be contested and will be discussed later in Part 2: Comment.

2.3.2. Exchanges

In the entire interview 42 Exchanges were identified (see Appendix C). Unsurprisingly for a professional interview 19 of these were Eliciting (2233 words, 54.3% of the interview) and 18 were Bound Clarify (1510 words, 36.7%). Together these constituted 3743 words, 91% of the interview. Four of the Eliciting Exchanges (Exchanges 12-13, 22-23, 28-29, and 32-33 – 1208 words, 29.4%) required a single Bound Clarify Exchange and 4 (Exchanges 4-5/6/7, 9-10/11, 14-15/16/17/18/19, and 35-36/37/38) required multiple Bound Clarify Exchanges – 1081 words, 26.2%). The remaining three identified Exchanges were Structuring (193 words, 4.69%), Informing (146 words, 3.55%) and the two Greeting Exchanges (30 words, 0.72%). Although Bound Repeat and Bound Re-Initiation Exchanges are possible, none

were found. Nothing was coded for Organizational Boundary, Organizational Summon, or Conversational Directing.

All of the Exchanges, except two, were encoded as being initiated by the presenter indicating the asymmetrical relationship between the presenter and the guest and the control the presenter has over the direction of the interview. The guest initiated Exchanges at Exchanges 21 and 27 as a response to what the presenter had said. Both emerge as an extension of the previous topic but for coding purposes it was felt that a fresh Exchange had to be created.

2.3.3. Moves

A total of 103 completed moves were identified (see Appendix C). Reflecting the nature of a professional interview it was not unexpected to find 37 eliciting and 41 informing Moves (80% of the total number of words). In addition, there were 17 Acknowledging Moves, 14 of which were protests.

In examining the Exchanges one can see that not only the Interview Introduction but also a number of the Eliciting Exchanges have lengthy Moves – both eliciting and informing. This is common to professional interviews and academic debate where each party is inclined to provide detailed information and to delimit the boundaries of the question and answer.

The eliciting Moves identified can be divided into 6 categories: a single elicitation (lines 042-043, 045-047, 249, 260, 375-380, 435-441, 856, 871, 878-882), an elicitation + information (lines 182-199, 345-351, 354-368, 516-526, 620-635), information + elicitation (lines 063-072, 091-098, 128-134, 140-156, 233-245, 489-494, 752-780, 797-809), multiple elicitations (lines 057, 080-082, 263, 280-293, 330-332, 865-869), multiple elicitations + information (lines 268-270), and information only (lines 109-112 (uncompleted), 251-258 (uncompleted), 593-598, 602-611, 673-689, 692-699, 714-729, 829-851). Issues regarding applying the coding system of Francis and Hunston's model for multiple questions will be discussed in Part 2 of this essay.

2.3.4. Acts

The Moves were composed of 216 Acts (see Appendix C). Disregarding engage, the group with the largest number of items was informative (34). However, combining the Acts related to questioning – inquire (10), neutral proposal (7), marked proposal (4) and return (18) – it was found that this group had the largest number of items (39). The difference between questioning and answering can be accounted for, in part, by the four confirms. Protest (20) and comment (25) were well represented illustrating the nature of such interviews.

2.3.5. Summary of Analysis

Using Francis and Hunston's revised model of speech discourse analysis a number of salient points may be made regarding this particular professional interview. These include the equality of the balance, in terms of the number of words and time that each person spoke; the asymmetrical relationship of control between the interviewer and interviewee; the variety and complexity of the eliciting Moves; and the identification of the various Acts that are predictable of a professional broadcast interview. In the following section issues that arose through applying Francis and Hunston's revised model of speech discourse analysis to the

interview will be discussed and comments on the usefulness of such an approach will be given.

3. PART 2 – COMMENT

Although the revised model is a powerful tool that provides insights when analysing discourse, a number of difficulties were identified from the ranks of Transaction to Act. These are discussed below.

3.1. Transaction

The first major problem was related to the rank of Transaction. In section 2.3.1. Interaction and Transactions it was mentioned that the inclusion of Transactions 1 (Interview Introduction), 2 (Greeting) and 3 (Leave-taking) may be controversial.

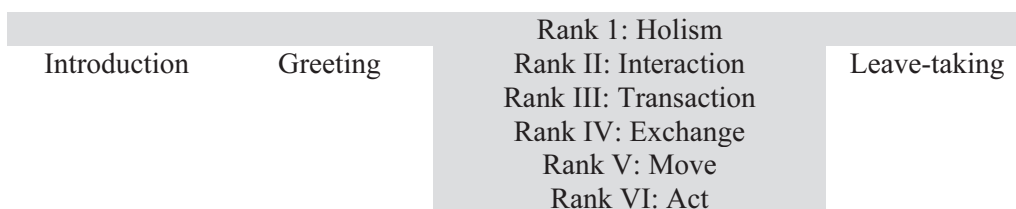
The justification for treating the Interview Introduction as a Transaction is that it is an integral element of professional interviews to introduce the guest to the audience and any analysis of professional interview discourse needs to take account of it. The Interview Introduction is a monologue, but it can be considered an exchange because it is addressed to the audience, who are admittedly remote and interactively passive, and can therefore be coded as I and R, with Ø representing the audience's silent act of acquiescing. It is structured in two parts: part 1 (001-032) gives an introduction to the background ideas of the guest to be interviewed and part 2 (033-036) presents a question to the audience to consider and structures the conversation prospectively (Francis and Hunston, 1992, p. 129).

It could be argued that the Interview Introduction ought to include the Greeting as the final part of the Transaction, but to respect the functional differences between an Interview Introduction and a Greeting and also to retain a symmetry with the closing Leave-taking, which is announced rather than connected to the preceding Eliciting Exchange, it makes more logical sense to isolate this complementary pair of Transactions.

The problem with this framework is that in the hierarchical scheme of Francis and Hunston's revised model, the Transaction is composed of Exchanges and if a Transaction is demarcated by only one Exchange, such as Tr.1 and Exch.1, Tr.2 and Exch.2, and Tr.14 and Exch. 42 then the Transaction is not composed of the Exchange but is identical with it, and the system of ranks fails. There are two possible approaches to deal with this, both of which are inelegant. The first is to allow the possibility of a Transaction being wholly composed of only one Exchange, but permitting this only for Introductions, Greetings and Leave-takings. This, in effect, tries to retain Introductions, Greetings and Leave-takings within the rank system, but acknowledges their structures can be different from the main discourse topics which are necessarily hierarchical. The second is to treat these as outside the perimeters of the Interaction, which alone conforms to a hierarchical structure. As Coulthard (1981, p. 16) notes, in some doctor/patient dialogues the doctor dismissed the greeting and leave-taking exchanges as part of the structure of the Interaction by turning on the recorder after the Greeting and turning it off before the Leave-taking, and therefore suggesting that these should not even be considered as part of the discourse and should be treated as external boundary markers that enclose the

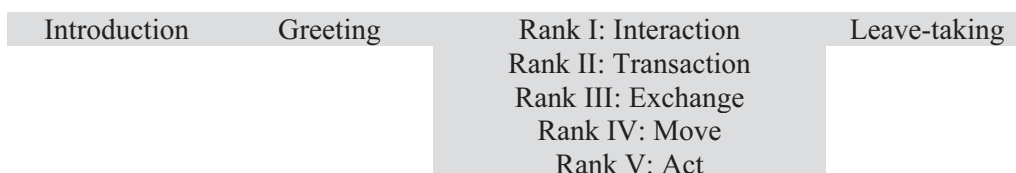
Interaction. If that were the case then a rank higher than the current Rank I: Interaction would need to be formed to encompass the boundary markers, relegating the current Rank I: Interaction to Rank II. The new framework might be diagrammatically depicted as below with the grey boxes highlighting the structure of speech discourse and the non-inclusivity of the boundary markers, Introduction, Greeting, and Leave-taking lying outside the hierarchical rank scale.

FIGURE 1A
Modified Version of Francis and Hunston’s (1987) Framework



However, a Greeting and a Leave-taking are exchanges between at least two people and an Interview Introduction is an exchange between the presenter and the audience, so it would be more realistic to retain the Interview Introduction, Greeting and Leave-taking within Rank I: Interaction and accept that for these three special categories the Transaction can be composed of only one Exchange. As Francis and Hunston (1992, p. 140) note, if these “are seen simply as marking the beginning and end of situations, they can no longer be subjected to internal analysis.” This framework could be represented as follows:

FIGURE 1B
Modified Version of Francis and Hunston’s (1987) Framework



The difference might be considered slight but it is an attempt to conceptually retain the Interview Introduction, Greeting and Leave-taking within the framework of discourse analysis rather than as boundary markers and, applying Ockham’s razor, not to multiply the number of ranks unnecessarily.

At this Rank level the revised model is no more successful in resolving this issue than the previous one, but the model is useful in terms of highlighting the differentiated natures of these various Transactions.

3.2. Exchange

The main part of the interview consisted of Exchanges 3-41. Each of these Exchanges were all Eliciting or Clarifying except Exchange 8, Structuring, and Exchange 25, Informing, the latter one appearing to be a little incongruous. This was coded as an Informing exchange because it was felt that the interviewer was making an observation Act where the information is known by both people. The informing Move at I resulted in another informing Move at R in which the interviewee appears to be answering a question. It might be argued that in any formal interview any informing Move at I should be considered to be functioning as a question or a stimulus to elicit a response and hence the Exchange should be coded as Eliciting. However, according to Francis and Hunston's model, an observation Act cannot occur in an Eliciting Exchange and so the Exchange has to be Informing. Here the model needs to be adapted to accommodate such informing Moves at I to be permissible in Eliciting Exchanges when analysing professional interviews. However, apart from this issue the revised model was successful and useful in identifying the various Exchanges.

3.3. Move

In section 2.1. The System of Analysis it was noted that according to the revised model any Exchange must conform to the following formula: I (R/I) R (Fn). This was not always easy to apply. At Exchange 28, the Exchange was encoded as I R1 R2 F R3. R1 was spoken simultaneously with the interviewer's eliciting and did not stop the interviewer from speaking. As Francis and Hunston note (1992, p. 133) an Engage is only to provide minimal feedback while not interrupting the other speaker. Thus this response might have been encoded as an Engage, but from the very nature of its utterance at line 523 it is clear that the interviewee is raising a protest. The interviewee then listens to the remainder of the interviewer's discourse before giving a secondary response at R2. It could be argued that responses made simultaneously and which do not stop the other person from speaking can be excluded from the main structure of the discourse, as are Engages, but by so doing the model fails to accurately describe what is actually occurring. Similar instances were also found at lines 153, 173, 355, 728, 762, 765, 777, and 779. Thus the model might be reformulated as I (R/I) Rn-sim (Fn) allowing for multiple simultaneous responses.

Another problem found in Exchange 28 was with an informing R3 Move at line 569 which follows on from an F. This is prohibited according to Francis and Hunston's model. To preserve the model the informing R3 Move would have to be coded as F2. But the only Acts permissible as a head at F are Terminate, Receive, React, Reformulate, Endorse, and Protest, none of which adequately captures the informative nature of the response. Maybe the Exchange has to be divided into two – lines 513-544 and 545-592 – making line 545 I and line 569 R. But to do so is to ignore the protest that the interviewer is making to the informing R2 Move. To preserve the model an informing Move at F would have to be made permissible or the model would have to be reformulated as I (R/I) Rn-sim (Fn) (R). For elegance and simplicity, the former is preferred to the latter.

At this point a question arises whether or not F is needed. Fundamentally an Exchange is an Initiation with a Response. What is F but a response or reply to a Response? Therefore feedback and other discourse follow-ons could be coded as R. Thus an exchange could be reformulated as:

I (R/In) (Rn-sim) Rn

where 'I' represents the obligatory Initiation, '(R/In)' the possible multiple Response/Initiation exchanges, '(Rn-sim)' the possible multiple simultaneous responses that do not prevent the initiator from speaking, and 'Rn' enabling a variety of interconnected responses to be permissible. I think this reformulation would prove better at describing the data and cause fewer issues of coding.

At this Rank level the overall model was found to be very useful. However, the closer one moved towards the Rank level of Act and the 'atomic' structure of the discourse the more difficult it became to fit the model to the data and hence the proposed reformulation just given.

3.4. Act

At the level of Act a number of issues arose. One was at line 173 where the interviewee's simultaneous Follow-on was coded as 'concede,' which is not a code within Francis and Hunston's model. Here it was felt that what was being said was far more than a mere engage and the other Acts as a head at F failed to fit the Act of conceding. Although it was thought that the Act of receive came closest it was felt that what the interviewee said was more than acknowledging a preceding utterance as it was admitting the truth of what the interviewer had said. Another coding issue arose at line 266 where the interviewer's 'Wha' was coded as an exclamation (excla.) which again is not a code within the model of discourse. The closest Acts were framer and marker, but they seemed to fail to encapsulate the nature of this exclamation. Thus the model should be modified to incorporate these Acts.

A far more substantial criticism upon the category of Act is that of return, which was felt to be a rather blunt, superfluous instrument that masked much of what was being done. By coding an Exchange as Clarifying with a 'bound repeat' element of structure Ib we already know that what follows is 'returning' to what was previously said. Looking at the Acts of return we see that they have different discourse structures. For example, Exchanges 5 and 7 have two questions, both of which could be coded m.pr as the interviewer is seeking agreement to what he has understood. In Exchange 18 there are again two questions, but this time they are n.pr. In Exchange 19 there are two n.pr questions followed by a comment. The coding return fails to give an adequate analysis of the discourse taking place and as such it was thought that it should be abandoned and the codes for the actual structures of discourse taking place should be used instead.

Further, there are problems with the standard coding of the structures of the Acts for eliciting Moves. For example, Exchange 20 consists of three questioning Acts: the first two being inquires and the last an n.pr question. How should this eliciting Move be coded? For the purposes of discourse analysis all three need to be coded separately and all recognised as mutually constituting the eliciting Move.

More examples can be found in Appendix D where the structures of the Acts for Eliciting and Clarifying Exchanges are given. Thus eliciting and clarifying Moves are often complex and the coding needs to reflect this aspect of discourse structure. Once again, the model was found to be useful, but there are aspects where it fails to capture the mechanics of what is actually happening at the micro level of discourse.

4. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the updated model has been shown to be useful in a number of ways in giving an adequate account of speech discourse within a broadcast interview. However, a number of issues were identified at the Rank levels of Transaction, Exchange, Move and Act where Francis and Hunston's revised model does not perfectly fit the data and suggestions have been made on how to modify and accommodate these aspects and in particular to consider a reformulation of the spoken discourse formula to I (R/In) (Rn-sim) Rn. Francis and Hunston (1992, p. 156) did not consider their revision definitive and it is hoped that with further research into how spoken discourse is structured in a wider variety of situations, as Francis and Hunston had hoped for, a finer-tuned model can be constructed.

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APPENDICES

Due to space constraints the transcription and other appendices are not included. These, together with the essay, are available [dmm77732@kwansei.ac.jp] or accompanying the online version stored with the Kwansei Gakuin Repository at the following address: <https://kwansei.repo.nii.ac.jp/>