

Using the Francis and Hunston Model to Analyze Everyday Conversation

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Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) demonstrated the predictive power of their initiation-response-feedback pattern in classroom discourse. However, this model of analysis was restricted in its application to the classroom. Francis and Hunston (1992) developed their own model of analysis designed to cope with a variety of discourse situations. This study sets out to see how well the Francis and Hunston model can be applied to a real discussion. A discussion type conversation was transcribed and analysed. The model successfully used revealed basic structural patterns of discussion-type discourse between friends. However, must be adapted to match the structural demands of the text genre being analysed

Using the Francis and Hunston Model of conversation to analyze a discussion between two friends

'Discourse analysis prioritises the interactive nature of language. In relation to spoken language, this means the co-operation of more than one individual is essential to its performance. But people are different in thought, word and deed.' (Sinclair 1995: 83)

Key Words : Discourse Analysis, Conversation Structure, Spoken English

1. Introduction

Sinclair and Coulthard's model of discourse analysis (1975) revealed the predictive power of initiations in exchanges and provided a framework for analyzing the *initiation-response-feedback* pattern that was found to be typical of classroom discourse. However, it was unclear to what extent the findings, which focused entirely on classroom interactions, were ascribable to this type of discourse, and how much of this patterning could be applied to other genres (Sinclair 1992: 80). Francis and Hunston (1992) took on this challenge; and building on the original Sinclair-Coulthard model (1975) developed a system of analysis with the aim of being 'flexible and adaptable enough to cope with a wide variety of discourse

situations' (Francis and Hunston 1992: 123).

The current investigation applies the Francis and Hunston (ibid) system to a discussion between two friends. It is divided into two parts; Part 1 presents an analysis of the conversation. A recurring IR exchange structure is illustrated with *starter* at act level being used to gain the initiative in the conversation and realise informing exchanges. Part 2 presents a commentary on this analysis. Noticeable features about the patterns and structures of this discourse are discussed and consideration is given as to how easy it is to fit the data to the categories. Four main issues are raised including: adapting the framework to the data; effective labelling of long turns; interpreting overlapping utterances; and ambiguity of the taxonomy.

1.1 The Francis and Hunston system of analysis

A summary of the Francis and Hunston system is presented in Appendix 1. This framework is used as a basis for analyzing the text, but was adapted to fit the discourse where necessary. This includes the reclassification of the act *loop* and a new sub-class of starter termed *starter-interrupt*.

1.2 The Data

The data analyzed in this study is a conversation between two native speakers of English (Steve and Derek), who are good friends. The conversation was recorded for ‘The Listening Project’, which is a collaboration between BBC Radio 4 and the British Library to broadcast and archive conversations (BBC 2012). This recording was chosen because it exhibits frequent alternations of speaker and falls within the remit of ‘everyday conversation’ that the Francis and Hunston model is designed to analyze. One drawback of studying a radio broadcast is the lack of paralin-

guistic features such as gestures and eye movements, which Francis and Hunston also acknowledge as a possible criticism of their own data on telephone conversations (Francis and Hunston 1992: 124). This recording is not a complete conversation and does not display any of the features of greeting and leave-taking.

2. Part 1: Analysis

Radio 4: The Listening Project 2nd November 2012 (www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/features/the-listening-project/conversation/p010ln9h)

Total time of section analyzed: 3 minutes 15 seconds

Participants: <S 01>: Steve; <S 02>: Derek

Key to symbols:

(inc) = incomplete exchange;

[= interruption or overlapping start or finish;

... = pause longer than one second;

--- = new exchange

Line of dialogue	act	e.s	move	e.s	exchange	ex	Tr
1 <S 01> I refuse to talk about what's in the papers	i	h	informing	l	informing	1	1
2 because just because you get three sorts of newspaper	com	post-h					
3 you are not informed, you are just trying to be clever.							
4 (low key)							
5 <S 02> [But you see but you see you are completely	prot	h	acknowledging	R			
6 wrong with that because newspapers aren't just things							
7 (high key),							
8 newspapers are things which inform you about what's	com	post-h					
9 going on. (mid key)							
10 <S 01> But you see I don't care (high key)	i	h	informing	l	informing	2	
11 <S 02> [I know you don't care	ref	h	acknowledging	R			
12 <S 01> [I really don't care (mid key)	ref	h	acknowledging	F			
13 <S 02> [and that's what I mean	s	pre-h		l	(inc)	3	
14 <S 01> [and it's not good but I really don't give a	s	pre-h		l	(inc)	4	
15 <S 02> [but you see that's what I was meaning	l	h	informing	l	informing	5	
16 <S 01> [yeah	rea	h	acknowledging	R			
17 <S 02> [maybe you didn't get my point	l	h	informing	l	informing	6	
18 <S 01> [no, sure, sure	rea	h	acknowledging	R			
19 <S 02> [when I say you are utterly wrong about that	l	h	informing	l	informing	7	
20 <S 01> [yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah	rea	h	acknowledging	R			
		h	informing	l	informing	8	
21 <S 02> because what I meant to say	l	post-h					
22 was you're completely a hundred percent wrong about	com						
23 that							
24 <S 01> [(laughs) completely yeah	ref	h	acknowledging	R			
25 <S 02> [and you and you it's not too late to change	s	pre-h	informing	l	informing	9	

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Line of dialogue	act	e.s	move	e.s	exchange	ex	Tr
26 you should pay attention to what's going on in the 27 world because there are bad things happening 28 <S 01> [I know	i com rea	h post-h h	acknowledging	R			
29 but I'm I'm afraid (high key) 30 <S 02> [there are bad things coming our way. 31 <S 01> [I just will,	s i s	pre-h h pre-h	informing acknowledging	I	informing	10	
32 well that's good to know Derek, 33 but I just do not for one second believe one thing I 34 read or one thing I see.	end i	h h	informing acknowledging	R I	informing	11	
35 <S 02> [oh no, that I mean that 36 <S 01> [So what I am saying is 37 I am not part or parcel of any conversations about 38 about politics because I've never voted, 39 I'm not proud of that either, 40 but erm it's not a thing I boast about urm 41 but it's just of no interest at all	prot s i com com com	h pre-h h post-h post-h	informing acknowledging	R I R	informing	12	
42 <S 02> [but all we've got 43 <S 01> [I'd be more interested in talking about hockey 44 or sandwiches (low key)	prot com	h post-h	informing	R			
45 <S 02> but all we've got in this country is our ability 46 to vote every four years or so 47 <S 01> I understand	i rec	h h	acknowledging informing	I R	informing	13	
48 <S 02> and if you don't vote 49 <S 01> yes 50 <S 02> then you kind of disenfranchise yourself 51 voluntarily 52 and you make out a case for not contributing if you 53 like 54 <S 01> I think yeah	i (eng) com com rec	h post-h post-h h	acknowledging informing	I R	informing	14	
55 <S 02> and when I said that um 56 that I was upset about you not caring about journalism 57 and politics 58 and the kind of general flow of information er that 59 comes that way 60 maybe I wasn't making myself clear 61 because I completely, fundamentally, totally disagree 62 with you 63 <S 01> somewhere at the back of my head I know you	l com com com rec	h post-h post-h post-h h	acknowledging informing	I R	informing	15	
64 <S 02> [and I do think I do think 65 I'm not including you in this kind of sweeping 66 generalization 67 I do think that one of the problems that we've got in 68 modern life is people's inability to engage in in subject 69 matter that is not too complicated 70 but it's beyond X-factor, 71 you know we are consumed every weekend by voting	s qu i com com	pre-h post-h		I	Re-initiation (bound-elicited)	16	

Line of dialogue	act	e.s	move	e.s	exchange	ex	Tr
72 for people on X-factor.							
73 More people vote for X-factor than vote for voting	com						
74 <S 01> [well do you think	s	pre-h					
75 <S 02> [well, (incomprehensible)	m	s	eliciting				
76 <S 01> Do you think there is a reason for that?	n.pr	h	informing	R/I			
77 <S 02> Yeah, yeah	i	h		R			
78 because I think people I think people aren't being							
79 educated the way they should be							
80 I think they don't care,	com	post-h					
81 I think they are urm you know I think there are far too	com						
82 many people in this country who are unemployed who	com						
83 who don't have jobs to go to and							
84 <S 01> [sure	(eng)						
85 <S 02> [just think it's very important toExample	com						
86 <S 01> [but aren't	s						
87 <S 02> [to urm to watch X-factor every week	com	post-h					
88 <S 01> you see the thing is Derek, that's true,	s	pre-h	informing		informing	17	
89 but what I'm saying is I have my own issues	i	h					
90 and there are personal ones to me	com			I			
91 and I think politics is a very personal thing,	com						
92 it just does not appeal to me urm at all, at all.	com		acknowledging				
93 <S02> I couldn't exist without the information flow	prot	h		R			
94 coming my way							
95 because I need to know how that is going to effect me,	com	post-h					
96 people like me and in fact people who are not like me.	com						
97 <S 01> You have always been interesting,							
98 you're one of the most unborning people that I've ever	qu	pre-h			informing	18	
99 met,							
100 but I do not like is people sitting up there and spouting			informing				
101 off about stuff	i	h		I			
102 and thinking, thinking and taking it for total that	com						
103 everyone's going to be interested in what they are	com	post-h					
104 talking about.	com						
105 The answer is they're not.							
106 <S 02> Yeah, that's true.			acknowledging				
107 <S 01> And that's the actual fact of it	rea	h		R			
108 so get real, get a life, get a refit, get a new head and	fr	pre-h	opening	I	structuring	19	
109 think about what you're saying.	con	h			(inc)		

3. Part 2: Commentary

3.1 Summary of Analysis

It is impossible to make generalisations about this genre of discourse. However, in this particular short text the Francis and Hunston system of analysis reveals clear structural patterns, particularly a recurring IR structure at the level of exchange. The lack of deviance from this pattern suggests that both participants understood and acquiesced to the presuppositions imposed on them by the previous initiation.

3.2 Applying the framework

The value of any linguistic model depends on how easily it can be applied to authentic data. Overall, the Francis and Hunston system was found to be a flexible method of analysis. However, when applying the apparatus to a discussion-type discourse several issues arise. These are discussed below.

3.2.1 Adapting the framework

The Francis and Hunston system is not designed to present a complete inventory of all the acts necessary in every possible conversation. Indeed, the creators state that ‘each new set of data will inevitably require adaptations at act level’ (Francis and Hunston 1992: 134). In this analysis, acts had to be adapted.

Loop

The act *loop* is used five times (lines 15, 17, 19, 21, 55), but it is not employed in the same way as in the original system. Francis and Hunston (1992) define the function of *loop* as ‘*elicit the repetition of a preceding utterance which was not clearly heard*’ (ibid: 130). However, this categorisation does not fit the data found in this text.

Example 1

Line 15: <S 02> [*but you see that's what I was meaning*
Line 55: <S 02> [*and when I said that um*

Speaker 2 is not eliciting repetition so the acts in Example 2 cannot be classified as *loop* under the original taxonomy. Sinclair and Coulthard define the function of *loop* as ‘*to return the discourse to the stage it was at before the pupil spoke, from where it can proceed normally*’ (Sinclair and Coulthard 1992: 21). This is much closer to the examples given above,

but is not entirely satisfactory. Therefore, I have reclassified loop as:

‘Realized by statement or by ‘yes’ and ‘no’ items and their variants. Realizes the head of an informing move. Its function is to return the discourse to an earlier utterance by the speaker. It often has a dual function of anaphoric reference to the speaker’s earlier utterance and interrupting the other speaker’s utterance.’

Loop is classified as the head of a move because, as can be seen in lines 15 to 20, it does prospect R at the level of exchange, even when used in isolation.

Starter

One feature of this text is acts overlapping and interrupting previous utterances. This is particularly the case with *starter* (lines 13, 14, 25, 29, 36, 74, 86). These acts do fall within the definition of *starter* offered by the Francis and Hunston framework as they ‘provide information about or direct attention towards the act realizing the move head’ (Francis and Hunston: 129). However, there appears to be a further function of taking control of the floor. This is illustrated in the sequence below:

Example 2

Line 13: <S 02> [*and that's what I mean* (starter)
Line 14: <S 01> [*and it's not good but I really don't give a*
(starter)
Line 15: <S 02> [*but you see that's what I was meaning*
(loop)

Thus, a sub-class of act was created and labeled *starter-interrupt*. Its function is defined as ‘*to interrupt the previous utterance and provide information about or direct attention towards the act realizing the move head.*’

The fact that *starter-interrupt* occurs at points in the discourse where both speakers are competing to take control of the floor makes them hard to identify as they are often incomplete. In fact, the act *loop* has a similar interrupting function. The key distinction is that *starter* cannot exist on its own in a move and its function is to draw attention to the upcoming head. It has no anaphoric function to an earlier part of the discussion, unlike *loop*.

3.2.2 Long inform turns

In the text, all the completed exchanges are

informing. Both speakers have opposing opinions and consequently there tends to be long informing moves with much shorter acknowledging moves (Lines 37-41, 55-62, 67-73, 77-87, 89-92, 100-105). Applying the original Francis and Hunston framework results in these long inform turns being labelled with two acts: *inform* and *comment*. As Burton (1981) identifies, using one label, or to label the first clause *inform* and subsequent units *comment* for long passages of informatives present in a text seems inadequate (ibid: 67). In discourse, acts have functional properties and the clauses observed in these longer turns clearly serve a distinct purpose.

To solve this problem, Burton (ibid) proposes using sub-categories suggested by Montgomery (1976 in Burton ibid) to label long informs. These include three sub-categories of informative: additive, adversative and causal items; and three sub-categories of comment: repeat, restate and qualifying items (ibid 1981: 67). Using Burton's taxonomy, we can label a long inform turn more precisely:

Example 3

<S 01> *I am not part or parcel of any conversations*
about politics because I've never voted **informative**
I'm not proud of that either, **informative-additive**
but erm it's not a thing I boast about urm
informative-adversative
but it's just of no interest at all **informative-adversative**

Whilst this new taxonomy gives a fuller reflection of the function of the discourse at the level of act, it is not possible using the Francis Hunston framework because of the effects it would have at the higher levels of discourse. Re-classifying these acts as informatives would make them the head of a new informing move (I). At the level of exchange, this would leave the initial predictive move (I) unanswered. Where a predicted element of an exchange is missing, the exchange must be labelled incomplete (Francis and Hunston 1992: 152). In Example 1, instead of having one complete exchange, it would be relabelled as four incomplete exchanges – a less satisfactory resolution than the original framework.

Another possible solution is to see longer contributions as a different type of discourse (Pearce 1973, cited in Coulthard 1985). Pearce (ibid) argues that these contributions are not interactive in the same way as shorter turns and therefore not suitable for

this type of analysis. However, if this approach were adopted it would mean that significant parts of the data could not be analysed using the Francis and Hunston framework.

Thus, to maintain the structural framework of the Francis and Hunston system, in this analysis, *comment* was used to label clauses immediately following an informative act.

Example 4

<S 01> *I am not part or parcel of any conversations*
about politics because I've never voted **informative**
I'm not proud of that either, **comment**
but erm it's not a thing I boast about urm **comment**
but it's just of no interest at all **comment**

This is not an entirely satisfactory resolution as it does not capture the distinct functions of these acts as well as in Burton's apparatus. However, this method can exist within the Francis and Hunston framework and does result in each clause within a long inform turn being given a value.

3.2.3 Overlapping utterances

In casual conversation utterances made in real-time frequently overlap and interrupt each other. This is a feature of this conversation (lines 9-21, 24-36, 64, 84-87).

The linear structure of the Francis Hunston framework struggles to capture this intersecting aspect of the conversation.

In Example 5, Speaker 1 responds to Speaker 2's initiation at line 28 and begins his own informative act at line 29. However, before he can complete the act, Speaker 2 interjects with another informative. Just as speaker 1 continues his informative he is forced to respond to speaker 2's informative at line 30, which in itself is a continuation of his utterance at line 27. This makes it difficult to decide where to place an exchange boundary; line 27 and line 30 seem to be the continuation of the same exchange, but the Francis Hunston model only allows us to look at a speech act in the light of the immediately preceding act. It is extremely difficult to pinpoint the boundary where one exchange ends and a new one begins.

A possible solution to this issue is again offered by Burton (1981). She introduces the concept of opening moves, supporting moves and chal-

Example 5

25	<S02> [and you and you it's not too later to change	s	pre-h	
26	you should pay attention to what's going on in the	i	h	informing
27	world because there are bad things happening	com	post-h	
28	<S 01> [I know	rea	h	acknowledging
29	but I'm I'm afraid	s	pre-h	
30	<S02> [there are bad things coming our way.	i	h	informing
31	<S01> [I just will,	s	pre-h	
32	well that's good to know Derek,	end	h	acknowledging
33	but I just do not for one second believe one thing I read ro one thing I see.	i	h	informing

Example 6: The Burton framework of spoken discourse

	Challenging Move	Act	Opening Move	Act	Supporting Move	Act
		1	2: and it's not too late to change	s		
		2	you should pay attention to what's going on in the world because bad things are happening	inf		
				3	1: [I know	ack
4	but I'm afraid	s				
		5	2: [there are bad things coming our way.	inf		
6	1: I just will	s				
				7	well that's good to know Derek	end
8	but I just for one second believe one thing I read or one thing I see	inf				

lenging moves to her model of spoken discourse. She proposes that when given an opening move by Speaker A, Speaker B can choose to support the presuppositions in that move or choose not to comply. She clusters these behaviours into supporting or challenging behavior (Burton 1981: 64-65). Using her framework, the data from Example 5 is re-analysed below.

Burton's apparatus better illustrates that exchanges are not linked together in a rigid, horizontal structure. We can see that Speaker 1 is divided between acknowledging Speaker 2's initiation and completing the exchange, whilst at the same time trying to challenge Speaker 1 and initiate another exchange.

However, within a hierarchical system of analysis, such as Francis and Hunston's, it necessary to have well-defined boundaries and clear limits on what an exchange can contain. Without these limits, it is impossible to apply the rank scale taxonomy to spoken discourse (Francis and Hunston 1992: 151). Burton's more open system does not seem to

capture the notion of predictability that is central to an exchange structure. Consequently, whilst it is felt that Burton's model better illustrates the frequent interruptions and overlapping of this text, it does not reveal that core elements of structure that Francis and Hunston's system achieves.

3.2.4 Ambiguity of categories

Almost every utterance in the data can be viewed as multi-functional. Some examples are detailed below.

Example 7

Line 43: <S 01> [I'd be more interested in talking about hockey or sandwiches.

This act is labelled as *comment* because its function in the move is to provide additional information about the head of the move. Yet, there is also a degree of irony in the statement and it might be interpreted as making a joke or even disagreement with the other speaker.

Example 8

Line 92: <S02> [You have always been interesting,
you're one of the most unborng people that I've
ever met, but ...

In Example 8, the act is labelled *qualify*. Its function is to detail conditions and exceptions of the next act. Alternatively, it could be argued that its function is to compliment or praise the other speaker or indeed as *informative*, giving information about the other speaker.

The Francis and Hunston framework necessarily contains a high degree of idealization (Stubbs 1983: 134). Acts, moves and exchanges are categorised within one label (except for I/R). As Francis and Hunston point out, these alternative interpretations are concerned with the relationship between the speakers in an interaction, rather than the structure of the discourse. Their framework is designed to capture only one dimension in the description of the structure (Francis and Hunston 1992: 152). The analyst, however, is still left with the difficult task of identifying the structural function of an utterance and then fitting a wide range of speech acts into a very limited and somewhat ambiguous list of items.

4. Conclusion: The Usefulness of the Hunston and Francis System of Analysis

As this study has demonstrated, the Hunston and Francis model can be used to reveal basic structural patterns of discussion-type discourse between friends. Nevertheless, careful analysis is required to fit the data to the categories. Furthermore, the model must be adapted to match the structural demands of the text genre being analysed. In this case, I extended the use of *comment*, redefined the act *loop*, and created a new sub-class for *starter*. With a bigger data sample, more adaptations and acts are likely to be necessary. Indeed, fitting the data to the categories would be much easier given more example acts and exchanges with which to compare a text. In a wider study, it is likely that the accuracy of classification would be improved if recognition criteria, including examples, for that genre were developed. Additionally, categories for analyzing long turns which are typical of this discourse type would have to be created.

Perhaps the main advantage of the Francis and Hunston system is that the elements in the apparatus and their possible combinations must be rigorously defined. This means that data analysed using the same structural criteria can be directly compared to reveal differences and similarities between texts (Willis 1992: 112). It would be interesting, for instance, to compare this text where the participants broadly disagree to a text where the participants broadly agree or reach a consensus, to learn if the same IR structure or prevalence of informing moves is consistent across the genre.

This type of analysis can only capture one aspect of the conversation (Francis and Hunston 1992: 152) and other more ethnological models must be used to gain a fuller understanding of the interaction.

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