Chapter 7

ACTS AND RELATIONS: WIDDOWSON'S APPROACH

When Widdowson introduced the concept of illocutionary acts (which he initially called 'communicative acts') in applied linguistics, he did so by showing that they belong in a different level of analysis than that where sentences belong. This approach is different from the ones followed in the previous two chapters. We could say it is a linguistic, rather than a philosophical approach. Its articulatory idea is that units combine to produce unity, and different sorts of unity correspond to different kinds of units.

There has not been any discussion *about* Widdowson's approach, although his findings have received the attention of all applied linguists. The rationale of the approach has not been made sufficiently explicit, and therefore, its consistent use has not been guaranteed, not even in the work of Widdowson himself. What is perhaps more important, the potential of the approach remains underexploited.

It is the purpose of this chapter to discuss Widdowson's approach, and then, in the light of such discussion, consider the distinction between illocutionary act and dissertation act. The concept of relative autonomy of levels will be proposed. By this I mean that the units of one level cannot be defined without reference to the units in other levels, although the rules of unity of any one level are independent of the rules for other levels. It will be shown that adherence to this concept would imply an alternation in the classroom between the so called authentic communication and the isolation of discourse levels.

It will be stressed that, as indicated in Chapter 2, the four basic categories of discourse analysis —sentence, proposition, illocutionary acts and dissertation act— require four kinds of unity. This view will direct us towards a distinction (suggested in Chapter 3) between acts and relations among acts, which is needed to solve the problems pointed out in chapters 1 and 2. A definition, an observa-

tion and a classification are examples of acts. A deduction and an exemplification are examples of relations between acts. The question of whether relations can provide the basis to establish a notion of act sequences, and thus bridge basic units and global structures, will be posed (and it will be retaken in the following chapters).

1973

In 'Directions in the teaching of discourse' (1973), Henry Widdowson was concerned because language teachers had paid "little attention to the way sentences are used in combination to form stretches of connected discourse" (p. 89). This way of referring to discourse,

> ...straddles two different, if complementary, ways of looking at language beyond the sentence. We might say that one way is to focus attention on the second part of my definition: *sentences in combination*, and the other to focus on the first part: *the use of sentences*.
>
> (Widdowson 1973: 90)

Widdowson reviews the main works in the study of language beyond the sentence up to 1971, and groups them in the two categories of sentences in combination and the use of sentences. In the first group he, of course, locates the work of Harris (1952). In the second group, Widdowson places the work of Labov (1969).

Of Harris, Widdowson tells us:

> He is thereby able to discover a patterning in the discourse in terms of chains of equivalences. What he does, then, is to reduce different message forms to make them correspond to a common code pattern.
>
> (Widdowson 1973: 91)

This kind of study is contrasted with the one Labov pursues. Widdowson quotes:

> Sequencing rules do not operate between utterances but between the actions performed by these utterances.
>
> (Labov 1970: 208; in Widdowson 1973: 97)

and

> The rules we need show how things are done with words and how one interprets these utterances as actions: in other words, relating what is done to what is said and what is said to what is done.
>
> (Labov 1969: 54-55; in Widdowson 1973: 92)

From these basis, Widdowson distinguishes *text analysis* from *discourse analysis*, the former aiming at showing "how a text exemplifies the operation of the language code beyond the limits of the sentence" (Widdowson 1973: 92), and the latter referring to "the investigation into the way sentences are put to communicative use in the performing of social actions" (Widdowson 1973: 93).

Text analysis is concerned with "*grammatical cohesion* between sentences", and discourse analysis with "*rhetorical coherence* of utterances in the performance of acts of communication" (p.96). Cohesion and coherence are exemplified with two pieces of dialogue which have become famous:

(1) A: Can you come to Edinburgh tomorrow?
B: Yes, I can.

(2) A: Can you come to Edinburgh tomorrow?
B: BEA pilots are on strike.

(Widdowson 1973: 96)

Dialogue (1) exemplifies cohesion: B uses an elliptical from of the sentence "Yes, I can go to Edinburgh tomorrow", which can be directly related to A's sentence. (2) is not cohesive, but we still recognize unity between A's intervention and B's intervention, if one is interpreted as an order and the other as a refusal to act upon the order. Widdowson explains that this is so if certain relations exist between A and B. He has recourse to what Labov calls 'preconditions' of an act, known in philosophy as 'felicity conditions'.

Among the preconditions of the act of ordering, we have the following: A must believe that B has the ability to carry on the action ordered. The coherence of the second dialogue is then accounted for by the fact that each utterance focuses on this precondition (Widdowson 1973: 97).

In sum, we have two levels of analysis, text and discourse, and to them correspond two basic categories and two sorts of unity: sentences and acts, on the one hand, and cohesion and coherence, on the other.

1978

In *Teaching language as communication* (1978), Widdowson discusses again the distinction between sentence and illocutionary act. But the scheme he now presents differs from the 1973 scheme in some interesting ways. These are:

1. Two dichotomies are introduced. One concerns aspects of performance, and the other types of meaning. The first is the dichotomy between usage and use. The second, the dichotomy between signification and value.

Usage is the manifestation of purely grammatical knowledge in decontextualized sentences or in texts which do not fulfil a communicative function. Use is the realization with language of genuine communicative behaviour. (Widdowson 1978: 3-7).

Signification is the meaning sentences have by virtue of combining lexical items according to grammatical rules (Widdowson 1978: 10-11). Value, on the other hand, is the kind of meaning "which sentences and parts of sentences assume when they are put to use for communicative purposes" (p.11).

The two dichotomies are related. Instances of usage have signification but do not have value. Instances of use will usually have signification, and they always have value.

2. The term 'text' no longer designates one level of analysis. There are perhaps various reasons for this. One could be the need to use the word in a pre-

theoretical sense, in connection with either sentences or acts, or both. Thus, on page 52, we read:

> Which text is to be preferred, then, will depend on which one can most readily be processed by the reader as a combination of illocutionary acts which constitutes an acceptable unit of communication.
>
> (Widdowson 1978: 52)

Another reason for abandoning 'text' as a theoretical term could be the danger of associating too directly the various dichotomies, that is, of associating text with signification and usage, and discourse with value and use. The danger would be to exclude text (and, therefore, cohesion) from genuine use. And Widdowson sees the adequate link between sentences as part of use.

Unfortunately, we are not told why 'text' is no longer part of the technical framework of discourse analysis.

3. The central matter of cohesion is identified as the thematic organization[1] of information:

> Generally speaking we can say that propositions are organized in such a way that what is known, or given, comes first in the sentence, and what is unknown or new, comes second.
>
> (Widdowson 1978:25)

Thematic organization even becomes an explanatory principle for the co-referential interpretation of anaphoric links[2], which Widdowson had considered from the point of view of Hasan 1968, and which was the salient feature of cohesion in Widdowson 1973, at least from the point of view of pedagogical use-fulness (see page 95). Thus:

> Note that it is because the information about the crops is given that B's reply does not need to make specific reference to them: the pronoun *they* takes on the value in this context of the full reference *the crops*.
>
> (Widdowson 1978:25)

One would hence be tempted to say that propositions belong in the level of discourse, if we are to maintain a separation of levels. However, Widdowson also says:

> If we know the dictionary meanings of the lexical items and understand the syntactic relations between them then we can recognize that this sentence represents a proposition and so has meaning...
>
> (Widdowson 1978:10)

and

> Sentences have meanings as instances of usage: they express propositions by combining words into structures in accordance with grammatical rules.
>
> (Widdowson 1978:11)

Propositions are now associated with signification, rather than value, and they seem to belong in text, rather than discourse. This appears to be confirmed in the subheadings "2.2 Cohesion and propositional development" and "2.6.1 Propositional development: achieving cohesion".

Such inconsistent associations of levels with the proposition require it be assigned a specific level. It needs to be clear that cohesion obtains among sentences, which is, really, Widdowson's idea:

> The notion of cohesion, then, refers to the way sentences and parts of sentences combine so as to ensure that there is propositional development.
>
> (Widdowson 1978:26)

What is needed is either that the phrase "propositional development" be left out of the definition of cohesion, or that the corresponding phrase "illocutionary development" be added, so that cohesion is properly seen as a property of "sentences and parts of sentences".

4. The proposition is explicitly introduced as a unit of analysis. This is done in a simple, ingenious way. The reporting of propositions is contrasted with the reporting of sentences and the reporting of illocutionary acts. Thus, in (3), (4) and (5), we have, respectively, the report of a sentence, a proposition and an act.

(3) She said: "My husband will return the parcel tomorrow."

(4) She said that her husband would return the parcel tomorrow.

(5) She promised that her husband would return the parcel tomorrow.

Unfortunately, and perhaps because of not dealing explicitly with the level of text —which could have been designated with another name, if necessary— it is not clear what level the proposition belongs to.

At some points, Widdowson follows a distinction between sentence and proposition which is similar to Strawson's (discussed in Chapter 5). That is, a proposition is expressed with a sentence; and which proposition is expressed is something which depends on the situation of utterance. In this sense, he says:

> We may begin by pointing out that when people produce a sentence in the course of normal communicative activity they simultaneously do two things. They express a proposition of one kind or another and at the same time in expressing that proposition they perform some kind of illocutionary act.
>
> (Widdowson 1978:22)

We also have an example of this way of conceptualizing the proposition. On pages 10 and 11, we find that in the following dialogue (6), and in the appropriate context, the string "the rain" takes on the value of the proposition "the rain destroyed the crops".

(6) A: What destroyed the crops?
B: The rain.

What I am proposing is that the 1973 approach be followed more strictly. This, of course, does not imply a rejection of the 1978 innovations – the introduction of the use/usage and signification/value distinctions, the identification of thematic organization as the central matter of cohesion and the introduction of the proposition as a unit of analysis –. These innovations are undeniably important.

What I mean is that the sentence, the proposition and the illocutionary act should be assigned to three distinct levels of analysis by recognizing three different sorts of unity. These levels need not have special names. Perhaps it is better to leave 'text' as a pre-theoretical term, as seems to be Widdowson's intention, and to use 'discourse' as a global term, to cover the three levels. And we can refer to them with descriptive phrases including 'sentence', 'proposition' and 'illocutionary act'. But we do need special terms for the different sorts of unity. For the reasons shown in Chapter 4, I propose that they be as in Table 3.

Table 3. *Units and sorts of unity.*

UNIT	UNITY
sentence	cohesion
proposition	connection
illocutionary act	coherence

Connection

The point is that propositional unity should not be assimilated to sentential cohesion. Let us consider an example from Widdowson 1978 (p. 26) and contrast it with a modified version:

(7) A: What did the rain do?
B: It destroyed the crops.

(8) A: What did the rain do?
B: The crops were destroyed by the rain.

Clearly, we have the same propositions in both exchanges, The difference is in the information structure. In (7) the topic of B's answer has already appeared in A's question, whereas in (8) B's topic is not found in A's question.

A plausible criterion for propositional unity is provided by van Dijk: "if the facts are related the proposition sequence representing them is connected" (van Dijk 1981: 4). This criterion can, for example, help us to analyse the following passage:

(9) John and Rita go to the same school. The school has some beautiful stained windows. In stained glass red is very difficult to obtain. Red is at one end of the visual spectrum.

This passage is very cohesive. Its thematic organization permits a very easy flow of information. The first theme is "John and Rita", and it has a comment which includes "the school", which in turn becomes the second theme, and so on. But there is a lack of unity, because the fact that John and Rita go to the same school has nothing to do with the fact that red is at one end of the visual spectrum.

There is, however, a problem with van Dijk's work. Various sorts of unity are assimilated to – confused with – connection:

> Work in this area, however, first required an answer to the more fundamental question about the *connection* and the coherence (also called the 'cohesion') of sequences of sentences, or sequences of their (underlying) propositions...
>
> (van Dijk 1981: 4)

> In order to connect clauses or sentences, language users will first construct propositions, organize these in FACTS and connect the respective FACTS.
>
> (van Dijk 1981: 8)

From the discussion of the two exchanges at the beginning of this section, (7) and (8), together with the discussion of John and Rita's passage, (9), it not only follows that connection must not be assimilated to cohesion, but also that the con-

verse is true as well: cohesion must not be assimilated to connection. Connection must, then, be genuinely distinct from other sorts of unity.

Perhaps another line of argument taking van Dijk's proposal in its own terms is necessary. It cannot be denied that often the aim of a discourse is to establish that two facts are connected – or that they are not! –. An author may, for example, wish to show that smoking often produces cancer. Or another may wish to show that dictation does not necessarily improve spelling. It can neither be denied that the reader's belief that the facts are unconnected (or connected) can be modified by such discourse. Furthermore, whether or not the discourse succeeds in establishing the (dis)connection of facts depends largely on its own cogency. Therefore, discourse unity, or at least some sort of it, is, in some sense, and at least in some cases, prior to fact connection. Hence, it cannot be a general principle that the ultimate criterion for discourse unity is fact connection. All we can say is connection is *one* sort of unity.

The corollary of the previous discussions is that we need one level of unity for every unit we postulate. Conversely, if a level of unity has been genuinely distinguished, then a unit of analysis corresponding to it must be identified. This is, in fact, a convenient way of making Widdowson's 1973 approach explicit.

But the discussion also shows the approach is both possible and necessary. Therefore, what has to be done now is to consider dissertation acts from the point of view of the relations among them.

Acts and relationships

Relationships between dissertation acts have always received the attention of ESP discourse analysts. They include: exemplification, deduction, contrast, paraphrase, and others. But on most occasions they have not been taken as relationships between acts. They have been taken as acts, *ie* as co-hyponyms of hypothesis, definition, generalization, observation and so on.

The need to distinguish between acts and relations can be shown with the help of two texts:

(10) All human beings are mortal. Socrates is a human being. Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

(11) All human beings are mortal. For example, Socrates is mortal.

The dissertation sequence in (10) could be described as: generalization, sorting, observation. These terms will be discussed in Chapter 9, but any intuitive or vague meanings with which they are associated will be sufficient for our present purposes. The first and the last act, the generalization and the observation, are also present in (11). What is different in the two texts is the relationship between generalization and observation.

In (10) we have what would naturally be called a deduction, and in (11) we have an exemplification. But it should be insisted that these are the relationships between the generalization and the observation, which (as such) have not changed from (10) to (11). With most present coding systems, "therefore, Socrates is mortal" might be registered as the deduction. In fact, the analyst would hesitate between deduction and observation, thus being exposed to unreliability.

Needless to say, the facts reported in (10) are not meant to be different from the facts reported in (11), nor is the connection between them. What is different is the dissertation about the facts. It might be argued that the presence of the proposition expressed by the middle sentence in (10) justifies seeing the contrast between the two texts in terms of connection. But this view is easily shown to be inadequate, with the help of (12), which also contains the said proposition:

(12) All human beings are mortal. For example, Socrates, who is human, is mortal.

The distinction between acts and relationships provides the basis for the solution to an important problem in dissertation analysis. When analysts think about acts properly, they (rightly) demand that texts be single coded, *ie* that one label be assigned to each utterance. But when they take act relations as acts they sense utterances are multifunctional, and insist that they could receive multiple coding. Their feeling is justified; an act will enter into relationship not only with one other act, but possibly with many more, which can be observed in explicitly numbered references to equations in mathematics texts (and perhaps less easily in

many other cases). Now, if acts and relations are properly distinguished, the analyst can code both in parallel, and in the case of acts adhere to the single coding principle whereas in the case of relations opt for multiple coding.

The need to proceed in this suggested way is exemplified in the experimental comparison between two modes of classroom interaction (lockstep and small group) which was discussed in Chapter 2. One part of the analysis of the data consisted in coding dissertation acts and relationships, but the difference between them had not been established. It was particularly difficult to code the following extract from a student working in a pair:

> (13) Yes,/ I don't think the creatures have creativity / because if they would have creativity, they all the they will changing his way to do the things,/ and they every year are doing the same the same the same./ So I don't think it's creativity. And the man all the years and even all day he is changing his way / to act and his way to build and everything and um um...
>
> (Long et al. 1976: 147)

In the discussion about the limitations of the coding system, we find:

> Instead of the simple one-to-one coding we have described, [the intervention] could be analysed something as follows:
> Having already decided that they are going to microclassify according to + or - creativity: "OK. So what do you think about creativity?" the pair of students now divide the problem into two parts: 'the creatures' and 'the man'. Next, the analysis of the first part, 'the creatures', is introduced by advancing the conclusion, in the form of a hypothesis, that creatures are -creative: "I don't think the creatures have creativity".
> The proof that animals are not +creative is carried out not by providing direct evidence but by showing the logical implications of the hypothesis:
> "If they would have creativity, they all the they will changing his way to do things" and then comparing this against evidence, "...and..." the comparison with evidence being provided in the form of the observation...
>
> (Long et al. 1976: 151)

Clearly, we needed multiple coding of the relationships — introduction, logical implications, comparisons, conclusion —. But we did not need multiple coding of the acts — hypothesis and observations —. Our main problem was, then, that we did not distinguish relationships from acts.

This is a simple but very important point. As chapters 2 and 3 suggested, the lack of a distinction between acts and relations has been one of the main sources of unreliability in speech act coding systems.

The same utterance can, in principle, be coded as the act it performs and as any of the relationships of which it forms part. If analysts are not aware of this, they will at different moments take different options, and do so inconsistently. Moreover, they will count relations as acts, and interpret the discourse they analyse on the basis of such statistics.

Akin views

The nearest applied linguistics came to the view of acts and relationships we needed were the positions reflected in two distinctions, one by Urquhart and another by Trappes-Lomax. Their consideration will make my point clearer.

Urquhart divides "inter-sentential" relationships into two basic types, paratactic (or non-subordinating) and hypotactic (or subordinating) (Widdowson and Urquhart 1976: 40). But then two acts, statement and assertion, are treated as relationships:

> In the case of hypotactic relationships, a basic distinction is drawn between *Statements*, declarative utterances which the author considers will be accepted by his audience without further question, and *Assertions*, which are always followed by supporting material designed to win acceptance for the Assertion.
>
> (Widdowson and Urquhart 1976: 40)

A class of acts is defined as the relationship an act has with its following act. Immediately afterwards we find the inverse confusion; a relationship is seen as an element in a sequence of acts:

> Hypotactic relationships are:
> I. Statement + Explanation:
> *eg* "The car stopped. The brakes jammed."
> II. Assertion + Substantiation:
> eg "This convenient technique is highly inefficient.
> In normal practice it is usual for more than 40% of the nitrogen to reach the plants."
> III. Assertion + Exemplification:
> *eg* "They are also superior in aesthetic sense: for instance, they discriminate colours better than boys."
>
> (Widdowson and Urquhart 1976: 40)

The problem is that statements and assertions are not properly seen as entering into the relationships of explanation, substantiation and exemplification. Rather, these relationships are seen as acts that follow statements and assertions. In other words, rather than something like (14), what we need is something like (15):

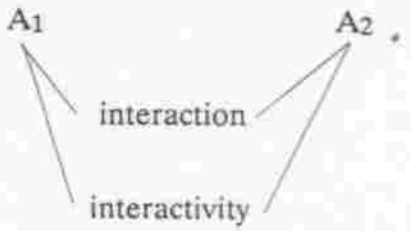
(14) Assertion + Exemplification

(15) Exemplification: Statement + Observation,

though, in the light of the contrast we had at the beginning of this section between deduction and exemplification, the question is somewhat more complex.

Now, Hugh Trappes-Lomax, in his sociolinguistics lectures at the University of Edinburgh during the academic year 1977-78, kept a less confusing distinction between relations and acts. In fact, he proposed two sorts of relationships between illocutionary acts. He called them 'interaction link' and 'interactivity link'. He liked to represent his view with simple diagrams like that in Figure 1, where A_1 and A_2 are speech acts:

Figure 1. *Trappes-Lomax's links.*



He said that inter-action obtained between people and inter-activity obtained between the activities performed in discourse. In his examples, he talked about questions and requests for information, and he almost arrived at the distinction I drew between these in Chapter 4. Indeed, I recognize that my view has his as one of its origins.

Other examples to illustrate the point, besides the question/request distinction, are not difficult to find; many have already been provided in the literature, although they have not been seen in the same way I regard them. Consider the following situation. Charlie is writing a piece of music. Sandy arrives and, after greeting Charlie, he says:

(16) It's hot in here...

Charlie replies with (17), and at the same time, goes to the window and opens it.

(17) Yes, it is.

The traditional analysis would be that (16) does not provide information, because it is really a request for Charlie to open the window. (Of course, it could be something stronger, such as a reproach for not having the window open, depending on intonation, on the relationship between Charlie and Sandy and other factors.) On this analysis, (17) would be linked to (16) only as an agreement to satisfy the request, or something like that.

Trappes-Lomax would, I think, have replied that (16) does not stop having information because it is a request, and that (17) is a confirmation of that information, at the same time that it is an agreement to satisfy the request. Either of the following modifications to our situation will make this more evident:

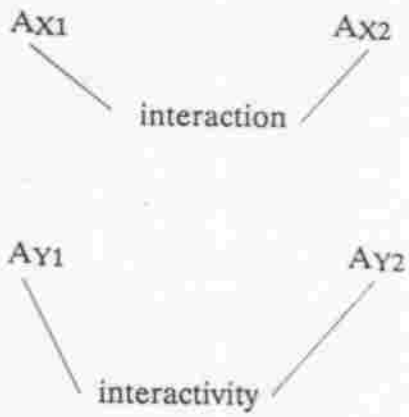
A. After (17), Charlie adds: "I hadn't noticed; my mind was completely absorbed." (He still opens the window.)

B. It is a third person, Sally, who utters (17). (Charlie still opens the window.)

It can be said that in the original situation utterance (16) only makes a certain already available information present, whereas in modification A it actually provides the information. It can also be said that in the original situation (17) is an agreement to satisfy a request, whereas in modification B it is an adherence to the request. But in the three situations (17) confirms (16).

The problem with Trappes-Lomax's position is that it is not in accordance with Widdowson's 1973 approach. Once different sorts of links have been identified, different sorts of acts should be incorporated into the scheme. In other words, the diagram to represent interaction and interactivity should be the one in Figure 2.

Figure 2. *Alternative representation of links.*



Going back to our situations, (16) is used to realize an observation, besides the request. (17) is also used to realize an observation, in fact the same one; this observation is realized at the same time that the agreement, or the adherence, is realized. Between these two observations in (16) and (17) there is a relationship of confirmation. This obtains besides, and independently of, the relationship between request and agreement to comply, or between request and adherence to the request.

To end this discussion, I prefer to retain 'coherence', rather than replace it with 'interaction', for two reasons. Firstly, Widdowson's term is already well established. Secondly, 'interaction' should be better left as a pre-theoretical term to cover various aspects of conversation, rather than be turned into a precise theoretical term to designate a specific kind of relationship. As for the other term, I prefer to use 'consistency', to show that it is in the same conceptual space as 'coherence', but denotes a distinct sort of link. Besides, it keeps an association with 'dissertation'.

Recapitulation

The following has been done in this chapter:

1. Widdowson's 1973 approach has been made explicit;

2. It has been shown that this approach is not strictly followed in Widdowson 1978 (though this work presents some very important innovations);

3. Connection, *ie* propositional unity, has been isolated and, thus, it has been shown that the 1973 approach can and should be kept;

4. Consistency has been shown to be different from coherence, which, according to the approach, has implied that the dissertation act and the illocutionary act are distinct.

In the course of doing this, it has been shown that the distinction between act and consistency (relation) is partly supported by previous views by Urquhart and

Trappes-Lomax and, at the same time, it improves them. It has also been shown that the distinction removes one of the sources of unreliability in coding systems.

Relative autonomy

The establishment of dissertation as a level of discourse, with its unit, the dissertation act, and its form of unity, consistency, does not necessarily mean that it is completely separate from the other three levels. In fact, what this chapter maintains, together with what was said in previous chapters, implies a relative autonomy of levels.

The type of relationship between levels in a theory of discourse deserves to be mentioned explicitly. The possibility of success a language teaching method has depends on the real nature of those relationships. A purely audiolingual method[3], for example, could only be effective if propositions and acts were directly derivable from sentences (which, we now know, is not the case). But real relationships can only be explored from a theoretical standpoint. Therefore, if a theory openly states its level relationships, it will contribute to clarifying language teaching issues.

Let us then discuss the notion of relative autonomy. It can be stated as follows: the units in one level of analysis cannot be defined without reference to other levels; however, the rules of unity for one level are independent of the rules for any other level. We cannot talk about affirmative sentences without mentioning the act of assertion, nor can we make sense of the idea of interrogative sentences without referring to the act of question; and in either case the notion of a proposition will be present, at least implicitly. Conversely, it is not possible to state what a proposition is without involving the concepts of sentence and act, nor what an act is without opposing it to the sentence and the proposition. However, once the concepts of these units are properly developed, cohesion does not depend on connection, coherence or consistency; nor does any of these depend on the others.

It is convenient to take the notion of relative autonomy down to a further degree of delicacy, by expanding the first part: to define an element of a unit in one level it is necessary to refer to its functions in other levels; it is not enough to

consider it in relation to the other elements in the same unit. It is not possible, for example, to define a noun phrase without invoking referents; it is not enough to contrast its syntactic behaviour with that of a verb phrase. *Viceversa*, it is not possible to give the meaning of 'predicate' without using the ideas of verb and adjective. However, once the elements of a sentence are defined, its grammaticality is not dependent on the well- formedness of the propositions it can be used to express, nor on the appropriateness or felicity of the acts it can be used to perform.

The general form given to the relative autonomy principle, which makes reference both to the internal unity of units and to unity between units, might perhaps be seen as an invitation to revise the problem of levels in different schools of general linguistics. However, although such a revision would strengthen the position adopted[4], it would lead us in directions somewhat removed from the main concerns of this thesis and would require a considerable amount of space. Therefore, only three direct sorts of evidence will be adduced here in favour of the principle:

1. Ambiguity. The fact that sometimes we are not sure what proposition is being expressed with a sentence, even when we understand the sentence as such, shows that there is no necessary projection from the sentence level to the proposition level (nor is there one in the inverse sense). The same can be said for the other level relations. We may understand the content of an utterance and not be sure of the illocutionary intention, or figure out a given speech act from the sequence of speech acts it is part of without knowing exactly what the sentence that realized it meant.

2. Error correction. The fact that we can repair unity breaks at some levels from our understanding at other levels is evidence that the units in one level contain information about the other levels. Notice that this repair need not be overt. In conversation, for example, mental repair (and perhaps a brief non-verbal signal that it has occurred) is often enough. If there were a necessary projection of one level onto another, then errors would be carried over from one level into another, and therefore they would not even be noticed; there would only be one reading possible, the "wrong" one.

3. Jokes. Jokes often exploit divergences between different levels. On many occasions the art of a joke consists in setting the units of discourse in such a way that the rules of unity at one or more levels are surprisingly violated, while the rules at other levels are strictly followed, as if everything was normal. This becomes clear, for example, in elephant jokes, because the person who tells the joke and the person who listens are, in a way, acting the joke. The alternations of questions and answers provides unity at the levels of illocution and dissertation. The thematic organization of sentences results in unity at the sentence level. However, the propositions are about events which cannot co-occur in the world; they exhibit disunity. Absurdity is presented in an environment of normality. That is why we laugh, if we do.

Implications and further research

One implication of the view exposed in the above sections is that in each level of discourse the basic units can be seen as constituting larger units, by the effect of unity relations. In the level of dissertation, for example, it is possible to think about groups or blocks of dissertation acts which are, perhaps, intermediate between the act and what Selinker, Trimble and their colleagues called 'general rhetorical functions', which include, among others, reporting and describing[5] (see Trimble 1985: 11). Relations, conceived in the way indicated here, might even be the clue to define the rhetorical functions operationally — and to clarify other notions in the approach developed by the said authors —. In other words, act relations could bridge basic units and global structures. Further research into relations would, then, be important. The point will be touched upon again in Chapter 9, and the proposal will be further elaborated.

The above hints arise a second suggestion: that genres be treated as conventionalized sequences of dissertation acts. This approach could, again, provide operational definitions, which are needed to complement the existing definitions in terms of communicative purposes (provided, *eg* in Swales 1990: 58). Comments on this will also be added in Chapter 9.

One area where this chapter's discussions may have significant implications is teaching methodology. As indicated above, how levels stand in relation to each other must determine what can be learnt from what. If they are relatively

autonomous, as I have argued, then it will be logically impossible for a student to construct the notion of a sentence element, such as a noun phrase, if this is not seen in use, *ie* if it is not seen in the act of reference. More generally, utterances have to express sentences and propositions and they have to realize illocutionary and dissertation acts, for the student to be able to grasp the sentences as sentences. The consequence is that what has been called "authentic communication", and perhaps should be referred to as "integral communication", or simply "communication", is indispensable for language learning.

However, relative autonomy also means that, once the sentence and the sentence elements are identified, the grammar rules that link them will necessarily be easier to perceive if they are presented in isolation from the rest of language, *ie* if they are artificially detached from communication. The same holds for cohesion, coherence, connection and consistency; each type of unity should be focused in its own terms.

These remarks lead to propose a teaching methodology based on the alternation between integral communication and focus on one level of discourse. This is perhaps controversial, because it reinforces some of the main stands of the communicative approach and, at the same time, contradicts some the most radical principles that gave it origin. The issue will be taken up again in Chapter 10.

Summary

This chapter has stressed the importance of Widdowson's 1973 approach, which can be condensed in the following canon: in discourse analysis, a basic unit is to be postulated if and only if it is to be associated to a form of unity. In agreement with it, consistency and the dissertation act have been shown to belong in the same level. Therefore, the basic categories of discourse analysis are those of Table 4.

Table 4. *The basic categories of discourse analysis.*

UNIT	UNITY
sentence	cohesion
proposition	connection
illocutionary act	coherence
dissertation act	consistency

In this chapter, the principle of relative autonomy between levels has also been proposed and argued for. The implication that teaching should alternate integral communication and detached focus on discourse levels has then been derived.

Addendum

At this moment a note on the utterance, a unit different from those that have been discussed, must be made. It was mentioned in Chapter 2 in connection with the Xochimilco study, and it must be used in almost any analysis.

Until recently, most researchers have adopted a notion of utterance similar to Lyons's (1977: 26-27), which derives from definitions by Bloomfield (1926) and Harris (1951). According to this notion, an utterance is any stretch of talk before and after which there is silence. "It may consist of a sequence of sentences; it may also consist of one or more grammatically incomplete sentence-fragments." It is observable and, "up to a certain point, can be described in purely physical, or external, terms." It is, then, a term that can supposedly be used "*prior* to and independently of...description within a particular theoretical framework" (my emphasis).

It is roughly in this sense that utterances were used in the Xochimilco study (discussed in Chapter 2). Students' interventions were first divided into utterances and, then, utterances were coded to register the speech acts they were used to perform. There are, however, two important differences. One is that silence was not the only utterance boundary. Intonation changes that signalled the speaker regarded what had been uttered as a speech unit were also taken as ut-

terance limits. So, it was possible to have more than one utterance within a turn, whereas for Lyons there is an implicit equation between a turn and an utterance.

The second difference is that there was a non-physical verification of utterance boundaries after the coding. This was imposed by the methodological demand of coding one utterance as the realization of at least one act, and not more than one act in any of the three dimensions adopted. This demand was, in turn, related to Sinclair's (1973) minimum criteria for descriptive systems.

This position not only allows for a methodological rigour which is otherwise unattainable, but also reflects a very basic intuition of informed analysts. An utterance is a unit of production, which is used to realize units of illocutionary activity. It is, so to speak, the perceptible, etic manifestation of an emic unit, as opposed to a mere sound block. This intuition is expressed by Lyons himself:

> ...we will now draw a systematic distinction between the terms 'statement', 'question', 'command', etc., on the one hand, and 'declarative', 'interrogative', 'imperative', etc., on the other. We will use the former set of terms in relation to utterances ... and the latter in relation to system-sentences...
>
> (Lyons 1977: 30)

There is now in use a more complex definition of utterance than Lyons's. It is partly in agreement with the Xochimilco position and partly in disagreement. It was originally proposed by Scollon (1976) and successively refined by Sato (1985) and by Crookes and Rulon (1985). These two authors state it as follows:

> ...an utterance is defined as a stream of speech with at least one of the following characteristics:
> (1) under one intonation contour,
> (2) bounded by pauses, and
> (3) constituting a single semantic unit.
>
> (Crookes and Rulon 1985: 9)

According to this definition, an utterance is again a physical, observable entity whose boundaries are not necessarily determinable on purely physical criteria. It is also distinct from the turn (and more than one utterance can constitute a single

turn). However, there is no explicit use of the notion of act, and the idea that utterance limits have to be verified after analysis is absent.

The origin of the two differences is related to the researcher's aims. In a comparison of the utterance and other units, Crookes (1990) argues that the former is more valid in "second language acquisition studies" because it "reflects psychological production processes".

He is not very interested in illocutionary or dissertation development. The units he compares with the utterance are the turn, tone groups and grammatical units derived from the clause. Of the turn, he says it cannot reflect production processes because it is determined by interaction. This argument is wrong; we should be interested in those production processes learners use when they are engaged in interaction. But I will not discuss it any further, because the turn is a theme I can only mention here. Its proper treatment is outside the scope of this thesis.

What I wish to focus on is Crookes and Rulon's third characteristic. Referring to the utterance as a "semantic unit" can help to solve certain segmentation problems, some of which are discussed by Crookes (1990), and which include, for example, deciding whether two morpheme productions are holophrases or separate utterances.

Crookes stresses segmentation following their definition can contribute to achieving statistical reliability. However, this is only possible among researchers who have worked in personal contact. In fact, from Crookes's own discussion, it is evident that direct training is necessary. The vagueness of "semantic unit" make any reliability measurements non-replicable by independent researchers. Is this expression synonymous with 'referent', 'predicate', 'proposition' or 'act'? Does it mean something else?

The problem can be illustrated with the aid of some hypothetical data. Let us suppose that "Friday" is the felicious utterance of a sentence fragment which, in the appropriate context, represents a whole sentence, *eg* (18), and, at the same time, expresses a proposition and realizes illocutionary and dissertation acts, which we might, at this moment, describe as (19), (20) and (21).

(18) It is Friday.

(19) That the 26th is next Friday.

(20) The speaker provides requested information.

(21) The speaker asserts the proposition described by (19).

In this case, utterance boundaries can, and probably should, be drawn before and after "Friday". But let us now suppose that "Friday" is the infelicious start of "Friday...Tuesday, it is Tuesday", which should be analysed in terms of (22) to (25). Here, there should be no boundaries after "Friday", in spite of its being a semantic unit (a referential expression) and its being followed by a pause.

(22) It is Tuesday.

(23) That the 26th is the following Tuesday.

(24) The speaker provides requested information.

(25) The speaker asserts the proposition described by (23).

This shows that a more specific form of characteristic (3) in Crookes and Rulon's definition is needed. It also shows that neither characteristic (1) nor characteristic (2) are sufficient criteria for delimiting utterances and, therefore, verification of boundaries is required after analysis.

Now, what is the best candidate for characteristic (3)?

From various examples discussed in the work cited by Crookes (1990), such as Sato's (1985), it would seem that on most occasions they have propositions in mind. This, I believe, is a good, practical criterion, specially if we are coding on-going discourse. But it cannot be the fundamental one. On many occasions, if a proposition is recoverable by an analyst, she can also identify a sentence or a sentence fragment from which a whole sentence can be reconstructed. And on almost all cases she will be able to code a dissertation and an illocutionary act. However, the converse is not true. There are utterances which realize illocution-

ary acts, such as greetings, which do not express any proposition at all and to which the notions of sentence or sentence fragment are inapplicable.

More complex, a sequence of simple propositions can either constitute one complex proposition, *ie* be associated to one assertion, or be a series of separate utterances each performing one assertion. This is shown easily by (27) and (28), which are two potential renderings of (26) in writing.

(26) I know ... he went to the theatre ... and she went to the cinema

(27) I know, he went to the theatre and she went to the cinema.

(28) I know he went to the theatre. And she went to the cinema.

Another reason for not choosing the expression of a proposition as the fundamental verifying criterion for an utterance is that, in language classrooms, teachers and students often say an empty sentence, *ie* they do not express any proposition, although they still perform the act of exemplifying the sentence.

It follows that we should in the first place define the utterance as a physical unit that is used to realize a speech act. Probably, we should then add operational algorithms to both identify and verify utterances in corpora. These could include the use of pauses and intonation changes (or punctuation signs in writing), as possible boundary signals, and the recognition of complete propositions as valuable checks. But they will also require the confirmation of speech act elements, which are the object of the third part of the thesis.

In Chapter 10, I will be in a position to exemplify the use of the utterance as a segmentation unit in the analysis of authentic data. For now, let us retain that an utterance is a physical unit, whereas the sentence, the proposition, the illocutionary act and the dissertation act are the analyst's reconstructions.

Chapter 7 notes

1. For matters related to the thematic organization of information, see Halliday 1970 and Leech and Svartvik 1975 (sections 410-424).

2. For questions related to anaphoric links see Halliday and Hasan 1976.

3. The audiolingual method consisted essentially of graded repetitions of decontextualized sentences. Today, we would say that these did not express propositions nor realize varieties of acts.

4. A revision of general linguistics schools would show that it is impossible to define syntactic units without reference to morphological and semantic criteria; in the case of the noun phrase, for example, we need to mention morphemes as well as the notion of entity. Conversely, semantic or morphological categories, such as that of property or that of suffix, cannot be properly defined if syntactic classes are not mentioned. However, once the units in any one level are defined, its rules of combination are independent of the rules for any another level; for example, a sentence can be grammatically correct even if it expresses a contradiction or if it does not make sense.

5. Actually, the general rhetorical functions have complex labels, which include not only rhetorical operations, but also the object of such operations. Examples are: "stating purpose", "reporting past research", "presenting information on the operation of apparatus used in experiment". In my terms, they combine aspects that belong in the level of dissertation acts and aspects that belong in the level of propositions. Unfortunately, the combination is not a clear one; rather, it introduces confusions, which I have avoided in the body of the chapter.