The language of business: discourse patterns in British and Italian meetings.

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To Andrzej, Sarah and David

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ABSTRACT

Couched in a phenomenological epistemology of the social world, this thesis regards coherence-building, or sense-making, as the aim of the process in which individuals engage in their daily lives.

In a business context, the fundamental form of coherence-building activity is the Meeting. Through it, individuals seek to make sense of the contradictions that inform the social world in the pursuit of a more coherent, i.e. comprehensible, order.

This process is visible in meetings at the levels of discourse and text-context interaction, and at the structural level. For this reason, a multi-layered interpretative framework has been proposed in order to investigate the three dimensions of meetings through which coherence is realised: the textual, the social and the structural dimension.

At the textual level, coherence is achieved through connectedness, i.e. intra- and inter-textual thematic continuity realised by semantically related pointers.

Under the social dimension, the conceptual framework investigates coherence as sense-making through discourse. Unlike connectedness, which relies on the presence of surface linguistic features such as 'theme', coherence as sense-making looks at the deeper, and therefore less immediately visible, realisation of text-context dependency. Pronominalisation, metaphorical expressions and phatic language are shown to be powerful indicators of this activity.

Finally, coherence in the organisation of the interaction emerges from the investigation of common structural features of meetings in a generic sense.

The originality of this thesis lies not only in the analysis of business meetings as a subject rather than a tool of research, but especially in placing meetings within a phenomenological perspective as the major sense-making activity taking place in the business environment. Unlike most work in spoken business interaction, the thesis is based empirically on a set of recordings of natural language data in two large multi-national companies, during which the author was present.

The second element of originality of this research is its cross-cultural nature: for the first time English and Italian business interactions have been compared and contrasted, and the influence of organisational and national culture highlighted in the process.

DECLARATION

This work has not been accepted in substance for any other degree, and is not currently being submitted in candidature for any other degree.
This is to certify that the work here was carried out by the candidate herself. Due acknowledgement has been made of all assistance received.

....
(Candidate)

....
(Director of Studies)

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

C. : *[...] if people have dogmatic reasons rather than lack of understanding we've eliminated (.)* ***the communication aspect*** *of it so we can say people do understand it (.) they just don't like it .*

C. : *[...] the reliability of of communication (.) doesn't necessarily have any bearing on on how well is accepted (.) so provided* ***provided the people are accepted*** *(.) even if the message is poor that might still be the one that becomes generally ehm (.) taken as representing the situation*

(2nd BAT meeting, company B.)

D. : *ragazzi finquando le cose non si fanno non si imparano (.) allora (.) o troviamo la strada per riuscire a entrare in quella cosa li' oppure ci facciamo sempre le nostre belle ehm sedute sui bachi del software o sulla temperatura in meno o in piu' che c'ha il coso e andiamo avanti tranquilli (.) [......]*

my friends unless you **do** things you will not learn to do them (.) so (.) either we find the way to crack it or we'll always go on with our nice meetings about the software bugs or the temperature which is too high or too low and enjoy life (.) [........]

(internal meeting, company A.)

1.1 Communication and meetings in business.

The first two extracts, from a meeting at a British telecommunications company, contain two important points about communication in business:

a) communication implies understanding;

b) communication takes place if the (human) source of the message is accepted.

C.'s experience as a manager has made him realise that communication relies heavily on its human component, and this despite the advances in the technology of information transfer, which is the raison d'etre of a telecommunications company.

Not only have reliable and fast communication media not replaced more fallible and less efficient humans, but it looks as if the potentially alienating maze of technical devices that characterises daily business life has made the need for direct human contact in communication all the more pressing. As the Planning Manager of an Anglo-Italian company put it: "I keep my door always open because my people out there need to know that they can walk in and talk to me if they want to". While an open door policy goes a long way towards encouraging face-to-face communication within a company, logistic and linguistic problems can seriously affect this type of approach. In international communication daily direct contact is an impossible proposition. Facsimiles and telephone calls are the obvious alternatives; yet, sensitive issues are left to discuss at the weekly or fortnightly meeting. Face-to-face communication in business is often synonym with attending meetings. The importance of this phenomenon in the daily life of a company is easy to underestimate because it is so frequent and taken for granted by individuals that it slips into the sphere of the "habitual".

The third extract quoted at the beginning proves this point: the manager of an Italian telecommunications company, faced with an adverse response to a proposed policy change, reacts by issuing a thought provoking warning: 1) either the partipants accept to do what they are told and make it a learning experience, or they continue with the usual routine of meetings on (apparently) insignificant issues. Action vs. inaction is this manager's interpretation, and meetings are equivalent to inactions.

Or are they? And what is behind this baffling interpretation of the most frequent face-to-face communication mode in business? This piece of research will seek to answer these questions by observing managers engaged in meetings in two telecommunications companies, one British and one Italian. Linguistic behaviour will be the focus in order to access not only the phenomenon of meetings, but also to interpret the relationship between this phenomenon and the wider corporate and social context.

1.2 The role of language in business communication.

In this section, I would like to focus on the reasons for choosing to concentrate on the linguistic component of face-to-face communication. Business relies heavily on information being passed around fast and efficiently. Paradoxically, if one visited a company during normal working hours and spent some time observing in what kind of activities business people are engaged, one would not fail to notice that against a background of buzzing telephones, faxes, computers, face to face communication still does take place widely, although, admittedly, not all talk is business talk.

The apparently total reliance on technological devices has not lessened the importance of the original and most direct form of business interaction, the *face to face encounter* that may take the form of a dialogue between two individuals, e.g. a performance appraisal meeting, an interfunctional meeting or an international negotiation. The examples quoted are typically meetings during which contact has not yet been mediated by any electronic device (but see: Valacich et al. 1991 and Nunamaker et al. 1991) and where, ideally, one could expect "total commitment to the interaction, [...] maximum degree of urgency exerted by the parties and no technical problem [...] as an excuse" (Leyton 1978). This is particularly important in international meetings, when the degree of complexity of any negotiation is increased by extra factors such as different language(s) and culture(s), and unfamiliar settings, all exerting considerable pressure on the individuals.

The ability to influence and control the "other side" will ultimately depend not only on the background knowledge available to the parties and the inherent attractiveness of what they can offer, but also on the skilful use of linguistic tactics and strategies from the very first encounter. In fact, when the cultural gap is wide, negotiators have a chance to show their good will and commitment first and foremost through the kind of language that they choose to employ, accompanied by appropriate non-verbal behaviour.

The importance for businesses of: a) direct communication; and b) the role of language in this type of exchange, seems to have become only recently a concern . The turmoil created by the "get ready for 1992 or die" campaign seems to have subsided. As often happens, alarmism has had the opposite effect, or little effect, on many businesses, especially the most vulnerable, i.e. smaller ones. As a result of a recent telephone survey of smaller companies in the East Midlands, I registered an overall indifferent if not negative response from most of my interlocutors. My concern at that time lay mainly in recording their level of "pro-European" commitment as indexed by the presence of any form of language/cultural awareness programme. The conclusion drawn from this limited exercise is that mentioning "language training" to business people can and does send the wrong signal unless it is intended as part of an effort to understand the dimensions of "communication competence" i.e. the "organisational capacity to modify attitudes and behaviours to secure and maintain closeness with foreign [and home] business environments in order to satisfy mutual purposes in interactions." (Holden 1990,39)

Britain and the United States represent excellent examples of how language and business have grown intertwined to the extent that much business transactions nowadays are conducted on the assumption that the foreign counterparts will adapt, and not only linguistically. The dominance of English as the international language of business has also meant that a large selection of published materials on language and communication in work environments have been written *in* English *on* English, while other languages such as Japanese, German and French have received little attention despite the important role of those countries in the world economy.

If we restrict our field of attention to the European community, a further division is applied between majority and minority languages, quite apart from the contribution that any single state makes to the European economy. Italy is a good illustration: its third place in Europe for GNP and its sixth place among the most industrialised countries in the world is not reflected in the number of studies on Italian management other than the few published in Italian. Consequently, there is an urgent need for management and language scholars to draw up a joint research agenda, the absence of which will become even more noticeable after the advent of the economic unification of Europe.

My reasons for taking up this challenge and leading the way are the dearth of comparative linguistic studies that a) focus on the pragmatics of less known languages, in this case Italian; b) use real-life data collected through observation and recordings carried out on site; c) use language as a powerful way of interpreting and explaining business behaviours; d) attempt to relate language behaviour to the (corporate) context in which it unfolds; e) elect meetings as the object of research.

In this thesis, I shall pursue the threefold aim of: a) outlining a multilayered interpretative framework for the interpretation of business meetings as complex, prototypical business encounters, b) applying the framework to the comparative analysis of authentic English and Italian interactions; and c) demonstrating how language and linguistic phenomena lie at the heart of the mechanics of business interaction and contribute to its dynamic coherent development while, in turn, being affected by and affecting the social order.

Finally, it is hoped that the results of the analysis, which will form the core of this doctoral thesis, will find subsequent applications in practical fields such as human resources management, cross-cultural business communication, international management, the teaching of language and culture, while at the same time representing an explicit response to the challenge to generate "useful results" addressed to language scholars (van Dijk 1990).

1.3 Chapter organisation and contents.

Chapter two: Language at work.

The literature review that forms the object of the next chapter is subdivided into two main parts : a) theories and models of communication; b) the language of work settings, and has the twofold aim of examining in detail the studies on the subject of linguistic behaviours in business contexts from two quite distinct perspectives.

Under the first heading, I shall begin with an overview of the concept of "communication" as interpreted by scholars in communication studies, with particular reference to the attention paid to language in the communication process. This will lead on to a discussion of the role of language in the narrower field of organisational communication, to which this study hopes to contribute. The second section will focus on a selected review of language in negotiation, which together with being the most extensively studied form of face-to-face communication, provides a useful introduction to what I shall contend is the typical business interaction, the Meeting. In fact, I would argue that negotiations are a sub-set of the meeting type, albeit with special rules of their own. The relevant works on meetings will also be the object of discussion.

The second part of the chapter will be taken up entirely by a review of the treatment of language in work settings from linguistic and sociolinguistic perspectives. While the number of publications on institutional discourse (medical, legal and educational) has grown steadily in the last decade, interest in business discourse has been lagging behind. It will be claimed and illustrated with examples from this literature that language offers a powerful key to a better understanding of both the contextual and personal dimensions at play in corporate encounters.

Chapter three: Research as experience, research as method: problems and issues.

In the first section, after a justification for the definition of Meetings as typical unmediated business interactions, the conceptual framework will be outlined as the product of methodological and theoretical assumptions and preferences. The issues arising from the choice of a "qualitative" rather than "quantitative" research design will be addressed in the second section. The last section will present the data and elaborate on the implementation of the research design, including data collection, transcription and coding and the emergence of descriptive categories from analytical work.

Chapter four: A multilayered interpretative framework of meetings.

This chapter represents the conceptual core of the thesis. In section one, I shall argue that together with being prototypical, Meetings are multilayered phenomena consisting of at least three, interleaved dimensions, the intra-textual, the inter-textual and the con-textual. A discussion on the nature of discourse is the subject of the second section, which prepares the ground for the introduction in section 3 of the concept of coherence as the backbone of the multilayered analytical model. A selection of relevant works on coherence and cohesion will be reviewed, and the pragmatic realisation of intra-textual and inter-textual coherence through devices such as *theme*, pronominalisation and symbolic language (metaphors) will be introduced in the last section, in preparation to the full discussion of chapters five and six.

Chapter five: Applying the framework to the Italian data.

In this chapter, I shall apply the cohering devices on which the multilayered framework is based to the analysis of the Italian data and illustrate my presentation with use of extracts from the recordings.

Chapter six: Applying the framework to the English data.

The English materials will be considered in this chapter along the same lines adopted for the exposition of chapter five.

Chapter seven: Meetings as genre.

In this chapter I shall further develop the analysis of meetings by concentrating on the structural properties that they share with a view to sketching a preliminary generic model. A selective review of the most relevant developments in generic modelling will serve as an introduction, following which a separate section will describe the analytical work. Structural components will be identified and defined based on the transcripts of formal and informal meetings.

Chapter eight: Cross-cultural linguistic analysis.

This concluding chapter will concentrate on contrastive linguistic analysis to show the *differences* between meetings in the two languages. After a review of recent work in cross-cultural analysis (section 8.2), section 8.3 will discuss the pragmatics of specific linguistic features in the two languages, as realised in the context of business meetings.

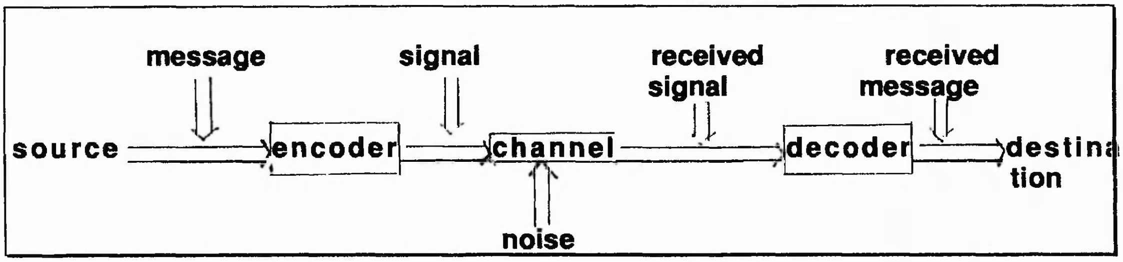
The final section will identify the areas to which this thesis has made a contribution and will make suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER TWO: LANGUAGE AT WORK

2.1 Language in communication studies.

All behavior is communication
(Gregory Bateson)

Bateson's statement would have startled the physicists and engineers who during the first half of this century were active in the field of "communications", concerned with the efficient use of channels rather than the nature of the "message". Not surprisingly, their communication models are simple, linear, mechanistic models like the well-known Shannon and Weaver (1949) model of communication slightly adapted by Sperber and Wilson (1986,4):



It is when language becomes the object of analysis in the communicative process that the shift from linear models to structural models of communication takes place. First Pierce, philosopher and logician, and later de Saussure focus on the meaning aspect of communication, leading the way towards alternative "semiotic" models of communication.

Jakobson's (1960) conceptualisation is of particular relevance in that not only does it introduce context as a variable influencing the process of communication, but relates each element of the model to a function of the language (in parentheses):

	context (referential)	
addresser (emotive)	**message** (poetic) -------	**addressee** (conative)
	contact (phatic)	
	code (metalingual)	

(adapted from: Jakobson 1960)

In these models, meaning is interaction-dependent and context-sensitive. An emphasis on the *quality* of the message is the principle that inspired the complex Targowski & Bowman (1988) multilayered model of communication. The authors see communication as a process happening within a context: they aim specifically to identity the component variables in the process and "show their relationship to each other and to the message itself". Moreover, each variable "provides a link between the sender and the receiver (and with the environment as well)." (p.10) This description reaffirms the ambitious aim of the authors of providing a comprehensive description of how communication happens between *two people*, a sender and a receiver. The authors claim to have taken into account "the various influences on the quality of the message" from the "purely physical to the purely mental", thus encompassing in their model, to a certain extent, a cognitive dimension. Their confidence in the model's capacity to break down the nature of communication into component parts and to demonstrate the influence of each component on the whole process is reminiscent of earlier mechanistic models.

Although in theory each part should fit neatly into the whole, it would be interesting to assess their testability and predictability

claims against dyadic business communication(s) taking place in various contexts. Real-life verbal behaviour reveals a different and much more complex picture, particularly when compounded with the communicative effects generated by non-verbal behaviour. Moreover, their claim that the model "is sufficiently flexible to apply to all communications" (p.23) means that it could be applied (only) to *all face-to-face dyadic encounters,* thus excluding mediated communication (e.g. via an electronic device) or group interactions.
It was not until after the second world war that the qualitative paradigm was applied to communications research. In contrast to quantitative studies, works such as Cherry's "On human communication" (1968) repeatedly emphasise the social nature and function of communication.

Defending an original and often controversial perspective on the pragmatics of communication, Watzlawick's ideas put him ahead of his own time. In the Sixties he treats communication and behaviour as synonyms and justifies his stand-point thus:

"For the data of pragmatics are not only words, their configurations and meanings, which are the data of syntactics and semantics, but their nonverbal concomitants and body language as well. Even more, we would add to personal behavioral action the communicational clues inherent in the context in which communication occurs. Thus from this perspective of pragmatics, all behavior, not only speech, is communication, and all communication - even the communicational clues in an impersonal context - affect behavior." (Watzlawick et al. 67, p.22)

In a recent collection of essays, the author re-affirms his anti-positivist view of communication when he uncompromisingly states that "there is more than one reality and that all forms of reality that we perceive are the results of communication." (Watzlawick 1983)
Theories of communication have evolved from the mechanistic view of information theory through the more flexible but still largely predetermined view of meaning advanced by the Parsonian perspective

of the social system to the phenomenological approach that sees communication as a goal-oriented and sense-making experience. One of the best known scholars influenced by the symbolic-interactionist school is Erving Goffman, whose view of reality as constituted of mental "frames" has generated what is perhaps the most anti-mechanistic definiton of communication, as an "intersubjective, spontaneous and creative action".

The characteristics of the two main paradigms of communication research described so far can be usefully summarised thus:

MECHANISTIC (emphasis on:)	**SYMBOLIC-RITUALISTIC** (emphasis on:)
- channels,networks	- language, modes, forms
- means, technology	- content
- causes and effects	- meaning and interpretation
- instrumental use	- expressive use
- one-direct. flow	- interaction and exchange
- control management	- sharing, participation
- non-ambiguity	- ambiguity
- vertical flow	- lateral flow
- measurem. & quantif.	- descriptive method
- closed systems	- open systems
- transmission of info.	- storage of information
- behaviour	- ideas
- the cognitive	- the indexical

(adapted from: McQuail 1984,200-01)

2.2 Communication and management studies.

From a limited survey of the vast literature on the role of communication in management, the dominant characteristic is the prescriptive character of most contributions. Even allowing for the prevailing demand for 'down to earth' writings raised by business practitioners, the reader is bombarded by a proliferation of buzz phrases such as "the communication factor", "conversational control", "interpersonal skills", and the like. Behind these banners, one is most likely to find a long enumeration of "do's" and "dont's" which, supposedly, pave the way to efficient, effective and powerful interactive strategies. An exemplary illustration of this tendency is the collection of papers by Charles J. Margerison (1988a, 1988b, 1988c,1989a, 1989b, 1989c) which follow the publication in 1987 of two books on management skills. The author's repeated reference to the relationship between good management and communication skills is a fully justified one, except that the problem is not tackled at its roots, - i.e. by focusing on the manifestations of language and behaviour in context. Rather, the complexity of the issues at stake is pre-empted by administering easily applicable step-by-step rules suitable for every situation. There is no doubt that *some* of the rules are going to work for *some* of the managers who read this literature. But are rules "testable" after all? How do we ever know whether they 'work' or not?

Recent publications are a mix of more or less comprehensive manuals on communication skills and practices such as Stanton (1990) and Katz (1989), or works developing from the more interesting perspective of organisational studies, such as Clampitt (1991) and Francis (1987). Katz promisingly acknowledges that "[i]n business, communication is all" (p.2) but he later confuses the reader with: "Communication in business is an exchange of ideas, messages and concepts, relating to the achievement of set commercial objectives" (p.4), followed by the usual list of rules. Equally unclear are Clampitt's fleeting remarks on the role of language in communication. In a book described by the Forword as "original and interesting" (p.vii), the author attacks the common belief that words are only "containers of meaning" and rebuts the notion that "meanings are developed in a unique vortex that includes the word used, the context of the utterance and the people involved". The rather vague notion of the "vortex" is followed by the reminder that "words do not so much act as containers of meaning as they act as useful, although usually sloppy, stimulators of meaning." (p.7) Again, the cryptic "stimulators" metaphor can at best lead to erroneous conclusions on the nature and functions of language.

On a refreshingly different note, McCall & Cousins (1990) put language in the foreground, starting from the subtitle of the book that reads "The language of effective management". Language matters figure prominently both in the subject index and in the references and comments throughout the book, which is an unusual (in the field of business communication) blend of psychology, sociolinguistics, social anthropology, marketing, organisational studies and management. These converge into a long overdue multidisciplinary approach to communication. The preface leaves no doubt about the authors' "alternative" view of communication:

"Our concern is rather with how people create meaning, the politics arising from different meanings; and the behaviours and strategies people can employ to handle these political situations. It is about influence, persuasion and negotiation."

In order to achieve these ambitious aims, the manual-type approach is hardly suitable. The authors have this to say on the subject: "We make no apologies for basing practical communication skills in *conceptual frameworks*. The view that everything should be distiled, simplified, *categorized in 'how-to-do-it' terms*, - and, by implication, *trivialized* - is not one to which we subscribe." (my italics)

In the Eighties there have been other promising exceptions in the literature on communication in business contexts. Knowledge of the communication processes in bargaining has received few contributions from social psychologists who have tended to deal with bargaining "almost exclusively as a bidding process and have concentrated on the magnitude and timing of offers and counteroffers. (Galinat & Muller 1988)

A content analysis of an experimental bargaining session has been carried out by Galinat and Muller using eight "theoretically derived" categories: 1) attempted antagonistic influence, 2) attempted cooperative influence; 3) strategic question, 4) justification, 5) self-disclosure, 6) concession, 7) concession refusal, 8) other.

The authors' concern with studying "the effects of bargaining strategies on the communication responses" is apparent from the analytical categories that they select. Two major criticisms apply to such an approach: a) the use of simulated data, so common in the experimental psychological tradition; and b) the use of yet another coding scheme. Although I agree in principle with Putman and Jones (1982a,275) that "investigators must standardize category systems and use them to explain as well as to describe action", this alone does not justify the still widespread use of simulated data. Moreover, Galinat and Muller employ Lag sequential analysis which enables the study of "[c]ritical questions regarding the sequencing and timing of messages (Putman and Jones,275) but they do so only on the buyer's messages, which is bound to generate an incomplete picture of the interaction.

The relevance of "relational communication" (Watzalwick et al. 1967) - i.e. "how the message is intended" - is discussed by Soldow &

Thomas (1984), who contend that its influence on individuals is variable and its effects can be *observed* and *measured*. Of particular interest to this thesis is their application to the analysis of the same interaction of a relational coding scheme, developed by Rogers and Farace (1975), and of a content coding scheme, as applied in Marsh (1972).

The relational scheme consists of two coding stages. During the first stage, three digits are attributed to each turn: the first identifies the speaker, the second is what the authors mistakenly label as the "grammatical form" (e.g. assertion, question, noncomplete, talk-over) and the third is the "response mode relative to the previous message" (e.g. support, answer, order, disconfirmation etc).

DIGIT 1	**DIGIT 2**	**DIGIT 3**
SPEAKER	GRAMMATICAL FORM	RESPONSIVE MODE RELATIVE TO PREVIOUS MESSAGE
1. salesperson	1. assertion	1. support
2. customer	2. question	2. nonsupport
	3. talk-over	3. extension
	4. noncomplete	4. answer
	5. other	5. instruction
		6. order
		7. disconfirmation
		8. topic change
		9. initiation/ termination
		0. other

(from Soldow & Thomas 1984, 90)

Digits two and three enable the definition of "relational control processes" in the second coding stage. The concept of control is simplified as dominance/deference, represented by an upward pointing arrow and a downward pointed arrow, respectively. This fourth element is then included in the coding scheme which, when complete, would look like this:

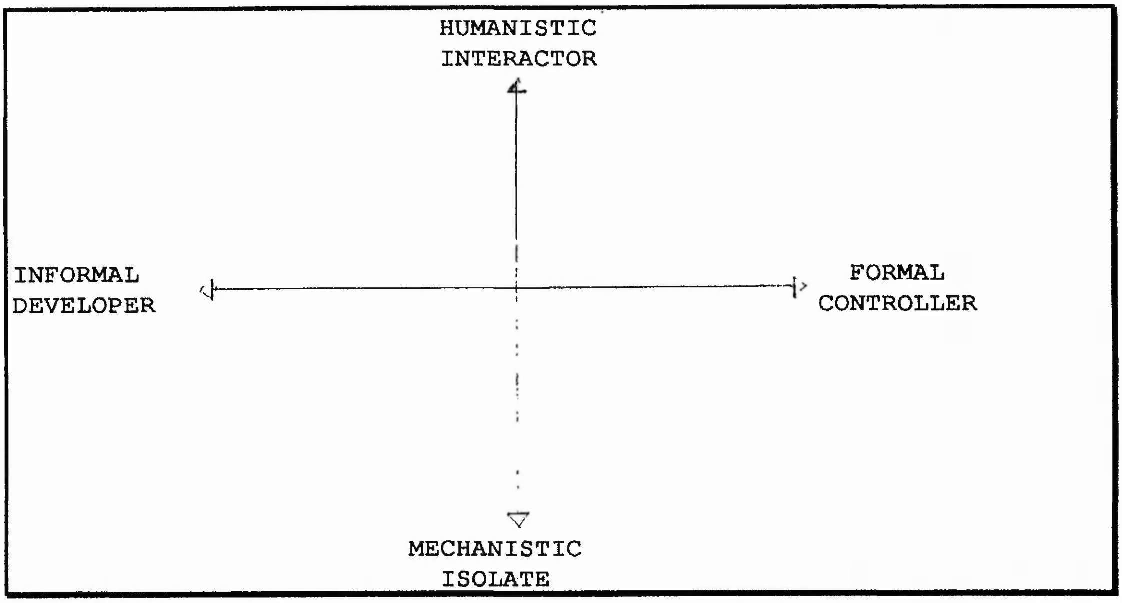
	digit 1	digit 2	digit 3	dominance/deference
a)	1	2	9	↑
b)	2	1	7	↑
c)	1	1	1	↓
etc.				

(adapted from Soldow & Thomas 1984,91)

Although the extra information provided by the relational control digit gives this coding scheme an advantage over content-only schemes, there are major drawbacks such as the crude definition of control, the misleading taxonomy of "grammatical forms" (including questions and talk-overs...) which could be better described as "speech acts", and the complex issue of turn-taking. How would such a scheme cope with a turn such as "mhm..." or a silence? And what about multiparty talk?

On a positive note, it should be emphasised that any proposition that questions a mechanistic view of human interactions, such as "relational communication", should be seen as an advance in the application to business of complementary, and possibly more powerful, analytical tools than those made available by the positivist tradition.

In a manager's daily routine, communication represents a substantial 60-80% share, according to observations of practising managers conducted by, among else, Mintzberg (1973,1975) and Kotter (1982). Prompted by the limited available knowledge of managerial communication patterns, Luthans and Larsen (1986) carry out an observation of 120 managers in five organisations from which they derive an empirical two-dimensional communicator model:



(from: Luthans & Larsen 1986,175)

The authors lay claim to methodological innovation in that, unlike in previous studies, they employ a mix of qualitative (observation and self-reports) and quantitative (canonical correlation analysis) tools which confer a higher degree of reliability on their findings.

The derived model is crude and, its authors admit, does not take into account important contextual variables which they group together under "organizational effects", nor does it make allowance for the bias introduced in communicative behaviour by corporate rank. These distortions may be partially redressed by privileging qualitative research tools in the early stages, thus enabling a more accurate picture of contextualised verbal and non-verbal behaviour to emerge for further quantitative analysis.

A more sophisticated (theoretical) framework is discussed in Donnellon, Gray & Bougon (1986). As in the previous work, both qualitative and quantitative tools are employed but in this particular study the latter are dominant. In fact, ethnographic research precedes theoretical sampling, which is followed by propositional and linguistic analysis. The four "communication mechanisms" that the authors identify have strong pragmatic overtones: metaphor, logical argument, affect modulation and linguistic indirection:

MECHANISM	**COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOURS**
metaphor	"A is B" (implicit or explicit)
logical argument	premises, inferences, conclusions
affect modulation	lexical choices that are symbolic, affect or emotion-laden; agitated non-verbal movements and postures; high pitch; fast tempo
linguistic indirection	passive voice; intransitive syntax, broad, imprecise terms; imperative mood; elliptical explanation; suppression of known qualifications.

(adapted from Donnellon et al.,47)

Their contention is that despite limited shared meanings, organised action can and does take place, and they illustrate, through extracts of discourse, how communication links meaning and action.

A major drawback of their work is the use of students as corporate actors: personal past experience strongly suggests that there are fundamental differences between real-life organisational discourse practices and apparently similar situations re-created in an artificial environment.

Written organisational communication has also been studied recently (Fiol 1989) by means of narrative semiotics. Letters from CEO's to shareholders have been submitted to textual analysis in order to prove the correlation between the strength of firms' interdivisional and external boundaries and the number of joint ventures.

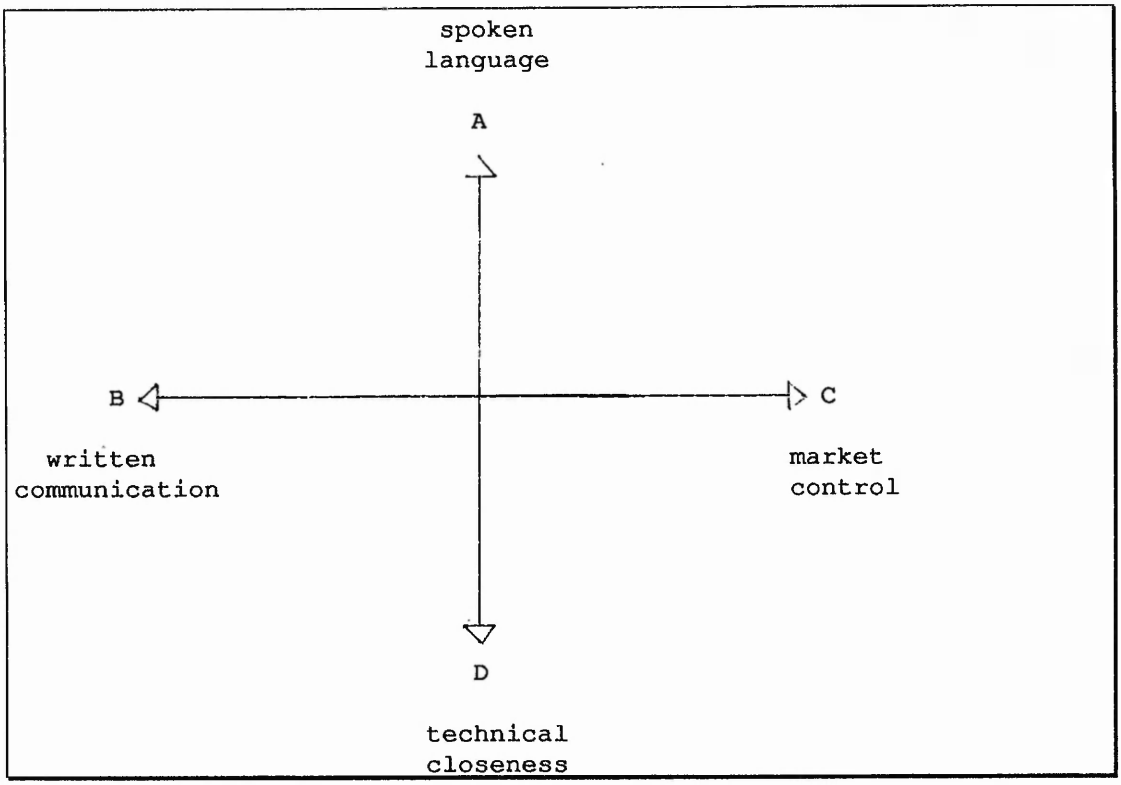
The author defends her methodological choice by saying that "[s]emiotics exposes underlying oppositional values through the identification of structural invariants" and she is not therefore concerned with "the multiple variations of the behaviors themselves or their performance implications". (p.298) Therefore, semiotic analysis differs from content analysis, - with its focus on "individual statements or actions", - in that the interpretation of data is based on "an a priori value schema". Thanks to this approach, Fiol can claim to have exposed "the simple belief patterns" contained in the CEO's letters and made it available for further research.

Possibly the most uncompromising programmatic statement in favour of a multidisciplinary approach to the study of communication in business contexts is that launched by Holden (1987) at the end of his survey on the (minimal) impact of language issues in management studies: "Those scholars of language who would like to see this particular balance redressed should aspire to nothing less than the incorporation of linguistics into the management sciences." (p.244)

As a linguist by education, and currently a marketing scholar and consultant, Holden is in a particularly apt position to make such claims, his experience constituting a bridge between disciplines considered until recently incompatible. By making use of the ethnographic concept of "communication competence" Holden (1989a) is able to marry insights from (international) marketing with the acknowledgement of the role of language (which includes foreign language capability) in successful intrafirm interactions.

It should be emphasised that Holden's "communicative competence", reminiscent of the ethnographic "communicative competence" as defined by Hymes (1978) and Gumperz (1982a) is not the equivalent of foreign language proficiency but it is rather an "organisational attribute" based on the recognition that there is " a relationship between language behaviour in general [...] and the achievement of closeness in a given market environment." (p.6)

Therefore, as for ethnographers such as Saville-Troike (1989) language is not the only dimension of communicative competence. As the figure below shows, it interacts with the two context-specific dimensions of "market control" and "technical closeness":



A pragmatic orientation is one of the strengths of this model, being derived from a field study of five British companies engaged in cross-cultural interactions (Holden 1989b).

In the social sciences the general tendency has been away from mechanistic approaches and towards a symbolic-interactionist perspective on communication. This trend began in "the decade of the 1970's [which] saw the overturning of a 'dominant paradigm' of communication from 'outside' and 'above' in favour of a view of communication as a complex network of interactive relationships whose understanding is a necessary condition of 'successful' communication'" (McQuail 84,237).

This brief discussion about some of the perspectives on communication does not aim at comprehensiveness: as argued elsewhere, the literature in this field is vast and encompasses contributions from several disciplines. However, in view of the concern of this thesis with language in the business environment, recent developments in a specific branch of communication studies merit consideration under a separate heading.

2.3 Language in organisational communication.

This section is particularly relevant not only because it outlines a field of studies which this research addresses, but also and especially because many of the methodological controversies currently on the agenda are reflected in the evolving condition of this relatively new field.

Recent developments in the interpretative research approach are well within the scope of this thesis which, using mainly a qualitative analysis, will seek to show how the organisational reality of meetings is constructed through the interaction of language and context.

The emergence of "organisational communication" as an autonomous discipline can be traced back to the Forties, under the early label of "business and industrial (or managerial, or administrative) communication". (Redding 85,p.51) In the Seventies, Dance (1977) after reviewing the definitions of "communication" by communication scholars and theoreticians, concluded that their conceptualisation of this notion is "too loose, indeed includes contradictory components", and further on he adds that "[t]he looseness of the concept of communication is reflected in the looseness of the field or fields identified with the study of communication." (p.20) If the question of defining the boundaries of communication studies is still substantially unresolved, even more open to argument is the definition of the narrower field of "organisational communication".

Roberts et al. (1977) in their synthesis of major organisation theories relevant to organisational communication remark that "communication is the backdrop against which many other organisational behaviors occur" (p.144) and go on to advocate an integration of "communication and other organisational variables". The field of communication has remained productively fluid throughout the Eighties, during which it was enriched by new approaches derived from phenomenology and anthropology. The discovery of the "cultural" dimension of organisations is the source of a novel approach to communication as the complex interaction of meanings and symbols through which reality is interpreted and forever de-constructed and re-constructed by social actors.

The shift in research methodology from the quantitative to the qualitative paradigm has been instrumental to this new perspective on organisational communication. Recent interpretative studies have been concerned with meanings, that is "the way individuals make sense of their world through their communicative behaviors." (Putman 83, p.31)

This is a standpoint that contrasts with the traditional functionalist view of organisations supported by quantitative analyses. Putman is not the only dissenting voice. Weick (1983) explicitly states his belief in the interpretative method, while at the same time pointing out the major drawbacks of contemporary organisational research. In particular, he addresses the issue of environmental determinism: does reality pre-exist or is it a construct? He puts forward three ways of accommodating subjectivity and objectivity since he notes "[d]espite widespread dissatisfaction with both extreme views, little has emerged to replace them". (p.17) The analytical approach of interpretative research seems to offer him a neat way out of this impasse, when he concludes that "[c]lear documentation of how, when, and where reality construction gets started should reveal that subjectivity and objectivity are blended at the start and that their relative influence over understanding varies as *a function of context* ". (p.19, my italics).

The second controversial issue concerns the dichotomy between macro and micro analyses, which, as Weick concedes, is conceptually flawed "since it admits only two levels of analysis." (p.21) Personal experience in work environments seems to support the view that the relationship between "local" variables and "global" variables is worth investigating since "[m]acro variables may index different cultures, climates, norms and values that affect outcomes." (p.20) Action within the immediate context is therefore affected by causes operating in the wider context. This is particularly relevant in cross-cultural organisational study where the "cultural" dimensions can be shown to impinge on the micro-level of interaction.

In his own work, Weick subscribes to the view that rigorous analysis and comprehension of the lowest level will allow extrapolations and eventual understanding of the phenomenon in all its complexity. Similarly, one could draw a parallel between meeting interaction (lowest level) and departmental interaction (higher level) and show how extrapolations from the analysis of meetings could possibly give insights into more complex, intra-organisational networks (see section 6.11).

The question of methodology is a sensitive one in many newer disciplines, such as organisational studies, where the tendency until recently has been in favour of survey methods. Having accepted the fact that "[b]oth labs and surveys, when used alone, mislead us because they do not capture context effects" (Weick p.21), scholars are left with the embarrassment of justifying their chosen alternative methods. One of them , "affirmation as a mode of enquiry", appears to be an attractive proposition for researchers employing observational techniques. Briefly, "instead of stating a hypothesis and attempting to falsify it, we should commit ourselves to a belief and in our research see if we can muster the evidence to support it." (Weick p.22) One of the dangers of this type of approach is the generation of what sceptical scientists would call "common sense" or "irrelevant" results. The reasoning that they follow is that "unsound" (= non-quantitative) research methods will inevitably produce at best unreliable results, or at worst, meaningless ones.

Social science seems set to accept the challenge to focus on the "ignored reminder", and getting "people with bounded rationality to notice things that they *overlook* at some peril". (Weick p.24) Attention to and investigation of the unsuspectedly relevant pattern(s) of action emerging from daily interaction in the organisation will generate results of value also for practitioners.

The quest for "useful results" is not a novel idea. In fact, the same appeal was launched only last year by *a linguist* (van Dijk 1990) to *language scholars* to venture into potentially rich fields such as business discourse and demonstrate the importance of language to the creation and unfolding of corporate manifestations.

2.4 Language in business negotiation.

In this section I shall distinguish between formal negotiations, where I shall review the literature selectively, and Negotiation as the essence of social order. As Strauss poignantly put it:

> *"[n]egotiation is not merely one specific human activity or process, of importance primarily because it appears in particular relationships (diplomacy, labor relations, business transactions, and so on) but is of such major importance in human affairs that its study brings us to the heart of studying social orders. [...] a given social order, even the most repressive, would be inconceivable without some forms of negotiation. The implication is that social orders are, in some sense, always negotiated orders".*
>
> *(Strauss 1975,234-5)*

The choice of negotiation as an access point to the literature on the subject matter of this thesis is justified on both ideological and practical grounds. Negotiation is considered as central to social order while it is also a very common business activity which, in its pragmatic realisations, is but a specific kind of "meeting" or "encounter", or "interaction point". Managers do "negotiate" most of the time when they are involved in verbal exchanges with their peers, subordinates, or superiors: they negotiate not only the terms of future actions, but also re-negotiate meanings and identities, personalities and positions and they do this mostly through verbal and non verbal behaviour. In fact, verbal behavior could be seen as the dominant mode, while non verbal behaviour acts primarily as a complement and/or supplement of the linguistic performance.

Being cynical, one might suggest that "negotiation" is an attractive sounding label that justifies so much research effort being invested in the subject. By contrast, the modest "meeting" has (erroneously) been dismissed as something ordinary, that everybody can tackle with little or no advice. It is probably this "ordinariness" that has contributed to the image of meetings as routine, general and boring events that ought to be relegated to the bottom of the list of favourite topics by management researchers.

However, there is at least one kind of meeting that has attracted much attention: business negotiations. My contention is that the high "visibility" of variables such as money, power, influence, status in, say, sales negotiation, does not imply that only in that kind of negotiation is the interaction influenced by the power relationships existing between the participants, or by the scope of (declared and undeclared) vested interests, or by the political implications of the outcomes. In fact, the reverse is almost always true. Any form of Negotiation and, by extension, of business interaction, is affected by personality-related and contextual variables that operate more or less overtly and the knowledge of which is unevenly shared by the participants. The dominant variable is *uncertainty*, the consequence of incomplete knowledge, and most of the prescriptive texts on negotiations predictably concentrate on eliminating the possible causes of uncertainty by dictating the "do's" and "don'ts" that ought to place practitioners in the winning bargaining position.
However, this is a succinct and partial judgement on a large body of literature which cannot be fully explored in this limited section.

The publications on negotiation that are most likely to have been consulted by business people and business students alike and which have had direct influence on actual work practices during the last two decades are the large body of textbooks and journal articles that have become available on the subject. A selective survey of these materials has revealed little of interest to the discourse analyst. Seldom does language receive more than a fleeting mention. However, bearing in mind the considerations on negotiations being a subset of the "meeting" construct, one cannot ignore possible developments in this section of literature that may have a bearing on research on meetings.

In 1970 professional negotiators rated the following seven characteristics as the most important in negotiation: 1) planning skills; 2) clear thinking in stressful conditions; 3) general practical intelligence; 4) verbal ability; 5) knowledge of the product; 6) personal integrity; 7) ability to perceive and exploit power (Karrass 1970,36). Despite the open-ended nature of this list, it is traits 4) and 7) which are of particular relevance to this thesis.

"Verbal ability" takes on further significance when Karrass introduces the notion of "message": "everything that goes on in a negotiation is a message, including the conference itself. A message may consist of commitments, threats, moves, and questions as well as non-verbal behavior" (p.81). Karrass's "message", then, includes the categories of verbal and non-verbal behaviour. Unfortunately, this conceptualisation is not developed any further, and his treatment of power is unsatisfactory, too.

The variable of verbal behaviour receives further attention a few years later, when Nothdurft (1974) underlines the importance of factors such as breathing, the pitch of the voice, the choice of words and the need for improving listening. He also adds that questions, rather than statements, are tactically important for the control of the discussion.

The Eighties have registered a considerable widening of the perspectives on negotiation, with verbal and non-verbal behaviour, and power relationships, being recognised as playing precise roles in the negotiating process (Scott 1981, Atkin 1983 and Wall 1985). Words become "the primary instruments of reaching the opponent's main arteries and gaining information, the opponent's senses of hearing and seeing" (Ilich 1980,91).

Wall (1985) is concerned that negotiation should not be thought of as a decision-making process, contrary to a certain tradition that has treated the two concepts as synonyms. He maintains that "people can make decisions without negotiating, and they can negotiate without making decisions" (p.133) This controversial conclusion must have far-reaching implications for further research, especially if combined with the author's views on power. Wall contrasts the effects of power and uncertainty on the promotion of negotiation and establishes that there is an inverse relationship between the degree of power that the parties can command and their will to negotiate. It will be interesting to see how these observations apply to business meetings other than negotiations since it appears from my data that, indeed : a) not all meetings are decision-making interactions (see section 6.8); and b) lack of power adversely affects discussion proceedings (see section 5.3).

From the psychological literature on negotiation, the "interactive model" introduced by Druckman (1977) according to which "under certain conditions, particular 'person' variables influence behavior when these are not moderated by role demands" (p.29) is one of the most promising developments for a discussion of the pragmalinguistic components of negotiation. Druckman points in the right direction when he stresses the necessity of analysing negotiation "in terms of actors and interactions, power and interests" (p.42).

The cross-fertilisation between sociology, psychology and linguistics has since generated new approaches whose methodologies and findings have shed light onto unknown facets of social interactions. Although Rubin and Brown (1975) in their seminal work discuss dependent variables used in experimental studies in the attempt to quantify bargaining effectiveness, it is the relevance of their *independent variables* (structural context, parties' behaviour, interpersonal relationships and influence strategies) that are most relevant to this study. I shall take each in turn.

Under the heading of "structural context" Rubin and Brown examine the "social, physical, and issue characteristics of the bargaining situation" (p.41) which include the role of communication. The authors recognise that the availability of channels does not guarantee effective communication, especially in a "conflict-intensified" situation. Furthermore, it is the amount of information each party should reveal and when that is essential to the smooth running of the interaction. If the quality and quantity of information exchanged is inadequate, the parties' reaction may be one of mistrust and suspicion, leading to "communicational isolation" (p. 92).

On the relevance of non-verbal communication in particular, Rubin and Brown review laboratory simulations run in the Sixties and early Seventies that suggest that the absence of visual contact does not affect negotiation effectiveness to any great extent while elimination of or interference with the verbal message is likely to damage the negotiation process. Like much of the earlier literature on negotiation, this approach to communication through negotiation is mainly concerned with the dependent variables, such as outcomes of business interactions, as real measures of achieved (or perceived?) effectiveness. Communication is seen as *a means to an end* - the successful negotiation - and little effort is spent on describing and analysing the actual forms and contents of the verbal (and non-verbal) "message".

The discussion on the second independent variable, the negotiators' behaviour, is one that owes much to personality psychology and social psychology and it is not directly relevant to this thesis. It will suffice to say that numerous experiments have been conducted to assess the influence of background and personality variables on the negotiation process.

"Interdependence", the bond between the parties involved in the business interaction, is the third independent variable that Rubin and Brown examine in their monograph. One of the three parameters that characterises the authors' conceptualisation of interdependence is the distribution of power. The actual or perceived status of the parties and variations in the reward structure and payoff matrices have been found to affect power distribution. The conclusion from many experiments is that a balance of power between the parties tend to promote negotiation whereas unequal distribution of power favours exploitative behaviour.

The fourth independent variable, influence strategies, is concerned with the realisation of power. A negotiator can either attempt to show his solidarity ("referent" power) or his superiority ("expert" power) to make his offer acceptable. Rubin and Brown propose four other forms of influence following French and Raven's (1959) analysis of social power: a) "legitimate" power, b) "informational" power; c) "coercive" power; d) "reward" power (pp. 261-2).

Rubin and Brown analyse the pattern of "moves and countermoves" through which negotiations develop, paying particular attention to concession making, promises and threats. Paralinguistic patterns of behaviour remain a largely unexplored area that using interpretative tools could lead to a descriptive framework, and in turn, to valuable theoretical developments.

Following a quantitative analytical approach, the Conference Process Analysis (CPA) of real life negotiations is introduced as an "objective" descriptive tool to be used for analysing both simulated and real-life negotiations (Morley and Stephenson's (1977). According to Morley and Stephenson, negotiation is "any form of verbal communication, direct or indirect, whereby parties to a conflict of interests discuss, without resort to arbitration or other judicial processes, the form of any joint action which they might take to manage a dispute between them" (p.26).

In common with Rubin and Brown, Morley and Stephenson highlight the "conflict of interest" and "the joint action", but unlike Rubin and Brown, they identify in negotiation a form of communicative behaviour in which the verbal component is dominant. Briefly, CPA divides negotiation into "acts", each containing "one single thought" and described according to a list of mutually exclusive categories under three dimensions: mode, resource and referent. The authors acknowledge the influence on their method of procedures described by the literature on problem-solving groups; but they claim that their categories have been specially developed to tackle the verbal complexities of negotiations (p.185). CPA claims to enable the description of "the changes over time in the balance between the interpersonal and interparty forces involved" (p.186). The results of this analysis show that 'successful' negotiations are characterised by stages which are not present in 'unsuccessful' negotiations.

Although I would disagree with certain prescriptive assumptions underlying both Douglas and Morley and Stephenson's works, the CPA's descriptive potential deserves a detailed examination.

Morley and Stephenson were not the first to propose a coding system for interactions within groups. In fact, in their description of CPA they refer to Bales's (1950) "Interaction Process Analysis' (IPA) and Longabaugh et al's (1966) 'Resource Process Analysis'(RPA) and they acknowledge that "while the categories used in CPA are organised according to his [Longabaugh's] principles of RPA, they are applied to the same basic units as those of Bales's IPA" (p.191).

CPA's basic units or "acts" each convey a "single thought", that is a simple sentence containing a subject and a predicate. Each act is coded by means of mutually exclusive categories within a three-dimensional model, consisting of Mode, Resource and Referent. Under the Mode dimension (how information is exchanged), "acts" can be classified as "offer", "accept", "reject", or "seek" (1) . The four main subcategories of Resource (what kind of information is being exchanged) are 'Structuring Activity', 'Outcome Activity, 'Acknowledgement' and 'Other Information'.

What differentiates IPA and RPA from CPA is Morley and Stephenson's third dimension, Referent (which is being described as the information being exchanged), introduced to cater for the distinction between interpersonal and interparty interaction.

(1) Very similar categories can be found in Murray's TN model of office communication reviewed in Ventola (1990) and quoted in section 7.3.

The claimed advantages of CPA are: a) common-sense orientation of its categories, all derived from noting interaction's components; and b) the potential for expansion implicit in the model. The existing categorisation offer ample scope for further additions, thus increasing the overall descriptive power of the model (p.194). Morley and Stephenson's analysis of both simulated and real-life negotiations using CPA does generate noteworthy results in the Resource and Referent categories, which are the categories that the authors specifically designed to describe negotiations.

The main contribution of Morley and Stephenson's work to the analysis of the negotiation process is their shift of emphasis from what they call "political and economic models of bargaining" - developed within the international relations and the industrial relations traditions - to a functional communication model based on empirical categories.(p.285)

More recently Putman and Jones (1982b) indicate that an expanded Bargaining Process Analysis (BPAII) coding system, based on Walcott and Hopmann's (1975) BPA, is capable of dealing with up to 25 different discourse categories. While the degree of sophistication is increasing, it is doubtful that discourse practices in negotiation can be accommodated within rigid models.

Donohue et al. (1984) criticise both BPAII and CPA on two grounds: a) neither can deal with the "correctness" of utterances, i.e. "how each utterance attempts to deal simultaneously with the prior utterance and with the subsequent utterance"; and b) neither can give an account of the interrelationships between communication tactics and strategies. Their own coding system uses twenty-six variables, of which twenty are "tactic indicators" and six are

"strategy indicators". Their data are a mix of simulated and authentic data but according to the results of fifty-two T-tests (13 df) they are comparable. In order to identify the overall strategic patterns, Lag sequential analysis was applied, which unlike in previous investigations, had to cope with the double coding of each utterance (cue-response). The results confirm that Donohue et al.'s coding system is better than BPAII at identifying "the strategic use of tactics over time because the tactics are organized conceptually by their underlying potential strategic impact on the opponent's position".(p.423)
Similarly, the double coding is "critical to capturing the essence of mixed-motive communication events" where competitive and cooperative elements must coexist if an agreement is to be reached. The use of mixed data shows that in authentic negotiation the parties use different communication tactics than those of simulated negotiations, resulting in more complementary roles. On the strength of this finding, the final recommendation is for a widespread use of authentic data "when trying to understand how actual bargaining communication tactics are used by negotiators."(p424)

Serious reservations should also be expressed about the use of empirical evidence from simulations and laboratory experiments which do not use authentic data. The linguistic performance of human subjects operating in contrived settings is bound to be affected in ways that are not always measurable or even predictable; therefore, the biasing factors can never be satisfactorily measured or even isolated. However, the other major shortcoming of the social-psychological approach is its main concern with the outcomes of negotiations rather than with the actual process, which probably explains the dearth of research in, among other things, the communicative dimension of negotiation. And while research into the cognition and behaviour aspects affecting negotiation should be encouraged, it is time that language, the medium through which these and other dimensions are realised, is given the necessary prominence.

2.5 The meeting and its language.

Johnsson (1990) proposes that: "Face-to-face contacts [are] the unbeatable methods to create real two way communication" and he elaborates further thus: "Indeed, all other contact methods can be considered only as substitutes for person-to-person contacts." (p.318) If person-to-person interaction is prototypical dyadic communication, so meetings are the prototypical form of multiparty communication. The characteristic shared by both encounters is the face-to-face quality, a quality that is central in the negotiating and bargaining processes dealt with in the previous section. But while negotiation is a frequently examined topic in the business literature, meetings are only mentioned on the list of managerial communication activities (Johnsson 1990, Stanton 1990, Mintzberg 1973, Katz 1989) or they are the topic of legal manuals (Shaw & Smith 1974, Newport 1944, Crew 1927) or of prescriptive textbooks (Janner 1986, Fletcher 1983, Dunsing & Hormel 1978, Bradford 1976).
Only one scholar has so far taken up the challenge of investigating the nature and dynamics of the Meeting. Schwartzman (1986) refers to an earlier survey (McCall et al. 1978) according to which managers tend to overestimate the time they spend in reading, writing and thinking, while they underestimate the time they spend in meetings. The figures for the latter activity are 49% (estimated by managers)

as opposed to 69% (actually observed by the authors). Although even the estimated figure is an interesting one, the results of observation confirm the contention that meetings (whether formal and informal, scheduled or unscheduled) are the essence of managerial praxis and the corporate communication process. On the other hand, a link could be established between the consistency in underestimating time spent on meetings and the implicit or explicit expressions of scepticism or boredom viz a viz this practice registered during my company visits. This consideration may become an important one when trying to understand the role played by meetings in situations of strategic and/or cultural change, where high levels of uncertainty are counterbalanced by the status quo promoting actions such as an increase in the number of meetings at all company levels.

This study lends full support to Schwartzman's critique of the current trend that uses meetings only as *tools* of research. Meetings must be granted status as a key form of face-to-face organisational interaction and as such become the *object* of research. To this end, investigations must be carried out that are aimed at gathering empirical evidence from which extrapolations can be made on the structural and functional nature of meetings in organisations. Although a theory of meetings is still premature, Schwartzman sketches some useful points that could eventually lead in that direction:

"We need to produce field studies that examine what naturally occurring meetings do for individuals in specific organizations, how individuals use meetings in their day-to-day organizational life, and how meetings affect individuals in specific settings. [...] [W]e should also begin to examine relationships between individuals and meetings, and to compare the structure and uses of meetings across organizations and cross-culturally." (p.249)

The way scholars view meetings will influence the methodology used and, consequently, the results of research. According to the anthropological perspective, meetings are seen as rituals or ceremonies, laden with symbolic significance and instrumental to the creation and maintenance of organisational life.

Schwartzman goes on to suggest that in the so called "organized anarchies" (March & Olsen 1976) meetings could become "social metaphors" allowing "individuals to engage in a variety of expressive activities while they appear to be engaged in instrumental behavior". (251) During meetings seen as social metaphors, the individuals' formal and informal relationships are then being reconciled with organisational aspects of life.

The third and complementary view of meetings as devices to maintain the status quo, - "meetings as homeostats" in Schwartzman's words - is particularly relevant in situations of change or crisis as a means "to disguise and yet at the same time maintain organisational ambiguity" (p.252). These three views of meetings are not irreconcileable: in fact, the amalgamation of insights from different disciplines can only lead to a richer and more comprehensive interpretation.

One characteristic is common to all meetings, however they are viewed, and that is language. In fact, in corporate contexts, there would be no institution called "meeting", without some form of verbal interaction. The review of the literature on negotiation has pointed to some of the issues that have been investigated in both theoretical and empirical studies and the relevance of which extends to the discussion on the Meeting.

In a useful review and critique of the literature on the role of communication in bargaining, Putman and Jones (1982b) identify three perspectives which closely match those discussed so far in this study: the mechanistic, the psychological and the pragmatic. All three approaches have shortcomings, especially the first one, which centering "upon the flow and transmission of messages, rather than upon the type or the meaning of information" (p.265) is unable to reveal the complex nature and functions of communication in bargaining. And while the potentially more fertile psychological approach concentrates on "the effects of strategies and tactics" on the bargaining outcomes, the pragmatic approach, with its emphasis on the process more than on the inputs and outputs, seems to offer the best alternative (p.276). However, the authors observe that "research needs descriptive and quasi-experimental field investigations on the communication patterns of negotiators" (p.276) since "both formal and informal bargaining are characterized by the strategic use of informative and persuasive messages." (p.277).

A similar recommendation is made in a later study (Donohue & Diez 1985) that pioneers research in the strategic use of linguistic devices in various types of negotiations. Among the tactics most commonly employed are requests (for information) that the authors suggest are equivalent to the speech act category of "directives". They give the following examples of directives, using Ervin-Tripp's (1976) classification:

1. **Direct Imperative:** *"Tell us what the cost factors are here".*
2. **Embedded Imperative:** *"Could you tell us what the cost factors are here?"*
3. **Need Statement:** *"We need to know the cost factors here".*
4. **Non-explicit Question Directive:** *"Do you know the cost factors here?"*
5. **Permission:** *"May we have the cost factors, please?"*
6. **Hint:** *"We can't figure this out".*

(adapted from: Donohue & Diez 1985,306)

Their claim is that analysis of directives expansions can help understand "how the negotiation of information influences the negotiation over specific outcome proposals". (Donohue & Diez,305) Having stated the key role of information manipulation in competing bargaining environments, they go on to show, somewhat predictably, that this manipulative process is largely context dependent. Four variables in particular are focused upon: goals and interests, negotiation procedures, relational history and topic, with the first variable directly influencing the interaction between the other three[1] .

Donohue & Diez's findings can be briefly summarised thus: the deployment of more face-threatening directives takes place when there is discrepancy in the interactants' goals and when personal involvement is high, and, more surprisingly perhaps, when the negotiation procedures are less rigid and the participants have known each other for some time. The partial use of simulated data in their investigation should be mentioned here as it is a possible source of bias, especially with respect to the effects of the "relational" variable.

Information manipulation comes again to the foreground in the form of companies' "agendas", as a contextual parameter that together with status and business motivation determines negotiation discourse (Lampi 1990). Beside the less interesting and readily available "open agenda", parties bring into negotiations "hidden agendas" which in turn are divided into "shared hidden agendas" and "individual hidden agendas". It is the interplay of these levels of more or less easily accessible information that constitutes an ideal research domain for the linguist. However, Lampi also found that the parties' perceptions of status and business motivation directly influence "what should be

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[1] Donohue & Diez's dimensions are of particular relevance to the framework proposed in this thesis because they include *topic*, a notion similar to *theme* (see section 5.3) and the invisible but active social and psychological component of relational history, which in this thesis emerges not only from the meetings but also from interviews. Similarily, the dominant dimension of *goals and interests* is reformulated in this thesis as the underlying principle that informs all verbal interactions.

discussed", and, I would add, *when* and *how.* Work on internal and extra textual coherence in negotiation discourse shows how "given" and "new" information are more or less clearly spelled out by parties depending on the degree of competition or collaboration characterising the exchange (Diez 1986).

Possibly the most comprehensive attempt to date to describe the strategic use of linguistic devices in negotiations remains the monograph by Lampi (1986). In it, the author adopts tools from both DA and CA, and, more specifically, she subscribes to the view that interactions can only be described if the four levels of discoursality proposed by Riley (1980) - illocution, interaction, propositional content and realisation - are analysed jointly. Micro-manifestations are embedded in "sequences of macrostructure" or "types of discourse" which Lampi identifies as: gathering, chat, discussion and bargaining, where the last three form the phases of the negotiation proper. Lampi illustrates the notions of "floor", "phase boundaries", "initiation" (of a new phase) with examples drawn from naturalistic data and employs the descriptive categories of act, move and exchange, widely used by contemporary scholars, with the intent of showing their potential for strategy realisation. In particular, the functional analysis of acts - reclassified as "discourse markers" and "topic oriented acts" - is fundamental in Lampi's analysis because it reveals the "layers of discourse"(p.87). Moreover, "[f]rom the strategic point of view, the crucial point about acts is that there is no way of NOT producing an act in communication: refraining from producing a verbalized/vocalized act will merely result in the production of a *silent act;* given the negotiation context, *silence* is taken to have strategic significance". (p.207) (my italics)

While discourse analytic approaches such as those examined so far and process analytical models generated by the pragmatic tradition (cf. sections 2.1 and 2.2) all presuppose the "socially organised nature of negotiation talk", research conducted under the conversation analysis mode of inquiry considers factuality, the taken-for-granted, as the object of investigation. So "talking topically" and "talking as a team" are themes employed to isolate the forms in which negotiation is realised through talk. (Francis 1986) The limitations introduced by CA - i.e. talk as a locally managed activity and limited context sensitivity - seems to make this approach less suited than others for research into organisational manifestations.

And while it is the case that both schools agree that "language structure and use are not peripheral to the study of social life but instead provide a central concept for understanding notions such as social organization and social structure" (Cicourel 1980a,2), it appears that so far only certain applications of DA acknowledge that the description of language is enhanced by knowledge of the social context within which forms of talk such as meetings are situated.

Cicourel (1980b) in a critique of DA isolates three models whose common weakness is their use of data as self-contained entities, for the analysis of which the researcher does not "use his or her knowledge of the world". (p.127) However, the "speech acts model" (Austin 1962, Searle 1969, Grice 1975), the "expansion model" (among others: Cicourel 1968 & 1974, Gumperz 1971,1976,1977, Labov & Fanshel 1977) and the "problem-solving model" (Rumelhart 1975), all have positive aspects that can be integrated, bearing in mind that "the study of discourse and the larger context of social interaction requires explicit reference to a broader organizational setting and aspects of cultural beliefs". (p.102)

The author's interesting discussion of the results yielded by applying the three models to the same conversation extract leads him to state that "[w]hat is missing from data-driven analyses is a chronology by the researcher that accounts for the interaction between the materials available for analysis and the kinds of inferences which require higher levels of predication". (p.127)

Moreover, he warns against two common problems faced by discourse analysts: the first is the unruly use of "expansion" techniques, which ignores the constraint that "the subjects under study *and* the researcher ...[are] limited capacity processors of information." (p.129)

The second and related problem is the constant danger of reification "that is inevitable when we insist on finding something inherently meaningful in everything said by the participants of social interaction." (p.129) A possible remedy to these "methodological aberrations" may lie with ethnography which should enable us to discriminate "between occasions of social interaction that are emergent forms of discourse and structured accounts designed to summarize what happened during these previous events." (p.130)

2.6 Language in the professions.

A survey of the field studies published in the Eighties and deriving their data from participant observation and emic description, i.e. ethnographic research, reveals that the use of language data is not as extensive as it could be. (Poole 1991) Despite this, "[e]thnographic research has documented discourse practices in a wide variety of contexts, demonstrating the culturally

organized and culturally dependent nature of language behavior."(Poole, 43) And the "ethnography of communication" (Hymes 1962,1964 and Duranti 1984,1985) shows a successful integration of ethnographic and discourse analytical methodologies.
Ethnography has also contributed to a wider notion of "context" (Duranti & Goodwin 1992) and demonstrated the inter-relatedness of culture and language to the extent that "[i]n some instances, full interpretation of language data has been possible only with access to information such as past events, local epistemologies, or typical patterns of novice-expert interaction." (Poole,42)

While much ethnographic work has been carried out on less known cultures (Ochs 1988, Duranti 1981, Schieffelin 1986,1990), or on educational issues, e.g. discontinuity (Erickson 1987,Ogbu 1987, Trueba 1988, Mehan 1979), and their cross-cultural manifestations (Michaels 1981, Hicks 1988), very little has been written on the ethnography of business settings.
Prus's (1989a,1989b) pioneering works on selling and marketing activities is a symbolic-interactionist analysis of the everyday marketplace activities. The author bases the findings of his *Pursuing customers: an ethnography of marketing activities* (1989a) on 118 interviews with vendors, on personal involvement in an enterprise for three years and attendance of thirty-two trade shows. It is unfortunate that only the buyers' perspective is registered, thus seriously limiting the ability to show how both sets of actors shape their world. Moreover, despite the copious use of verbatims, the discourse is rather indirect and/or "general" (i.e. use of "we", "it" + impersonal construction) and the vendors' profiles remain fuzzy, while they could have been enhanced by biographic and organisational details. A recent collection of papers on the discourse of economics

(Samuels 1990) despite the claim made by the title uses language rather "indirectly", with only one author quoting language excerpts and commenting on them.

It was not the aim of this section to consider all the varieties of discourse analysis approaches, nor to engage in a comprehensive review of the literature on discourse analysis in work settings. Both tasks have already been accomplished, and the reader is referred to Tannen (1990) and Swales (1991) and Johns (1987), respectively.

To conclude this brief discussion on the contribution of DA, some observations should be made concerning the nature of two definitions commonly found in the field. "Institutional" discourse (Agar 1985) - and, to a lesser extent, "professional" discourse (Grimshaw 1989) - is often taken as synonymous with "asymmetric" discourse, i.e. characterised by uneven distribution of power and control among the parties. As far as it is possible to deduce from the data in this study, organisational discourse fits uneasily in the "institutional" category, despite the presence of strong power and influence manifestations that can be shown to operate more or less overtly in the language used. Yet there is no obvious distinction between the "authority" (i.e. doctor, judge, teacher) and the "subject" (patient, defendant, pupil.)

To find a more comparable "genre", one might approach the field of "professional peers" interaction (Grimshaw 1989). In such contexts, actors are deemed to enjoy the benefits of equally shared power, and yet one could think of possible restrictions on the degree of informality and spontaneity being imposed by matters of hierarchy, prestige, influence, i.e. just power.

Furthermore, the literature on the socio-psychological aspects of negotiation (Rosenthal 1988, Bazermann & Carroll 1987, Bacharach

1983, Hermann & Kogan 1977) shows that factors such as, among others, irrational behaviour, interpersonal expectations and organisational politics all contribute to the highly complex nature of face-to-face business interactions.

Given the influence of different contextual and personality variables, the results of previous work on DA in education, law and medicine is of limited relevance to this study. Two theoretical works that deserve separate consideration for the critical and powerful analysis of discourse practices in organisations are Mumby (1988) and Daudi (1986). The first essay analyses the relationships between language, shared meanings, power, ideology and organisational culture. Mumby proposes a "deconstruction" of stories and metaphors as ideology, thus recognising that discourse reproduces and maintains institutional power structures. The author's alternative paradigm of research goes beyond interpretative theories: participatory research is the means that enables the creation of radical discourse practices that challenge the status quo and the systematic distortion of communication through which hegemonic power is ensured.

Also Daudi (1986) explores the interrelations of power, discourse and organisational politics, although the focus is on the theory and realisations of power. Discourse practices, - in the author's words "discursive rules of formation" - are criticised as limiting in that they reduce power to "frozen facts". His critical-interpretative approach generates powerful insights into the wrestling of political actors within organisations seen as "political negotiable entities". (p.159) Despite the book's aim of providing a description of the discourse of power, there is little evidence that the author is interested in the micro analysis of the language of organisational actors. This would have been a source of not only illustrations of his arguments but also of inspiration for future research in organisational communication.

To complete the overview on organisational discourse, it is worth mentioning the interest of social scientists (some of which have already been reviewed in section 2.2) in the language as expression of the "organisational culture". The use of "specific languages" or terminologies in the various business sectors appears to be the most prominent feature of language use. But what are the functions and influences of terminologies on employees' perceptions and on corporate life? A recent empirical investigation has revealed that "[t]erminology which may originally have been no more than a handy abbreviation now fulfils several additional functions: it promotes cohesion within its user-group, helps maintain necessary attitudes among existing members, and instils such attitudes in new entrants." (Taylor 1987,5) Group solidarity and efficiency are among the positive results of the growing adoption of "military models, concepts, and terminologies" in organisational life. In her review of literature used in management schools, Garsombke (1988) found that inculturation through the use of military language is a growing phenomenon. This probably reflects a current general trend in society promoting a "macho" culture as not only a desirable but a necessary response to fierce competition.

At a somewhat deeper conceptual level, discourse styles or tropes have been used in an attempt to make the "various ways in which language mediates between the world and perceptions of the world [...] a primary locus of analysis." (Manning 1979,661)[2] The influence of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche on writing and on qualitative

[2] Evidence of this has been found in both the Italian and the English transcripts (see sections 5.5 and 6.10 on the use of metaphorical language).

research are discussed on the assumption that these tropes "conceal and reveal aspects of the social world."(p.662)

An empirical study claiming validity for storytelling as a means of acquiring and using knowledge in organisations seems to share with Manning (1979) a "phenomenological" view of the world. Hummel (1991) writes:

*"Even initial research into the appropriateness of science and scientific validity standards for managerial knowledge acquisition shows that both analytic science and its standards may not be appropriate for providing the fundamental kind of knowledge and confidence in it that managers need. The knowledge they seek must answer the question '**What is going on here?**' before any scientific attempt at measuring what goes on where and when." (p.32, my embolding)*

Hummel's intriguing paper maintains the importance of story-telling as a management tool. Through this type of communication, managers make sense of their own world for themselves and for the others. And the fact that organisational stories have been found to be fundamentally similar (Martin et al. 1983) shows the significance of the representational and cohesive functions of language as a vehicle for the creation of a (apparently) individual and unique corporate identity with which members can identify themselves.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH AS EXPERIENCE, RESEARCH AS METHOD. ISSUES AND PROBLEMS.

"Persons are language creators who in relation symbolize a shared vision and experience. In fundamental research on the human condition, persons in relation regenerate the use of language, revise and extend its protocols, through cooperative endeavour in symbolizing the ways in which they have extended the horizons of their shared vision and experience."

(Reason & Rowan, 1981,27)

3.1 Framing the subject matter.

The brief discussion on the role of communication in business (section 2.2) and organisational life, in particular, (section 2.3) has revealed not only the state of incomplete knowledge of these topics but also, and especially, the limitations of and dissatisfactions with "traditional", positivist methods of investigation and analytical tools. On the other hand, alternative stances such as Weick's (1983), although convincing in its argumentative strength, would benefit, for instance, from complementing statistical evidence, especially when dealing with language and linguistic manifestations.

The source of the unease of some social scientists in dealing with figures and tables when describing social reality, and the diffidence of others towards "rich" descriptions unsupported by quantitative data, is to be found in their differing epistemological positions. While the former will dismiss the validity of the use of "quantifiers" in capturing the multiform nature of social phenomena, the latter will find the would-be vagueness of words unacceptable. The crux of the matter, however, is the nature of the evidence. Qualitative research based on empirical evidence, such as the recordings used for this analysis, cannot be dismissed as merely a "subjective" exercise. Rigour and formality are the other two tenets that I have borrowed from that stream of ethnomethodology which sought to achieve "a naturalistic observational discipline that could deal with the details of social action(s) rigorously, empirically and formally." (Schegloff & Sacks 1974,233). Furthermore, the empirical validity of language materials for interpreting organisational phenomena has undeservedly been ignored by social scientists.

The task of finding one's own niche on the methodological continuum can be further complicated by the research topic chosen. In the case of this study, meetings appeared to be particularly intractable when first approached. Was this going to be a descriptive work only, however "rich" that description might be? Or could a model be derived from the data that would go some way towards formalising the findings and that could be subsequently applied to the analysis of new materials? How could statistics complement, if at all, the interpretative power of such a model?

These were some of the methodological questions that arose in the course of the design and implementation of this research project. Prior to these phases, and indeed during them, the main question remained the same: could the very nature of the organisational phenomenon that we know as "the meeting" be rendered empirically, bearing in mind that I proposed to look at the "linguistic manifestation" of meetings, with language as the condition *sine qua non*?[1]. The importance of methodological choices is such that I propose to discuss those affecting this study in some detail in the next section.

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[1] In fact, I went as far as to say that no meeting is possible without use of language, even though one might think, as an extreme counter-example, of an meeting between two intelligence agents who, without uttering a single word, can exchange information by means of paraverbal cues: but this is hardly a meeting at all, it is perhaps more of a highly uncommon "encounter" governed by equally specific rules

3.2 "Qualitative research" versus "quantitative research": a false opposition.

In this section I shall provide the background to my methodological choices in the form of a discussion of the approaches to social enquiry which seemed most relevant to my work. It is convenient, in spite of the danger of being misleading, to adopt the common (but ultimately false) opposition of "quantitative" vs. "qualitative" methods to start with.

The former needs little introduction. Stemming from the positivist philosophical tradition, quantitative methods have been widely applied in the sciences, including the social sciences, and rely on experimental or quasi-experimental design, statistical measurements, dependent and independent variables etc. The latter have often arisen in antithesis to the positivist dogma of "objective research", while at the same time purporting to be "empirical". Among those which deserve special attention are: a) ethnomethodology, developed by Garfinkel (1967) with its roots in the phenomenology of Schutz and source of inspiration for conversation analysts (Roger & Bull 1989, Heritage & Atkinson 1984); and b) symbolic-interactionism (Goffman 1971 and 1974, Denzin 1989a, 1989b), with its methodological offshoot, naturalistic interactionism, (Mead 1934) which "involves the studied commitment to actively enter the worlds of interacting individuals" (Denzin 1989a). At first sight, both appeared to be suitable approaches for this study, but a more in-depth examination of their aims and methods revealed some quite important shortcomings. Phenomenology believes that "social action must be examined by the scientist in terms of the actor's own interpretation of his or her action and its motivational background." (Bryman 1989). However, stepping into someone else's shoes to describe the world the way *they* see it begs the question: what becomes of the role of the researcher's own background in this process? Can his/hers be an "unprejudiced examination of the world as it is found in our ordinary experience" (Sharrock & Anderson 1986,7), or, is it, instead, one of the many possible "accounts" of the phenomenon under observation? Perhaps distorting this latter, and I think more truly, phenomenological belief, ethnomethodologists' efforts concentrate on "the examination of the unwitting, without extrinsic motivation, production of the ordinary social object." (Livingston 1987,10). In extreme cases, their obsessive interest in the detail, exemplified by some conversation analysis practices (cf. the Sacks-Schegloff-Jefferson tradition), tends to tie them down to the "local", while at the same time negating any link between local manifestations of phenomena and their social and historic context (but see: Sigman et al. 1988 for an "alternative" view of CA).

According to Denzin, much of Goffman and Garfinkel's work is also ahistorical and non-existential because they "adopt a structural, impersonal view of interactants and interaction. They study 'moments and their men' not 'men and women and their moments of interaction.' (Denzin 1989a,20) Denzin's alternative is interpretative interactionism which offers a seemingly more attractive methodological proposition, in that it is "existential, interactional [...] biographical [...] naturalistic [...] postpositivist [...and] it is concerned with the social construction of gender, power, knowledge, history, and emotion." (Denzin 1989a,19)

The translation into practice of such a sweeping programmatic statement is less impressive. Later in his essay, Denzin describes the steps of the interpretative process, which include extracting the phenomenon from its natural environment, de-constructing it in order

to identify its components, and then relocating it back in the context. Although for analytical purposes some form of "deconstruction" is not only advisable but necessary (see my own "deconstructive practices" in chapters 5 and 6), the isolation of the phenomenon under observation from its own natural environment or context poses serious questions. How can a phenomenon, which is "in process", i.e. dynamic, be de-contextualised without affecting its interpretation? And even accepting the fact that any kind of investigation will tend to "freeze" a historical process for the benefit of analysis, how acceptable is it to talk about "putting the phenomenon back together in terms of its essential parts, pieces and structures" (Denzin 1989a,48)? Interpretative interactionism partially compensates for this deficiency by showing much concern for issues related to language and its importance in the process of understanding and interpreting. In fact, Denzin maintains that "[l]anguage structures and creates the processes of understanding and interpretation. Experiences cannot be shared if the language and the meanings that organize the experience are not understood." (Denzin 1989a,72) Hence the need for the researcher to learn the language spoken by the interactants. This observation is particularly relevant given that the phenomenon that I have chosen to study is; a) realised in a language that is not my native language (in the British case-study) and; b) generated within environments with which I am partially familiar, after a limited number of visits to British companies carried out on the occasion of a previous project.
In the Italian case, of course, the use of my mother-tongue facilitated not only the contact with people, but also the "immersion" in their work environment.

A second observation regards the very nature of the research process. Again, Denzin's notion of an "interpretative process" that *includes* the formulation of the research question is particularly suited to this study. The early search for an acceptable epistemological stance has not only enabled a subsequent, deeper understanding of the phenomenon, but has, in fact, come to represent the first landmark in the process of interpretation. It soon became apparent that the terms "research" and "interpretation" were synonyms.

This critical development also meant that acceptable interpretative tools would have to be found that would assist me in the task of continuing my interpretative journey. Contact with a new (company) environment, more than methodological consistency, oriented my choice towards empirical methods such as observation, fieldnotes, recordings, interviews, etc. After being allowed in, I rejected the temptation to formulate and rigidly adhere to a "research strategy". After deciding that I ought to let events guide the early stages, it was natural to use observation both as a "survival" and a learning tool. Self-awareness and reflexivity were usefully employed to monitor the development of the enquiry: in fact, they became major components of it at all times. My debt to a certain ethnographic tradition should now be acknowledged. Hymes (1978) and his "ethnography of speaking" are a useful starting point but I considered the application of his "SPEAKING" model too limited to develop the full potential of my own linguistic environments. Moreover, my interest lay beyond the definition of individuals' performance, even though Hymes relates speech to the wider socio-cultural context.

Perhaps the single most important development in the early stages was the realisation that research was not something separate from the researcher and that there was no tangible "object of research". Research was my presence among the people that made up that institution and although my interest was generally in interaction, and the language that makes it possible, it was some time before my attention focused on a particular form of interaction. What happened before that, however, was part of the research or interpretative process, because as ethnographers observe "what we take to be the most important feature of social research [is] its reflexivity, the fact that it is part of the social world it studies" (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983,x).

Together with reflexivity, naturalism (Denzin 1989a,21) characterises ethnographic research. Interactionists have elected it as their research method; not only would researchers enter the world of interactants, but they would "attempt to develop theories about interaction that rest on behaviors, languages, definitions, and attitudes of those studied." (Denzin 1989b,7) It is the location of research in "the natural worlds of everyday, social interaction" that informs its naturalism.

"Naturalism", in this wider accepted meaning, is inherent in many other research methodologies, including experiential research (Heron 1981), action research (Sanford 1981), heuristic research (Moustakas 1981), participative research (Brown and Kaplan 1981) and endogenous research (Maruyama 1981). In fact, the researcher's participation in the world that he is researching is a fundamental tenet of the so-called "new paradigm research", which has been proposed as an alternative to naive inquiry and orthodox research and defined as "objectively subjective" research. (Reason & Rowan 1981,xiii). Interestingly, participant observation is criticised under this new paradigm on the grounds that "the researcher retains an 'objectivist' perspective and 'uses' his subject-matter to his own ends". (Reason & Rowan 1981,xx). Although highly desirable, collaborative and participatory research, in the sense of sharing the experience and results of the research and seeking to influence events through it, is an impossibility for many social scientists. My case was not an exception, and naturalism has to be re-shaped by logistic and policy factors.

Having argued that "quantitative" vs "qualitative" research is a false opposition, and having instead defended a qualitative research paradigm that relies, - as in this study - on empirical evidence and rigorous methodology, I shall now turn to Bryman (1989) who calls for integrated methodology and convincingly shows how quantitative data can be combined with qualitative data, while still reflecting the "subject's own ways of understanding the world." (p.145) This integration is not only productive for the research but enables the achievement of a degree of "epistemological harmony" because even if it is true that, as Bryman contends, "epistemology is different from research practice", the researcher should seek to attain overall coherence in his work.

In this study, the use of quantitative data to illustrate the significance of qualitative categories should be seen as an complement, rather than a "proof", of the findings generated in the course of observation, collection and analysis of empirical evidence. The value and validity of authentic linguistic materials is paramount.

3.3 Context: some reflections.

Approaching the subject of context in a brief section may seem either somewhat preposterous or very naive. However, a separate, if concise, treatment of context, identified in the framework by the social dimension, is essential in a study that owes so much to a context led interpretation of linguistic phenomena,

Before attempting to give a definition of context based on the treatment of it in this study, I shall briefly refer to some of the more significant past contributions to its study. From the early notion of context that "must burst the bonds of mere linguistics and be carried over into the analysis of the general conditions under which a language is spoken" (Malinowski 1923,306) and the consequent use of detailed ethnographic analysis, to the more abstract, and thus generalisable, framework proposed by Firth, to the over-simplified three-dimensional Hallidayan schemata (Halliday and Hasan (1985).

Hymes through his SPEAKING model established a branch of ethnography known as ethnography of communication to which researchers like Gumperz and Saville-Troike belong. Hymes' categories are culturally rather than linguistically based and overcome the limitations imposed by the speaker-hearer pair, replaced by the participants.

Within the pragmatic tradition, the language as action approach culminated in the speech act theory of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) where context is seen as as a set of conventions. Sociology has also contributed to the debate in the form of an ethnomethodological analysis of the social order, expounded in the work of, among else, Cicourel and Garfinkel. Minute description of the developing process of order construction as seen from inside is at the core of much ethnomethodology.

In different ways and with varying degree of success, social scientists, linguists and language philosophers have tackled the difficult task of defining what they mean by *context*. Perhaps one of the most convincing attempts to date to narrow down to focus towards a possible definition is that of researchers operating across the disciplines of linguistic anthropology and ethnography of communication. From Duranti and Goodwin's (1992), introduction to a long-due collection of writings on context, I have extracted some observations that seem to be particularly relevant to this study[2] :

a) the context in which participants are embedded is an ever-changing, multifaceted condition, or in the authors' words, "the dynamic, socially constitutive properties of context are inescapable since each additional move within the interaction modifies the existing context while creating a new arena for subsequent interaction" (p.5);

b) context should be interpreted in relation to all the activities that the interactants are engaged in when realising the social order;

c) context should be analysed according to the personal parameters of the actual participants, rather than by imposing an outsider's perspective.

While fully subscribing to these principles in theory, field experience has shown repeatedly that the complexity of context and its description according to the above prescription is overwhelming. In general, research work at companies A and B has been conducted with the constant awareness of the interplay of human agents with/on factors external to them, be they physical or non physical, near and recent, or remote in space or time. More precisely, with reference to Duranti and Goodwin's observation a) change happened to be a tangible feature of both the environments within which I worked, and not only

[2] Duranti and Goodwin's presentation of various approaches to context is a useful summary of the discordant perspectives on the subject that still divide researchers from different disciplines. The authors' own comments are not conclusive, although some of their observations I have found very pertinent to my experience.

as a consequence of interaction at micro-level but also as a prominent feature of the socio-historic context.

As far as point b) is concerned, a limited stay in the field cannot guarantee an accurate understanding of the nature of the many activities in which participants are engaged during the day and of their influence on speech events observed. This was a distortion in the case-studies described here that only more time on site by a team of researchers would have reduced.

Finally, point c) is the most thorny also because of its dependence on point b). Patchy knowledge of an environment and the actors operating within it (and changing it all the time) can only lead to a partial interpretation of their behaviour. The verbal records that the researcher takes can often be the only source of knowledge and therefore interpretation of a particular situated event.

These observations should have hightlighted the gap between the theory on context and the praxis. Cook (1990) in his paper on context presentation, appropriately entitled "Transcribing infinity", concludes on a pessimist note: "full transcription of discourse context is ... a theoretical as well as a practical impossibility". (p.15) And this is because what theory seems to suggest is that to everything that makes a speech environment what it is, and not only the physical setting and its human agents, can be attached contextual significance, in accordance to Duranti and Goodwin's purported "mutually reflexive relationship" between context and talk.

This is in no way meets the requirement for a precise definition of the notion of context; however, Duranti and Goodwin's suggestion for an interpretation through the participants' (rather than the researcher's) perspective may offer a valuable research technique that might eventually lead to a pragmatic definiton of "context".

In this study of discourse in companies A and B I have adopted a mixed approach, linguistic-driven and participant-driven analysis, although I suspect that ultimately also much of the linguistic work is inferentially dependent on my personal contact with interactants. Participants' contributions include interviews and informal conversations, while company literature has only been consulted to derive statistics and dates.

This section began with the hopeful statement that a definition of context could be devised. Only tentatively, I would suggest the following: context is all that participants to an event consider relevant to the interpretation of that event. The researcher's personal contribution to this process of contextualisation is part of her personal interpretation of the event, the inferred nature of which should be openly declared. In the light of what I have already pointed out regarding the research methodology of this study, it appears that this is an a posteriori statement, since I have tended to mesh contextualisation and interpretation, especially in the linguistic-driven sections of my analysis (e.g. thematic development). Although a participant-driven contextualisation process is a potentially attractive proposition in that it shifts the focus of the research process away from the researcher and closer to the interactants, only the test of fieldwork could prove its validity.

3.4 Research or interpretative stages.

In this section I propose to sketch out the history of this study, which is not a chronology of events but is rather a human and intellectual journey. It should be seen as an interpretative tool for the reader in the belief that the researcher cannot hide *behind* her language, but should reveal her stance *through* it.

3.4.1 Genesis of an idea.

The quest for methodological solutions which would enable me eventually to focus upon the "meeting" phenomenon stems from my combined interest in the social world and verbal communication as interacting and mutually influencing dimensions. This is the result of the long-held conviction that social actors, and the intricate network of relations that they construct in their varying roles, are an inexhaustible source of inspiration for the scientist and the lay person alike. When the opportunity presented itself to test both interests and conviction against actual phenomena, and do so cross-culturally, my response was unconditional.

3.4.2 Developmental stages.

In the beginning I set out "to do research". Later on, I began to realise that I, the researcher, and "it", the research, in fact made up a whole, the research experience, which meant accepting that my personality and experience, more than the literature, were determining my understanding of social phenomena. Admittedly, certain ideas and writings contributed more than others to the creation of this self-awareness. However, direct contact with the world that I had decided to observe remained the major source of my analytic awareness. The understanding of methodological innovation applied to this study is not necessarily equivalent to novel tools: rather, it refers to the innovative application of existing tools in order to make explicit and interpret, and, as far as possible, to formalise features of social phenomena that would help explain their intimate nature. My linguistic background assisted me in this, for it enabled me to access a relatively unknown, and often misunderstood, social phenomenon like meetings through the language spoken, in itself an innovative initative. Moreover, very little has been written on meetings, with the exception of the already quoted work by Schwartzman (1986 and 1989).

3.4.3 Fieldwork: negotiating relations.

In the light of what has been said above, fieldwork began as soon as I embarked on research. The physical movement to the site where the social phenomenon to be analysed takes form is only one of the fieldwork activities. And before the former can materialise, the painstaking and delicate operation of gaining first informal acknowledgement and then formal acceptance into that part of the social order must be undertaken. At this stage a "social contract" is silently underwritten by all parties involved to the research that will probably formally end only when representatives of the collaborating institutions receive a written feed-back, in the form of a bound thesis.

It may be significant that formal access-gaining to both companies in fact began through previous personal contacts. In the British case study, the presence of one of the research supervisors "on site" acted as a potent legitimation instrument in an otherwise unpromising corporate juncture (see section 3.5).
The Italian company, like the British one, was struggling in a deep and dangerous crisis which had affected the former aura of prestige that its name used commonly to evoke, whether employees or local inhabitants or the average Italian. And it was the *human impact* of this crisis, so well depicted by the protagonists in their interviews (see section 3.6) that provided a powerful interpretative key to my

Italian experience. This, combined with the re-discovery of the symbolic and relational power of my own language, after ten years of relegation to second language status, contributed to the exhilarating nature of my Italian stay. Possibly evem more important was the necessity to re-learn relation-making (and therefore sense-making) in my own country, a process for which language is so essential. Developing a cross-cultural sensitivity means exactly this: learning to develop means and strategies to relate to people and their world. I assumed that my Italian birth and education would endow me with an understanding of "Italianity" for life. My experience in Italy proved me totally wrong. Rather it demonstrated how in order to survive within a different culture, one un-learns to a great extent her original cultural patterns to make her suited to the new circumstances. A return to the roots will often mean that the acculturation process must be started again, with all the difficulties that involves. Relation-building work it was, but of a very different nature to that required in the British setting. Overall, innumerable people and events came into play which I have intentionally omitted, but ultimately it is the **ways** that they informed and enriched my own stance that matters, and that is what this section meant to convey.

3.5 Case-studies: past and present.

The claims laid by the previous section should not be seen as the defence of an "a-historic" view of research. By its very nature, research is a process that takes place in real-time and meshes with the historic events that it seeks to capture. This study is no exception: the two companies selected were visited at a time of great internal uncertainty and external economic crisis, a time that social scientists would call of "deep change". The significance of the historic juncture cannot be underestimated and in this section I shall place the two case-studies historically within a wider socio-economic context, whilst deferring the description of the immediate corporate contexts until section 3.6. in order to respect the wishes of anonymity of both companies and individuals involved, I shall refer to the Italian company as "company A" and to the British one as "company B", and refer to individuals by job titles.

Company A.: "A. was the sun".

Company A. was founded in Northern Italy at the beginning of the century and remained a family run business until the first external managing director took it over in 1978 and injected new life (and funds) into an ageing organisation threatened by financial collapse. The views of this take-over are conflicting[4] but the fact remains that 1978 marks the watershed between the traditional company - which had created around itself an extremely advanced (for its day) network of social and cultural services from which not only the employees benefited, but the whole community - and the company with a new face and a radically different culture. In 1989 the most radical yet re-

[4] Fond memories of the old days creep into the interviews with employees of the "old guard", the generation that had worked for A. for 20 or more years and had grown to love the company as an important part of their lives. Describing the employees' perception of their company's prestige 20-30 years ago, one executive expressed himself thus: "A. was the sun". Even after filtering out sentimentalism, one is impressed by the older employees' feelings of genuine pride and sense of loss for the "old ways", particularly with reference to the, then unique in Italy, provision of most modern services by the company to its staff (nurseries, schools, training courses, a university, recreational activities). The early company identity is remembered as a powerful and attractive cohesive bond which employees of all ranks had felt privileged to share. In the Seventies, market economy and the need to survive the competition imposed their own rules on company life: the benefits of a futuristic and caring "social system" built around the company gradually disappeared and at the same time several internal re-organisations introduced profound changes in the corporate relationships.

organisation generated a holding company on which depend, directly or indirectly, 220 companies in over 30 countries. With nearly 60,000 employees world-wide and a turnover in excess of 9 billion lire in 1989, A. ranked among the first ten largest multinationals in its sector (1989 statistics from company literature).

Company B.: "Who will feed the ducks?"

Interestingly, company B.'s history shows remarkable similarities with company A.'s. Its origins date back to the beginning of the century, at first under foreign ownership and in 1926 entirely British-owned. Company B. grew to become the largest employer in the area, providing services for its staff on site although in a more limited fashion than company A. The Sixties and the change of ownership coincided with the company's heyday, making it a self-sufficient manufacturing site. Like with company A., fierce international competition meant several internal re-organisations, a joint venture in 1988 and finally a take-over by two of the world's largest concerns in the sector. Some of the employees who lived through that troubled period expressed their anxiety at the extent of the changes and the loss of a common identity, as yet unreplaced in the continuing climate of uncertainty and change. An executive plainly stated that "currently the company doesn't have a culture", with all the implications that follow.

What is relevant to this study, then, is the affinity of feelings, more vocally expressed in the Italian company, between the two sets of employees, who find themselves thrown into an apparently uncontrollable sequence of events for which they are often unable to appreciate the rationale. The consequent, dominant perception of uncertainty and insecurity is most apparent in the interviews but emerges also from the recordings of the meetings that I attended (see section 3.6). But whereas in the British case a good dose of irony is introduced by the participants, I believe, as an antidote to self-destructive cynicism or hopeless nostalgia[5] .

3.6 Materials collection and treatment.

This section will be devoted to the description of the techniques and tools employed for gathering, editing and handling the linguistic materials. All choices in the sense of what to collect and how and what the pre-processing and processing work should unfold ***are part of the research process,*** and are therefore influenced by the interpretation of the social order proposed earlier in this chapter. In a continuous effort to narrow down the scope of research to manageable proportions, choices must be made that will inevitably involve abandoning alternative perspectives, not because they are likely to be less fruitful but simply because a wider scope must be matched by sufficient resources (time, finance and manpower). As I progressed into the study of meetings, an early hunch grew into a conviction, defended elsewhere in this thesis, which legitimated this choice: the very nature of meetings ***is*** language.

Going back to the actual collection, the materials that form the linguistic corpus of this thesis are a selection of those gathered during several visits to the sites. My first contact with the British environment produced only notes on interviewing training sessions which I was not allowed to record for fear that a microphone could

[5] These signs probably reflect widely spread cultural attitudes. While the British are well-known for their many variants of humour, Italians' repertoire will tend to mix the elagic with the utterly self-destructive, generally making little use of innuendos and indirectness in their language. Am anedocte recorded at the time when I was visiting company B. sharply illustrates the British use of irony. In the background of a serious crisis involving job losses and drastic re-structuring, somebody coined a phrase which, referring to a totally peripheral issue (the care of the ducks in the neighbouring nature reserve) masterly picks on, and plays down, the gloom of an uncertain future: "who will feed the ducks?"

affect the participants' performance. (Incidentally, the trainees were being videorecorded so that they could assess their performance and improve on it.) As already pointed out, the intervention of one of the research supervisors was instrumental to my access to a different, less restricted and restrictive environment where controversial issues such as performance related pay were discussed. At this stage my learning about issues and people accelerated considerably. I was allowed to record several scheduled meetings that saw a (voluntary) group of keen individuals searching for the most acceptable ways of assessing the employees' reactions to a highly controversial policy to be implemented by the management. Recordings were accompanied by notes written during and after my participation in the meetings and added to remarks and comments made "off the record" by various individuals. I decided to transcribe the recordings, as accurately as possible but without coding them as a CA analyst would do, except for a speaker's letter code preceding each line. This single operation was meant to make the transcripts suitable for future computer handling.

In the Italian company, I found myself placed within Quality Assurance (QA), sharing an office with a relatively junior member of staff whose colleague (the only female in the department) was temporarily off sick. Mobility within the company was restricted to one of the buildings only and a special permit was necessary to enter other sites, although physically adjacent. The fact of not having a choice of department obviously meant that the meetings available for me to record were only going to be those taking place within that department. Whatever the reason for my placement in the QA department, the substance of my research was going to be affected by this turn of events in a way that I had not foreseen. It became clear that the "cultural" dissonance between the environment in company B.(above departmental divisions) and the QA environment in company A. would translate into different kind of meetings to those I had already recorded, and I grew increasingly dissatisfied with the British materials already available. After the Italian experience, I sought a more "comparable" environment in company B. that would yield the materials that I was looking for. Quality Assurance became the obvious choice, although contact with staff in this department led me on to meetings that could not be labelled "quality reviews" (as in the Italian case) but still had "quality improvement" as the underlying theme. Besides, the new set of British meetings, though still multifunctional, were more formalised and based on "compulsory" attendance.

Under the heading of "treatment of materials" I should include the use of the OCP (Oxford Concordance Package) for the quantitative analyses. This package performs concordances, indexes and statistics, it is quite powerful and versatile and I have used its capacities to isolate the linguistic forms in which I was interested.

The tools employed during the collection and processing phases varied according to the circumstances: a) a standard tape-recorder operated by myself and an external microphone usually placed in the middle or at one end of the table during meetings at both companies; b) a small tape-recorder with incorporated microphone, or a dictaphone, for personal interviews, usually placed on the table by the speaker. The dictaphone proved essential in two cases where individuals were very hesitant to be interviewed and the sight of an intruding piece of equipment would have led to an outright refusal. The recordings were then transcribed, edited and coded for computer processing and a PC compatible computer was usefully employed to carry out much of the searching and selecting operations that yielded the preliminary sets of linguistic forms. Continuous manual reference to the original manuscripts was necessary to interpret these materials, elaborate hypotheses and test them against other materials. Sometimes, at the beginning of the analytical process was a hunch, or a reading on an apparently unrelated topic: how far various approaches intermingled in the course of the investigation it is difficult to tell. On the whole, however, both inductive and deductive techniques were flexibly employed at different stages in response to the issues raised by the materials and in line with the beliefs underlying this study.

An important question that must be addressed in relation to both the recordings and the processing is the degree of my personal influence. This was tangible during the first of every series of meetings and, to a lesser extent, during the first ten or fifteen minutes of every meeting. The recordings reveal a certain stiffness and even embarrassment by some participants who either giggle or crack jokes in an ostentatious manner; this was particularly the case of British meetings, whereas the early Italian meetings, or early phases of them, are characterised by a persistent and unnatural silence that the chairmen initially break with some difficulty[6].

The influence of my presence during the meetings, although decreasing with the increasing frequency and length of the interactions, must have been an affecting factor: from an interview with one of the Italian chairmen, for instance, it emerged that one of the ensuing effects was a dramatic drop in the number of swear

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6 The variety of non-verbal behaviour is worth a mention of its own: the facial expressions and body postures observed varied considerably during the interactions in line with the linguistic behaviour of the individuals, but the variation was more noticeable in the Italian setting, where people turned from still and self-conscious to agitated. Gesticulation played a very active role in defining the Italian paralinguistic behaviours.

words. This in turn leads on to another important issue: did gender play a role? If yes, how important? A cautious guess is that my "external" status was ultimately more important than gender; therefore, while control was exercised over the use of bad language mainly for gender reasons, my presence there as an observer who was going to write about the company and its employees[7] must have been a far more daunting and inhibiting condition.

My influence on the phenomena that I was observing was not limited to the recording act: in fact, a preliminary "editing process" preceded the actual recording when I decided which series of meetings to select out of many taking place in the companies during a given period. Manifestations of the meeting phenomenon were therefore carved out of the social canvass for convenience of analysis, subjected to observation, reified into tangible recordings which are then dissected. Hence, process and researcher became inextricably linked: what is essential for an understanding of the research effort that derives from this interplay is an adequate knowledge of the ideology, i.e system of ideas, and consequently of the choices and tools employed to arrive at a given interpretation of the phenomenon. This chapter so far, and the complementary information contained in the next section, should assist the reader in this task.

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[7] The real purpose of my study was never disclosed to any of the individuals involved: the official reason for my presence was the observation of managerial decision-making processes. Often individuals were unaware of my presence and intentions until the very meeting. With interviews, appointments were always necessary and therefore people were, at least, psychologically prepared for the experience.

3.7 Synopsis of materials: **meetings**

COMPANY A

EVENT TYPE (*)	DATE	DURATION (approx).	NO. OF PARTICIP.	VENUE
QA internal meeting	21.5.91	50 mins.	3	QA meeting room
quality assurance (QA) meeting	21.5.91	95 mins	12+	site conference room
quality assurance meeting	23.5.91	140 mins	12+	site conference room
product development meeting	21.5.91	115 mins	10+	marketing meeting room
interfunctional meeting (observed only)	22.5.91	N.A.	6	QA meeting room
intrafunctional QA meeting (observed only)	22.5.91	N.A.	4	B.'s office

(*) Descriptive notes

QA Internal meeting.

This meeting took place between three QA executives, one (the chairman) being more senior than the other two. The subject matter was a briefing about a new comprehensive quality policy to be implemented by the company in the near future. The decision to go ahead with it had already been taken somewhere else in the company and the chairman was instructed to pass the message to his department that something ought to be done, although the locus of responsibility, the aims and the terms of the implementation were still undefined.

Quality Reviews.

The Quality Reviews are periodical, multifunctional meetings that assess the viability of a new product design or its marketability. The number of participants is quite high, varying from between 15 to 25 individuals. This is due to the what an executive called the "malpractices" of many managers in sending one or more of his/her delegates, who do not have decisional

power and therefore only contribute to the crowding, or having a manager accompanied by one or more of his/her subordinates to answer more technical questions.
These meetings always turn out to be what one responded called "mass meetings" where the even the most skilful chairman would struggle to keep above the proceedings. In all the meetings that I recorded (or sat in on) I can only register the presence of two women, occupying non managerial posts.

COMPANY B

EVENT TYPE (*)	DATE	DURATION (approx.)	NO. OF PARTICIP.	VENUE
Business Action Team meeting (BAT)	1.5.91	45 mins	7	Private office
Business Action Team meeting	10.5.91	70 mins	5	Private office
Business Action Team meeting	18.6.91	60 mins	4	Private office
Business Action Team meeting	26.6.91	45 mins	5	Private office
Business Action Team meeting	31.7.91	90 mins	N.A.	Private office
Business Improvement Programme (BIP) meeting	29.7.91	120 mins	8	QA meeting room

Business Improvement Programme meeting	5.8.91	120 mins	11	QA meeting room
Business Improvement Programme meeting	N.A.	120 mins	7+	QA meeting room

(*) Descriptive notes.

Business Action Team (BAT) meetings.

This is an interaction which, like the internal meeting above, contrasts with the other materials in that it proposes alternative insights into the meeting phenomenon. Its organisation, rules and language are different and, like the Italian internal meeting, is representative of a distinct meeting typology while still sharing the basic characteristics pertinent to the general phenomenon. The subject matter is the design of an instrument to investigate employees' perceptions of a new performance related pay policy. The group is rather small, 4-7 participants and mixed in gender.

Business Improvement Programme (BIP) meetings.

The emphasis of these meetings is the analysis of processes with the final aim of improving their effectiveness by implementing a series of optimising measures. This is move inspired by a drive towards "total quality", the forms of which appear to be different to those encountered in the Italian company. The plan is in its early stages in both companies and my technical knowledge is not sufficient to fill the gaps. Reading the full texts of the interactions, however, makes following the progress relatively easy.
The number of participants is always manageable, 8-10 individuals, predominantly male but with the noticeable exception of a female chairperson.

Interviews.

In this second part of the synopsis, I shall give details of the interviews conducted with members of the QA departments of companies A. and B.. Interviewees, identified by their initials and their job title, were asked to answer questions contained in a written questionnaire[8] .

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[8] All interviews were conducted using a written questionnaire (the same in the two languages) that the interviewees were not allowed to see in advance. However, in order to

COMPANY A

INTERVIEWEE	JOB TITLE	DATE OF INTERVIEW	VENUE
A	QA executive	May 1991	A' office
B	senior QA exec.	"	B's office
C	QA executive	"	C's office
D	QA executive	"	D.'s office
E	QA staff	"	E.'s office
F	QA staff	"	F's office
G	QA staff	"	G's office
H	QA staff	"	H's office
I	QA staff	"	I's office

The choice of a written questionnaire was dictated by methodological expediency rather than preference or need for such a formal tool. Staff in the two QA departments were made aware of the fact that I intended to talk to each of them personally and I felt that in the Italian company particularly, my professionality was being assesssed on the basis of the (formal) tools and techniques that I would employ in appraching the task of communicating with people. Moreover, I needed a common base for all interviews that could cue the interviewees' contributions to desidered topics so as to be able to compare easily reactions and perceptions.

The questionnaire (see appendix 3.1) consists of closed and open questions, the former coming first and used as ice-breaker. The fact

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create a less formal atmosphere and to give them more time to answer, they kept the paper on their desks next to the tape-recorder, while I was sitting facing them, reading the questions aloud and following their progress from my own copy of the questionnaire.

that a few interviewees could not answer these questions is not important: by the time they had reached the "real" questions, the answers to which I was truly interested in, people were relaxed and concentrated enough to engage in often stimulating and detailed reports from which I was able to extract much of the background knowledge that guided the interpretation of the events that I observed.

COMPANY B

INTERVIEWEE	JOB TITLE	DATE OF INTERVIEW	VENUE
A	QA executive	July 1991	A's office
B	QA senior exec.	"	B's office
C	QA staff	"	C's office
D	QA staff	"	D's office
E	QA staff	"	E's 'office
F	QA staff	"	F's office

CHAPTER FOUR: A MULTILAYERED INTERPRETATIVE FRAMEWORK OF MEETINGS.

The meeting form is crucial for organizations because it allows individuals to engage in a variety of enterprise activities while they appear to be engaged in instrumental behavior.

(Schwartzman 1986)

4.1 Meeting as a research topic and the need for a multilayered approach to its study

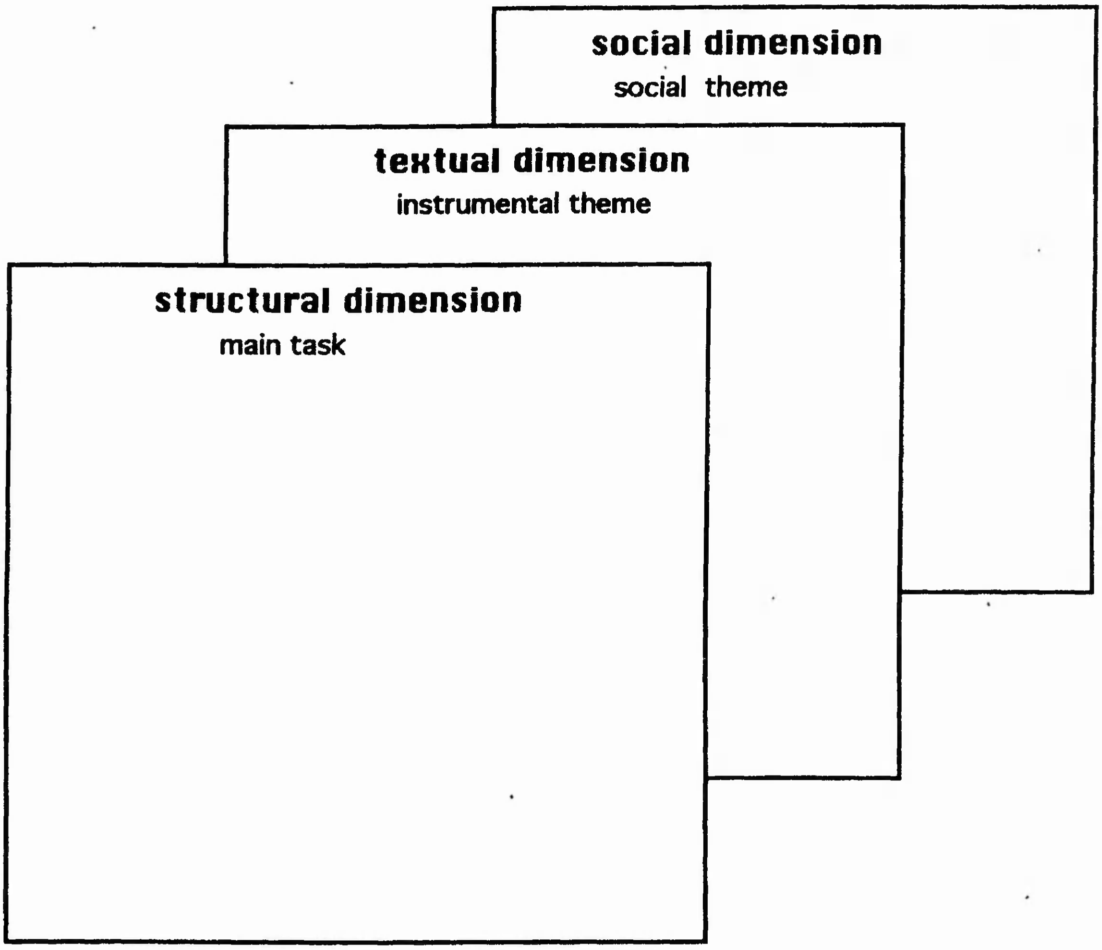
In this section I shall contend that the justification for a "multilayered" interpretative framework lies in the nature of meetings as complex social phenomena. While it may be too early to claim that "meetings can both generate and maintain an organization by providing individuals with activity and with a way to make sense of this activity and their relationship to each other" (Schwartzman 1989,11), my field experience strongly points in that direction. The multifunctional complexity of meetings is further increased by contingent factors in both the English and Italian case-studies. Corporate life is undergoing an irreversible process of change, brought about by causes beyond the control of single individuals. The very "change operators" are perceived as distant and, often, overwhelmed by the course of events. Uncertainty seems to have gripped people's minds and while some employees' personal stake in the company could be boosted as a result, i.e. through promotion or move to a more desirable position within the organisation, the feelings of the many are apathy or, worse, defeatism.

And yet, during meetings there are little obvious signs of impending crisis: meetings become the forums where (apparent) order is created and temporarily maintained, where social and corporate identities are re-negotiated, where sense-making is the first item on the "hidden agenda". As Schwartzman (1988) sharply observes, "[t]he meeting form is crucial for organizations because it allows individuals to engage in a variety of enterprise activities while they *appear* to be engaged in instrumental behavior (author's italics). The "enterprise activities" cannot all be ascribed to the visible, official agenda; in fact, there are more important activities which are contained in the "unofficial agenda", known only to the people within the organisation and therefore difficult for external observers to ascertain. Sense-making, or coherence-building, is one of them, perhaps the single most important one for its essential role in the maintenance of the interpersonal and corporate ordering from which the survival of the organisation's social fabric ultimately depends. This would explain the recent increase in the number of meetings lamented by members of both organisations during our informal conversations: it appears that in response to a crisis, more frequent exchanges at all levels are needed to counteract the negative effects that economic pressures exercise on organisational relationships. Through meetings, individuals grant their support to the organisation and expect the others to do the same; sometimes silent attendance is sufficient to achieve this aim[2] If one subscribes to this interpretation of meetings, the inescapable conclusion is that a linguistic description of surface features of discourse is limited in that it restricts severely the appreciation of the multifacceted nature of the phenomenon that it is seeking to tackle. On this subject, Lavandera (1988) writes:

"[...] the examination of units like utterances, short exchanges, and speech acts and texts in isolation are but intermediate (though necessary) steps in the understanding of the social nature of speech. To obtain a full picture of language in context, we must study interdiscourse relations, in which several discourses are connected by their reference to

2 Silence is the contribution to meetings by what I would label as "shadow interactants", i.e. the participants to some of the Italian meetings who attended (allegedly) in order to assist their immediate superior or colleague on matters of technical nature.

FIGURE 4.1 A MULTILAYERED INTERPRETATIVE FRAMEWORK



The social and textual dimensions can be interepreted through coherence as connectedness (textual dimension) and coherence as sense making (social dimension), bearing in mind, however, that they overlap to a great extent.
The structural dimension will be analysed in more detail in the study of meetings as a genre.
The task-orientation of meetings interacts with the other two dimension by providing the basic communicative structure within the two parties, chairman and group, operate.

the same topic with differences in their schematic organization; intertextual or sequential relations, i.e. where each discourse paves the way for the discourse that will follow it, produced by the same or by a different speaker; and how the social function of a discourse is altered by the ideology within which it is produced or received." (pp.11-12)

Schwartzman (1989) has made the unique move, so far, of bringing meetings to the foreground as a ***topic*** of research. Against this background, I wish to make a further move, which is both conceptually and methodologically significant. I wish to focus on ***language*** as the main medium of interpretation of meetings, and *linguistic* tools and categories as the primary means of investigation. Hence, the need for a pragmatic framework that, far from being imposed on the data, can be shown to stem from it. Moreover, it is essential to consider not only what Lavandera calls the "interpersonal context" but move into the "social context", for ultimately the production and interpretation of discourse at its lowest level, i.e. utterance or speech acts, is dependent not only on the more immediate "interpersonal" environment but also on the wider social and historic one.

The three aspects of a speech event, textual, personal and social have required the construction of a **multilayered empirical framework** (see figure 4.1) where the three dimensions are inter-dependent. The analysis will show how the interpretative power of the linguistic medium, reflecting both the immediate and wider context, enables the generation of (at least) two interleaved layers of meaning, the textual and the contextual. Perhaps it would be appropriate to note that the influence of the social context is less immediately obvious at the first level, with the exception of a noteworthy use of technical language which is context-defined. .

Discussion would not be complete without some reference to the methodological appropriateness of a multilayered framework of meetings which is consistent with a phenomenological perspective of language. In section 3.2 I have discussed the epistemological basis of my choice of methods. Subscribing to a "phenomenological" view of the world, while not excluding a priori the use of quantitative techniques, should privilege a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. And this in order to satisfy the need for a richer, empirically based description and interpretation of the phenomena under observation. The multilayer concept is a pragmatic attempt at capturing at least some of the aspects of the phenomena called "meetings".

4.2 Considerations on the nature of discourse.

After declaring affinity with a "phenomenological" perspective of the world, in this section I propose to elaborate on the impact that such a perspective has on the perceived nature of discourse.

At first sight, the adoption of a multilayered framework seems to warrant the existence of clear demarcation lines between discourse in real time, or discourse as process, and recorded discourse and written discourse, or discourse as product. Indeed, it would be tempting and convenient to consider them as free standing entities capable of being analysed quite independently from one another[3] . But at the same time, when trying to perform a simple search for certain linguistic items such as prepositions or lexemes - a task that even an unsophisticated wordprocessing package will accomplish in seconds - the uncomfortable feeling creeps in that one is not in fact looking at a *speech event* any longer but at a speech artifact. Therefore, once the computer has duly performed its search, the list

[3] The danger is more acute when one is presented with a substantial computer printout of the transcribed version of one meeting or another: the first reaction is one of satisfaction at having been able to enclose a particular speech event within controllable physical boundaries.

of items that streams out no longer belong to the "whole", the "text": they are isolated (hence potentially meaningless) pieces of evidence. And the return to the source, to the "whole" artifact is the first necessary step backwards. In fact, the analytical process, naively begun with an attempt at dissecting the would-be examinable manifestation of the speech event, the transcribed "text", grows into a quest pointing *backwards*. Listening to the audio-recording adds remarkable delicacy to meaning contours and it becomes even harder to justify attempts at removing portions of it. This is particularly relevant when attempting to isolate fragments from multiparty speech events where the intricacies of the interaction defeat simplifying transcription techniques.

The use of video-recordings could bring back also part of the "atmosphere" inevitably lost through audio-recording. Nevertheless, the picture would not be complete even with the support of images. Further back along the fieldwork path, in the quest for elements that help one "making-sense" of speech artifacts, is the researcher's own experience of the event in real-time, coupled with the researcher's personal luggage of "background knowledge". Under this definition, a convenient umbrella word that hides the complexity of one's own intimate world, the filter of values and prejudices actively sifts the verbal avalanche that characterises meetings. Schiffrin (1987) aptly writes about "*cognitive contexts*", which include past experience and knowledge, and "*cultural contexts* through which both self and others draw upon institutional and interactional orders to construct definitions of situation and action." (p.4,my italics).

To summarise, the discourse analyst should be aware of the limitations imposed on her investigative practices by the multifaceted nature of speech phenomena.

4.3 Introducing coherence as a focal concept.

In this section I propose the adoption of **coherence** as a unifying analytical concept on which the linguistic categories of *theme, pronominalisation* and *symbolic referencing* (see chapters 5 and 6) functionally depend. The choice of a principle of **coherence**, of sociological and linguistic relevance, is an acknowledgement of its fundamental role in the construction of the social order and is derived from the understanding of meetings as public forums where individuals make sense of, or interpret, organisational phenomena, thus weaving the threads of social coherence. Efforts at coherence are visible in all human expressions, of which language is probably the highest and most complex. For this reason, after tracing the origins of the principle of coherence to the social world - the **social dimension** of the interpretative framework in chapter 5 - I shall concentrate on its linguistic manifestations, examined under the **textual dimension** of the same framework.

Much of the work on coherence and cohesion, sometimes wrongly treated as equivalent in meaning, is based on the analysis of written texts (eg. Halliday & Hasan 1976). Spoken discourse has made its appearance on the research agenda only relatively recently (eg. Heydrich *et al.*1989). The debate is still very much open as to the nature of both cohesion and coherence in spoken discourse, while English remains the most frequently studied language so far. The concern of this section is not with a theoretical disquisition on either subject *per se*. Nevertheless the extent of their relevance to this thesis make it necessary to provide a concise discussion on recent developments, which, unsurprisingly, concern mainly English discourse.

Goldberg (1983,33) states that "[c]oherence is a matter of relatedness, consistency, relevance, and order." The way speakers achieve coherence is the subject of on-going debate among scholars of various social disciplines. Golberg suggests that linguistic models of coherence based on thematic progression, illocutionary acts or lexico-semantic principles are flawed because "each [...] glosses over the emergent, interactive accomplishment of discourse." (p.32)

Of particular interest is the fact that the author's descriptive framework based on four "moves" is not concerned with predicting the well-formedness of discourse, but rather with demonstrating "how interactants are able to influence the course of talk - how discourse develops, evolves and revolves." (p.36) This notion of discourse as a dynamic process is fundamental to this study and probably much more widely accepted now that it used to be when Goldberg presented her model. This may now appear somewhat outdated, but it is thanks to her concept of "move" that discourse markers such as "y'know" and "well" are given pragmatic significance.

This text-based approach to coherence contrasts sharply with essentially mind-based ones, according to which "interpretation is sense-making, or coherence building. [...] Interpreters rarely question whether coherence exists. Rather, they appear to operate under a will to cohere, an assumption that coherence inheres in discourse and emerges as a matter of interactive course." (Hopper 2983,81-2)

This is a reminder of the extreme position defended by Charolles (1983) according to which coherence is an attribute or mental ability of the listener. A similar stance is taken by Jacobs & Jackson (1983) who argue that sequencing rules alone cannot explain pragmatic coherence. Instead, coherence is achieved in discourse when participants cooperate "rationally toward the achievement or obstruction of the goal." (p.65) Therefore, a mentalistic and goal-oriented perspective on coherence is put forward.

Like Hopper (1983), Sanders (1983) does not question the inherently coherent nature of discourse; unlike Hopper, however, he proposes a less deterministic and more reflexive view of coherence when he says that "[g]iven that it is optional rather than obligatory to actively utilize cohering devices, the point of actively using them is to exercise some control over the interpretation of specific items, and thus the meaning relations among them." (p.76)

The suggestion that cohering devices can be used strategically in conversation is of particular interest to the discourse environment provided by my data and is a definite step forward from earlier test-based models of coherence. As Sanders perceptively concludes: "[t]reating coherence as something that communicators are obligated to bring about is a prototypical case: it treats the tools of cohering discourse as markers that communicators are obligated to use, and to use solely for the purpose of ensuring coherence. Their strategic utility is thus lost to observers and unexplained by theory." (p.80) The adoption of "alignment strategies" by interactants of unequal status is another example of patterned, coherent talk used tactically by the parties (Ragan 1983).

The emphasis on topicality as a source of coherence (Sigman 1983, Crow 1983) is rather controversial, not least because of the lack of commonly agreed notion of "topic". As Crow (1983) says, "[d]efining 'topic' with any greater specificity than 'what the conversation is about at any given moment' usually entails focusing on topic boundaries and shifts." (p.137) And this inevitably brings about a host of contrasting views as to when a topic begins and ends and the ways conversants achieve one or the other.

However, it may be possible to overcome the impasse by adopting a pragmatic view of conversational coherence "the description of which requires freedom of movement from microlevels to macrolevels of conversational organization, from acts to sequences to episodes to intertextual ties." (Crow 1983,155)

The dynamics of discourse are therefore not only *intratextual* but extend to the *intertextual* dimension, thus calling on all potential sources of coherence-making present in the *context*. Crow's perspective allows for a notion of topic realised at the micro level of specific acts while its influence on global coherence can only be appreciated "from the vantage point of the higher order conversational structures." (p.155)

Agreement on the internal locus of production of coherence is also questioned by Sigman (1983) when he introduces external (to the text) influences on topicality in the form of "the information status of social relationships and agenda patterns." (p.183) Sigman postulates three aspects of the information states around which social relationships are organised:

1) taken for granted information,
2) information expected and that must be exchanged and
3) information that must be excluded.

Constraints on coherence are therefore not only internal but also external and imposed by social relationships that define what is relevant and acceptable through "interaction agendas".

On a distinctly different note, Gumperz et al. (1984) point to prosody (intonation, stress, tone of voice etc) as "among the most important of devices that accomplish cohesion in spoken interaction." (p.5) Assuming that the authors use **cohesion** as equivalent of

coherence, it is hardly questionable that a comprehensive analysis of cohesive, or cohering, discourse patterns should also include prosodic coding. But while the detailed transcription required to bring out prosodic cues may be accomplished reasonably quickly on brief speech extracts, the same treatment applied to a corpus of several thousand words would require a team of experts to work on it for weeks on end. Gumperz et al.'s suggestion will therefore be applied parsimoniously either to underline particular effects that might have been achieved by the deliberate use of certain prosodic features, or in the process of disambiguation.

More recently, Schiffrin (1987,6) introduced the notion of "properties of discourse" (Schiffrin 1987,6) such as structure formation, meaning conveyance and action accomplishment. These are probably the best studied properties so far but certainly not the only ones. Schiffrin shows how they stem from traditional concerns with linguistic components of discourse (morphemes, clauses, sentences), the nature and source of meaning and the goal-oriented nature of verbal interaction, respectively. A natural development of this line of thought seems to lead to the need for a model of discourse that integrates these three main dimensions. Interestingly, Schiffrin proposes "coherence" as the underlying and unifying concept:

"In other words, both users and analysts of language build models which are based on a patterned integration of units from different levels of analysis. Such models are what allow them to identify discourse segments with parallel patterns, and more importantly for my current point, ***to make overall sense*** *out of a particular segment of talk - to define it as* ***coherent.*** *"(p.22, my emphasis).*

It should be noticed that Schiffrin's "coherence" is not a global concept but a "local" one, referring, in the author's own words, to "the outcome of joint efforts from interactants to integrate knowing, meaning, saying and doing." (p.29) (but see: Goldberg 1983,31 for a contrasting view).

Schiffrin's model consists of one linguistic structure labelled *ideational* and two non-linguistic structures, an *exchange structure* and an *action structure*. They form the first plane of discourse. The second plane is the so-called *participation framework* where social-interactional contributions by the speakers and listeners are examined; and the third plane is the *information state*, where the interactants' cognitive contributions are being focused on.

I unreservedly subscribe to Schiffrin's view that "[i]f we attempt to analyze the structure (or syntax) of discourse without also analyzing the meaning that is conveyed (both semantic and pragmatic) or the action that is performed (the interactional force), and without also viewing such properties as joint accomplishments of both speakers and hearers, we may not get very far in understanding what quality (or qualities) distinguish discourse from a random collection of sentences, propositions or actions" (p.20).

Using coherence (which I take *to include* cohesion) as the guiding principle, I shall attempt to show how it is realised in the genre of meeting discourse, i.e. what are the cohering tools used in verbal interactions and their dependence from the surrounding social context. In order to identify these, one should be aware of the dynamic nature of discourse on the one hand, and the existence of sources of coherence **within** and **beyond** discourse on the other hand, and the effects of their interplay on the ensuing discursive practices.

4.4 The pragmatics of coherence.

The brief overview on coherence in section 4.3 shows how diverse the perspectives are on what remains a controversial issue in current linguistics. Particularly, if one adopts a functional and process view of language, realised through the interdependent action of the (at least) two levels that I have identified in the previous section, it almost becomes an interpretative necessity to think of a conceptual common denominator cutting across them. Going back to the cohesion-coherence dyad, cohesion cannot be excluded *a priori* as a possible candidate on the grounds that the syntactical level at which it operates severely limits the type and number of meaning realisations that show text-context interdependence. Only recently pragmatics has unveiled the cohering functions fulfilled by what were normally thought of as "cohesive devices". However, coherence encompasses cohesion, which in its pragmatic contribution to overall coherence illustrates the necessity of a move from the *local* to the *global*, from the textual to the contextual[5].

Further proof of the dependency of cohesion on coherence came on testing the comprehension of recordings on naive listeners: the conclusion was that business meeting discourse did not "make much sense". Similarily, the transcripts of the (English) meetings appeared rather obscure to people who neither attended nor belonged to the organisation. These reactions challenge Charolles' (1983) claim that coherence depends on the listener "and on his ability to interpret the indications present in the discourse so that, finally, he manages to understand it in a way which seems coherent to him". (p.95). For Charolles, cohesion is the prerequisite for textual

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[5] Allowance should be made for the fact that those listeners did not, in fact, observe the meetings. However, observation only is not in itself a guarantee that meanings will be clearer: my personal experience is that even native knowledge of the language spoken (Italian) would not have helped if I had not been prepared through interviews, conversations and company literature.

[6] My interest into discourse markers has stemmed from the dissatisfaction with an earlier attempt to search for "cues" of coherence in the transcripts of the Italian meetings, which yielded unsatisfactory results. (see section 4.2).

coherence. However, the "sense-making tests" run on both audio-recordings and transcripts strongly suggest that cohesion markers alone are *not* sufficient to interpret the meanings of the interactions4 . Moreover, if coherence is elected as underlying concept, "much could be gained by systematically examining instances where coherence is not displayed, so as to gain a fuller appreciation of those situations made possible because of a mutually coherent sense of social structure." (Beach 1983,219)

If cohesive devices offer limited advantages, pragmatics has shown promising developments in recent years. In the latest review of studies on discourse markers in English, Fraser (1990) identifies three major types of (pragmatic) discourse markers (*basic, commentary and parallel*) and analyses their syntactical properties. However, the author concedes that the task of how to identify and interpret a discourse marker is a major problem even allowing for the fact the English has received much more attention than other languages.

The debate on discourse markers as pragmatic devices dates back at least to Levinson (1983) and it is relevant not only to the interpretative framework that I am going to propose in chapter 5, but also to my general perspective on language in use[6]. Levinson discusses at length the importance of deixis, or indexicals, as the most common forms that reflecting structurally the relationship between language and context. What is of particular interest to this study, however, is the author's distinction between "discourse (or text) deixis" and "social deixis", where the first type is"the encoding of reference to portions of the unfolding discourse in which the utterance (which includes the text referring expressions) is located" (p.62). The use of *that* and *this* in the following examples illustrates the point: "Puff puff puff: *that* is what it sounded like. *This* is what phoneticians call creaky voice ". (Levinson 1983,63) But it is the second type, social deixis, that is particularly interesting. This encodes the "social distinctions that are relative to participant-role, particularly aspects of the social relationship holding between speaker and addressee(s) or speaker and some referent." (Levinson 1983,63)

Firstly, in Italian, deictic expressions such as personal pronouns need not be expressed due to the presence of inflected verbal forms; therefore, their presence in my transcripts is *significant*. To this category of "personal" indexicals, I would like to add forms of address that infringe accepted rules by combining the familiar you (**tu**) with surnames.

A second feature of discourse emerging from the Italian data is the use of phatic language, which in some instances is particularly "dense". Since these forms are normally not adding to propositional meaning, one should look for their significance above sentential level. Following Fraser (1990) I propose to investigate their nature and discourse functions as pragmatic categories contributing to the overall intratextual and intertextual coherence.

The third and last category that I shall isolate in my data is constituted by symbolic or metaphoric language as a powerful interpretative instrument of contextual influences.

As far as English discourse is concerned, it is anticipated that the pragmatic analysis of personal pronouns cannot rely on presence-absence patterns; therefore, I shall concentrate on identifying "orientation patterns" realised through by pronominal clusters and illustrating the positioning of individuals and groups with respect to each other and to the context. Similarly, phatic language and metaphors will be analyised as "context indexicals" or "pragmatic cues" by means of which the dynamic relationships within and between texts and between text and con-text are realised and maintained during interaction and accessed during interpretation.

The controversial and widely studied linguistic category that operates at a level higher than those cited is **theme**. To its analysis have contributed: a) syntactic perspectives (Danes 1974); and, later, b) textlinguistic perspectives, according to which there is a correspondence between "main events" and "thematic structures" (van Dijk 1988).

Another textlinguistic approach sees in "thematic chains" the instrument of "surface coherence" (Lundquist 1989), meaning formal rather than semantic coherence. This contradicts my understanding of coherence as a general principle governing human interpretation of the social world. A semantic and pragmatic component is essential to this understanding, which is why, moving one step further than Lundquist, I have attributed the following properties to the notion of theme: the pragma-linguistic realisation (at macro textual level) of the interactants' management of a speech event as a social phenomenon.

Text is therefore seen as a product of the contextual factors, the knowledge of which is essential to the process of interpretation of a speech event.

A related controversial issue that emerged from the review of the literature on coherence is the notion of *topic* (see Crow 1983 cited in section 4.3). There has been a recent attempt to study the transition between *major* topics within business meetings: Linde (1991) acknowledges the difficulty posed by a definition of topic and therefore avoids dealing with topic shifts within an agenda item. Her focus on the macrostructures of "major topics" or "discussion of individual projects" is justified by the claim that agendas are generally organised by project.

For the purpose of this study, I have chosen not to address the question of theme vs. topic because the theoretical implications of such a debate are not a concern of my investigation.

Instead, consistently with the definition of theme given above, I shall examine its linguistic realisations and contribution to the textual coherence of meetings by participants as social actors engaged in sense-making. To this effect, I shall identify semantic indicators or **pointers** through which the thematic development is accomplished within a single interaction (Italian case-study) or across sequentially-oredered interactions (English case-study).

CHAPTER 5: APPLYING THE FRAMEWORK TO THE ITALIAN DATA

5.1 Preliminary observations.

On watching Italian meetings (and later on listening to the recordings), it was tempting to rush into unwarranted conclusions, especially after growing accustomed to the quieter (at least on the surface) manners of English business meetings. For instance, in any of the recorded Italian interactions the tone of the voice is louder, the pace faster; the apparent lack of concern for turn-taking practices is sometimes disconcerting; the degree of ego-centred involvement indexed by frequent first person pronoun *io* (I), which is grammatically redundant in Italian is noticeable. All of these might be taken as signs of different discursive practices.

Beyond these commonsensical observations, what is it that gives these Italian (and English) speech events the pragmalinguistic status of "discourse", as opposed to what Schiffrin (1987,20) calls "a random collection of sentences, propositions or actions"? My contention is that it is **coherence**, where coherence is the product of a sense-making process in which interactants (and listeners) are involved and through which speech events like meetings emerge in their "connctedness", i.e. internal wholeness and relatedness to each other and to the context that informs them, as illustrated in diagram 4.1. This view of coherence seeks to encompass both the mentalistic and the textual perspectives briefly reviewed in section 4.3, for they are inseparable and complementary manifestations of the same process.

As anticipated in section 4.4,, in this chapter and in the next I shall map the pragmatic meanings and functions of some of the most salient textual manifestations of coherence, i.e. **theme, personal pronouns** and **metaphorical language,** as realised in a selection of the business meetings that I recorded.

The selection of speech events among those listed in section 3.7 is aimed to guarantee sufficient density of the above categories: an example of intra-textual analysis if offered by the use of the Italian QA internal meeting to investigate the named manifestations of coherence. Conversely, the English materials are particularly suited to the investigation of the inter-textual aspects of it, such as **longitudinal thematic progression** (section 6.4) since they include a series of temporally-ordered meetings. The same meetings are also used for the investigation of inter-textual patterns of pronominalisation (section 6.9), symbolic referencing (section 6.10) and contextual dependency (section 6.11).

In this chapter and in the next, references to the literature will be kept to a minimum. The development of the model presented in 4.1 and the analysis of materials based on it are the outcome of reflections on the wide-ranging literature that I have surveyed in chapters 2 and 3: however, none in particular has had a major influence on the model or on the centrality of the concept of coherence to that model. However, I shall cite works that have dealt with particular issues - such as the pragmatic significance of pronouns in discourse - which have not been dealt with in the literature survey.

5.2 Quality Assurance internal meeting: the background

and the structure.

SYNOPSIS
Title: Quality Assurance Internal Meeting.
Nature: Ad hoc departmental meeting.
Date: 25th May 1991
Duration: One hour
Venue: Conference Room at Company A.
Number of participants: 3

In this section I shall introduce the Italian meeting that I have chosen as the best suited to the illustration and discussion of some of the pragmalinguistic categories through which business discourse is realised. Although structurally the transcript reads like a conveniently self-contained textual unit, the presence of the contextual links becomes apparent if one pays attention to the less obvious, underlying network of exophoric (or external) references such as *quella riunione* (that meeting), or *il capo* (the boss), *il marketing* [the marketing deparment]. It is obviously impossible to reconstruct the historical development of these links through, for instance, longitudinal thematic development (section 6.4) as in conjunction with the English meetings. However, the following is the only meeting, among all those recorded at the Italian company, that encompasses all the categories that I wish to isolate and discuss, making it a kind of blue-print and an ideal starting point.

At this meeting, the chairman (C) is putting forward a proposal **(la proposta)** that involves extra duties to be taken on by his department, Quality Control, of which both G. and DR. are executives. However, C. is not arbitrarily imposing a new policy of which he is the originator. During this meeting, he is acting as a spokesman for their common boss **(il capo)**, who has already decided the course of action on their behalf:

LEGEND
C: QA senior executive and chairman
G: QA executive
DR: QA executive
(.) pause of less than 3 seconds
(5) pause of x seconds
|
| turn overlap
.... continued

C: .... *A. sul cp del prodotto (.) allora nell' ambito di quella discussione la volta scorsa e' venuta fuori er una* ***proposta*** *(.) che poi e' stata condivisa un po' da tutti me compreso e ieri sera anche dal capo che er (.) vedrebbe er (.) una responsabilita' globale dell'assicurazione qualita' nella quality review di commercializzazione*

.... A. on the product cp (.) now then last time from that discussion a proposal came out (.) agreed on by nearly everyone, myself included, and last night also by the boss, which would envisage global responsibility for quality assurance in the marketing quality review

It is only at the very end of the meeting, in the "small talk phase", that the real nature of the interaction is revealed. And it is not the chairman who volunteers an explanation; it is G. who elicits one:

scusa ma potrei fare una domanda inutile (.) ma cosa ne pensa il capo cioe' (.) a parte dire che e' d'accordo (.) ha qualche idea

sorry could I ask you an idle question - but what does the boss think of it that is (.) apart from saying that he agrees (.) does he have some ideas

( ) il discorso lui dice che si' lui e' lui e' concettualmente er d'accordo e poi chiedeva il vostro parere sulle prime reazioni

( ) the thing is he says that yes he's he's conceptually er in agreement and then he was asking for your opinion on the first reactions

Here the official or **instrumental theme (la proposta**: i.e the new policy) is intertwined with the unofficial or **social theme**, i.e. G. and DR.'s relationship with the boss **(il capo)**. This fragment lends support to the view expressed by some QA staff that a top-down style of management is being applied by the senior executive who has the responsibility for Quality Control in the company. Subordinates are faced with new measures that they can only accept, even if, at least on the surface, they are being asked for their opinions. And when they decide to accept, the burden of implementing the new initiative will become solely their responsibility. This attitude of senior management in company A. became apparent in another internal meeting (which I was not allowed to record) where the above mentioned **capo** was present and took a rather intransigent attitude towards people and issues alike.

As far as the formal structure of this meeting is concerned, apart from the first and the last phases referred to so far, there are another eight functional phases, corresponding to the necessary actions taken by the chairman alone or jointly with the group to accomplish the **sub-tasks** (see diagram 4.1) through which the meeting unfolds. The following are the components of the structural dimension of the multilayered interpretative framework:

STRUCTURAL DIMENSION

MAIN TASK	*SUB-TASKS*
announcement of the proposal	1) business small talk 2) preface 3) introduction of agenda 4) expansion of agenda 5) discussion 6) breakdown 7) repair 8) final agreement 9) (informal) closing 10) business small talk

This is a rigid structure in that each phase is sequentially and functionally related to the preceding and the following phases and is oriented to the fulfilment of a sub-task: any alteration of this order would change the nature of the interaction to something other than a meeting, perhaps structurally a loose exchange such as those that I often observed in the corridors of company A[1]. More importantly, a missing phase (= unfulfilled sub-task), say a missing repair action, will affect the development of the interaction. And since I have noticed that participants to all meetings recorded tended to look for common ground in the end even when appearing to adopt conflictual styles, - this meeting being unexceptional - a preliminary conclusion is that unfulfilled tasks may lead to an unsatisfactory end of the meeting, where agreement fails to be reached. Consequently, the achievement of the main structural task - (in the case of this meeting a transfer of information) would be undermined with serious repercussions for the social dimension. All this, the textual dimension registers in forms which are not always immediately discernible.

5.3 The instruments of coherence: theme.

I shall now move on to the definition of the notions introduced in the previous section and the explanation of their relationship to the multilayered interpretative framework (diagram 4.1) and their functions within it.

The beginning of the ten functionally inter-related phases aimed at accomplishing the same number of tasks are signalled by **sub-task shifts,** where the notion of **sub-task** is intended pragmatically as *what the interactants are seeking to achieve through language at a given time in the interaction.* This does not imply lack of disagreement among

[1] The amount of inferential work necessary to interpret informal conversations overheard during my visit to company A. would be overwhelming. Nontheless, one cannot exclude the presence of structurally ordered elements even in such forms of talk. However, this structure cannot, in turn, be accessed unless sufficient inferred information is available to interpret meanings.

the parties: in fact, no interaction recorded in both companies is exempt from open or hidden disagreements. What is more important is that while the process can and will be conflictual, to a lesser or larger extent, in order to be able to further the interaction and open the next phase some form of agreement has to be achieved[2] . This can be signalled in various ways, silence being possibly the most frequent.

The whole meeting, therefore, is interpreted as a goal-oriented activity, where the **main task** is identified with the **instrumental theme** of the interaction, in this case the announcement of **la proposta** (the proposal). This theme can be mapped at the textual level through the semantic and syntactic network of items indexing it, the **thematic pointers** such as *la proposta* and other items semantically related to it (see appendix 5.1). The **thematic development**, and the accomplishment of the task, can be seen as a joint realisation of all participants. This is not a process without difficulties, as illustrated by the **thematic breakdown**, followed by a **thematic repair**, contained in this meeting (see page 112).

Over and above the surface theme, which in this particular interaction is the sole instrumental theme, there usually is at least one underlying theme, which is linguistically less "visible" than the former because its identification often requires familiarity with background knowledge that only the interactants possess, or a

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[2] In simple numerical terms, there may be a (silent) majority resolution in favour of one compromise solution, leaving one or more members dissatisfied. However, I am not examining meetings from the individual's viewpoint, nor judging the success of the structural development on the basis of the degree of satisfaction recorded for each participant. Measurements of this kind are irrelevant to this study because they do not cast light on the functions of meetings in complex social settings, nor do they help interpret the contributions of their participants as social actors.

considerable amount of interential work on the side of the researcher. As an observer and interviewer, I was able to gain some insights into this knowledge which I shall use to re-construct the underlying **social theme**. Under this convenient descriptive label unfolds the arena where the interactants engage in interpretative operations to make sense, through language, of the social world that surrounds them. Meetings offer an ideal setting for this type of activity because under the cover of the agenda and the official or instrumental theme, often more important and engaging activities are undertaken by the participants in the fashion described by Schwartzman (1986).

As already explained early in the section, the QA meeting chosen is particularly suitable also because it has a very simple official agenda, where one **instrumental theme** (the announcement of "the proposal"), develops in parallel to the more important, for the participants as corporate actors, **social theme,** i.e. their relationship with the boss, and by extension, with senior management.[3]

The main conclusion so far is that both themes, the instrumental and the social - corresponding to the textual and social dimensions of the multilayered framework - can be seen as tools through which interactants achieve coherence: at textual level, coherence takes the form of "connectedness", realised through a choice of consistent linguistic forms such as lexemes and deictics that contribute both at

[3] It should also be added that QA staff originally belonged to other departments in company A. and were forced to converge onto Quality Assurance by senior management. The interviews revealed that they had all found the experience very stressful and did not fit into the new environment. Experiences like this influenced the nature of verbal interactions such as interviews and meetings, but their more explicit psycholinguistic manifestations, although potentially enriching of the framework of chapter 4, could not be given justice within the scope of this thesis.

semantic and syntactic level, to the linguistic realisation of local sub-tasks and, ultimately, of the main task. Thus, the inter-relationship with the third dimension of the framework (the structural dimension) emerges.

If disagreement between the parties, the chairman and the group, takes place, one would expect failure in "connectedness": instead, while coherence at textual level is maintained, coherence in the social dimension, i.e. sense-making, is disrupted, and discordant positions emerge (thematic break-down). This is a delicate moment, where repair action is necessary to enable continuation of the interaction. If this is forthcoming, as it normally happens within the largely cooperative environment of meetings, thematic development is re-instated and cohering processes within the social dimension resume on a less conflictual tone.

In a meeting like the one chosen as illustration, interactants engage in the extremely complex enterprise of maintaining the flow of communication focused on the instrumental theme (main task). Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, they demonstrate to be able to "fine-tune", or "re-tune", after a break-down, their experiential sensitivity to the rapidly evolving context of the interaction which is shaping and being shaped by the wider corporate context. Given the situation at company A., social "fine-tuning" had often to be replaced by drastic and often traumatic shifts in personal and corporate perceptions, leading to a forced re-shaping of well-established and confident life styles for most of the QA staff. All this relational turmoil emerges quite clearly in the interviews [4], but it also finds its way into apparently routine meetings such as this, although in the form of "hidden agenda".

In the light of these observations, the indirect personal references employed by the participants of the Italian meeting in the first and last phases take on a special meaning:

*DR era da **lui** stamattina ( )*
G: io gli ho portato il floppino (.) aveva la B. di fronte e stava telefonando con qualcuno
DR: se era verso le 8.30 ero io
G: no erano le 10 meno 20
DR: ah no per carita' .... *(phase 1 - small talk)*

was he (she?) with **him** this morning ( )
I brought him the floppy disk (.) B. was sitting in front of him and he was speaking on the telephone to someone
if it was about 8.30 it was me [i.e. it was me to whom he was talking on the phone]
no it was 20 to 10
oh no for heaven's sake ....

*DR: allora se tu chiedi a **lui** sicuramente **lui** (.)dice per il mio livello ma certo che si fanno queste mi vanno benissimo fatele (.) siccome so che non c'e' ......* *(phase 9 - small talk)*

now then if you ask him (.) he will certainly tell you as far as we are concerned of course we should do this I fully agree with it do it (.) since I know that there isn't ......

These two extracts vividly synthesise the meeting and corporate atmosphere: consistent use of **lui** (he) to refer to the common boss strongly conveys the social distance separating the superior from his subordinates and confirms that predominant hierarchal structure of the company[5].

At this point, it is necessary to make clear a fundamental

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4 The linguistic realisation in the two settings, however, is quite different: while during the meeting members will resort to the protective cover of their group affiliation, or corporate function (eg. the **we=department** or **I=QA executive**), the social mask is lifted during one-to-one interviews, where DR, to quote an example, becomes the bright Napolitanean middle-aged man who has loyally worked for company A. for twenty years and watches his hopes for a successful continuation of his career dashed by recession and shrewd re-organising.

5 Distance, then, but not necessarily respect, since no mention of the superior's surname is made. Or, perhaps, in the common language of these three people, **il capo** and **lui** are the short forms conventionally used to refer to that person.

assumption of this thesis, according to which social relationships are to be seen to develop from solidarity-oriented to conflictual along a power continuum. It follows that power and solidarity are not a polarity set, but coexisting dimensions in human interactions. The situation represented in this internal meeting lends itself particularly well to the explanation of the concept of a solidarity-power continuum in relation to social distance and and lnguistic indirectness.

It is possible to associate the idea of social distance, rendered through linguistic indirectness in the participants' speech - to a position near the power end of the continuum, since the higher is the (perceived) distance, the stronger is the (perceived or real) power that the referent can command on the individuals, as sketched out below:

power ———————————————— **solidarity**

social distance | social closeness

This stance is not in conflict with the interpretative framework illustrated in diagram 4.1. On the contrary, the power perspective adds depth and delicacy, both analytical and ideological, to an otherwise incomplete representation of social relationships. Therefore, while the notion of coherence with its textual and sense-making realisations, is the essential abstract link between the (possibly manifold) dimensions of the interpretative framework, arguably the major influencing dependent variable active at social level, and thus influencing also the textual aspect, is *power*. Ignoring or underestimating its influence would be naive and dangerous, and would ultimately lead to a distorted picture of the phenomena that I am seeking to investigate.

It is in the light of these important considerations that meetings can be examined as interaction where *powerful* and *powerless roles* are acted out. However, it is not simply the case of attributing power to, say, the chairman, in opposition to an inevitably passive and powerless audience. The Italian QA meeting, and others recorded both at the Italian and British company, show that roles can and are subject to negotiation, within the constraints of the meeting structure[6].

Having to exclude personal and psychological traits from my analysis for the reasons already given elsewhere, I shall concentrate on the individuals as social actors and identify their roles within the structural dimension of the interaction. According to the power-led perspective that I have just introduced, and in line with the structural nature of meetings, the two roles that emerge are that of the *Chairman* and that of the *Group*. The visible instrument of power that only the Chairman is entitled to use in order to direct the interaction is the official agenda[7].

However, it is the *invisible, unofficial* version of the agenda that has often far-reaching consequences for the participants as social actors.

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[6] Two instances of negotiated role-taking stand out, the first from a Business Development Programme meeting at company B and the second from an (unrecorded) Product Development meeting at company B, both inter-functional in nature. By then, I had inferred the degree of relative influence exercised by the various departments in the two companies and I assisted to a display of powerful roles when the Production Manager and the Planning Manager, respectively from company B and A, verbally swept aside the chairmen of the two meetings by using different techniques while achieving the same end result. In the first instance, sustained argumentation (and corporate status?) put the individual in control; in the second case, technical eloquency (supported by corporate status?) left the audience baffled and reduced the meeting to a queer form of soliloquy.

[7] Lampi (1990) has identified four types of agendas according to the interests that they represent: formal, informal, hidden and personal.
Incidentally, I was never allowed to read copies of the agendas at company A, while I obtained copies of the agendas for the less "sensitive" meetings at company B.

On that agenda for the QA meeting, the priority item must have been the re-definition of the participants' roles caused by the new policy and affecting their relationship with the boss. Significantly, the final question that the Group put to the Chairman in an apparently casual way is:

... e il capo cosa ne pensa

... and what does the boss think of it

This appears to point to the fact that, after all, **il capo** remains the recognised authority and that, regardless of what the meeting may have decided, his opinion is at least worth knowing.

However, is this position of power a permanent endowement of the individual, or, rather, a feature subject to negotiation like the controlling role of the chairman in a meeting? To find out, I shall chart the power profile of the meeting, as it may reveal unexpected insights.

Although knowledge of the official agenda may be shared by all participants, like in the QA meeting, the accepted praxis is for the chairman to open the meeting and introduce the item(s) for discussion, in this case a significant change in company policy which is due to increase the responsibilities resting with the QA team.

The chairman opens the proceedings in a controlling position; he appears in charge of the meeting at the inception, and he expresses this verbally by, firstly, announcing the opening of the session through a **preface** that informs the group about C's involvement in a certain process for product development:

C: *allora facciamo una **premessa** io sto seguendo (.) nell'ambito della del del piano di qualita' totale (.) la er il il process on ring (.) del prodotto* now then let's make a premise I am following (.) the er process on ring of the product

The chairman's controlling role is maintained by means of the introduction of the **theme** :

C: *A[...] sul cp del prodotto (.) allora nell' ambito di quella discussione la volta scorsa e' venuta fuori er* ***una proposta*** *(.) che poi e' stata condivisa un po' da tutti me compreso (.) e ieri sera anche dal capo che er vedrebbe er (.) una responsabilita' globale dell'assicurazione qualita' nella quality review di commercializzazione*

A[...] on the product cp (.) now then last time from that discussion a proposal came out (.) agreed on by nearly everyone, myself included (.) and last night also by the boss (.) which would envisage global responsibility by quality assurance in the marketing quality review

Interestingly, **il capo** (the boss) is not cited as the main source of power, the initiator of the proposal. Instead, a *proposal* emerges from *the discussion* and it is agreed upon by *more or less everybody* : while appearing to supply unquestionable information, the chairman is being (deliberately?) vague. This preface shows that the chairman (and perhaps even the boss) is only a link in the power chain. His unofficial agenda reads thus: a) he is to convey news of a new policy that has been agreed on by an unknown (and more powerful) source, and subscribed to by an unpopular boss; b) he is to impose it on his team; c) and yet, he is unable to help his staff implement it:

[..] questo pero' come farlo come non farlo non lo so (.) io l'ho gia' detto a C. ieri che (.) e' un lavoro in piu' che voi dovete fare e che

however how to do it or how not to do it I don't know (.) I already told C. yesterday that it is extra work for you to do and that

The chairman's role, although apparently a powerful one, is adversely affected by internal politics. So while the main task, or instrumental theme of the interaction, is conveying the news of an impending new policy, the underlying, and far more sensitive task (or social theme) is gauging the reactions to it. In his responses to the comments and later adverse reactions from both participants, DR and G, the chairman consistently uses *thematic pointers,* words or phrases semantically related to the theme, three of which, **proposta**, **checklist** and ***two step-** (and its variations) stand out as a *thematic refrain* throughout the event (see appendix 5.1). ***Pointers*** are indicators of textual coherence, or "connectedness", by referring as they do to the development of the instrumental theme throughout the interaction. While building internal textual coherence through direct endoreferencing (or internal referencing), the *pointers* form an indirect exoreferencing (external referencing) network that links the interaction with its immediate context, i.e. the company, thus realising coherence as sense-making. The *thematic pointers,* then, play a double cohering function, for while they index the official theme *direct through the language,* they also establish an indirect, "interpretative" link with the unofficial or social theme, i.e. the relationship between the QA staff and their boss, and ultimately, the company that he represents. This is how coherence operates simultaneously at the two levels of the intepretative framework (see diagram 4.1).

The selection of thematic pointers in the QA meeting is particularly interesting because it includes some English words or Anglicisms which are given marked status by both the chairman and the group, both in frequency terms and in the deliberate, if not ostentatious, patterns that they establish within the discourse. Admittedly, it is the chairman who first employs such terminology, but the group, sustaining the meeting as a collaborative effort, follow suit[8] . The use of additional Italianised expressions such as ***two step-** (two steps) further reinforces this point. One could look into the pragmatic significance of the use of Anglicisms in the chairman's speech. Apart from the most obvious explanation that has to do with automatic use (and abuse) of routine English technical phrases, I am inclined to think that, in the speaker's and listener's mind, the use of foreign expressions adds professional credibility and force to the arguments. Knowledge of a foreign language, that in an Italian business environment very often means "English", is considered an attribute of an educated and professional individual, unlike, perhaps, what happens in a British context.

Going back to the internal meeting, it is possible that the chairman may be using Anglicisms as *thematic pointers* only for rhetorical effect. This, combined with frequent repetition, could be seen to increase, in the eyes of DR. and G., the persuasive power of the chairman's arguments. On the other hand, bearing in mind the power-solidarity continuum, one could even hypothesize that the common use of distinctive indexical expressions such as ***two step-** and **checklist** (clearly borrowed from a common technical vocabulary), signals solidarity between C. and DR. and G.

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8 The habit of introducing English, or Anglicisms, in Italian, although not unusual for a multinational company manufacturing IT products is here particularly significant because foreign terminology is given a doubly prominent role by the interactants using it as *thematic pointers*. English technical terminology is widely accepted within the company not only in commercial or technical settings but also in less formal situations, such as small talk. This is one of the most noticeable influences of the technical and international context on speech and writing, but it becomes more significant when technical terminology is not strictly required by the situation and Italian words of equivalent meaning are available, like *passo* for "step", or *lista di controllo* for "checklist".

ITALIAN INTERNAL MEETING:

THEMATIC FLOWCHART

THEMATIC INTRODUCTION
(chairman)

THEMATIC EXPANSION
(chairman)

THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT
(joint)

THEMATIC BREAK-DOWN
(chairman?)

THEMATIC REPAIR
(DR)

THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT
(joint)

THEMATIC ENDING
(chairman)

This is particularly true when, after the *thematic breakdown* both DR. and G., who earlier opposed C's argumentation, sound willing to bridge the gap between themselves and the chairman, and do so by sharing in his choice of *thematic pointers* :

DR: si mette giu' la ***checklist*** *( ) si definisce perche'*
DR: one puts down the checklist ( ) one defines it because

G: impostare e arrivare alla ***checklist*** *che non e' una cosa*
G: to make a plan and arrive at the checklist (.) which is not a thing

G: [...] una volta che hai definito la ***checklist***
G: ... when you have defined the checklist

DR: non fa parte pero' della ***list*** *non fa parte quella e'*
DR: i it does not belong though to the list - that doesn't it is

DR: dovrebbe far parte di questa ***check-list*** *a mio avviso (.) perche'*
DR: it should belong to this checklist in my opinion (.) because ...

The implied solidarity message of the above *thematic repair* would then be something along these lines: "after all we (DR, G **and** C) all belong to the same group because we have now agreed to share the same language and we signal that by using the two terms that you C. have chosen to highlight by uttering them in English".

The break-down happens during the discussion phase where, unlike the highly structured first four phases (see section 5.2), power relationships become more openly negotiable. Even the apparent control exercised on the meeting by the chairman is of a ceremonial rather than a practical nature, since it has been shown that the chairman himself only pays lip service to an unknown (and truly powerful) figure or figures pulling the strings somewhere else in the organisation. The temporary conflictual situation that is generated between the two parties, the Chairman and the Group, has its source *outside* the interaction while the Chairman changes from a would be powerful role into a sympathetic and solidarity-oriented role, especially when he admits to his inhability to offer solutions to the forseen problems:

C: allora ditemi voi che cosa devo fare
you tell me what I am supposed to do
C: non riesco a capire a chi la fai la domanda no... non non ho capito
I can't understand who you're asking this question to I don' t don't understand

C: ti devo dire io che cosa devi fare
should I tell you what you must do

C: ma perche' non te le vai a cercare tu
but why don't you go and look for it yourself

With the above three (rhetoric) questions and a final admonition to DR, the chairman announces a *thematic break-down* at textual level (see flowchart). However, it is uncertain whether full responsibility for this happening should be placed solely on the individual, given that his power has been eroded both by structural factors (i.e the negotiable nature of the discussion phase) and social factors (i.e. the revelation of C.'s secondary position with regards the new policy and his source). Incapable of controlling the interaction, C.'s powerful role becomes fully negotiatiable and dependent on the other participants' will to re-instate it. The *repair action* discussed on page 111 achieves this effect while also re-establishing the flow of the thematic development.

In the next section, I shall study the contribution of pronouns to textual and social coherence.

5.4 INSTRUMENTS OF COHERENCE: PRONOMINALISATION.

I shall open this section by resuming the argument with which I opened this chapter: the first impressions that one gains when sitting in and listening to Italian meetings. Even as an Italian myself, I cannot dismiss as a matter of Italian "temperament" the louder tone, faster pace and dominant perception of tension, although a certain amount of apparently idiosyncratic behaviour is probably culture-dependent. In particular, the excitment detectable in the prosodic contours of at least two of the participants cannot be attributed only to personal incompatibility, nor resistance to temporary codified roles (Chairman/Group), since, overall, the interaction remains collaborative and differences are ironed out. At a deeper level, however, dissatisfaction, or even frustration, are constant features of the meeting. These tensions are channelled into the **social theme** of the interaction, i.e. the relationship between the parties at the meeting (including the chairman) and their boss and company.

In this section I shall attempt to show the existence of an "I"/"we" versus "he"/"they" dichotomy that is reflected in the language by patterned use of personal pronouns, both subject and complement.

As I have already pointed out in section 4.4, the use of these pronouns is a grammatical redundancy in the Italian language, hence it is significant. From the grammatical level I shall move to the pragmatic one in order to identify the local functions of these categories with respect to textual coherence and their contribution to sense-making. This is based on the assumption that personal pronouns contribute to connectedness through the establishment of an internal textual network, while at the same time providing the meaning links between the meeting phenomenon and its environment.

The distribution and frequency of personal pronouns (and their functionally-related forms) will be charted and analysed in detail to elaborate these links.

5.4.1 On the use of statistics in this study.

It should be borne in mind that the figures in tables 5.3 and 5.4 below are only numerical *indicators* of **relational orientation patterns** (e.g.. inward vs. outward = I+we vs he+they) expressed by the interactants through their language. They are intended to complement the results of a morphological analysis of verbal forms selected as illustration in section 5.4.2.

The figures in tables 5.1 and 5.2 have also been collated to provide a quantitative picture of the frequency and distribution of personal pronouns in the interaction which is being investigated.

To obtain these figures, the OCP (Oxford Concordance Package) has been instructed to perform a frequency count for the items contained in a command file. These items had previously been selected manually from the word index of each participants to ensure that all forms, included those subject to elision, would be included.

TABLE 5.1: Italian marked personal pronouns (subject and complement)

(DR:2122 words C:3563 words G:1085 words)

	no. occurrences	*distribution*		
io	76	(DR=39	C=29	G=8)
me	29	(DR=17	C=7	G=6)
mi	34	(DR=19	C=13	G=2)
tu	31	(C=13	G=10	DR=8)
te	6	(DR=2	C=2	G=2)
ti	26	(C=10	G=9	DR=7)
lui-lei	15	(C=6	DR=6	G=3)
gli-le	3	(DR=2	G=1	C=0)
noi	11	(C=8	DR=2	G=1)
ci	10	(C=6	G=3	DR=1)
voi	4	(C=3	DR=1	G=0)
vi	4	(DR=2	C=2	G=0)
loro	2	(C=1	G=1	DR=0)

TABLE 5.2: Italian unmarked subject pronouns

verbal forms	frequency and distribution		
verbs with "I" subject	DR = 119	C = 105	G = 26
verbs with "you" (sing.)	C = 39 (13+10)	DR = 22 (28)	G = 19 (8+3)
verbs with "you" (plural)	C = 7 (4)	G = 2	DR = 2
verbs with "we"	C = 43	G = 11	DR = 21
verbs with "they"	C = 27	G = 18	DR = 13

[Note: the figures in brackets refer to the phatic form "scusa" (excuse me) which, although sharing with other verbs the implicit subject pronouns "tu" or "voi" will be dealt with in section 5.5.3 on phatic language.]

TABLE 5.3 : GROUPINGS expressed by pronouns

	frequency and distribution			
	DR	C	G	
self-grouping (explicit and implicit "io")	194	164	42	= 400
you-grouping (explicit and implicit "tu")	39	64	40	= 143
we-grouping (explicit and implicit "noi")	24	57	15	= 96
you-grouping (explicit and implicit "voi"	3	10	2	= 15

they-grouping (expressed and implicit "loro")	13	28	19	=	60

TABLE 5.4 SCORES FOR RELATIONAL ORIENTATIONS

1) **singular** (io+tu)	**vs**	**plural** (noi+voi+loro)	=	543	:	171
2) **self** (io)	**vs**	**others** (noi+tu+voi+loro)	=	400	:	410
3) **we** (io+tu+noi)	**vs**	**others** (voi+loro)	=	637	:	75

5.4.2 Observations on the results.

In table 5.4, orientation 2) shows a perceived strong ego-centred tendency impressed on the meeting by the participants' own "selves" to the, interestingly, equally high-valued "others" category. The emerging picture is, after all, one of equilibrium (400 vs 410). However, this result seems to contradict trend 3) where the individuals' "selves" and their corporate projections within the meeting environment are in opposition to external influences. This may suggest that the intensity of the inward-looking relational work among the three participants is very high, and is exemplified by the building a tight network of internal personal references in the process of negotiating a common understanding of the issues and people involved.

A closer examination of the pragmatics of personal pronouns uncovers an usage that partially explains the cooperative nature of the meeting. Only **tu** (familiar "you") is used throughout, conferring to the transaction the same tinge of collegiality sensed in the wider company environment. However, **tu** is not followed by a first name, as expected. Instead, it is followed by the surname, with which it is functionally at odds. However, the unusual match between **tu** and the surname achieves the right balance between informality and formality in a professional environment, and it is ultimately a balance between the need for social proximity and the maintainance of interpersonal distance as dictated by work conventions.

A particularly interesting incident illustrating this point is the monologue recited by DR. in response to C.'s request to take on extra duties. Using reported speech to voice his discontent, he dissociates himself from the "complaining" *alter ego* whom he addresses as DR (his own initials):

*1 ma perche' oggi **ti sto** dicendo che **io** oggi (.) la quality review di commercializzazione non*
*2 l'**abbiamo** mai fatta mai nel modo piu' assoluto (.) se **stai** dicendo che nell'ambito*
*3 dell'assicurazione qualita' **si** vuol fare un certo tipo di lavoro (.) **impostiamo** per*
*4 fare questo tipo di lavoro (.) impostiamo per fare questo tipo di lavoro **cerchiamo** di*
*5 capire cosa ci vuole a bordo per gestirlo (.) pero' per cortesia non **vorrei** che **DR** fosse*
*6 **DR** che **deve** andare a capire tutto cio' che ci vuole a bordo per gestirlo perche' oggi*
*7 non **ho** il tempo per fare gia' le cose che faccio **io** (.) se **mi si** vogliono dare quelle (.) di*
*8 quelle attribuzioni di responsabilita'(.) **si** prende una persona che abbia un minimo di*
*9 competenza (.) **si** incominciano a capire le cose da fare e **si** creano le premesse per*
10 gestire queste cose

1 but because I'm now telling you that now (.) that we have never ever done the marketing quality
2 review at all (.) if you're saying than within the competence
3 of quality review one wants to do a certain kind of job (.) let's do some preliminary
4 work on it(.) let's try to understand
5 what it takes to manage it (.) but please I wouldn't want that DR (.) is
6 DR who must understand all that it takes to manage it because at this moment in time
7 I haven't got the time to do the things that I'm supposed to (.) if one wants to give me those (.)
8 those functions one takes on a new staff with a minimun of
9 competence (.) one begins to understand the things that want doing and one creates the premises to
10 manage those things

Besides a curious case of personality split (DR. on DR.: line 6) so theatrically rendered, the passage is particularly significant in that it vividly exemplifies the "I-you-we-they" dynamics, summarised in table 5.3. DR's turn opens with a self-focused *I to you* move where the first occurence of I ="io" is implicit in the verb **sto** and the second is expressed; while the unmarked pronoun **ti** (=to you), singular, is a rather weaker reference to C. (line 1). In line 2 the personal focus shifts abruptly from **io/ti** to **noi** (=we) (implicit in the verb **abbiamo**, line 2) and coincides, significantly, with a vigorous joint denial of ownership of a process. Through a skillful paraphrase, DR. re-directs again the focus on "you"=C. (implicit in the verb **stai**, line 2), only to hit a target farther afield: the **si** (= impersonal "one") of line 3 is an impersonal pronoun that acts as a cover for an unidentified decision-maker. DR. tactfully avoids blaming C. for the incombent policy change and in this attempt he is forced to choose an unnamed scapegoat. In doing this, DR. does not imply lack of will to cooperate. In fact, in lines 3 and 4 the focus is back on **noi** (=we) implicit in the verbs "impostiamo" and "cerchiamo" ("let's do some preliminary work" and "let's try"), with their positive semantic connotations. However, while supportive of coopertive action, DR soon after refuses to be singled out for the task. In line 5, the warning phrase **pero'per cortesia** (but please) marks a switch back to a second, powerfully worded *I move* which contains the "DR on DR" piece on which I have already commented. The power of DR's statement is conveyed not only by a cautious refusal (**non vorrei**="I wouldn't want", line 5), but also by the pragmatic device (indirect speech to talk about himself) that DR skilfully employs at this point.

The *I-move* turns into a *they*-move in line 8, where the impersonal **si** (=one) introduces the unidentified person onto whom ownership of the policy and responsibility for it is being transferred back. DR's elaborately argued stand is that only with the help of a new qualified staff would he be able to accept ownership of (and therefore responsability for) "the proposal".

In this section I hope to have shown how the pragmatics of pronominalisation offer insights into the networking activities of social actors, while representing a high-density category of textual connectedness. The significance of metaphorical language in a business context (Italian case-study) is the subject of the next section.

5.5 The instruments of coherence: metaphors.

The study of metaphors as an intepretative key to social practices and relationships is not a novelty. The suggestive and relational power of metaphors in both companies, but in particular in the Italian one, emerged as an outstanding feature during the interviews conducted with the QA personnel[9] .

As a function within idiolects, metaphorical language could be dismissed as idiosynchratic and therefore not reliable as an intepretative tool. I happen to believe that the opposite is true. As a distinctive feature of an individual's linguistic profile, metaphors can reveal aspects of his interpretation of social phenomenon that non-metaphorical language cannot render. Without wishing to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the metaphorical language of all meetings, I think it is useful to illustrate through selected examples the ways in which interactants use metaphors to maintain and advance meetings as social and personal exchange forums.

To that effect, I shall remain with the QA meeting because it offers a very good example that I wish to use to prove my point. More precisely, I shall focus on **discorso**[10] as a metaphorical category that not only shows a high degree of semantic and pragmatic complexity, but it is also shared by

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[9] One particular example (**A. era il sole** = company A. was the sun) has been quoted in section 3.5: linguistic images such as this are used by individuals to conjure up emotionally charged images of places and people, of the environment as they perceive it, or they used to in the past.

[10] C's constant focus on **discorso** referring to the policy change is consistent in all but one of his uses of the term, reported in appendix 5.4, extract 1, with the exception of one instance (extract 2) where **discorso** is used as a synonym of "issue".

all participants and thus becomes a focal thread in the textual canvas. Its frequency and prominence in the interaction suggest that it should be treated as a major building block in the internal connectivity network (textual dimension of the framework). At the same time, its use by C. to refer to an unidentifiable entity external to the meeting provides a constant pragmatic link between the text and the context, thus contributing to the overall coherence network realised within the social dimension of the framework.

1 DR: si ve- scusa si vede che e' uscito M. eh
2 C: si' beh er (.) e' lo stesso no (.) comunque qual e' la ragione
3 G: tirava lui no
4 C: uhm
5 G: tirava lui ***il discorso***
6 C: scusate eh (.) dai dobbiamo finire alle due er c'e' c'e' una

one can tell that M. has left
yes well ehm (.) it's all the same isn't it (.) anyway what is the reason
he was playing the tune
ehm
he was playing the tune was he not
sorry (.) come on we've got to finish by two ehm there's there's a

From its inception, **discorso** acts as a euphemism for something that all participants are aware of but do not wish to name or cannot define with precision. Most frequently, the referent is the change of policy to be introduced in the transition from Quality Assurance to Total Quality, a fuzzy and threatening consequence - DR and G seem to think - of the climate of change affecting the company. M. is identified as the acting force behind the Total Quality plan, he who played the tune (lines 3 and 5) but eventually left (line 1).

Tirare il discorso is a colloquialism that loosely translates into "play the tune": the issue is too sensitive, so C. cuts short with DR and G.'s queries (line 6) and moves on to a fuller explanation of the intended policy change. .

G: inoltre al lavoro in piu' c'e' un altro ***discorso*** *(.) quando tu arrivi alla quality review finale ....*

G: va be' non ha nessun senso pero' e' sempre il solito ***discorso*** *per cui il marketing puo' chiedere (.) ....*

G: penso di si' (.) i i quei piani che escono comunque sempre a posteriori (.) di di V. (.) e di P.su tutti gli adempimenti del marketing per supportare un prodotto adeguatamente e li' ci sono i corsi c'e' il ***discorso*** *del (.) si'ecco pero' ...*

beside the extra work-load there's another **aspect** (.) when you reach the final quality review

ok it doesn't make sense but it's always the same **old story** whereby marketing can ask (.)

I think so (.) the the those plans that anyway always come out afterwards (.) by V. and P. about all marketing's accomplishments in order to support a product properly and there there're the courses there's the **question** of (.) yes ok but...

G. follows on with a sequence of objections, all containing the same metaphor, **discorso** (in English the translation of each of them would vary according to their context: "aspect", "old story" and "question", respectively). The polysemic value of **discorso**, made possible by its semantic vagueness, is amply exploited by all three interactants. G. is simply using it functionally as a convenient preface to introduce his arguments, so that his favourite construct is:

1) indirect announcement of an argument (including **discorso** as a keyword) followed by 2) expansion on the topic of the argument.

Later on in the meeting, G. persists in his critical moves while still using **discorso** consistently:

G: ( ) ***discorso*** *di di qualita' (.) qua sembra di andare a fare le pulci*

G: questo e' il solito ***discorso*** *perche' se pensa di fare le cose in piu' con meno persone (.) alla fin fine veramente vengono fuori delle grandi cavolate e basta*

( ) the **question** of of quality (.) here's it's like splitting hairs

this is the same **old story** because if one thinks of doing more with fewer people (.) in the end really what one gets is nothing more than a load of rubbish

DR. adopts a similar pattern, with **discorso** prefacing an elaboration over his arguments:

*DR: perche' altrimenti (.) cioe' e' **il discorso** dell'ispettore no che non conosce un prodotto e gli dai una check-list e lui non poverino non sapendo rispondere dice a me mi han detto di controllare queste cose*

*DR: non fa parte pero' della list non fa parte quella e' un e' un **discorso** di servizio il la come si chiama il servizio tecnico a me dovrebbe dirmi se il prodotto e' assistibile (.) .....*

because otherwise (.) that is it's the **case** of the inspector isn't it who doesn't know anything about a product and you give him a check-list and he poor soul not knowing how to answer says I've been told to check these things

it isn't part of the list it isn't part of that it's it's a **matter** of assistance (.) the the what's their name the after sales assistance should tell me if the product is assistable (.) ....

This contrasts with G's previous use of **discorso** and agrees with C.'s euphemistic use of **discorso**, meaning the new policy:

*C: quindi direi che e' un primo passo questo per (.) cominciare a allargare (.) o a focalizzare la nostra responsabilita' su un **discorso** piu' completo di quel che non sia adesso (.) il il come implementarlo (.) e' una cosa da vedere insomma no e'*

so I'd say that it's a first step this one to (.) begin to widen (.) or to focus our responsibility on a more comprehensive **area** than the current one (.) how how to implement it (.) it's to be seen after all isn't it it's

C. suggests that DR and G are to focus [their] responsibility on a more comprehensive *area* (**discorso**) than the current one, which means taking on more duties in order to move towards Total Quality. And they are therefore invited to "accept this [*policy change*] (**discorso**) in two steps".

*C: .... dopo di che ripeto mi rendo conto benissimo che non abbiamo visibilita' su quelle cose li' (.) l'importante appunto e' accettare questo **discorso** in due in due step uno ....*

having said that I repeat I'm fully aware that we don't have visibility on those matters there (.) the main thing is just to accept this **[policy change]** in two in two steps one ....

Later on in the meeting, a reaction against DR. and C's criticisms generates C's new interpretation of **discorso**[10] which, unlike the previous one, is polysemic. The various meanings are: (a) & (b) "objection; (c) "argument"; (d) "concept"; (e) "one thing is" (f) "constructive talk" (g) "if one is saying" (preface to argument as in G.'s uses). In this repeated use of **discorso** which *does not* have the policy change as a referent, C. appears to be making a move towards G. and DR. in that he shares *their* interpretations of the term. The metaphor draws the participants closer, despite the critical contents of C.'s epilogue and the possible threat to the compromise reached after the *thematic breakdown* earlier on in the meeting (see section 5.4). Although the tone of the exchanges remains lively, the meeting slowly settles back into the cooperative framework that underlies it.

Discorso is the most significant case of polysemic metaphor found in the Italian meetings, but it is not the only instance of significant symbolic language. In particular, there is another set of metaphors which, while less frequent in the text and not polysemic, is specially relevant as an example of how individuals interpret their relationships with others and with their environment:

C: l'assicurazione della qualita' ha (.) la responsabilita' oggi di tirare un qualche cosa che viene er ***recitato*** *dall'R&D e dalla produzione (.) quindi non e'* ***l'attrice principale*** *di (.) er e che porta ( ) contributi ma ha un'azione di coordinamento*

quality assurance has (.) the responsibility now to pull along something that has been **enacted** by R&D and manufacturing (.) therefore it isn't the **leading actress** of (.) ehm and that brings contributions but it has a coordinating function

C.'s introduction outlines the responsibilities lying within the Quality Assurance function: QA bears the responsibility for the role enacted by R&D (Research & Development) and manufacturing but QA does not have the leading role, rather a coordinating one. This statement not only serves as a background for the current internal meeting, but also provides a reliable interpretation of the status that various functions command in the company, status that ultimately depends on the (perceived) importance that a function has for the survival of the business[11] . In the extract above, C. admits to the perceived low status of his own function, an admission that became self-criticism when, during an interview with another QA executive, the reply to the question "who is not important (in the company)?", was a surprising "we are not important". C. actually uses the word **coordinamento** (=coordination) to describe the role of QA. But however positive the value of his definition may be, C. significantly chooses to place it *after* introducing R&D and production as the functions enacting jointly the "main actress role". On the set that is the company, various roles are performed but only one is the leading role and it does not belong to QA. The minor "coordinating role" that QA finds itself to enact could in fact become a leading role with the advent of Total Quality (TQ) as a management philosophy that, ideally, should inform all aspects of corporate life. But "act one", - the first step towards TQ, - the notorious "proposal" (see section 5.2) is received with scepticism and reservations by the very actors who are expected to perform according to its script.

Later on in the meeting, C. puts forward his view of the coordinating role of QA accomplished in conjunction with marketing, service and the unidentified 'dpo' department in an attempt to bring QA to the foreground where the leading actors already operate:

*C: .... si potrebbe vedere questa funzione di coordinamento dell'assicurazione della qualita' avendo come **attore** il marketing [...]service e la dpo per quanto riguarda tutti i processi er commerciali e di field no (.) quindi c'e' una certa coerenza no ....*

....one could see this coordinating function by the quality assurance having marketing as **actor**

[11] Given the highly advanced technological field in which company A. operates. R&D is a powerful department. Manufacturing, too, plays an essential role, and probably traditionally so in any company. In company A, however, manufacturing lost some of its status when the production of some lines was drastically reduced, or even halted, due to a falling market share. By contrast, marketing is not perceived as important as the other two departments, nor is QA. And this is, apparently, a widespread perception that I had the opportunity to register when talking to employees from various departments.

[...]service and the dpo as far as all commercial ehm and field processes are concerned (.) so there's a certain coherence isn't there ....

Marketing receives full acknowledgement of its future role vis a vis QA; in fact, expanding on the theatre metaphor, marketing is seen by C. as the department who will have to "recite the poem", i.e. make a substantial contribution as spokesman of the commercial interests of the company:

C: ..... ed e' stato ribadito che il marketing ha proprio la funzione di rappresentare il il mondo commerciale qui al centro no (.) quindi e' responsabilita' del marketing ***recitare la poesia*** *(.)*

....

.... and it's been confirmed that marketing has just the function of representing the the commercial world back here in the company doesn't it (.) so it's the marketing is responsible for **enacting a role [lit.:reciting the poem]**

Eventually, the turn comes for QA to consider its role, and this is possibly the only statement of confidence that C. seems willing to make about his own department:

C: ....perche' tutto sommato il ruolo che ***noi recitiamo*** *che* ***abbiam sempre recitato*** *nella quality review (.) e l'abbiamo recitato magari bene perche' abbiamo le competenze per andare a vedere i processi di sviluppo del prodotto no (.) le abbiamo sempre fatte ....*

... because after all the role that **we enact** and that **we've always enacted** in the quality reviews (.) and we've enacted it maybe well because we have the qualifications to look into the processes of product development don't we (.) we've always done them ...

Further on, C. uses again the theatre metaphor when referring to the QA staff as "actors":

C: gli ***attori*** *che* ***recitano*** *nella quality review di commercializzazione ...*

the **actors** that **enact** in that marketing quality review ...

The tone has become more optimistic as C. ponders the future and the need for *coherence* in the QA role and within the whole company, rather than in relation to the manufacturing department only:

C: si tratta di er di di far diventare coerente un ***ruolo*** *dell' assicurazione della qualita' osn non un* ***ruolo*** *di un'assicurazione qualita' della del settore industriale (.) che e' una cosa completamente er (.)*

it's a matter of making the **role** of quality assurance at osn a coherent one not a **role** of quality assurance of the the industrial section (.) which is something to be totally enacted (.) then I prefer to have ...

Difficulties are envisaged, but C.'s view of a QA function firmly established within the company, with its own well-defined role is slowly emerging:

C: alla fin fine ci saranno all'inizio ci sara' un periodo di transizione in cui riusciro' er (.) a malapena a entrare in certe (.) nel merito di certe cose piuttosto che er (.) trascurarla completamente (.) questo visto in ottica aziendale no (.) e in ottica del ***ruolo*** *che noi dobbiamo avere nell'azienda*

in the end there'll be in the beginning there'll be a transition period when we'll be struggling to understand certain (.) certain things rather than (.) neglect them completely (.) this as seen in the company's perspective (.) and in the light of the **role** that we must have in the company

C. has persued his line of reasoning in an orderly fashion, illustrating concepts through metaphorical language, using quite appropriately, I think, a theatre metaphor to describe at first the current state of affairs, and later to formulate his vision of how he sees his department to contribute to company life. Perhaps it is also worth adding that C.'s efforts are partially undermined by G., who shares in C.'s choice of the theatre metaphor, only to convey the criticism that they, G. and DR., do not have the manpower necessary to implement the proposed changes; more actors are needed to perform the play:

G: ( ) hanno gli ***attori*** *che t'aiutano nel senso (.) a questo punto qui invece (.) tu devi (.) andare tu a verificare che tutto il processo di di distribuzione ambienti giusti etc (.) sia stato fatto ...*

( ) they have the **actors** that help you meaning (.) instead now here (.) you must (.) it is we who must go and check that the whole distribution process the correct environments atc(.) are on place (.) ....

In summary, the chairman, C., proposes a positive scenario of corporate functions enacting revised roles on the common company stage: the consequence is that QA (Quality Assurance) could one day be called to take on a leading, cohering role, under the new name of TQ (Total Quality), under which the current "leading actors, or actresses" will be coordinated.

Another linguistic category of pragmatic significance to the realisation of textual connectdeness and relation-building work by interactants is the patterned and shared use of phatic language, the study of which is the subject of the next section.

5.6. The instruments of coherence: phatic language.

The connective and sense-making network built by metaphorical language can be further extended to include other pragma-linguistic categories that participants use in Italian meetings. The one that I intend to single out for discuss in this section is phatic language, which in Italian is often closely related to non-verbal behaviour. While for technical reasons the latter could not be recorded, the phatic expressions **scusa/scusami** (excuse me/sorry: singular) and **scusate**[12] (excuse me/sorry: plural) create intra-textual relational patterns worth investigating (see appendix 5.3 for full text of extracts). The discrepancy between their literal meaning and their functions in authentic conversation is another feature of these categories that has prompted me to investigate their pragmatic uses in business; also, their relative statistical significance makes them noteworthy.

The first important observation to be made concerns the distribution of the singular form, **scusa**: all three participants share approximately equally in its use, whereas the plural form **scusate** is C.' prerogative. As it will be shown in section 5.7, this is one of the ways in which his role

[12] Figures for these forms are shown in brackets in table 5.1 because although they look like verbs, functionally and pragmatically, they are, in fact, phatic expressions. It should also be noticed that in Italian they are not emotionally loaded, i.e. they are not used to convey feelings of regret; but then, perhaps, neither are the equivalent English expressions.

as a chairman is accomplished, through the exclusive use of certain linguistic forms.

There is no semantic or pragmatic difference between **scusa** (excuse/sorry) and **scusami** (="excuse me/sorry) other than a possible emphasis on the "self"; interestingly, however it is not the most self-centred participant, DR., who uses it most frequently, but it is both C. and G. (see appendix 5.5: citations 23,25,26,27,29,31).

On examining each occurrence of **scusa(mi)/scusate** in context, it is possible to group them into two classes according to the pragmatic functions that they fulfil in the interaction: 1) *argumentative device* in final position in the utterance/turn; 2) *turn gaining or turn holding device* in initial or middle position, respectively.

As an argumentative device, the function of **scusa(mi)/scusate** is one of emphasising and reinforcing the stance just expressed by the speaker. Therefore it normally appears in final position in the utterance or turn, like in examples 10(a,b,c),20,24,25,27,30 and 31. Example 10 is a complex one in that DR's argument is fragmented and not until the end of the turn did he satisfactorily rephrase his position and conclude it with the third *scusa*.

It is when observing the dynamics of turn taking that the second pragmatic function of **scusa(mi)/scusate** becomes obvious: as a floor gaining device it introduces interruptions and turn overlaps as in examples 1,3,4,6(b),7,9,11,12, ,13,14,15, 20(c),22,23,33. The choice of *scusa* (and related forms) to initiate a turn-taking move is used as a mitigator: therefore, semantics and pragmatics coincide. Formal politeness is used to "soften" the impact of the interrupting move, also in anticipation of the (often) critical contents that it carries.

The interactants are engaged in a save-facing exercise (Brown & Levinson 1987), a fundamental requirement in social exchanges that in the Italian meetings is accomplished by the frequent use of politeness formulae: shared and patterned use of **scusa(mi)** reinforces the perception of meetings as cooperative and coherent interactions, as illustrated by the QA meeting. On the contrary, **scusate** is used by C. only. The explanation is not only the application of a grammatical rule, whereby C. uses the plural of **scusa(mi)**, i.e. **scusate** because he addresses two people. Neither DR. nor G. use the plural form, despite the fact that their audience still consists of two individuals. The pragmatic explanation is to be found in the role that C. represents: he is the chairman, therefore addresses the group in the plural, whereas group members in response focus on the chairman, i.e. use the singular form. The distinction between the chairman/group roles is therefore maintained and reinforced through a choice of the appropriate form.

On the other hand, shared and patterned use of forms pragmatically significant such as **scusa(mi)** and **scusa** sustains connectedeness and is instrumental to the joint interpretative or sense-making effort in which interactants are continuously engaged.

5.7. The linguistic tools of chairmanship.

From the analysis so far, the figure of the chairman, C., emerges with a distinctive linguistic profile, characterised by

1) the relatively most frequent use of verbs with **noi** (we) as an marked or unmarked subject pronoun (see tables 5.1 and 5.2);

2) the self-critical use of the theatre metaphor (section 5.5);

3) the exclusive use of the phatic **scusate** (see appendix 5.3); and, perhaps, more importantly for the overall structure of the meeting,

4) a constant dedication to the maintainance of *thematic continuity*[13] .

In this section I wish to concentrate on C. and his role as chairman and the pragmalinguistic features which inform that role and which I shall collate in a "linguistic profile". This discussion should provide evidence to support the twofold assumption of: a) the centrality of the chairman's role in meetings, and, especially, b) the complex approach that such individual takes in order to reconcile often discordant personalities, wants and issues while operating within the structure of meetings and social framework of a company, both exerting pressure and imposing constraints.

The following is a preliminary summary of the features of the chairman's linguistic profile as supported by evidence from the Italian QA meeting:

1) thematic initiation and organisation through *pointers* such as **checklist** and **step-**);
2) connectdeness and coherence building through symbolic use of language (metaphors);
3) maintainance of "we-orientation", expressed in the choice of linguistic features such as pronominals;
4) role-marking (and self-distancing) through exclusive use of phatic **scusate** and rhetorical questioning.
5) patterned use of English terminology.

C. consistently builds his unique social and linguistic role as a chairman by maintaining a fine balance between responsibility for *thematic control and development* through lexical cueing (*pointers* and metaphors), elicited cooperation (plural pronominals) and occasional self-distancing (plural phatic language and rhetorical questions). The influence of the chairman's linguistic choices is felt not only on the meeting as a structure (through control over thematic development), but also on the meeting as a social event (power and roles). Ultimately the two dimensions merge. The extrapolation of the figure of the chairman is not only a convenience: it seems to me that on the basis of a Chairman vs Group analysis, his role

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[13] Perhaps the single instances where the atmosphere of cooperation tinged with imposition coincide with C.'s use of attacking rhetorical questions (see p.112).

stands out in (at least) the ways outlined above, from that of any other member of the group, with power as the varible that I have indicated is responsible for the role analysis.

By the virtue of being a Chairman, an individual becomes more powerful with respect to the group, or at least he can command control over the proceedings even if his corporate status or personal power attributes are very limited. In the case of the QA meeting, the chairman happens to be more senior than the group members, although not necessarily hierarchically above them. His personality traits are less important than seniority in determining the share of power that he can command; however, his role as a chairman emerges quite clearly in the distinctive linguistic contributions that he makes to the interaction, some of which I have considered in detail in section 5.6 and summarised at the beginning of this section.

To conclude, I would like to focus on one of the linguistic tools of the chairman, i.e. the use of foreign terminology, since it is a feature that I do not expect to find in his British counterparts and yet it is quite common in managerial discourse in company A..

Even if the attempted analysis of such discourse practice is still too impressionistic and anecdoctal to warrant generalisations (see section 5.4), the growing importance of business English terminology in in Italy, documented in Rando (1990), and its dominant use in relation to other languages in work environments, coupled with the necessity to possess at least basic reading and/or conversation skills when operating in advanced-technology manufactures like companies A.. This is a which must be reckoned with in any serious study of discourse. In the meetings recorded, where the need for English varied from essential (technical terminology) to the apparently redundant (as in the QA meeting) the presence and analysis of foreign items must be approached in different ways. The "redundant" use of

English in the QA meeting is far more significant, both linguistically and socially, than the forced choice of technical terminology in a quality review session. Apart from assuming that an ostentatious show of "familiarity with English" might have induced C.'s use of words such as "step" and "checklist", (easily replaceable by the equivalent Italian items "passo" and "lista di riferimento"), if one takes a closer look at the pragmatic functions that English terms fulfil in the text, it emerges that the reiteration of the items quoted above sustains the thematic development of the meeting. Thematic development, in turn, contributes to textual coherence, or connectedness, as seen in the previous sections. The choice of marking English terms as thematic pointers assists the leading role of the chairman in achieving connectedness: the group's sharing in his choice is instrumental to sense-making, since common language is used to interpret (and influence) unfolding social events. Perhaps a cautionary note should be sounded with reference to the limited variety of C.'s English vocabulary. Not surprisingly, all words he (and the other two interactants) use either originate from business or technical language (quality review, marketing, know-how, software, hardware, feed-back, planning, pricing) or are drawn from everyday English to refer to technical realities (field, checklist, team, part-time, brochure); the only possible exception is the omnipresent and multifunctional "ok". However, restricted variety does not diminish the importance of the linguistic choice of English which appears to be deliberate and which just because it is unnecessary, i.e. easily replaceable by Italian, is all the more meaningful.

This phenomenon is unique to the Italian case-study, especially since it is shared by many of the interactants: the previous observations isolate the chairman's use of English expressions as meaningful choices in the exercise of his role. However, more extensive monitoring of business discourse in other departments of company A. would be necessary before attempting any conclusion regarding the overall significance of this practice.

In the next chapter, the English case-study will be approached and the same interpretative framework applied to its analysis.

CHAPTER 6: APPLYING THE FRAMEWORK TO THE ENGLISH DATA

6.1 Preliminary observations.

The nature of the English materials and the analysis that I intend to perform on them are somewhat different than those of the Italian recordings considered in chapter 5. The first set of 5 meetings that I shall consider (sections 6.2 and 6.6-6.8) is a selection of scheduled, temporally ordered meetings of a BAT (Business Action Team) which has the aim of finding out employees' perceptions of a new policy (PRP= Performance Related Pay) to be introduced by management at company B. The meetings will be shown to represent a coherently ordered sequence of speech events[1] : in fact, it is my contention that *theme*, beside contributing to internal coherence (section 5.3), is a powerful instrument of longitudinal coherence (sections 6.3 and 6.4) through which group members maintain the flow of interaction.

In section 6.9, the cohering function of pronominalisation will be mapped and the possible clusters analysed in detail. The *orientation trends* emerging from within the meetings and between meetings and context will also be studied. The cohering functions of symbolic referencing (e.g. metaphors) will be investigated in section 6.10, while the last section will provide a pragmalinguistic illustration of the inter-relationship between text and context.

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[1] The series included 3 other meetings (two between meetings 2 and 3 and one between meeting 4 and 5) which I could not record due to my visit to company A (2 meetings) and to technical problems (1 meeting).

6.2 Business Action Team meetings: the background.

SYNOPSIS
Title: Business Action Team (BAT)
Nature: Task-oriented meetings
Date: From May 1991 until September 1991
Duration: 45 mins.~ 110 mins.
Venue: Various personnel offices
Number of participants: 5~7

The participants to the BAT meetings varied in number from between five and seven, but their functional representativeness remained constant throughout the duration of their activity, with members from the personnel function outnumbering one to five other functions. The official task of these meeting was to design and administer a questionnaire on PRP (Performance Related Pay), a controversial policy that company had planned to implement at all levels after introducing it for managerial staff[2]. A formal enquiry into the employees'perceptions of this policy was a sensitive move because of the volatile internal climate following a major restructuring and re-organisation programme, with the loss of hundreds of jobs. It soon became apparent that the use of the acronym PRP, or the words Performance and Pay would focus the workforce's attention on the pay aspect at the expense of the performance aspect, which is what management insisted should be the main issue.

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[2] Originally, however, this BAT had set out to gauge employees' perceptions of ALL the company's new initiatives, only to see the scope of its investigation reduced to a single issue).

STRUCTURAL DIMENSION

MAIN TASK	SUB-TASKS
questionnaire design and administration	1) business small talk 2) apologies 3) nomination of secretary 4) review of current situation 5) statement of the problem 6) discussion 7) challenge 8) agreement 9) fixing the next meeting 10) business small talk

As in the Italian meeting (section 5.2), the structure above shows the phases that correspond to communicative functions and *sub-tasks*.. However, the BAT meeting immediately appears structurally more complex, with phases 2, 3 and 9 not present in the Italian meeting. Also, the *statement of the problem* - equivalent to the reading of the official agenda, a phase that is instrumental to the opening of the discussion - only takes place well into the interaction, after a rather long introductory sequence that has the effect of increasing the formality of the meeting:

LEGEND
(.) pause of less than 3 seconds
(5) pause of x seconds
|
| turn overlap
.... continued (the text has been edited)
pay: boldface: thematic pointers
THOUGHT: capitals denote a stressed word

C: ok ehm (.) then I think the next one was a brief brainstorm around our problem statement ehm (.) and what <u>we thought we needed to find out ehm about people's perceptions of performance related pay ehm (.)</u> and I think one of the things that came out of that was that in order to find out what people THOUGHT about it we have to ascertain first of all ehm (.) that they have some sort of basic understanding (.) of what it was what it meant to them how it would affect them and (.) where they had obtained their current sources of information (.) from (4) we then went on to .... (phase 5)

Moreover, unlike in the Italian meeting, the chairman officially opens the proceedings with an announcement that contains the *social* (rather than the *instrumental*) *theme* of the whole series of meetings (underlined in the extract). In the next sections, I shall map this theme throughout the meetings recorded so as to achieve a longitudinal perspective of its development. *Thematic pointers* will be sought that are used by interactants to maintain textual coherence, or connectedness, both within each meeting and across all meetings.

6.3 The instruments of coherence: theme.

As indicated in the introductory note of section 6.2, this BAT stems from the planned introduction of Performance Related Pay; interestingly, however, in the first meeting the *theme* is referred to by only four pointers:

(phase 6)
*C: what we thought we needed to find out ehm about people's perceptions of **performance related pay** (.) ehm*

(phase 6)
S: we should have some form of invitation whether it's verbally or written to outline what |we're doing (.) not
H: |right
*S: just ringing somebody so I can talk to you about **performance related pay***

(phase 6)
*S: was it hinging on on **prp** (.) are are the problems because they don't understand what it is or is it that they do in fact clearly understand it*

(phase 6)
H: (commenting on one of the draft questions) *I like this one about where their knowledge of **prp** comes from*

There is a fifth pointer, **pay,** that belongs to the same semantic cluster but that in this instance I would define as "accidental" because it is mentioned by C. in connection with a spelling mistake that he has found in the minutes of the previous meeting. The thematic flowchart for the first meeting would therefore be a simple (and incomplete) one to sketch, if based only on the *thematic pointers* emerged so far:

THEMATIC FLOWCHART FOR MEETING 1

THEMATIC INTRODUCTION (phase 5)
(chairman)

THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT (phase 6)
(joint)

THEMATIC ENDING (?)

The chart seems to suggest that there is an unexpected lapse in the *thematic progression*. In fact, listening to the interaction the impression one derives is quite different. The interaction flows smoothly from beginning to end, despite the apparent change in the original theme. This is because an *instrumental theme*, the questionnaire, stemming from the main theme, PRP, is taking over the interaction. In the problem statement, the chairman refers to the need "to find out" about PRP: the tool for the task is a questionnaire, which becomes the *instrumental theme* and links this first meeting to the preceding training session:

H: ..... have you reviewed the training session (.) at all
C: no no this is our first meeting since the training session ehm (.) the last (.) half an hour of which ehm we were starting to put together our ***questionnaire*** *...*

From this moment on, several pointers associated with the *instrumental theme* appear throughout the interaction as shown in the revised thematic flowchart:

THEMATIC FLOWCHART FOR MEETING 1

THEMATIC INTRODUCTION (instrumental theme)
(chairman - phase 4)

THEMATIC INTRODUCTION (main theme)
(chairman - phase 5)

THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT (instrumental theme)
(trainer - phase 4)

THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT (instrumental theme)
(H. - phase 6)

THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT (main theme)
(joint - phase 6)

THEMATIC BREAKDOWN (instrumental theme)
(H. - phase 7)

THEMATIC REPAIR (instrumental theme)
(Ha. - phase 7)

THEMATIC ENDING (instrumental theme)
(joint - phases 9 and 10)

Therefore, in this meeting, the cohering function of the theme at textual level is only partially fulfilled by the *social theme*. The intervening *instrumental theme* helps to maintain the thematic flow throughout the interaction, so that on listening to the recording, the overall impression is one of a fundamentally coherent speech event. At the same time, the cohering function of the *social theme* links the meeting to the historic corporate dimension of the change that the company is experiencing. It is interesting to follow the interplay of the two themes in the four meetings that follow.

MORE MEETINGS STRUCTURES

SECOND MEETING:
1) business small talk
2) minutes-taking (?)
3) review (by chairman)
4) discussion (joint)
5) final phase (?)
6) business small talk

THIRD MEETING:
1) business small talk
2) minutes-taking (self-nomination)
3) review (by chairman)
4) discussion (joint)
5) final phase (joint)
6) business small talk

FOURTH MEETING:
1) business small talk
2) review (by chairman)
3a) discussion
4) minutes-taking (self-nomination)
3b) discussion (joint)
5) final phase (joint)
6) business small talk

FIFTH MEETING:
1) business small talk
2) minutes-taking (elicited response
3) review and discussion (guided by chairman)
4) final phase (?)
5) business small talk (?)

One can observe a remarkable similarity between the phases that are common to the following basic meeting structure:

1) BUSINESS SMALL TALK
2) REVIEW
3) DISCUSSION
4) FINAL PHASE
5) BUSINESS SMALL TALK

On this basic structure, other phases are grafted on according to the individual nature of each encounter. A phase that is common to all meetings but one is MINUTES-TAKING, shorthand for "nomination of a secretary"[3]. It is also the nature of the *instrumental theme* (questionnaire design and implementation) and its interplay with the *social theme* (the reactions to Performance Related Pay), that characterise the irregularities in the meetings' structure. For instance, in meeting 5, a combined task is being accomplished in phase 3, "review and discussion", since participants are asked to report about the results of their own pilot studies, and after each report a multi-party discussion takes place. Similarly, a heated discussion that takes up most of the time in meeting 3 appears to have no formal conclusion, possibly due to the fact that the contrasting interpretations put forward by two participants (one in favour of administering the questionnaire of PRP and the other is against it) have not reached a compromise before the time allocated to the meeting.

In chapter 7, I shall discuss the structural properties of business meetings in more depth when addressing the issue of business meetings as a genre. This brief introduction, however, provides a suitable

[3] Some comment should be made about the nature and function of "small talk" which invariably opens and ends these and the other meetings observed both in company A and B. Unfortunately, most of the materials under this label remain off the record because on every occasion everyone's permission to record was formally sought on my behalf by one of the participants and this clearing operation would only take place just before the meeting was to start.

background to the investigation of the notion of *theme* in its longitudinal manifestation, which is the subject of the next section.

6.4 Longitudinal thematic development (LTD) as a pragmatic coherence device.

In all the five meetings introduced in the previous section it is possible to trace both the main theme (PRP) and the instrumental theme (questionnaire) through their respective *thematic pointers*. What is particularly useful about the notion of a twofold *longitudinal theme* is not only the possibility of following its development over temporally ordered interactions but also the variety, ambiguity and even elusiveness of the linguistic forms which derive from this dual nature. The themes also conflict with each other and it is the tension between the instrumental theme and the main theme that surfaces in the initial stages of the second meeting, after a relatively uncomplicated (thematically speaking) first meeting. After reviewing the current state of affairs, the chairman, C., warns about the possibility of a change of direction in the BAT set course of action:

> *C: ... whether it was appropriate to focus on performance related pay (.) it was (.) recognised that the activity we were engaged in was a valuable one that of goi- actually going out to gather data (.) but the question was whether it was appropriate to gather data on performance related pay (.) particularly since (.) few people were aware of any of the details and we might be asking questions er (.) about subjects (.) that they had had very little exposure to (.) ....*

In fact, it is the sensitive nature of the "new initiative" (the introduction of a new style management based on performance, or PRP) which may become the cause of a change in the BAT's original aims and objectives, and consequently, of its *social theme*. A justification of this change is put forward by a participant, T, a very active supporter of both the BAT and the "new initiative":

T: .... what it's about is (.) it it about where we go to next having done all these good things like DOC BIP and PDP (.) and (.) all of those all of the advances that we've been making over the over the past months and probably years now in terms of a winning culture and teamworking and integrated grading (.) personal development (.) careers skill based development and all those good things (.) making the making the conclusion really that they've all got something in common what people might tend to say well well not another initiative and it's another personnel you know idea that we've got to do (.) but to say well there's a reason for all these has been that there's been an underlying theme...........

T's intervention highlights the non viability of the *social theme*, Performance Related Pay, as the subject matter of the BAT. The very word "performance" in association with "pay" is perceived as misleading, if not outright dangerous, and insistence on their joint use in a questionnaire would jeopardise the future "new initiative"[4]. The new concept of "performance" advanced in the "new initiative" should not be automatically associated with "pay", even though pay is going to be the main concern of many employees:

T: so yeah so it wasn't (.) it was felt that it shouldn't be (.) we shouldn't concentrate perhaps on the pay (.) see what I mean (.) 'cause pay is just (.) just a part of it (.) so that was the kind of message ....

The impersonal construction "it was felt that..." hides the agent who opposes the BAT's concern for PRP. In fact, no individual is singled out but a second team called the Business Improvement Team (BIT for short) to whom, interestingly, also some of the BAT members belong. It is therefore a case of divided loyalty.

[4] Incidentally, this was the latest, and possibly most far-reaching, measure in a series of efforts "to turn the business round", as T. pragmatically summarised it during this meeting. Its success was therefore seen as crucial to the development of new values in the workforce as a whole, even if the main target are managers.

Also the *instrumental theme* of the BAT meetings is questioned as the source of possible negative effects on the "new initiative": until the BIT has briefed the Personnel Director and his first line about PRP, it is vital that the BAT takes no action:

R: ok the impact of this team (.) I mean the point T. was making the other day (.)
he was concerned that if the first knowledge of anything to do with this came
out of a survey which concentrated on ***performance related pay*** *as the key issue*
(.) then we shift the focus from being overall ***performance*** *discussions to simply*
performance related pay *(.) the implications are (.) ......*

But someone within the BAT thinks otherwise, and in so doing is probably interpreting the employees' current concern:

*S: I mean I think (.) regardless of what we do or don't do (.) that [**PRP**] is still*
people's focus (.) or certainly will be in the initial phases anyway until
we've had a chance to try and communicate the whole (.) process

At this stage, the twofold thematic progression (social/instrumental) of the first meeting seems to have changed from PRP/questionnaire to performance/? in the second meeting, where the two social themes represent the clashing interests of two distinct teams, the BAT and the BIT. The paradox is the affiliation of some of the interactants, including the chairman (C) to both parties!

The *instrumental theme* (questionnaire) is closely dependent on the *social theme*, which is why in the second meeting it is abandoned. On the other hand, as the discussion unfolds, there is a growing feeling that perhaps the whole BAT exercise might be best dropped for the time being:

T: ehm (.) may be we can er er I mean there's always a danger of hijacking the BAT
with someone else's project to say (.) er (.) yeah do we use this as as a
selling activity for (.) for (.) this Moving Forward ["the new initiative"] type
(.) project
S: I mean is (.) the BIT's concern is that we're pre- emptying the Moving Forward
project
T: no it's the pay side

However, a less drastic solution is proposed by R. (BAT's facilitator but also concerned with the the team's effects on the "new initiative") who brings the questionnaire back in the arena of the discussion:

*R: ... I haven't obviously seen your **questionnaire** (.) the other part (   ) I mean only you could say (   ) what you've heard so far and (   ) whether you think you need to re-address (.) the way you ask the **questions***

Obviously, it is not only a matter of re-wording the questionnaire; more importantly, certain controversial thematic pointers such as *pay* (and underlying issues) should be removed, and this would consequently change the original emphasis and objectives of the BAT, making them more acceptable to the BIT. It is once again T. who launches in a monologue, as if thinking aloud, in an attempt to clarify to himself and to the group the conflictual position in which they find themselves in, both as teams and as individuals:

*T: I think the (.) yeah I mean the **pay** (.) the **pay** issue is obviously of fundamental interest to to (.) to to me in my department obviously (.) ehm (.) but I'm keen that we do understand the basis of **performance** and **performance** driven employment as well I mean that **pay** is an indicator to me (.) I mean as far as I'm concerned you can see **pay** for all the other things that **pay** is and wages and so on and what you want to call it (.) that money in (.) you might consider that to be an exchange for work done or whatever (.) whatever those traditional definitions might be put (.) you always (.) you give messages with money with **pay** you know (.) it's it's it's so focal everybody knows about it because they have some and they get it (.) it's an immediate vehicle and it's always in the limelight and everyone's either moaning about it or talking about it or whatever and you can put some (.) if you're going to have some cultural values that you want to shove out into the organisation or you want the organisation to say (.) to declare to the organisation that these are things that we think are important and the things that we stand for then pay is an immediate and obvious vehicle to do that with and that's what **performance related pay** does I think (.) or should do in my view (.) it should say to an individual (.) you're going to get some more money because you are you are performing and a definition of **performance** is along the lines of you your practices and behaviour supporting business values and objectives (.) so it's an it's an indicator you know (.) so you can say here you are it's a it's the box of chocolates to tie the ribbon to sort of thing (.) you can pass it out and say you're getting this because and that's what that scoring chart was there for (.) we hadn't devised how it how that would actually relate to money in terms of pounds and pence you know (.) I mean if you did this you got that that's not the important thing that we needed to get out first the important thing is this is **performance** and these are some*

performance** factors (.) they're to be scored against all that we'd like you to work to so they become very (.) you know (.) they become obvious straightaway you can see them they hit you in the face you know (.) they're there (.) so in terms of earning the process or earning the problem then yes I'm interested in **pay

This apology for the theory of performance, while providing insights in the complexity of the problem, does not have the effect of simplifying the BAT proceedings: on the contrary, the odds seem to turn in favour of the BAT's original mission, thus creating an "impasse" that leads to a renewed exortation by R.:

H: what shall we do next
R: well I I was gonna suggest you go and have a re-think now (.) 'cause you may there may be things that prompt you to ( ) all I say (.) maybe address the concepts rather than lay out and the words ( )

After this second remark, the insistence on the need for a change in the course of action deepens the divide between those in favour and those against, as the long silence that follows (2 minutes and 15 seconds) clearly suggests. A welcome interruption which is provided by the chairman's sharp eye on orthographic matters:

C: supporting has two p's

Because of its total irrelevancy, this comment provides a vivid contrast to the gravity of the situation related by T.'s lenghty monologue. After the silence, the BAT's "hidden agenda" emerges:

T.: well that's (.) that was one of the things (.) the considerations actually because (.) we were as a team we were trying to develop a method of selling PRP into the into the workforce if you like I think that was was that (.) the way we're going .....

This is a turning point in the second meeting and in the whole series; the social theme will include two aspects of the PRP question, i.e. a) what the BAT intends for PRP; and b) what the reactions to their focus on PRP might be from the workforce. **Performance** and **pay** appear both in the phrase "performance related pay" and as separate items (see appendix 6.2) but at the end of the discussion the chairman expresses the position eventually prevailing within the BAT that the two be kept separate linguistically and as policy matters:

C.: yes but if it's launched in an appropriate way (.) the the more far-sighted (.) may say as we appear to be saying now (.) ***performance related pay*** *is is is one thing but what the company is really trying to do (.) is is to do something about* ***performance*** *and when the* ***performance*** *(   ) then the* ***pay*** *will flow through it from it (.) ....*

At this stage, it becomes easier for all participants to accept that perhaps the team should re-think their original objectives by focusing on **performance** only:

C.: in which case isn't it is it appropriate for us to re-focus (.) on performance itself (.) with a- a- another change in problem statement

T.'s supportive move lends further strength to the revisionist tendency:

T: well I won- I wonder I mean I (.) I wonder if we should (.) try and understand more about that ["the new initiative"] *(.) if that's gonna be launched pretty quickly or soon ....*

Unfortunately, due to a technical failure, the final phase of this meeting was not recorded. However, from my notes it appears that C. and T.'s remarks round off the main body of the discussion phase which was followed by an uncontroversial final phase (fixing date, time and venue of the next meeting).

Contrary to what emerged from the Italian interaction, where *thematic progression* was closely associated with the figure of the chairman, the main contributors to the *thematic progression* of the second BAT meeting are, in order of imfluence, T., C. (the chairman), and R,. the team facilitator[5].

What was to be a one-issue problem statement for the BAT to be tackled by means of a questionnaire (first meeting) is soon taken over by another, more urgent internal development, advanced by the BIT and the contents of which clash with the BAT's own concern.

Both teams have "performance" as a focus, but while the BAT would investigate the workforce's own perceptions and understanding of Performance Related Pay, (with the risk of re-enforcing in peoples' minds the assumption that performance equals pay), the BIT has the more ambitious and far reaching objective of introducing a concept of "performance" which, far from being translatable in terms of pay only, should inspire a new culture in company B. This conflict will eventually come to a head and cause the BAT to halt its activities.

6.5 The figures for longitudinal thematic progression.

It is interesting to follow the *longitudinal progression* of the theme during the remaining meetings and observe how towards the end of the series the density of lexical items associated with the *main theme* (PRP) decreases substantially. The figures appear in the table below:

[5] T.'s divided loyalty between his active role in the BAT and his support for the BIT's objective are expressed in his long stretches of monologue (two of which are cited in this section) through which he argues the pros and cons both for himself and for the group.
C., on the contrary, keeps a low profile, intervening less often and showing from the very beginning an inclination to accommodate "the new initiative" at the expense of the short-term objective of the BAT.

TABLE 6.1: FIGURES FOR THEMATIC PROGRESSION

meetings	1	2	3	4	5(*)	
duration in mins. (approx.)	(45)	(60)	(60)	(45)	(?)	
						scores
prp	2	4	35	7	-	48
performance related pay (PRP)	2	33	38	3	2	78
pay	1	38	8	-	3	50
performance	-	48	8	8	5	69
social theme score	5	123	89	18	10	245
questionnaire	8	9	22	31	3	73
question/s	12	8	95	20	15	150
instrumental theme score	20	17	117	51	18	223

(*) The figures for this meeting have limited validity since the recording of the interaction ended about half a way through due to a technical problem.

Methodological note.

The table above should be seen as a stage in the discussion of Longitudinal Thematic Progression (LTP), giving a quantitative summary, albeit a crude one, of certain facets of LTP that would appear less meaningful if interspersed in the analytical process or irrelevant if taken in isolation from it.

As in the case of the Italian statistical results, the above figures must be interpreted cautiously, as *indicators* of possible trends. Also, allowance should be made for the bias resulting from the (relatively contained) differences in the duration of the meetings, which might have affected some of the figures, especially in the case of the last, incomplete meeting.

These considerations notwithstanding, I would like to put forward the following observations:

1) The *theme scores* of 245 and 223 not only confirm the initial perception on the presence in the interaction of at least two themes, but also reveals the importance of the *instrumental theme* vis a vis the *social theme*.

2) The scores for *thematic pointers* indicate the variations in the relative importance of each pointer, not only within a single interaction but within the series of meetings. One can observe an increasing trend in the case of the **questionnaire** pointer, whereas the reverse is true for all other pointers.

3) The *social theme* seems to draw equal strength from the two sub-sets of pointers, **PRP+Performance Related Pay** and **pay+ performance,** whereas the *instrumental theme* develops through the pointer **questions** rather than the pointer **questionnaire,** in a 2:1 proportion.

4) Of particular interest is the variation of the cumulative scores for **PRP/Performance Related Pay** and the **pay-performance** sets of pointers across meetings 2 and 3. Whereas the first set is dominant in meeting 2, the reverse happens in meeting 3. This trend is to be seen in conjunction with the variation of the *instrumental theme* score, which is lowest in meeting 2 and highest in meeting 3.

This twofold manifestation mirrors the shift of concern within the BAT from a discussion on the meanings and significance of "pay", "performance" and "performance related pay" (well exemplified by the T.'s monologue cited in the previous section) to a discussion that appears to be guided by "performance related pay" + "prp" AND the tools for investigation ("questionnaire" + "questions"). The latter is an informed guess based on the above figures only; in fact, the thematic progression of meeting 3 will be mapped in the next section.

6.6 Further progression of the twofold theme: meeting 3.

As already mentioned elsewhere, meeting 3 did not follow meeting 2 in real life. Two other meetings took place in between that I could not attend due to my visiting company A. Therefore some of the numerical values tabulated above refer to two events separated not so much by the temporal barrier of five weeks, but especially by the accumulation of contextual influences that cropped up during that time and which must have directly influenced meeting 3.

During the review phase (see 6.3 for the meeting structure), the chairperson H. refers to one of the contextual elements that will have closely influenced the development of the BAT activities, the nature of which she defines as "even more sensitive than I thought":

H: I didn't actually circulate (.)the material that we came up with ehm (.) I thought we'd look at it today I got a bit twitchy about sending it out in the post when I saw it in black and white it looked (.) <u>even more sensitive than I thought</u>
T. oh dear
J: |(laughs)
H: |so that's why (.) ehm but you know we'll obviously continue work on it today (.) I think before we start it might be worth just talking about the BIT meeting we had last week 'cause M. [Personnel Director] was a visitor (.) was it last thursday (.) and so we had we had a chance to update M. on what the team's been doing and he was very supportive (.) you know wants us to press on (.) ehm (.) he did stress

himself the sensitivity of what we were looking at and you know (.) ehm (.) expressed his own close interest in it and suggested that when we get to the point where we're ready to pilot the questionnaire that he'd like C. and I to go and go through that with him so he can have a look at it so (.) there wasn't anything else ( )

The BIT is again referred to as the source of BAT's authority, as already pointed out during meeting 2 by the then chairman, C:

C: ...... however (.) yesterday (.) er (.) three four of us three can't remember four attended the little BIT from which we derive our authority[6] *.....*

It is probably at this stage of meeting 3 that the existing tension between the constrasting needs for wider participation to the BAT on the one hand, and maintenance of secrecy on the other hand dissolves in favour of the latter. It may be worth remembering, however, that as I underlined in section 6.2, the composition of the BAT was strongly biased in favour of the personnel function, and that at the beginning this was perceived as a drawback by most of the BAT members:

J: what was the what was the initial purpose of having sort of (.) a fair proportion of people from outside the function involved with it does that still stand (.) ( )
S: because we have a problem
C: yes (.) the the original concept was people's perceptions of (.) we said BIP [Business Improvement Programme, another new initiative] but we really meant new initiatives and the way in which er (.) we were developing the company was developing (.) and it seemed pointless (.) to (.) start looking at a problem that affects people outside the function and it's only people within the function that are looking at it because what it would come right round to again is (.) inward-looking we know what's best for people we own it (.) we might let you have a sight of it but remember that it's our doll and we'll take it away at any time (laugh) sort of typical things that we've always done in the past (meeting 2)

---

[6] On the occasion quoted by H., however, the acknowledgement and legitimation of the work carried out by the BAT is made official by the presence of M., the Personnel Director. The sensitive nature of the the issues dealt with by the BAT is also confirmed by the fact that the draft questionnaire will undergo M's scrutiny before being piloted, i.e. before the news of its existence becomes public property.

And it was again C., as chairman of meeting 2, who comes out in support of the BIT and their emphasis on performance, while urging his own BAT group to adopt a low profile on PRP:

C: yes but if it's launched in an appropriate way (.) the the the more farsighted (.) may say as we appear to be saying now (.) performance related pay is is one thing but what the company's really trying to do (.) is is to to do something about the performance and when the performance is |( )

One month and some BITs later, the unease generated by the dominant role of personnel employees in the BAT and the controversy over who should go forward with what policy seem to have settled. Meeting 3 is set to work on the questionnaire and therefore on PRP:

H: ok (.) so (.) we need to really get on with the questionnaire as (.) quickly as possible I think ....

As Table 6.1 shows, the *instrumental theme* score is highest for this meeting and this is explicable in that most of the interaction concentrates on the design and refinement of the **questions** (thematic pointer). The *social theme* score, if relatively high, is somewhat misleading. In fact, contrary to what happened in meeting 2, reference to the *social theme* in meeting 3 is incidental, i.e. it is a consequence of the need to name the issue investigated by the "questions". There is no evidence of the debate and argument over the meaning and significance of PRP, and related issues, which informed meeting 2 (see Appendix 6.2).

The absence of C., chairman of the previous two meetings is one possible cause of this change of emphasis; beside, other factors external to the BAT, such as the BIT and their "new initiative", seem to have eased their pressure on the BAT for the time being and meeting 3 proceeds as if meeting 2 had not happened. The meeting is a fine example of the argumentative discourse on methodology, further complicated by the sensitivity of the issue investigated; therefore the choice and use of language is all the more important for the success of the survey. However, a detailed examination of the transcript would beyond the scope of this study, where the analytic categories have been derived in order to illustrate *coherence* within the interaction and between the interactions and context, as illustrated in figure 4.1.

Theme, in its twofold manifestation, forwards coherence on the temporal axis, i.e. *longitudinal coherence*. Yet, it is difficult to justify its contribution to contemporary *contextual coherence*, i.e. coherence with the social context at the time of the events, since it has been suggested that the BAT members seem determined to go ahead with a questionnaire on PRP despite some external pressures not to do so. The text of meeting 3 reveals the discord between corporate expectations (the context) and the meetings' activity. However, there is at least a powerful link between the BAT and the corporate context: it is M.'s (Personnel Director referred to in H.'s quote, p.124) seal of approval that provides it and it is probably under the his authority that the initial thrust on PRP (and thus continuation of the original *social theme*) can be sustained for another meeting.
In fact, the statistical results of Table 6.2 appear to indicate quite a different situation for meeting 4.

6.7 Thematic anti-climax: meeting 4.

The meeting that took place in real life between what I have labelled as "meeting 3" and "meeting 4" is summarised by H., the chairperson, in the review phase of meeting 4 (see section 6.2.4 for the meeting structure):

H: .... ehm so last week we really cracked on with (.) well I thought we cracked on with (laughs) getting the ***questionnaire*** *sorted out ehm (.) and we identified those four sections (.) which are in your notes as the four things we wanted to find out about from people ie what their understanding of PRP is how they'd got that understanding who's talked to them about it where they've heard about it whether they have heard anything about it (.) why they think the company is (.) ehm taking this route from the company's point of view (.) which links in with what we were talking about the week before about the advantages and disadvantages for the company (.) and then finally and maybe most importantly to them how they think it will affect them and whether they feel positive or negative about it being produced and what effect they think it will have on them re their job (.) so having decided that they were gonna be our four sections to address we then tried to link in the* ***questions*** *we've (.) invented so far*
J: yeah
H: to those four areas (.) ehm (.) and we found that we had actually (.) got quite a few ***questions*** *sorted already ......*

From this summary it appears that work has proceeded with no major problem and that the BAT is now finalising its questionnaire. However, bearing in mind that meeting 4 lasts about 45 minutes and is expected to concentrate on refining the questionnaire, the thematic scores in Table 1 are rather low. Could that be due to the emergence of another theme or, even, other themes? Careful listening to the recording suggests otherwise. The *instrumental theme* is still present and, to a lesser extent, so is the *social theme;* yet, the general feeling is that the interaction has reached an anti-climax, after the engrossing argumentations of the first two meetings and the intense debate on the mechanics of questionnaire design of meeting 3. In fact, the BAT members have accomplished much of the planned work and are preparing a draft questionnaire for C., former chairman, to comment on. The interaction stalls on several occasions and there are numerous humorous remarks exchanged between the participants. This is reflected in the quantitative results, which show a reduced contribution to *Longitudinal Thematic Development* by this meeting compared to meetings 2 and 3 (see

Table 6.2 below for scores and Appendix 6.4 for the full text of *thematic pointers*[7]).

TABLE 6.2: REVISED FIGURES FOR THEMATIC PROGRESSION

meetings	1	2	3	4	5(*)	
duration in mins. (approx.)	(45)	(60)	(60)	(45)	(?)	
						scores
prp	2	4	35	7	-	48
performance related pay (PRP)	2	33	38	3	2	78
pay	1	38	8	-	3	50
performance	-	48	8	8	5	69
social theme score	5	123	89	18	10	245
questionnaire	8	9	22	31	3	73
question/s	12	8	95	20	15	150
pilot (+study, stage(s), reviews)	-	-	-	13	4	17
instrumental theme score	20	17	117	64	22	240

(*) The figures for this meeting have limited validity since the recording of the

[7] A new *thematic pointer* for the *instrumental theme* is being used in this meeting (and in the next): **pilot** (and derived combinations = pilot study, pilot stages, pilot reviews) referring to the testing phase of the questionnaire, when a selected sample of trusted inviduals from various departments where interviewed by the team.

interaction terminated about half a way through due to a technical problem.

Although internal coherence around the twofold theme is weakened during meeting 4, the external cohering link between the BAT and the company is maintained through the reference to the Personnel Director, M., as the person to whom the team is answerable

H: so you're saying before we can do that we all need to have a bit of time to look at the questionnaire (.) so
J: we need to get the (.) feedback from (.) M.
S: M.

Reference to senior management provides possibly the strongest cohering links between the BAT and the corporate environment. Text-context interdependence emerges in other linguistic manifestations such as pronominalisation and symbolic referencing, examined in detail in sections 6.9 and 6.10, respectively.

6.8 A case of thematic breakdown?: meeting 5[8]

According to the notes that I took that day, the participants discussed the results of their pilot schemes in depth and introduced some amendments to the questions. The questionnaire would have been ready for use after this meeting and after the promising results of pilot interviews run on a small number of employees. However, the BAT was suspended and its actions "put on hold", as one of the participants told me at a later date. Something or someone intervened to halt their activities just at the time when team members where ready to submit the final version of the questionnaire. The causes of this abrupt change should be sought in a worsening of the internal climate, with a new wave

8 The recording of this meeting is incomplete due to a fault in the microphone that developed during the operation and was not detected until the interaction was over.

of redundancies, hitting also managerial positions, scheduled for the autumn. The sensitivity of the issues raised by such a questionnaire must have made it a non-viable move for management. Nothing has happened since.

Linguistically, the *thematic development* shows a progressive weakening from meeting 3 onwards and this is due mainly to the fact that the BAT is approaching the completion of its task, therefore the need for referencing through pointers diminishes progressively. Similarly, the dominance of the *social theme* over the *instrumental theme*, particularly visible in meeting 2, coincides with the discussion on the concept of PRP and the implications of its application in company B., while at a later stage it is the mechanics of questionnaire writing that informs the discussion, hence the growing focus on the *instrumental theme*.

The quantitative results for both themes in meeting 5 (see table 6.2 above) does not indicate a shift of focus from one theme to the other; rather, they appear to be pointing to a fading interest and involvement by the participants in the BAT objectives. This is the impression that one derives from listening to the recording of meeting 5, which is also unusually quiet and lacking sparkle. The overall low tone of the interaction is mirrored by changing linguistic patterns at macro-level already visible in meeting 4, where long pauses, side-tracking and light-hearted humour are incidental features.

Humour, in particular, has been a consistent trait of this series of meetings but it is interesting to observe that its pragmatic functions or sensitive areas, whereas in the second half of meeting 4 it consists of "unmarked" or "generic" gags that could have been used in various other situations.

On the whole, one perceives an approaching subdued *finale* and one wonders if the BAT participants were also aware of the smooth decline towards inaction that was being prepared for them.

With reference to the title of this section, one could say that the thematic progression seems to be partially heading towards natural completion (see Appendix 6.5 for extracts of the *pointers*) in that at least some of the aims have been achieved. On the other hand, however, one could hypothesise that further stages could have occured - had no other external intervention changed the course of events, - leading to quite different corporate outcomes and linguistic manifestations.

I wish to conclude this section with an observation that will also prepare the ground for the sections to come. If one takes *theme* to be the "backbone" of an interaction onto which other pragmalinguistic phenomena such as symbolic referencing are grafted, a relationship of interdependence between theme and the other phenomena emerges. The categories selectively chosen for this study, - theme, metaphorical and phatic language and symbolic referencing - can then be seen to serve the twofold purpose of a) illustrating the workings of coherence as the principle that governs social action (and therefore language), and b) showing the degree of interdependence that link linguistic phenomena at macro level. The forms of this relationship will be explored in the next sections.

6.9 The instruments of coherence: pronominalisation.

In this section, an analysis of personal pronouns (subject and object) will be undertaken with a view to highlighting their possible contribution to temporal coherence. As with the Italian materials, I shall provide tabulated results of the computer search of relevant items, followed by an interpretation of the emerging patterns. Unlike the Italian materials, however, I shall seek to establish the existence of *longitudinal or inter-textual patterns* rather than intra-textual patterns, thus continuing and expanding on the analysis of the previous section.

6.9.1 Some observations.

Before presenting the results, it is necessary to comment on some aspects of English pronominalisation that differ from Italian. Firstly, in Italian subject pronouns are rendered redundant by the presence of inflected verbal forms. Even accepting that colloquial spoken English may present similar elliptical forms, it is unlikely that a corpus of business meeting recordings will contain more than a negligible proportions of these forms. Therefore, I will base my search on the assumption that all personal pronouns have been made explicit by the interactants.

Secondly, in Italian there are no contracted forms, which are very common in spoken English: these must be identified and retrieved by the computer programme.

Thirdly, the form *they* in English may refer either to humans or objects (animals being an unlikely category in the business context!). Therefore, a post-search selection operation relying on contextual clues is necessary to weed out the inanimate referents.

Fourthly and lastly, the pronoun *you* can be either singular or plural, have a personal referent or introduce an impersonal expression, or be part of a discourse marker such as *you know*. The discrimination is not always easily made even by a human operator, but it is a forbidding task for the Oxford Concordance Package. Short of writing a piece of software that could deal with the semantics of *you*, one must take the crude figures provided in the table below with a good deal of caution.

TABLE 6.3: FIGURES FOR PRONOMINALISATION (MEETINGS 1 TO 5)

meeting	1	2	3	4	5(*)	total
no. words	(4227)	(9099)	(11109)	(5727)	(2370)	scores
I	119	210	242	108	72	75
me	8	10	21	13	4	56
(you	8	174	361	120	47	784)
he	25	8	21	2	12	68
him		4	6	1	3	17
she	-	-	-	-	6	6
her	-	-	-	-	4	4
we	104	208	360	226	49	954
us	13	11	27	4	1	56
they	26	23	104	38	22	213
them	7	13	55	27	9	111

(*) The figures for this meeting have limited validity since the recording ended about half a way through the interaction due to a technical problem.

6.9.2 Interpretation.

In the light of the remarks concerning the pronoun **you** expressed in section 6.3.1, I shall omit this category from my interpretation. The analysis of the figures referring to the remaining pronouns seem to indicate the following trends:

1) while the value for the **we-us** category is expectedly very high, confirming the impression of collegiality derived from listening to the recordings, the remarkably high score for the ***I-me*** category is somewhat surprising in that this strong "self" orientation is not immediately detectable in the interactions;

2) noteworthy is the absence of female referents in all but one meeting, while many of the masculine pronouns refer either to individuals present at the meetings, or to the Personnel Director, in roughly the same proportion. The important role played by this single referent on the proceedings and their outcome will be explored in section 6.11.

3) the ***they-them*** category refers mainly to company employees also identified as "workforce" or "employees" (see section 6.10 for a discussion on these items). The highest score for ***they-them*** registered for meeting 3 (104+55) correlates with the highest score for the **instrumental theme** (see table 6.2). This is due to the fact that **they** (the employees) is used very frequently as a collective referent during meeting 3 on questionnaire design . Following this line of interpretation, one could isolate the following orientation scores:

TABLE 6.4: RELATIONAL ORIENTATIONS expressed by pronouns

meeting	1	2	3	4	5		total scores
self-orientat (*I* + *me*)	126	220	263	121	76	=	806
we-orientation (*we* + *us*)	117	209	387	230	55	=	1010
they-orientation (*they* + *them*)	33	36	159	65	31	=	324

Although the total score for the **we**-orientation seem to lend support to the claim that, taken globally, the interactions are of a cooperative nature, single scores indicate an internal individualistic pattern: the scores for the first two and the last meetings suggest that the ***I***-orientation is marginally if not definitely stronger. A closer examination of the transcripts shows that this is due to the emergence of two distinctive personalities within the meetings, namely C. and T., who are jointly responsible for a large share of the ***I***-orientation. So much for endophoric (internal to the BAT) referencing.

As far as exophoric (external to the BAT) referencing is concerned, it is worth remembering that the ***they***-orientation score is largely made up of collective referencing to the workforce in general, as potential recipients of the questionnaire. Longitudinal inter-textual coherence is maintained with some difficulty due to the powerful individualistic thrust (*I*-orientation) that weighs against it in at least three meetings.

Pronominalisation, as one of the instruments throught which coherence (as connectedness and as sense-making) is realised, is meaningful only if one attempts to chart intratextual or intertextual patterns. In fact, a close-up view of the behaviour of pronominals without the necessary contextual framing would only lead to cohesive patterning, where cohesion is intended according to Halliday & Hasan (1976). The analysis of the Italian meeting (section 5.4) provided the essential contextualisation by interpreting the quantitative findings against the background of the social dimension of the interaction. Taking advantage of the sequence of speech events available from the English company, it has been possible to add further depth afforded by an inter-textual approach, so that orientation patterns have been traced longitudinally while always interpreting them in relation to the social dimension.

In the next section, I shall move on to another component of the coherence building process, symbolic referencing, where some of the categories already identified will be studied as components of metaphoric clusters.

6.10 The instruments of coherence: "symbolic referencing"

In section 5.6 I have analysed the pragmatics of the **discorso** metaphor in the Italian verbal interaction. In this section I propose to go one step further to try and identify what I shall call *metaphoric clusters* in the English materials and show their contribution to coherence through the system of *symbolic referencing* that they realise.

With reference to the tables in the previous section, I shall begin my discussion by focusing on the pronominals **he** (and object form **him**) and **they** (and **them**) as exophoric personal referencing, i.e. between the meeting context and the wider corporate context. As I have already mentioned elsewhere, *he* and *they* refer to the Personnel Director and the workforce, respectively. Beside this direct referencing action, *he* and *they* fulfil a symbolic referencing role, in that, by extension, they index two different, and for some, ideologically opposed, semantic fields: management and workers.

But there is a third component of this network that is mentioned in connection with the sensitivity of certain lexical items to be used in the questionnaire (see sectio 6.11): the trade unions.

By mapping the network built by these and other indexicals semantically associated to them, I hope to show how they function as referents of a system of "symbols" (or "ideology") which informs the corporate environment of company B.

- *'Managers' and 'people'* -

... we're saying this is the style of managemental behaviour we want from managers (.) how do you get that (.) well part of it is understanding the management styles and methods and educating the managers and people in what is around .... (T., meeting 3)

In this section I shall outline the development of one element in the symbolic network consisting of two symbol-laden semantic clusters present in this corporate environment: *the management* and *the workforce*. Significantly, the most common forms of reference to the two clusters tend to be the pair **he+his** or a proper noun, and **they+them** or **people**, respectively. The BAT members identify themselves in the collective **we+us** or the less frequent, individualistic **I+me**:

addressees cluster

managers	***workforce***
"he",M.,manager(s), director B.,company,management.	they",people,employee(s), individuals, colleagues, respondents, population,areas,sample, everybody,groups,someone,anyone.

addressors cluster

we I the BAT team personnel BAT......

There is a third set of referents that should be added to the **managers** and **workforce** sets: the trade unions. Their semantic cluster is composed of the following items: shop stewart,unions,trade unions, excluding any pronominal or personal reference.

It should also be noted that Performance Related Pay was only going to be introduced for managers after the BAT was set up: this means that managers are excluded from the survey and the BAT is left with the task of surveying the employees in non-managerial positions. This situation might have affected the system of referents which I have just outlined by sharpening the polarisation on one of the two clusters, thus over-emphasizing the divide traditionally thought to exist between the two groups. Had the managers been part of the survey, the components of these "symbolic networks" might have been less immediately identifiable, leading to fuzzier clusters.

Earlier in the first meeting, "people" is used to refer to anyone within or outside the function:

*C: yes indeed the original concept was **people**'s perceptions of we said BIP but we really meant new initiatives and the way in which er (.) we were developing the company was developing (.) and it* *seemed pointless (.) to (.) start looking at a problem that affects **people** outside the function and it's only **people** within the function that are looking at it ....* (meeting 1)

while at a later stage, the vague **people** identifies individuals outside the function, while the collective **we** is reserved to the BAT members:

*C: .... we thought **we** needed to find out ehm (.) about **people**'s perceptions of performance related pay ehm (.) and I think one of the things that came out of that was that in order to find out what **people** THOUGHT about it **we** have to ascertain first of all ehm (.) that they have some sort of basic understanding (.) of what it was .....* (meeting 1)

The thematic progression influences the choice of referent; so PRP (main theme) is mainly associated with **people**, while the semantic field of "questionnaire" (instrumental theme) attracts terms such as "population" (and its permutations "sample population", "disparate population", "whole population"), "person", "volunteers" and "individuals".

Meeting 2 continues the association between **people** and the workforce while introducing the BAT (**we**) as spokesman for management, part owner of the new policies and responsible for their implementation :

*T: ...making the conclusion really that they've all got something in common what **people** might tend to say (.) well well not another initiative (.) and it's another personnel idea ....*

*T: ....the reason for all these has been that there's an underlying theme and that is a firm belief in developing the business through developing **people** and that's what's been at at at the back of all of these concepts and initiatives ....*

*T: ...the fact that we might want to pay **people** to reward them for good performance is perhaps not the object in in total terms ...*

*T: .... I suppose from that starting point the object of the exercise this time is to make sure that **people** understand the concepts and what's behind it no matter what that must take*

(meeting 2)

The BAT's dependency from and loyalty to the company's management is further confirmed by the personal references in meeting 3, where managers, directors and the same MD are all, figuratively speaking, brought into the arena. This is set against an intense discussion on the relationship between employees and management and how this is going to be affected by the introduction of PRP. When interpreting the likely reactions from the shopfloor, some of the BAT members do not shun colourful language:

T: we might decide to put that in to get a feel on on how effective the launch has been in concentrating people's minds on actually lifting the company rather than (.) this is another way that the company have got for screwing us out of our rightful returns and vice versa
S: yes
T: well this is a way we can screw the company
J: yes
T: we'll soon get round this scheme (meeting 2)

The discussion on the difficult relationship between "company", "managers" and "people" vis-a-vis the introduction of Performance Related Pay reaches a climax during meeting 3, when the necessity to design an effective and uncontroversial questionnaire leads the BAT members into intricate arguments on the appropriate language for the task. Here is an example, on whether to use a general expression ("the company") or the three letter acronym identifying it:

?: are we still using (company acronym)
?: what does (company acronym) stand for
?: better than the company
?: shall we just say (company acronym)
?: from (company acronym) standpoint

The "symbolic network" mentioned above becomes complete with the introduction of the third indexical, which is relatively infrequent if compared to the others: the "unions". Nevertheless, the presence of this third element should be analysed because even though physically external to the corporate environment, its significance is enhanced by the period of economic crisis and change. Although the first reference is a light-hearted one

S: I think the other important point that came out was also er the fact of when we contact people you know the invita-... we should have some form of invitation whether it's verbally or |written to outline
H: |right
*S: what we're doing |(.) not just ringing somebody so I can talk to you about **performance related***

H: | uhm uhm yes 'cause you might get (laughter)
*S: **pay** ( ) advisable given the current circumstances*
J: can I b ring my shopstewart with me (meeting 1)

it conveys the message that employees' diffidence may provoke an intervention by the unions. More elements of the relationship company-unions emerge from meeting 4: on the surface, it is a linguistic choice that sparks the argument:

*?: where it's got the (.) for for er (X) as a company what effect do you think performance related pay would have on the following (.) resistance from **unions***
T: what's that resistance to what
J: we thought well (.) both resistance to PRP and also resistance to generally you know the the sort of comments that this is another thing management are trying to screw us with and whether that would affect resistance generally to (.) to other things (meeting 4)

The twofold issue of employees' perceptions of effects of PRP on the unions and the likely unions' (negative) reaction to it cannot be ignored:

*J: I thought one of the issues there would have been like union power as much as maybe resistance from **unions** uhm (.) it is important but if under (.) if if you're saying that maybe that people think PRP undermines **union** power then that will lead to resistance* (meeting 4)

But the word "resistance" is the stumbling block:

*T: yeah (.) perhaps **resistance** is the wrong word*
J: sure sure
*?: there it could be something like **union** involvement or **union***
?: yeah
T: reaction
?: no you can't because it's got to increase or decrease hasn't it (meeting 4)

The alternative words "involvement" or "reaction" are put forward as less controversial in an attempt to avoid inducing an adverse response. Together with a careful choice of wording, the tactical use of the questionnaire is also important, so as to avoid undue dwelling on potentially controversial questions:

?: whether they will or not so maybe if we could stop sort of somewhere in the middle sort of

?: yeah
?: yeah
?: without sort of giving anyone pre-conceived ideas about what you're trying to
J: sure sure
T: we should go down the list immediately 'cause they'll take the resistance from unions and
?: oh yeah
?: you know (meeting 4)

Eventually, a significant agreement is reached on the final wording:

*?: the word **resistance** <u>about unions we thought it was too biased</u>*
?: mmmmm
?: it was implying a negative to start off with
?: ok
?: we thought <u>influence</u> in the unions was a bit more conventional (meeting 4)

This section has provided a vivid illustration of how effectively language is used to represent, relate and influence perceptions of social phenomena by various individuals/departments within a business environment, i.e. how language is used to maintain the ideological foundations of a corporate culture.

6.11 Text and context interaction: an illustration.

... my personal view is that if you understand the context of the whole thing then (.) it probably won't have any major impact because (.) you will understand in understanding the education of that the whole thing about the context of where and what you're looking at ....

(R, meeting 2)

The comment made by one of the participants to meeting 2 is a an apt introduction to this section, in which I will attempt to map the network of text-context links that emerge from the recordings of the BAT meetings with a view to showing the inter-relatedness of discourse and corporate situation.

The analysis of the theme has brought up several contextual links, one of which I shall follow up as it develops throughout the BAT meetings: the role of the personnel function. This is particularly relevant in that the BAT: a) is mainly composed by personnel staff;

b) derives its authority from and is in close contact with the personnel director.

"The function" and "the others": a difficult partnership?

This is an attempt at re-constructing the image of the personnel function as seen from within company B, both by its members and by the workforce. As already mentioned above, the BAT group that I have observed included mainly personnel staff, despite the chairman's wish that people from other functions would participate:

H: that gives us a team of seven I think (.) one two
: (whispers)
C: seven we only did want a team of seven we originally started off as quite a large team ehm because I I wanted people from outside ***the function*** *(.) er but it's people from outside* ***the function*** *more or less who dropped out (.) stay with us A. don't leave*
A: |yeah don't worry I won't leave the sinking boat (meeting 1)

A. is the only "outsider" at the first meeting and assumes the role of the token representative. The BAT members are aware of and uneasy about the gap between themselves and the rest of the company, especially at a time when the BAT is supposed to gauge the workforce's perceptions of the many organisational changes that have affected, or are going to affect the company:

J: what was the what was the initial purpose of having sort of (.) a fair proportion of people from outside ***the function*** *involved with it does that still stand (.) ( )*
S: because we have a problem
C: yes it did the original concept was people's perceptions of we said BIP but we really meant new initiatives and the way in which ehm we were developing the company was developing (.) and it seemed pointless (.) to (.) start looking at a problem that affects people outside ***the function*** *and it's only people within* ***the function*** *that are looking at it because what it would come right round to again is (.) inward-looking we know what's best for people we own it we might let you have a sight of it but remember that it's our doll and we'll take it away at any time* (laugh) *sort of typical things that we've always done in the past* (meeting 1)

The imagery that C., the chairman, uses to depict the personnel function (italicised text) is vividly self-castigating. He is the individual who, more than anyone else within the BAT, is ready to adopt self-criticism when anticipating the workforce's possible reactions to the "new initiatives". The same strength of feeling is not shared by other members, one of whom is in open disagreement with C.'s position:

J: so do we feel that we still need that that (.) that input I mean obviously we still have people ( )
C: well how do YOU feel
J: I think I would get in the preparation collecting information anyway without looking (.) people's views more generally ***outside*** *ehm (.) I don't think is necessarily (.) necessary*
: (laughs)
C: that's a point of view (meeting 1)

The matter is eventually settled with a general, if reluctant, acceptance of the dominant position of personnel members in the BAT :

S: .... ehm yeah I I mean if we want a team of eight there are six from ***the fun... the personnel function***
H: yeah (4) happy
C: ok we seem to have resolved that one then (.) continue as we are hope that more people don't drop out (meeting 1)

It should be added that this function is quite a powerful one in company B., although, apparently, not as powerful as it is in other British companies. Due to its rather high ranking order on the one hand, and its distance from the more operative sections of the company on the other hand, personnel appears to be loosely associated by the workforce with management, of whom it is seen as the "longa manus", a channel that management use to implement new organisational policies and obtain and store information about the workforce[1] . Messages that come from that source are therefore duly ignored:

C: yes, yes A. raised a very valid point about paper which I can't recall exactly but it was that pieces of paper that arrive tend to be treated with the contempt they deserve
A: they do don't they
C: they tend either to be pushed to |one side and dealt |with
A: |( )
H: |especially if they're from
H: ***personnel***
A: ( )
H: yeah (meeting 1)

[1] These conclusions have been inferred from comments and remarks made off the record, or from conversations with employees from various departments.

Although some managers would admit to communications being a problem area in company B., when the source of information is the personnel department the reaction is likely to be negative, thus reinforcing the existing gap. During his first appearance at meeting 2, T., a personnel executive and driving force of the BAT, comments on what he fears may be the workforce reaction to a "new initiative" that is thought to be proposed by the personnel function:

T: ... M's (.) probably M.'s first line I think is we're having a meeting on tuesday (.) to decide just that (.) the the the next things to do but I do know that
T1. (.) particularly is keen that we that we should put this thing right out throughout the organisation (.) not as a oh no not yet another ***personnel*** *nitiative but as a a a platform if you like that brings together all those things that we we have been doing so that the next stages are do have a ki- a bed-rock from which to develop into .....* (meeting 2)

The personal references in this extract are both significant ones: M. is T's superior and director of the personnel function, while T1 is the originator of the "new initiative", an independent consultant working for the company.

That the personnel function is being given a leading role in implementing the "new initiative" becomes clear during meeting 2. The privilege and power obtained through unrestricted access to the flow of information places this function in a dominant position with respect to many others in the company, the role of which seems to be reduced to "absorbing" the materials carefully processed for them:

T: .... so the plan will be sort of (.) maybe to launch something from B.M. [Managing Director] saying look you know we're about to go sort of coming on (.) during that time we've got to make sure that ***the (.) personnel function*** *have got the opportun- opportunity to to pick up the education and to go through the questioning process and the rest of it and then to to look at ( ) (.) then to let the rest of the business take in on board ....* (meeting 2)

The avant-garde role of personnel extends beyond the small Business Action Team (BAT) circle to the more extensive Business Improvement Plan (BIP), within which the "new initiative" is being discussed. R., a personnel member and BIP spokesman, paraphrases T.'s previous statement when he elaborates on the action plan expected from the personnel function:

R: ....ehm (.) those are the sorts of things we're working on we're actually presenting to M [Personnel Director]. and his first line the concepts for the implementation (.) or the key points for the implementation (.) the key guiding principles of the implementation next tuesday (.) and from there on we'll have a better idea of the way we think we ought to be going (.) but there's there's a need to go through that (.) understanding and questioning process within ***the personnel function*** *before we THEN try and take it outside the....* (meeting 2)

Although there is general agreement on the necessity for the personnel function to take on the responsibility for organisational changes, the sensitivity of the issues which the BAT is asked to deal with causes a dilemma. Should personnel mention the prohibited acronym (PRP) while at the same time attempting to focus the workforce's attention on what management feel is the real issue, i.e. performance?

T: ... we had our customers at the BIP some time back one of them said (.) well you've you've listed out lots of interesting problems to work on but no one of you has mentioned perfomance related pay and that's the number one thing on my agenda but you don't seem to be (.) focusing or concentrating on it so why aren't you (.) please ***mr personnel*** *(.) and this was someone who works in another business sort of (.) so I said ok good point* (meeting 2)

Judging on other similar comments recorded during the BAT meetings, this is an attitude shared by many individuals and sections throughout the company, and probably other bodies beyond the corporate boundaries such as the trade unions.

However, following the single-sided approach adopted by the BIP in favour of dropping the performance=pay equation, the BAT members are left with the responsibility of decision-making and no contribution from representatives of functions other than personnel:

S: it's a shame the (.) members of the team from (.) outside ***the function*** *aren't here* (meeting 2)

And the likely cause of this state of affairs is hinted at later on:

R: it's interesting 'cause I was walking over to the can I just share something with you I was walking *over to this house and I thought (.) I'd better warn them not to do it (.) and then I thought no don't ( ) they're old enough and ( ) enough to know for themselves (.) what it is (.) I'm not gonna warn you (.) no I I it actually said much about the the our secrecy within* ***the function*** *(.) that I even thought about that I was really you know (.) very sad about it* (meeting 2)

But while the BAT group are aware of their privileged position in the company, a protected species in their ivory tower, at the same time they perceive their organisational status vis a vis the top men as insufficiently high to be entrusted with the delicate and controversial task of looking after the introduction of "the new initiative":

T: .....I wouldn't have thought that say if B.L. [Managing Director] and M.T. [Personnel Director] and and B.S. [Business Director] and one or two others got together and said yeah that's what we want to do that's when we want to launch it (.) right B. the way we're gonna do it is there's this little ***personnel BAT*** *and we're gonna get them to go and launch it I don't think (.) I mean it might do but I don't think ( )* (meeting 2)

The question of "ownership" of the "new initiative", or, rather, of its launch, is the key issue, and until the BAT becomes owner of this task, which may happen in the immediate future, its authority is limited and so are its powers:

R: fundamentally I mean this is (.) this (.) could well be top priority (.) as a ***personnel thing*** *(.) from july (.) quite likely to be (.) ok it's not so easy I I take T's point points on board that (.) you don't own this yet* (meeting 2)

Comments on the role of personnel is often ironic and even sarcastic. The notoriety of alleged practices associated with personnel is picked upon in the last two extracts. The first is taken from meeting 4, during which the techniques of questionnaire writing and interviewing dominated the discussion. T. anticipates a very likely reaction from a possible worried interviewee:

T: right ok ( ) how you're gonna assure me that this information's (.) gonna be treated (.) in total confidentiality (.) I don't believe you (.) I've heard about you ***people in personnel*** *as well (.) you've got files on me ...* (meeting 4)

Paradoxically, the adherence to the confidentiality principle by the function is being questioned, while previous citations show how "secrecy" is perceived to be a limitation by a member of that very function. It is interesting how aspects of the same practice are given different names according to the personal perspective. Therefore, while a personnel member comments on the "secrecy" of their function (see R., meeting 2, above), a worker is likely to imagine behind that "secrecy" an apparatus that holds records of anything that s/he says, thus infringing his/her right to confidentiality.

It appears that personnel's trustworthiness is under attack. But that should not be the case, according to C.'s self-critical sarcastic remark:

*C: .... NOT as they said in the past performance related pay is what we're going to go for (.) how we're going to do it well give us a little time and we'll we'll let you know (.) you know (.) leave it in our capable hands (.) the **personnel department** can be trusted can't it (.) you know **personnel***

(meeting 4)

From this brief discussion, the "little personnel BAT" appears to be positioned in a kind of "organisational limbo", entrusted with a delicate task by the top management but at the same time enjoying limited action potential due to the controversial nature of the very problem that the team has been asked to tackle. The emerging picture is one of conflicting interests that will eventually resolve in inaction.

Similarly, the picture of the personnel department that emerges is one of conflicting interests and divided loyalties between the maintainance of a privileged status quo and the urgent need for renovation and openness. On a smaller scale, these are some of the issues that trouble company B as a whole while it is in the process of searching for its new identity.

However, what is more interesting from a linguistic point of view is the use of the form **the function** by personnel staff to refer to their department. This repeated use of a short form, quite misleading for an outsider, has turned out to be quite exclusive to that particular section of the company, as far as I can tell from my recordings: no one else belonging to a different department and meeting in interfunctional sessions used the same form to refer to the personnel function, or, for that matter, to any other department. Therefore, **the function** seems to be a kind of password, the pragmatic uses of which: a) are restricted to members of a particular department; b) contribute to re-enforcing the climate of exclusiveness which, as some individuals acknowledge during the BAT meetings, is a problem.

The network of meanings created by this phrase within the BAT environment contributes not only to internal textual coherence but it establishes links with the social dimension in that it reveals the tensions existing between the personnel department and other sections of the company, while at the same time indicating the intermediary role that personnel is called upon to play between management and the rest of the workforce. The questionnaire-writing exercise in which the Business Action Team is involved is not only aimed to provide an instrument for gauging perceptions, in itself a delicate task to accomplish in a volatile corporate climate. There is a second aspect to it, i.e. the language work that the compilation of such a questionnaire entails: it is a negotiations of the literal and hidden meanings of words and of the context-link meanings that apparently neutral vocabulary may take on in a given setting[2] . All of this is

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[2] A good example of this search for a politically acceptable word is the debate on whether to insert the lexeme *confrontation* in a question regarding the perceived effects of PRP on

treated by the interactants as a stage in the process towards a goal. In fact, in a highly (social) context-sensitive situation like the one where the BAT group find itself operating, the achievement of the goal is dependent on the language work that precedes it, not only because the wrong wording could jeopardise the whole project but also because the simple naming of a controversial issue by certain individuals could in itself undermine the success of the policy. This seems the case with Performance Related Pay in company B. and it might well have been the reason why the BAT was asked to abandon the project before it reached completion.

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the relationship between the company and the trade unions. Eventually it was decided unanimously that the word was politically loaded and should be replaced by " ....".

CHAPTER SEVEN: MEETINGS AS GENRE.

7.1 Introduction.

In the two remaining chapters of the thesis, I shall seek to achieve two complementary aims: 1) to highlight the features that meetings share[1] (chapter 7), and 2) to underline some of the ways in which they differ (chapter 8).

To this effect, chapter 7 will address the question of business meetings as a distinct *genre,* while the next will look at some aspects of pragmatics that are realised in different ways in English and Italian business contexts.

The interpretative framework introduced in chapter 4 has a third important component that I have labelled as *structural.* Although in the previous two chapters more than one example can be found of structures of meetings (see sections 5.2 and 6.2), these have mainly served the purpose of acting as a background to the linguistic analysis of the speech events. A more in-depth investigation of the structural properties of meetings leads on to the theoretical area of *genre* analysis where formal structures are seen as informing the nature of the event. The relationship between a speech event like a business meeting and its structure affords a further perspective of that event and one that can be seen as linked with the social dimension of the framework, since the internal ordering of an interaction is partially determined by cultural conventions and rules. It is against this background that I shall attempt an analysis of (English) meetings as a *genre.*

[1]The generic model of meetings discussed in section 7.4 is based on English meetings only. Section 7.7 addresses the "cultural" differences that bring out the limitations of a generic model for cross-cultural analysis.

A selective critical survey of the works that have contributed to the theoretical notion of *genre* will be presented in section 7.2, followed by a discussion of some of the models proposed in recent years (section 7.3). In section 7.4, a generic model for (business) meetings will be presented, which is based on the materials described in section 3.7.

7.2 The notion of "genre": some perspectives.

The task of reviewing, albeit very selectively, the literature on *genre* could occupy a chapter rather than a section of this thesis, such is the complexity of the subject and the diversity of fields to which it is relevant, e.g. literature (e.g.. Green 1992, Butrym 1990, Kent 1986), popular fiction (e.g. Longhurst 1989, Carr 1989), poetry (e.g. Kamboureli 1991), linguistics (e.g. Ohtsuka 1990, Haastrup 1986, Dubois 1980), cinema, (Krutnik 1991), theatre (e.g. Conesa 1989).

Although the evolution and interpretation of the concept of "genre" has received attention in all these disciplines and in others as well, I shall restrict my discussion to works that have dealt with *genre* from an eminently linguistic standpoint, even though the individual notions of genre proposed within different disciplines partially overlap. Indeed, as Stankiewicz (1984) rightly remarks from within the literary tradition:

[t]he definition of genres as set of distinctive and hierarchically organized features points up the similarity of the literary codes to linguistic systems, or more specifically to the phonological and conceptual features of language that, like the genres, form hierarchies of oppositions that recur and differentiate all the phonemes and grammatical forms of a given language. This parallelism between the poetic and linguistic codes is not a matter of chance, for it reflects the basic homology of verbal (as well as nonverbal) systems. (my italics) (p.175)

In a social-semiotic perspective, the verbal and non-verbal systems of signs embedded in discourse are ascribed to genre categories by social groups. However, "[g]enres only exist in so far as a social group declares and enforces the rules that constitute them." (Hodge & Kress 1988). In this tradition, genre is seen as a semiotic category which, if not resisted, remains dominant and constrains beliefs and behaviours. In a fuller discussion of genre as a category to be interpreted within a social and historical context, Kress & Threadgold (1988) understand genre as "essentially intertextual, processual and always only probabilistic". (p.219) The taxonomic approach adopted by much literary research becomes outdated, and so does the notion of "purity of genre" typical of the Renaissance and classical periods. Kress and Threadgold's ideological semiotics sees in the purity of genre a way of ensuring "both fixity of meaning and social stability".

Social power and control over the generic structure of texts, then, affect their fluidity. If this observation is applied to verbal communication, it means that "the relative strength of generic form serves as an indicator of the degree of power at issue in the interaction, and the instantiation of genre". (p.238)

And even more significantly for this study, Kress and Threadgold attack the normative and predictable nature attributed to genre by a certain linguistic tradition and propose, instead, a notion of genre that borrows from both Bakhtin and Derrida:

> ***Genre is evidently part of a number of patterned processes by which systems of ideas and belief (ideologies/the world of common-sense reality) are constructed, transmitted and maintained. These processes involve institutions, power relations, questions of access, and thus questions of the construction of social agents and subjects. They are not autonomous or objective scientific categories for the analysis of texts: they provide no answers by themselves.*** (p.227)

This is probably one of the more advanced contributions to the debate on genre, while awaiting Kress and Threadgold's forthcoming book on the subject. Interestingly, similar conclusions were reached in the late Seventies by Todorov (1990, French ed.1978) who opens his reflections on genre with the hardly innovative definition: "genres are classes of texts" and goes on to elaborate on the nature of discourse as "always and necessarily constituted by speech acts". (p.16)

In line with an apparent liking for short, if controversial statements, Todorov elaborates on genre thus:

"A genre, whether literary or not, is nothing other than the codification of discourse properties." (p.18)

Despite Todorov's rather restrictive notion of discourse, his conceptualisation of genre is more than reminiscent of Kress & Thredgold's. The parallel becomes more obvious when Todorov discusses the social roots of genre:

"a society chooses and codifies the acts that correspond most closely to its ideology; that is why the existence of certain genres in one society, their absence in another, are revelatory of that ideology and allow us to establish it more or less confidently." (p.19)

Genres as ideological codes? The social-ideological dimension, which contributes to the generation of language in interaction, should be accommodated in modelling dynamic generic structures of discourse. Whether and how this can be achieved is the concern of section 7.3.

7.3 Generic models: developments in the last decade.

For a review of the some of the recent approaches to generic structure in the Eighties, I turn to Ventola (1989). The author comments on van Dijk's (1981) Transformational Grammar model and on the fact that it can generate "superstructures" for written texts. However, Ventola points out that in van Dijk's (1981) TG model not all steps are illustrated, and that for the spoken texts model, the author does not provide any phrase structure rules, or hierarchical constituency rules, and consequently, no tree diagrams either. Similarly, Adams Smith's (1987) rank scale discourse model is rightly criticised by Ventola on the grounds that, like van Dijk's model, they "have only discussed the *canonical sequence of generic structure elements*.(p.135,original italics).

Rather than looking at texts as static products, as in the two models above, generic models need to consider texts as processes, i.e. as having an essentially dynamic nature. The second set of models that Ventola discusses adhere, at least partially, to the latter paradigm. Ventola's (1987) dynamic generic model of service encounters emerged as a reaction to the limits of Hasan's (1984) Generic Structure Potential model, which is limited both by a high degree of linearity, and poor representation of recursion and interaction. Ventola's (1990) claim that her flowchart dynamic model for generating interaction fulfils the minimum requirements is of particular interest here, since it provides a means of further development.

The author goes on to list her model's characteristics:

1) representation of the canonical sequence of structure elements and of rules of their variation in the sequence; 2) inclusion of rules of reiteration; 3) indication of optional elements; 4) identification of verbal and non verbal components to the realisation of the elements; 5) representation of the text as shared construction. These advantages are balanced out by a number of drawbacks that Ventola perceives affect her model, such as the limitations that flowcharts impose on the representation of complex social interactions generated in real time, the representation of the language choices as they are re-negotiated during the interaction, and the influence of cultural factors. It is inevitable that the design of generic models that can cope with the complexity of social interactions will at first bring up more problems than they are able to solve. Moreover, the

contributions which attempt to devise adequate generic models are far fewer than those focused on the theory of "genre".

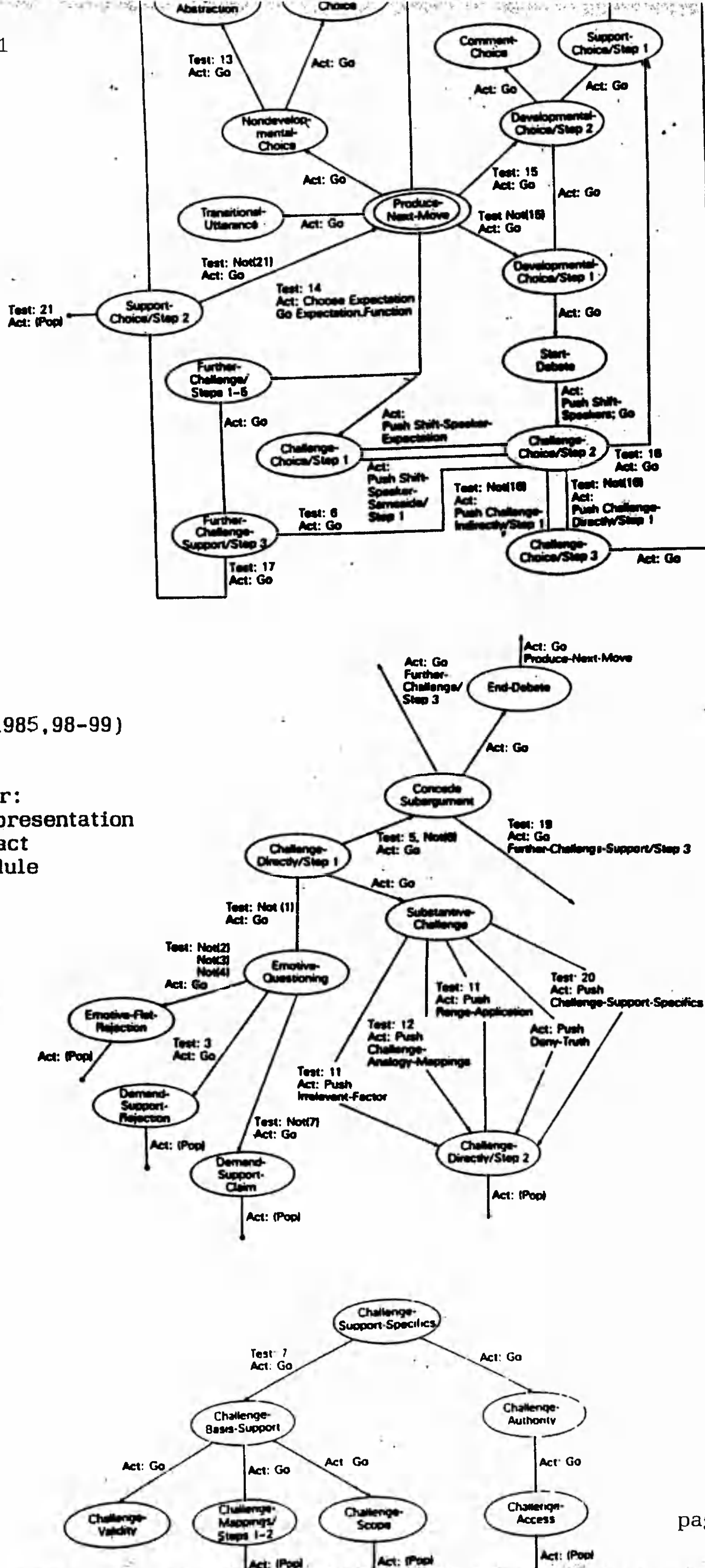
Within the ethnographic tradition, works by Walter (1988), Harris (1984) and Duranti (1983) have attempted to define the generic structure of jury summation, court discourse, and Samoan speechmaking, respectively, following the notion of "genre" as "a recognized (by its users) unit of discourse with some well-defined features such as sequential organization (viz. which part should come before what), constraints (and expectations) on (some of) its content and form, and socially defined appropriate context of use." (Duranti 1983,20 note 2). Duranti's notion of "context of use" should be extended to include what happens before the event and what follows afterwards since a speech event is generated within a dynamic social context and has direct influences on it and its human agents.

The longer established genre analysis based on written texts has recently received a major impulse from the work of Swales (1990) on academic writing. He proposes a definition of "genre" reminiscent of Duranti's:

"A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale of the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style." **(p.58)**

According to Swales then, the recognized "communicative purposes" within a genre exercise a crucial influence on the generic structure, the semantic and stylistic choices operated by the interactants. The identification of these "communicative purposes", and consequently, of the specific structures, may be relatively unproblematic in some written genres like memos or reports, with their strong monologic orientation. Generic structures that represent and generate dyadic speech events such as interviews or service encounters are more

Figure 7.1



Reichman (1985,98-99)

The Grammar:
the ATN representation
of an abstract
process module

difficult to realise, while genres involving multiparty talk are still largely uncharted terrain as far as I am aware.

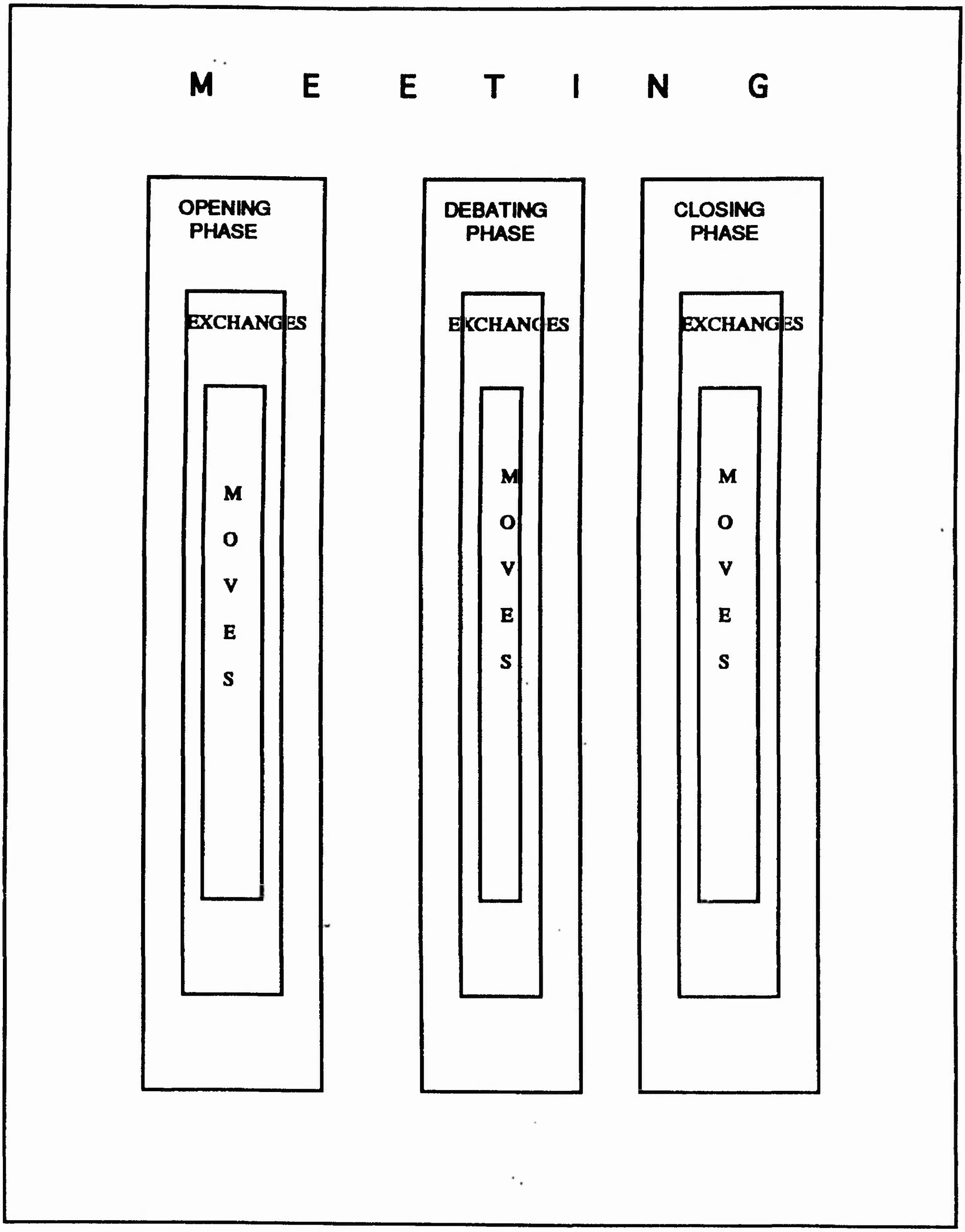
Advances in language interpretation and generation have been made in fields beyond linguistics, Artificial Intelligence being probably the best-known example. During the last two decades there has been a steadily growing interest in computational models of natural language processing (e.g. Charniak & Wilks 1976, Joshi & Webber 1981, Brady & Berwick 1983, Sparck & Wilks 1987). One of these abstract models (Reichman 1985) is based on a rather sophisticated and advanced discourse grammar that "presupposes that conversation can be decomposed into a limited set of constituents that combine with one another in regular ways [...] The grammar thus provides a *structural description* of discourse based on the *functional relations* between parts". (Reichman 1987,51 my italics). In her monograph, the author gives a detailed description of the components of her grammar, the fundamental one being the "context space". This contains the "conversational moves" taken by the interactants and the information related to them in the form of "registers". The resulting complex model is dynamic, hierarchical and predictive; its graphic representation using ATNs (Augmented Transition Networks) clearly illustrates its potential.

Reichman gives only a few examples of her grammar with related algorithmic notations. Figure 7.1 illustrates one of them.

Particularly relevant to the subject matter of this chapter is Reichman's rejection of the argument that "different genres have different structures". In fact, she continues later on, "different genres have different thematic developments" (p.172)

Abstract, general rules of discourse are not genre-specific: therefore, the call for more "genre grammars" to complement

Figure 7.2 Meetings: a generic model



preliminary generative models (Fawcett et al. 1988) seems somewhat misguided. However, it is also true that highly context-sensitive discourse manifestations such as the business meetings examined so far may be used to benchmark the abstract, context-free grammar rules developed so far: after all, if, as their authors claim, they are generalisable across genres, they should provide the backbone of all generic models. Therefore, one of the main aims of genre analysis should be the contribution to the existing grammars of context-specific, i.e. generic, rules for discoursive phenomena that the abstract, context-free grammars cannot account for.

7.4 Towards a generic model of meetings.

7.4.1 Introduction.

In this section a preliminary generic model for meetings is discussed which is based on the English meetings listed in section 3.7.. Although the meetings recorded are business meetings, this model should be generalisable to most meetings in various settings. The constituents identified are not all obligatory: in fact, less formal meetings may have a reduced number of smaller components, but the basic elements are shared.

Section 7.4.2 provides introductory information on the meeting analysed and on the participants, while section 7.4.3 is devoted to the full discussion of the model (illustrated in figure 7.2), with extracts from the recordings. Graphic representations of the various components and stages of the model are contained in separate tables.

7.4.2 Background information.

The business meeting from which the extracts for analysis have been taken is an example of a quite formal and structured interaction between nine male individuals of various ranks, from a junior Commercial Support Officer to the General Manager of Systems Operations (the most senior position in the group) through a Commercial Support Executive. The Chairman occupies a managerial post. A simplified organisational chart would see these individuals placed thus:

GROUP MANAGING DIRECTOR

Director **Director** **Director**

General Manager or Executive

Manager

Non-managerial position

The group relies on the voluntary participation of its members to a set of meetings, preceded by a training seminar when they were introduced to a new manufacturing scheduling technique due to be implemented in the company. The task of the group is to familiarise themselves with this technique with a view to advising the directorate on the best mode of implementing it. They therefore need to study the positioning of the master scheduler (an individual or a team) within the company, his/their duties and powers, and subsequently report their findings to the group director by whom they are empowered and receive financial and staff support:

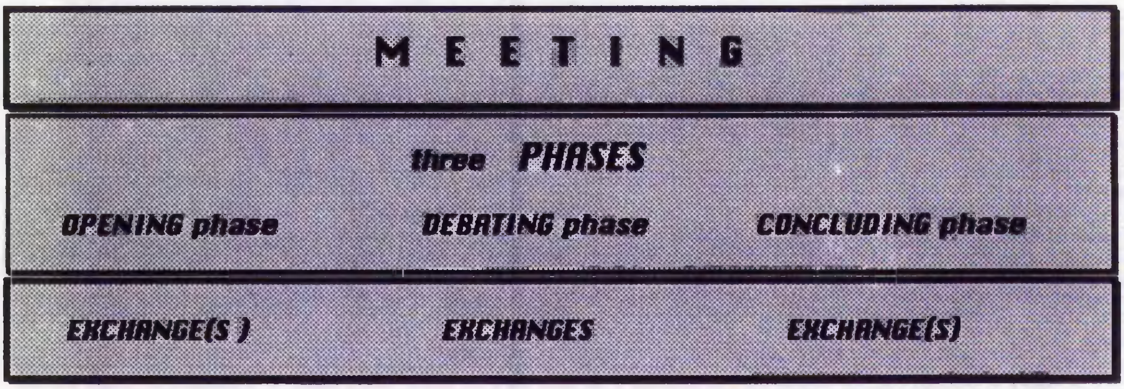
Legend:
CH: Chairman
IT, Q, C1, C2.: participants identified by the initial of their department (Information Technoloy, Quality, Commercial etc)

CH: er we have far from being (.) in any restricted in what we are going to do we've been asked if we need more resources to do it and this is by B.M. [Managing Director] (.) er he's offered us more more people on the team he's offered us more money for the training ehm virtually we can have what we want ehm that's how mportant it is (.) it also follows that every ehm (.) aspect of the of the work that means each task team will be very has been very closely reviewed ehm and the reports that come in from every meeting will (.) be made available to to the directors (.) so we are very much in the spotlight with everything that we do from now on (.) ..

.....

(Chairman, Opening Phase, Initiation Exchange, Backgrounding Move)

The reasons for choosing this meeting to illustrate the generic model are twofold: 1) it is formal in the sense that there is a set agenda and the roles of Chairman and Group are quite well defined; 2) because of its degree of formality, the meeting includes not only the compulsory components of a generic structure, as illustrated in the diagram below:



but also the optional components, all at the levels of move[2] as illustrated in diagram 8.2 (in appendix)..

[2] Two of the components of the generic model presented in this chapter, namely exchange and move, are the same as in Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) 'system of analysis', and so is their hierarchical ordering, i.e. moves are subordinate to exchanges. This choice has been dictated by a preference for easy, if not self-explanatory, categories the definition of which is not necessarily the same as in the original source (see section 7.4.3).

The definition of the components of the model presupposes the existence of two roles within meetings, i.e. the Chairman and the Group and is based on the action or task that each component contributes to this simplified dyadic interaction. The pattern emerging from the English meetings is that the chairman exercises considerable control during the *opening* and *closing phases*, while control appears to be negotiated during the *debating phase* [3] .

The pre-condition of the existence of two distinctive roles in meetings commanding unequal power over the interaction is fundamental to the model that I am going to discuss in the next section, while at the same time it is a major constraint in that it is responsible for the hierarchical ordering of exchanges within phases and moves within exchanges. Indeed, while the internal sequential ordering within each set of components (phases, exchanges and moves) satisfies the requirements of an hypothetical abstract, generative model of discourse similar to the one proposed by Reichman (see section 7.2) - where no dependency exists between components - the hierarchy established in my model between phases and exchanges and exchanges and moves is in contradiction with such a model of discourse, which do not admit subordination between components.

It should however be noticed that Reichman's model of discourse is derived from a conversation among friends; therefore, the author did not probably need to worry about intervening variables such as power and status which are active in business meetings and are bound to influence the dynamics of the interaction and hence the structure.

---

3 The Debating Phase to be found in any meeting appears to be based on structures or moves that could be found for instance in a general debate: Developmental and Non-developmental moves (to borrow Reichman's labels), Challenge moves, Support moves, Further Challenge moves, etc

This is only a brief indication of the complexity of the areas of generic modeling and discourse modeling: however, the scope of this chapter must be kept within the achievable target of presenting a first generic model of meetings, and in so doing raising the problems that future research will face.

7.4.3 The opening phase .

The way the first phase *(Opening Phase)* is structured clearly shows the presence of two parties in the interaction: the Chairman and the Group. However, the Chairman only can start both the *Exchanges*, **Initiation** (cited on page 186) and **Elicitation** that normally constitute the Opening Phase:

CH: ... one of the ways I'd like to to start with is ehm to go around the table and ask you (.) really to to to elaborate on on the course assessment that that you put in at the completion of the course last week ( )
to understand how much er you feel you got out of that course and what still still needs to be done I think
there are probably some things that need to be done (.) so could we start perhaps with you H.

(Opening Phase, Elicitation Exchange)

This first phase points towards a high initial degree of inequality between the two parties, further reinforced by the exchanges contained in the **Elicitation** block (**Elicitation** and **Compliance**), when only the chairman is allowed to elicit information, while the group can only comply. The alternative move to **Compliance** would obviously be perceived as **Resistance** or **Challenge**, since, according to the rules, no member of the group can afford NOT to respond.

The **Elicitation** can be of two types: **Identification** and **Questioning**. **Identification** is used by the chairman when he calls on individuals to introduce themselves (not available in any of the meetings recorded because participants are already acquainted). The chairman may use **Questioning** either to ask the group whether there are any questions/comments or to ask specific individuals for their personal comments/feedback:

CH: ... so could we start perhaps with you H.
(Elicitation Exchange, Questioning Move 1)

CH: D.
(Elicitation Exchange, Questioning Move 2)

CH: F. what are your impressions
(Elicitation Exchange, Questioning Move 3)

The **Compliance** exchange consists of **Response** *Moves* from the participants such as the following:

Q: well what what I got out of the course really was a was a like an overview of MRP2 ....
(Elicitation Exchange, Compliance Move 1)

C2: well forecasting (.) ehm (.) REALLY is (.) I mean (.) why why you did the sort of the formulas and things about forecasting ....
(Elicitation Exchange, Compliance Move 2)

C1: well the first day we crammed a lot of information into it (.) and although in one sense I thought hey we're really sort of storming through this and am I really taking it in hand side ....
(Elicitation Exchange, Compliance Move 3)

which enable the Chairman to continue the interaction in the form of an **Acknowledgement** move such as a **Comment** on the previous turn:

CH: I think I think that forecasting requires (.) to have an an understanding of mathematics to deal with direct forecasting techniques ....
(Elicitation Exchange, Acknowledgement Move (Comment))

or the next **Questioning** Move (see above); or even a <u>non-verbal</u> Move, such as a nod. Alternatively, the Chairman may request further information (**Further Elicitation** Move) or speak out against the previous turn (**Challenge** Move):

CH: it's been valuable for that (.) what about forecasting
(Elicitation Exchange, Further Elicitation Move)

CH: yeah but I mean as part of the the stream of course ehm you do need to understand

(Elicitation Exchange, Challenge Move 1)

CH: you personally don't think it should be effective then if you ( )
(Elicitation Exchange, Challenge Move 2)

The first *Phase* of the model is illustrated in diagram 8.2. As this shows, between the *Initial Phase* and the *Debating Phase* there is a **Transitional** Move which is usually a summary by the chairman. This move signals that the first phase of the meeting is completed and, at the same time, it sets the scene for the discussion to follow:

CH: ehm the thing that does come out of the ( ) I think that everyone said this is is on forecasting ehm (.) ..... I think it's becoming evident to me that that as Dave said we we we need a specialist in on this one (.) ...and really what we need I think is to to have an expert look at the actual data we get how we collect it ehm and perhaps ehm help us to choose a a an appropriate method of treating that information (.) with one of these techniques of maybe more than one of these techniques ( ) .....

7.4.5 The debating phase.

In the *Debating Phase*, moves can be grouped into three classes:

Chairman-to-Group Moves *Group-to-Chairman Move* *Group-to-Group Moves*

according to the initiator.

The rationale behind this subdivision is based on the following principles:

a) the interaction is, to varying degrees, an unequal one, since the chairman can exercise restrictive control over the group especially during the first and last phases (see discussion above). This is true not only of formal meetings, but also of informal ones;

b) both formal and informal meetings are task-oriented and problem-solving interactions, and as such they build on moves that the interactants engage in in order to achieve an outcome.

As for the *Opening Phase*, it should be possible to identify in the *Debating phase* a finite set of moves that fall within one of the three categories above and subsequently isolate the moves that a) characterise each of the three sets; b) illustrate the unequal nature of the interaction. The comparison between the chair-group moves and the group-group moves is particularly useful in highlighting the latter.

The first exchanges in the *Debating Phase* are either Group-Chairman or Group-Group moves. The following two Exchanges from the sample meeting are representative:

Exchange 1:

IT: I did tell what happened in the last company (.) in the end the IT guy reported to the managing director otherwise it was being governed by what his boss wanted ( ) it just didn't work so they had to bring it all over again and that also happened with their american parent as well	DEVELOPMENTAL MOVE *(GROUP)*
CH: yeah but I mean it's not a single person involved in in masterscheduling not [on a company level (.) it's	CHALLENGE MOVE *(CHAIRMAN)*
IT: [it's a function (.) and the	
CH: a function (.) yeah	
IT: head of that function (.) has got to be completely unbiased and not governed by the whims of HIS lord and master	SUPPORT *(GROUP)*

Exchange 2:

Q: will that be his only function or or you know (.) would it could could the master production scheduler also be running materials (.) but not reporting to manufacturing about it reporting as you've said but	DEVELOPMENTAL MOVE *(GROUP)*
IT: no no because if he is then responsible for materials he is going to view masterscheduling differently (.) his job finishes with coming up with an agreed accepted plan for (.) business for production	CHALLENGE MOVE *(GROUP)*
Q: and he's going to be [( )	FURTHER DEVELOPMENTAL MOVE *(GROUP)*
IT: [his performance is more than how well that is achieved	

Q: he's only responsible for that so it's it's almost a function on / its own
/
IT: / well that's what I keep saying yeah

SUPPORT MOVE (GROUP)

The move boundaries can be rather difficult to identify and criteria must be chosen before embarking on the analysis. A combination of local topic and discourse markers provides a useful tool for move identification, as argued later on in this sub-section. The two moves above, for instance, are sequentially ordered: the first marks the beginning of the debating phase and follows immediately the Transitional (summary) move accomplished by the chairman; the second is opened by a direct question, possibly addressed by a group member to the chairman but intercepted by a proactive colleague. In these two instances it appears that a shift in the local topic, marked by "I did tell you what happened..." and a question, respectively, mark the boundaries of the two moves while at the same time maintaining coherence through adherence to the general theme, i.e. the function and place of masterscheduling techniques in the company. The use of discourse markers such as *but, so, yes well, yes I mean* signal a new move (Reichman 1985).

The group is discussing access by the company's customers to updated information held centrally by the master-scheduler(s):

O2: does does the master-scheduling area ta- take up the responsibility of interfacing with the customer	DEVELOPMENTAL MOVE (GROUP)
CH: .... if you're gonna be truly customer-orientated ehm then the customer really wants to go to talk to someone in the organisation who can give him an accurate up to date information immediately (.) the master schedulers are the best per- the best persons in the organisation to do that	SUPPORT MOVE (CHAIRMAN)

The next Group-chairman move is introduced by a challenging *but:* C1 is putting forward a different scenario:

*C1: **but** assuming that the information is held in a central core as we're suggesting we can get all information and it can be [...]assessed by others as well*	CHALLENGE (GROUP)
CH: (expresses agreement)	SUPPORT (CHAIRMAN)
*C1: **so** there could be other issues involved .....*	FURTHER CHALLENGE (GROUP)
CH: yeah	SUPPORT (CHAIRMAN)

In this case, ***so*** links pragmatically the second **Challenge** to the first one while providing a syntactic link with the immediately preceding Support utterance. ***But***, in turn, signals the beginning of a **Challenge** Move referring back to the chairman's **Support** move, and is therefore both a semantic and a syntactic link. Of particular interest in the *Debating Phase* are the Moves reserved for the chairman: the **Interim Summaries** and the **Directional** Moves. **Summary** Moves may either conclude an exchange between participants, such as the following:

....

*CH: **so so** I think we've agreed in our previous discussion as well there has to be and we know now from training er (.) that that we have to have a link here between the the measure we use at the at the s.o.p. level and the (.) a master production schedule*

....

*CH: ( ) **in practice** to get to get the state of coming- in forecast (.) to get the firm orders coming in to get the resource form coming (.) in fact the master scheduler ( ) and puts forward all this stuff together and and and presents it*

or a set of exchanges, as when the chairman reviews the diagram that he has just finished to draw on the flip chart:

CH: right so have I understood it right then that that in fact when you're in for- in the forecasting area of of the mps so you're outside the time fence alright (.) ehm then (.) you're obviously into this quality of information all of which is got to directly come back to you (.) there when you move on and forecast terms for firm order or rather terms for firm order which is being engineered (.9 then in fact planning information can be re- replaced by (.) the S T's [name] code which you put there or even be free-standing, as the following:

CH: yeah ***so*** *that's (.) I think that all these arguments all support the view that in fact not to give the master scheduler access (.) or rather non to give the customer access to the master scheduler*

CH: well I think we've made some progress (.) we're gonna have to to work at the detailed level ehm (.) in this area to work out how we're gonna get the connection (.) ( ) we understand that problem (.) but once we've that I reckon we could model this through iscx (.) straightaway (.) don't you

Through **Directional** Moves the chairman introduces new items on the agenda:

CH: how do you think in fact let's think about let's pose the next question [.....] what other meetings do you think will be needed to support that (3) would there actually have to be a sort of sub-meetings between commercial and manufacturing with the master- scheduler as it were in the chair to reconcile these all these issues and build up a recommendation to the to the to the md

CH: now let's let's let's in the last few minutes go through the minutes of the last time 'cause in fact there was some action in there (.) ehm

or restrains digressions:

[an individual is hijacking the debate]
CH: yeah alright we're getting we're getting away from it we're getting away from it

or directs the group's focus of attention on a particular item:

[the chairman reads a document included in the agenda]
CH: let's let's understand (.) let's understand exactly what he's saying (.) can I can I just read it out (.) stop me if I'm wrong (.) he's saying the COM systems ....

or questions a group member in order to obtain explanations:

[the chairman refers to a written document submitted for discussion by a group member]
CH: well look this is what ( ) can can you explain F. because I don't understand it

Through all these moves, the Chairman exercises his power of control over the flow of the interaction in an explicit manner. Another type of move that does not openly rely on status and authority may be used by the chairman simply to stimulate the discussion:

CH: what about the manufacturing part of the sales sales and operations plan then

CH: what's the role there of the master scheduler

These open questions can be usefully defined as **Developmental** Moves since through them the Chairm does not specifically aim to *direct* the interaction but rather to further discussion of items of the agenda already "open". The most relevant feature that these Moves share is their signalling of a new Exchange by shifting the focus from one local topic to another.

Interim observations.

What can be concluded so far is that Meetings are based on a structure comprising three distinctive (and compulsory) *Phases*. This structure is functional and derives from the presence in the interaction of two separate parties: the Chairman and the Group. The chairman's unique functional role in the interaction is a combination of some of the following factors: status, prestige, authority, age, experience and others specific to each organisation. The discrepancy between the chairman's role (of power and control) and the group's subordinate position informs the functional structure of the Meeting as it has emerged so far.

It is the very presence of two clearly defined phases (*Initial* and *Closing*) that distinguishes structurally the Meeting from other types of interactions, such as discussion groups. On the other hand, the external differences between types of encounters must not lead to false assumptions; in fact, the many types of unequal interactions in professional settings are functionally, if not structurally, very similar to the business meetings analysed above in that the underlying fundamental feature - the presence of two parties with unequal powers - is present in all of them. Where the multiparty

meeting is both structurally and functionally very different from professional encounters such as teacher-pupil, doctor-patient, judge-defendant, is in its core component, i.e. the Debating Phase. This essential constituent of Meetings is closer to "spontaneous" conversation than any of the other above mentioned interactions, since the chairman's control is relaxed during this phase and sometimes is even dangerously undermined by the presence of "strong" or "pro-active" personalities, as shown in the analysis that follows. Discourse flow may therefore become subject to continuous negotiation between the two parties (the chairman and the group) rather like in a conversation and unlike most unequal interactions.
The Meeting therefore appears to be difficult to categorise, positioned between the two "extremes" of conversation and formal institutional discourse. This is apparent in its structure, two phases of which are strongly reminiscent of unequal discourse and one which shares many of the features of conversation; but even more importantly, it is brought out by the functional mix generated by interaction control, which is at first non-negotiable and then becomes negotiable only to revert back to the non-negotiable again.

Like Reichman (1985), I tend to believe that all forms of discourse, whether a debate, a conversation or a meeting, share a basic grammar, that is a set of rules from which fundamental discourse components are generated. Therefore, rather than promoting a quest for more and more generic structures (Fawcett et al. 1989) one could possibly start from within would-be "generic structures" and isolate the discourse constituents already known to be fit the ultimate generative model of discourse, a target which remains well beyond the current reach of both Linguistics or Artificial Intelligence. In that way, one would possibly be left with spurious elements that do not fit this still hypothetical model and that could therefore be called genre-specific. These elements are likely to be also culture-specific, meaning by culture not only national characteristics but contextual features that affect the nature of the interaction. (On a micro-scale, one could even include psychological constraints.)

Arguably, the similarities across the various types of interactions are greater than the differences, and this is probably because the shared core is based on a common grammar of discourse. Moreover, the single factor that determines the existence of a more or less rigid structure (informing the various genres) is the distribution of power among the interactants: if control over the interaction is not negotiable[4] , we have the highly structured unequal encounters already cited; if control over the negotiation is variable because subject to negotiation, the resulting structure is more flexible, as in the business meetings in question. If, on the other hand, control is largely open to negotiation, we may be dealing with discussions among friends who, far from being aim-less and un-structured, always rely on some form of negotiable task-oriented, interactively negotiated, control structure.

Reichman (1985) maintains that utterances can perform two functions: a) embellishment and continuation of a preceding move or b) initiation of a new communicative act. In the latter case,

[4] If control represents real power, then it may appear negotiable without really being so. If the Chairman has no real power, then control may be genuinely negotiable. Interactants are usually well aware of the difference.

utterances become conversational *Moves* and play the role of developing in a functional sense discourse topics.

Moves are not the only constituents of Reichman's formal discourse grammar, but they are fundamental to it and the most suitable starting point for an analysis of the most complex phase of a meeting, the Debating phase. Reichman (p. 24) proposes six main categories of conversational moves (the labels in brackets are mine):

1) presenting a claim (statement)
2) explaining a claim (explanation)
3) challenging a claim (challenge)
4) giving support to a claim (support)
5) shifting topic (topic shift)
6) resuming a preceding subject of discourse (topic resumption?)[5]

Beside listing a (non-exhaustive) set of conversational moves, Reichman supplies linguistic tools for their detection in the discourse canvas: "surface linguistic signals", also referred to as "discourse markers" in this study, accompany different moves and signal that the boundary of a "context space" - the hierarchically higher constituent

of the grammar - has been reached and a new move is being introduced. The following is Reichman's list of markers matching the *Moves*:

CONVERSATIONAL MOVE	CLUE WORD(S)
1) Support	Because...; Like...; Like when...
2) Restatement and/or conclusion of point being supported	[illegible] So...
3) Interruption	Incidentally...; By the way...
4) Return to previously interrupted context space	Anyway...; In any case...

5

5) Indirect challenge	Yes/Right but..; Except, however..
6) Direct challenge	(No) But...
7) Subargument concession	All right/Okay but...
8) Prior logical abstraction	But look/listen/you see...
9) Further development	Now.

(adapted from Reichman, p.36)

This list, like that of conversational moves, is not exhaustive but it works on Reichman's analysis of a debate among friends. A cursory look at the transcripts of my meetings suggests that the number of clue words/phrases/expressions may not be sufficient, implying not necessarily the presence of new items but rather the use of different introductory elements to the conversational moves. A close examination of the first section of the *Debating phase* should illustrate the points introduced so far.

After the chairman's **Transitional** Move (see above), one of the group members (IT) takes a turn that overlaps with the chairman's:

CH: .... that we've got to make ( ) organisation |( )
IT: | I did tell what happened in the last company in the
I end the Iguy reported to the managing director
CH: yeah
IT: otherwise it was being governed by what his boss wanted ( ) it just didn't work so they had to bring it all over again and that also happened with their american parent as well

and is followed by the chairman's indirect challenge, supported, in turn, by IT. taking the floor by interrupting the chairman and partially pre-emptying his turn:

CH: yeah but I mean it's not a single person involved in in masterscheduling not |on a company level (.) it's
IT: |it's a function (.) and the CH: a function (.) yeah
IT: head of that function (.) has got to be completely unbiased and not governed by the whims of HIS lord and master .....

This *Exchange* is therefore structured as follows:

IT: Interruption (implicit: "by the way", ... + overlap)
CH: Indirect challenge (yeah, but I mean...)
IT: Support (by pre-empting chairman's turn)

The *Exchange* that follows is functionally linked to the preceding through a **Further Developmental** Move by Q. who expands on the local topic ("who is to be the master scheduler, an individual or a function?"):

Q: will that be his only function or or you know would it could could the master production scheduler also
be running materials (.) but not reporting to manufacturing about it reporting as you've said but

and is challenged by IT:

IT: no no because if he is then responsible for materials he is going to view masterscheduling differently his
job finishes with coming up with an agreed accepted plan for (.) business for production

Q. lends further support to the topic in focus by paraphrasing IT's previous statement:

Q: and he's going to be ( ) he's only responsible for hat so it's almost a function on its own

This triggers IT's unconditional support:

IT: well that's what I keep saying yeah

Therefore, the structure of this second *Exchange* looks like this:

Q : Further developmental (direct question on the topic in focus)
IT: Direct challenge (no no because ...)
Q: Reinstatement and conclusion of point being made (he's only ...)
IT: Support (yeah ...)

The local topic is not exhausted by these two *Exchanges*. A third and final *Exchange* will position the current topic in the background, to use Reichman's terminology, and bring another topic into focus.

IT. opens with a **Return** Move:

IT: yes well the two firms had (.) one the last one I worked with had to do it and their parent company had
to do it so I've only got experience of two firms one american based one uk based ( ) asked what they're
doing on select box 'cause they've got a master scheduling function now and does that report to (.)
it'd be interesting to seek their view

and receives the support of the chairman in the form of the information he needs to complete his move:

CH: M.G.[name] the last time I spoke |(.) reported to ( ) it's mater-... to materials management which is
traditionally where all manufacturing scheduling has has has been done ehm (.) we will have to see

A third member of the party offers a **Reinstatement** move in favour of IT.'s point, split into two parts by a chairman's support moves:

CH if we're running on a wee.. weekly basis I would have thought that there probably would be enough
activity when you consider it's master master-scheduling a number of products not just ...... I think it's
a full time task for a group of people that
C1: oh yes yeah I mean I was (.) agreeing with D.'s comment in terms of it's it's somebody with
responsibility for almost a |departmental area (.)
CH: |yeah yeah yeah
C1: it's a matter where that fits in

The structure of the third *Exchange* can be sketched out thus:

IT: Return to previously interrupted context space (yes well...)
C1: Reinstatement of point being made: (part one) (if we... so...)
CH: Support (I think...)
C1: Reinstatement of point being made: (part two) (oh yes yeah ...)

If the moves are now collated into a whole structure constituted of three exchanges, the first section of the *Debating phase* will look as follows:

DEBATING PHASE: THE FIRST THREE *EXCHANGES*

1) IT: **Interruption** (implicit: "by the way", ... + overlap)
2) CH: **Indirect challenge** (yeah, but I mean...)
3) IT: **Support** (pre-empted turn: it's a function...)

4) Q : **Further development** (direct question on the topic in focus)
5) IT: **Direct challenge** (no no because ...)
6) Q: **Reinstatement and conclusion** of point being made (he's only ...)
7) IT: **Support** (yeah ...)

8) IT: **Return to previously interrupted context space** (yes well...)
9) C1: **Reinstatement of point being made**: part one (if we... so...)
10) CH: **Support** (I think...)
11) C1: **Reinstatement of point being made**: part two (oh yes yeah ...)

Some preliminary conclusions could be drawn from this experimental use of Reichman's *Moves* categories. Firstly, signalling markers are not necessarily found in all moves and although in at least one example (no. 1) an implicit marker could be inferred, in others (nos.3,4,6,10) one must make recourse to logical links between the moves in order to interpret the correct functional value. Discourse understanding requires much more than surface indicators. Secondly, the *Moves* identified in the sample meeting are by no means linked in a linear fashion. At some point, it will be necessary to make explicit the hierarchical links in the design of a more advanced generic model of business, be it in the form of a flowchart or an ATN's structure.

7.4.6 *Concluding Phase.*

After the relative flexibility of the *Debating Phase*, the rigidity of the meeting structure is fully re-introduced when the interaction nears the conclusion. Normally it is a time constraint that is used as prompt:

CH: now let's let's let's in the last few minutes go through the minutes of the last time 'cause in fact there was some action in there (.) ehm

This move, already cited in connection with the controlling action of the chairman, at first would appear to signal the approaching conclusion of the meeting. In fact, the next item on the agenda turns out to be the most controversial one and a new phase of the debate is opened to deal with it. However, time pressure is eventually felt and the chairman announces the *Closing Phase* and leaves the unsolved question for the care of a group member:

CH: we've three minutes to go and we've got to wrap it up (.) F. [name] can you take the action to think this through a bit more and perhaps (.) next meeting next monday (.)

In the final phase it is the chairman's responsibility to check that "actions" on the agenda have been seen to:

CH: ehm (.) there are other actions on last last last week minutes ehm one for D. [name] another one for G. [name] (.) ehm another one for K. [name] ( ) next week you'll have to follow those up

and if, like in this case, they have not all been reviewed, they will form part of the agenda for the next meeting:

CH: you take that action on say
C1: I will gain an understanding of the degree of commitment to that (.) where that sits this document at the moment
CH: well it's an action there isn't it (.) ehm so the main items on the agenda which were for today (.) but for next week there will be the review of the data (.) ehm on order input ( ) and how we can use the data

In the *Concluding Phase* of the sample meeting there is no mention of a venue or time for the next meeting, although the chairman is explicit about the day ("next Monday"). The reason for the lack of explicit instructions is to be found in the scheduled nature of these meetings, for which both venue and dates have already been set. One interesting incident that characterises this meeting is the current chairman's delegation of powers to another individual who is going to chair the next meeting in his absence:

CH: now I'm not gonna be here next monday because I'm on holiday (.) so your agreement with H. [name] being the chair
C1: yeah that's fine

Immediately afterwards, the group members who are going to be absent announce it to the group, and, significantly, it is the newly appointed chairman (Q) who takes on his first duty:

O2: I'm off on holiday
Q: you're on holiday (.) does that mean that (.) I mean is M. [name] *coming*
O1: M. is off for three weeks (.) ( ) hoping that it will be a new company when he comes back
Q: are you here then A. [name]

The transfer of power and duties has taken place in a an almost imperceptible way. Q. is now in the chair and with this episode the meeting comes to its last few minutes.

7.5 Comparative analysis.

In the second part of chapter 7, I shall carry out a comparative investigation of English *formal* and *informal* meetings with a view to highlighting possible differences with respect to the model of *formal* (English) meetings outlined in 7.4.3.

After a brief explanatory note on the notion of "formality" with reference to meetings (section 7.5.1), I shall introduce a discussion on the structure and functional components of informal English meetings recorded in the same company but with different participants, aims and setting (section 7.5.2). Section 7.5.3 will focus on the structural features specific to the Italian meetings with a view to highlighting the differences with the generic model based on English meetings.

7.5.1 Informality versus formality in business meetings: setting the criteria.

The deliberate use of the modifiers "informal" and "formal" for the purpose of characterising two would-be different sets of interactions needs explaining. The notions of "formality" and "informality" as used in this study rely heavily on pragmatic criteria, derived from direct observation of the presence (or absence) of certain behavioural patterns and conventions. Therefore, when I talked about "formal meetings" at the beginning of this chapter I meant relatively structured encounters with a fixed agenda, a nominated chairman, scheduled dates and taking place at purpose-built venues such as a conference room. The formal meeting described in section 7.5.3 fulfils all these criteria. By contrast, the informal meeting that I am about to introduce is one of a series in which the chairman may be a different person every time, drawn from the group of participants; the dates are fixed at the end of every meeting to suit all or most people; the venue is always somebody's office. The only common element between the two types of meeting is the agenda, which is known in advance and distributed to all participants.

These are the structural, general differences that can be identified. However, what determines the presence or absence of these elements is ultimately the purpose of the meeting. If this is considered by management to have potentially far-reaching effects on the whole company - such as the introduction of master-scheduling techniques -

both the tone of the meeting and the selection of participants and venue are going to be affected, and in turn, the degree of formality. Similarly, if the purpose is, for instance, the compilation of an internal questionnaire, however delicate may be the issues dealt with, the meeting does not necessarily require the intervention of influential senior executives, nor careful planning and a formal venue. (Sometimes, perhaps, apparently informal meetings are deliberately kept low key so as not to attract undue attention).

7.5.2 Informal meetings: structural and functional components.

As already mentioned in the introduction, I shall make continuing reference to the discussion in section 7.3 and adopt, where suitable, the same categories. In the meeting[5] that is the object of this section, six people of various status but all below executive level take part, one being a manager and all others more junior, including a secretary. They agreed to take part in a series of meetings on a voluntary basis, while the manager has been made formally responsible for the whole series. Dates and venues are decided at the end of each meeting and this is the first encounter after a training section that introduced the group to questionnaire and interviewing techniques. Their task is that of producing a questionnaire to gauge the employees' perceptions of a new policy - Performance Related Pay - which is already in operation for managers and is about to be extended to all levels. The issue is considered a sensitive one, especially in the situation of profound changes in which the company finds itself operating, where hundreds employees have already been made redundant. Against this highly charged background, the group

[5] As for discussion on the components of (formal) meetings (section 7.4), I shall choose one particular meeting among those defined as informal on the grounds of representativeness. Structural variants of informal meetings are likely to be more numerous than those of formal ones since there is a higher degree of variation in the combination of *optional components* that may be present in formal meetings.

meet to decide what action to take. The chairman, C., is one of the group, the most senior (and oldest). He opens the proceedings by checking who is present:

C: .... S.who you will remember turned up once he said yes he was very interested he would like to continue .....

His **Initiation** Move is continued by a group member, H, who intervenes without having been asked:

H: just checking who we are (5) is there any one missing D's gonna be late
C: yeah (.) T.
H: well T.s involvement is (.) what is he gonna be involved at every meeting now he's saying he's going to join the team

After this, a third member S. adds her rather lengthy contribution and the interaction seems to be about to slip into a full debate. The chairman takes advantage of this by asking S. to take the minutes:

C: yeah (.) you're taking some wonderful notes there S. does that
C: mean that (.) you'll transcribe that into minutes
S: if coerced yes but I can't guarantee when one will receive the minutes

However, a **Backgrounding** Move, explaining the reasons for the meeting and expected from the chairman, comes only when prompted by a **Questioning** Move from the group:

J:what was the what was the initial purpose of having sort of (.) a fair proportion of people from outside the function involved with it (.) does that still stand	QUESTIONING MOVE (group)
C. yes it did the original concept was people's perceptions of we said bip but we really meant new initiatives and the way in which er we were developing the company was developing (.) and it seemed pointless (.) to (.) start looking at a problem that affects people outside the function and it's only people within the function that are looking at it	ELICITED BACKGROUNDING MOVE (chairman)

It is not until later that the chairman delivers a second **Initiation** Move, again on the prompt of a group member (H.):

H: have you got a copy of it (10) have you reviewed the training session (.) at all
C: no no this is our first meeting since the training session er the last (.) half an hour of which er we were starting to put together our questionnaire (3) the training session er as such started off with our own reasons for being there and introductions and attempting to (.) give us a reasonable degree of comfort with what we were trying to do ....

After this, the **Initiation** Exchange becomes shared between the chairman and the facilitator (R.) who took part in the training session and is responsible for assisting the group with matters of methodology. His authority is legitimated by the chairman in the following:

C: R. would you like to add to that have I missed anything
R: ( ) ehm the only point was that I repeat your suggestion that if you'd like me to to be available on call if you needed more advice
C: uhm uhm (nodding)

Overall, the **Initiation** Exchange is partially elicited from the chairman by the group and jointly concluded by the facilitator who provides a **Transitional** Move as a substitute for the chairman's **Summary** Move (see section 7.4.3):

INFORMAL MEETING: OPENING PHASE

INITIATION EXCHANGE **(shared: chairman+group+facilitator)**

1) **First Initiation** (or Roll calling) move (chairman)
2) **Secretary nomination** move (chairman)
3) **Backgrounding** move (elicited by group)
4) **Second Initiation** (or Feedback) move (elicited by group)
5) **Transitional** move (facilitator)

ELICITATION EXCHANGE (missing)

Some or all of these moves could have taken place also in the first exchange of a formal meeting; what is unusual, however, is for the chairman *to be asked questions* leading to those moves. This tactic undermines the chairman's authority and status; in fact, I would go as far as to say that the Group (including the Facilitator) plays the leading role in the *Opening phase*. Control over the interaction is regarded as negotiable, thus increasing the informality of the meeting: the group reveal very early on that they are quite comfortable with this situation. Plausible factors determining to chairman's rather secondary role in this meeting are his rather accommodating personality and, perhaps, his lack of a definite programme for the day.

Questioning is frequently used throughout by the group to direct the interaction. Accordingly, the *Debating Phase* is opened by a group member with an indirect question to the chairman:

H: sorry I might have missed the point but (.) was it agreed that we were gonna produce a questionnaire paper questionnaire that you then had a discussion over (.) I know you've ( )

The Moves in this Phase are not dissimilar from those described in the formal meeting. However, it is much harder to identify move boundaries and classify moves according to the three category division proposed in section 7.4.1, i.e. chairman-group, group-chairman and group-group moves. It looks as if the chairman soon becomes a member of the group and his authority or status is no higher than any other member's. However, one can still cite instances when the chairman's authority is preserved; I refer to the **Summary** and **Review** Moves which, as in a formal meeting, are a chairman's preserve:

[after a discussion on communications]

C: sources of information tend to be many and varied (.) some of them are good some of them quite frankly are appalling er and (.) the reliability of of communication (.) doesn't necessarily have any bearing on on how well is accepted (.) so provided the people are accepted provided the message is is even if the message is is poor that might still be the one that becomes generally er taken as representing the situation

[at the end of the meeting]

C: yeah (.) very quick review of the meeting (.) I'd like to have done more but I think under the circumstances we did quite well and we seem to have got a new impetus back (.) makes you feel as if we are going for something and

Considering the overall informally structured nature of this meeting, it is surprising to find that the *Concluding Phase* is relatively structured, although the chairman's role never becomes dominant. Again, it is the group that is responsible for a **Transitional** Move, which comes quite unexpectedly in the middle of an animated debate:

H: .... do we need need to spend (.) if you want to still finish early shall we just spend a few minutes deciding what we do at the next meeting and when we meet
C: good thinking there yeah yeah

The agenda, date, time and venue for next meeting are negotiated between the group and the chairman, who only puts forward proposals and alternatives:

H: agenda for next meeting
C: analyse questionnaire
....
C: ok so that's finalising and refining the questionnaire
.....
C: refine and finalise the questionnaire ehm (.) I suppose I'd better start playing some samples out
....
C: ok (.) er (.) have I a planned timetable for (.) appointments ......
C: how we feel about this day a week
......
C: thursday morning 9th isn't it a good idea
....
C: friday morning
......
C: alright well (.) friday afternoon (.) we'll feel pretty relaxed
....

C: across the room comfortable with friday afternoon

....

C: one forty

....

C: here

The Closing phase is therefore organised as follows:

INFORMAL MEETING: CLOSING PHASE

Review Exchange **(chairman)**

1) Meeting review
2)......

Planning Exchange **(chairman and group)**

1) Action planning
2) Logistic planning (date, time, venue)

The most striking difference between the formal meeting of section 8.4.3 and this informal meeting is the highly negotiable distribution of power between the chairman and the group, which is most marked in the less authoritative role of the chairman. Even allowing for the inevitable differing personality traits - the chairman in the former meeting comes across as markedly more "competent" and confident - other variables (among which is the degree of formality) must have played a key role in setting the norms for advanced power-sharing.

7.6 A preliminary generic model of meetings.

In the light of the analytical work based on English materials and illustrated with extracts selected from both formal and informal meetings, I am now in a position to sketch out a tentative generic model

which, at this stage, is largely based on pragmatic categories. The usefulness of generic modelling is, it seems to me, its contribution towards the construction of abstract generative models of discourse which, while originally derived from natural language situations, will be able to represent with a limited set of categories the complex functioning of discourse mechanics. Obviously, the model that I am about to introduce is still a long way from this ideal objective, but it is the only attempt of which I am aware to represent meetings in terms of discourse categories.

The rationale of the model is based on the following principles:

1) meetings are **task-oriented encounters**;
2) meetings result from the cooperative efforts of **two parties**, the chairman and the group;
3) meetings are structured according to distinctive **structural units** at intermediate and local level, and these units are realised when sets of or single tasks are accomplished.

As the diagram below shows, interactions (i.e. meetings) are realised by *Phases*, which are (normally) three compulsory components of the structure. Each Phase consists of Exchanges, which vary in number according to the Phase. In informal meetings, for instance, it is not unusual to have a single (Initiation) Exchange in the Opening Phase. In this sense, Exchanges too are compulsory elements of the structure since on the presence of at least one of them in each Phase depends the realisation of the Phase itself. In turn, Exchanges are realised by Moves, the minimal component of the model. Therefore, the graphical representation of the hierarchically-ordered model is the following:

1st LEVEL	**INTERACTION**	(the meeting / general task)
2nd LEVEL	**PHASES**	(opening,debating,closing / sets of sub-tasks)
3rd LEVEL	**EXCHANGES**	(initiation, elicitation, planning../ single sub-tasks)
4th LEVEL	**MOVES**	(developmental, challenge, support. a section of a sub-task)

The first level is the meeting itself or *interaction*, set up to achieve a specific aim, or accomplish a task. In a business meeting this is sometimes referred to as the "problem statement", which contains the reason why the group is getting together.

At the second level, one finds a fixed set of three *phases* , quite easily identifiable in most meetings, but of varying structural complexity depending on the degree of formality of the interaction. Each phase is complete when the sub-tasks pertaining to that phase have been accomplished, which is not always the case in the more informal meetings, where phases may contain fewer elements, or in fact, only one element each, such as only an initiation exchange in the opening phase, or a review exchange only in the closing phase. The latter eventuality is common in the final meeting in a series, when planning may not be required, thus leaving the closing phase without a planning exchange. Therefore, not only the degree of formality, but also specific contingencies can reduce the complexity of a phase.

Below the phase level, the controversial category of *exchange* has been adopted to define single sub-tasks, such as elicitation or planning. The choice of a label for this category is a difficult one and exchange has been selected for want of a better term. Moreover, the very category does not seem to be applicable in the debating phase, which is the core of the interaction. This is because, contrary to what happens in the opening and closing phases, where sub-tasks are clearly defined and regulated by the chairman, in the debating phase the chairman's role and, consequently his power and control, are subject to negotiation with the group, as already illustrated in the previous sections. Therefore, the phase is quite fluid and it is hard to establish internal boundaries between possible exchanges. In fact, from this preliminary work on both English and Italian data, the exchange level is the most problematic to define, as it is also in other types of discourse.

The minimal functional unit is the *move*, corresponding to a segment of the sub-task, i.e. a single utterance or set of utterances through which an interactants contribute to the sub-task. It is essential to avoid the temptation of compiling long lists of moves; rather, bearing in mind the level of abstraction to be achieved in the final model of discourse, it is much more productive and effective to seek to identify a finite set of moves which are defined in general enough terms to be able to encompass sub-moves or secondary moves. Burton (1980) has adopted the same criteria when rationalising Sinclair and Coulthard's model of classroom discourse. The author is still left with seven types of move, but she correctly observes that conversation can be understood as consisting essentially of support and challenge moves. It is unlikely, however, that a model of this kind will be able to account for all discourse. And this is a major problem area, with the most promising solutions conceivably coming from Artificial Intelligence, and especially from research, like Reichman's, in natural language interpretation and generation.

7.7 The influence of culture on the structure of meetings: the Italian case.

This section will concentrate on assessing the effects on the organisation of meetings by the single and arguably most important factor: *culture*. Elsewhere in this study I have used the term *culture* to mean not only national culture but also organisational culture. Although it is true to say that the former inevitably influences the latter, in this section I shall try to distinguish between features that belong to a notional "typical" Italian culture and those that emerge from the analysis of linguistic behaviour within the specific setting of company A.. The aim of this brief section then is not to list a set of general characteristics[8], but rather to assess the extent to which culture-dependent behaviour affects the generic model of meetings that has been discussed so far.

First of all, formality is a less influential variable in the Italian case study: a comparison of both formal and informal Italian meetings with equivalent English examples shows that the demarcation lines between Phases in the Italian data are more difficult to establish, although in every meeting recorded there is always an attempt by the chairman to introduce the interaction, for instance by reading extracts from a report, like points off an agenda[9] :

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[8] Despite this cautious approach, it is interesting to notice that the observations on Italian meetings contained in this section have been confirmed during interviews to British managers of an Anglo-Italian joint venture (Bargiela 1993). This suggests that the culture of company A. shares features which are not idiosyncratic but represent an initial platform for a more extensive cross-cultural investigation.

[9] I should mention again the fact that I was not allowed to view the agendas of the meetings that I observed because, apparently, they were rated as "confidential documents". Therefore, it can only be assumed that agendas were there, although there is no evidence from the proceedings that that was the case.

CH:.... la tastiera si blocca sul testi di bios (.) punti di rete fuori standard (.) un punto di rete durata 500 millisecondi (.) il sistema si blocca a un punto ( ) risolto con l'emissione di bios r1.09... (Quality Review meeting, Opening Phase)

CH: .... the keyboard

or by providing a Backrounding Move in an informal meeting:

CH: allora facciamo una premessa (.) io sto seguendo (.) nell'ambito del piano di qualita' totale (.) il process on ring del prodotto (.) con A[name] sul cp del prodotto (.) .....

However, these Moves are not structured into Exchanges. After this very concise opening, the meeting turns into a full discussion, as if both the Chairman and the Group had tacitly agreed that formalities should be kept to the necessary minimum.

Similarly, the Closing Phase, clearly marked in formal and informal English meetings, does not find a close equivalent in the Italian meetings. This may be due to the nature of the interactions which I have recorded, all of which are either a) regular monthly or bi-monthly reviews, in which case dates and venues may be known in advance and therefore not subject of discussion; or b) ad hoc meetings called to discuss specific issues and entailing no further meeting. In neither case is a Planning Exchange required.

There is also the possibility that a complex Closing Phase is made redundant by the fact that the chairman will fix date, time and venue of a meeting before it takes place and circulate these details for approval (or for information) to all parties involved. This would be quite conceivable in a organisation which, like the Italian company, is hierarchically structured and compartmentalised.

Having said all this, "winding up" markers always appear at the end of the Italian meetings, such as the following:

(chairman) G: va bene grazie

DR: possiamo andare a prendere il caffe'

G: ok thank you
DR: can we go for a coffee

at the end of an internal meeting, or with a:

(chairman) B: va bene
?: va bene e' stato un piacere

B: ok
?: ok it's been a pleasure

to bring a more formal Quality Review session to an end.

This evidence shows that both the *Opening* and *Closing Phases* in Italian meetings are drastically simplified versions of their equivalent described in the generic model of section 7.6 and, consequently, their contribution to the realisation of a structurally balanced interaction is greatly reduced. The most significant outcome of this structural imbalance is the complexity and duration of the *Debating Phase*, where the role of the Group is clearly dominant and the Chairman is often reduced to moderating verbal excesses:

?: (many voices)
CH: va bene (.) test di compatibilita' (5) io farei far la (.) la picture da qualcun altro (6) chi e' che la (.)

CH: ok (.) compatibility tests (5) I'd ask someone else to put us in the picture

or attempting (with mixed results) to change the direction of the debate by raising the next point on the agenda:

CH: si' si' (4) scusa io passerei ad altri item poi quando arriva G. chiudiamo un attimo 'ste argomento qua

CH: yes yes (4) sorry I'd move on to the next items and when G arrives we'll close this topic too

CH: senti io passo alla documentazione (.) allora se c'e' qualcosa sulla documentazione

CH: listen I'll move on to the documentation (.) now then is there anything about the documentation

Unlike the English meetings then, during which the control over the interaction is normally negotiated between the Chairman and the Group, especially if the Chairman's personality is a strong one, the Italian meetings show an overwhelming control exercised by the Group over the most important phase, the *Debating Phase*. This situation is ideal for dominant individuals to emerge, either by virtue of the department that they represent - Planning and Operations being the most influencial in company A. - and the senior position that they hold within that department. Perhaps an extreme case is represented by the Director of Planning who during a meeting (which I was not allowed to record) monopolised the whole *Debating Phase* by turning it into a monologue of duration disproportionate to the importance of the issue that he was seeking to put across to the hapless Group. I believe that abuse of monologic style interventions in Italian meetings can often be attributed to personality rather than necessity; and when clashes occur they are more likely to be due to the fact the individuals tend to crusade for certain issue as if they were personal issues rather than organisational matters. This explains why discussions of relatively simple questions often become fully-fledged debates on the possible scenarios which may result from taking a given action. Assuming responsibility for a decision-making process ensures that the ensuing action is feared in case it results in failure, which would be interpreted as personal failure and would therefore affect the individual's status in the company. In one word, *face* is at stake[10] .

This trait is not attributable to the organisational culture of company A. but rather to a national culture which encourages

[10] This interpretation is supported by comments made by the English employees of an Anglo-Italian joint venture questioned on the perceived differences between English and Italian ways of conducting meetings (Bargiela 1993).

individualism and competition from a very early age. While this attitude stimulates personal creativity, it leaves many individuals unable to cope with teamwork and pragmatic decision-making, which are the recognised strengths of Anglophone businessmen.

However, there is at least one organisational feature that can also explain dominant or even manipulatory behaviour at meetings in company A: the hierarchical structure. Company A. has a multi-layered, compartimentalised structure with well-defined, fixed roles especially at the top end. The dividing line cutting across the pyramid isolates the "dirigenti" (loosely translatable as "executives") from the rest of the company. The top of the "dirigenti" rank, the most senior personnel are the most remote. The title of "dirigente" is a prestigious one, acquired after working for the company for several years or after being head-hunted from rival companies. This position affords status, power and an office with no see-through doors and kept shut. The combination of this position and certain personality traits may result in the manipulating individuals who are to be found in Italian meetings and whose behaviour is re-enforced by the lack of team spirit and pragmatism in decision-making.

I believe that these are only *some* of the factors that influence the structure of Italian meetings: more research is needed to look into the generalisability of these findings. As far as the scope of this section is concerned, however, it can already be anticipated that the construction of generic models valid across cultures will encounter enormous difficulties: a promising working hypothesis is the construction of models that stand the test of similar cultures, for instance the Northern European cultures and the Mediterranean cultures, bearing in mind that management and organisational styles are essential contributory elements.

These considerations take me back to the discussion of Reichman's model of discourse and to the need for working out the fundamental components of this and other generative models, i.e. *Moves*. Failure to come up with a robust, cross-cultural generic model of meetings does not imply incompatibility at the lowest level of *Moves* between two very different cultures, such as the Italian and the British. I believe that there is much more scope for fruitful results at this level, at least to begin with. This is the first challenge for future research in this new field.

CHAPTER EIGHT: COMPARING AND CONTRASTING. CROSS-CULTURAL LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS.

8.1 Introduction.

The title of this chapter needs justifying and explaining. The label "cross-cultural", preferred to the synonym "inter-cultural" and to be distinguished from "pan-cultural" (Triandis *et al.* 1986) refers to research that takes a set of cultural dimensions and compares their variations across two or more countries.

This study has focused on language, and more precisely on meetings as linguistic phenomena through which corporate, and possibly national, culture is expressed. Hence the qualifier 'linguistic' in the title. The specified categories have been assumed to be 'universal', i.e. applying to both settings investigated, and the aim of section 8.3 is to map the variations of these categories within the two corporate and national cultures, following a brief overview of the field of cross-cultural linguistic studies in section 8.2.

In the second part of the chapter (section 8.4), I shall make suggestions for further research under the three key headings that I think summarise the essence of the work contained in this thesis: 1) meetings; 2) business discourse; and c) contrastive linguistic analysis.

8.2 Cross-cultural linguistic studies: recent developments.

Fisiak (1980) writes that contrastive linguistics "is concerned with the comparison of two or more languages (or subsystems of languages) in order to determine *both the differences and similarities* that hold between them". (my italics, page 1).

The relative cultural closeness of the two case-studies that I am going to compare in the next section, both European, is further enhanced by the common multinational nature of the corporate contexts within which language is used: the presence of a set of values assumed as shared could substantiate the commonsensical conclusion that the two companies examined in this thesis are characterised by more similarities than distinguishing traits. But this may only refer to formal or structural similarities, while the "cultural" contents, lying somewhere behind the statistics and the misleading facade of a levelling internationalism, generate a distinctive character that is difficult to describe on the basis of a short visit and a round of interviews and informal conversations. This is where the linguistic records become particularly useful. Indeed, despite the methodological problems that I have discussed at some length in chapter 3, the recordings of verbal interactions such as meetings and interviews, fix and retain through language the interpretative work of individuals as actors operating within a certain "cultural environment"[1] .

Social sciences such as psychology and its various sub-disciplines have a tradition of cross-cultural research (see: Kagitcibasi & Berry 1989 for an extensive overview); also "communication studies" witn its offshoots of inter-ethnic communication (e.g. Hecht et al. 1989, Singh et al. 1988, Inman 1983, Ross 1978) and inter-cultural communication (e.g. Knapp et al. 1987, House and Blum-Kulka 1986, Liberman 1984, Gudykunst 1983) have been prolific in the Eighties.

Within theoretical linguistics, too, the traditional branch of contrastive studies has continued to receive attention in recent years (Oleksy 1989, Kastivski and Szwedek 1986, Fisiak 1984). However, it is to the lesser developed, but more directly relevant fields of contrastive conversation and discourse analysis (e.g. Neumann 1991, Maynard 1990, Yamada 1990, Grinstead 1990, Ventola 1980), and cross-cultural pragmatics

1 By "culture" here I mean not only the wider national cultural but also the corporate or organisational culture that characterises a company's unique identity."Organisational culture" is now established as a major area of interest in management studies and something that can and should be planned for especially in multinational concerns (Hofstede 1989).

(Wierzbicka 1991) that I would like to focus on for a critical and selective review of recent developments.

The first observation to be made concerns the nature of the data analysed and the method of collection: Ventola (1980) is a representative example of the earlier regrettable practice of comparing short pieces of conversation set up for the occasion, i.e. produced in non-comparable environments by a non-native speaker of the language (the author herself). The difficulty of obtaining authentic language materials, especially from business sources, has led researchers to use laboratory role-playing and simulations (e.g. Grinstead 1991, Bargiela 1991) with the consequence that most of the conclusions which emerge from the analysis of rehearsed interactional patterns are not validated by evidence obtained from authentic interactions.[2]

While language authenticity is a fundamental concern in any type of linguistic analysis, and therefore also in cross-cultural work, in the latter comparability stands out as a primary requirement. According to Maynard (1990) this is to be fulfilled in the approach to cross-cultural analysis that she calls Contrastive Conversation Analysis (CCA): context, the nature of the speech event and the characteristics of the participants should be comparable. 'Equivalence' in this thesis, as in Maynard's case, was "sought in the sociolinguistic context in which the conversational data is produced" (p.401) and further maintained by the application of the same interpretative framework.[3]

[2] Even a cursory comparison of the simulated negotiations recorded at the Business School of the Nottingham Trent University with the authentic materials contained in this thesis reveals the degree of controlled artificiality that affected the discourse practices and the pragmatics displayed by the interactants.

[3] Maynard admits to allowances made in the application of this rule: "discourse theme", i.e "the types of themes discussed" and "regional difference among subjects" varied. Similarily, in this thesis the subjects of the meetings are different in the companies, while ethnic origins were strictly uniform within the two sets of participants).

Beyond these methodological considerations, which have been addressed and implemented in this study, Maynard raises a point that is particularly relevant to cross-cultural linguistics and that I shall quote in full:

> *[f]ollowing the initial preliminary contrast, it is important to assess and interpret the results in the light of linguistic and sociocultural idiosyncrasies of the speech communities under investigation (the fifth step of CCA). Even when the same methodology is applied, the subject matter being analyzed may bear different significance in different societies. By concentrating on pre-selected linguistic and interactional strategies, for example, the researcher may overlook seemingly unrelated devices which in fact serve similar or nearly equivalent functions in the contrasted speech communities. (p.400)*

Given the common European roots of the Italian and English communities investigated in this study, - in contrast with Maynard's analysis of two very different linguistic communities, the American and the Japanese, - the selection *a priori* of certain analytical categories that I intend to single out for contrastive analysis is, arguably, going to be less affected by cultural bias. At the same time, however, one should acknowledge that the dominance of English in linguistic studies is in itself a source of culture-dependent and therefore biased analytical categories.

Despite the very interesting issues raised by her Contrastive Conversation Analysis approach, Maynard's work falls short in one of the pre-conditions that she lists as essential. Although she successfully manages to control many contextual variables (number, gender, ages and degree of acquaintance of the participants) the experimental nature of her recordings, made by an unattended video-camera operating in a room where "the subjects were left alone ... after being instructed to talk as naturally as possible about anything they liked" (p.402) is worrying, especially in view of her interest in back-channel expressions. The artificial atmosphere of the setting, increased by the presence of the video-camera may conceivably have affected the listeners' response patterns, a distortion that could have lasted far longer than the initial two minutes regularly discarded by the author.

Methodologically closer to the approach selected in this thesis is Yamada's (1990) research in intra-cultural and inter-cultural (American and Japanese) conversational styles, based on recordings of authentic business meetings which, however, she did not attend. Her conclusions on cultural patterns of turn distribution observed first in intra-cultural and later in inter-cultural situations suggest that each party when confronted with a culturally mixed setting tends to reinforce his/her native conversational strategies instead of adapting to the new linguistic configuration. She concludes that "cross-cultural miscommunication may therefore occur as a result of misinterpreted covert conversation strategies, such as turn distribution, in addition to more explicit verbal strategies." (p.292)[4]

Inter-cultural discourse analysis, like CCA is still in its infancy. Rare also are studies focusing on a language other than English as the lingua franca. Although this is not always and necessarily a major stumbling block, it has meant that other European languages and certain important language-specific discourse conventions, such as the use of the polite vs. familiar address, have received far less attention than they deserve.

Research that has looked at languages other than English includes Neumann (1991) who relates the findings of the analysis of a face-to-face negotiation between a German and a Norwegian, conducted in German. Apart from the unusual (in business) use of the familiar *du* (you) instead of the polite *Sie* by the German party, the author noticed differences in turn-taking management by the two parties that enabled the German partner to exercise control over the interaction while maintaining a collaborative framework. The Norwegian partner was obviously in difficulty not only

[4] It would be interest compare the cross-cultural analysis of my recordings, on which I shall concentrate in the next section, to the analysis of inter-cultural Anglo-Italian business meetings. Although this is not going to be possible with companies A and B, I hope to be able to obtain at least recordings of such meetings from a recently created Anglo-Italian company with which I am in contact.

because he was forced to use German, in which language his vocabulary was not always adequate, but also because he was not aware of the pragmatic implications of that language which he could have turned to his advantage. Neumann correctly points out in her conclusions that better knowledge of the pragmatics of German, *even* if only at the intermediate level that he claimed he could command, would have helped the Norwegian party redress somewhat the balance in his favour.

Evidence based on triangulated data, which include both the analyst's and the participants' perspectives (Tyler & Davies 1990) shows that cross-cultural communication is also hindered by different interpretations of discursive aspects, including the misunderstanding of prosodic cues. Although Tyler & Davies base their conclusions on a single interaction, they convincingly demonstrate how the choice of two culture-specific discourse management strategies by the interactants lead to miscommunication.

Instances of failure in communication provide a particularly rich source of information on the discursive and pragmatic differences between languages and even, I would suggest, between speakers of the same language (Bargiela 1992).

One of the approaches to cross-cultural research that emerges as potentially valuable methodologically is the "pragmatics through semantics" proposed by Wierzbicka (1991), based on what the author claims is a "universal, 'culture-free' perspective, and its 'multicultural,' culture-specific, content." (p.24). As one might expect, Wierzbicka argues that Anglo-centrism in linguistics and pragmatics has affected cross-cultural research by creating and using labels and categories that are strongly culture-dependent, such as 'self-assertion', 'sincerity', 'solidarity', 'spontaneity', etc. She proposes an alternative set of "intuitively clear and intuitively verifiable" quasi-universal concepts such as *want*, *say*, *know, think, good* and *bad*. However, it seems to me that such a framework, while avoiding gross distortions introduced by culture-dependent values, still relies heavily on uncovering and understanding the cultural network of rules and conventions that are reflected in language usage and from which derive the perceptions of *good, evil, knowledge* etc. This applies also to alleged "universal constructs" such as forms of personal address that I shall examine in detail in section 8.3. One could go so far as to suggest that the pragmatics of a language ultimately is accessed through its cultural background, more than in its semantics.

This perspective is in sharp contrast with Heyman's (1989) thought-provoking conclusions according to which "culture is not a scientific concept which can be used a priori to analyze and explain problems in interaction; rather, it is a common sense notion." (p.47) Basing his work on an ethnomethodological approach to social interaction, the author claims that like language, culture is "indexical and reflexive" and therefore cannot be assumed to exist as a ready-made construct to be used in the study of verbal interaction among members of different cultures.

If this understanding of "culture" is now contrasted with Wierzbicka's belief in the existence of an objective, and therefore, taken for granted, set of cultural differences that distinguish speakers of different languages, one is left with an ontological and methodological dilemma. In fact, in section 3.2 on the methodology of this thesis, I supported a phenomenological view of social events, and therefore of meetings as well, while at the same time proposing an interpretative framework that in its social dimension incorporates a strong cultural (corporate and national) element as a given set of characteristics traceable through language. From a notion of meetings very close to Heyman's indexical and reflexive "culture", I have moved towards a Gumperzian interpretation of cross-cultural interactions by assuming that cultural differences do exist, and I have therefore used them to explain verbal behaviour (see next section). This unconscious shift from a phenomenological to a pragmatic reading of verbal phenomena has arguably been induced by the need to provide an interpretative tool that would be of assistance to others as well in carrying out the same kind of analysis: indeed, an uncritical adherence to phenomenology might have left a void in the place of the "cultural dimension" of diagram 4.1 if, as Heyman did, I took the unsettling view that "[t]he best we can ever do in understanding cultural difference is to pay attention to the design specifics of the interaction, as they unfold sequentially in real time, in which cultural difference makes itself available as a feature of that interaction." (p.64)

In the next section, I shall take the view that objective variations in some well-known linguistic constructs and conventions index cultural differences.

8.3 Comparing and contrasting English and Italian managerial discourse:findings from a preliminary investigation.

In this section I shall investigate and contrast the linguistic manifestations and pragmatic implications in English and Italian of the following:

1) **pronominalisation and social relationships**: an aspect already considered for its contribution to the realisation of coherence (sections 5.4 and 6.9).

2) **tentativeness**.

3) **interruptive tactics**: I shall assess the validity of the popular belief that Italians interrupt more than British speakers.[5] .

[5] Some of the materials used here are quoted from a paper presented at the 3rd EnCode International Seminar on Cross-cultural communication under the title '*Empty words' in business: redundancy or rhetoric?*, Amsterdam, March 1992.

I assume that the notion of "pronominalisation" is self-explanatory when referring to English and Italian, given the presence of a very similar personal pronoun system in the two languages. (A major difference, however, lies in the general rule governing the use pronouns in English and Italian, which are marked in English and unmarkded in Italian. For a more detailed discussion of this aspect, see section 5.4.).

The notions of "tentativeness" and "interruptions" are culturally-dependent in the sense intended by Wierzbicka (1991) and the linguistic forms associated with them can therefore be expected to differ in English and Italian. In fact, the same remark that Wierzbicka makes about the use of tentative language, such as hedges in English and Polish[6], could apply to the English-Italian comparison: "As a different manifestation of the same cultural difference I would mention the English preference for a hedged expression of opinions and evaluations, and the Polish tendency to express opinions in strong terms, and without any hedges whatsoever".(p.43)

A characteristic of speech for which Italian are notorious in the Anglophone world is the alleged high frequency of interruptions in their conversations. Interruption patterns, however, are also subject to strong cultural perceptions of what polite, or at least, acceptable, verbal interactions should sound like. After a long immersion in the English environment and having absorbed many of the conversational practices considered natural by the natives, my personal reaction to business meetings in company A seemed to confirm, at first, the stereotype of the unruly and noisy Italian conversants (see section 5.1). However, recent research has shown that "[c]ontrary to common belief among native speakers, no relevant differences in frequency of interruptions as violations of conversational rules are found in the two [.i.e English and Italian]

[6] Polish and Italian, although belonging to two difference language sub-groups are much closer in pragmatic terms than English and Italian. This is due to historic and cultural reasons (not least religious beliefs) and has translated into a link of affinity between Poles and Italians that is missing with Britain.

contexts". (Testa 1988,p.285) It appears that in spontaneous conversation differences are limited to the choice of interruption tactics, where the "smooth" opening marker *well* used in English, contrasts with the adversative opening marker **ma** (but) of the Italian (Testa 1988).

I shall now take these three topics in turn and explore the ways and the extent to which their pragmatic implications differ in the two languages in a business context.

8.3.1 Pronominalisation and social relationships.

In sections 5.4 and 6.9 I have outlined and commented on the *relational orientation patterns* constructed by personal pronouns in Italian and English business discourse.

From the Italian meetings emerges a pragmatic use of the familiar address **tu** (you) which is particularly noteworthy and, I suspect, typical of business and professional environments.

In conversations among friends or relations, the (generally unmarked) **tu** verbal form implies a relationship based on first names. In company A instead, I have noticed the use of the informal address followed by surnames, a violation of 'standard' functional and grammatical rules (see p.117). This can only be interpreted as an attempt to establish a comfortable relational distance, conducive to good communication and therefore collaboration, while at the same time avoiding the infringement of personal status which every professional can command in his or her area of competence. In simple words, **tu + surname** is the formula of address for setting and maintaining co-operative but professional relationships, as in the following extract from a Quality Assurance technical meeting:

CH: (chairman)
A: (one of the participants)

CH: |allora io l'altra volta avevo capito che capitava in un certo range di midita' ma poi mi spostavo da quello e non veniva piu' fuori (.) avevo capito questo (.) poi ora i dice no e' un discorso di ponticellatura (.) mi sembra strano che un ponticello no (.) abbia la sensibile a un range ben determinato di | ( )

*A: | allora **DR[surname]** forse non **hai capito** enerdi' quando te l'abbiamo spiegato (.) dal punto di vista tecnico non e' il ponticello ......*

CH: |now then the last time I had understood that it had happened within a certain humidity range but if you moved
out from that it wouldn't happen anymore (.) that's what I had understood(.) now you're telling me no it's a matter of bridging (.) it seems to me strange that a bridge you know (.) as is sensitive to a well-defined range of | ( )
A: | now then **DR [surname]** perhaps **you [fam.]** didn't understand last friday when we explained this to **you [fam.]** from a technical viewpoint ....

One of the participants addresses the chairman DR by his surname followed by an unmarked **tu** and a further familiar dative **te** (to you). Here the contrast between status and informal address is even stronger given that the addressee happens to be chairing a formal interfunctional meeting. Interestingly, a few seconds later, when the discussion threatens to escalate into an argument between two delegates, A. and H., the latter tactically uses the familiar address according to the standard construction (**tu + first name**):

A: | se tu lo ponticelli in modo sbagliato anche le altre parti della macchina non funzionano
*H: no aspetta un momentino va tutto bene ehm **E.[first name]** non t'agitare (.) ecco il discorso e' che ......*

A: | if you bridge it wrongly the other parts of the machine won't work either
H: no wait a second it's alright er **E.[first name]** don't upset yourself (.) it's a matter of ....

Maintaining the collaborative tone of the discussion threatened by a serious disagreement is considered more important than respecting the business **tu+surname** address form, which is violated again, by the chairman himself when dealing with the same individual (E.):

*CH: |... cioe' se questa manifestazione e' molto | frequente cioe' quello che io dicevo all' **E.[first name]**. s*
?: | no
CH: (.) siccome e' una prova ( ) ....

CH: | .... that is if this manifestation is very | frequent that is what I was telling **E. [first name]**
?: | no
CH: (.) since it is a test ( ) ....

The informality of CH's first name address is enhanced by his use of the determiner "the" preceding the name, a practice often found in colloquial and familiar Italian. The literal translation of the phrase above would therefore read:

This local use of the grammatically and functionally "standard" form of address (**tu + first name**) does not affect the dominant role of the **tu + surname** address in the meeting. Only a few minutes later, the chairman reverts back to it, in a direct question containing a marked **tu** (in expectation of a positive reply): :

CH: va bene test di compatibilita' (5) io fare far la (.) picture da qualcun altro (6) chi e' che la (.)
M: niente qua (.) test di compatibilita'
*CH: ne parli **tu M.[surname]***
M: c'e 'poco da parlare....

CH: ok compatibility tests (5) I would ask (.) somebody else to outline this (6) who's going to (.)
M: now then (.) compatibility tests
CH: are **you** [familiar] going to talk about it **M.[surname]**
M: there isn't much to talk about....

In his role as a chairman of a multi-functional review meeting, CH will often need to call on individuals to provide information about the current state of the items on the agenda. This he does by employing the same **tu + surname** formula, as in the following:

P: non puo' non essere arrivata (.) l'ho mandata il 16 maggio via fax dicendon | (   )
*CH: | **scusa scusa***
***[familiar] P.[surname]** qual e' la situazione che **tu** .....*

P: it can't not have arrived (.) I sent it on 16 may by fax saying I (   )
CH: **I excuse me [familiar]**
P.[surname] what is the situation that you ....

If we now turn to English pronouns for evidence of a similar pragmatic use, the first observation to be made is that the disappearance in modern English of the thou/thee form, equivalent in meaning to **tu/ti** has not only left a gap in the pronoun system but also a considerable void in the address system of the language[7]. In such a situation, one could speculate

[7] This phenomenon is in contrast with what Muhlhausler & Harre (1990) consider the general tendency in the case of reduced pronoun systems. The authors remark that it is pronouns signalling personal deixis (such as tu, the German du and the Old English thou) that tend to remain while honorifics and distancers, signalling social deixis, tend to be lost. You in Old English functioned as a distancer and has remained, while the second person pronoun you had been lost.

that English speakers will have developed functional and pragmatic devices to express social closeness/distance that compensate for the lack of one of what Wierzbicka calls "universal semantic primitives" (pp.13-14). Moreover, is the advantage of a undistinguished and therefore "democratic" *you* a real one? Wierzbicka has this to say:

The English you is of course very democratic, it is a great social equaliser, but it can also be seen as a distance-building device. This is not to say that the meaning of the English word you i s analogous to that of a V-form in a language that does have a T-V contrast. But I think that in the absence of such a contrast the form you can't convey the intimacy signalled by the choice of a T-form. An intimate form allows the speaker to get psychologically close to the addressee, to penetrate the wall surrounding each individual." (p.47) .

In Italian business discourse, the right balance between "psychological closeness" and professional distancing is achieved through a compromise address form. This does not apply in English; therefore one needs to look further afield, perhaps in the use of short forms of proper names which "imply informality and friendliness" (Wierzbicka, p.48).

A further issue concerns the existence in English business discourse of possible code switches in the address forms, from moderately formal to informal as a tactical move to safeguarding the cooperativeness of an interaction, as in the Italian meetings. Perhaps one of the best examples of how Italian speakers would not have used personal pronouns to create a deliberately ambiguous situation is illustrated in the following exchange between the chairman (C.), a man, and one of the participants (a woman) to the first BAT meeting (see section 6.2):

C: yeah (.) you're taking some wonderful notes there ***S. [first name]***
does that mean that (.) you'll transcribe that into minutes
S. if coerced yes but I can't guarantee when one will receive the minutes

The tone of this exchange is light-hearted, C. uses the addressee's first name and the two are acquainted, while belonging to different departments. Their exchange is significant in that it combines a very reluctant assent prefaced by a hypothetical *if* and an elliptical passive, the negative value of which is further reinforced by the strong semantics of the verb *coerce*. Any doubt about the S.'s show of resistance is dispelled by the second part of her turn, which is a threat of retaliation introduced by a warning adversative particle (*but*) and the use of the impersonal form (*one*). Of course in the context of a jocular exchange (or is it?) S.'s reaction would not be perceived as a threat: her elaborate syntactical and lexical choices, whether conscious or not, seem to have the effect of enhancing the comical quality of the exchange, as the general laugh that followed suggests.

However, after listening several times to the recording, I cannot dismiss the impression that S. is tactfully trying to send the following message to C.: "I would not want to take the minutes, but if you as a chairman ask me to, I shall have to do it; otherwise I would put myself in an embarrassing situation in front of the other participants. You should however know that as a consequence of being asked to do something that I do not like, I may retaliate by taking my time before getting the minutes ready". Of course, there is always the serious risk of over-reading into discourse, especially as a non-native speaker of the language, but the complexity of S.'s response is revealing of a sophisticated use of pronominalisation in English, where omission of personal self-reference (if **I** am), use of a passive (**coerced**) and vagueness when referring to the target of her retaliation (when **one** will receive the minutes) drives home the point without hurting anybody's feelings. On the other hand, it is just this verbal ambiguity that arises the participants' laughter since they all know very well who the target is.

In Italian I cannot imagine such a syntactically (and pragmagically) complex reply, and not only because it would not be translatable as it stands: the reaction of an Italian to C.'s request/order would probably have been some form of open disapproval, perhaps framed in a witty reply. Moreover, in an Italian context, the status of the interactants would have played a decisive role in fine-tuning the strength of the complaint, or even the appropriateness of one.

Going back to the English meetings and to the search for culture-specific use of pronouns, I have found that the dominant inclusive pronoun is **we**, used by both the chairman and the participants, while the most frequent exclusive pronoun is **they**, referring to the company's employees. The ego-centric **I** is also used by individuals either when they ask questions to the chairman or they express personal opinions. The chairmen tend to use the inclusive **we**, except when they signal that they are about to express a personal opinion or make a personal comment. This localised use of **I**, achieves the effect of shifting the focus of attention temporarily away from the group to the chairman's person:

*CH: ... **I**'m inclined to think it would work but it's actually (.) an awful lot is is is required of the master scheduler* (BIP formal meeting)

*CH: | **I** don't understand **I** think there's a lot of ambiguity in there* (BIP formal meeting)

*C: so that's all that **I** feel that **I** want to say* (BAT informal meeting)

On the whole, English meetings do not reveal any other noteworthy use of personal pronouns. Therefore I shall move on to the element in the English address form which is said to typify familiarity and informality: first names. Participants to the informal BAT meetings are on first name terms with each other. The situation is different for other more formal meetings, such as the one chosen in the chapter on *genre* (see section 7.4.2) on the grounds of its formality and structural completeness. During that interaction, the pattern seems to be that the chairman uses first names routinely with the participants, while the latter use the chairman's first name only on certain occasions, and not as a relational exercise but rather as a self-focusing device:

CH = chairman (first initial B.)
PT = participant

CH: ...... (4) I'm inclined to think it could work but it's actually(.) an awful lot is is is required of the master scheduler
*IT: now **B.[first name]** you've just agreed with me it's not the guy type it's the pure personality.....*

This behaviour could be either role-related, i.e. it is the chairman who can summon the participants but not vice-versa, or it may be fortuitous. Introducing the variable of status does not assist interpretation, since a number of participants to the BIP meetings are in fact more senior than the chairman and still respect the general rule outlined above: only evidence from a larger corpus of recordings could warrant less tentative conclusions.

In the English meetings recorded at company B, I cannot find firm evidence that the use of first names implies friendliness, or familiarity; on the other hand, it is quite conceivable that the absence of forms of address such as surnames or honorifics, implies collegiality among professionals by deliberately excluding status or hierarchy markers.

One feature that distinguishes formal and informal English meetings is the presence of humour in informal meetings, leading to the tentative conclusion that this may be a cue of solidary relationships. Gags such as the following:

(talking about a draft of the questionnaire circulated before the meeting)

H: well ok (.) I'm quite happy with it (.) well I've been privileged because I typed it
C: you've probably read it more than I have
T: and you've had it injected

(talking about the relationship between the BAT and the BIT - see section 3.7)

R: yeah (.) I just wonder (.) I just made the link (.) is this a godsend (.) well it's not I was just thinking (.) let me -put the opposite view from where a I sit (.) is that (.) without trying to hijack your BAT (.) it is in fact
T: nice try (.) didn't wor k

are interspersed in the text of all BAT meetings, while such jocular behaviour is absent in formal BIP meetings (see section 3.7). Seckman and Couch (1989) distinguish between jocularity and sarcasm and note that "[j]ocularity is most commonly contextualized by solidary relationships and in turn invites or affirms solidary relationships. Sarcasm may be contextualized by either solidary or authority relationship." While the two exchanges above could be defined as jocular, the ambivalence of the exchange between C. and S. cited on page 231 is hard to classify without knowing the exact nature of the relationship between the two individuals involved. However, I agree with Seckman and Couch as to the contribution of humour in the shaping of relationships at work: evidence from the English corpus (of informal meetings) supports their conclusion. In the absence of lexicalised forms of solidarity such as the Italian **tu** pronoun, it is conceivable that other discursive practices are employed instead to achieve the same objective. But on the whole, evidence of relational work of the kind that I have just highlighted in the English interactions is still too fragmented to allow anything more than speculation.

After documenting the relevance of pronominalisation to relational work in Italian business discourse only[8], it may be the case that for English an approach is needed that goes beyond syntactic forms in order to reach the less apparent pragmatic dimension of culture-specific behaviour which, like jocularity, may be targeted to the establishment and maintenance of social relationships at work.

8.3.2 "Tentativeness" and "directness": misnomers or cultural traits?

Another subject which is going to pose more questions than I can hope to answer in a short section is the analysis of "tentativeness" and its verbal encoding in Italian and English.

As Wierzbicka (1991) observes about Polish, English expressions such as *I think, I believe, I guess, I wonder, I imagine,* or other hedges are not

8 Recent cross-cultural research on the linguistic manifestation of affection (Ochs & Schieffeling 1989) has singled out Italian and Spanish as the two European languages that use a complex array of devices (pronouns, reflexive forms, casemarking, suffixes and sound symbolism) to express emotions. These do not have lexical equivalents in English, which may imply that a) either emotions are expressed in other, less apparent ways in English; or b) the range of linguistic constructs expressing emotion is in fact more limited due to the allegdly more reserved and cautious nature of its people.

translatable. This also applies to Italian. A sentence like: "I think I like it" would simply translate in Italian as "I like it". The expression of feelings, and often also opinions, in Italian is not mediated by metalinguistic expressions, which may result in the speaker being considered abrupt or self-imposing by an Anglophone listener. Consider the following examples from the 3rd BAT meeting:

*R: in terms of (.) **I think** I was talking to (.) this guy I was talking to this morning (.) but in terms of this group it's not a question of training all our staff again ....*

*T: in its sort of overall terms (.) I mean (.) **I think that if you agree** at the moment it's a very down patch that we're going through at the moment in some ways ok (.) which is likely to at least carry on till the end of may because that's the focus of people leaving the business and so on*

The phrases emboldened could not be translated into Italian; the tentative approach of the speakers is further emphasised by "fillers" such as *in terms of*, *in its sort of overall terms* and *I mean* .

Now compare these with the following Italian extracts from one of the Quality review meetings:

(a)

A:... ora se tu mi dici che e' cosi' semplice nessun problema tu mi dichiari questi elementi compatibili io passo la compatibility guide al field e gli dico sul 52.50 andate tranquilli a mettere la nostra macchina che non c'e' problema |perche' nell'attimo ......
*M: |fare- fare- **faresti malissimo** anche perche' (.) **faresti malissimo** anche un attimo dopo che io abbia fatto le prove di compatibilita'*

A: ..... now if you tell me that it's so easy no problem you declare to me that these elements are compatible I pass the compatibility list on to the field and tell them with the 52.50 you're safe if you install our machine there is no problem | because as soon as...
M: | you woul- you woul- **you would be very wrong** [to do that] even after I have done the compatibility tests

(b)

*A: .... **io non penso** che ci sia nessuno (.) e **spero che non lo facciano** (.) che venda i pc in funzione dei contenuti di compatibility guide (.)*

A:... **I don't think** there's anyone (.) and **I hope they won't do it** (.) that no-one will sell the pc's on the basis of the contents of the compatibility guide (.)

The first exchange contains an excellent example of how opinions are not exactly subject to negotiation in Italian discourse: the outright condemnation emerges in the middle of a complex technical discussion on the merits of selling portable computers on the basis of a partially verified compatibility guide. Opinions on the matter are very different and this leads to strong statements of the kind recorded above. While such a behaviour would have conceivably attracted negative reactions of varying intensity in an English meeting, the course of the Italian meeting is not visibly upset.

The second extract contains the phrases **I don't think** and **I hope they won't do it** which, interpreted according to the prosodic profile impressed on them by the speaker, mean: "I am certain" and "I have some hesitation". The pragmatics encoded in the language (and interpretable only through prosody) changes from initial certainty to slight hesitation. Subsequently, in a truly direct Italian style, the speaker is openly accused of lying:

M: non e' vero (.) fanno anche quello
M: it's not true (.) they do that too

These examples are by no means extreme cases quoted to support my initial intuition: in fact, I have scanned the transcripts of the Italian meetings in search of equivalent, non-idiosyncratic examples of "tentative", or mediated, language but with no success, perhaps because I have been looking for syntactically similar forms.

In an Anglo-Italian context, the degree of directness testified by the Italian exchanges would be judged "abusive" by many English speakers, with possibly serious consequence on the outcome of the interaction. The differences in the pragmatics of multi-party talk in the two languages are real and significant: in a recent conversation with the English commercial manager of a new Anglo-Italian venture, it emerged that despite the fact that the Italian counterparts have sufficient or even good command of English, the mismatch between the linguistic forms and its pragmatic meanings has often left the English parties completely baffled as to their interlocutor's intentions. Apparently the Italian managers' talk comes across as a translation of Italian forms into English which, although grammatically correct, may not convey the pragmatic meaning intended. Research on the praxis of international communication in general, and business negotiation in particular (see section 2.4) has relied for too long on anecdotal evidence to substantiate the claim of cultural infuence: a possible and more sound alternative has been proposed in this introductory exploration, where an investigation of certain discourse practices in Italian and English has shown how *verbal interaction* can be used to identify culturally based practices that affect communication.

8.3.3 Against a cultural explanation of interruptive strategies.

Very little is known about the extent of the influence of the pragmatics of language in cross-cultural business mis-communication, even though informal contacts with individuals involved in international communication confirm the intuition that mastery of linguistic forms is no guarantee of effective interaction. Moreover, certain writers (e.g. Hofstede) who insist on cultural differences while knowing little about authentic linguistic practices, have fuelled a whole series of prejudices based on anecdotal evidence or hearsay.

A typical example is the widely accepted belief that Italians interrupt more often than English speakers[9] . Two issues must be addressed before assessing the merit of such a claim:

a) what is the nature of the interactions compared, i.e. formal or informal meetings (for a discussion on the criteria of formality in business meetings, see section 7.5.1); and

b) what is meant by "interruption".

Even if one is satisfied that the nature of the materials is comparable, there remains to be addressed the controversial notion of "interruption".

[9] The suggestive power of such popular beliefs, associated with a long absence from Italy, had influenced at first my own perceptions of Italian business meetings, as I remark in section 5.1. More careful listening of recordings of formal meetings has cast serious doubts on the validity of such perception. As far as informal meetings are concerned, more Italian materials are needed to attempt a preliminary comparison of interruptive patterns in the two languages.

If for interruption one intends the violation of turn-taking practices, then one should be aware that different turn-taking practices pertain to different types of interactions , e.g. spontaneous conversation, debates, meeting, etc. Therefore, what is permitted in a conversation among friends would be interpreted as a violation of the normative practice in a formal meeting. On the other hand, Testa (1988) observes that overlaps, often interpreted as interruptions, are common in multi-party talk and she adds "Simultaneous speech, even at nonproximal completion points in the ongoing turn, may be ascribed to factors that are not necessarily related to competition, as in the case of asynchrony caused by unrelaxed communication." (p.288) Similarly, pauses in the turn will tend to attract gap-filling interventions that could not be mistaken for violations. Testa found that both English and Italian speakers tend to orient themselves towards the fulfilment of the underlying principle of "economy of talk" (i.e. leaving no gaps) when engaged in spontaneous conversation and they are assisted in their task by "the predictability of the turn in progress and a high degree of shared knowledge among the participants".
The author's quantitative analysis of the frequency of different kinds of overlaps and interruptions does not support the common belief that Italian speakers use more interruptive actions. However, more interestingly, Testa compares the initial particles employed in interruptive switches in English and Italian and concentrates on those which occur most frequently, i.e. **well** and other affirmative items contrasting to the adversative **ma** (but). Her findings confirm the conclusions reached following my contrastive investigation concerning pragmatics opening markers (Bargiela 1992) according to which the function of **ma** is not always interpretable at syntactic and semantic level as adversative, like in the following example:

(a)

M.....pero' noi visto che ci ricordiamo che ci hanno tirato fuori dei problemi le mettiamo li' (.) la vecchia board perche' tira fuori dei problemi (.) sappiamo benissimo che il | (   )

A: | <u>ma</u> questo e' un discorso di progetto cioe' questo e' un discorso piu' vostro che nostro no

M: .... but since we remember that we've had problems with them we've picked them out (.) the old board because it gave us trouble (.) we know very well that the | ( )
A: | but this is a matter for the research & development department that is this is your concern not ours

but requires understanding of the interactants' intentions, as in the following examples:

(b)

E: tu- tutti correremo per metterli a posto | e' ovvio no
*CH: | **no no <u>ma</u> anche** (.) d'accordo per la x[sister company] in quel caso la' potrebbe (.) cioe' dal punto di vista della responsabilita' si' questo io l'ho certificato e' un mio componente (.) e' come se fosse un fornitore....*

E: we'll all rush to fix them | it's obvious isn't it
CH: | **no no but also (.) I agree** that for x[sister company] in that particular circumstance it could (.) that is from the point of view of responsibility yes I have certified this as my component (.) it is as if it was a supplier

(c)

E: oltretutto che le piastre che arrivan dall'[name] hanno gia' questa release 1.09 | no
A: | che <u>avranno</u>
E: .che avranno la release 1.09 (.) cioe' in effetti x[name] fornisce con lo 1.09 | ( )
*A: | **no <u>ma</u> comunque** il concetto di responsabilita' bios (.) noi sul bios torno a ripetere non tocchiamo neanche un bit (.) cioe' il lavoro che e'stato fatto ....*

E: beside the fact that the plates that arrive from x[sister company] already have this 1.09 release | don't they
A: | they <u>will</u> do
E: they will have the 1.09 release (.) that is to say that x[sister company] supplies with the 1.09 installed | ( )
A: | no but however the concept of responsibility for the bios (.) I repeat once more we don't touch even one bit of the bios (.) that is to say the work that has been done.......

In both cases, **ma** appears in lexical contexts which reinforce its basic adversative value. Yet, a closer examination of the pragmatic meaning of the two constructs reveals a supportive move (example b) and a concluding supportive move (example c).

A significant difference between the uses of **ma** recorded in Testa (1988) and in Bargiela (1992) concerns the immediate contexts in which they appear. While Testa's examples from spontaneous conversations all show **ma** in initial position and not followed by any other discourse marker, my survey of (formal and informal) Italian business meetings reveals that **ma** is normally prefaced by **no** (+) and often followed by **scusa/scusate** (excuse me/sorry): the stand-alone alternative (see example a) is extremely rare.

Explaining this phenomenon by means of different interactional strategies used in conversations among friends and among work colleagues should be approached with come caution. Nevertheless, one could tentatively argue that the argumentative urgency perceivable in the Italian meetings, particularly the formal ones, reflects itself in the emphatic repetition of negative discourse markers (**no, no, ma** (no, no but) and **no ma scusa** (not but sorry) to quote but two of the possible permutations) which *do not always* have adversative or negative pragmatic value . In fact, they can preface a supportive move, as in the two following examples:

D: appunto appunto pero' essendo oggi la quality review (.) non posso fare | a meno di dirlo eh
CH: |__no no ma no__
D: (.) questo non non mi sta | ehm bene
CH: |va benissimo anzi

D: exactly exactly however being this a quality review (.) I cannot help | mentioning it (.) I
CH: | no no but no
D: (.) I don't agree with | er it
CH: | it's absolutely fine

A: da ora in | poi
CH: | esatto esatto si'
A: perche' quello che e' stato fatto fino adesso non e' |completamente significativo
CH: | __no no ma__ infatti bisogna azzerarlo eh e partire ora e vedere

A: from now | on
CH: | exactly exactly yes
A: because what has been done so far isn't | entirely significant
CH: | no no but in fact one must set it to null and start again and see

Two further factors may be the reason for the use in interruptive turns in the context of business meetings of emphatic formulae instead of the simple **ma** found in the previous research: regional variations of Italian and idiolects. Testa's examples are in the Italian spoken in Rome, whereas my own come from northern Italy, and more precisely, from Pindemont.

Alternatively, such variations could index an individual's distinctive way of performing an interruptive move (such as in the two examples above). More evidence is needed from a larger corpus.

The question that still remains ununswered, however, is the following: what does one mean for "interruption"? In fact, taking the last two extracts above, can C's turn-taking moves be called "interruptions"? A commonsensical observation is that the other parties are undeterred hy CH's interventions, and complete their turns unaffected by him. Furthermore, CH's appear to be supportive moves (despite their negative lexicalisation), latching on to an existing turn. Perhaps one should call interruptions only attempts that are directed at shifting the topic of the current turn without the speaker's consent, although the vagueness of the notion of "topic" would add to the difficulty of the problem.

On this point, Testa differentiates between "anticipatory overlaps" and "violative interruption" and on the basis of this distinction the statistical differences between Italian and English speakers interruptive behaviour are not relevant and would conclude that the perception that interruptive behaviour is more frequent among Italian conversants could be explained by the use of adversative markers such as **ma**, as opposed to the smooth English pre-start "well". This remark is all the more relevant when referred to the negative **no(+)** chains isolated from business discourse (Bargiela 1992).

In this section I have deliberately focused my attention on three aspects of language in use that I have found to be of particular relevance for cross-linguistic analysis. The conclusiveness of the findings is obviously affected by the exploratory nature of the investigation: therefore, for instance in the case of pronominalisation, what I took for granted in my language appears not to have a corresponding pragmatic manifestation in English. Similarily, I hope to have shown that the use of

Anglo-centric labels such as "tentativeness" and interaction-dependent notions such as "interruptions" may lead to assumptions that may bias contrastive analysis.

On the subject of tentativenss and indirectness, it is tempting, albeit risky, to associate these two notions with yet another cultural (and universal?) phenomenon, *politeness* (see Brown and Levinson 1987), thus warranting the conclusion that English verbal behaviour is overall "more polite" than the Italian. English interactants recorded in company B, do show a higher degree of "tentativeness", or rather, "indirectness", than their Italian counterparts in company A., but whether this characterisation of their speech, based on cues such as the higher frequency of "hedges", implies politeness remains to be demonstrated[10].

In the next section, I shall review the contribution made by this study to what I think are its three main inter-related concerns: 1) meetings; 2) business discourse; and c) contrastive linguistic analysis.

8.4 Conclusions and suggestions for further research.

Choosing to write about business meetings in the wake of the revolution in group communication heralded by the introduction of the Electronic Meeting System (EMS) described in Nunamaker et al. (1991) may seem at best an academic anachronism. Indeed, why bother with a social phenomenon that is on its way out, replaced by efficient and, one day perhaps even error-free, computer technology?

[10] The problems related with parallel linguistic categories and the study of their manifestations cross-culturally are addressed, if not all solved, in Blum-Kulka and Kasper (1989). Based on speech act theory, one of the contributions of the volume is to show how different speech acts - requests and apologies in this case - can be performed in different ways in each language examined. Here is where the concepts of "directness" and "expliciteness" are brought into focus (pp.76-81). In turn, lack of expliciteness can be related to either vagueness or ambiguity. This last point is particularly relevant in business discourse, where often these aspects of verbal verbal behaviour can be attributed to tactics and strategies employed by interactants in the achievement of corporate as well as personal goals.

The literature on meetings as subject rather than source, to which Schwartzman (1981, 1986 and 1989) is by far the most prolific contributor, only gives a preliminary, though stimulating picture of the complexity and importance of such a phenomena in organisational life.

Having now reached the final stage of this study, which has implemented the original approach of making language the medium of interpretation of meetings, I can say with the conviction derived from personal observation in two different cultural settings and evidence from several participants that meetings 1) are indeed central to business life and 2) will never be completely replaced by technological advances.

I should mention again that by "meeting" I do not mean only the scheduled formal gathering of managers to discuss a fixed agenda, although many of the materials on which this study is based are of that kind. Meetings as unmediated encounters between two or more individual happen frequently and at all levels of an organisation. The choice to focus on a specific type of meeting in the two companies that I have visited was the outcome of a compromise between methodological and logistic requirements, as discussed in chapter 3.

My investigation could have begun on the shop-floor and concentrated on the nature of meetings among non-managerial staff; or, had I enjoyed very special privileges, (or the gift of invisibility!), I could have sat on board room meetings. There is no doubt that each type of meeting has distinctive socio-linguistic character according to where it takes place in the organisation: my collection of recordings is "middle of the range", including large, formal, interfunctional, periodical, technical meetings, an internal meeting, informal problem-solving meetings and more formalised interfunctional task-oriented meetings. This mix ensures the presence of representatives mainly from low to upper-middle management, with a sizeable proportion of participants at "executive" level (about one quarter).

While in this thesis the choice of the materials selected for analysis has been dictated by their representativeness (Italian internal meeting in chapter 5 and English BIP meeting in chapter 7) or by the need for sequential events (English BAT meetings), as a second stage it would be interesting to contrast the different types of meetings within each company, thus capturing internal patterns of variation both in the structural and verbal organisation of the events. The same exercise could be repeated across companies of different sizes in order to establish if there is any correlation between the features of meetings highlighted in this study and the size of the organisation. I expect that findings might reveal structural variations rather than unique discourse patterns, e.g. in a small company, meetings may not follow the complex and somewhat rigid generic structure outlined in chapter 7, but its discourse characteristics may not differ substantially from those of meetings in a large company. The interdependence of structure and discourse is an issue that deserves further attention not only in relation to the size/type of organisation but also to the degree of formality of the interaction, since in this study more complex structures have been associated with a higher degree of formality in the proceedings, and this across two multinationals of comparable size in two different countries.

Cross-culturally, this is the first attempt at contrasting English and Italian meetings of which I am aware. It is true that at least one type of meeting, i.e. commercial negotiations (especially between American and Japanese) have attracted growing attention in recent years because of the economic gains to be derived by a better understanding of the dynamics of these encounters. It is equally true that in any kind of business meeting, beside those finalised to achieve a sale, there are elements of negotiation: in the increasing number of joint ventures or international acquisitions, technical personnel will be involved in dealing with their counterparts abroad as much as commercial staff. However, isolating one particular type of meeting, (i.e. commercial negotiations) as if it were the only kind of face-to-face encounter taking place in international forums, or, worse, the only concern of a company operating world-wide, is distort the reality.

Meetings are phenomena that hold the fabric of company life together: through them individuals create, maintain or change the characteristics that give a company its distinctive cultural profile. Cultural values percolate through meetings: a superficial reading of the official agenda, if there is one, will only be of limited assistance to the observer who is cut out from the network of shared meanings within which interactants operate at ease. Understanding the hidden meanings and functions of meetings in an organisation gives insights into its social life. And language, as the essence of meetings, is instrumental to this interpretative work.

In the light of these considerations, it is surprising and disappointing that so little research has been carried out on this subject. This study has the aim of contributing an original approach to meetings as topics, revealing the interpretative potential of meetings as dynamic socio-linguistic forums: my hope is that the results contained here will have stimulated interest in pursuing further research, particularly on the characteristics of meetings across different cultures.

The interest in contrastive research is bound to be intensified by the trend in international business which points to more encounters among individuals of various nationalities, despite the introduction of advanced telecommunication technology.

Researchers should not be discouraged by the practical difficulties met when making contact with companies in search of authentic materials for analysis, since it can be shown that the company can gain in terms of a better understanding of aspects of corporate life examined by an external observer. The yet more demanding, and probably more rewarding, experience of involving companies from different countries should be the final target of any research work in international communication that would earn respect with both the academic and the business community.

A final word on the view that soon computerised telecommunications such as video-conferencing will take on the world: insofar as human beings perceive some form of unmediated contact as essential to a successful business partnership - and indications from both British and Italian managers point overwhelmingly in this direction - the often criticised but as yet unreplaced institution of the Meeting will continue to remain a feature of corporate and social life.

8.4.1 On the discourse of meetings

In this thesis, the choice of language as a medium for interpreting meetings is not accidental: language is the essential component of any human interaction, and therefore also of meetings. And while Schwartzmann's work is guided by a sociological perspective of meetings, in this study I have opted for a socio-linguistic approach illustrated in diagram 4.1, which allows a reading of business encounters mainly through their language. The literature on business discourse is dominated by the analysis of the language of negotiation as a two party interaction (e.g. Lampi 1986, Neumann 1991, Linde 1991, Staplers 1987). In this study, I have analysed and the dealt with meetings consisting of of between three and fourteen interactants, thus confronting the problems involved in the transcription and analysis of multi-party talk, such as the attribution of turns, overlaps and interruptions and control over parallel discussions. However, since my attention has focused mainly on the semantics and pragmatics of lexical items of discourse, these issues have not proved to be a real obstacle, except in cases of inaudible stretches of recording due to concurrent interventions or technical causes.

As a further development, it would be interesting to look into interactive practices employed within meetings, i.e. the dynamics of multi-party discourse with a view to highlighting the ways in which an increased number of personal and corporate interests, some of which will inevitably be conflicting, are accommodated within the framework of a meeting.

Furthermore, one could explore the hypothesis that structural formality may be an institutional device aimed to maintain control over the room for manoeuvre allowed to each member. In this context, the chairman is not only a referee of the proceedings but can influence them in a much more substantial way by actively apportioning time slots that privilege certain individuals and therefore their interests. There is no doubt that chairman's control is part of the strategic action required to maintain the meetings within acceptable time and topic boundaries, as it emerged from the discussion of Chairman vs. Group roles (section 7.4). Further research is needed on the discourse tactics and strategies employed in "political chairmanship", thus placing the emphasis on the basis of unequal access granted to interactants in business meetings. There is abundant evidence of such inequality existing in dyadic institutional discourse (eg. Harris 1992): one could plausibly interpret business meetings as unequal multi-party institutional discourse, although this investigation may well be a more complex task than analysis of dyadic institutional discourse, due to the numbers involved and the coalitions or interest groups coexisting within the same meeting.

The ideology that underlines the linguistic analysis of meetings carried out in this study is, intentionally, non-political, based as it is on the psychological concept of *coherence* (see section 4.3) realised through sense-making, a basic human activity in which we engage all the time as we seek to interpret the reality that surrounds us. My contention has been that meetings are social phenomena inspired by the basic need that social actors have for maintaining (an appearance of?) coherence in the environment where they operate: hence the proliferation of meetings in conditions of change, as emergency reaction to the threat of de-stabilisation and insecurity.

Connectedness, as represented in diagram 4.1, is the textual manifestation of coherence: it concerns the ways meetings "hang together" as textual entities.

Theme, pronominalisation and symbolic language (metaphors and phatic expressions) have been selected for their contribution to connectdeness. At least one of these categories (*theme*) is well know to text-linguists: the novelty of the approach proposed by this thesis lies in mapping the thematic development of spoken texts in a manner that links the *textual dimension* (see diagram 4.1) of the meeting to its *social or contextual dimension* (see diagram 4.1). Thematic pointers therefore have a twofold referencing function, 1) as connectedness devices within the textual dimension and 2) as coherence devices with regard to the contextual or social dimension.

The notion of thematic development has been extended to include longitudinal thematic progression (LTP) in order to map the development of theme across sequential speech events: tables of quantitative results have been used to integrate the findings of what is an essentially "qualitative" approach to the analysis of discourse phenomena. The evolution of the notion of theme from the early syntactic aproach by Danes (1974) to the recent contribution by textlinguists such as Lundqvist (1989), is still ongoing and changing according to the underlying assumption of the analysis. The flexibility of this notion could be exploited by mapping the semantic networks of theme generated by the interweaving of multiple goals in multi-party business discourse. Similarily, the choice of sequentially ordered speech events, such as a series of meetings, and their interaction with the corporate context lends itself to the study of how social hyperthemes develop dynamically from context and, in turn, influence it.

The analysis of pronominalisation of both English and Italian discourse has included a numerical component for intra-textual groupings (table 5.3) and inter-textual groupings (table 6.3), from which relational orientations patterns (tables 5.4 and 6.4) have been derived. The insights from this macro-analytical approach could be integrated by studying, for instance, the significance of pronominals use by individual interactants as means to establish and negotiate intra-textual and contextual relationships.
Patterns of pronominalisation are powerful indicators of the dynamics of self- and group positionings both within the immediate meeting context and the wider corporate context.

Although all language is symbolic, I was particularly interested to show how the symbolism and pragmatic functions of the metaphoric and phatic language traced in meetings is highly context-dependent. The polysemy of the Italian metaphor **discorso** (section 5.5) for instance, illustrates the individuals' work of interpretation of the changing semantics of elements in a shared discourse; the *theatre* metaphor (section 5.5) and personal referencing (section 6.10) signal the establishment of roles boundaries, and relative areas of influence, which affect both individuals and their departments.

This lexically-guided approach could be described as "pragmatics through semantics" and it is reminiscent of Wierzbicka's (1991), although I consider.semantics to be an access to the pragmatics of a language, not exclusive of other approaches.
For instance, at macro-level, structural properties of discourse organisation may index formality or cultural preferences: chapter 7 has

explored some of the variations in meeting structures within the British company, while a cursory look at the Italian transcripts of comparable (formal) meetings reveals a fuzzier discourse organisation, where, unlike the British examples, Chairman-Group interaction is less clearly modularised according to recognised roles, especially in the concluding phases[11] .

The awareness of the dependence of discourse meanings and practices on socio-historic factors has been discussed in some detail in chapter 3, where I also subscribed to the view that discourse is a process which, in turn, influences the context in which it takes place. Mapping the extent of this influence as an external observer is a daunting enterprise: in this study I have pursued this aim within the constraints of a project limited by both time and resources. It is a great challenge to future research to examine the contribution of discourse to social change, an endeavour to which I hope to have contributed by raising a number of important questions and supplying some of the answers.

8.4.2 On cross-cultural linguistic analysis.

Perhaps the most difficult theoretical challenge to be met by pragmatic research is posed by the question of universality, i.e. the degree of variation of rules that govern language usage across different cultures. Having deliberately excluded in this study individual features that may influence speech behaviour, in chapter 7 I have concentrated my attention on what Blum-Kulka & Olshtain (1984) call "situational variability", and I

[11]Availability of a larger selection of informal meetings in Italian is necessary in order to be able to carry out even an exploratory contrastive analysis. Moreover, local or text-based semantics should be extended to include contextual meanings beyond the individual interaction: placing a meeting in its temporal slot, if part of a series, and within its social framework is in itself a task that requires much bakcground work within the organisation and with its people, participants and others.

have compared the structural complexity of English meetings according to the formality vs. informality criterion.

To this effect, two functional roles have been identified in meetings, the Chairman and the Group, and has emerged that in the formal meeting quoted as a representative example the Chairman exercises overall control over the proceedings, except during the Debating Phase, when the Group negotiate shared control. Shared control becomes a more permanent feature in the informal meeting of section 7.5.2, during which only the Closing Phase is more clearly conducted by the Chairman, while in the remaining phases he allows (or he is forced into) a remarkable degree of freedom of intervention for the Group.

Comparison of more data of the both types is necessary in order to establish with greater certainty the degree of influence of situational factors such as formality on the organisation of discourse in meetings. Once situational, and possibly individual factors, have been accounted for, the task of contrasting discursive practices cross-culturally should become relatively more manageable.

In the first part of this chapter, I have carried out a contrastive analysis of the pragmatic rules governing some uses of pronominalisation in Italian and English: I have shown how the presence of a T/V system in Italian and the switch to marked forms lead to the use of some interesting tactics in professional peer discourse.

By contrast, the absence of such options in the English syntax directs the attention towards other possible tactics, such as the impersonal *one* and/or ellipsis. However, these are remarks based on lexicalised items, or absence of them: it is quite possible

that in English "professional closeness" - expressed in Italian by *tu+surname* - is signalled in ways other than pronominalisation, perhaps through the use of first names accompanied by jocular language.

Humour appears to be a constant feature of informal business meetings in English, while it is absent in all Italian meetings. Even if my analysis is still explorative, there is enough ground to suggest that humour plays an important role in English multi party business talk, possibly as a shared tactic for the establishment and maintenance of a collaborative climate.

Under the heading of "tentativeness", I have highlighted some of the features in the two languages that support the intuition of English sounding more indirect and therefore more tentative than Italian. Again the exploratory nature of the investigation suggests caution in arriving at conclusions which I have drawn as a non-native speaker of English. Of course, this situation can be turned to advantage when assessing the influence of cultural factors on language: in the case of tentativeness and indirectness[11a] , for instance, I am inclined to think that their degree of manifestation in language is determined by culture, so that in Italian one is brought up thinking that it is legitimate to voice personal opinions directly, whether in agreement or disagreement with the other parties. Similarily, positive and negative expression of feelings is far less regulated by awareness of the possible reactions to it by the listeners. Perhaps, in this respect Italian culture could be described as more self-centred than the (British) English[12] , while at the same time, less self-conscious and more ready "to come out in the open". Interestingly, however, Italian explicitness does not necessarily translate into increased interruptive behaviour in multi party talk: previous research on the third and last topic of my contrastive analysis, shows that statistically, there

[11a] I assume that the meaning of these labels can be worked out intuitively by both English and Italian speakers, thus arriving at mutually comprehensible definitions. However, I would feel uneasy to extend the same notions to non Western cultures, where the significance and value attributed to them may vary significantly.

[12] During a discussion that I have had on this topic with Prof. Sandra Harris, who is American, she remarked that the differences in pragmatics uses of language clearly emerge in a comparison between British and American English, thus supporting the view that cultural values are indeed determinants of verbal and non verbal behaviour.

is no significant difference between English and Italian interruptive tactics: the common impression that Italians are less respectful of turn-taking practices is probably derived by their use of adversative rather than supportive opening markers. The materials used in this thesis contain ample evidence of this practice.

The value of contrastive analysis such as that that I have conducted on English and Italian multi-party talk cannot be measured in quantitative terms alone, since in the early stages of any pioneering work it is not important how much evidence of certain behaviours can be produced but whether there is any evidence at all of differing cultural values and attitudes showing through verbally and non-verbally. The essential task in these early stages, then, is the definition of cross-culturally acceptable analytical categories, following which the linguistic and paralinguistic forms of their presence (or, for that matter, their absence) in those cultures can be studied.

And although language is not the only medium through which culture can be accessed, - observation of paralinguistic behaviour is the complementary aspect that comes to mind - the findings of this thesis, and the issues that it has raised, confirm the unexhaustible richness of linguistic expression and the continuing challenge that it poses to linguists and social scientists alike.

AFTERWORD

Culture meets culture: the voices of the protagonists.

> *"Il fattore che ha portato ad un mutamento delle percezioni: la conoscenza reciproca."*
>
> The factor that has led to a change in the perceptions: mutual knowledge.
>
> (Italian manager of an Anglo-Italian joint venture).

In Chapter Eight, descriptive and analytic work has been given prominence over the perceptions of individuals whose two cultures I have been seeking to contrast. In this afterword, I propose to let the same two cultures speak about each other in the words of their representatives, and therefore contain my commentary within a more modest role. In the belief that listening (with understanding) to the protagonists provides an appropriate continuation to Chapter Eight, and a suitable *finale* to the thesis, I invite the reader to study the materials that I shall introduce and, in their light, review the conclusions reached in this thesis and in works on cross-cultural communication in business, such as Mead (1990)[1] .

The opening quote is taken from an interview[2] with an Italian manager who was asked to indicate the most important factors that had contributed to his change of perception about their British

[1] MEAD R. (1991) *Cross-cultural management communication.* Wiley & Sons, Chichester.
[2] The quotations appearing in this afterword have been taken from Bargiela (1993).

colleagues one year into a joint venture between two traditional British and Italian companies. Both the cause of and the remedy to many cases of cross-cultural mis-communication are identified as: *perceptions* and *mutual knowledge*. Perceptions derive from systems of values that individuals operating internationally often do not share. This condition is further aggravated by the fact that these individuals may not be aware that they do not share values, i.e. they assume that their values are shared when in fact they are not. Perceptions, and self-perceptions, about personal and organisational features are formed when managers from two different cultures, in this case Italian and British, come into regular contact with one another. *Mutual knowledge* is the second stage of the process, the pre-requisite to starting a successful, and long-lasting relationship.

From an investigation conducted among Italian and British managers[3], it appears that their perceptions of one another, embodying a whole array of cross-cultural communication issues, roughly fall into two categories:

a) perceptions on *being;* and

b) perceptions on *doing,* where these two dimensions constantly interact.

This simple categorisation has the practical advantage of providing a focus and a framework for the presentation of the quotations.

As a background note, it should be mentioned that some of the managers/executives from both sides had already known each other through business prior to the formation of the joint venture; in two cases acquaintance dates back a few years.

[3] A more detailed discussion of the findings has been included in a report to the Chief Executive of the joint venture in question.

The following are *their* statements about themselves and their colleagues, elicited by a questionnaire made available at the time of the interview:

BRITISH ON ITALIANS

THE WAY WE ARE/DO THINGS	THE WAY THEY ARE/DO THINGS
the UK company is generally a team, we all work well together and would never score points on each other	the gap between managers and managed is enormous
as a manager you have to try and understand what makes people tick	I don't think that they [Italian managers] are taught to communicate
to do your own job well surely means communicating and helping other people do their job well	many very clever people don't do the job to the best of their abilities because they don't communicate well
we're much more used to making quick decisions and then standing by them good or bad	in Italy a manager always tends to sit behind a closed door normally
most relationships in the company are good, we've formed good working relationships in so far as we've come to learn how the Italians operate and we've fitted into it to a very large degree	I don't get the impression that they want to change
I think the English people are having to compromise more than the Italians mainly because the centre of gravity of the commercial operation is definitely on the Italian side	relations between Italians in a business sense are not so informal as between UK people
there's no informal exchange of information between the two companies	in Italy if you are the boss you allow the people under you much less freedom and you make the key decisions yourself perhaps without much recourse to their own views on them
I think we'll have to satisfy ourselves with something in between where we are not rivals but we are not bed-fellows, we're something in between - there's a national identity UK and a national identity Italy quite separate	it is like stepping back to how we were in the UK in the 60's early 70's when the employee participation in decisions and motivation as a result of that didn't seem to happen

The idea of team decision and team meetings is much more common in the UK

there's a lot more concern in Italy about the personal impact of getting their decisions wrong - there's a strong feeling that you've always got to make 100% right decisions because it's a reflection on your competence if you don't

you don't feel like a member of the [Italian] site, you feel like a visitor

Our Italian colleagues have much greater sense of it [decision-making] being a game of chess, that you have to plan your moves well in advance, look where the threats are ......

our old company's culture [before the j.v................] was very much more an open operation; people expected you to question, to discuss and expected you to move out of your little box, little area, whereas it seems to be totally the opposite in the Italian company

it seems to me that the reasons for certain decisions being taken may not just be the correctness of the decision at that time

...there's no cross-discipline discussion...I think we've all around here tried to figure out whether it is a company's thing or an Italian thing

I suspect that taken outside of the [company] culture most [Italians] would be fine, good and bad like the British

from the UK perspective the UK operation has always felt like a small company for which you have a lot of responsibility and amount of say and influence on the way it operates

if a piece of work comes into their area they will deal with it and then it will move on and once it's outside of their area either it it's coming in or going out they will take no responsibility for it so there's not concept of progress chaser

I don't think that our ways of running the business will influence our counterparts because the commercial operation to all intents and purposes is an Italian one because of the strength of the commercial director

in the j.v....... the feeling of responsibility and influence is considerably reduced

certain information is not made available in the Italian company whereas in Britain it is taken for granted what that you should know what sort of state, within reason, your company is in

they seem to have a tendency to use the written word far more than we do

ITALIANS ON BRITISH:

THE WAY WE ARE/DO THINGS	THE WAY THEY ARE/DO THINGS
they saw the Italians as the people who were going to be responsible for the commercial department	the English approach to problem-solving is much more methodical and pragmatic than the Italian one; I consider them slightly less available to discuss and compare ideas, but they are better at problem-solving
[we are] nearly friends, and I say nearly because we are apart but relations are good with them and even better than with many colleagues here... they are not at all formal relations, but not with everybody of course	I have certainly noticed that the 'you' form which is normally used to address senior managers does not always imply familiarity and friendship as in Italian
now we are living the problem of integration with less conflicts; our earlier resistance has now disappeared	communications must be given much importance; information flows more rapidly and reaches more people in England than in Italy; information reaches lower levels of the company in England than it does in Italy; in Italy information is either made available to few people only, or with much delay
the market is Italian and the business will continue thanks to the Italians	the English approach is that what has been decided during a meeting must be implemented in that exact form
internal communications are a big problem, perhaps independently from the joint venture... it has often happened that mis-information has become an instrument of power	shared participation to problem-solving is an English approach which is certainly better that ours
there are big problems on a regular basis but I receive a fair support from my English colleague and we give them a fair support in the solution of their problems	what I must mention is the collaborative atmosphere on both sides and their fair play
each side had to review their ways of thinking and doing in order to establish a dialogue	from an operations point of view, the English feel that they are superior

internal relations are still very difficult because there still exists a linguistic barrier, although not for managers

they always hope that the company will be 100% British owned

they have a completely different personnel policy

my impression is that the English will always be English, as Shaw said, a race on their own... they are English, and the others are continentals

Briefly, what emerges from the interviews is a mix of remarks on objectives cultural and organisational differences and, to a lesser extent, predictable prejudices and stereotypes.
For example, if one takes particular "cluster" of negative comments, the competitive and hierarchical character of the Italian company is admitted even by its own members. The ensuing poor internal (and external) communications are a resented consequence of such a closed, rigid structure. It would have helped the British managers to know that competitiveness and hierarchy are two traits of the Italian society as a whole, from primary education to work environments. Interestingly, however, a British manager of a company other than those visited for this research reported something quite different after spending three months in Italy: "Italians do not need training in team-work because they already work as a team ...... communication takes place all the time, in the corridors, at the coffee machine...".

Perhaps the key to beginning to understand a different culture is to un-learn the interpretative mode that we take for granted, having grown into it from birth. As the British manager of the opening quote, one begins to realise that perhaps one's counterpart(s) in a different culture have the same goal after all, but different ways of achieving it, involving different priorities.

In accomplishing the fundamental steps of cross-cultural communication, i.e. 1) becoming aware of each other's perceptions, and 2) analysing critically one's own cultural schemata in preparation for a 3) joint effort in mutual understanding, language is again brought to the forefront. It is the starting point and the point of final convergence, as it has been for this thesis.

APPENDIX 5.1: Italian internal meeting.

SEQUENTIALLY-ORDERED THEMATIC POINTERS

MAIN THEME: (step, checklist, *passo*)

*...io immaginavo di avere (.) di avere **due step** no uno -(.) come primo passo - attenersi solo a alla definizione di una **checklist** di...*
...I thought of having - two steps alright one - as a first step - to be concerned only with the definition of a checklist of...

*...scusa fa parte di quella **checklist** di ( )...*
...sorry it is part of that checklist...

*appunto e' accettare questo discorso **in due in due step** (.) uno..*
...indeed to accept this development in two in two steps - one...

*quindi direi che e' un **primo passo** questo per (.) cominciare a...*
...therefore I would say that it is the first step to begin to...

*ci sono **due step** per i quali dobbiamo dobbiamo passare (.) il primo...*
...there are two steps which we have got to go through - the first one ...

*...la **check list**...*
...the check list...

*...in **due step** er vuol dire che si fa un piano no bisogna identificare una **check list** bisogna farla con dpo [...]service e marketing abbiamo...*
...in two steps means that you make a plan don't you you must define a check list you must do it with production service and marketing we have...

*tanto e' vero che pro- immaginavo **due step** no di cui gli **step**...*
so much so that I pro- thought of two steps alright two steps which ...

allora se non sono ***due step*** *saranno 25 saranno 32 non mi interessa che...*
...now if it isn't two steps it will be 25 or 32 I'm not bothered...

per arrivare alla prima definizione della ***check list*** *e entrare...*
to arrive to an early definition of the checklist and to get into...

eh ho capito e va beh e qui il discorso e' si fara' (.) nel ***secondo step...***
alright I understand alright now this subject will be addressed (.) in the second step...

APPENDIX 5.2: Italian internal meeting.

THE LINGUISTIC TOOLS OF THE CHAIRMAN: RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

[C and DR arguing about the contents of a new policy

DR: non so qua dentro cosa c'e' qua dentro
C: ma scusa cosa ti ci vuole per saperlo
DR: ma poi che me lo dica qualcuno cosa ci vuole per saperlo DR ....

DR: I don't know what there's in there
C: but sorry what will it take you to get to know that
DR: but then let someone else tell me what it takes to know

C: no tu mi dici va bene al casella pero' non siamo
|preparati
DR: | (   )
C: allora ditemi voi che cosa devo fare
DR: oggi non son preparato perche' non so

C: |no you tell me that the slot is alright but we're
|not ready
DR: | (   )
C: now then you tell me what I'm supposed to do
DR: now I'm not ready because I don't know

C: |ti devo ti devo dire io che cosa devi fare (   )
DR: |non so sei tu o C. [boss] o qualcun altro
C: ma perche' non te ne vai a cercare tu

C: |must I must I tell you what you should do (   )
DR: |I don't know whether you or C. or someone else
C: but why don't you go and look for it yourself

C: |scusa mi vi sto chiedendo che cosa si deve deve fare fare per arrivare li' sopra (.) non non devo dirvelo io

C: |sorry I'm asking you what must be done to get on top of it (.) it isn't it isn't ***me*** who is to tell you

APPENDIX 5.3: Italian internal meeting.

PHATIC LANGUAGE:

'SCUSA(MI)' AND 'SCUSATE'

'SCUSATE'

(1)

```
DR: no ma |(     )
C:          |scusate eh (.) dai dobbiamo finire alle due er
    ....
```

(2)

```
C:  c'e' una fase finale in cui bisogna dar l'ok alla
    commercializzazione scusate e oggi si da' in seguito
    alla quality review perche' la review di annuncio non
    si fa (.) no
```

(3)

```
DR: ... oggi io non lo vedo nel modo piu' assoluto tanto
    e' vero che io dico sempre se dietro a questo
    problema che oggi voglio gestire
C:  scusate sono (.) allora la vostra risposta la vostra
    risposta
DR: lo gestisco in un'altra sede ma non (     )
```

'SCUSA'/'SCUSAMI'

(4)

```
C:  praticamente viene fatto in maniera estremamente (4)
    diciamo labile no (.) ecco quello che er si|vuole
    fare                                       |
DR:                                            |si ve-
    scusa si vede che e' uscito M. eh
```

(5)

```
G:  ... secondo me e' da rimpostare come (.) come proprio
    momento di quality review |(     ) ci son diversi ...
DR:                           |no ma e' secondo me scusa
    a parte i contenuti di quality review no (.) ....DR:
```

(6)

DR: .... e non sapendo quali momenti in quei momenti di verifica cosa devo andare a verificare poi
C: **scusa**(a) fa parte di quella check-list di |( )
DR: |**scusa**(b) pero' la check-list potrebbe esserci una check-list no fatta anche oggi

(7)

C: |( )
G: |**scusa** (a) no quello che volevo dirti io e' che per fare una cosa del genere quei piani li' non devono uscire a posteriori **scusa** (b) devono essere dei piani ....

(8)

C: ormai e' gia' cosi' no nel senso che oggi la quality review e' qualche cosa che va a vedere determinate cose non ancora ben se poi capito che cosa ( ) in fine **scusa** le poche che han fatto C. ed altri e S. alla fin fine si diceva ok alle specifiche ecco

(9)

C: ricerca di mercato o cose di questo tipo
DR: **scusa** (.) sulla quality review di commercializzazione (.) la la un'impostazione di questo tipo qua che si vuol dare ora avevan gia' in mente qualcuno (.) i tempi di attuazione

(10)

DR: io la mia riserva c'e' l'ho in termini di conoscenze di processi di ( ) e' **scusa** (a) e' quella che avevo detto prima **scusa** (b) no l'hai no (.) allora se viene fatta a quel livello li' decade subito l'importanza della quality review di commercializzazione data alla qualita' (.) se invece viene fatta con cognizione di causa e' un'altra cosa **scusa** (c)

(11)

C: sara' necessariamente un discorso di check-list di riferimento per cominciare a capire quali sono i processi e poi pian piano entrarci |e allora ( )
DR: |allora allora **scusa** nel transitorio ( ) potrebbe

(12)

C: un'assicurazione qualita' della del settore

industriale (.) che e' una cosa completamente er da
|recitare allora preferisco avere almeno io
DR: |**scusa** ma tu che dicevi (   )

(13)

G: io do' l'ok alla qualita' del |prodotto che puo'
DR: |**scusa** io no
G: |essere
commercializzato se qualcuno decide che e' opportuno

(14)

DR: |(   ) se si vuol fare si |fa (   )
C: |no no **scusa** io devo dare
una risposta

(15)

C: non e' che la casella va bene la casella non va bene
perche' non sei preparato allora scusa |non puoi dire
DR: |**scusa** la
casella
C: si fa cosi' e concettualmente e' giusto pero' non lo
faccio

(16)

DR: non so qua dentro cosa c'e' qua dentro
C: ma **scusa** (a) cosa ti ci vuole per saperlo bisognera'
cominciare a lavorare con chi er riteniamo opportuno
lavorare per definire i contenuti di di controllo
DR: **scusa** (b) stiamo dicendo le stesse cose che volevi dire
adesso io che sto dicendo

(17)

C: dico solo va bene il concetto bene adesso fammi un
piano per arrivare ad essere capace di gest... di
gestire quella roba li' (.) **scusa** perche' devi
aspettare che le cose ti arrivino da cielo o da

(18)

DR: .... non essendoci queste competenze uno deve crearsi
la competenza per farlo ok |(.) allora no ma **scusa** un
C: |attenzione perche'
perche' perche'
DR: attimo allora

(19)

G: questo e' il solito discorso perche' se pensa di fare le cose in piu' con meno persone alla fin fine veramente vengono fuori delle grandi cavolate |e basta
C: |**scusa** mi vi sto chiedendo che cosa deve deve fare fare per arrivare li' sopra ....

(20)

C: |lui l'ha appena detto adesso ha detto m'ha confermato di si' e adesso tu dici di no
G: va be' **scusa**| (a) hai detto di si' alla sua
C: |( )
G: non possiamo decidere una cosa stravolgente in mezz'ora eh **scusa** (b)
DR:|no poi **scusa** (c)

(21)

G: ad oggi i problemi sulla qualita' quelli li sappiamo gestire i problemi commerciali del marketing |non li
DR: |**scusa** ( ) se c'e' stato processo che ha defin to che c'e' una quality review di commercializzazione circa un anno fa io mi domando ....

(22)

DR: alla quando capita alla quality review allora io ti |dico
C: |no **scusa** non so non so quanto tu mi hai detto la prossima quality review (.) se la prossima quality review e' fra 6 mesi....

(23)

C: ....per arrivare alla prima definzione della check-list e entrare cosi' nella |( )
G: |no ma **scusa** (a) eh io ti dico un part-time significativo perche' |(.) so per certo
C: |va benissimo
G: che non ci danno la persona dedicata punto eh eh eh
C: **scusami** (b) la riserva che ho fatto gia' io ieri a ( ) no non si puo' pretendere di aggiungere contenuti a qualcuno ....

(24)

C: .... il discorso di dire quando uno mi deve preparare la pappa perche' io non ne so assolutamente niente non l'accetto (.) non e' accettabile **scusa**

(25)

C: |si' va bene quello li' e' un contenuto gia' della
quality review eh (.) oggi dell' dell'approntamento
dei piani di oliservice

DR: cioe'

G: lo e' perche' non c'e' nessun altro al momento
scusami

(26)

DR: dovrebbe far parte di questa check-list a mio avviso
perche' quello che e' un servizio

C: no **scusami** il piano di supporto secondo me fa parte
della quality se e' vivo ancora quello che manca
cioe' sul piano di

(27)

G: tornato indietro che ti sia provato perche' se devi
andare a farlo tu non lo fai piu'

C: no non devi andare a farlo tu devon esser loro
scusami i i

(28)

C: sono quelli che ci siamo detti non e' che noi
dobbiamo andare a vedere le cose se son state fatte
oppure no

G: be' pero' |**scusa** dobbiamo mettere in atto dei piani
di qualita' per

(29)

G: si' ma devi essere ben chiaro anche (.) il differente
livello di di responsabilita' tua nello scrivere
determinate cose poi quando fai la quality review eh

DR: ( )

G: perche' la quality **scusami** le prime che fai a
livello globale tu

(30)

C: il fatto di |garantire verso l'amministratore

G: |e' li' che mi preoccupa **scusa**

C: delegato il fatto

(31)

C: ....apprendimento il fatto di fare il notaio puo'
anche essere utile (4) poi sai **scusami** (a) anche nella
quality review si' entri nel merito di quello che

dice il il er l'R&D pero' se l'R&D ti dice anche non ti dice delle cose non vai mica a scoprirlo non so **scusa** (b)

(32)

DR: parte non c'e' neanche quella capisci
C: eh va be' **scusa** (a)
G: **scusa** (b) potrei fare una domanda inutile ma cosa ne pensa il capo

(33)

C: si' ma vedi che quello e' quello il problema non e' il problema di |organizzazione
DR: |**scusa** eh io mi scaldo il giorno in cui qualcuno dice tu devi farlo e io non so cosa devo fare non riesco a farlo perche' non ce la faccio a farlo

APPENDIX 5.4: Italian internal meeting.

METHAPHORIC LANGUAGE:

'DISCORSO'

EXTRACT 1

C: sara' necessariamente un **discorso** di check-list di riferimento per cominciare a capire quali sono i processi e poi pian piano entrarci e allora ( )

C: eh se fossi se fossi (.) er in voi che gestite poi queste cose er preferirei avere in mano un **discorso** piu'concreto anche se poi alla fin fine ci saranno (.) all'inizio ci sara' un periodo di transizione ....

C: bisogna per rendere operativo questo **discorso** andare a fare il discorso con il marketing er ( )

C: allora scusami se la prossima e' fra 3 mesi sarai preparato se la prossima e' fra 10 giorni non mettero' un **discorso** di ( ) cioe' si introdurra' quando si fa (.) di fatto oggi comunque tu dai l'ok alla commercializzazione alla quality review

C: ...evidentemente c'e' una fase di apprendimento no fino ad arrivare ad accrescere il proprio know-how per entrare nel merito dei processi (.) questo e' **il discorso** che bisogna fare

C: eh ho capito e va be' e qui **il discorso** e' si fara' (.) nel secondo step

C: ( ) **il discorso** lui dice che si' lui e' lui e' concettualmente er d'accordo e poi chiedeva il vostro parere sulle prime ( )

EXTRACT 2

C: .... per quanto riguarda per esempio il dpo in questa

sede qua che deve (.) debba portare **il discorso** di
pricing di gestione

EXTRACT 3

C: allora io accetto (a)**il discorso** di dire non lo possiamo fare perche' non abbiamo le risorse dedicate (.) non accetto nessun (b)**discorso** che sia (.) scusami io personalmente no non accetto nessun (c) **discorso** che sia limitativo e dire io non ci so entrare non voglio neanche prepararlo (.) a me o qualcuno mi prepara la minestra poi io la mangio anche altrimenti non mi interessa (.) (d) **il discorso** no il concetto e' giusto pero' bah un altro (e) **discorso** e' ragazzi ci vuole una persona che sia qui a fare questo mestiere allora questo e' un (f) **discorso** serio (.) (g) **il discorso** di dire quando uno mi deve preparare la pappa perche' io non ne so assolutamente niente non l'accetto (.) non e' accettabile scusa

APPENDIX 6.1 English meeting 1.

SEQUENTIALLY-ORDERED THEMATIC POINTERS

MAIN THEME:
(PRP, performance related pay, performance, pay)

C: ok ehm (.) then I think the next one was a brief brain-storm around our problem statement ehm (.) and what we thought we needed to find out ehm about people's perceptions of **performance related pay** ehm (.) and I think one of the things that came out of that was that in order to find out what people THOUGHT about it we have to ascertain first of all ehm (.) that they have some sort of basic understanding (.) of what it was what it meant to them how it would affect them and (.) where they had obtained their current sources of information (.) from (4) we then went on to ....

S: I think the other important point that came out was also er the fact of when we contact people you know the invita- we should have some form of invitation whether it's verbally or |written to outline what
H: |right
S: we're doing |(.) not just ringing somebody so I can
H: |uhm uhm
S: talk to you about **performance related pay**
H: yes 'cause you might get (laughter)
S: ( ) advisable given the current circumstances
J: can I bring my shop-steward with me

S: was it hinging on on **prp** (.) are are the problems because they don't understand what it is or is it that they do in fact clearly understand it

H: what we what we get to know when we say whether the people are likely accept (.) you know what do we need to find out is about certain points (.) half a way through we said we need to find out whether they're likely to accept it (.) is that (.) well what is it
S: was it hinging on on **PRP** (.) are are the problems because they don't understand what it is or is it that they do in fact clearly understand it

H: uh uh (4) I like this one about where their knowledge of **PRP** has come from

INSTRUMENTAL THEME (questionnaire, question(s)

R: basically they're saying that the **questionnaire** will formulate questions or start off with general questions |(.) and we go down (.) funnel down to more
H: |right
R: specific questions and I think this is why I drew that ( )

H: sorry I might have missed the point but (.) was it agreed that we were gonna produce a **questionnaire** paper **questionnaire** that you then had a discussion over (.) I know you've ( )
C: we haven't tested into concrete |but I think that was
H: |right
C: the direction in which we thought we were going

Ha: .... whether they felt happy about actually interviewing people ( ) I voiced my fear that that on the first one I did I'd like to go with somebody else to see how they did (.) it it's not something that I'm used to doing but everybody seemed quite happy that we all went along just to talk to people
H: right but given that an interviewer would always have a structured **questionnaire** you wouldn't have to improvise then wouldn't you unless you wanted .....

H: ( ) next meeting
C: analyse **questionnaire**

H: yeah perhaps if everyone went away with an action on it ( ) do some homework
C: ok so that's finalising and refining the **questionnaire**

H: do we need have we got enough space for the **questionnaire** business

S: ....I think it would be valuable if we spent time before the next meeting just thinking about
H: **questionnaire**

APPENDIX 6.2: English meeting 2.

SEQUENTIALLY-ORDERED THEMATIC POINTERS

MAIN THEME:
(PRP, performance related pay, performance, pay)

C: but the question was whether it was appropriate to gather data on **performance related pay** (.) particularly since (.) few people were aware of any of the details and we might be asking questions er (.) about subjects (.) that they had had very little exposure to ....

T. ..coming out of that of course is a is is an influence in terms of (.) we should as a bu- as a business and probably as a function be looking at **performance** as a concept of something that's embodied in all aspects of employment .... so where it might have an influence or a cutover into what this team is doing is (.) that in terms of (.) it was perceived by the BIT that perhaps **pay performance related pay** is is not a (.) is is maybe even a mistake to look at the **pay** it's the **performance** (.) the performance side of it which is which is the object (.) if you like (.) ...

T: so yeah so it wasn't (.) it was felt that it shouldn't be (.) we shouldn't concentrate perhaps on the **pay** (.) see what I mean (.) 'cause pay is just (.) just a part of it (.) so that was the kind of message ....

R. ok (.) the impact for this team (.) I mean the point T. was making the other day (.) he was concerned that if the first knowledge of anything to do with this came out of a survey which concentrated on **performance related pay** as the key issue (.) then we shift the focus from being overall **performance** discussions to simply **performance related pay** (.) the implications are (.) ....

H: but that is the BIT's concern that it would have a
J: yeah the
: a negative

T: if you if the first thing that everyone saw was **performance related pay**
: yeah
T: then whatever came along afterwards in terms of personal development or **performance** measurement then all these sorts of ideas about (.) you know (.) getting the right sorts of values and so for the business (.) then people would focus back on the **performance related pay** (.) that I think is the point T. was trying to put over the other day

S: I mean is (.) the BIT's concern is that we're pre-emptying the Moving Forward project
T: no it's the **pay** side

T: well T's actual words were (.) it's a definite mistake to use **pay** (.) to look at **pay** regardless of Moving Forward or anything else (.) it's a mistake to isolate **pay** (.) to isolate pay because it's just a part of the total (.) total thing isn't it

T: I think the (.) yeah I mean the **pay** (.) the **pay** issue is obviously of fundamental interest to to (.) to to me in my department obviously (.) ehm (.) but I'm keen that we do understand the basis of **performance** and **performance** driven employment as well I mean that **pay** is an indicator to me (.) I mean as far as I'm concerned you can see **pay** for all the other things that **pay** is and wages and so on and what you want to call it (.) that money in (.) you might consider that to be an exchange for work done or whatever (.) whatever those traditional definitions might be put (.) you always (.) you give messages with money with **pay** you know (.) it's it's it's so focal everybody knows about it because they have some and they get it (.) it's an immediate vehicle and it's always in the limelight and everyone's either moaning about it or talking about it or whatever and you can put some (.) if you're going to have some cultural values that you want to shove out into the organisation or you want the organisation to say (.) to declare to the organisation that these are things that we think are important and the things that we stand for then pay is an immediate and obvious vehicle to do that with and that's what **performance related pay** does I think (.) or should do in my view (.) it should say to an individual (.) you're going to get some more money because you are you are performing and a definition of **performance** is along the lines of you your practices and behaviour supporting business values and objectives (.) so it's an it's an indicator you know (.) so you can say here you are it's a it's the box of chocolates to tie the ribbon to sort of thing (.) you can pass it out and say you're getting this because and that's what that scoring chart was there for (.) we hadn't devised how it how that would actually relate to money in terms of pounds and pence you know (.) I mean if you did this you got that that's not the important thing that we needed to get out first the important thing is this is **performance** and these are some **performance** factors (.) they're to be scored against all that we'd like you to work to so they become very (.) you know (.) they become obvious straightaway you can see them they hit you in the face you know (.) they're there (.) so in terms of earning the process or earning the problem then yes I'm interested in **pay**

C: yes (.) the differences is of course that we (.) the initial discussions were of **performance related pay** it is going to happen ehm (.) how its going to happen will be decided later but it is going to happen and what's pre-empted that now is that this year for the integrated grade structure there will be a four and a quarter percent increase across the board and so they can temporarily shelve the the **pay** side which does give the the concept team the opportunity to get people thinking about the concept rather than concentrating on the **pay** (.) so that suggests it would be rather wrong of us to go back in and start re-emphasising the **pay** aspect we're we are not luddites we're not saboteurs (.) we ehm for our own ends don't want to go and undermine someone else's initiative to try and get people thinking in the direction of lifting the company (.) my own feeling at the moment is that until that has been launched in whatever way is is decided there isn't a great deal that we can do at the moment (.) there is certainly one section of the **questionnaire** that's still valid (.) ehm (.) and that's getting people to think about what concepts do embrace **performance** and what concepts don't

T.: well that's (.) that was one of the things the considerations actually because (.) we were as a team we were trying to develop a method of selling **PRP** into the into the workforce if you like I think that was was that (.) the way we're going .....

: I thought the team was looking at how we could help

launch it correctly
: **performance related pay** that was wasn't it
: yeah (.) so maybe we can look at how we can help launch the BIT properly as well well I I think that was probably probably some of the view of the BIT wasn't it really and there was it was perhaps not wise to (.) ehm talk (.) the **pay** aspect was trying to look at the **performance** aspect and if you want to look at the performance side which at least one of these questions does
: people are still going to bring the **pay** back
: they will themselves yes
: they related **performance** to **pay** 'cause that's what we

: I mean what next
: I still think that they are going to turn round and say but what's it going to mean about my **pay**
: yeah
: yes they will do
: you know |especially
: |there's no doubt
: especially because we've reinforced that belief by the way we've gone about it so far

: so in (.) for the workforce the reasons for the implementation of **performance related pay** because that's (.) my problem statement says that people don't understand why (.) why we're introducing it
: yeah
: what is (.) what is the desired state of affairs then is it that people
: have a clear understanding
: have a clear understanding of why we're introducing **performance related pay**
: yes
: I mean I could make a suggestion that if that goes exactly right as planned
: yes
: that's actually the solution to the problem we're addressing
: yes

: continue the emphasis on on **pay** to a certain extent we are going to be undermining
: yes there is that as well
: to say fine **pay** may come from it at some later stage but the emphasis is on **performance**
: mmmm
: and when we've got people thinking about **performance**

then we'll we'll consider the **pay** aspect of it
: mmmm
: the **pay** I mean and **performance related pay** is clearly well truly on the agenda in terms of the people out there because it's already been pushed

: so I mean a document subtitled personal **performance** is (.) triggers **performance related pay** instantly

C.: yes but if it's launched in an appropriate way (.) the the more far-sighted (.) may say as we appear to be saying now (.) **performance related pay** is is is one thing but what the company is really trying to do (.) is is to do something about performance and when the performance ( ) then the pay will flow through it from it (.) ....

C.: in which case isn't it is it appropriate for us to re-focus (.) on **performance** itself (.) with a- a- another change in problem statement

the only reason behind my questioning is on that particular point is that to date the only thing that people have is this knowledge of **prp** stand alone no link to any of this
hmm go on
so they know because we sent out the blue leaflet that it said **prp** they know from the certain or certain areas know that you know **performance related pay** is coming into existence
yeah
yeah
but you know (.) I suppose my immediate concern is that we don't feel we've been hijacked by somebody else because if we feel that prp is the thing is the issue and the comment I made at the BIT yesterday was that its something we can get hold of you know it is an immediate issue and when we had our customers at the BIT some time back one of them said well you've listed out lots of interesting problems to work on but not one of you has mentioned **performance related pay** and that's the number one thing on my agenda but you don't seem to be focusing or concentrating on it so why aren't you please mr personnel and this was someone who works in another business sort of so I said ok good point say coming back on H.'s point is the way you know this **performance related pay** is a problem point
yeah

INSTRUMENTAL THEME (questionnaire.question(s).

C. so really the major action today was just to extend our **questionnaire** with a view to completing it

R. .....the implications are (.) please don't (.) I would suggest not to send out a **questionnaire** before next tuesday because of the better idea of timetables and things ....

T. I think just in a response to some of that if I remember rightly I think this team had actually agreed to send out **questionnaires** (.) the preferred approach was to go and to talk to sit down and talk to people and use the **questionnaire** as a prompt
yeah
ehm (.) and perhaps as an observation I think is that we (.) I (.) looking at the **questionnaire** so far there are questions like (.) you know ....

R: ... I haven't obviously seen your **questionnaire** (.) the other part ( ) I mean only you could say ( ) what you've heard so far and ( ) whether you think you need to re-address (.) the way you ask the **questions**

T. there is certainly one section of the **questionnaire** that's still valid ehm (.) and that's getting people to think about what concepts do embrace **performance** and what concepts don't

T. isn't it (.) I wonder if just to go back to the **questionnaire** again (.) let's say we don't know anything about this (.) this hasn't happened (.) we were going along happily we we've done the **questionnaire** (.) we we we've picked off ....

APPENDIX 6.3: English meeting 3.

SEQUENTIALLY-ORDERED THEMATIC POINTERS

MAIN THEME:
(PRP. performance related pay. performance, pay)

MAIN THEME

: what do we need to find out
: peoples currently understand their **PRP** and why it's being introduced (.) how they think it will affect them (.) whether they ar likely to accept it why they think they don't understand it

: no um peoples current understanding of **PRP** do we know what that means what people understand by the term **PRP**
: yeah or
: but doesn't that isn't that all encompassing in sort of in clue to the other thing isn't it why is it being introduced I mean that's part of their understanding how they think it will affect them
: well that's what people expect **PRP** to be
....
: so yes but if your basing it on it was the fact that you had to have an initial question you know what is
: what is **PRP**
: what do you think **PRP** is
: right
: where have you got that understanding from i.e. the last one
: yeah
: why is it being introduced or why do you think it's being introduced and how do you think it will affect you
: right have we said this one what people expect **PRP** to be that same as their current understanding of it we start off by saying what do you think PRP is how did you find that out about it

: so are we saying at this point we're more interested in their understanding and their views on what **PRP** is how its likely to affect them and not whether they're likely to accept it or how they're likely to

: so if we're looking at peoples current understanding of **PRP** how will we know we've got people's understanding of PRP
: we did that didn't we
: did we

: march twelfth feedback to the staff asking questions about **PRP**

: well no because then we have what we have what do you understand **PRP** stands for
: so the first section if you like of the survey is going to be what what is **PRP** to you
: what is it and where
: what does it mean to you and where did you hear about it

: I'm just looking at what people expect **PRP** to be
: what does that mean and what did we mean by that
: does it mean how much are you going to get in your pay packet
: I think it was probably based on the mechanics of **PRP**
: I think that's the mechanical isn't it

: it would be useful to know if they have heard about it first wouldn't it
: yes your mess at the end by the way have you heard about **PRP**
: has anyone mentioned this to you before

: yeah 'cause then we've got at least we've got a result got 10% of people have never heard of **PRP** before
: but are we classing it as PRP or actual the words performance related pay
: depends whether our first question is what do you understand **PRP** stands for and if they say
: is that out that one
: no we changed that we just said that we 'cause we didn't like **PRP** we'd better find out if people actually knew what the acronym meant
: right
: so what do you understand P what do you understand **PRP** stands for

: how do you **PRP** how am I going to put some categories away
: yeah
: but how did you hear of **PRP**
: yeah
: do you know any good jokes of **PRP**
: we need to go back to that one
: do we want to do that category

: could you tell me about or whether the rep said hey have you heard about this I'm going to tell you about **PRP** does it really matter who instigated the transfer of the knowledge or is the important thing is that it came from a Union Rep and not from a manager a manager know what I mean

: it's going to help us in our future approach isn't it when we come to looking at these are the issues that you **PRP** needs to become a way of life and this is going to help us to to understand how best to go about that

: which of the following effects will from company B's stand-point which of the following effects will performance related pay have
: will **PRP** have yeah

: don't know they're not going to say why do you think company B. wants to introduce **PRP** to get union resistance I mean they're not going to use those kind of disadvantages are they

: so we've done that one why do you think company B. wants to introduce **PRP** and then which of the following effects do you think it will actually have
: and then we need to list

: how do you feel about **PRP**
: well no you could just ask them that use those words and say what disadvant- what advantages and disadvantages do you think performance related pay will bring to you

: yes trialing it within samples

: samples and trials what where did you hear about **PRP** anything else that will be an action coming out of next week

INSTRUMENTAL THEME (questionnaire.question(s)

H:....suggested that when we get to the point where we're ready to pilot the **questionnaire** that he'd like C. and I to go and go through that with him so he can have a look at it

H: ok so we need to really get on with the **questionnaire** as quickly as possible I think ....

H: ok well what we came up with was a list of about 7 things that we felt we needed to find out by this **questionnaire** and interview technique and I think what we've been trying to do since then is design **questions** that tap that information but I think it would be worth us perhaps going back to that list making sure that that list covers what we want it to and then make sure that as we design **questions** they link in specifically to one of those areas

: so yes but if your basing it on it was the fact that you had to have an initial **question** you know what is
: what is **PRP**
: what do you think **PRP** is

: didn't we start this because we decided that we didn't want to ask **questions** specifically related to **pay**
: a bit more general
: a bit more general **questions** about **performance** OK it's got a its got a connection with pay but

: I think the question's (.) it's the right kind of question its just that used the unfortunate word of acceptance

: and then current understanding isn't that can you actually understand it as closed **question** because if you say to me have you heard about **performance related pay** I want to ask you another question I want to say well what about it I mean I've heard the words being used so the answer to that is yes you know I I have heard about the managers have got it or something but I don't know what it how it works and what it means to them or to me as an individual so the answer to that is no so maybe that's a qualitative type of answer

: you could just ask lots and lots and lots of you know closed **questions** until you get to you know any question can just be an open **question**

: well let's say that we've decided they they didn't ask so we've got to try and get them in the frame of mind where they do ask how how are we going to do that is that our approach to implementation going to include something that in induces people to ask **questions**

: you've got to remember how you're going to collate the information when you get it back that's the trick with **questionnaires** I mean they're not that good at all really

: for that **questionnaire** (.) ehm and perhaps as an observation I think is that we I looking at the **questions** like (.) you know what is (.) what do you understand (.) which of the definitions would you say which of these things list **performance** (.) do you think these things define **performance**

: yeah so we're we're just trying to be in a logical order for the basis of the **questionnaire** so we're starting with what people understand by the term PRP right at the start how what sort of information they've had what's been said to them about it so far where their knowledge has come from what they think if means for the company globally what they think it means for them as an individual yeah

: have we've got the **question**
: yes we've got the **question**
: we can think about the answers later
: no no no what's the **question**
: how do you **PRP** how am I going to put some categories away
: yeah

: but how did you hear of **PRP**

: finalise the **questionnaire** next meeting couldn't we get it in a fit state for us to go and talk to R. about it

: I take it that means the draft of the **questionnaire** needs doing for next week

: so next week the purpose of the meeting is to finalise the **questionnaire** and then we can start to decide about the population or well we'll be actioning C. so we won't be able to crack on with that till he's back but we can perhaps think about piloting it yeah

APPENDIX 6.4: English meeting 4.

SEQUENTIALLY-ORDERED THEMATIC POINTERS

MAIN THEME:
(PRP, performance related pay, performance, pay)

H:... um and we identified those four sections which are in your notes as the four things we wanted to find out about from people ie what their understanding of PRP is ....

H: and we came up with some questions um under each of the four headings (.) which are those things you see there (.) what have you heard about **PRP** (.) and that that list was chosen which of these things do you think you believe describe the ideas of **performance** that was the list that was developed on the training guide of the traditional ideas of **performance** mixed up with ....

: .....what effect do you think **performance related pay** would have on the following (.) resistance from unions
: what's that resistance to what
: we thought (.) well both resistance to **PRP** and also resistance to generally ....

: ....if if you're saying that maybe that people think **PRP** undermines union power then that will lead to resistance

: what do they think about performance in general (.) I mean it's going to be fairly obvious once we start asking **questions**
: yeah
: that we're talking about **PRP**
: I don't think there's any point in trying to hide what there is (.) you know you know what we're trying to do

: no can't hide being (.) it's written **performance** but ehm
: no but we could maybe set it in more of context by

looking at **performance**

: they'll be inquisitive about it really (.) maybe they'll get volunteers so maybe pick up something they article in Regional News we're looking for volunteers to try out **PRP**

: my comment was we were talking a lot about in the first BIT about **performance related pay** and why people are twittery about **performance related pay**

INSTRUMENTAL THEME (questionnaire.question(s)

H: .... ehm so last week we really cracked on with (.) well I thought we cracked on with (laughs) getting the **questionnaire** sorted out ehm (.) and we identified those four sections (.) which are in your notes as the four things we wanted to find out about from people ie

H: ...and we came up with some **questions** um under each of the four headings (.) which are those things you see there ....

H: J. and S. agreed to go away and draft what we've done so far into a **questionnaire** that we could have a look at today before C. comes back next week (.) ehm (.) I've actually talked to J. and S. about it as well so I've seen the draft but perhaps we could all have a look through it

H: that's right but its also the items (.) I think the material this is developed from like J. says the list of advantages and disadvantages in the meeting and try and tie them with the **questions** we came up with last week you know we might get some confusion

: and do you think people would feel comfortable answering that sort of **question**
: yeah I think so
: yeah and would we feel comfortable asking the **question** and comfortable that we know what we mean by
: well that's one of things that we ought to get together and actually

: we can still move on through 'cause assuming the questionnaires OK for the moment without T. and C. looking at it

: I mean how about having a ballot box thing whereas we'll tick the things so it'll always be in the same persons handwriting then we'll give it to them and they can stick it in a box with all the other questionnaires

: what do you think of the questionnaire
: I think it's brill
: do you
. yeah (.) good

: not exactly no I mean this is only really an update of a meeting so that we can hammer out the **questionnaire** we we weren't really sure

: we need to think about doing the pilot stage
: right
: to test the **questionnaire** out
: do we need
: action plan

: further up the page
: we'll make that redraft the **questionnaire**
: influence of the unions and the less accurate but more
: appropriate
: less confrontational
: right is that all we need to do
: research common agreement on

: we've got to decide how we're going to invite the people to come to the questionnaire

: right so at the next meeting we we know M. will have seen the **questionnaire**

H: so you're saying before we can do that we all need to have a bit of time to look at the **questionnaire** (.) so
J: we need to get the (.) feedback from (.) M.

: rejig the **questionnaire**
: and then circulate it
: and circulate it
: right
: no problem

: how to do analysis of **questionnaire** basically decide
how to do analysis

APPENDIX 6.5: English meeting 5.

SEQUENTIALLY-ORDERED THEMATIC POINTERS

MAIN THEME:
(PRP. performance related pay. performance, pay)

: I had whether it was **performance** assessment was the same as performance related pay and the he went into how he thought **performance** would be assessed and why being assessed and being assessed as being **performance related**
: ok
: right the what have you heard about **performance** assessment looking at your job to see if they're getting the best out of you that's the first one
: no that there it is this one looking at the two sexes (.) second one was
: what have you heard about **performance**

: we're we're gonna review the **questionnaire** next aren't we
: yeah ehm (.) it was fairly easy to lead in anyway wasn't it just get people come to accept it alright the second section what have you heard about **performance** assessment we invited people to tick as many of the particular boxes as they thought relevant ehm if my two were anything to go by you'll have lots of ticks

INSTRUMENTAL THEME (questionnaire.question(s).pilot(s)

: which H. produced for us and I thought she'd circulate it(.) the idea was that that the interview would would remain on a personal basis and you'd say the first **question** you're going to be about sources of information and where you first heard it about **performance related pay** there are a number of possible sources down here (.) would you look down that list and please tell me which of those ehm (.) were were the sources that you that you heard it through

: right everyone ready (.)right before we go into the individual **pilot** reviews has anyone got any general impressions on how well or otherwise they were received

A: a bit regarding the **questions** (.) I made a note of it asking the

questions (.) rubbish was mentioned many times as an alternative answer (.) I said I'm afraid you can't say rubbish I'd like you to respond with one of these answers

: I got the impression that that certainly in the case of the male his responses were a little bit guarded and he wanted to mull over what the **question** was what could possibly be behind it ehm before he answered but when we got into the swing of it he felt more comfortable

T: but it was fine really open arms job
: yeah they liked the idea
T: yeah didn't like the **questions** but liked the idea

D: ....I mean one of the things I (.) was was like weaknesses in actually the **questions** by asking these questions to somebody not being involved in this totally looking at the **questions** afresh and we you know we had some problems with some of the **questions** but no problem actually doing the survey at all

: well my approach was was not to proffer the **questions** but to ask them so that it was on a personal basis and to offer them the chart to look at that one

: I actually photocopied the **questionnaire** and gave them the copy and they read it while i was asking the **questions** i didn't think anyone was afraid of that

: J. speaking for yourself first of all
: well I did I did a half of my **pilot** and I managed one
: you did one

: D.
D: I managed to do ehm (.) half my **pilot** with with ehm the team here ehm (.) nobody we had no problems on on doing the survey ....

: so we've done nine pilots
: so nine **pilots** and we've had three seven ten thirteen responses (.) ehm

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COMPANIES A & B.

1) GENERAL BACKGROUND

IN WHAT COUNTRY ARE YOUR ORGANISATION'S HEADQUARTERS LOCATED?

TOTAL NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES:

AGE OF ORGANISATION:

NUMBER OF FACILITIES (PLANTS, SALES OFFICES, BRANCHES, SUBSIDIARIES LOCATED OUTSIDE YOUR ORGANISATION'S HEADQUARTERS COUNTRY:

... NONE ... 1-15 ... 6-10 ... MORE THAN 10

PROPORTION OF REVENUES THAT COME FROM YOUR ORGANISATION'S HEADQUARTERS COUNTRY

... ALMOST ALL ... MORE THAN HALF ...HALF ... LESS THAN HALF

... NONE ... DON'T KNOW

TICK THE THREE FACTORS THAT ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOUR ORGANISATION'S SUCCESS:

... TECHNOLOGY
... PROBLEM SOLVING
... GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION
... SUPPLIER RELATIONS
... MANUFACTURING TECHNIQUES
... MANAGEMENT
... TRADE POLICY
... PRODUCT QUALITY
... PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT
... CAPITAL
... WORK FORCE SKILLS
... CUSTOMER SERVICE
... DISTRIBUTION SYSTEMS
... MANAGEMENT/LABOUR RELATIONS
... PRODUCT COST

TICK THE STATEMENT THAT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR ORGANISATION'S PROFITS OR OPERATING SURPLUS:

LAST YEAR: ... INCREASED ... DECREASED ... REMAINED THE SAME
LAST 5 YEARS: ... INCREASED ... DECREASED ... FLUCTUATED OR REMAINED THE SAME

IN YOUR ORGANISATION'S PRIMARY LINE OF BUSINESS, ARE YOUR STRONGEST COMPETITORS

... DOMESTIC ... GLOBAL ... BOTH

COMPARED WITH YOUR STRONGEST COMPETITORS, IS YOUR ORGANISATION'S MARKET SHARE

... INCREASING ... DECREASING

WHAT ARE YOUR ORGANISATION'S REGULAR PLANNING HORIZONS?

... LESS THAN 1 YEAR
... 1 YEAR
... 2-4 YEARS
... 5 YEARS
... 10 YEARS
... MORE THAN 10 YEARS

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING CHANGES HAS YOUR ORGANISATION EXPERIENCED IN THE PAST TWO YEARS? TICK ALL THAT APPLY.

... MAJOR RESTRUCTURING OR REORGANISATION
... MAJOR REDUCTION IN NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES
.....MERGER, DIVESTITURE, OR ACQUISITION ...
......EXPANSION IN YOUR HEADQUARTERS COUNTRY
... EXPANSION OUTSIDE YOUR HEADQUARTERS COUNTRY
... NEW CHIEF EXECUTIVE
... MAJOR CHANGE IN STRATEGY
... PRIVATISATION

TICK THE CATEGORY THAT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR PRIMARY AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY.

... SALES AND MARKETING
... FINANCE
... OPERATIONS
... RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT
... INFORMATION SERVICES
... HUMAN RESOURCES
... OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)

TICK THE MANAGEMENT LEVEL THAT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR PRESENT JOB.

... SENIOR MANAGEMENT
... MIDDLE MANAGEMENT
... NON MANAGEMENT

LENGTH OF TIME WITH COMPANY
LENGTH OF TIME IN THE PRESENT POSITION HOW DID YOU COME TO JOIN THIS COMPANY?

HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH YOUR CURRENT JOB?

... VERY ... SOMEWHAT ... NOT AT ALL

SEX: ... MALE ... FEMALE

AGE: ... 20-29 ... 30-39 ...40-49 ... 50-59 ... 60+

DO YOU EXPECT THE NEXT GENERATION TO LIVE A MORE COMFORTABLE, FINANCEABLE, SECURE LIFE THAN YOURS?

... YES, DEFINITELY ... PROBABLY ... UNLIKELY
... NO, DEFINITELY NOT

3) *ORGANIZATIONAL DECISION MAKING*

CIRCLE THE NUMBER THAT INDICATES HOW STRONGLY YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH EACH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS.

1 strongly agree 2 agree 3 neutral 4 disagree 5 strongly disagree

answers are divided into a right answer
and many wrong answers 1 2 3 4 5

mistakes are signs of individual failure	1 2 3 4 5
action should be dictated by "scientifically"-defined alternatives	1 2 3 4 5
decision making which is strong, decisive clear, and direct is good decision making	1 2 3 4 5
a position of authority confers intelligence and wisdom in relationship to those under the person holding the position	1 2 3 4 5
work is simply an economic contract "quid pro quo"	1 2 3 4 5

IS DECISION-MAKING SHARED?

IS THIS ORGANISATION COMPETITIVE OR

INTEGRATIVE BY DESIGN?

4) *ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE*

IS ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE DESIGNED AROUND:
... maintenance of tradition
.... stability of operational activity
.... technological and product leadership and innovations
.... seniority definitions
....
....
....

(open questions)

WHAT ARE THE IMPORTANT POSITIONS IN THIS ORGANISATION?

WHO DO YOU CONSIDER AS PARTICULARLY MEANINGFUL PERSONS IN THIS ORGANISATION?

WHO IS NOT IMPORTANT?

WHAT ARE THE PRIORITY ELEMENTS?

HOW DOES THE ORGANISATION APPROACH ITS RULES, REGULATIONS AND POLICIES?

IN WHAT PERIOD MEETINGS DO YOU PARTICIPATE?

HOW DO PEOPLE BEHAVE DURING THESE MEETINGS?

WHICH EVENTS ARE CELEBRATED IN THIS ORGANISATION?

WHAT THINGS DO PEOPLE VERY MUCH LIKE TO SEE HAPPENING HERE?

WHAT'S THE BIGGEST MISTAKE ONE CAN MAKE?

WHICH WORK PROBLEMS KEEP YOU AWAKE AT NIGHT?

WHAT ARE SPECIAL TERMS THAT ONLY INSIDERS UNDERSTAND? DESCRIBE EVENTS THAT CHARACTERISE WHAT WORKING FOR THIS ORGANISATION IS REALLY ABOUT?

HAVE YOU BEEN ABROAD FOR THIS COMPANY?

WHAT ARE YOUR IMPRESSIONS OF YOUR VISITS ABROAD?

WHAT ARE YOUR MAIN REASONS FOR REMAINING WITH THIS COMPANY?

HOW WOULD YOU ASSESS THE PRESTIGE OF WORKING FOR THIS COMPANY IN YOUR PROFESSION?

HOW WOULD YOU CHARACTERISE YOUR COMPANY'S MISSION?

AND THE MISSION OF YOUR DEPARTMENT?

IN WHAT WAYS YOUR COMPANY IS UNIQUE?

IN GENERAL, HOW COMMITTED WOULD YOU SAY YOU WERE TO THE MISSION OF YOUR COMPANY?

TO THE COMPANY ITSELF?

TO WHAT IN YOUR JOB ARE YOU MOST COMMITTED?

IN GENERAL WOULD YOU SAY THAT MOTIVATION AT YOUR COMPANY IS HIGH? WHAT IS MOTIVATING ABOUT YOUR WORK?

WHAT REDUCES THE MOTIVATION?

HOW DID YOU LEARN ABOUT YOUR COMPANY'S MISSION?

HOW DID YOU LEARN ABOUT WHAT THE MISSION MEANS ON A DAY-TO-DAY BASIS?

WHAT FORMAL TRAINING OR INFORMAL SOCIALISATION DID YOU RECEIVE?

WHAT WERE KEY EVENTS IN YOUR INITIATION?

WHAT KEY PEOPLE OR EVENTS IN YOUR COMPANY'S HISTORY ARE NOTED?

SOURCE: "World Leadership Survey" from *Harvard Business Review*

DIAGRAM 7.3: GENERIC STRUCTURE OF (formal) MEETINGS

PHASES (compulsory*):

1) opening
2) debating
3) concluding

(*) fixed in number and sequence in the British meetings

EXCHANGES (compulsory**):

<u>1)Opening Phase:</u>

0) Preamble (?) (chairman)
1) Initiation (chairman)
2) Elicitation (chairman)

<u>2)Debating Phase:</u>

1) Chairman-group
2) Group-chairman
3) Group-group

<u>3)Concluding Phase:</u>

1) Review (chairman)
2) Action planning (joint)
3) Logistic planning (joint)
4) Formal close (chairman)

(**) at least one exchange is necessary for each Phase to be realised

MOVES (optional***):

<u>1)OPENING PHASE</u>

1) Backgrounding (chairman)
2) Introductions (chairman)
3) Questioning (Chairman)

<u>2)DEBATING PHASE</u>

a)Chair-group:

1) Transitional move (summary)
2) Directional move
3) Developmental move
4) Interim summaries
5) Support
6) Challenge

b)Group-chair:

1) Questioning
2) Challenge
3) Further challenge

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         c)Group-group: 1) Challenge
                        2) Further challenge
                        3) Support
                        4) Questioning (?)

3)CONCLUDING PHASE
                        1) Review (chairman)
                        2) Action planning (chairman)
                        3) Logistic planning (joint)
                        4) Formal close (chairman)
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(***) "Optional" here refers to the many possible variations in number and sequence at Move level. However, it is obvious that the realisation of an Exchange implies the existance of at least one Move within it, although, more commonly, Moves appear in clusters of three or more.

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