The idea of lingual economy

Albert Weideman
Unit for Academic Literacy
University of Pretoria

Abstract

There are a number of philosophical concepts in linguistics that may be conceptualised as 'primitives', i.e. as founding concepts of the discipline. Many of these are of significant historical interest: lingual system (as in work from De Saussure to Chomsky); lingual position and sequence (as in structuralist linguistics); lingual constancy and movement (as in transformational grammar). Less obvious but equally important are notions of spheres of discourse, text type and acceptability. Generally, such foundational notions may be characterised either as constitutive concepts or regulative ideas. This paper will discuss one such regulative linguistic idea, that of lingual economy, especially as this was articulated in the work of the ethnomethodologists on turn-taking. While many intuitive, naïve interpretations of the notion of 'lingual economy' are possible, it will be argued that this came into its own as a linguistic idea only when it was articulated in the work of ethnomethodologists. Like many other linguistic primitives, this idea constitutes a significant historical advance in our understanding of things lingual. The analyses that are referred to below have been particularly useful in gaining insight into the normative dimensions of our communicative ability to function as lingual subjects within the material lingual sphere of conversation. These insights, I shall argue, have taken us much further than the initial analyses that an earlier generation gave of conversation, where the overall impression is that it is 'random', forever edging towards indeterminacy and chaos. In analyses of a number of different spheres of discourse, we may build upon the remarkable explanations, first given by ethnomethodology, for lingual distribution, equality, lingually scarce resource, and so forth. The article will argue that these are not merely metaphorical expressions, but relate to significant regulative ideas that disclose the structure of the lingual dimension of reality.

Linguistic primitives

This paper conceptualizes linguistic primitives as belonging to a class of foundational theoretical concepts in linguistics. Since they are characterized as foundational concepts, this means that they are, in essence, founding concepts of the discipline, and, in that sense, philosophical. Though they refer to concepts used within the discipline of linguistics, they derive at least part of their meaning from some coherent foundational or philosophical framework. In a recent analysis of such a framework (Weideman 2007), I have, following Hommes (1972) and others (De Jongste 1949,

1956; Verburg 1951, 1965, 1971, 1976; Strauss 1967, 1970, 1971; Yallop 1978; Weideman 1981; Bakker 1984) and contrary in some respects to, for example, Hoogland (2005: 36) and Visagie (2006: 202), presented a foundational articulation of various such linguistic "primitives" or elementary systematic concepts of linguistic theory.

The further starting point of this article is that such systematic concepts are closely linked with the history of the discipline. Many of these are of significant historical interest: compare, for example, the notion of lingual system (as in work from De Saussure to Chomsky); that of lingual position and sequence (as in structuralist linguistics); and the concepts of lingual constancy and movement (as in transformational grammar). Less obvious, perhaps, but equally important are notions of lingual spheres of discourse, text type and lingual acceptability that normally fall within the purview of the linguistic sub-disciplines of pragmatics, discourse analysis and text linguistics. Such systematically and historically important and influential concepts are related to the coherence between the lingual dimension of reality, which delimits the field of study of the discipline of linguistics (cf. Weideman 1981, 2007), and other aspects of reality, such as the numerical, the spatial, the kinematic, the logical, the formative, the social, and so forth. For example, the notion of lingual system that De Saussure was so influential in identifying, articulates the coherence between the lingual and the numerical: a system of lingual norms is a unity within a multiplicity of norms. Similarly, the factual position and sequence of lingual elements, as this was explicated in the work of the structuralists, provides evidence of the connection between the lingual and the spatial dimensions of our world. The notions of lingual constancy and movement (also the regular positional movement of lingual elements) are analogies that lie at the heart of transformational grammar, and relate to the link between the lingual dimension of reality and the kinematic.

Generally, such foundational notions may be characterised either as constitutive concepts or as regulative ideas. The examples of the links or analogies between the lingual and the aspects preceding it that are given in the previous paragraph belong to the set of elementary linguistic concepts. In that sense the numerical, spatial and kinematic aspects are "earlier" aspects than the lingual, and such concepts are, by that token, constitutive. Those connections between the lingual dimension of reality and the aspects following it, on the other hand, are elementary linguistic ideas or limiting concepts. Since the social, economic, juridical and ethical dimensions of reality are subsequent or "later" aspects in relation to the lingual, a systematic investigation of their coherence with the lingual will only be able to grasp that linkage in terms of a set of anticipatory moments, or a set of limiting concepts or regulative ideas. If we take as a final example the analysis of the social anticipations in the structure of the lingual aspect (an analysis that yields a linguistic idea), we encounter notions of lingual spheres of discourse, each with their own normative requirements that variously determine the factual lingual text types that operate within them, and ideas of lingual

acceptability within a differentiated number of spheres of discourse (cf. Weideman 2007: Chapter 14).

A third assumption that this article makes, and will seek to illustrate in the analysis that is offered, is that constitutive elementary linguistic concepts and regulative linguistic ideas are interdependent. In the development of a systematic linguistic methodology, the investigation of constitutive linguistic concepts must be complemented both by an enquiry into regulative linguistic ideas, and by a systematic linguistic analysis of the various complex linguistic concepts. Moreover, the conceptual understanding of one set of such linkages or analogies is not really possible without either implicit or sometimes explicit reference to other analogies.

Among the limiting concepts that should be reviewed in such an investigation are the linguistic ideas of normative and factual lingual economy (including the phenomena of aposiopesis, abbreviation and catalysis; cf. Hjelmslev 1963: 94 f.), factual and normative lingual *harmony*, lingual *accountability*, lingual *integrity* and lingual *trust.* These are ideas that link the lingual aspect to the economic, aesthetic, juridical, moral and confessional aspects of experience.

The analysis that I offer in Weideman (2007) illustrates, I believe, that the analogical connections between the lingual aspect of our experience and the other temporal modalities yield not a single analogy to be analyzed, but normally offer a whole set of retrocipations (in the case of constitutive analogical moments) or anticipations (analogies looking forward to the relationship of the lingual modality with those aspects following it in the temporal order). As I have pointed out above, while the former are analyzable in terms of theoretical concepts, the latter connections are conceptually clarified in terms of linguistic limiting concepts or ideas.

The main purpose of the current article is therefore to take an element of a linguistic limiting concept, that of lingual economy, further along the analytical track that has been indicated by the systematic framework briefly described above. As will be shown, the notion of lingual economy cannot be understood without reference to other analogical relations or sets of relations, but in fact deepens the systematic exploration of these. In a very specific sense, the idea of lingual economy that will be systematically articulated below enhances our understanding of the social disclosure of language in different material lingual spheres, which is discussed in detail in Weideman (2007: Chapters 4 and 14). The regulative idea of a lingual economy, in which the lingual aspect of experience anticipates the economic dimension, is mediated, in fact, through such social anticipations or analogies within the lingual aspect. Although the current discussion also contains new references to some of the critiques of the work on the idea of a lingual economy that will be discussed below, I shall freely use the material and analyses that are discussed in a broader context and detail in Weideman (2007: Chapter 15).

The idea of lingual economy

There are, naturally, all kinds of intuitive and practical, everyday notions associated with the idea of lingual economy. One may think, for example, of judgments we make of an interlocutor's loquaciousness or taciturnity, or of the more intellectually sophisticated assessments we might make of the economy of expression that is associated with certain forms of verbal art, in particular poetry, which achieves a remarkable density through its utilization of a number of lingual and other symbolic resources.

Then there is of course the further temptation to conceive of the analogical modal link between the lingual dimension of our experience and the economic dimension of reality in terms of the concrete phenomenon of language and its role in the sphere of economic life, in other words in the world of trade, commerce and financial transactions. These are no doubt interesting issues. The way that language acts as barrier to commerce and trade, or the way in which economic considerations influence the power that some languages gain on a global scale, while others stand to lose, are complex issues that are studied within the realm of language management or planning, as well as in language politics, and are therefore more properly treated in these sub-fields of applied linguistics (or in development economics, as Van Langevelde 1997 and 1999 have done for Friesland and minority regions). I would argue that, for systematic reasons, the analysis of these phenomena be postponed until we have come to a better conceptual understanding of the elementary linguistic concepts that concern the abstract modal relationships between these two dimensions. This does not mean that they have a lower conceptual or theoretical status; quite the contrary: such concrete issues are much more complex, and the problems that they throw up need deliberate and sustained attention, and are worthy of consideration from a multiplicity of perspectives.

Instead, I propose to set out below a single illustration of how, in the theoretical approach known as ethnomethodology (cf. Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974; Goffman 1981), a breakaway school of sociology, we find a theoretically exceptional treatment of the idea of lingual economy. Their analyses enlighten us as regards the wonderfully complicated nature of lingual interaction when our theoretical view ventures beyond the consideration of the expressive kernel of the lingual modality to an analysis of the structuredness of the shared expression or communication that lingual subjects attempt every day. If shared expression or communication provides the starting point for this analysis, it situates the lingual facts that are brought into view squarely within the social domain, or what I have been calling the social anticipations of the lingual aspect. That, in turn, immediately places spoken interaction in the theoretical spotlight. In pointing out the differences between Grice's (1975) 'theory-driven' methodology and that of the 'data-driven' approach of the ethnomethodologists, Svennevig (2001) is correct in observing that our

claims about spoken interaction are based on theoretical primitives (such as *meaning*, *rationality* and *communication*).

These "primitives" indeed are foundational linguistic concepts that express the connections between the lingual dimension and, respectively, the logical aspect of experience (in the concepts of factual lingual identity, rationality or *meaning*) and the social (lingual expression that is shared with others to deepen into *communication*). However, we should also acknowledge that the ethnomethodological articulation of the idea of a lingual *economy* operating in spoken interaction proceeds from just such a "primitive" or foundational linguistic idea, in this case the anticipation by the lingual of the economic aspect of reality.

In the illustration that follows, I shall freely use some earlier material and analyses that I have made individually or in collaboration with others (Weideman 1984, 1985, 1988; Weideman, Raath & Van der Walt 1986; Weideman & Verster 1988).

A system for lingual sharing

The analyses that the school of ethnomethodology made have been particularly useful for us in gaining insight into the normative dimensions of our communicative ability to function as lingual subjects within the material lingual sphere of conversation. These insights, I shall argue, have taken us much further than the initial, preliminary analyses of Crystal and Davy (1976), where the overall impression is that conversation is 'random', forever edging towards indeterminacy and chaos. Most of the examples cited in this early study are of a lexical and syntactic nature, that is: they use factual lingual units at word and sentence level.

We should note, however, that once we take the study of human lingual competence and action beyond the notion of grammatical competence, other considerations emerge, and other levels of lingual object-formation come into play. Thus it is with the analysis of conversation. Far from being random and indeterminate, conversation analyses have shown such talk to have a remarkably tight and economical organization.

Central to this analysis is the idea of turn-taking in conversation. It is of course true that the lingual economy that is effected by means of turn-taking among those sharing in communicative interaction is not limited to conversation. Conversation is only one form of talk: that which is conducted among equals in an associative relationship. In most forms of talk, done within the various material lingual spheres of discourse that are referred to in Weideman (2007), some normative system of turn-taking is indeed operative. Take for example the allocation of turns at talk in a classroom, that has been investigated by Greyling (1987; cf. too Coulthard 1985; Duff 2002; Storch 2004; Arthur & Martin 2006) and others. Such is the inequality in this

form of institutional talk that in conventional classrooms the teacher normally occupies two-thirds of this scarce resource, in initiating a typical exchange by eliciting information, and ending it by giving feedback to the learner's response. Similarly, in ecclesiastical settings, which make up another institutional context, there may be predetermined and liturgically or ritually specified measures of how turns at talk are distributed. Parliamentary debates (cf. Shaw 2000) and courtroom discourse provide further examples of institutional lingual interaction, and there have even been studies of how audience applause — a non-verbal, but certainly lingually meaningful action — in all kinds of settings is both allowed, elicited and achieved (cf. Levinson 1983: 301).

For conversation analysts, however, the central problem was to explain how participants at talk manage in a lingual context that is associational, that is a context in which there is neither accepted authority, nor a more or less durable relationship between the members. How, in a relationship that is characterized rather by equality between participants, do they manage a lingually fair and economical way of distributing access to a scarce lingual resource: a turn at talk? What lingual subjects in the communicative event that we call conversation need, as Levinson (1983: 297) puts it, is

> … a sharing device, an 'economy' operating over a scarce resource, namely control of the 'floor'. Such an allocational system will require minimal units (or 'shares') over which it will operate, such units being the units from which **turns** are constructed.

The idea of turn-taking as a set of norms or a system of lingual economy is so deceptively obvious that, before the advent of ethnomethodological analyses, very little attention had been paid to it. Of course, like many other theoretical ideas, the idea of a turn-taking system that is operative in conversation has been strongly contested (for example by O'Connell, Kowal & Kaltenbacher 1990; Cowley 1998), but these either proceed from a misunderstanding of the methodological and procedural starting points of conversation analysis (cf. for example Sacks 1984, Schegloff 1992, 2001) or misrepresent both the positions and the claims made by ethnomethodologists. What is important, however, is neither their contestation nor the theoretical endurance of these ideas in spite of their being challenged, but the historical significance of the insight, that opened up a dimension of linguistic conceptualisation that we did not have before. The earlier analyses of conversation referred to above failed to recognize the potential significance for discovering any organizational structure in conversation, and also the host of explanatory problems that it evokes.

One of the hardest questions to answer, if one agrees with the ethnomethodologists, is why it is so that turn-taking is central to conversation. When we look at an actual instance of conversation, it is not difficult to observe that one participant talks, stops, that at that point another starts, talks, stops, at which point the turn at talk is transferred to the first speaker, and so on.

One possible explanation for this is that in the roughly equal (in the sense of recurrent) distribution of talk across the turns of different speakers there is evidence of the (social) equality of the speakers. Note that, while the notion of lingual distribution is certainly an articulation of an echo of the economic modality (which is originally concerned with the allocation of scarce resources) within the lingual sphere, and the idea of equality concerns the social specifications of the role of lingual subjects, the concept of lingual recurrence most probably echoes and conceptually broadens the constitutive relation between the lingual aspect and the kinematic. When the opportunity for talk is as evenly and recurrently distributed as in conversation, it is a way of securing, a ratification, of the equality of participants. We return below to the articulation of the idea of ratification or lingual confirmation as a juridical analogy within the structure of the lingual aspect.

To see why this explanation is plausible, we need to compare the relatively equal distribution of turns at talk in conversation with other forms of talk that were referred to above. In non-associational, institutional settings for example, there is often a marked and widespread lack of an equal distribution of turns (Greyling 1987, Coulthard 1985, Arthur & Martin 2006). The lecture is a case in point, for here one of the participants holds forth for almost any length of time, and, moreover, has the ability to withhold from other participants any opportunity of talking, by employing a number of devices: "Let me just finish this point ..." is a technique often used to counter an interruption signal from one of the other participants, be it in the form of a cough, a raising of the hand, the clearing of a throat or any combination of these. Actually, then, it is not so much the size of the turn that suspends the equality of the participants; it is more likely the presence of an authority to allocate (or withhold allocation of) turns. This is probably the case in all institutional settings, even those where one would expect the power gradient between the person who has the authority to influence the allocation of turns and the co-participant at talk to be less steep, as in receptionist-patient exchanges (cf. Hewitt 2006: 142; also 34).

The same inequality seems to reign in law courts, religious services and meetings, where there are either ritualized ways of allocating turns, or where one participant has the acknowledged right to allocate turns (be such a person presiding officer of the court, chairperson, or whatever). There are in these types of discourse signs of the authority relationship that ordinary conversation lacks.

One of the most interesting observations that follows from turn-taking or speaker change in conversation is the remarkable lack of overlap between speakers. It has been calculated that less than 5% — a minimal amount by any standard — of talk overlaps between the turns of ratified speakers (Levinson 1983: 296). In the moment of speaker ratification, we find an echo of a juridical analogy in the lingual aspect: once rightfully confirmed as speaker, and acknowledged as such by co-participants at talk, a speaker has a defensible, allocated space in which to speak. What is even more remarkable about the lack of overlap between speakers is that at the same time gaps

between speakers' turns are almost immeasurably small — only a few tenths of a second, and sometimes considerably shorter. In spite of speaker change, talk is therefore *continuous*, always in progress. This is a significant enhancement of our understanding of the concept of lingual continuity, which is another linguistic primitive, related to the analogical link between the lingual and the spatial dimensions (for a more detailed discussion, cf. Weideman 2007: Chapter 7). It is an illustration, once again, that the constitutive linguistic concept of continuity is enlivened and developed further by the regulative linguistic ideas that flow from the modal interconnections between the lingual and the social, economic and juridical analogies, since the idea of lingual continuity is now conceived of as a communicative space (the turn) in which lingual subjects share expression or meaning in an economically moderated way that not only allows for the sharing of such lingual space, but rightfully distributes and allocates it.

How can one explain this? Conversation analysts suggest a rule to which speakers are subject that explains both the absence of gaps between turns and the simultaneous lack of overlap, i.e. the continuity of talk in conversation:

RULE: *At least and not more than one party talks at a time*

This rule has a normative character, and so does not function as a natural law which is inviolable. Indeed, speakers do in fact overlap (marked //) as in

[1] Desk: What is your last name // Lorraine?
     Caller: Dinnis.
     Desk: What?
     Caller: Dinnis.
                    (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974: 702)

but the amount of overlap either remains negligible, or can at least be remedied, as in the above, since both speakers know that a fundamental rule has been violated, and collaboratively set out to rectify such deviation in their first subsequent round of turns. In this lingual collaboration, we see another dimension of the social analogies within the lingual modality. Furthermore, in the normative lingual orientation that co-participants in conversation have towards such violations, we find an illustration of the idea of lingual accountability – speakers set out to rectify and repair the continuity that is to be jointly and collaboratively achieved – which expresses in yet another way the anticipations within the lingual aspect of our experience and the juridical and social.

That knowledge of the rule above is part of our subjective communicative ability or competence is also evident, firstly, in the fact that we know, within milliseconds apparently, that in the case of speakers competing for a turn one has started first. This will probably be the one who will continue while the other drops out, as in

[2] A: ... I thought he was going to talk us into having to do another complete set of ... set
        books for that bloody philology // paper
   * B: Erm +
   * A: If he had I'd // have said …
   * B: the .. the other the other the other + the other man ehm who .. I thought was going to
        get you wild was Potter.
     A: (swears) I'll crown that bastard before I'm finished with him.
        (Svartvik & Quirk, 1980: 47, adapted from 786-797; + marks the end of overlap)

        Secondly, if there is almost exactly simultaneous talk, we have techniques to
snatch a turn or to let it go by either upgrading our tone and pitch, or by fading, as in

[3]   J: But this // person that DID IT + IS GOT TO BE
    * V: If I see the person
    * J: ... taken care of
              (Levinson, 1983: 301)

and

[4]   A: .. It is *sui generis* ..., you see
      B: Yes.
      A: Ehm..
      B: // But I I +
   * A: THIS IS + this is one of the things that eh one of the many things eh in English
        structure which is ehm an item in a closed system.
              (Svartvik & Quirk, 1980: 46 f., adapted from 738-750)

        However interesting these observations may be, ethnomethodology requires
that we offer a local explanation for them. If, as we have remarked, we indeed, as part
of our communicative competence, possess the general ability to recognize and act
upon overlap, while striving to maintain and uphold the fundamental rule of talk that at
least but not more than one party talks at a time, then it should be obvious that we have
some kind of system for achieving this. For if talk must normatively be continuous,
then, given the fact of turn-taking or recurrent change of speaker, we must have some
means of achieving such change.

        How, in other words, do we hand over turns to another in speaking?

        One obvious way of transferring a turn at talk to another lingual subject is by
nominating the next speaker. But while in other kinds of talk this occurs frequently —
cf. parliamentary debates:

[5] I now call upon the honourable member for Upington ...

or press conferences:

[6] Mr Jackson, from the Daily Star?

— it is clear that speaker nomination has to be done much more delicately and subtly in conversation. It would be ludicrous if in conversation we are forever being formally and explicitly called upon to speak. And yet we are called upon to speak, and, if we reflect upon it, are often selected as next speakers in continuing conversation, by means of address terms tagged to questions or statements, checks, and so on:

[7] Are you coming, David?
[8] You've been here before, right?
[9] Beg your pardon?

By looking closely at the data, conversation analysts have, however, come up with a whole system of rules to effect speaker change. They have found that turns form units, the ends of which may act as places for transition. These possible completion points are called transition relevance places or TRPs. With this in mind, one may then formulate the rules for speaker change in ongoing conversation by ratified speakers. They are (C = current speaker; N = next speaker):

RULE 1 (applying at the initial TRP of any turn):

(a) If C selects N in his current turn, then N and no other must speak.
(b) If C does not select N, then any party may elect to speak, and the first party to do so has rights to the next turn.
(c) If C has not selected N, and no other party self-selects under rule l(b), then C may, but need not, continue.

RULE 2 (applying at all subsequent TRPs):

When by rule l(c) C has assumed the right to take another turn at speaking, then at the next TRP rules 1(a) – 1(c) re-apply, and so on recursively until speaker change is effected.

(adapted from Levinson, 1983: 298; cf. too Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974: 704).

These 'rules' are again *normative*, that is, orientation points or starting places for the *collaborative* lingual effort we call conversation. It is clear that the rules must be attended to by both S (speaker) and H (hearer) if they are co-operatively to accomplish a conversational exchange, i.e. transform an $S{:}H$ relationship into a $C{:}N$ one.

Instances of rule 1(a) applying at the first possible completion point for a turn are straightforward enough. When we come to a discussion of the turn constructional units called adjacency pairs below, further examples will be cited. Of course, [7] – [9] above will be units at the end of which one may normally expect transition to *N*.

But what about the operation of the other rules? We have, in other contexts, already looked at examples of this, but another clear example of where self-selection occurs is marked * in the following exchanges (the phenomenon marked ** will be discussed below):

[10] A: Ih .. is .. is it this year that eh Nightingale goes?
      B: Eh no, next year.
  * A: Ehm sixty / f..
      B: Sixty five + ..
 **A: Four, sixty five
      B: Yeah.
  * A: I thought it was before sixty-five. || So it's not until next year that
        // the job will be advertised
 ** B: January I suppose there + may be an interview round about January.
      A: Yeah.
           (Svartvik & Quirk, 1980: 38, adapted from 238-247)

In all the turns marked * in the above, self-selection (as opposed to other, or *C*-selection) has occurred because there are no *N*-selection devices present in the preceding turn, and transition takes place at the end (TRP) of this turn. The operation of rule l(c) is also evident in A's fourth turn (marked ||).

The *normative* character of rules 1 and 2 also provides, of course, for their violation, as in the intentional interruption

[11] C: Well, I wrote what I thought was a a .. a reason//able explanation
      F: I think it was a very rude letter
          (Levinson, 1983: 299)

which violates the provision for taking up a turn at a TRP.

Moreover, we have, by virtue of the normative character of these rules, an explanation for significant silences. In [12], A's utterances select B as *N*, but B, in initially refusing to heed rule l(a) finally yields to the normative force of the rule, which is dependent on the connection between the lingual dimension of experience and the physical aspect of energy-effect, only on his last turn:

[12] A: Is there something bothering you or not?
         (1.0 second gap)
      A: Yes or no?

(1.5 second gap)
A: Eh?
B: No.

(Levinson, 1983: 300)

Apart from explaining why B's "No" probably means "Yes", the rules for achieving speaker change also clarify the sense that lingual subjects, as speakers, have of significant silences. Yet it is astonishing to see how quickly, under normative pressures for conversational continuity, they become so. Silences between turns are not tolerated in this kind of talk, and call up complaints of the kind

[13] You're not listening to me!
[14] C: Mac

J: Yes

C: Ø

(2 seconds)
    * J: Hey, trying to waste my time or something?

(Weideman, Raath & Van der Walt 1986: 97)

Since both the fundamental rule for conversation and the rules for achieving change of speaker are normative, they do, as we have seen, allow not only silence(s), but also overlap. The collaborative nature of conversation, however, provides for specific ways of extricating oneself from the chaos that would result if violations were allowed to stand without remedy. One such remedy, where overlap occurs, is the recycling of the part obscured by overlap, as in [2], [4] and [10] above (marked ** in the latter case), whereby repair is effected.

Repair can also, in the case of inadvertent overlap, be called for in the form of a check, as in Desk's second turn in [1], and effected by the subsequent turn of *N*.

The existence of (still to be precisely defined) possible completion points for turns presents yet another problem not only for *N*s, who have to attend to TRPs to avoid complaints in the form of [13], but also for *C*s who for some reason wish to hold the floor, i.e. in formal terms, strive to avoid the application of rule l(b) and to continue talking past possible completion points (TRPs) by rule l(c). Thus *C* may employ what are known as incompletion markers by conversation analysts: "but", "and", "however" constitute devices for temporarily suspending the normative precedence of rule l(b) over l(c). Such markers, however, are only successful in avoiding application of rule l(b) in some instances, as

[15] B: Joe has goh .. got it of course // and

A: Has he +

    * B: and presumably those are the two people who do it.

(Svartvik & Quirk, 1980: 39, adapted from 324-327)

but not in others:

[16]   B: That's what it would amount to, isn't it, but I'd plan to get // somebody ...
        A: Well he wouldn't have to hire + somebody you see, he'd have you built in.
                (Svartvik & Quirk, 1980: 39, adapted from 299-302)

In fact, more than a quarter of all interruptions occur after conjunctions (Coulthard, 1985: 64).

Yet other incompletion markers are openings with "since", "if", or, more elaborately,

[17] I'd like to make two comments on that. First .... Second ...

Of course, no 'incompletion marker' can guarantee that *C* keeps the turn, but they do show up *N* as violating the norm by interrupting, which may be decidedly anti-normative behaviour (see [11] above).

The most sophisticated solutions to the problem of *C* wishing to hold the floor occur before story-telling or jokes. These special incompletion markers are called story-prefaces. Stories and jokes are often begun with

[18] Have you heard the one about ...
[19] There were these three girls ...

The suspension of the rules for turn-taking by story-prefaces calls forth another problem for *N*s, of course: how do they know that the floor is again open, and that the rules are in operation again?

In the case of jokes the solution is easy, for they have recognizable endings, or punchlines. The laughter that is normative after the punchline paves the way for a resumption of rule-application. But in the case of stories it is of course less easy to perceive endings (which in their turn call for nods, comments, or both) and resumption of talk by rule 2.

A broadening of the concept of objective factual lingual unit

Some of the phenomena of conversation that have been considered in the previous section also concern its lingual wholeness and continuity — specifically the continuous, sequential nature of talk that disallows both gaps and overlap, as well as the beginnings and endings of shorter and longer turns. These two concepts are related, respectively, to the analogies of the numerical and spatial dimensions of experience within the structure of the lingual aspect. It should be obvious that the current

discussion significantly broadens and opens up the constitutive notions of lingual objects, restricted as these are to factual units such as morphemes, words and sentences in 'formal' linguistics, that is, in that part of linguistics that attempts to focus and deal exclusively with constitutive linguistic concepts, as these have been defined within the framework employed here. The conversational phenomena that were considered above were discussed within the context of an analysis that focused on the norm-side of the lingual aspect, specifically on the normative analogies that link the lingual aspect of our experience with the economic. This analysis allowed us to conceptualize the turn-taking system discovered by conversation analysts in talk among equals as a device or norm for a shared economy of a scarce lingual resource.

In what follows we shall see how the lingual norms for speaker change determine the factual lingual units that are regulated by these norms. In this, we probably have the best illustration that the idea of a normative lingual economy is not merely a metaphorical way of referring to lingual phenomena, as some would claim (Cowley 1998). We should not confuse abstract theoretical conceptualisation with mere metaphorical usage, as if the former may be conducted in a way that is unrelated to the concrete, factual phenomena that operate within various aspects of reality, and as if, additionally, these aspects themselves do not cohere with other dimensions of reality.

If we now turn to focus on the factual phenomena that are regulated by this system of a normative lingual economy, we may consider some remaining questions related to the concepts of objective lingual unity and continuity. These questions relate to the theoretical determination of the lingual extent of the objective lingual phenomena of conversation; in short, to their beginning, continuing and ending. The questions include the following:

(a) What is the minimum format of the linguistic unit we have been calling a 'conversation'?
(b) How is this unit begun and ended, and, having arrived at an ending, how can it be re-opened?
(c) Do we know anything about the overall organization of conversation? (For this would be crucial if we wish to understand and probe further its objective lingual continuity and wholeness).
(d) Finally, by what other means is conversation maintained, i.e. not only systematically and organizationally (e.g. by rules for change of speaker), but in the efficiency and effectiveness of the content of what is said?

A minimum unit for conversation

When, by rule l(a), *C* selects *N* and *N* takes up a turn at speaking, they fulfil their normative lingual obligations — another juridical analogy — so that these two turns

(of *C* and *N*) constitute what we may call a minimum unit of conversational exchange. Most of these units are called adjacency pairs, i.e. they are paired utterances, and exhibit a particular typology of sequence. Thus (initial and closing) greetings are followed by (initial and closing) greetings, questions by answers:

[20] A: Eh there was a very nice letter in *The Observer* on Sunday I don't know whether you noticed?
   B: I didn't see that, no.
            (Svartvik & Quirk, 1980: 78, adapted from 1227-1232);

offers and apologies by rejections or acceptances, summonses by answers, complaints by responses, and so on. Again this is an observation that seems quite obviously to match our intuitions about conversational exchanges, but that was first characterized in detail only after receiving the kind of close attention that conversation analysis gave to the data of conversation.

For a conversational exchange to qualify as an adjacency pair, it has to be

(a) two utterances in length
(b) adjacent
(c) produced by different speakers

while the two utterances are moreover to be

(d) sequentially arranged as first and second parts of a particular typology of sequence (cf. Levinson, 1983: 303).
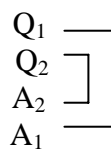
It is clear, though, that adjacency pairs are only minimum units of conversational exchange. What is more, the requirement of adjacency is often too strong, for conversation analysts have also discovered that in actual data the uttering of a second pair part is often postponed by an intervening 'checking' sequence, as in (Q = question; A = answer)

[21] A: Where do you come from? Q_1
    B: You mean where was I before? Q_2
    A: Yes. A_2
    B: History (giggles) A_1
              (Svartvik & Quirk, 1980: 152, adapted from 1-5)

that itself forms an adjacency pair. This postponement of uttering an expected second pair part, however, again stresses the normative organization of conversation: if a second pair part fails to occur, as is normatively expected, the expectation is either retained through the completion of an intervening sequence (technically: an insertion sequence), after which the second pair part occurs, or, in the case of complete failure

to occur, it is noticeably absent, as in [12] above. As Weideman, Raath and Van der Walt (1986: 91 point out:

> The notion of expectability that one is dealing with in this regard is therefore an idea of the normative expectations inherent in the (sequential) organization of talk.

Within the ethnomethodological framework, what is here called normative expectability is known as 'preference organisation' (cf. Levinson 1983: 307 ff.). In the theoretical perspective adopted here, the kind of organisation of lingual objects (adjacency pairs) within the material lingual sphere of conversation echoes in more than one respect the correlation of lingual norm and lingual fact. This correlation has been discussed in relation to a number of analogical moments in the analyses in Weideman (2007), and, as has been pointed out there, entails a broadening also of our idea of what in a restrictive sense was termed the relation between 'langue' and 'parole' (De Saussure), or 'competence' and 'performance' (Chomsky).

Opening and closing conversations

The discussion above of the lingual objects known as adjacency pairs or minimum conversational units leads quite naturally to the question of what larger factual lingual units one may find within this material lingual sphere. In order to determine what these may be, one may consider the ordering or organisation that is evident in the opening and closing of conversations, where, for example, the expected initial greeting-greeting sequences ("Hello/Hello") qualify as such units, as do the closing greeting sequences ("Bye/Bye"), or

[22] B: Thank you very much.
     A: It's a pleasure.
            (Svartvik & Quirk, 1980: 82, adapted from 1460-1463)

   Conversation analysis has also discovered that there are sequences (so-called pre-closing pairs) that normally precede closings, as in the turns directly preceding [22] above (marked below in [23] with a single *):

(23) **   B: So that's how it goes, um, you know. This bloody university will be the death of
           me.
      A: Yeah. Oh well. If you inherit a university from bureaucrats what do you expect.
    * A: (laughs)
    * B: Yes ...Oh well
            (Svartvik & Quirk, 1980: 82, adapted from 1449-1459)

   It appears that our ending of conversations must again be a co-ordinated,

collaborative effort, and pre-closing sequences ("Okay ... Okay/Right") are a means of achieving this.

Moreover, it has also been discovered that participants in a conversation recognize the transition to pre-closing sections because the turn preceding such a section (cf. the turn marked ** in [23]) is marked by the use of idiomatic and proverbial formulae ("This … will be the death of me"), or by the reiteration of arrangements already agreed upon

[24] A: See you this afternoon then
     B: Okay

the giving of regards, as well as the proverbial "All's well that ends well" or idiomatic

[25] Theresa: Yeah, well, things uh always work out for the best
       Dorinne: Oh certainly
              (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973: 307)

The normative character of the organizational machinery available for closing a conversation is once again evident in that, having progressed to the closing or pre-closing stages of conversation, participants can jointly achieve a re-opening. The subject of how such 'closings' can be 'opened' again was indeed the topic of one of the more well-known studies in conversation analysis (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). In such cases, the reopening bid is usually marked heavily ("Oh BY THE WAY ..."; "HEY LISTEN, I ...").

It follows, from the discussion so far, that what we know today about smaller and larger objective lingual units within conversation, that is about adjacency pairs as well as about the factual opening and closing sections of conversation, has also given us a clearer picture of the structure of conversation as a whole, and to this we now turn.

The overall organization of conversation

Conversation analysts have also discovered that, having engaged in conversation, we move in a highly ordered way from one topic to another. Thus there are topic boundaries that signal the end of one topic, as well as topic markers that indicate that a new topic is about to be embarked upon, as in

[26] A: Well that finishes that ehm now what was the other thing I wanted to ask you ...?
                    (Svartvik & Quirk, 1980: 38, adapted from 236-237)

or in the following, taken from a conversation that had been going on for some time:

[27] B: I've got a problem for you my lad.
    A: A problem?
    B: Yes.
                  (Svartvik & Quirk, 1980: 44, adapted from 601-603)

The literature on topic opening, topic maintenance and topic transition is interesting in its own right, and excellent surveys of the work done are readily available (e.g. Coulthard 1985). Two final remarks here must, however, suffice for the moment. Firstly, the randomness that stylisticians of a decade or two ago noticed in conversation may have been occasioned in part by the observation of frequent, and sometimes stylistically inexplicable, changes of topic. We know today that such changes are negotiated by means of the complex machinery that is available to speakers.

Secondly, studies have shown that the overall organization of conversation is also normative, in the sense of being a kind of global outline: so speakers may for various reasons skip over some parts, and pay closer attention to others. But we do know that the typical picture that emerges is a progression from one stage to another, and may look something like this (Ferrara, 1980: 332; for other kinds of talk, cf. e.g. Hewitt 2006):

(a) initial greeting sequences
(b) howareyou sequences
(c) non-topical sequences
(d) topical sequences
(e) encounter-evaluative sequences
(f) arrangement sequences
(g) closing greeting sequences

The detailed investigation of this kind of organization will no doubt reveal that the organization tentatively outlined here is normative, and may be violated, flouted, changed or exploited by lingual subjects in the collaborative work that they engage upon in talk. But it will also show that lingual subjects have an orientation towards mutuality in talk, and towards responding in their formation of lingual objects to a system of norms that allows each enough talking space, and the opportunity to share their expression — often called the 'co-construction of meaning' — with selected and ratified others.

Some other factual lingual units

Conversation analysis in the ethnomethodological mode does, of course, not have a theoretical monopoly on the identification either of systems for shared expression or

communication, on the one hand, or of the observation and isolation of objective lingual facts, on the other.

Indeed, in the discourse analysis literature, we find numerous other instances of factual lingual units, such as the hierarchically arranged (in the sense of 'consists of' relations) lingual objects that Coulthard (1985: 123 ff.) identifies in the organization of discourse in 'transaction', 'exchange', 'move' and 'act', where transaction, the highest objective lingual unit in the hierarchy, is said to consist of two or more exchanges, exchanges consist of moves, and moves in turn consist of a specifiable set or combination of lingual acts. While there may be clear theoretical differences between the hierarchical approach of discourse analysis and the bottom-up perspective of ethnomethodology (in the sense of taking a view of how talk is locally organized and managed – according to Sacks [1984: 21] conversation analysis "seeks to describe the methods persons use in doing social life), Coulthard's distinctions do not appear to be so far away from the lingual sequences (adjacent pairs) identified by conversation analysis, for in a real sense we are able to say that such lingual sequences consist of turns at talk (Heritage & Atkinson 1984: 8).

Similarly, there are in the field of discourse analysis the near synonymous concepts of frame, script, scenario and schema that describe the coherence of a given stretch of text (Brown & Yule 1983; cf. also Craig & Tracey 1983), nor should one forget the groundbreaking work done by Halliday and Hasan (1976) in conceptualizing lingual extension and unity in their analysis of lingual cohesion and coherence (cf. also De Beaugrande & Dressler 1981).

All of these distinctions attempt to articulate the great variety of objective lingual units that function on the factual side of the lingual aspect once the structure of this aspect is disclosed in the anticipatory direction of time to grasp theoretically not only the restrictive, constitutive analogical moments within the lingual modality, but also to come to an understanding of its social, economic and juridical anticipations. It is as if the abundance of such distinct objective lingual units celebrates the opening up of this modality in the transcendental direction of time. To this author, this wealth of lingual resources has been a constant source of wonder and awe, and an indication that the theoretical apparatus with which we aim to conceptualize all of the resources of language is limited and always incomplete.

The remainder of the agenda

There is little doubt that a further systematic investigation of the remaining elementary linguistic ideas referred to in the introduction — the ideas of lingual *harmony*, lingual *accountability*, lingual *integrity* and lingual *trust* — will enable linguistic theory to come to a better theoretical understanding of the multifaceted, and no doubt interesting, complex linguistic concepts of the relation between lingual norm and lingual fact, lingual subject and object, and the idea of the origin, introduction,

acquisition, use, development and, in some cases, the loss or extinction of language. We have barely begun to conceptualize these in a systematic framework such as the one utilized in this article. I return in the *Epilogue* of Weideman (2007) to components of a possible research agenda for such an analysis.

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