

**THE TEXTUAL FEATURES OF A DIALOGUE ON THE BASIS OF DRAMATIC  
WORKS AND COLLOQUIAL CONVERSATIONS**

**Theses of a PhD dissertation**

**Written by**

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## **1. The purpose and topic of the dissertation**

This dissertation aims at presenting the textual features of dialogue on the basis of a spontaneous textual corpus collected by the author and two contemporary dramas in a functional and cognitive theoretical framework.

According to this the analysis examines the contextual factors related to the outer domains of the dialogues (situational context, the context of action, thematic context), the structural features of the dialogues, adjacency pairs, the construction of turns, topic switches), and the implementation of the basic relationships of the micro-level (deixis, coreference). The main idea of the analysis of the linguistic elements is to show their communicative function on the basis of the functional approach. Since the corpus under examination contains partly spontaneous texts, partly fictional, constructed dialogues (which is due to their fictional nature), the analysis also tries to find out what basic differences can be found between the two types of dialogues, and to what extent these variables contribute to the typological distinction of spontaneous and planned texts.

## **2. The structure of the dissertation**

After a comparatively short and general description of the relationship between cognitive linguistics and dialogue-research, the second chapter presents different definitions of a dialogue through summarising the main trends of Hungarian and international dialogue-research, laying the emphasis mainly on research applying the functional approach (sociological, pragmatic, cognitive).

The third chapter discusses the material and methods of the research, and shows the features of the textual corpus to be examined. It also shows the opportunities for dialogue-analysis offered by cognitive linguistics through the analysis of three main aspects, which are contextual factors, turns and the analysis of micro-level elements.

The forth chapter goes into details through the analysis of textual corporuses. On the basis of the results of the analysis of spontaneous and constructed conversations it attempts to describe the most important textual characteristics of a dialogue. The most emphatic part is the examination of the turns and some of the micro-level elements, which examines how each variable shows up on higher levels of the text on the basis of the analysis of deixis and coreference.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings and it also attempts to show what question have been left unanswered by the present dissertation, and also what further research it can provide a useful basis for.

## **3. The subject and method of the research**

The examination of the textual features of dialogues has been implemented through the analysis of two, in many aspects similar, but basically different text corporuses. In both samples we can find conversations involving two or more people, their use of the language, style and textual structure show the characteristic features of common everyday linguistic activities. The basic difference among them is that one of the corporuses consists of real, spontaneous conversations, the analysis of which has been carried out after recording them on tape, with the help of simplified transcription. The other material, however, consists of pre-constructed dialogues, although it attempts to preserve the nature of spoken language in every aspect, it consists of fictional dialogues. The main difference between the two corporuses as far as their conditions of origins are concerned is that they have different social and temporary dimensions and the roles of participants also differ. According to the prototype-theory one of

the corpuses can be regarded a prototypical spontaneous dialogue, which takes place in colloquial speech, in a direct interactional situation, where the participants' roles constantly change. It is spontaneous and its reception is instant. The other corpus, however, is seemingly a prototypical planned text, which appears in written language, in an indirect interactional situation, with a delayed reception. One of its important characteristics is the constant nature of participant roles, and the fact that it is planned. It should be interpreted that the conversations of participants take place in a direct interaction with the exchange of embedded participant roles, due to the characteristic features of a fictional piece of work a drama is characterised by appearance in written language and the constant nature of real participant roles (author and recipient). The problem of dramatic text is increased by the basically dialogic nature of linguistic activity, since this interactive feature appears both in the relationship between the author and the recipient and also on the level of different discourses.

According to this, the analytical chapters of the dissertation aim to show the textual characteristics of prototypical conversations on the one hand by examining the text-corpus that consists of spontaneous conversations. The analysis of dramatic dialogues contributes to this, since the corpus that consists of dramatic dialogues cannot be classified into either prototypical conversations or prototypical planned texts, but their similarity to prototypical conversations provides an opportunity for the more detailed textual analysis of those. On the other hand, due to their similarity to the characteristic features of planned texts, the analysis of dramatic dialogues it makes possible to show the basic differences between spontaneous and planned interactions.

The analysis of corpuses has been carried out basically with the help of three methods. To compose the hypotheses related to the characteristic features of dialogic texts, first it was necessary to revise the related research literature, with a special emphasis on practical analyses. The methodological framework for displaying the sequential organization of conversation analysis has been provided by conversation analysis, making it possible to extend the textual analysis of dialogues. In these chapters, some statistical calculations were necessary (e.g. index of depth/complexity) to determine the rates of adjacency pairs and speech acts, to show the characteristic features of topic switches and to describe the structure of the dialogues. The findings referring to deixis and coreference are the results of the analyses of numerous practical examples, but it was also important to take into account the frequency of the phenomena under investigation. As far as the methods applied in the dissertation are concerned, generally it can be stated that each chapter has been prepared in three steps. In the analysis of each topic area the first step was to process the related research literature, this step was followed by the detailed analysis of the corpus in order to determine the frequency of the occurrence of the given phenomenon, and then with the help of characteristic examples taken from the text the comparison of findings was carried out together with formulating the theses related to the given topic.

#### **4. The theses and findings of the research**

**The role of contextual factors in the formulation of the text.** The contextual factors of the dialogue are the most important elements of the communicative medium of the text that has been constructed, thus they can be ranked to the outer domain of the text. The situational context, the context of the action (the actions that take place during the dialogue), the thematic context (the context of the texts), the preliminary knowledge that is necessary for creating and processing of the dialogue, the linguistic interaction between the parties communicating and the linguistic norm that determines the text as a product belong here. The chapter that examines the contextual factors aims at finding differences between everyday spontaneous conversations and planned dramatic dialogues on the basis of the factors

mentioned above. Summarising the factors, the following differences can be identified in the outer domain of the texts on the basis of the corpuses that has been examined:

- The occurrence of complex **space- and time structure** characterises both spontaneous and planned dialogues. There is an important difference, however, namely that the participants of spontaneous dialogues are usually found in the **same physical world**, in the same space and time, while it does not necessarily apply to the real and embedded characters of dramas in each case. Moreover, the space- and time structure of situational contexts in spontaneous conversations is much **more varied** than that of dramas, but it is not marked explicitly in the text of the conversations.
- As far as the **social world** of spontaneous and planned texts is concerned, it is true for both that different kinds of the social deixis are used to mark the relationships between participants. However, in spontaneous texts, as opposed to the embedded characters of dramas, the picture about the **sociological and cultural position** of the other party comes into play in each case.
- It is true for both types of dialogues that their linguistic acts appear together with other, non-linguistic acts, but while in spontaneous conversations **the context of the act** can be deduced from the **texts** of participants, in a drama it can be deduced from the **author's instructions**.
- Frequent, **non-associative topic-switches** are characteristic of the **thematic context** of both spontaneous and planned dialogues. Apart from this, in spontaneous conversations **recurring topics** that are exploited through a series of replicas and later, as well are the most frequent, in the text of a drama **situational topic switches** occur most frequently. In spontaneous conversations the knowledge organised around a **central concept** has the most important role, while in dramatic texts **following the script** is given a more significant role.

**The basic unit of a dialogue is a turn.** This chapter examines the turn as the basic unit of dialogic texts through the analysis of spontaneous and planned conversations. The analysis examines the structural features of the turns on the basis whether they are closed or open and it also takes into account the complexity of dialogues. It also takes into account the typical occurrences of adjacency pairs together with the characteristic features of the embedded sequences and speech acts. On the basis of the findings of the analysis of spontaneous and planned dialogues, the following main differences can be identified:

- As far as the structure of the turns is concerned, in spontaneous texts **one- and two-level** dialogues occur most frequently, while in dramas **two- and three-level** dialogues are the most widespread. In spontaneous texts there were more **open** dialogues, while in dramatic texts the ratio of **open and closed** dialogue-types was equal.
- Examining the sequential organization of dialogue-types, in both cases the dominance of **question/answer** pair sequences was the most characteristic, but in spontaneous conversations the rate of **yes/no** questions was higher, while in dramatic texts there were more **wh-questions**. In dramas the negative answers were more frequent. Their sequential organization was more **varied** than that of spontaneous conversations.
- **Spontaneous** conversations were characterised by a more frequent occurrence of interpolated sequences and sidesequences. The function of **communicative interpolations** was different in the two types of dialogues.
- The topic of the mezzo-level paragraphs in spontaneous conversations was **implicit**, while that of dramatic texts was present in an **explicit** form. The paragraphs in spontaneous conversations usually **did not relate** to the previous and the following

turns, while in the text of the drama this **relationship** usually existed. Spontaneous conversations were generally characterised by the use of **Reported/Indirect Speech**, while in the text of the drama often **narratives in Direct Speech** occurred.

- As far as direct speech acts are concerned, in spontaneous conversations the **preparatory strategy** was more frequent, while in dramatic texts the **suggestory formula** occurred more often.

**The micro-level elements of dialogues and their macro-level implications.** In the structure of dialogic texts the chapter examined two basic micro-level features. One of these phenomena is the deixis, which plays an outstanding role in the formulation of personal relationships on mezzo- and macrolevel, moreover, it also has an important role in the establishment of the network of time- and spatial relationships. These relationships usually cannot be separated from the points of view applied by the speaker and/or recipient, and this way deixis shows a close correlation with the concept of perspective. The first part of the chapter aims at showing perspectives and time- and spatial relationships applied in spontaneous conversations and dramatic dialogues, and in the analyses it lays the emphasis on the analysis of the relationship between the phenomena mentioned above and deixis. The second part of the chapter deals with coreference, another micro-level feature, and it examines conceptually elaborated and schematic modes of appearance together with perspective, text-topic and text-focus. The analyses also provide examples of the points where the two components show a close correlation, and how it can be used in text-typological research as a text-typological variable. From the analysis of the micro-level components, the following can be stated with regard to the difference between spontaneous texts and planned texts:

- The deixis in spontaneous conversations is most often **exoforic by nature**, in dramatic dialogues, however, we can find **endoforic** deixises, as well.
- The most significant difference between the relations of perspective in dramatic dialogues and spontaneous dialogues appeared in the question of the “**subject of awareness**”.
- The most important characteristic of dramatic dialogues is **perspectivisation**, while in spontaneous conversations different forms of **subjectivisation** occurred fairly often.
- Normal conversations more often contained examples of **Direct and free Reported Speech**, while in dramatic texts **Reported (Indirect) Speech** more often occurred.
- In spontaneous conversations verbal inflections were used to indicate possible variations of viewpoints, while in dramatic texts **personal pronouns** served the same purpose.
- Coreference proved to be basically **anaphoric** in both types of dialogues, in their attitude to viewpoint **no significant difference** could be seen between the **two types of dialogues**.
- The most significant difference between dramatic dialogues and spontaneous conversations can be seen in their characteristic means of highlighting **text-focus** and **text-topic**.
- The relationship between **deixis** and **coreference** appeared to be closer in dramatic dialogues.

**The characteristics of spontaneous and planned dialogues.** Summarising the findings of the analyses that have been carried out so far, this chapter tries to give a global description about the most important textual characteristics spontaneous and planned texts. After the description of spontaneous conversations, which is intended to serve as a kind of summary, there comes the description of planned dialogues with a restriction that the conclusions drawn

on the basis of the text cannot be applied generally or categorically. When discussing the two types of dialogues, it is worth pointing out that these categories are gradual as far as their nature is concerned, which means that each characteristic feature should be interpreted as a relative concept. According to this a given characteristic can be valid for a given conversation to a different extent, therefore planned and spontaneous conversations can be placed at different points of an imaginary line. At one end of this line we can find prototypical spontaneous dialogues, while at the other end we will find prototypical planned dialogues, and the given dialogues are situated between the two endpoints according to their extent of planning. According to this viewpoint, the prototypical spontaneous text adjusts to schemes that structure conversations to a minimum extent, and applies as few elements of that scheme as possible (e.g. the greeting or the leading-up topic is missing), in prototypical planned dialogues, however, parties continuously adjust to the given scheme, and continuously apply the rules of conversations (e.g. they generally build up dialogues with a closed structure and they follow the script related to the situation.). Spontaneous and planned texts are characterised by gradual position, not only from the point of view of planning, but other textual features also follow it. As a result of this, the summarising statements related to dialogues should be interpreted in the light of this.

As a result of the analysis, some relative concepts can be identified with the help of which a better description of spontaneous and planned texts can be given. On the basis of the corpus that has been examined the following relative concepts can be identified:

- (1) the occurrence of schemes of conversation
- (2) the complexity of spatial and time structures
- (3) the relationship between linguistic and non-linguistic actions
- (4) the nature and frequency of topic switches
- (5) the extent of deviation from the norm
- (6) the rate of adjacency pairs
- (7) the structural characteristics of turns
- (8) the function on interpolations
- (9) the question of the “subject of awareness”
- (10) the role of deixis and coreference

According to the extent and/or the way these characteristics are implemented, each given dialogue shows a gradual position between the two endpoints of the spontaneous and the planned.

## **5. Summary**

The summarising chapter of the dissertation reflects on the theses that were formulated at the beginning of the research according to the following criteria.

According to the first hypothesis a significant difference was anticipated between spontaneous and dramatic dialogues as far as their planning is concerned. This hypothesis proved to be true since spontaneous dialogues sometimes followed one of the presumable schemes only in an implicit form, while they appeared in the text of the drama much more strongly.

The second hypothesis presumed that there would be several agreements between the contextual factors related to the exterior domain of spontaneous and planned texts due to the similarity of the situations and the relationships among participants. This presupposition mostly proved to be right, since the elements of the situational context showed significant differences in both texts, the intentions and motivations of the linguistic and non-linguistic

acts of the participants, which were carried out simultaneously, were similar and all of them did their best to create and understand texts that were valid in the given situational context. The most significant differences appeared in the following areas: the degree of explication of the information related to the contextual factors, the application of previous knowledge and the extent to which the norms are followed, which can be related to the roles of embedded participants of planned dialogues.

The third statement was referred to the interior structural characteristics of texts, and it presumed that from this point of view spontaneous and planned texts would show significant differences. This hypothesis has only been partly been proved, since several similarities can be found between the structural characteristics of dialogues. Such similarities include the sequential organisation of dialogues, since in both types of texts the rate of question-answer adjacency pairs was the highest. In both types of dialogues we could see examples of two-level open dialogues, interpolations and the application of mezzo-level text-parts, but the application of sidesequences was not common in either corpus. The examination of the structural characteristics of turns showed both similarities and differences: in spontaneous texts one-level dialogues and interpolated sequences were more common, while in dramas even three-level dialogues appeared quite often. The function of interpolations was different in the two types of dialogues, when communicating mezzo-level text-parts characters in spontaneous texts rather used reported/Indirect Speech, while in dramas characters more often applied Direct Speech. From indirect speech acts, in spontaneous conversations the most frequent one was the preparatory strategy, while in the language of dramas the suggestory form was the most frequent.

According to the fourth statement, deixis that belongs to the micro-level components of a text plays a crucial role in creating the perspective of spontaneous and planned dialogues and also in creating spatial and time-relationships, as well. The analyses in both text-corpora proved the relationship between deixis and perspective and also the relationship between deixis and spatial and time-relationships, and these analyses have proved the statement in the second part of the hypothesis, according to which certain linguistic tools of the deixis have different functions in spontaneous and planned texts, since in spontaneous conversations verbal inflections are used most often to indicate possible variations of the perspective, while in dramatic texts personal pronouns serve the same purpose. Apart from these, they have also pointed out the main differences between the deictic references in the two texts: the exo- and endophoric nature of the deixis, the question of the “subject of awareness”, the subjectivisation and perspectivisation and also to the application of Direct Speech, free Reported Speech and Indirect Speech.

The fifth hypothesis stated that the coreference-relationships of spontaneous conversations would be characterised by the frequency of pronominal anaphors that is expressed by a schematic concept. This hypothesis proved to be true completely, this hypothesis has been complemented on one hand by the fact that the dominance of pronominal anaphors was characteristic of dramatic dialogues, as well, not only of spontaneous conversations, and on the other hand by the fact that the explicit deixis and coreference are in close contact with each other in dramatic texts.

According to the sixth hypothesis there are several peculiarities in the text of drama that are due to conscious planning and their purpose is to imitate characteristics of authentic speech in the dialogues of the characters in the drama. The examples taken from the text of the drama have proved even more that it has been expected that the author applies a wide range of linguistic tools in the conscious planning of dialogues in order to create a harmony among the situation, the text and the style. These linguistic tools are generally less characteristic of fictional texts, while in everyday conversations they are essential. Such tools are the application of topicalized structures, error corrections, interpolations, interpolated

sequences and discourse markers and also the syntactically incomplete construction, which is generally a characteristic of spontaneous texts.

According to the seventh hypothesis, which is a kind of summarising hypothesis, during the analysis of spontaneous family conversations and planned dramatic dialogues several differences are anticipated that might help to differentiate between spontaneous and planned texts. The criteria that have been formulated as a result of the analyses can be used only as relative concepts when differentiating texts. Some of them (e.g. the relationship between verbal and non-verbal actions, the structural characteristics of turns, the function of interpolations, the “subject of awareness” or the nature of deictic references) seem to be applicable in practice as a text-typological variable, but in order to apply them text-typological research and further corpus-based analyses are necessary.

The second part of the summary also states that although more research seems to be necessary to get a complete textual description of dialogues, in the fields of definiteness, concord, and the theme of distribution of the text-topic and text-focus, the findings of the dissertation can be applied well in text-typological and stylistic research that has a cognitive focus.

## **6. Publications on the topic of the dissertation**

### **Books, chapters, monographs:**

- 2007. Bevezetés a pragmatikába. In: Sándor Csilla (szerk.): *Tanári Kincsestár—Magyar Nyelv*. Raabe Kiadó, Bp. 2007. 25 old.
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### **Articles in learned journals:**

2008. Konverzációelemezés és anyanyelvtanítás I-II. *Anyanyelv-pedagógia*. 1. évf. 2-3. sz. 25 old. <http://www.anyanyelv-pedagogia.hu/cikkek.php?id=60>
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