# Introduction: The simple and the complex

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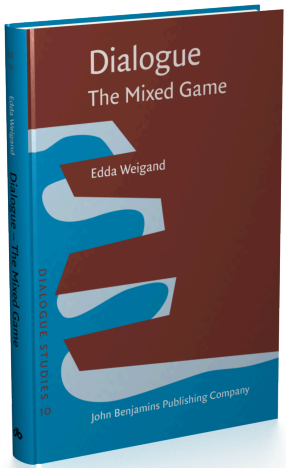


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INTRODUCTION

# The simple and the complex

Looking back at the beginnings of the 20th century, the first century of modern linguistics, we recognize that we have made some progress in addressing and understanding our object-of-study 'language'. In the course of the last century, language has turned out to be an extremely elusive object which has lost its clearly delimited structure as a sign system and has gone on to occupy adjacent areas of related disciplines. The theory of dialogic action games or the Mixed Game Model (MGM) made a fresh start by *going to the heart of language* and coming to terms with it as dialogue.

De Saussure (1916) was well aware of this issue. He knew that the linguist's real object is 'la parole'. Nevertheless he started from the simple, from 'la langue', because his time was not yet prepared to address the complex. He therefore took the reductive path of *abstraction* and created the artificial concept of language as a *sign system* which was situated somewhere 'in the underground', underlying 'la parole'. Abstraction from 'la parole' to 'la langue' was so complete that nothing was left of 'la parole' at the level of 'la langue'. Two totally different objects which had nothing in common were established. Their correlation was simply a thesis. Linguists did not seem to be worried by this step towards total abstraction; de Saussure's thesis became the *dogma of modern linguistics* which attracted above all 'searchers after hidden laws' (Searle 1972).

In the following period Chomsky (e.g., 1965) confirmed de Saussure's view of rule-governed abstraction but changed the structuralist static concept of 'la langue' into the generative dynamic concept of 'competence'. Even a few decades ago, it seemed impossible to express doubts about the dogma of language as a sign system. Only a few voices dared to question this concept of language without, however, offering workable alternative views (e.g., Baker & Hacker 1984, Harris 1981). Even in our times, linguists resist abandoning the construct of a sign system and tend to arrive at a pragmatic view of language use by simply adding further parameters of the speech situation to the sign system.

But structuralism not only proposed the methodology of abstraction; precisely the opposite was proclaimed as well, namely a rejection of any abstraction by totally ignoring the level of meaning. American structuralists very early on attempted to study language in a rigorously empirical way by recording and analysing Indian languages exclusively by means of formal criteria. In recent decades

this path has experienced a fresh revival through approaches which hypostasize the authentic oral text. Although empiricists proclaim that they are addressing 'real' language, what they are in fact addressing is only the tip of the iceberg, the part which is observable at the surface level. This part is however not independently accessible but determined in its performance by the part below the surface. Simple observation yields nothing. Observation has to be guided by reflection, by questions which go beyond what can be perceived, i.e. by goal-directed or reflective questions which arise from the complex unity of meaning and expression. The 'New Science' starts from the natural object, living beings, and tries to describe their behaviour and actions by means of goal-directed observation. According to Feynman (2001: 173), "making observations" must not omit "the vital factor of judgment about what to observe and what to pay attention to".

Performance is not a blind empirical process but means performance of human action and behaviour. The empiricists' procedure of scrutinizing the authentic text is at its core a procedure of avoiding the complex. In their search for empirical 'data' they ignore the fact that 'data' can only be identified by reference to meaning (Weigand 2004a). De Saussure was well aware of this crucial point, from the very outset, when he pointed out that there is *no empirical evidence as such*, that the 'signifiant' needs the 'signifié' in order to count as 'signifiant'. The same insight was again highlighted by Chomsky (1959) in his famous review article on Skinner.

Language cannot be grasped either by empiricists dwelling on arbitrary changes at the surface level nor by 'searchers after hidden laws' trying to impose rules on the part of the iceberg below the surface of the water. Both approaches tear language apart. If we try to grasp language as a natural object, not restricted by methodological exigencies, it is comprehensible neither as the empirically observable part nor as the hidden part below. The issue is not only how to bring both approaches together; the issue is even more complicated. There is no object 'language' as such in performance; there is only the human *ability of speaking* which however cannot be separated from other abilities: speaking is integrated with thinking and with perceiving (Weigand 2009, 2010b).

Everything human beings do is dependent on their abilities, which are capabilities and restrictions as well. They filter what enters our minds, be it by perception or cognition, and cannot be switched off. For human beings, truth is inevitably truth in the eye of the observer. If we start from the premise that the world is only recognizable as far as human abilities can reach, we have to conclude that everything, in the end, depends on human nature and the conditions of the environment in which human beings live. The question of interest is no longer whether language is genetically determined, as the generativists proclaim, nor whether culture makes man, as empiricists assert. The question is to what extent biology

and culture interact. As Wilson (2004: 18f.) emphasizes, "each person is molded by an interaction of his environment, especially his cultural environment, with the genes that affect social behaviour". Sociobiology becomes the basis for any theory of human behaviour (Wilson 1975, Lumsden & Wilson 2005).

Human beings have a double nature: they are individuals and social beings at the same time. Recent neurological experiments on mirror neurons can be interpreted as confirming human beings' double nature as well as the interaction of their abilities (Rizzolatti & Arbib 1998, Weigand 2002a, Iacoboni 2008). Being oriented towards our own self we are at the same time oriented towards the other; perceiving the action of our fellow being and intending the same action are somehow interconnected. As social individuals we need abilities, such as speech, to address the other human being. The concept of language as a system of its own no longer makes sense but has to be redesigned as a concept of *language as dialogue* which is based on human nature and on the inherent integration of speech and other human abilities in dialogic interaction. 'Language as dialogue' is not restricted to the dialogic form but means the dialogic function or orientation, in principle, of any language use.

This change from the artificial simple to the natural complex poses the question of how to address complexity in theory. In any case it requires a *change in theorizing* from reductionism to holism, from division and addition of separate parts to interaction of integrated components (cf. also Simon 1962). Descartes' dualism of body and mind and his view of reason and emotion as separate areas are no longer tenable. Any human ability is an 'embodied' ability. There is no mind or any other ability without the brain. The new way of theorizing must take precautions against a procedure which starts with methodology as is usual in traditional theorizing. Martinet (1975) called it a fundamental *methodological fallacy* to cut the object-of-study so that it fits methodology. Instead of distorting the natural object to make it conform with methodological restrictions, a holistic approach starts from the attempt to achieve a first understanding of the complex whole by reflective observation and then derives methodology from it. There is in principle no other way of addressing the complex than by starting from the complex, as Austin (1962: 147) already told us when emphasizing that 'the total speech act in the total speech situation is the only actual phenomenon which, in the last resort, we are engaged in elucidating'. *For any part of life, there is no simple at the beginning*. Even the ostensibly simple units of mirror neurons reveal themselves to be complex multi-dimensional units, not only as cell tissue but as tissue which works by firing (Weigand 2002a).

The notion of language as determined by the sociobiology of human behaviour inevitably cuts across disciplinary boundaries, not only within the humanities. Rethinking language also means *rethinking academic boundaries*. Even if in

a holistic approach linguistics can no longer be exclusively devoted to the study of verbal means of communication, language still remains the central focus. As a discipline, linguistics needs to specify its *scientific interest* in order to achieve a clear profile which is to some extent distinct from the profile of other disciplines that also deal with language, e.g., psychology or sociology. In my view, the central linguistic interest is directed at describing and explaining how human beings succeed in coming to an understanding in human affairs. Linguistics in this sense is not a discipline restricted to logical or rule-governed systems nor to the analysis of authentic texts but derives its principles from human beings' needs and abilities (Weigand 2000a, 2002b). As a *humanized linguistics* it belongs to the circle of disciplines that jointly contribute to the study of humankind. Human abilities, in the end, are devices for survival and reproduction, and language is just one of them (cf. Wilson 2004: 2). Their very nature and interaction emerges on the basis of a view that considers the different disciplines from the natural and social sciences to the humanities as interrelated by consilience or the unity of knowledge (Wilson 1999).

The complexity of life can never be grasped with absolute certainty. Western thinking, which has been based on a belief in certainty since antiquity, faces 'the end of certainty' not only in physics (Prigogine 1994, 1997; Toulmin 2001). The big question is how to deal with uncertainty in theory. More than half a century ago, physics showed the way in the change from classical physics to modern physics or quantum physics, from fixed rules to probabilities. Economics settled the issue in the move from rational economics to economics based on practical reasoning (Simon 1962, Kahneman & Tversky 2000). The humanities face the same challenge. 'Living with uncertainty' requires adapting to ever-changing conditions. Not only inferences but also rules of behaviour are applied with a certain probability. There is no absolute benchmark, performance never means perfect performance.

In a world of change and chance human beings show extraordinary abilities created by the evolutionary principle of survival of the fittest: they are not the victims of chaos but are able to come to grips with the complex, 'with whatever life throws at them' (Sampson 2005: 193). I call this extraordinary ability *competence-in-performance*. It is based on the integration and interaction of human abilities; the use of language is an integrated component of it.

From modern physics and other disciplines we can learn that 'theory' cannot be restricted to rules and order abstracted from chaos outside of 'theory'. If it is meant to be of any significance to human beings' lives, it has to tackle the interaction of order and chance (Daneš 1995). This is precisely what human beings are able to do: as complex adaptive and creative systems they orientate themselves in ever-changing surroundings by mediating between order and disorder, between general regularities and individual particularities (Gell-Mann 1994).

They know that 'anything goes' could be possible in performance, but they know, too, it would be possible only for a short while. Human beings first try to structure the complex according to rules but are, from the very outset, prepared to go beyond rules and to include chance. They act according to *principles of probability*. In a theory that aims to describe and explain how human beings proceed in dialogic interaction, principles of probability are the methodological basis. A theory which aims to come to terms with a phenomenon of life has to come to grips with open-endedness and can no longer be restricted to a closed system of rules. Simon (1962) made an interesting proposal about 'the architecture of complexity' in general which can also be related to the complexity of the mixed game and its core concept of competence-in-performance. Complexity does not result from the division and addition of parts, as for instance in hierarchies of generative tree structures, but from differentiating the complex whole in a hierarchy of *derived* subsystems. The complex whole is more than the sum of all the interactions among the subsystems.

The theory of competence-in-performance is not a disguised theory of competence underlying performance. Traditional theorizing separated the level of competence from the level of performance and faced the problem of bridging the gap. There is however by definition no bridge between the level of rule-governed competence and the level of 'anything goes' in performance. The problem turns out to be a methodological pseudo-problem. The gap is bridged in human beings' minds.

Theorizing needs to be *justified*. To my mind, clear-cut arguments in theorizing about human abilities can be drawn from assumptions about human nature and the evolution of the species. Fortunately, our assumptions can nowadays rely on experimental proofs in biology and neurology (Wilson 2004, Damasio 2000, Lumsden & Wilson 2005). Not only the integration of human abilities but also the co-evolutionary interaction of the human genotype and culture can now be taken for granted. The well-known debate on 'the language instinct' turns out to be a speculative game played at the extremes (Weigand 2007a). Culture is not only a phenomenon which can be perceived in the external world, e.g., in certain customs. On the contrary, human beings are, to some extent, cultural beings. We need to know other cultures and languages in order to recognize the pecularities of our mother tongue. Linguistics is thus at its core a comparative discipline.

A theory of the complex has first and foremost to address two basic questions: how can we grasp or *circumscribe the whole*, and how can we unlock it or what is the analytic *key concept*. The whole must comprise any variable which influences the phenomenon under analysis. For a theory of human competence-in-performance the minimal autonomous unit in which human beings can come to an understanding is the dialogic action game or the mixed game.

In the first century of modern linguistics, linguists continually changed their *unit of analysis*, from the smallest possible one, the phoneme or more precisely the distinctive feature, to the morpheme and to the sentence. By the pragmatic turn the limit of the sentence was crossed in two directions: linearly, from one sentence to the sequence of sentences or text, and vertically, by changing the sentence into the utterance and opening up the underlying level of speech acts. The following period moved from the monologic unit of the single speech act to the two-part dialogic sequence of an initiative speech act and its reaction. However, not even the sequence of action and reaction can count as the minimal autonomous unit of dialogic interaction. The level of action is not an autonomous level but points to human beings who carry out actions and reactions at the centre of the action game. Human beings are dependent on their abilities, their personal life story and on the cultural surroundings in which they live. We thus arrive at the cultural unit of the mixed game as the minimal autonomous unit in a theory of human competence-in-performance.

The other question of the *key concept* that gives us access to the whole goes to the heart of human action and behaviour. The issue is: what is the driving force for the human species to engage in dialogic action? This is not an issue of actual games but the principal general issue. In order to find an answer we have to focus our attention on human nature. Due to human beings' double nature as social individuals they are guided by an innate instinct of self-assertion and at the same time by the need to be accepted by other human beings. The self is always dialogically oriented towards the other self. Both needs are interrelated, and they are crucial for the survival and reproduction of the species. It is the needs and purposes of human beings as social individuals which give us the key to opening up the complex.

Addressing the mixed game in a holistic theory means considering the complex whole as a hierarchy of interacting subsystems, among them human abilities such as speech, perception and thought. The way they interact can be thought of as a balanced system of rules, conventions, inferences and chance which works on the basis of probabilities. Principles of probability must not be derogatorily viewed as principles of ignorance; on the contrary, they represent powerful techniques for effectively addressing ever-changing conditions of performance. The results and insights gained within rule-restricted models are not totally wasted; but they do need to be basically re-interpreted within a holistic approach.

When I first delineated my view of 'language as dialogue' more than two decades ago, I was convinced that developing a theory has to start from theoretical reflections and that a theory, in principle, has to be rule-governed. Weigand (1989a) thus represents a theory of communicative competence. Since then I have continually

been confronted with examples which a rule-governed model is unable to describe and with arguments which go beyond a classical theory of competence. I therefore changed sides and opened up the theory of well-formed dialogues towards a theory of competence-in-performance in the second edition (Weigand 2003a). As it was a second edition, I could not go directly to the heart of the new object competence-in-performance but was, to a great extent, restricted to the outline of the first edition. It is therefore time to make a completely fresh start.

Before starting a new theory, rethinking theory is needed. *Part I* of the book therefore deals with two objectives: stocktaking and addressing the turning point. Stocktaking requires a critical overview of the state of the art. The turning point becomes apparent when the necessity of going beyond the limits of reductive approaches is recognized. We are on the way to breaking the shackles of coded patterns and to addressing human action and behaviour from its origins in human nature. In order to pave the ground for a new beginning it is necessary to unmask fashionable, specious assumptions and techniques and to demonstrate the limits of orthodox approaches.

The reader might miss a preliminary chapter in which the terms are defined. On the one hand, it cannot be the goal of the volume to give an overview of the multiple terms as they are used in the literature. Dialogue analysis does not represent a unified model but comprehends various approaches with differing terms and meanings. On the other hand, the model of the dialogic action game and its terms are developed in the volume step by step while going through the complex, from premises to methods, and indicating links back and forth. It would be counterproductive to sum up the results in advance. The terms are explained and defined when they are needed for argumentation. The definitions might also be extended later on. The reader is referred to the index which indicates the essential occurrences of a term and marks off the crucial ones.

The Theory of Dialogic Action Games or the Mixed Game Model (MGM) is expounded in *Part II*. Two issues are focused on: premises about the object, and the methodology to be derived from them. Premises about the object 'competence-in-performance' start from preconditions of human nature and include cultural influences and environmental conditions. The methodology consists of principles of probability, constitutive, regulative and executive.

*Constitutive principles* describe the fundamentals of action, dialogue and coherence. The *Action Principle* defines action as the correlation between communicative purposes and means. The *Dialogic Principle proper* describes communication as dialogic action based on action and reaction. The single speech act thus turns out to be a dialogically oriented speech act. The *Coherence Principle* focuses on how the different communicative means interact in producing the utterance.

Coherence can no longer be restricted to textual phenomena but is established in the minds of the interlocutors.

*Regulative principles* mediate between different human abilities and interests. They are especially crucial in controlling the double interests of human beings, their self-interest and the interest in being respected in the community, and in mediating between reason and emotion. Principles of politeness as well as principles of emotion are culturally dependent rhetorical principles which tell the interlocutors how to behave according to cultural conventions.

*Executive principles* are sequencing principles. They are not only dependent on general action conditions and on institutional order but also include deliberate strategies which are applied in the interests of individuals and institutions.

*Part III* of the book develops a *taxonomy of minimal games* on the basis of a dialogic speech act theory. According to the Dialogic Principle proper, speech acts are defined as dialogically oriented parts of the minimal sequence of action and reaction. The taxonomy starts from the general purpose of dialogic interaction and derives basic minimal games and subtypes by exclusively functional criteria.

*Part IV* focuses on the 'architecture of complex games'. Basic principles for a *typology of complex games* are discussed. As a result the distinction is made between extended minimal games, i.e. extended one-phase games, and multi-phase games. Extended one-phase games open up minimal games by introducing sequences of clarifying and of negotiating divergent views. They can also come out of problems of understanding, including misunderstanding and non-understanding. Multi-phase games pose the complex mental challenge of structuring 'dialogue in the stream of life'. In addition, as the Mixed Game Model intends to be a comprehensive unitary theory for all types of dialogic action games, literary action games are included and described as a special type of complex games.

The last chapter 'Summary and Outlook' sums up the main steps and concepts of the MGM and draws conclusions for an *understanding of the species*.