

## 2. Complex human affairs

 <https://doi.org/10.1075/ds.10.17ch2>

 Available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license.

Pages 229–250 of

**Dialogue - The Mixed Game**

**Edda Weigand**

[*Dialogue Studies*, 10] 2010. xii, 304 pp.

© John Benjamins Publishing Company

This electronic file may not be altered in any way. For any reuse of this material, beyond the permissions granted by the Open Access license, written permission should be obtained from the publishers or through the Copyright Clearance Center (for USA: [www.copyright.com](http://www.copyright.com)).

For further information, please contact [rights@benjamins.nl](mailto:rights@benjamins.nl) or consult our website at [benjamins.com/rights](http://benjamins.com/rights)



## Complex human affairs

### Dialogue in the stream of life

Whereas *one-phase games* are to some extent within our grasp as they can be directly traced back to *speech act functions*, for *multi-phase games* the situation is different: we are confronted with complex purposes related to complex states of affairs, i.e. with a *network of subcomplexes* which needs to be elaborated. Such multi-phase games confront us with a twofold challenge: to analyse the complex purpose, i.e. to clarify what is at stake, for instance, in ‘planning’, and to clarify how to proceed in putting the subpurposes in linear order.

#### 2.1 The complex whole

The challenge of the real complex, to my mind, can be rendered as the challenge of games we are involved in, knowing that we have to settle them in conditions of uncertainty with no predesigned path staring us in the face. These are games that will take time and will have to be accessed by multiple endeavours, in linear or parallel order, but the issue of what individual endeavours are to be made and in what order has not at all been predetermined. Such games are mostly called by empty names, for instance, “meetings” or “discussions”, and even the points on the agenda, for instance, “The company’s progress” or “Defending the results”, do not precisely indicate what is at stake. These games touch upon the fundamental issue of dialogue analysis which has up to now only been metaphorically addressed by ‘dialogue in the stream of life’ (Wittgenstein 1981[1967]). In everyday as well as in institutional life, we are always confronted with the complex, which has no independent structure of its own but waits to be structured according to our needs.

In linguistics this field of complex games is still elusive. There are few reliable guidelines. That is not surprising because the complex cannot be addressed from within well-guarded borders of disciplines. According to Lumsden and Wilson (2005: xIvi), it needs “intensified dialogue among the arts, humanities, and sciences of human nature. [...] A substantive familiarity with science, including especially evolutionary science, is once again *de rigueur* for respectable philosophy of mind.” Respectable philosophy is a philosophy on the basis of *consilience*,

i.e. a philosophy which “cuts through the levels of organization from society to mind and brain” (Wilson 1999:205). Encouraging results have been achieved in the field of ‘the co-evolutionary process of genes, mind, and culture’ (e.g., Lumsden/Wilson 2005, Wilson 1978), and also by other approaches that cross disciplinary boundaries, e.g., Gell-Mann (1994), Damasio (2000), Prigogine (1997), Ramachandran (2003) or Simon (1983). We might join Lumsden and Wilson (2005:xIvi) in being optimistic: We “know something is happening. The synthesis, indisputably, is under way”. We have to focus on ‘synthesis’. It is beside the point to separate language and thought as Levinson (2003: 43) does and even to maintain: “The reason we have a developed vocabulary (instead of the limited repertoire of other animals) is that we have found it helps us to *think*”. Thought does not need the “food” of vocabulary. Words or more precisely the faculty of speaking is needed for dialogic interaction.

The starting point for any advance in the complex requires us *to circumscribe the complex*. In accordance with the premises of the MGM, we grasp the complex as the dialogic action game which is played by human beings on the basis of their *competence-in-performance*, i.e. their ability to come “to terms with whatever life throws at us” (Sampson 2005:193). There is no complex in front of us, we are at the centre of the complex and shape it according to our abilities. To my mind, that is what Wilson (1975) called “the new synthesis”, which, in my terms, means the synthesis of human nature, environment and culture. It is the *game of life* or the synthesis of innumerable interacting variables put to action and interpreted by human beings. The challenge is to open up this complex and to deduce subcomplexes step by step not by abstraction but by distributing the load of the whole and *differentiating* the components. Human beings are, on the one hand, able to grasp the complex in their minds but, on the other hand, their actions need to *proceed linearly*. Consequently, at the bottom of the hierarchy, the complex subcomplexes must be ordered as subsequent steps to be passed through in actual dialogue.

We are thus confronted with the issue of structuring the complex as a hierarchy of interacting complex subsystems, a holistic hierarchy which is more than the sum of all the interactions. We can hope to cope with this issue only under the condition that the whole and its subsystems are “nearly decomposable” (Simon 1962); otherwise we would be exposed to chaos.

The *condition of near-decomposability* is met by the general characteristics of action, namely that it is decomposable as an action function or purpose related to a state of affairs:  $F(p)$ . As human beings distinguish between being and appearing, the action function can again be divided into what is openly presented, the communicative purpose  $F$ , and what is hidden behind, the concealed interest which can even be the opposite to the purpose. In any case, the condition of near-decomposability is constitutive not only for individual speech acts or minimal

games but for complex games as well, even for the challenge of life which we may grasp with Sampson's words as 'COMING TO TERMS WITH (whatever life throws at us)'. Other essential features of what near-decomposability might mean are contributed by the necessity of a '*division of labour*' in growing societies which is achieved by human beings' abilities of *focusing attention* and *specializing* in different areas. We can therefore decompose the complex whole as a complex of interacting subsystems:

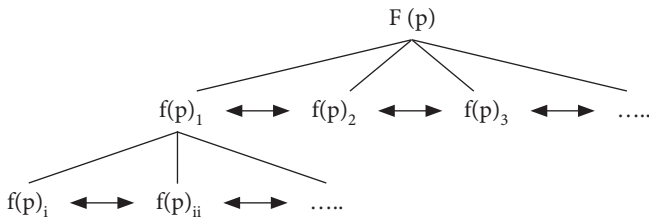


Figure 68. Decomposing the complex whole

For analytic purposes the structure is oriented towards what is presented. Interests are considered as intervening forces in the background.

To give an *example*: We can assume a complex subsystem or an area of specialized action called 'business'. The complex goal of any company will be to effectively run the company: [EFFECTIVELY RUN (the company)]. This complex subsystem consists of various subcomplexes, e.g., production and marketing, which by their effective interaction contribute to the functioning of the whole.

In its essentials, the procedure of deriving subcomplexes is comparable to the issue of deriving individual speech acts from the general purpose of communication (Part III). Superficially, it seems to be *some sort of 'tree-structuring'* (Simon 1962, Sampson 2005) but in essence it is totally different from what generative grammar has defined as tree-structure. Generative tree-structuring does not start from complex performance but from an artificial symbol *S* which is formally *divided into parts* by the tree. Tree-structuring the complex, by contrast, starts from a natural phenomenon which is structured by distributing its meaning load among interacting subcomplexes. I therefore prefer the terms '*specialization*' or '*differentiation*' because the whole is differentiated not divided into parts. A generative tree consists of parts, and all the parts add up to the whole. The complex whole however is not the result of the addition of parts. Any subcomplex is again complex and internally connected with the whole. The criteria used to arrive at subcomplexes are functional features of the whole which become more specific, unfolded step by step. In the case of speech act types, the starting point is the general purpose of dialogue, namely coming to an understanding, projected to the minimal unit where understanding can be achieved. From the complex purpose

at the top all criteria can be derived by which the concrete action types at the bottom are distinguished. In the case of complex dialogues, it is the ‘game of life’ we have to start from, not life as such but the game to be played by any individual in various human affairs as a *mix of interests, needs and purposes*.

Unfolding or differentiating the complex means decomposing the complex into subcomplexes step by step by specialization, i.e. *creating a hierarchical structure*, not simply by listing components. In performance human beings are confronted with the outcome of this process at the bottom, i.e. with concrete steps in linear order, which they are going to carry out or have to interpret in specific action games. Their technique is primarily the practitioners’ technique of coming to terms with a concrete event at a concrete spot in the linear time sequence of actions. They tentatively proceed by adaptation, i.e. by using regularities as far as they go and being prepared to change direction if necessary. Tentatively proceeding is not proceeding by trial and error but by taking decisions on the basis of deliberately *evaluating probabilities*.

The game of life as a complex mixed game is based on human beings’ abilities and needs, i.e. in the end on their basic mental states of *belief and desire*. We want to come to an understanding with our fellow beings about what we hold to be true of the world and about what we want to happen. Beliefs and desires are the basis not only for individual actions but as well for complex actions in human affairs. Desire is directed to practical action and to knowledge as well. We are by nature curious to know what is at stake. Exploring what is at stake represents to some degree a precondition for our beliefs and desires. Another precondition for human beings’ living together as social individuals refers to a certain degree of mutual reliability. Very interestingly, Wilson (1999: 245) lists “reliance on long-term social contracts” among the “most distinctive qualities of the human species”. The desire for intersubjective validity could be satisfied by common acceptance in the early days of the human community; in modern societies in most cases a legal basis is needed.

*the game of life*

as a mix of belief and desire

for carrying out practical action

for attaining knowledge

for establishing intersubjective validity

**Figure 69.** The mixed game of life

From the very beginning, the *dynamics of evaluating and deciding* becomes a crucial feature of the game of life, as human action is not a programmed response, not even in very similar situations, but depends on intention, choice and decision (see Lumsden & Wilson 2005: xxxix).

## 2.2 Decomposing the whole by specialization: The emergence of institutions

Having circumscribed the complex whole as a hierarchy of interacting subcomplexes we are now confronted with the issue of identifying these complex subsystems. To my mind, we can orient ourselves towards a basic distinction which developed out of the necessity of division of labour in growing communities (Part II 1.2.). *Division of labour* meant specialized labour or area-specific action complexes which needed some organization within the working group. Institutions were about to develop.

In the growing human community the pending labour had to be divided among various groups which can be considered as *precursors* of what we nowadays call *institutions*. They had to take care of, for instance, the basic activities of producing certain goods, of exchanging these goods with other goods produced by other groups, of having a means with the status function of money for changing goods, of instructing others in learned skills and techniques, of caring for health problems, etc. When the individual groups increased in terms of the number of their members and when different groups for the same specific purpose also emerged, they needed a solid *organizational structure* which could no longer only bear on collective acceptance but had to be sustained *by law*. Diverging interests and conflicts could no longer be informally settled. There had to be those who are entitled to decide and those who are committed to carrying out the decisions. *Hierarchies in rights and duties* were set up and backed by sanctions. This step of creating organizational hierarchies can be considered a decisive step in creating an institution insofar as it includes a shift from function by virtue of physics and natural abilities to *function by virtue of status* (cf. Searle 1999:125). According to Searle (1995:228), it is the capacity to make something symbolize which creates institutions. Whereas in primitive societies certain persons may have a specific status or reputation, for instance, as a witchdoctor, without any legal basis, for modern societies status functions need to be backed by a specific organizational structure on a legal basis.

Institutions thus derive from basic needs and purposes of the species by introducing organizational structures which include the power of status functions. What is important for dialogic interaction is the fact that status functions have direct consequences for dialogic actions insofar as they include the right to decide over and above arguments and the possibility of exerting sanctions. Truth is no longer a matter of arguments but becomes a matter of *power*.

It is thus the increasing complexity of growing communities and the diversity of labour which necessitates specialization and the establishment of *institutions as legally based organizations for specific purposes*. For actions in everyday life,

such as planning a journey, we can rely on experience and practical knowledge, for actions in institutions, for instance, planning the future course of a company, we need highly specialized expert knowledge of the area which can only be marginally terminological knowledge. It is thus not only status functions but also the *difference in knowledge* which distinguishes games in everyday life from games in institutions. The specific profile of institutional actions mostly results from specific institutional affairs to which these actions are related.

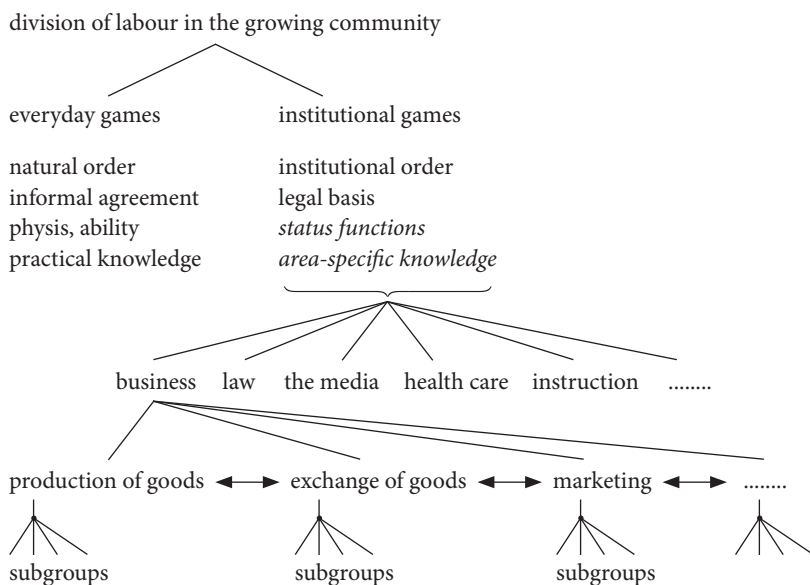


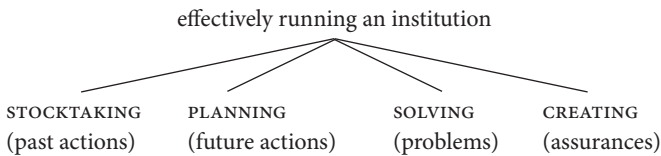
Figure 70. The emergence of institutions

### 2.3 Decomposing the subcomplexes: Towards a linear order

Going down in the hierarchy we approach the difficult issue of distinguishing the components which by their interactions constitute the subcomplexes. These interactions can *run parallel* in different departments, for instance, business departments of marketing, research, the laboratory in the pharmaceutical industry; in the end however any dialogic interaction proceeds *in linear order* as a sequence of actions in time.

To my mind, there are a few *basic action complexes* any institution is confronted with, among them STOCKTAKING, PLANNING, PROBLEM SOLVING and CREATING RELIANCE. In general, STOCKTAKING refers to a sequence of events in the past by reporting and evaluating what happened. PLANNING, as a consequence, refers

to a sequence of actions in the future by announcing and evaluating what is to be done in order to achieve a predesigned goal in limited time. **PROBLEM SOLVING** starts from an uncomfortable situation regarding which first has to be clarified what is at stake before proposals can be made for solving the problem. Finally, **CREATING ASSURANCES** and intersubjective validity by commitments is a necessary step for reliable negotiations in any institution.



**Figure 71.** Basic action complexes

These four complexes of action roughly correspond to the basic types of minimal games, representative, directive, explorative and declarative. They are however not exclusively correlated with one speech act type, for instance, stocktaking with representative sequences. Stocktaking not only means making claims to truth but includes other supportive actions as well, for instance, explorative ones. In the end, stocktaking aims at knowing the position already achieved or at evaluating the state of affairs at a certain time. The other complex actions are also not restricted to one action type. Planning means deciding the future course of action which necessitates determining the goal and evaluating possible alternatives for achieving it, and problem solving means getting to know what is at stake and settling inconveniences.

There are, of course, other subcomplexes of action, for instance, **INSTRUCTING**, **CONSULTING** and **MOTIVATING**, which are subordinated or, at least, related to the basic four. **CONSULTING** aims at evaluating alternatives of action and putting forth a suitable one; it can thus support interactions of planning. **MOTIVATING** aims at inducing volition to act and can also be regarded as part of a planning process; the same is true of **INSTRUCTING**.

I classified these subcomplexes using expressions from ordinary language such as *to plan* or *to solve problems* which are only rough-and-ready terms. What the actions mean is different from how expressions are used. How the complex action of 'effectively planning the future course of a company' can be broken down into constitutive actions does not result from a semantic analysis of how the verb *to plan* is used. It is rather the cognitive challenge of decomposing the complex down to the level where the components have to be brought into a linear order.

Let us make a first step in this direction by decomposing, for instance, the complex of stocktaking. **STOCKTAKING** will in any case comprehend a sequence of

reporting speech acts: REPORT (state of affairs). Reporting comes about by a sequence of CONSTATIVE speech acts which refer to actions, events, or situations in the past. Those propositional states of affairs can be further differentiated with respect to different areas the reported object refers to. Stocktaking however is not yet done by just reporting; it includes EVALUATING the results, mostly by comparing them with the results in other areas or by drawing conclusions to future consequences. Those speech acts are no longer constative acts; they include a decision based on some truth which is not open to our eyes but ASSERTED or concluded. We can thus roughly decompose STOCKTAKING as a sequence of REPORTING and EVALUATING:

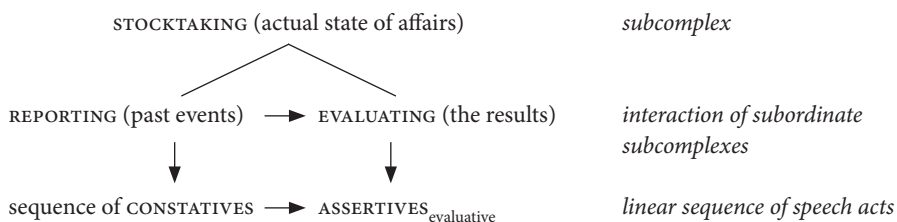


Figure 72. Decomposing stocktaking

In our analysis of an authentic business meeting below we will reconsider and complete this issue of decomposing STOCKTAKING.

## 2.4 From purposes to communicative means: Rhetoric as an inherent part

Having determined *what* actions are to be carried out and in what order, the final step of analysis is directed towards the issue of *how* they are to be carried out. This is the step where the *communicative means* are at stake. As there are always alternative means of communication, it is again a step of choice and decision. The communicative means and strategies to be taken strongly depend on cultural conventions and on the institution's purposes and interests (cf. Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 1998). In an administrative institution they will be different from those in a competitive institution like business. Moreover, every institution has to decide upon its individual '*institutional culture*'. The decision about a more socially and team-oriented culture or a more authoritarian one will strongly influence the selection of the means and strategies to be used. In the end the selection will be directed towards effective, successful action. *Rhetoric* becomes a very important and deliberately exercised part of institutional action (Part II 2.1.2).

Rhetoric or effective language use in institutions is, to a great extent, determined by underlying strategies of *cooperation* versus *confrontation* which do not coincide with strategies among members of the institution versus strategies

towards other institutions. Cooperation relates to the common interest of an organization and may include confrontation at lower levels. The institution as a *we*-organization represents an ingroup which not only has to maintain its position in relation to rival outgroups, *the others*, but also sometimes to settle internal diverging interests among *we*-members (cf. Weigand 2006c). Because of such underlying strategies, organizations mostly have a double face, one that is presented with purposes openly expressed and one behind it, the 'real' face, with interests in striving for success which are not made public in our competitive society. The empirical surface, i.e. the institution's appearance in performance or practice, is therefore not a direct guide to the underlying purposes and interests.

Rhetoric however cannot be restricted to the selection of communicative means and strategies. Rhetoric includes both the choice of *how* and of *what* is to be said, for instance, of what *arguments* can be considered useful for strengthening specific positions. The choice is dependent on evaluative criteria and therefore, in the end, on some ideology. Rhetorical questions are always questions of how action could be optimized. Optimizing performance cannot simply start from practice but needs *benchmarks* which are not directly evidenced in authentic texts. They presuppose reflection on how the whole is to be decomposed and put to action.

## 2.5 Rethinking the empiricist position

At this point, I think, we should take up the issue of the *authentic text* once again and discuss its role in the complex whole. The empiricist postulate that we have to start from what is called 'reality' and to transcribe any empirically noticeable element whatsoever, unfortunately seems to claim some quasi-dogmatic status. Yet, what does 'reality' mean? To my mind, the postulated procedure of first recording and meticulously transcribing what has been said and possibly perceived, and will never be said and perceived again in this way, contrasts strikingly with what we as interlocutors do in 'real' performance.

First, there is the principal problem that empiricists speak of *data* which are not at all data but arbitrary elements listed without knowing if they are relevant. Elements become data only if we can attribute some meaning to them. On the other hand, the linguist as observer may ignore perceptual elements which are of crucial importance for the insider participating of the game (Weigand 2004a).

The issue of the 'data' points to the question which lies at the heart of the problem: *Is indeed any element of spoken language worth recording?* If we focus on our own competence-in-performance, we become aware of the stark contrast between empiricist methodology and the way we actually proceed and this

sheds a dubious light on what empiricist call 'reality'. Human beings are neither bogged down in empirical chaos nor do they start from alleged methodological exigencies but approach the complex 'reality' quite differently. They are not worried about possibly losing an empirical element and do not hastily chase after whatever might turn out to be relevant. On the contrary, they accept the complex and its basic features of uncertainty and variability of expression. They deal with it by adapting to ever-changing action conditions in negotiating meaning and understanding. There is no recording of every empirical detail; instead human beings focus attention on what might emerge as coherent meaningful constellations. *Focusing attention* means trying to simultaneously grasp as many parameters as possible and letting the rest pass by. We know that not every element is relevant and do not care that some are lost. We trust that we will establish coherence in our minds. *Being competent-in-performance* means letting elusive elements elude us and focusing on what counts on the spot.

It is therefore completely beside the point to put forth the dogmatic postulate of starting from authentic texts and concentrating on any empirical element in a chaotic flux or even deriving 'grammar' from it. Transcriptions are momentary, transitory transcriptions and lose significance in the next moment. By contrast, being competent-in-performance in no way means adapting to chaotic empirical features but means focusing our attention on what might turn out to be meaningful real 'data'. The empiricist thesis that we have to start from any detail of the authentic text turns out to be a deadend if it is taken as the starting point for theorizing on the complex whole. It contradicts any reasonable concept of science insofar as it overlooks the crucial factor that we must first evaluate what to observe and to focus on (Feynman 2001: 173). If there is no pre-reflection and if we operate in complete abstraction from meaning we will not get anywhere. The concepts of 'standard language', 'mother tongue', the 'native speaker' are all connected to meaning. They were problematized when it turned out that they cannot be strictly defined. However they still exist and count (Weigand 2010a).

Recording and transcribing simply means documenting what can be heard and seen. From the perspective of the observer what can be heard and what can be seen need not be connected. The ability to speak is isolated from and unconnected with other abilities of the speaker which possibly interact and determine whether variations of speaking are relevant or not. So the question of relevance should not be begged by proponents of spoken language. As insiders of the dialogic game *we are not confronted with authentic verbal texts*; we speak and think and perceive simultaneously and expect our interlocutors to do the same. Moreover, we do not care about casual variations because we know that they are of little relevance. They occur because perfect performance is impossible. The complexity of performance necessarily introduces the overall law that any regularity can be broken. Empirical

variability is not only due to casual factors such as absent-mindedness but also, among other factors, to ignorance of rules. Searching for rules by starting from authentic texts means searching for 'language' by starting from 'speaking' or even equating 'language' with 'speaking'. Human beings use their ability of 'speaking' on the basis of their competence-in-performance, i.e. in integration with other abilities. By focusing on competence-in-performance we do not ignore rules and abandon ourselves to the ever-changing individual moment of speaking. In contrast to the 'reality' of the game, empiricists give priority to speaking and even end up in 'constructing grammar' from speech, i.e. in completely dissolving language by the methodological view of grammar as 'emerging' from discourse (Hopper 1987, Weigand 2010a).

I would like to illustrate the consequences of such a concept by a simple example: The term *corpus* in German takes the grammatical genus neutrum according to its Latin origin: *das Corpus*. Most speakers, however, do not know Latin and say *der Corpus*. Checking the frequency of both usages in a representative corpus of German would certainly result in a higher frequency of the use of *der Corpus*. We might therefore consider *der Corpus* as conventional use and in this way 'construct language' out of 'speaking'. The criterion 'frequency of use' is without any doubt of great importance for language change or for what counts as conventional use. As soon as possible variations some day result in conventional use, we have indeed the case that speaking influences language. This case is well known in descriptions of language change as diachronic process due to historical chance (cf. Hundsnurscher 1988, Weigand 2006a). It has nothing to do with the overall methodological principle of 'grammar emerging from speaking', i.e. of prescribing relevance to any variation whatsoever in spoken language. Whether a variation counts can only be said *in retrospect*.

Creole languages are another case of 'regularities' which emerge from speaking and become conventionalized in language. In our global society, communication is far from being exclusively communication between native speakers. Cross-linguistic communication is becoming more and more the norm and may lead to some sort of 'grammar' which emerges from irregularities of speaking. Again, we are called upon to rethink traditional concepts of 'standard language' and 'mother tongue' and to raise the question of what makes our native competence so unique. This is however a question which proponents of 'emerging grammar' seem to ignore.

I think it has become clear that we cannot hide our heads in the sand of empirical chaos if we want to deal with performance. We must grapple with the challenge arising from appearances and what is behind them. Those sceptics who still have doubts and who are not prepared to distance themselves from the fetish of authenticity can be safely ignored. This does not mean that we should disregard

authentic texts. On the contrary, they are part of the action game, the verbal component of our competence-in-performance. They can however not be the starting point if we want to elaborate rhetorical principles for practice, for instance, in business games. Rhetorical principles of *optimizing competence-in-performance* cannot straightforwardly be derived from the appearances of actual cases. We have to reflect upon evaluative criteria which could be benchmarks for testing authentic games. Optimizing means knowing what is to be optimized and how it could be done in specific environments. For a complex whole, for instance, a business company, it is very difficult to diagnose as an observer whether a dialogue is going well or should be improved in the interests of the company. In any case, we have to presuppose some understanding about the architecture of the complex whole before testing authentic dialogues and making proposals for optimizing practice. Authentic texts can help us by demonstrating some *principles of competence-in-performance at work* which might confirm our theoretical reflections. In addition, they can help us to detect paths of interaction which we might have overlooked. It is for these reasons that we are now going to analyse a sample of an authentic text.

## 2.6 Sample analysis of an institutional game

I will take as an example a part of an authentic text, originally in German, of a complex *business meeting* as it is recorded by Schnöring (2007) (see also Weigand 2006c). Before analysing the text, I would like to glance briefly at the literature in the field of business dialogues (for a detailed report on the state of the art cf. Schnöring).

*Economic research* focuses on economic reflections about the market, the organization of a company, management tasks, public relations, etc. Dialogue and communication remain bland catchall terms which, if at all, are analysed using expressions from ordinary language such as ‘discussion’, ‘talk’ or ‘strategy meeting’. On the other hand, *linguistic research* in this field is mainly based on conversational analysis and reduces the object to meticulous analyses of empirical ‘data’, i.e. to a corpus of transcribed authentic texts and audiovisual recordings (e.g., Brünner 2000:2). The state of the art in the field of business dialogues can therefore be characterized in the main by *two separate strands* of research which exist side by side in two different disciplines and which neglect principles of consilience. The various action games that take place in a business company are however not dialogic games, on the one hand, and financial or economic games, on the other. They are *games dealing dialogically with economic objectives*. What is needed is a genuine interdisciplinary effort to address the complex integrated

whole of human interaction in business companies. In this respect, Schnöring (2007) represents a first valuable attempt at bringing together reflection in economics and linguistics with the analysis of authentic texts.

Let us now start from the complex whole of a 'strategy meeting' in business, as it is called by the chief executives. In the area of business dialogues a strategy meeting represents a subcomplex which, generally speaking, aims at '*economic dialogic action*' or '*tackling economic issues in dialogic interaction*'. In a capitalistic society, the purposes in business which belong to the areas of 'exchange of goods' or 'offer on demand', among others, are basically determined by the dominant interest of WIN, i.e. of 'making a profit' or of 'maintaining one's position' in a competitive market:

WIN [exchange of goods]

Figure 73. Games of business

In the end, the numbers will decide whether the company has been successful at the market. Numbers will influence every individual step, for instance, what types of goods are to be produced and offered for sale, or how a specific type, for instance, of car, will be advertised. Even an advertising spot such as *Toyota doesn't break down*, finds its place in the complex hierarchy of economic action as part of a directive subgame that relates to the general purpose and dominant interest:

WIN [directive (buy(x,y,z))]  
 interest<sub>WIN</sub> [purpose<sub>claim to volition</sub> (proposition<sub>buy(x,y,z)</sub>)]

Figure 74. Advertising in business

Furthermore, besides *purpose and interest*, the *organizational structure* of the company as an institution has to be taken into account from the very beginning. The meeting represents the hierarchy of *status functions* from the senior executive with general responsibility, two other executives with partial responsibility for specific regions to a few subordinate heads of department:

senior executive with general responsibility  
 ↓  
 ▼ executives for specific regions  
 ↓  
 ▼ heads of department

Figure 75. Hierarchy of status functions

The *topics of the agenda* give us a first cue about what is to be dealt with. Calling the dialogue a 'strategy meeting' does not yet tell us what is at stake. The 'strategy

meeting' might turn out to be a single action game or belong to a series of action games. We are faced with an astonishing feature of performance: human beings might be very well experienced in practice and have a good grasp of what is to be done but nevertheless are unable to call things by name. This is the case with the chairperson, the senior executive, who is competent in structuring and leading the meeting but uncertain in calling the concrete steps by name. As observing linguists we have to interpret and evaluate what we observe by considering it against the background of some conception of the whole. In this way, we can interpret what is called on the agenda *the company's progress in the first quarter of the new financial year* as an action game of STOCKTAKING and what is called *defending the results* as an action game of PLANNING. It is not the authentic text, not the empirical elements themselves which tell us what they mean. We need an integrative approach which combines reflection and empirical observation in order to gain insight into such complex games as strategic management meetings.

Let us now focus on these two action games of STOCKTAKING and PLANNING and try to describe them as subgames of the complex whole. The issue is: what makes up 'stocktaking' versus 'planning'? How can we *decompose* these complex subsystems? As mentioned above (2.3), stocktaking in any case means REPORTING on the past and EVALUATING the moves of the past according to the numbers set as a goal for the whole company and for its individual departments. Evaluating however does not only mean indicating whether the numbers have been achieved or not. It also requires REASONING, i.e. reflecting upon the reasons and relating the results or numbers achieved to the measurements taken in the individual departments:

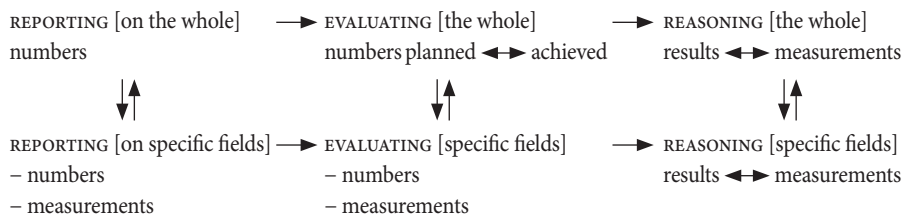


Figure 76. STOCKTAKING

As these steps are to be gone through in the meeting, they have to be dialogically organized by the senior executive as chairperson: it is his task to call upon the points of the agenda, to give the floor to those who want to speak or to ask for comments on the current points. We will thus find various speech acts in the text that do not directly bear on subpurposes of stocktaking but on the organization of speaking, i.e. mainly declarative speech acts of CHAIRING the meeting.

Now having decomposed stocktaking to some degree in our minds let us see how it is dealt with in the authentic text (303) (see the original text in German in the appendix). It is impossible to go through the whole text nor would it be useful to do so. The dialogue consists of various turns the order of which is not strictly fixed but could be varied to a certain extent. Nevertheless, there is some *thematic order* manifested by *the agenda* and the internal structure of the individual points of the agenda. The speech acts of the *chairperson*, the senior executive, such as opening the meeting, indicating the topics to be discussed, allotting the turns, have declarative functions. Moreover, he has the status of the most senior manager and therefore he decides in the case of controversial issues. As chairperson he opens the meeting by calling the first point of the agenda:

(303.1–19)

- (1) I would suggest that we start with the agenda immediately. We wrote on the agenda again the company's progress in the first quarter of the new financial year with which we can on the whole be really very satisfied [...] Because at all events [...] regarding turnover things look in general better. [...] By and large I think we are about one per cent below last year's figures [...] We had overall planned on a minus of three per cent – so at any event we can be satisfied.

In (1) the chief executive uses the 'hedged performative' *I would suggest* which is not really a suggestion but a declarative speech act setting up the first point of the agenda in a polite manner that characterizes his sense of business culture for the company. He calls this first point *the company's progress* which, strictly speaking, indicates a propositional topic. The specific goal is not really expressed by *write on the agenda* even if the talk is clearly structured and demonstrates that the chairperson has a good grasp of what has to be done in practice:

dialogic purpose	(state of affairs)
<i>to write on the agenda</i>	<i>(the company's progress)</i>

Figure 77. The company's progress

The question is: *Did we comply with our plan?* which is not simply a question of knowledge but a question that includes evaluating a network of variables. The chairperson has already decided this issue in his mind. He reports on economic data and evaluates the correlation of plan and result. EVALUATING presupposes REPORTING. Both represent specific speech acts as described in the dialogic speech act taxonomy in Part III. In our case they refer to business affairs expressed in the proposition:

F	(p)
REPRESENTATIVE <sub>EVALUATIVE</sub>	(state of economic affairs)
<i>we can be satisfied</i>	– with the financial quarter – that we are one per cent below the previous year

Figure 78. EVALUATING business affairs

The next step in the process of stocktaking refers to DIFFERENTIATING the overall result as indicated by the chairperson according to *specific regions and sectors*. For this purpose the chairperson allots the turns to the other managers who are responsible for specific regions asking them to report on their part. Again he is very polite and uses indirect speech acts:

- (2) We can go straight away to the sectors again. I don't know if you want to comment on any individual aspects. Are there any comments anyone would like to make?

Even if we can assume that he already knows the data for the different regions, this data has to be put on the table. The chairperson's EXPLORATIVE speech act *Are there any comments anyone would like to make?* initiates a sequence of REPORTS which are classified as COMMENTS, i.e. not really as news but as illustrative or more precise details. The dialogue thus continues with several REPORTS on the respective regions, for instance:

- (3) But we can see quite clearly [...] that in my sector the East is making a negative contribution. [...] For that reason the relationship to the plan is of course significantly negative because there had been a lot of optimism and confidence.
- (4) You could say: OK everything's still fine in Bavaria. Well, there too we have significant problems. [...] Well, the Munich shops have been making a loss.

Again we see both comments are immediately connected with numbers, calculated as a relationship between planned and achieved results.

The next step in analysing and evaluating the course of the company calls for REASONING as expressed by one of the managers:

- (5) What's the reason then why our figures are so good?

Reasoning again represents a step that integrates cognition in finding out the reasons and dialogue in evaluating and negotiating their role for the course of the company. The reasons for being profitable or unprofitable are seen in *specific measures* that have been taken in different regions:

- (6) And I can only emphasise: it's very important for our branches in the East to have special stock.
- (7) And things ... I just want to mention this at this point again have gone very well in Münster. Well the closing down sale in Münster was really great and we really managed to sell off lots of old stock.
- (8) And could I just add again: Payback-Card. Payback was also a really very very great help in the West. That's an important point ... that really caused gigantic interest ...

These different practical measurements are EVALUATED with respect to their influence on calculating the numbers. Evaluations are pervasive throughout the whole meeting, for instance:

- (9) That's gigantic. Our expectations regarding Payback were exceeded tenfold. [...] Sensational.
- (10) It's a fantastic marketing instrument too.
- (11) If we look at the following: it's in the area of watches for young people that we've dramatically lost ground [...]

What the chairperson has called *the company's progress* has thus been dealt with in a dialogic game of STOCKTAKING by means of a sequence which goes through the following steps:

- stating the relationship between planned and achieved results by expressing it in numbers
- evaluating the overall result
- differentiating the overall result for specific regions and sectors
- reasoning by relating different results to specific measures
- evaluating the measures

The *chairperson summarizes* the result of the talk at the end of this first point:

- (12) But even so I would say that I believe we can say today – as in recent years too – that we will jointly achieve the goal we've set ourselves [...] Because that's an important number too.

Stocktaking has thus achieved a positive result.

Let us now structure the second point of the agenda which is called *defending the results*:

- (13) Yes, well the results are great. And of course the more exciting bit starts now: defending the results. That's an unaccustomed pleasure. But it also hurts,

doesn't it? Because up to now we've always hoped that there'd be a positive result. And now it really hurts [...] when there's some money in the till that you've got to take some out again each month.

What is meant is the action game of **PLANNING**, i.e. drawing conclusions from stocktaking to the issue of how to continue the positive course in the future. Planning means setting up the future goal and deciding on the measures to be taken. We can thus expect the following sequence of actions:

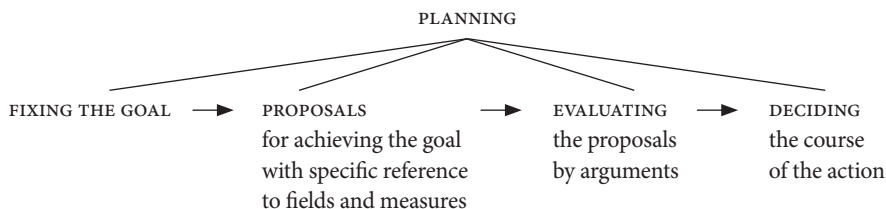


Figure 79. The action game of **PLANNING**

Let us see how the authentic meeting deals with this point. Whereas during the first point of stocktaking the senior executive could restrict himself to chairing the meeting and allotting the turns to his colleagues, he now becomes dominant when future success or losses are at stake. Most of the time he is speaking, he decides and determines the course. Thus he **DECLARES** the goal:

- (14) Our goal is roughly 10 million. [...] that in principle that every month's result has always to be considerably better than the previous result.

And he determines the strategic measures:

- (15) I think the chances aren't bad. But in the final analysis everything depends primarily on turnover and gross proceeds. Right? And of course what's important in defending the results is that we single-mindedly put into practice our restructuring measures in order to get rid of old stock. Perhaps a word about our products: [...] And we had announced and discussed the following measure with regard to that. That we want to recall the goods from the branches [...] that we want to send out recall lists [...]

The other managers have the right to make proposals. To give an example: the chair had proposed:

- (16) ... beforehand we want to communicate with each other as follows: every employee can buy a maximum of two items for their own personal use. But is expressly not allowed to sell these on to a third party.

One of his colleagues very cautiously questions this decision:

(17) Is that right, two items?

The chair makes clear that he is prepared to discuss this point:

(18) We can discuss that.

After a short discussion he decides:

(19) Well, shall we say three? Agreed? Three items per employee. The precise procedure will be laid out again. That's dealt with that topic, hasn't it? Right?

We clearly see how the hierarchy of status functions finds expression in specific speech acts but, on the other hand, we also see that politeness is attributed a high value by the business culture of this company.

Now let us *bring both subgames together* as the main pillars of 'strategy meetings'. Strategy in business means relating any step to the uppermost interest WIN. The action game of PLANNING is profiled as a follow-up activity to STOCKTAKING. From reasoning about the past, proposals on future measures are derived and specific strategic decisions taken.

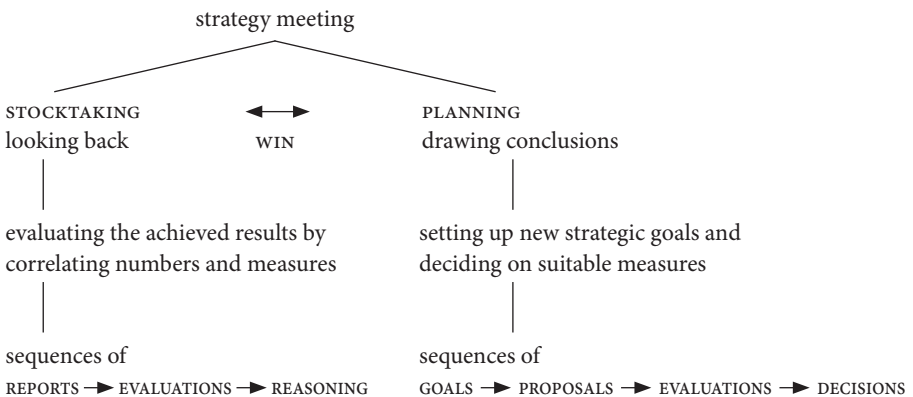


Figure 80. The complex game of a strategy meeting

Figure 80 only roughly indicates the essential steps. *Stocktaking* and *planning* are expressions taken from ordinary language use, expressions for processes that guide and control human action not only in business but in general. Often PLANNING is not clearly distinguished from PROBLEM SOLVING (e.g., Fritz 1982), and indeed there is a certain affinity which, in some cases, can make it difficult to separate both action games. I would however see a difference between a game of 'problem

solving' which starts from a problematic, uncomfortable situation (e.g., *we are making losses*) and aims at elaborating ways of settling this problem and, on the other hand, a game of planning which, to my mind, starts from an already fixed goal and aims at tracing paths, evaluating and deciding on measures to achieve this goal, if possible by taking into account the results of previous stocktaking. Whereas in 'problem solving' the issue is an open question: "What is to be done?" and even includes eliminating the problematic affair, the issue in 'planning' means fulfilling certain criteria known from the very outset, for instance, in our case, continuing the successful course.

I think it has become obvious that we need an *integrative approach* combining reflection and empirical analysis in order to get insight and achieve a deeper understanding of what is going on in such complex games as strategic management meetings. Even if the senior executive does not use action theoretic terms, he knows the decisive steps to be taken by experience. It is his economic and rhetorical competence-in-performance that enables him to successfully chair the session. He has decision-making power which is at the same time directive power. He decides on the goals and the essential measures that will lead to practical actions. His decisions are expressed, on the one hand, by *DECLARATIVE* speech acts that create fixed points of orientation, and, on the other hand, by *DIRECTIVE* speech acts with binding strength that initiate and determine the course of actions.

The hierarchy of positions we can observe at the top level runs through the whole company. As a whole the company represents a cooperative ingroup that has a joint goal and interest. The hierarchical structure attributes different status functions to the individual members and subgroups. The subgroups are at the same time in- and intergroups that will sometimes compete or have conflicts with each other even if they all have to coordinate their activities for the benefit of the company.

## 2.7 To sum up: The mixed game

In trying to sum up this chapter on 'dialogue in the stream of life', I think it has become evident, especially from the sample analysis of an authentic business game, that human beings do not carry out dialogues and alongside carry out specific mental or practical tasks. They have mental objectives and practical needs which are to be dealt with in dialogue. In order to understand what is going on in these dialogues we cannot divide the complex into parts, such as the dialogic 'text' to which we add the 'context' (Weigand 2009c), but have to refer to human beings who act and react in culturally shaped units, i.e. in specific dialogic action games. All the parameters derived from the nature of human beings and the

environment, in our case the business environment, are integrated in the 'mixed' game. Nevertheless we can distinguish between mental actions such as decision making and practical actions such as the marketing instrument of Payback and dialogic actions such as discussing pending decisions and arguing for or against payback measures. In order to advance in this adventure in the complex we have to take an integrative approach that combines theoretical reflection and empirical observation.

What is crucial is the fact that businessmen are not engaged in dialogue because of dialogic purposes proper. Their primary interest and purpose is 'effectively running a company', i.e. an economic purpose which needs dialogue to be achieved. In this respect there is no decisive difference between everyday and institutional games. Even everyday games are not carried out because of dialogic purposes proper. In any case, we want to negotiate our positions in human affairs. Even small talk is usually not carried out because of the pleasure of conversing but because we feel socially obliged to exchange some words. Differences in the games, everyday or institutional, result from differences due to specialization and institutional order as noted above (2.2).

If we look at complex meetings in a business company, there is no point in closely analysing where business affairs turn into dialogic affairs. We know that within a big business company dialogue makes up a very essential part of the management. About 70% of the working time of a manager is spent in dialogue. But what does dialogue here mean precisely? Obviously it refers to spending time in meetings. However, not only in meetings, i.e. in open dialogues, *management is dialogue, and dialogue management*. Thinking about management also proceeds dialogically in the minds of executives, in an inner dialogue of the manager with him- or herself.

The overall objective of 'effectively running a company' poses first and foremost a mental challenge. Mental issues are usually simultaneously dialogic issues. They are tackled in dialogue, be it an inner dialogue of a speaker who wants to get an issue clear in his or her mind or be it an explicit dialogue with others. Dialogue as a process of negotiating meaning and understanding starts by decomposing the whole into subcomplexes and ends up in a linear sequence of speech acts. Decisions about practical actions and rhetorical strategies are included.

*Calculating the costs*, i.e. numbers, can be considered the specific key for business dialogues in capitalistic societies, and this is also made clear in our sample of an authentic text. For business action as competitive action there must be a balance between money to be spent and money to be made that guarantees the company's survival. Economic expertise and successful strategies in economic decisions are needed in order to be profitable or at least to achieve some balance. This key aim of making a profit or of balancing the numbers is expressed by the

category WIN. To comply with this aim, expert knowledge is required which not only includes rational and mathematical thinking but also experience in practical reasoning. There is no single predetermined strategy which can guide actions under uncertain conditions. There is a complex scenario of variables which requires flexibility and adaptation to ever-changing exigencies in a way that the effectiveness of the action taken is guaranteed or, at least, can be expected (Simon 1983: 15). Rhetoric plays an important role in business negotiations not only by smoothing superficial atmospheric conditions of business culture but also by persuasively positioning one's claims and carrying through the rigour of calculating costs and benefits.

The question of *how to optimize practice* includes the question of how to evaluate authentic dialogues. Evaluative criteria cannot yet be found in the authentic texts. Evaluation will turn out differently if carried out from inside the company or by an external observer. Authentic texts are the result of performance and are only a tiny portion of the whole. As the result of performance they may or may not be part of a successful game. How can we know if we only take into account the authentic text as an observer? One way to tackle this issue would be to compare dialogues in successful companies with dialogues in malfunctioning companies (cf. Simon 1983, Toulmin 2001). There is however no direct correlation between successful companies and their recorded authentic dialogues. Even dialogues in successful companies are sometimes bad dialogues. The alternative is to face the challenge of decomposing the complex and identifying benchmarks for potentially successful action. Authentic performance can then be evaluated with respect to those benchmarks that we have set up in our minds.