6.0. Introduction

This chapter attempts at exploring conversation in terms of its characteristic features. By conversation, we generally mean spoken interaction as opposed to written. However, the boundary between the two is very thin and at times intersecting.
Nevertheless, when we use the term ‘conversation’, we refer to the dialogic nature of the discourse, the way it is created, interrupted, negated, modified instantly; the way it includes non-linguistic features such as laughter, winking, facial expression, body movement, positioning, and so on within the process of discourse creation and interpretation. Conversation is vitally dependent upon the participants for the progress of the discourse – their interpretation of the utterances, deciphering of the contextual clues in terms of the individual world view and the shared knowledge of the participants, the denotation as well as the specific meanings of the utterances in terms of discourse, topic, and mode - all these shape and generate the discourse. Moreover, non-verbal and physical clues of every possible nature, referring back and forth to small group or public memory, can influence the interpretation of the linguistic signs. Silence is another feature, which is assigned an extremely important position in this type of discourse. Slightest variation in intonation contour, voice quality, pitch can also change the nature of the discourse. Laughter is another significant feature that influences the progression of conversation. All these collaborate in moulding conversation as the most challenging of the discourse types. However, with the use of telephone, e-mail, Internet, and other media, conversation has lost some of its features (such as physical presence and proximity of the participants in the same setting) and has already been presenting new challenges for the analysts.

Conversation has a continuum ranging from very formal and strictly predestined movements such as a legal proceeding in a courtroom, to a very casual and unpredictable chat among close friends. Casual conversation can be differentiated from formal and/or rhetorical conversation in the following way:
In casual conversation, the participants do not always deliver their utterances with the awareness that these might be used as verifiable data. In formal conversation, the participants generally are on the guard of what they say.

In casual conversation, the participants do not experience their talk as an enactment of their socio-cultural-political-economic-educational-class identity. On the contrary, it is in casual conversation itself that these identities are mostly reflected.

In casual conversation, ongoing modification, denial of utterance are 'possible', 'feasible' and 'actually done'. In formal conversation, the utterances have more rigidity and in certain institutional settings they cannot be denied or negated.

For all these, casual conversation becomes the most relaxed, spontaneous, and least self-conscious for the participants in comparison to the other conversation types. It is also the most dynamic, flexible and dialogic of all. On the other hand, a formal conversation shares many characteristics of written discourse – conscious and edited delivery, selection of formal mode, and so on. Nevertheless, while use or knowledge of the standard, grammatical, formal, written language has been the thrust area of research for linguists, conversation attracted intellectual attention rather late. We have already discussed in chapter one of this dissertation how Conversation Analysis (CA) the discipline has developed over the last four decades as a distinctive research stream out of the wider intellectual programme of Ethnomethodology. The latter is a term coined by Garfinkel (1974: 16) to refer to the study of the availability to a member of common sense knowledge of his or her society, i.e., the knowledge of the ordinary arrangement of
a set of located practices. Garfinkel's research reveals mainly that participants' understanding of their circumstances provide for the stable organisation of their social activities. Language (and action through language) is no less a situated product of rules and systems than other social typifications. Hence, the meaning of a particular utterance is indexical to a particular context and purpose.

Although specific conversation analyses may not always have their Ethnomethodological heritage, some of the key ideas in CA such as the focus on the details of actual events, the notion of context as being both retrospective and prospective ('context shaped' and 'context renewing') and so on can be related to Ethnomethodology. Heritage (1984: 241), and Roger and Bull (1989) summarised the basic orientation of CA studies in terms of the following fundamental assumptions:

1. Interaction is structurally organised.

2. Contributions to interaction are both context-based and context-renewing.

3. These two properties inhere in the details of interaction so that no order of detail in conversational interaction can be dismissed a priori as disorderly, accidental, or interactionally irrelevant.

4. The study of social interaction in its details is best approached through the analysis of naturally occurring data.

These basic assumptions were developed to handle the phenomenon of contextual determination of speech activities, displayed in seminal works such as Sacks (1972, 1973, 1975), Schegloff (1972) and so on. Simultaneously, interests in the sequential organisation of interaction assumed a prominence, which steadily increased over time. It
led to a focus on the management of conversational turn taking and related issues concerning co-ordinated entry into, exit from, and suspension of the turn taking procedures for conversation (cf. Schegloff and Sacks 1973). These studies demonstrated that turn-transfer is interactionally managed through recursive procedures, which enable very precise real-time co-ordination between speakers. Moreover, the studies on greetings, openings, closings and similar topics also intimated a variety of ways in which the turn-by-turn ‘context-renewing’ character of interaction involved the provision both of ‘directionality’ for subsequent talk and an architecture for the maintenance of ‘intersubjective understanding’ within talk. Both these latter aspects received an elementary specification in the discussions of the ‘adjacency pair’ concept (cf. Schegloff 1972). This concept highlighted a basic directionality in conversation with the observation that the production of the first member of a pair of utterances (for example, a greeting) empirically projects and normatively requires the relevant next occurrence of a complementary utterance by another speaker. It thus established the concept of adjacent positioning as a ‘built-in’ motivation for conversational performance. It was of key significance in handling a range of more complex speech activities.

In relation to the maintenance of intersubjectivity, the adjacency pair concept suggested ways in which participants through the production of next actions naturally display a particular shared understanding of the prior talk. There necessarily arises a chain movement from the first to the second to the third utterance and so on. In this way, adjacent positioning generically provides a framework for the continuous updating of interpersonal understanding. Similarly, it is by means of adjacent positioning, as
Schegloff and Sacks (1973: 297-98) observed, that various forms of appreciations, failures, and corrections thereof could be recognised.

Since late 1970s, developments in CA have ranged over a large number of substantive topics: preference organisation, topic organisation, the use of non- or quasi-lexical speech objects (for example, laughter (Jefferson 1985); teasing (Drew 1987)), the integration of vocal and non-vocal activities, interaction in institutional settings. CA thus offers the most objective study of the structure of conversation, assigning careful attention to exact audio and/or video recording; and considering smiles, gaps, overlaps, repetitions, incomplete utterance, the speed at which an utterance is delivered, and similar features as components of conversation itself. Thus, as a discipline, CA adheres to the methodological notion of an exact reproduction and objective survey of the data collected.

The methodology followed in this chapter is described in the subsequent section.

6.2. Data Collection and Analytic Procedure

The methodology followed in this chapter falls in line with the general methodological framework for this dissertation. I collected one sample of conversation from a television programme named *Big Fight*, telecast on 1 July 2001 on a private news channel. Out of the many television programmes that are telecast everyday, this programme was selected on the basis of the stylistic range of the conversation, the number of participants involved, the kind of topics discussed and such other features. Within the programme, this particular telecast was preferred to others because:
Society, politics, education, economy, and so many other factors loomed largely on the topic and therefore on the language use within this particular telecast.

It exhibits subtle shifts in the role relations of the participants.

Since I belong to the part of India discussed in the telecast, I personally have a fairly comprehensive idea of the topic discussed, the geographical, economic, educational, social situation of the region, the emotions involved, the increasingly hostile attitude of the people towards the country and the politicians, and similar issues that have come up in the course of the conversation.

The conversation was created mainly by six active participants who were given the right to participate in the whole of the discussion. Moreover, there were several semi-active participants from the audience who participated only in the audience round. The whole audience served as the potentially active participant group, their reactions to what the others were saying were carefully captured by the camera. The general topic was the political situation in the North Eastern part of India, particularly Manipur. This general and predetermined topic narrowed down the conversational diversity. The active participants consisted of the anchor of the programme (S1 in the transcript); one political leader from the North East who had been a member of the Parliament for thirty five years and a Cabinet Minister for some time (S2); one of the former Chief Ministers of Manipur (S3); a top rank retired police officer who worked in the North East for more than twenty five years (S4); a news reporter for a standard Indian weekly (S5); and another for a regional press (S6). Interestingly, in the whole communicative event of the programme, there is not a single woman participant active or semi-active. Whether it reflects the
conventional notion of women being least concerned with ‘serious’ issues like politics, or the deliberate ignorance of vocal women and women politicians by a ‘male dominated’ media is a matter of debate.

The anchor first decided and distributed the turns and the time limit for each participant (cf. appendix 4 sample 1 transcript 1). Therefore, the beginning of the conversation has a deliberate, conscious, and artificial movement. This stiffness melts down in the interaction part, with swift movement of turns and question-answers, overlaps and repetitions (obviously so in the audience round). Therefore, this particular conversation is considered to be representative of both the types – formal, conscious conversation on the one hand and everyday, spontaneous conversation on the other; and is therefore preferred to one that is representative of only one type. The transcribed samples are presented in appendix 4 sample 1. Three other samples are selected as instances of very casual conversation – a casual discussion between friends (from Carter and McCarthy 1997); the exchanges between a barber and her customer; and another friendly chat.

6.3. The Analysis

The whole conversation is a communicative event consisting of several discourse units interlinked by the common topic. Each discourse unit consists of several speech acts employed by the same or different speakers to realise different discourse strategies. The institutionalised setting partly ascribes the authority of interpreting and summarising to the anchor. This authority is not questioned throughout the communicative event, though
it is negated or ignored in the most dynamic parts of the conversation. For example, in the beginning, while the anchor was introducing the speakers and mentioning the rules of the programme along with the speaker turns (cf. Transcript 1), we find the conversation to be purely monologic as all the participants accepted his authority of power distribution in the conversation. It breaks down in the question-answer sections and in the audience round, when the conversation becomes a *multilogue* (cf. Eggins and Slade 1997: 20). S1 conspicuously regains his power position in transcript 7, which presents a moment in the conversation when he throws a question to all the immediate participants, i.e., the participants that are physically present there. It comes at a point in the discussion when one participant from the audience comments that Manipur is a part of India and the people of India cannot ignore Manipur. The anchor’s question, his code mixed reference to one of the most popular contemporary television programmes (*kaun banega krororpati question*), his concluding remark interpreting the lack of geographical knowledge concerning the North East to be a part of the problem - all these show that he dominated the discourse at this point, demonstrating his professional expertise. His interpretation of the silence, though apparently too broad a generalisation, is not questioned:

S1

ok:: let me ask / ALL of you aah (04) umm / > JUST a minute < / let me ask / all of you / if you were asked to name / the seven capitals of the north eastern states / how many of you HONESTLY / raise your hands would be able to say it / within / a minute / if you have a
kaun banega krororpati question / how many of you would ↓ actually be able to say it / ↓ honestly /

(20.5)

S3 not for ↓ Manipur / ↓ rest / ↓ others (huh huh huh huh)

(25)

S1 well THAT (05) THAT seems to be part of the ↓ PROBLEM / the ↑ fact is / that ↑ GEOGRAPHICALLY / the North East is ↑ still not / on the ↑ CONSCIOUSNESS / of the rest of India in a ↑ manner / that it ↑ perhaps /
↓ SHOULD be /

Thus, silence accompanied with a lack of the expected body movement plays the most decisive part in the development of the discourse here. Using the silence, the anchor gives a twist to the ongoing discussion, directly accusing all the participants and in a way many other people like them in the creation and sustenance of the problems in the North East.

The sample exhibits many features – lexical, grammatical, phrasal, clausal, as well as discoursal – of spoken interaction as against written ones. Some of these features are discussed below:

*to open up our debate IS MR P* (Transcript 1): This directly sweeps off other participants’ use of the immediate turn. It contrasts sharply with a very informal conversation where the turns remain totally or considerably indecisive (cf. sample 4.3).
Well (Transcript 1, 7): ‘Well’ is a very common filler in spoken language. It gives the speaker a time span to formulate the discourse strategy. It is therefore not found in written discourse where the writer has enough time to decide and edit the discourse strategy and then present it in written form.

Pji (Transcript 1): A typical address form in Indian English that signifies honour for the person addressed. All the other participants in the discourse address one another without this honorific. S3’s address of S2 signifies that he eager is to show that he does not treat S2 in equal terms.

you see the central govement can you can you aah aah visualise the situation (Transcript 2): ‘You see’ is a discourse marker used to get hearer response. Here the speaker is fumbling for a strategy and a proper set of vocabulary. Therefore, he uses the usual discourse techniques of response seeking, repetition, and reformulation.

now aah the several issues are being raised during discussion (Transcript 6): A typical instance of ongoing modification of an utterance which characterizes any casual discourse. The deletion of the definitizer before ‘discussion’ marks a common characteristic of the Indian variety of English. A similar instance of ongoing modification can be seen in sample 4.3: And his eyes but unfortunately I can’t and walked off and left him, fuming.

ok (Transcript 6): Ok is a common conversational device, a discourse marker, used mainly for persuasion, argumentation, turn taking and so on. It also marks the boundary of one topic and the next. Hence it is common enough in arguments, persuasions, information delivery speeches or spoken guidelines, and other speech acts where an immediate interaction between the speaker and the hearer occurs. It
is marked by its absence in formal written discourse. There is another instance of *ok* in this conversation in transcript 5, accompanied by a rising tone and loudness, used by the anchor to cut the long question of S7 short. It is a direct intrusion in the other participant's turn. This particular instance of *ok* by S8 is not an intrusion but an agreement marker used by the speaker to seek agreement from the hearer.

*now Gujarat produced...* (Transcript 6): *Now* does not have any temporal reference here. Its use is discourse strategic – it marks the shift from one topic or issue to another. By using it, the speaker is creating a ground to present his argument cum accusation.

*kaun banega krororpati question* (Transcript 7): This is a reference to one of the most popular contemporary television programmes telecast in India - Kaun Banega Krororpati ('who wants to be a millionaire'). In that programme, questions mostly on general knowledge are asked and the immediate right answer ensures monetary gain for the answerer. The anchor's reference to this programme gives his question and the issue under discussion a comparative status and an ironic touch.

*just a minute* (Transcript 7): A typical discourse strategy used to continue with the turn that one is using, and also to persuade the other participants not to interrupt.

*I have we have* (Transcript 2): The ongoing modification in the use of the pronoun is significant. With the help of this, the speaker subtly shifts the responsibility, which was ascribed to him alone, to his class in general.

*why there an ↓ excuse* (Transcript 3): The deletion of the verb here has manifold significance. It marks the utterance as unplanned – we can say grammatical correctness is ignored in the excessive attention that the speaker pays to take the
immediate turn in the discourse. At another level, it might reflect the English grammatical competence of the speaker. It might also exemplify a typical Indian English feature.

_the question↑ is(03) / this I agree with Mr ↓ P / that unless you have ↓ development / but how do you ↓ develop the North East↑_ (Transcript 4): the first two sentences are formed and left half-uttered. It is a typical conversational feature when the speaker is sure of the shared knowledge of something, he or she mentions only as much as he or she feels is necessary.

These are some of the common features of conversation that the sample exhibits. Moreover, all the discourse units of the whole communicative event are marked by the use of repetition at various levels:

Lexical, for example, _you_ in Transcript 2; _yes_ in Transcript 2, 6; _what_ in transcript 3; _no_ in transcript 2; _of_ in Transcript 4.

Clausal, for example, _let me ask all of you_ in Transcript 7.

Stylistic, for example, _where has the money↑ gone / where are the↑ resources / where are the↓ EFFORTS_ in Transcript 4; _by the planning commission↑ / by the government of India_ in Transcript 5; _from the point of↑ economy / from the point of↑ politics / from the point of↓ soci::ety_ in Transcript 3.
Strategic, for example, what is the ↓ meaning of consultation (05)/ what is the ↓ connotation of consultation in Transcript 4; by being ↓ based in Delhi / by being ↓ identified / with the kind of ↑ politics in Transcript 3.

The lexical and clausal repetitions can be stylistic and strategic as well. Repetition at these and various other levels serve a range of discourse purposes –

- it adds emphasis to the utterance (for example, we will take the ↓ audience round / we will take the ↓ AUDIENCE round in Transcript 4; really really seriously in sample 4.2.);
- it gives a scope to continue with one’s utterance/turn/speech (for example, you talked about you talked about in Transcript 4);
- it helps one in intruding into another’s turn (for example, why don’t you in Transcript 2);
- at times it shows irritation (for example, THAT’S AN EXCUSE / THAT IS THAT IS in Transcript 3); or
- fumbling (four and a half decades you are ↑ THERE / your party was ↑ there / a::nd a lot of you know crude oil is ↑ there / already ↓ there / the the um ↓ oldest refinery is there at di ↑ Digboi / these are ↑ there / the refinery is ↓ there Transcript 5);
- it can be used for directive or demonstrative purposes (for example, so you can have one of them and one of them if you like in Appendix 4 sample 4);
it can show concern, and also enthusiasm (for example, Look at her, look in Appendix 4 sample 4).

In appendix 4 sample 1 transcript 2, the interchange of the terms politicians and you both pinpoints and generalises the accusation made by the speaker against one of the hearers. We can unpack many other discoursal features if we have a closer look at the discourse context of the conversation. I propose to analyse it in terms of the Hymesian SPEAKING grid:

Setting/scene: Institutionalised

Participants: Six predetermined participants with several non-determined ones from the audience (immediate/active/direct)

Innumerable others as audience of the show in the television (passive/indirect)

Ends: To explore the reasons of the political, social, economic and other instabilities in a particular region (global)

To ascribe the responsibility of the problematic situation at an individual or group level, or to deny that responsibility (local)

Act sequence: Many complete or fragmentary speech acts of assertion, question, declaration, accusation, refutation of accusation, and similar ones

Key: Various (serious to ironical and jocular)

Instrumentalities: Mainly verbal, probably supplemented at one or two places by written scripts
Norms of interaction and interpretation: Shared among the participants as members of a particular society (global)

Shared among the participants in terms of the setting (local)

Genre: Conversational

This discourse context restricts the use of language, genre, style, strategies to a considerable extent. For example, though the genre is conversational, the institutionalised setting ascribes formality to the discourse and it eliminates the use of certain features of casual and/or informal conversation which can be noticed in the other samples, for instance, the use of slang (wodge in sample 4.4.), the use of short forms of common words (cos for ‘because’ in sample 4.3.), use of exaggeration for narrative effect (a whole jar of raisins in sample 4.5.) and so on.

The global and local ends of the conversation gave it an ‘attack-and-defence’ structure. Since two of the participants belonged to the region discussed and also to the ‘ruler or rule making class’, they were taken to be the representatives of the government or political authority and they had to be defensive in tone and discourse strategy while the others used attacking tone and strategies.

Hutchby (1996) provides an explanation for the attack-and-defence structure of a discourse and the distribution of power in this kind of discourses. Analysing British radio call-in broadcast, he concludes that the fact that the callers are required to go first by expressing a point of view on some issues means that hosts symmetrically get the second chance. Going second, he argues, represents a more powerful position than the first in
argumentative discourse. Principally, the host becomes able to critique or attack the caller's statements simply by exhibiting scepticism about the claims, challenging the agenda and relevance of assertions, or taking the argument apart by identifying minor inaccuracies in its details. At the same time, there are resources available for callers to resist the host's powerful strategies and sometimes exercise powerful strategies themselves. Thus, power is not a monolithic feature in radio call-in broadcasts, with the corresponding simplistic claim that the host exercises power over the caller by virtue of his or her "control of the mechanics of the radio program" (Moss and Higgins 1984: 373). Rather, in a detailed way, the power dynamics at work within calls are variable and shifting. Hutchby claims that the empirical analysis in his article extends towards demonstrating how two of Foucault's (1977) central ideas can be located in the analysis of power in the details of talk-in-interaction. These ideas are - first, that wherever there is power, there is resistance; and second, power operates in the most mundane contexts of everyday life, not just at the macro-level of large processes. By 'power', Hutchby means the interactional power that threads through the course and trajectory of an argument. In line with the conversation analytic approach, he located that form of power in some of the least significant instances of social life: the relationship between turns at talk-in-interaction.

In our sample conversation, power distribution and the conflict arising out of it is reflected at many junctures. For example, we can have a look at transcript 3 and 6. In transcript 3, clearly, S1 has the advantageous position that Hutchby (1996) describes. Nevertheless, we cannot move on to a generalisation looking merely at positioning; since, in transcript 6, the power dynamics is more complex and S8 acquires the more powerful
position simply by persistence and ignorance of others’ attempts of acquiring the same. Here the globally accepted turn allocation pattern is totally ignored and negated, the power of the immediate discourse dwindling among the participants for a time until the audience questioner (S8) turns the table to his side:

S2  yes I am giving you ↓ one example / =
S1   = no::: there’s =
S2   one example =

S8  = number ↓ two / you talked

about   you [talked about
S1  no
S2  ( )
S8 ↓ development / ↑ ok / now (04) Gujarat produced something like eight

            million tons of ↓ fruit / you see Gujarat [...]
S3  ↓ NO / I am not saying about ↓ that / I am talking about the (04) loss of credibility of the ↓ politicians –

S5  —( )—

S1  – THAT'S AN ↓ EXCUSE –

S3  —( )—

S1  — ↓ THAT'S AN EXCUSE / THAT IS THAT IS –

S3  —( ) the ↓ Samata Party has just ↑ said / < the people of ↑ Manipur / are not ready to ↑ take / the words of the ↓ Prime Minister / or the ↓ Home Minister > / that ↑ means / ↓ what it means /

S1  > it means you are equally responsible as are the central ↓ politicians / that you ALL are responsible for the mess in the ↓ North East < /

S3  we::ll (05) / the whole ↓ country / would be ↓ responsible /

S1  > that's an excuse that the ↑ Chief Minister of Manipur / the former Chief Minister ↓ gives < /

As this instance makes it all the more obvious, the audience round of the conversation discards many features of formal, stiff discourse and acquires the dynamic characteristics of a casual conversation. The audience round also exhibits overlappings, denials, rapid intonational changes, frequent delivery speed changes, and laughter. Transcript 3 captures some of these characteristics. The anchor uses several discoursal strategies to keep the general track of the whole discourse (maintaining the common notion that the politicians are responsible for the situation in the North East). When S3
puts forward a rhetorical question (what it means), S1 immediately takes advantage of the situation and offers his own subjective interpretation, ignoring the additional comment that S3 makes. So far the discourse power was dwindling among the participants, but now S1 uses his power as an anchor and not as one participant among the others and offers the final concluding remark of the round (> that's an excuse that the ↑ Chief Minister of Manipur / the former Chief Minister ↓ gives < / ). The ongoing modification of the attribution “the Chief Minister of Manipur / the former Chief Minister” is typical of a dynamic discourse such as conversation, and is very unusual in instances of written metalinguistic discourse, official report, investigation presentation, and so on.

The topic of the discourse foregrounds the social or rather the political role and standpoint of two of the participants (the representatives of the ruling class) against their personal, familial role. Interestingly enough, the same orientation saves the other participants from being totally identified with their political roles. In case of the anchor and the two journalists, the professional role comes to the forefront. Whereas in case of the police officer, the individual role takes over – he brings to the foreground his personal self, i.e., what he feels as an individual, not as a cog in the machine, i.e., the government or the ruling class. However, to do that, he uses the experience of his professional self – what he saw and realised as a police officer. Throughout the discourse this foregrounding of individual role is not debated. Nevertheless, when S2 and S3 try the same, they are vehemently questioned and their political roles are reasserted (Transcript 3 partly reflects this conflict). The power dynamics in the discourse, biases against politicians, the societal image of politicians in general, and other related factors play the decisive role in these matters. Van Dijk (in Bell and Garrett 2000: 25) proposes that ideologies reflect the basic
criteria that constitute the social identity and define the interests of a group. That is, ideologies may be represented as group self-schemata, featuring such categories as membership (Who belongs to our group? Who may be admitted?), activities (What do we do?), goals (Why do we do this?), values (How should we do this?), position (Where are we? What are our relations to other groups?), and resources (What do we have, and what do we not have?). Because these schemata are ideological, the way groups and their members represent themselves and others may of course be 'biased', when seen from the point of view of others. This can be clearly seen in the conversation we are analysing.

The discourse strategy of the speakers, particularly that of S2 is conspicuous in the circumlocutionary manner in which he attacks 'the other' for the socio-political condition in the North East. First, he attacks the 'centre' and 'the people in Delhi' for the pitiable condition in the North East. However, he was immediately reminded that being an MP of the ruling party for thirty-five years and being a cabinet minister for some time, he himself is a part of 'the other' he is attacking. The speaker then reformulates his accusation by saying although he was a cabinet minister; he held that position for a very short period of time. He argued that unless one is in the decision making body, one cannot do anything substantial. He pointed out that he is the second politician to be selected for a higher position in the country level from the North East, that too after a gap of almost twenty years. He also complained that the 'unfortunate' part for the politicians from the North East is that however capable they may be, they are not selected to be decision makers. This comment raised immediate reaction, with the focus being shifted to the political condition in the North East and the total failure on the part of the politicians to take the responsibility for the mess there. S2 then accepts that the centre cannot be
blamed totally. However, he subtly shifts the accusation from lack of action to difference in perception:

[... ] aah ↑well / (03) we ↑cannot blame the centre ↓totally / ↓ we also have to act ↑responsibly / from the ↓North Eastern states / I ↓do agree to that point / but I am talking ↑about / the general (09) ↓PERCEPTION /(05) about the ↓North East [... ]

However, this accusation is also refuted in the course of the discourse. S2 is pointedly attacked again for the failure in controlling the political situation in the North East. S2 accepts the blame, but at the same time he deliberately gives it a different twist:

= > oh yes ↓yes< / of course I ↓do take responsibility myself / that I have we have not been ↑able to / perhaps aah assert ourselves in ↓DELHI / and this ↑realisation has come ↓NOW / that's why aah ↑you know / we have ↑plotted a forum in ↓Delhi / called the ↑North East MP's ↓FORUM / ↑because / you →know / now every ↑state has yah –

S2 is checked again at this point and the discourse focus is brought back to the topic of the lack of credibility and failure of the political leadership in the North East. S2 makes every attempt to save his positive face by again presenting the centre as 'the other': 
no no no < the centre ː (02) / here again the ↓ centre is to be blamed / ↑ knowing fully well / what is ↓ happening in the North East / the↑ centre / does ↓ not want to assert sometimes / where they → have / they ↓ need to be ↑ asserted / they ↓ don’t / when it comes to ↑ corruption / when it comes to ↑ non-performance > / the ↑ central govrnment says / oh it is a ↑ sensitive area / we should have ↑ going to it / we should have –

An irritated S1 stops S2 at this point by asking how long does he want to continue with the centre-state dichotomy:

[...] < HOW can you ↑ debar / debar yourself from ↑ responsibility / by continuously attacking the ↓↑ centre / of which you were a ↓ part of />

S2 immediately changes his position:

no I am not a ↑ person / who have been ↑ attacking / attacking the aah ↓ centre / you know I have ↑ bee:n / (02) a part of central → govrnment no ↓ doubt about it / < ↑ I AM TALKING ABOUT / THE ↓ POLICY TOWARDS THE NORTH EAST /

At this point, S3 comes forward to help S2 out:
what's important is the ↓ policy / the ↑ individual excellence of what Mr P has done / or he has ↓ not done / what the ↓ politicians have done or have not done / ↓ yes / it may be ↓ difficult / the ↑ basic approach / the basic ↓↑ policy / should be ↓ towards the North East ↑/ it's it's not –

The attack now is aimed at S3, not only by the anchor of the show, but by the other participants as well. S3 attempts different discourse strategies, i.e., by trying to generalise the attack (< if you talk about the credibility of the → politicians / the ↑ credibility of the politician / is ↓ not confined to Manipur or the ↑ North East / the ↑ credibility of the politician / IN THE ↓ NATION / IN THE ↓ COUNTRY/ AS A WHOLE HAS GONE ↓ DOWN / >), by trying to draw the attention to the issue that the people are not ready to believe in the politicians' words (→ the ↓ Samata Party has just ↑ said / < the people of ↑ Manipur / are not ready to ↑ take / the words of the ↓ Prime Minister/ or the ↓ Home Minister > /), and by trying to draw audience response in a rhetorical way (that ↑ means / ↓ what it means /). S1, taking advantage of the powerful position he has been enjoying in the discourse, cuts S3 short by analysing his behaviour in terms of his political self:

> it means you are equally responsible as are the central ↓ politicians / that you ALL are responsible for the mess in the ↓ North East < /

↑ we::ll (05) / the whole ↓ ↑ country / would be ↓ responsible /
S1 > that's an excuse that the ↑ Chief Minister of Manipur / the former Chief Minister ↓ gives < /

A similar situation arises when S3 is attacked with the allegation that he was briefed before the declaration of insurgency in Manipur. Other speakers have also used the technique of assertion and immediate denial. For instance, we can pinpoint the following utterance of S4:

[...] there was not a single political ↓ party / with the ↑ exception of / (04) may be (01) one or ↑ TWO / which did not have ↓ links / with the ↓ militants / [...] 

The extraordinary stress on 'not', 'single', 'political', and 'party' shows that it was a conscious and firm delivery, which was loaded with the speaker's personal belief and experience. However, a short remonstration forces him to modify the comment and blunt the cutting edge of the sharp statement along with its possible political effect. The assertive 'be' verb is replaced by a vague and weak modal 'may'. 'May' signifies probability, not existentiality. Nevertheless, since the denial is left vague, with no name explicitly taken, the possibility of ascribing it to any and every political party remained open. This kind of an utterance is always tricky, throwing stones at everyone in general and none in particular. It exemplifies the speaker's mastery in handling discourse strategy that the other two, i.e., S2 and S3 conspicuously lacked.
The attack-and-defence structure has some immediate and long-term effects. This is reflected in the delivery technique of the two groups. The defensive role players, i.e., the representatives of the governing or ruling class (S2 and S3), use very conscious, careful, slow delivery technique in their allotted turns. Whether scripted (that is, a written text converted to a spoken one), or unscripted, these utterances have the common features of a scripted or at least planned utterance. Berendt (1991: 6-9) compares unplanned, unedited conversation data with their respective edited versions and discovers the following features:

- Speech is produced in utterances defined by tone and pause groups, whereas the sentence structure is the locus for organising ideas in the written style.
- The production of unplanned speech involves the simultaneous coincidence of thinking, processing, and adapting the speech to the contingencies of the communicative situation: the who, when, where, what, and why of speaking.
- A conversation or a particular episode of an extended interaction cannot begin or proceed without initial contact and the continuing reinforcement of knowing that the contact is there.
- Conversation usually cannot proceed without verbal and/or non-verbal feedback.
- Speaker initiated expressions to bind the relationship and to identify the nature of the relationship can be seen first in the use of the name of the person addressed, name substitutes and secondly in general linking expressions.
- Conversation is usually dyadic in nature, although there may be more than two participants.
There is a difference of dominance strategies in the basic exchange structure in planned and unplanned conversations. Planned conversation focuses on the descriptive use of language where the exchange of information is primary; whereas unplanned conversation focuses on the expression of social relations and personal attitudes, the affective-emotive meanings in language use.

Most of these features are reflected in the conversation we are analysing at present – it exhibits the features of both formal/edited/planned conversation as well as unplanned conversation. At the surface level, we can ascribe the predominant formal nature to the formal setting. However, in spite of the formality of the setting, the conversation later on discards grammaticality at several places with the utmost importance heaved on the immediate topic. We can compare the following two utterances at two different points during the conversation:

S2  < WELL  aah (09) ° what has happened° in ↑ ManiPUR /(05) has proved TWO things beyond ↓ doubt / (05) ↓ ONE >

(Transcript 1)

S5  >but the ↑ FACT that / I (05) strongly ↑ feel / that the politicians from the ↑ North East / people like ↓ you / you have ↑ TOtally (05)/ the ↓ politicians have lost their credibility /(03) in the whole of the ↓ North East< /

(Transcript 2)
The setting is the same for both the utterances. However, the first one exhibits the characteristics of a carefully delivered, formal, linear, grammatical speech, whereas the second one shows the special emphasis on the immediate topic (i.e., the politicians have lost credibility). The effective performance of the speech act of accusation is given more importance. The same idea unit is stated and restated, to make sure that it elicits the expected response from the intended or the immediate hearer. The ongoing modification in the utterance shows an ongoing change in the discourse strategy, with a subtle shift in the focus from the intended or the immediate hearer as an individual, to the same as a representative of a group. Another instance can be:

S9  I just want to ↑ ask /directly from Mr ↑ P / that (06) you said that the complete North East is ↓ underdeveloped / ↓ not developed / I just want to know in the last four ↓ decades / four and a half decades you are ↑ THERE / your party was ↑ there / aːnd a lot of you know crude oil is ↑ there / already ↓ there / the the uum ↓ oldest refinery is there at di ↑ Digboi / these are ↑ there / the refinery is ↓ there/ and the what –

(Transcript 7)

Going back to the earlier instance, the careful delivery of the statements by S2 and S3 gives us the general impression of a political speech by an expert politician. However, once the two speakers are questioned and cross-questioned, this careful and
slow delivery gives way to conscious, defensive, and fast delivery. Compare the following two utterances made by the same participant:

< WELL aah (09) ° what has happened° in ↑ ManiPUR /(05) has proved TWO things beyond ↓ doubt / (05) ↓ ONE >

(Transcript 1)

> oh yes ↓ yes <

(Transcript 2)

The anchor also delivered his utterances in an extraordinarily fast manner. However, the speed, fluency, and emphasis that his utterances in general exhibit, reflect successful professional role-playing. If we compare his speech (in Group A below) with that of S4 (Group B) who is also a professional, a journalist of a national weekly, we can discover the difference at the level of proficiency, of exposure, and may be also of education:

Group A

S1 > why don’t [you why don’t you take the responsibility in question ↓/
S2 no no
S1 why don’t you ↑ accept / that you also have LOST < =
Group B

S4  >but the ↑ FACT that / I (05) strongly ↑ feel / that the politicians from the
    ↑ North East / people like ↓ you / you have ↑ TOtally (05) / aah the ↓
    politicians have lost their credibility /

In Group A, in spite of S2’s interference, S1 repeatedly makes attempts at emphatic and fast delivery of his utterance, and as the sequence shows, he succeeds in taking over the conversational turn from S1. In comparison, in Group B, S4 delivered his utterance without interruption, yet he stumbled and could not exhibit his professional expertise.

At this stage, a point of clarification is in order. I have analysed a single feature, i.e., the speed of delivery of an utterance, as the outcome of a journalistic attacking style/tone/mood and also of a careful, defensive style/tone/mood. This apparently conflicting interpretation is a consequence of the importance attached to the context in the analysis. It is the background information about the speakers – their education, social status, role relationship in the speech event and outside that led us to this kind of a discrepancy in explanation. It is also the context of the previous and following utterances by the same speaker and our inference about his individual speed of delivery, his discourse strategies, his achievement in negotiating the turns, and other factors of the immediate context that play a significant role in the deduction. Recent researches in interactional prosody [for instance, Gregory and Webster (1996), and Gregory et al (2001)] foreground context as a deciding factor in the use of fundamental frequency (F₀). In the conversation we are analysing, low frequency is used in several utterances:
Instance 1: S3

[...] ↓ I said this –

(Transcript 5)

Instance 2: S3

what is the ↓ meaning of consultation (05) / what is the ↓ connotation of consultation /

(Transcript 5)

Instance 3: S8

↓ please ((smile))

(Transcript 6)

In all these utterances, low frequency is coupled with a falling tone. In the first two instances, the speaker is confronted with questions that he does not want to answer directly. Evading direct answers through a process of reformulation of the question is common enough among politicians as well as rhetoricians. The way politicians use their language particularly in question-answers has attracted considerable attention from different researchers. Harris (1991) establishes criteria for ‘direct’ versus ‘evasive’ answers for the purposes of assessing the relative evasiveness exhibited by various politicians under various circumstances. However, the relative status of what is ‘direct’ as against the ‘evasive’ makes the distinction inadequate for analytic purposes. Analysing the 1988 US presidential debates, Clayman (1993) scrutinizes ways in which public figures answer questions from journalists. The public figures seem to begin their turns by reformulating the question. Clayman presents two functions of this practice:

i) to provide the trajectory of an upcoming answer; and

ii) to shift the topical agenda.
The first function is seen as innocent; the second as politically motivated. Clayman discusses how evasive answers may be performed for different discourse ends. The instances that we have posited are used as face saving devices adopted for the purpose of shrugging off the responsibility that the context assigns to the participant, i.e., S3.

In section 1 of this chapter, I have argued that in casual conversation the participants do not experience their talk as an enactment of their socio-cultural-political-economic-educational-class identity. On the contrary, it is in casual conversation itself that these identities are mostly reflected. Thus, the anchor exhibits one common Indian grammatical error in subject-verb agreement:

> the rules of the \textsuperscript{†}Big fight/ (0.3) is the \textsuperscript{†}same as always/ 

(Transcript 1)

A similar instance is:

\textit{[...] this concept / have \textsuperscript{†}now been accepted/} 

(Transcript 5)

At another point, S8 exhibits another typical Indian English feature in his use of double superlative: \textit{the most costliest} (Transcript 4). There are other instances of Indian English as well. Stressing the preceding adjective instead of the noun or the adverb it qualifies is one common Indian English feature and it can be noticed at several places, for example: \textit{very strongly} (Transcript 3).
Overuse of present continuous tense is also another Indian English feature and we can find example of it in the conversation in utterances like:

the development seems to including the issue of containing or combating insurgency/

(Transcript 3)

Use of the verb after the subject is another Indian English feature that is echoed in this conversation also:

why it did not affect the development of ↑Punjab /

(Transcript 3)

Phonetic features like vowel length, stress pattern, use or non-use of aspiration (which are not shown in the transcripts in detail but can be recovered from the recorded data), mark the whole conversation as non-native.

Intonation plays a decisive role in the discourse proceeding in utterances like:

S1 > Mr ↓ P / central leaders like ↑ yourself / are ↓ responsible / for the mess that you are ↓ talking about –

(Transcript 1)
Here the attacking tone of the speaker is reflected in the rising tone in 'yourself' and the consecutive falling intonation units. The immediate response of the intended hearer is partly moulded by this straightforward attack. Since S2 did not have an immediate readymade response, he takes time in formulating the discourse strategy of defence by using discourse markers like 'you see' and non-linguistic devices like coughing:

S2 - you see ((cough)) I was a part of the major political party no ↓↑doubt / I ↑ was / a ↓ ( ) there for long time / but ↑ I was in the decision making body / I was hardly for ↓ five months / in my entire political ↓ career /

(Transcript 1)

Explorations of non-linguistic features can be very subjective and narrow. It becomes even more problematic in the analysis of a play. Since a play is meant to be performed in front of a certain group of audience, in the analysis of drama, the presentability or otherwise of the imaginary dialogues, stage setting, appearance of the characters, their facial and body expression, intonation, and various other factors play a vital role in the discourse interpretation, so much so that in most of the plays, the expected delivery pattern of the written script is explicitly mentioned by the author. For instance, here is an extract from a play:

Rani: Before the resident becomes too generous will he be pleased to state his business?
Lawrence: He will be honoured. (Suddenly in changed tone.)

I came to inform you of two things. The Khalsa at Bannu led by the English officers has isolated the difficult tribes, and things are on the way to normalcy in the Frontier.

Rani: (Coldly) Our congratulations!

Lawrence: (Exaggeratedly) Thank you.

Rani: What else?

Lawrence: (Uncomfortably) a small detachment of English soldiers was crossing the gate towards the bazaar, when the officer in command found their way blocked by a couple of cows. Not attuned to Indian sympathies, and being young and impetuous, I'm afraid he cleared the street in the quickest possible way.

Rani: (Genuinely) Hai! He killed the cows.

(Das 2001: 44)

This play is written by an Indian writer depicting the situation of late nineteenth century in an Indian province that had a de jure Rani or Queen and a de facto British Commissioner, Laurence. They held positions that demand high formality (although they have secret intimacy that demands the most intimate and informal kind of language). The use of passives and third person singular to a person who is physically and immediately present there as the only hearer (will he be pleased to state his business), and the same kind of reply (He will be honoured) exhibit this high formality. The immediate shift to direct ‘you’ and ‘I’ may be because of the discarding of the former role relationship,
which might be due to the urgency of the message the speaker wants to deliver. In fact, there are two messages, one joyous and one ominous. It is the general tendency of every speaker to deliver the good news first and then the bad one. This speaker also follows this technique. However, the second message has enormous socio-cultural significance for the Queen and her subjects, which the Governor can only partly realise and his soldiers were blind of. With his partial understanding of the gravity of the situation, Laurence delivers the message in a very hedged way. The cows are made partly responsible for their destruction by mentioning first that they blocked the road for the soldiers. Then the innocence of the soldiers is stressed, foregrounding their ignorance of Indian cultural beliefs, as well as their young age. The word ‘kill’ is carefully left out, which a shocked queen utters in genuine concern.

The intended utterances in this extract are decidedly fixed not only in terms of the lexical and syntactic units that are explicitly mentioned, but also in terms of the intonation, the emotion, the body language that might come along with the utterance. Several problems crop up in a created, imaginary conversation such as this. The author has to mentally place himself or herself in the spatial and temporal setting that is created for each of the characters. Moreover, the author has to think in terms of all the characters and give appropriate utterances to all of them according to the nature of characters created, the various discourse strategies they might use, the idiolect variations they might have, the extent to which they can held ‘the willing suspension of disbelief’ of the audience. The plot is generally decided first and then the utterances are created in a way that suitably carries the plot, develops the characters, and paves the way for a satisfactory perlocutionary effect. A play is generally a written text, which is converted to a spoken
form through a collaborative effort of the performers and the director. The director decides whether the spoken delivery along with the bodily expression and the setting recreates the world the author wants to depict. In Shaw’s plays, every minute detail of the setting is mentioned; in Shakespeare’s plays little or none is mentioned. Hence, Shakespeare’s plays can be performed in hundred different ways, while Shaw’s plays do not have that much of flexibility.

Therefore, any analysis of a play or a dramatic presentation becomes extremely context bound. The discoursal coherence may lie somewhere outside the utterances, or outside the grammatical cohesion. Even in casual everyday conversation, the discoursal coherence may rest somewhere outside the text. We can recall the famous example from Widdowson (1973):

A: That’s the doorbell.
B: I am in the bath.
A: Ok.

Here are three grammatical sentences that do not have any cohesive links. Yet, they carry a complete communicative message in the context of a communicative event and within that communicative event, the sentences are tied to each other in a discourse coherence. We have already stated in the context of the other discourse types that coherence is a relative phenomenon, based on the context of the topic, the setting, the participants, the role relations and so on. Since sample 4.1 here is a relatively formal conversation, the grammatical cohesion leads to coherence in greater extent than in an
informal conversation such as sample 4.3. In the latter, instead of grammatical cohesion leading to coherence, it is the topic, the setting, the participants and their roles in the discourse that moulds the coherence. For example, we can have a look at an extract from sample 4.3:

<S01> So, right yeah.
<S02> And I generally style it, but it's 'cos it's got so, I generally have like a maybe side, side-ish parting
<Parting going over that way>
<S01>
<S02> just to give it a bit more

Yeah,

(Sample 4.3.)

In utterances like these, we can discover coherence only when we understand from our practical experience and background information that the setting is at the barber's; and one of the participants is a customer directing the other participant, i.e., the barber, what kind of a hair style she wants to go for. The barber, with her professional experience, is helping out the customer in her description of the hairstyle.

In all these instances we have seen that conversation is deeply rooted in the context, which can be as diverse as linguistic, social, cultural, political, ideological and so on. Exploration of the non-linguistic or paralinguistic features and formulating generalisations on the basis of it can lead to extreme subjectivity at times. Therefore, not
going deep into their roles in orienting the conversation, I have cursorily mentioned them at this point, to unwrap the close and complex relationship between society and language. The following section presents an overview of other research works done in related areas, to evaluate my framework and analysis and also to arrive at some tentative generalisations.

6.4. Literature on Conversation

As stated in section 1, analysing conversation is one of the most challenging research areas in Sociolinguistics at present. A few works done in the area are reviewed in this section.

One major area of exploration in Discourse Analysis in general and conversation/spoken discourse analysis in particular is the unwrapping of similarities and differences between spoken and written language. Several works have been done in this field. We have already discussed Berendt (1991)(cf. p. 230 of this dissertation). Tannen (1982) is a collection of studies by Chafe, Polanyi and others, on orality and literacy in language use, explored from diverse points of view. The most relevant article for my work in this volume is that of Chafe. It contains a statistical analysis of orality and literacy in language use, on the basis of samples of the following four modes of language used by graduate students and teachers:

1. Informal spoken language, from dinner table conversations;
2. Formal spoken language, from lectures;
3. Informal written language, from letters;

4. Formal written language, from academic papers.

On the basis of his analysis, Chafe assigns the difference between spoken and written language to two sets of features. The first set is distinguished by a dichotomy of integration vs. fragmentation in written and spoken language respectively. Integration refers to encapsulation of more information into an idea unit than the rapid pace of spoken language would normally allow. In fragmented language, a typical idea unit consists of a single clause. Integrated language, on the other hand, makes use of a variety of devices such as nominalizations, participles, attributive adjectives, sequences of prepositional clauses, and complement clauses for incorporating additional elements. This, Chafe suggests, is a consequence of the differences in the use of time in speaking and writing. The features of the other set reflect an involvement vs. detachment dichotomy, attributable to the different relations of a speaker or writer to the audience. Whereas written language fosters detachment in the use of passives and nominalizations, spoken language manifests a variety of involvement devices such as the use of first person references, monitoring of information flow, use of particles expressing enthusiastic involvement, fuzziness, direct quotes and so on. Statistical data is provided for the use of each of these devices in written and spoken language.

Hutchby (1996) used the idea of a relationship between interactional activities and organizational structures as the basis for developing an account of the arrangement of power in a British radio call-in. He showed that on radio call-in, the opening of the call is not only designed to set up an environment in which the callers introduce the topic, but
by virtue of that it also places the participants on significantly asymmetrical footings with respect to those topics. In section 2 of this chapter, we have already discussed the conclusions that Hutchby arrived at.

Eggins and Slade (1997) is a study carried out under Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics. They distinguish between pragmatic (motivated by pragmatic purposes, i.e., business conversation and therefore more formal and shorter in length) versus casual conversation (not motivated by any clear pragmatic purposes and therefore spontaneous and lengthy). The main objective of the book is stated to be the presentation of a range of techniques for analysing the interactional patterns through which interactants jointly construct social relations. Within the interactional patterns they included:

- Grammatical patterns at the clause level which indicate power and subordination within interactions;
- Semantic patterns which indicate frequency of contact and familiarity among the interactants;
- Conversational structure patterns which indicate affective involvement and shifting alignments within conversation;
- The use of text types which give some indication of shared world views about normalcy and predictability.
These interactional patterns are not explored in all the samples uniformly. Instead, different samples are analysed for different patterns. The study therefore does not seem to present a unified finding.

Carter and McCarthy (1997) is a presentation of the CANCODE (Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English) corpus of spoken English, which consists of extensive samples of naturalistic conversational data. Twenty samples are distributed across the following speech genres:

A. Narrative: Anecdotes told with active listener participation (for example, dangerous childhood pranks).

B. Identifying: Extracts in which people talk about themselves, and their present and past lives (for example, two old friends meet again).

C. Language-in-action: Extracts recorded while people were doing things (for example, cooking rice).

D. Comment-elaboration: Extracts of people giving casual opinions and commenting on things, other people, events around them and in their daily lives (for example, two teachers chatting).

E. Service encounters: Extracts in a variety of goods-and-services settings (for example, at the post office).

F. Debate and argument: Extracts in which people take up positions, pursue arguments, expound on their opinions on a range of matters (for example, local radio phone-in).
G. Language, learning and interaction: Language in an institutional sense and in the context of learning (for example, school discussion).

H. Decision-making/negotiating outcomes: Extracts in which people work towards consensus or negotiate their way through problems towards solutions (for example, publisher’s planning meeting).

The extracts are accompanied by a general commentary along with a line-by-line commentary revealing key interpersonal functions in the use of tense, modality, ellipsis, deixis and clause structure, as well as the role of discourse markers as a kind of conversational punctuation. Carter and McCarthy define genres as episodes of speech of which participants (if interaction is successful) have a shared view of their nature as social encounter. Genres vary in the surface grammatical manifestations such as ellipsis and discourse markers, but these merely mark the socially-determined differences of purpose, degree of shared knowledge, institutionalised ‘rules of speaking’ (for example, in classrooms, debates), roles and relationships between the participants, and so on. Variation in canonical (written) word order is shown to be common across a wide range of genres of speech. At the same time, it is demonstrated that:

a) a key grammatical structure such as situational ellipsis, particularly associated with informal English, occurs in most others genres but not very commonly in narrative genres;

b) in service encounters, stretches of conversation often rely very heavily on discourse markers;
c) in language-in-action genres there can be extensive interaction without reference to the main objects in front of the participant and with a constant reliance on deixis such as 'this', 'that', 'here', 'there'.

McCarthy (1998) examines the pedagogical impact of these expositions. In the section concerning discourse and pedagogy, we discuss these in detail.

Delin (2000) is organised around six different everyday discourse types – the language of written news reporting, of sports commentary, instructions, interviews, magazine features, advertising. Levels of descriptions proposed to be used in the book include:

- **Production values**: The way in which texts of certain types are constructed around expectations of what they will, and will not, contain.
- **Rhetorical structure**: The constituent parts of texts, such as summaries, descriptions, narrative, warnings, step-by-step directions.
- **Conversation structure**: How a dialogue is constructed in ‘turns’ between speakers, and how these are formed, begun, and ended.
- **Syntax**: The way certain syntactic constructions – different sentence types – are used.
- **Lexical choice**: The way words are chosen, and used in relation to one another.
- **Semantics**: The way meaning is conveyed by certain grammatical and lexical choices.
Pragmatics: The way meaning is retrieved through inference and through the use of shared knowledge and context.

Sound: The way audible elements such as intonation and stress contribute to meaning.

Delin does not expose all these levels in her analysis of different types of discourses. However, at certain points, she highlights the ideological ‘work’ a text performs as it is interpreted by its intended audience, which illustrates the relationship that the text has with its producer, consumer, and situation. These expositions are made at the level of lexical and syntactic choices.

Another exposition of ideological underpinnings that we have already discussed is that of Clayman (1993). Commenting on Clayman’s research, Pomerantz (1993) pointed out that his research was path finding in analysing actions that are ambiguous and subtle. Secondly, Clayman’s work was immediately relevant to the political life of the society. Finally, Clayman’s work combined interests in sociology, mass communication, and rhetoric, a synthesis that has had, and will continue to have, growing support.

Interactional Prosody is a recent development, which studies prosodic variations in terms of interactional patterns and variables. For example, Couper-Kuhlen (2001) shows that prosody – specifically of onset level – is deployed in situated interaction to cue frames of interpretation for talk. For example, in radio phone-in-programmes, the turn constructional units in anchor position are heard to be lacking a high onset. When this happens, the moderator responds in a way that shows he is not treating caller’s talk as the reason for the call, but rather as a preface to the statement of reason. This empirical
study suggests that prosodic configuration in discourse cannot be dealt with 'across the board' independently of the context in which it occurs. The context that is relevant for appreciating interactional prosody includes the turn, its verbal design, and the sequential location in which this turn is situated.

Both Gregory et al (2001), and Gregory and Webster (1996) study the vocal channel of the human voice beneath 0.5 kHz, best known as the Fundamental Frequency of Phonation ($F_0$) and find it to reflect non-verbal information such as social status and its importance for the participants. What is interesting about these two studies is that they reveal two ostensibly conflicting research conclusions, the former showing a lessening of $F_0$ effect with the introduction of the visual channel and the latter showing an enhancement of it. This discrepancy is negated by examining two salient differences in the interactional environments for the two studies. The conclusion arrived at is that though $F_0$ may have a specialised auxiliary function to communicate social status information, it is clear that other channels such as the visual can effectively attenuate that function and the social context of interaction plays an important role in the ways this attenuation is managed.

Hutchby (2001) discusses the multiplicity of ways in which conversational practices interface with technological devices. For example, the telephone has brought into existence not only new forms of interaction but also new forms of identity, which participants need to negotiate competently. Again, novel forms of workplace technology such as collaborative video links can be seen to encourage the development of apparently new forms of interpersonal interaction. Nevertheless, people who attempt to communicate via these technologies continue to rely on everyday interactional
competencies, which in turn lead to many of the problems that are experienced in computer-supported collaborative working. Hutchby also looks at Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), specifically multi-user conversations in Internet Relay Chat (IRC), and adapts the basic perspective of conversation analysis to investigate the nature of participation in this novel arena of social interaction.

Markee (2000) highlights another related field – the possibility of the use of Conversation Analysis in second language acquisition research. Conversation Analysis can be used to demonstrate how micro-moments of socially distributed cognition instantiated in conversational behaviour contribute to observable changes in the participants’ states of knowing and using a new language. Her book uses two extended examples of conversation analysis to show how learners succeed or fail in learning the meaning of a word or phrase in a conversational context. She thus draws our attention to the potential use of the micro-analytic possibility of conversation analysis as a methodological resource for second language acquisition studies.

**Discussion**

This brief exposition of some of the existing studies in the field was expected to help us in the evaluation of our framework and the analysis attempted in section 2 of this paper.

Chafe (1982) is a more general study then we are doing here; so is Berendt (1991). Although we have not probed into the details of the differences between spoken and written language, the lexical, phrasal, and discoursal features that we analysed fall in line with their expositions and thus pave the way for a generalisation.
Carter and McCarthy (1997) took under their purview more speech genres and samples than we could take up in this chapter. Thus their samples provide a basis for comparison and contrast with the sample I have taken up for close examination. However, since they provided only commentaries and not detailed analysis, their exposition is more useful for students and teachers than for researchers in the field.

Eggins and Slade (1997) exhibit a dichotomy. They believed that for a comprehensive account of any casual conversational excerpt, a systematic working of analyses from the grammatical to the generic is extremely useful. This signifies that they consider the levels of analysis to be fixed. However, in their analysis, they used different analytical levels for different types of conversation. They arrived at the conclusion that the particular questions one asks of the text would lead to the foregrounding of particular analyses over others. This in turn posits relevance to be the determining factor. In my framework, I have stated relevance to be the most important factor for the occurrence of any discourse; Eggins and Slade treated relevance to be the most important factor for the use of a methodology.

Delin (2000) encompasses the language of everyday life in terms of six different fields, explores the tenor and attempts at unpacking the significance that lies behind the use of different modes. Thus, it is a study under Hallidayan framework with the addition of some Critical Discourse Analytic expositions and it shares the shortcomings of both. Although Delin does not explore conversation, her exposition of ideological structure working behind any mundane language use shows the similarity of outcomes with our analysis. Clayman’s (1993) exposition is displayed in the reformulating technique that S3 employs in the conversation we have analysed.
Markee (2000) highlights another related field – the possibility of the use of Conversation Analysis in second language acquisition research. In my analysis, my orientation was not pedagogic in particular, and therefore, I have not highlighted pedagogical implications that might be there in the data I have analysed in this chapter. Similarly, Hutchby (2001) highlighted an area, which is not taken up for analysis here. Even then, studies of this kind give us a glimpse of the newly broadening field of conversation and its implications in interaction.

On the basis of our exposition and the discussion of the related works done in the area, the following tentative conclusions can be arrived at:

- Conversation is socially carried out. In other words, conversation progresses in a social context that assigns meaning to it.
- Conversation is vitally dependent on the context in which it occurs.
- The context can be both immediate and long term.
- The context includes not only the linguistic context but also interpersonal, social, cultural, topical, discoursal and other contexts.
- Conversation is by nature dialogic and very dynamic. These lead to the fact that conversation can break down depending upon the immediate response that it receives from the participants.
- Cohesion and grammaticality are largely discarded for coherence and intersubjective understanding.
- Silence plays a significant role in the progress and interpretation of the discourse.
Exploitation of power, both local and global, vitally shapes the discourse, assigning turns, ascribing meanings and leading on to different topics.

It must be noted that this list is not exhaustive – these comprise only some of the characteristics of conversation. The reason for this inexhaustiveness lies in the unlimited possibilities of interaction, setting, role-relationship among the participants, topics, as well as interpretations.

6.5. Evaluation

I am aware of the fact that the analysis I attempted here is to a great extent subjective. I ascribe it partly to the nature of conversation – its extraordinary reliance on context and shared knowledge for the deciphering of meaning. Unwrapping of the implicit power distribution, interpretation of features like speed of delivery and so on are some of the issues where I anticipate diversity of interpretation if other researchers were to analyse it.

Interactional prosody, though not explored in a detailed manner, raises interesting questions, such as, is the variation a feature of Indian English, or of specific genres (such as political speech, journalesse), or is it just idiolectal. Nevertheless, because of the topic and the setting, the conversation taken up for detailed discussion did not display very subtle play of intonation in the interpretation of the discourse/s. Due to the same reason, sample 4.1 did not reach the lowest level of the conversation continuum – very casual conversation. Although the selected conversation had more than two participants, due to
the institutionalised setting, this conversation did not reveal many features of casual conversation such as schisming (i.e., the splitting of a conversation into multiple ones, cf. Sacks et al 1974, Schegloff 1995, Parker 1984. Schism-inducing-turns are analysed in Goodwin 1987, as well as in Egbert 1997).

6.6. Conclusion

This chapter attempted an analysis of conversation in terms of the tentative discourse analytic framework. It examined a sample of institutionalised conversation in detail, in addition to references to other samples of conversation with different stylistic ranges. The framework could be applied suitably to the sample. The tentative conclusions arrived at were then compared with the conclusions deducted by other researchers assuming diverse points of view. On the basis of all these, the path for a more comprehensive analysis is made open.