

APPLYING THE PROBLEM-SOLUTION PATTERN TO A RADIO COMMERCIAL

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Abstract – In this paper we present an analysis of a radio commercial from the perspective of the clause-relational model as especially developed in Hoey (1979, 1983, 2001). Our attention will thus focus on the larger patterns which regularly occur in texts, and in particular on one of the most common and important patterns: the Problem-Solution pattern, which occurs in a wide range of types of written and spoken discourse. A brief description of the Problem-Solution pattern therefore precedes our analysis and our discussion of the utility of the model in describing the organization of our piece of discourse, and of some of the difficulties encountered in the application of the model to it.

Keywords: discourse analysis; Problem-Solution pattern; clause relations; advertising.

1. Introduction

While in recent years important discourse and genre analysts have drawn attention to the increasing use of promotional strategies in genres which are traditionally considered non-promotional in their communicative purposes,¹ in this paper we present an analysis of a radio commercial from the perspective of the clause-relational model as especially developed in Hoey (1979, 1983, 2001). Our attention will therefore focus on the larger patterns which regularly occur in texts, and in particular on one of the most common and important patterns: the Problem-Solution pattern. A brief description of the Problem-Solution pattern therefore precedes our analysis and our discussion of the utility of the model in describing the organization of our piece of discourse, and of some of the difficulties encountered in the application of the model to it.

2. The Problem-Solution Pattern

The Problem-Solution pattern has been recognized as one of the most common “macro-patterns”, the larger patterns of discourse organization which regularly occur in a vast range of types of written and spoken discourse, at the same time reflecting and influencing our cultural knowledge.

The classic Problem-Solution pattern comprises the following four main components: Situation-Problem-Solution (or Response in Hoey’s model, as we will see

¹ See in particular Bhatia (1993, 1994, 1995, 1997, 2004, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2017), Fairclough (1993, 1995). Among the numerous genres which have been shown to contain promotional elements – genres which are traditionally considered non-promotional in their communicative purposes – we will remember at least: job application letters, reference letters, grant proposals, company reports, book reviews, book introductions, academic course descriptions.

below)-Evaluation; there are, however, a number of variants, which are discussed and illustrated in Hoey (1983, 1986, 2001) in a variety of discourse types, while Jordan (1980, 1981, 1984) examines the variants of the pattern as they occur in factual reporting.

Although Problem-Solution patterns can be traced back under different terminology to Greek philosophy, they appear to have been first noted by the American philosopher of art Monroe Beardsley in his work on practical logic (1950). The first linguists to discuss them as a text-organizing device appear to have been Young and Becker (1965), who identified the Problem-Solution pattern as one of two important paragraph structures (the other being Topic-Restriction-Illustration). Similar, though not identical, to the Problem-Solution pattern is the structure identified for certain kinds of narrative by Longacre (1972, 1974, 1976, 1983, 1989): aperture-setting-inciting moment-developing conflict-climax-dénouement-final suspense-closure.

A real Problem-Solution model is the pattern of narrative structure identified by Labov and Waletzky (1967) and Labov (1972) in spontaneous oral narratives of personal experience. Aiming to identify formal linguistic properties of narrative and relate them to their functions – the referential and evaluative functions – Labov finds that spontaneous personal anecdotes often include components like abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, result/resolution, coda, the evaluating component – in which external and internal evaluation can be distinguished – actually forming a secondary structure concentrated in the evaluation section but also occurring in various forms throughout the narrative.

Mention of the Problem-Solution pattern is also made by Grimes (1975, pp. 211-212), who notes:

Both the plots of fairy tales and the writings of scientists are built on a response pattern. The first part gives a problem and the second its solution. The solution has to be a solution to the problem that was stated, not some other; and the problem is stated only to be solved [...] the content of the second part is dependent upon the content of the first part to a great extent. How to express this interlocking seems to be beyond us [...] but that is the shape of the relation.

In his long-standing interest in “macrostructures”, Van Dijk has repeatedly drawn attention both to the narrative structure setting-complication-resolution-evaluation-coda/moral and to the scientific discourse structure introduction-problem-solution-conclusion, often stressing that (Van Dijk 1977, p. 155):

It is the task of a general theory of discourse to classify and define such categories, rules and their specific textual functions. If discourse types were merely differentiated according to different semantic content (topic), we would have a potentially infinite number of discourse types. It is more interesting to elaborate a more abstract theory which relates structural categories to conceptual categories. The structure of an argument, for example, should be assigned independently of whether it is about engineering, linguistics or child-care.

Greater attention to the Problem-Solution pattern was given by Eugene Winter, who termed the structure “a larger clause relation” (for example, Winter 1977, p. 19). The author, however, dealt with the pattern in works (especially Winter 1969, 1976) that only exist in mimeographed form and that, like most of Winter’s works, are by now “largely inaccessible” (Hoey 2001, p. 34), as Hoey invariably points out. It was, however, from Winter’s work that many linguists derived their approach to the Problem-Solution pattern, including, as we will see below, Hoey himself, but also Hutchins (1977a, 1977b), who discusses the pattern as it applies to scientific texts and to the needs of abstracting, and Jordan (1980, 1981, 1984), who examines the variety of forms that the pattern can take in

factual reporting.

One of the most detailed analyses of the Problem-Solution pattern is represented, however, by the work of Michael Hoey (especially Hoey 1979, 1983, 1986, 1994, 2001), who, as anticipated above, derives his procedure for discourse analysis and his approach to the Problem-Solution pattern – as well as to the other patterns that he examines in his work, such as Matching Patterns and General-Particular Patterns – from Eugene Winter’s work on clause relations.²

In his work, Hoey explores the ways in which discourse patterns of various kinds are constructed out of clause relations, showing how these patterns are indicated to the reader by means of different kinds of signals, and how they can be reconstructed by the analyst.

The starting – and crucial – point of the analysis is thus represented by clause relations. A clause relation is a semantic relation holding between parts of a text. These parts may be phrases, clauses, groups of clauses, sentences, groups of sentences, paragraphs – or even nominal groups or single words (Hoey 1983, 1986, 2001; Jordan 1980, 1984, 1992). As sometimes pointed out by Hoey himself (e.g., 1983, 2001) as well as Jordan (e.g., 1984, 1992), the term “clause relation” may appear to be misleading, as it implies that the relationships are only or primarily between clauses. For this reason, in order to avoid misinterpretation, in his work, Hoey refers to clause relations simply as relations, whenever no ambiguity results from the omission of the term “clause”.

Following Winter, Hoey avoids detailed classifications of types of relations. As the author states, “Elaborate classifications of relations can sometimes obscure similarities and kinships amongst the relations” (Hoey 1983, p. 20). Clause relations are thus divided into two main categories: Logical Sequence relations and Matching relations (Hoey 1983, 1986, 2001; Winter 1971, 1974, 1977, 1982, 1994).

Logical Sequence relations are relations between successive events or ideas, whether actual or potential. This class of semantic relations includes:

- Cause-Consequence (or Cause-Effect), e.g., *it was cold, so Mary put her coat on;*
- Instrument-Achievement, e.g., *John beat off the attack by opening fire;*
- Instrument-Purpose, e.g., *Mary put her coat on to protect herself from the cold;*
- Time Sequence, e.g., *Jane switched the lights off and then went to bed;*
- Spatial Sequence, e.g., *Paul’s coat hung on a clothes stand in the hall. An umbrella lay on a table next to it* (Hoey 1983, p. 19; Hoey 2001, p. 30).

Matching relations are relations where statements are “matched” for points of similarity or difference. These relations include:

- Compatibility, e.g., *I like flowers and so does my brother;*
- Contrast, e.g., *I like flowers but my brother does not;*
- Generalization-Exemplification, e.g., *My brother doesn’t like flowers. For example, he hates carnations;*
- Preview-Detail, e.g., *There are two kinds of flowers I especially like. I really love roses and adore orchids;*

² The main works in which Winter developed his concept of the clause relation are Winter (1968, 1969, 1971, 1974, 1976, 1977, 1979, 1982, 1994) and Hoey and Winter (1986). As already noted above, most of Winter’s earlier studies are “now largely inaccessible” (Hoey 2001, p. 34), but useful accounts of his clause relational work as well as of the grammatical implications of his work can be found in more accessible studies like Winter (1977, 1979, 1982, 1992, 1994) and Hoey and Winter (1986), as well as, as we will see below, in Hoey’s works.

- The simplest kind of Matching relation is Topic Maintenance, e.g., *Roses are one of my favourite flowers. They are often called "the Queen of flowers"* (Hoey 1983, p. 20; Hoey 2001, p. 31).

Following Winter, Hoey (1983) also adds that the two categories of clause relations outlined above – Logical Sequence relations and Matching relations – are themselves governed by a more important relation, that of Situation-Evaluation, which represents the two facets of world-perception ‘knowing’ and ‘thinking’ (Hoey 1983, pp. 20, 55). This already points to two of the fundamental elements of the Problem-Solution pattern.

The basic criteria for identifying the Problem-Solution pattern – and the other patterns as well, of course: these are the criteria for identifying *the organization of a discourse* – are essentially the same that lead to the identification of clause relations. These criteria can be distinguished and defined as follows:

- the explicit signals present in the discourse. These include:
 - subordinators, such as *because, if, before, after, when, as, while, whereas, by-ing*;
 - sentence connectors-conjuncts, such as *then, therefore, thus, so, thereby, as a consequence, as a result, consequently, however, nevertheless, moreover, furthermore*;
 - lexical signals, such as *cause, reason, situation, problem, difficulty, dilemma, drawback, concern, danger, fear, unfortunately, need, avoid, prevent, counteract, reduce, help, answer, consequence, effect, outcome, result, solution, solve, (in)effective, manage, overcome, succeed, (un)successful, viable, etc.*;
 - repetition, which plays a special role in Matching and General-Particular Patterns.
- the methods for eliciting, clarifying, making explicit the meanings of relations/sequences/discourse organization when overt signals are absent: paraphrase and the projection of a sequence into question-answer dialogues.³

It is clear that these criteria are consistent with the view that the interpretation of relations and the identification of patterns are cognitive acts on the part of the reader/listener, and that they try to reflect fundamental aspects of this interpretative process seen as an interactive activity between reader and text or author: if conjuncts, subordinators, lexical signals are the writer’s/speaker’s explicit signalling of the intended organization and interpretation of the discourse, so that the relations signalled in this way are those most readily decoded by the reader/listener, questions are a reflection of the way in which readers/listeners interpret a discourse in terms of expectations and retrospective relations, and paraphrases are, similarly, simulations of the process that a reader goes through in trying to understand how a current sentence, or group of sentences etc., relates to what he has already encountered in the discourse (Hoey 1983, 2001).

Now, if it may seem evident that the means which signal and/or help identify clause relations can also establish and/or indicate the overall organization of a discourse, this in reality involves a series of considerations.

First of all, the recognition that a relation may either be signalled as complete in itself or carry in it evidence of being part of a larger set of relations. In order to understand

³ Among the studies on the signals of clause relations, we will remember at least the following: Crombie (1985), Hoey (1979, 1983, 1986, 1994, 1996, 2001), Hoey and Winter (1986), Jordan (1981, 1984), Winter (1968, 1969, 1971, 1974, 1976, 1977, 1979, 1982, 1992, 1994).

the function of some sentences or groups of sentences, we must take into account not only the relation between the sentence, or group of sentences, and its neighbours, but also the relationship of the sentence, or group of sentences, to the discourse as a whole. These relationships are established or identified by connectors which in fact signal at a different, though of course related, level: that of the discourse as a whole, which, at the same time, means both distinguishing between types of connectors and signals, and, even more importantly, realizing that some of them point to the overall discourse organization and not (only) to the lower-level clause relations (Hoey 1983, pp. 32, 34, 43, 45, 47, 56, 61, and *passim*). It is through the presence or application of more general connectors that it is possible to recognize fundamental functions such as Situation and Evaluation, and, from this, to identify a complete Problem-Solution pattern.

Before elaborating on this important point, we must also remember that Hoey (1983) points out that the relationship between levels, that is the relationship between clause relations such as Cause-Consequence, Instrument-Achievement on the one hand and functions like Problem, Response⁴ on the other also requires formalization, namely a set of rules which can relate one level of relations to the other. Hoey (1983) thus proposes a set of four mapping conditions, which, as we shall see in the following section, make it possible to use the signals of clause relations as signals of Problem-Response (Hoey 1983, pp. 56-61).

Returning to the connectors identifying Situation and Evaluation, it is clear that those identifying Situation are very general connectors (such as, ‘when’, ‘what happened?’, ‘in what situation?’, ‘while’, ‘what is the situation?’), which connect the sentence not only to the immediately following sentence but to all the sentences which are present in that particular (stretch of) discourse (Hoey 1983, 2001). This means that the meaning of that sentence is not derived from its proximity to the following one but from its position in the discourse pattern as a whole (Hoey 1983, 2001). In other words, Situation can be defined only in terms of a complete discourse pattern, inside which it has precisely the function of providing a context for a better understanding of subsequent sentences (Hoey 1983, 2001). It is also important to note that all the elements in the Pattern, apart from Evaluation, contain, to a varying extent, situational features, in the fundamental sense that while Situation, Problem, Response represent the ‘knowing’ aspect of world-perception, answering questions like ‘What are the facts?’, Evaluation represents the ‘thinking’ aspect, answering questions like ‘What do you think of the facts?’ or ‘How successful was this?’ (Hoey 1983, pp. 20, 45, 55).

The different dimension of the function Evaluation has already been revealed to us by Labov: certainly concentrated in the Evaluation section, it is also present at various points throughout the discourse, answering different questions and then performing a

⁴ As indicated above, Hoey uses the term “Response” rather than “Solution” in his model. More precisely, Hoey follows the normal practice in the literature of referring to the structure as the Problem-Solution pattern when talking of the overall pattern. When the author refers to the individual parts of the pattern, he instead prefers the term “Response” to that of “Solution”, because the latter term contains within it an evaluation of a particular response as successful. Since, as we will also see in our analysis, it is common for Evaluations to be negative, the term “Response” appears to be more appropriate for this part of the pattern, because it does not carry any implications of success.

This may seem a subtle distinction, but in fact it is important also because, as we will see below, a negative Evaluation of a Response is a signal of Problem, which determines the common phenomenon of multilayering, that is, the presence of more than one Problem-Solution pattern within the same discourse (Hoey 1983, 1994, 2001).

different function from the other elements of the pattern (see also Hoey 1983, pp. 47, 55, 186 and *passim*).

The special importance of Evaluation is also confirmed by the fact that, in normal circumstances, only a positive Evaluation of the Response will bring a Problem-Solution pattern to an end: a negative Evaluation signals another Problem, thus determining the common phenomenon of multilayering, that is to say, the existence of more than one Problem-Solution pattern within the same discourse (Hoey 1983, 1994, 2001).⁵ The fact that a positive Evaluation is normally required in order to feel the pattern complete, to the extent that a negative Evaluation not only creates a sense of incompleteness, but actually upsets or/and impresses the reader, is of course further evidence of the existence of a Problem-Solution pattern reflecting and, at the same time, influencing our cultural knowledge (at least as far as the Western world is concerned).

There is another, though obviously related, sense in which Evaluation is fundamental. We have already noted that all the elements in a pattern contain evaluative features, actually, all signals, all relations are evaluative (e.g., Hoey 1983, pp. 47, 55, 186 and *passim*). It is through these evaluative features that the writer expresses his voice, or rather it is even impossible for a writer not to use evaluative elements, since all his ways of relating one idea to the other, his decisions on what to say and what to omit included, and even the reasons why he decides to say something point to his ways of evaluating a Situation, a Problem, etc. At the same time this is also what the reader wants: simple lists of facts, lack of explanation of and comment on causes, motives, similarities, etc., may produce inept discourses, to which “the withering rejoinder ‘So what?’” (Labov 1972, p. 366) is one of the inevitable replies.

Rhetorical ineptness – which may also be caused by under-signalling and mis-signalling (Hoey 1983, pp. 179-183, 187) – is, of course, distinct from inability to produce coherent discourse. Incoherent discourse appears to be the result not of the misuse of relations and signals, but of the non-use of relations; thus, we can say that we have incoherent discourse when writers or speakers fail to relate the sentences of their discourse to one another, and even when they just fail to relate one of these sentences to any of the other sentences in their discourse (Hoey 1983, pp. 179-183, 187).

While noting, then, that this approach can help account not only for coherent/incoherent discourse, but also for inept discourse, we wish to conclude our brief description of this approach to discourse analysis with what, in our opinion, best clarifies how it is possible to arrive at the fundamental notion of textual coherence developed, as we have seen even from our brief account, by this approach, how, that is, it is possible to characterize and account for discourse organization as in fact a complex construction in which each unit relates to other units, smaller units contribute to the construction and understanding of larger units, where, in brief, a clear logic determines and holds between all the units of the discourse. The two definitions quoted below show in fact how this approach can help account for both the perception and the creation of coherent discourse – which is also the reason why Hoey first quotes and then adapts Winter’s definition of the clause relation:

⁵ Hoey (1983) identifies three types of multilayering: chained multilayering, where each Response leads to a different Problem; spiral multilayering, where there are repeated attempts to solve the same problem, all but the last of which fail; and progressive multilayering, where each Response solves part of the Problem but leaves part of it unsolved, with subsequent Responses attempting to solve the part of the Problem still requiring solution (Hoey 1983, pp. 81-94, 105).

A clause relation is the cognitive process whereby we interpret the meaning of a sentence or group of sentences in the light of its adjoining⁶ sentence or group of sentences. (Winter 1971 quoted by Hoey 1983, p. 18).

A clause relation is also the cognitive process whereby the choices we make from grammar, lexis and intonation in the creation of a sentence or group of sentences are made in the light of its adjoining sentence or group of sentences. (Hoey's 1983 adaptation of Winter's definition of the clause relation, p. 19).

Before passing on to the analysis of our piece of discourse, we must mention the existence of discourses containing more than one of the various patterns like Problem-Solution, General-Particular, etc., either following one another or embedded within one another, which can occur even in brief and simple discourses.

3. An application of the Problem-Solution pattern

The piece of discourse we have chosen for analysis is a radio commercial from a British radio station (see the transcription in Appendix A; for convenience of reference, each orthographic sentence in the discourse is numbered).

We were struck by the extreme simplicity of this commercial. Used to subtle forms of advertising, we were impressed by the extremely clear and explicit way in which the message was conveyed. It seemed the skeleton of the essential features of advertisements. In a sense, one could say that the simplicity and clarity of the message are due to the nature of the problem which the product is claimed to solve: a real-world problem which does not need much hidden persuasion to be understood.

At the same time, the skeleton-like picture that emerges certainly also has the function of emphasizing the seriousness of the problem, arousing in the audience a sense of anxiety, dismay, which were in fact the feelings systematically experienced by several people known to the present writer, when they heard the commercial.

From a discursal point of view, however, our piece of discourse conceals unexpected complexities and difficulties, as we will see in the following pages. Certainly, the presence, in our discourse, of a Problem, and a serious one, and of a Response positively evaluated is clear and explicit. The organization of the discourse is however more complex than it seems, giving us – among other things – an interesting example of multilayering in a brief and linguistically not difficult piece of discourse.

One of the first features we note is not however related to multilayering, but is what Hoey (1983, p. 105) defines “personalization of advertisements”, which in our discourse is present from the very first sentence. Sentence 1 directly addresses the listener: “Do you often etc.?”, immediately establishing participant-linking (Hoey 1983, pp. 94-106; Hoey 2001, pp. 133-141), and actually forcing the listener to agree/realize that yes, she too often has this problem, and in fact to “see” (so real is in fact the image created by the first sentence) and feel all the gravity of the problem. As the pronoun *she* that we have used certainly indicates, the Problem and the whole discourse are even more personalized, since they address a particular “you”: a young woman or girl, which is made explicit by the fact that the voice that shouts “Emergency” in the alarm in fact belongs to a young woman.

⁶ As Hoey (1983, pp. 18, 168) points out, in Winter's definition of the clause relation, “adjoining” should be interpreted as meaning “within the same discourse”.

Up to now we have referred to sentence 1 as the Problem. Certainly a number of signals of a problematic situation are present: “vulnerable” already sets the scene, “insecure” reinforces it, and then we have the perfectly evoked picture of “a strange place” where “you are walking on your own” without anybody you know to help you, if necessary. The fact that this happens, or may happen, “often” adds to the seriousness of the problem.

In reality, as can be seen in the Appendix, we have divided sentence 1 into two parts: sentence 1*a* (“Do you often feel vulnerable and insecure?”), which functions as (part of) the Problem, and sentence 1*b* (“when you are on your own, particularly when you are walking in a strange place where there’s no one you know”), which is instead the part of sentence 1 that functions as Situation.

In an attempt to apply two other important criteria for identifying a Problem-Solution pattern, we will now see at least three things in fact: the first is the function of sentence 1*a* as (part of) the Problem, the second is the function of sentence 1*b* as Situation, while the third will lead us back to the question of personalization in this discourse. It is not difficult, in fact, to imagine a real-world situation in which somebody says:

No, you see, *my problem* is that *I* often feel vulnerable and insecure when *I*’m out on my own, particularly when *I*’m walking in a strange place where there’s no one *I* know.

Similarly without difficulty, we can imagine the following exchanges (among many others):

- A: Why don’t *you* go, then?
 B: No, really *I* can’t.
 A: But why?
 B: Well, you see, *I* often feel vulnerable and insecure when *I*’m out on my own, particularly when *I*’m walking in a strange place where there’s no one *I* know.

Or:

- A: Why do you want me to come with you, can’t *you* go alone?
 B: Well, *I* often feel vulnerable etc.

The elements in italics in our paraphrases/projection into question-answer dialogues of the opening part of our piece of discourse confirm clearly the personalization of the radio commercial from the start. We also find confirmation of the functions of sentence 1*a* as (part of) the Problem and of sentence 1*b* as Situation.

Up to now we have referred to sentence 1*a* as (part of) the Problem because we must also take into account sentence 2*a*. There seem to be various ways of looking at the relationship between sentences 1*a* and 2*a*. One is to recognize in the relationship two levels of the Problem. More particularly, we could say that the problematic situation in sentence 1*a* is caused by the possibility/ existence of the Problem expressed in sentence 2*a*. It is not difficult to continue the brief dialogues in the above examples in the following way:

- A: Why don’t you go, then?
 B: No, really I can’t.
 A: But why?
 B: Well, you see, I often feel vulnerable and insecure when I’m out on my own, particularly when I’m walking in a strange place where there’s no one I know.
 A: But why? (don’t be silly, etc.)

B: But ... because should anything happen, who would help me? etc.

Obviously, it is quite possible that “something” happens to a person who does not experience the negative emotional state expressed in sentence 1*a*, in which case sentence 2*a* would be established as a problem on its own. In our discourse (as in many real-world situations) it would appear however – though we want to point out that the two problematic facts can often be two distinct problems – that the two are part of the same problem, and are in a Cause-Consequence relation. That this interpretation is not incorrect seems to be confirmed by the fact that a positively evaluated response can represent a solution to both levels of the Problem.

Concentrating now on sentence 2*a*, we see that the characterization of this sentence too as Problem is confirmed by the fact that a Response is immediately given: “you could always call out for help”. It will seem that we are taking the negative meaning of “happen” and of the whole of sentence 2*a* for granted, thus indicating that sentence 2*a* has been independently established as Problem. Even if we wanted to deny the evident negative meaning of sentence 2*a* and its being independently established as Problem, it would be possible to show that sentences 2*a* and 2*b* fulfil the functions respectively of Problem and Response.

As they stand, sentences 2*a* and 2*b* meet the conditions of the first of the 4 mapping conditions, the 4 rules proposed by Hoey (1983), which, as we have seen above, make it possible to use the signals of clause relations such as Cause-Consequence, Instrument-Achievement as signals of Problem-Response. In particular, the first of the four mapping conditions reads as follows:

We will assume two parts of a discourse, *a* and *b*, in a Cause-Consequence relation. *If (i) a* has been independently established as problem *and (ii) b* contains the role of agent, then *b* is Response. (Hoey 1983, p. 57)

If we wanted to say that sentence 2*a* has not been independently established as Problem, we could apply both mapping condition 3 and mapping condition 4. Mapping condition 3 says (Hoey 1983, p. 58):

We will assume two parts of a discourse, *a* and *b*, in a Cause-Consequence relation and that *a* has not been independently established as Problem.
If (i) b contains the role of agent *and (ii) b* also prevents, reverses, avoids, or avoids harm to some crucial aspect of *a*, or seeks help in preventing, etc. some crucial aspect of *a*, then *a* is Problem and *b* Response.

The application of mapping condition 4 would simply force us to express “call out for help” in an awkward purpose clause (actually, we could also attach another purpose clause). With this change we could apply the more complicated mapping condition 4, which is based on the same assumptions as mapping condition 3, requires, as always, the role of agent in *b* (clearly, “you” in sentence 2*b*), and the possibility of attaching to *b* a Purpose clause *c* “which spells out a layman’s understanding of what *b* means” (Hoey 1983, p. 58). The relation between the two parts *b* and *c* has to be one of Instrument-Purpose, “in which *c* prevents, reverses, avoids, avoids harm to, or seeks help in preventing, etc., some crucial aspect of *a*” (Hoey 1983, p. 57). If all these conditions are satisfied, *a* is Problem and *b* Response (Hoey 1983, p. 58).

We can certainly conclude that sentence 2*a* is also (part of the) Problem and sentence 2*b* is Response. Our application of the mapping conditions has obviously taken advantage of the presence in sentence 2*b* of the lexical signal “help”, which, as we have

seen, plays an important role in the mapping conditions: among the typical lexical items of Response, it is in fact a signal of both Problem and Response (Hoey 1983, p. 86). This is then the first layer of our piece of discourse: sentence *1b* fulfils the function of Situation, sentences *1a* and *2a* fulfil the function of Problem and sentence *2b* that of Response.

The sentence “you could always call out for help” (sentence *2b*) in a sense anticipates that something else is to follow. What follows is a negative Evaluation (sentence 3) of the Response in sentence *2b*, which then signals a new Problem. But there is something more in sentence 3. In the transcription of the commercial we have not separated sentences *3a* and *3b* with a full stop. There is a pause, of course, after “heard”, but not sufficient, in our opinion, to justify a full stop. However, even if we want to imagine a full stop after “heard”, the fact remains that we have, simply conjoined with “and”, two very different things. One is sentence *3a*, which signals a new Problem in the form of a negative Evaluation, with Basis for this negative Evaluation, of something already dealt with in the discourse. The other is what, at first sight, seems to be a negative Evaluation of something up to this point not mentioned at all in the commercial. However, the out-of-the-blue impression that we get from sentence *3b* is only in part justified. A more careful examination of sentence *3b* reveals that what it contains is not just a negative Evaluation. And, in fact, how could we have an Evaluation without a Response? If we try to paraphrase, or rather expand sentence *3b*, we can imagine something like this:

Another solution that you could adopt (or: you already adopt) is represented by personal alarms. But ordinary alarms just make a meaningless noise that’s all too easy to ignore.

What we have then in sentence *3b* is: another Response to the same Problem in sentences *1a-2a*, and a negative Evaluation, with Basis for this Evaluation, of this Response. All is expressed in a few but “strong” lexical signals: “meaningless”, “ignore”, “just”, “all too easy”, and in fact by the whole movement of the sentence.

The actual Response – the positively evaluated Response – arrives, at last, in sentence 4. Introduced in sentence 4, it displays all its power in sentence 5, which is then followed, from sentence 7, by Details of Response.

Obviously, since the Problem and in fact the whole discourse have been participant-linked, the Response too is personalized. Actually, the Response is in general the element of the pattern more frequently participant-linked in advertisements (Hoey 1983, pp. 104-105). The personalization of the Response means that, as we have seen with the Problem, instead of answering general questions like ‘What is the Response?’ or ‘What response has been made?’, it in fact answers the question ‘What response can I make?’ (Hoey 1983, p. 104). In these cases, the formulation of the Response, as can be clearly seen in our discourse, is that of advice/instruction to the reader/listener especially (but not only) in the form of an imperative (Hoey 1983, pp. 104-106). The sentences in our discourse displaying these personal features of the positively evaluated Response are sentences 4, 8, 10, 12.

Of course, there is something more in this second part of the discourse. It is evident that the whole Response (Response + Details of Response) is couched in Evaluative terms. In particular, in the Detail part, sentences 7, 9 and also 11 (“costs just”) answer both the questions/requests: ‘Tell me about x in greater detail’, ‘How does it work?’ (Details of Response) and the questions ‘Does it work?’, ‘How successful is this response?’, ‘What is your evaluation of this response?’ (Evaluation). Besides, Evaluation takes, as often, the form of Evaluation accompanied by Basis (Hoey 1983, pp. 49-51, 78-80, 88).

A particular role is then played by sentence 10. At first sight, it seems to express nothing more than a general Evaluation just to conclude the commercial with an

appropriate slogan – which of course is true, too. In reality, its “comforting” and the whole “*comforting to know you’ve got Sidekick on your side*” represent the most direct Response to the first (only because first expressed in the discourse) level of the Problem, namely sentence 1*a*.

It is actually interesting to note how the various parts of this whole – Response/Details of Response/Evaluation/Basis – answer the different Problems presented in the first part of the discourse – not only the Problem in sentences 1*a* and 2*a* but also the new problems stated in sentence 3 – showing then how the final Response actually meets all the needs/solves all the difficulties which the former Responses did not. We have already mentioned sentence 10. With regard to sentences 5, 6, 7, 9, we can note that sentence 5 displays all the “power” of the alarm directly against “the meaningless noise” of “ordinary alarms” in sentence 3*b*, and in sentence 7 we can also note “*new* generation in personal alarms” against “ordinary alarms”. “Nobody can ignore that” in sentence 6 is in direct opposition to the “meaningless noise that’s all too easy to ignore” (in sentence 3*b*), and “it keeps on repeating that message until help arrives” in sentence 9 matches against both the “meaningless noise” in sentence 3*b* and “it’s impossible to make yourself heard” in sentence 3*a*.

Although the contrast can be isolated in particular parts of the discourse, it would seem that we can generalize it in terms of a global Matching Contrast between the first part of the discourse and the second.⁷ This is an oversimplification of course, but it is interesting to note that, though in our discourse the Matching Contrast is particularly evident because the final Response is claimed to solve all the problems presented in the first part, and actually is measured against them, a kind of Matching Contrast seems to be always present in a Problem-Solution pattern – where there is a positive Evaluation of the Response – since the movement is in fact from the presence of a Problem to its solution, from the exposition of the various negative aspects of the problematic situation and of the limitations of former responses to the detailed description/explanation of how they are solved/eliminated by the positively evaluated Response.

4. Concluding remarks

In concluding this paper, we would like to point out at least some of the numerous positive aspects of the clause-relational approach to discourse analysis, and also to return briefly to some of the difficulties we have encountered in the application of the model to our discourse.

As we have seen in the previous section, the most difficult point in the analysis of our discourse was the relationship between sentence 1 and sentence 2*a*, a relation which can certainly be seen in various ways, only some of which have been examined in our discussion.

We cannot hide our interest in analyzing our piece of discourse. The commercial really impressed us, the first times we heard it, with the simplicity of its message. It was clear from the start that there was some negative Evaluation and therefore an example of multilayering. But the actual complexity of the discourse, with more than one negative Evaluation and a clear contrast between the first part and the second, was something we discovered only after transcribing the commercial.

⁷ On Matching Contrast see Hoey (1983, pp. 20, 113, 115-121, 125-129, 133).

From a discursal point of view, our piece of discourse is then a very interesting and instructive example of the complexity that even a brief and simple – in terms of language and concepts expressed – stretch of discourse can reveal.

This approach to discourse analysis certainly makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of how discourses are organized and how they can be analyzed. A model which sees discourse as a network of semantic relations holding between the various segments of the discourse, and which starts from the lower-level units in the discourse to show how they combine to make up larger relations and, from there, complete discourse patterns – so that we can analyze discourses in terms of multiple layers, each layer providing details about the units of the other layers – can certainly give us an adequate, appropriate characterization of discourse organization, and, as we have already noted, can certainly account for coherent discourse – both the perception and the creation of coherent discourse.

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Appendix A – Transcription of the radio commercial analyzed

- (1) (a) Do you often feel vulnerable and insecure (b) when you are on your own, particularly when you are walking in a strange place where there's no one you know?
- (2) (a) Should anything happen, (b) you could always call out for help. (3) (a) But sometimes it's impossible to make yourself heard; (b) and ordinary alarms just make a meaningless noise that's all too easy to ignore.
- (4) What you really need is someone to shout for you, like this:
- (5) "Emergency! Emergency! Call the police [police sirens] emergency, emergency ..."
- (6) Nobody can ignore that. (7) It's Sidekick, the new generation in personal alarms. (8) You wear it over your shoulder or on your belt. (9) It's easy to trigger and it keeps on repeating that message until help arrives.
- (10) It's comforting to know you've got Sidekick on your side.
- (11) Sidekick costs just 49 pounds 99. (12) Order now on 0208-78030, that's 0208-78030.