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GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES

Trabajo de Fin de Grado

A Conversation Analysis Approach to English as a First Language:

Analysing informal interaction in close scopes

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Date: 19th July 2021

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Signature:

Abstract: Conversation Analysis deals with studying naturally occurring social interaction and needs socialization to function. In this study, two audio transcripts are presented in which different groups of interactants talk in an informal setting, belonging to two different English-speaking countries. The goal of this project is to introduce these transcripts to a Conversation Analysis approach, which is in charge of seeing what the linguistic structures are, and of analyzing their characteristics, studying them in natural conditions.

Through basic organizational practices, the aim is to analyze the construction within both societies, which share certain aspects, being Western cultures that share the same language. This will verify that the communication management in each case is polite and reciprocal, despite the differences between the two communities in terms of speech strategies. The performance of oral interactions sometimes may pretend to have some superficial disorganization. After being analysed from a Conversation Analysis framework, these oral interactions reveals that order exists amid apparent disorder.

Key words: Conversation Analysis, talk-in-interaction, turn-taking organization, sequence organization, preference organization

Resumen: El Análisis de la Conversación se ocupa de estudiar la interacción social que ocurre naturalmente y necesita la socialización para funcionar. En este estudio se presentan dos transcripciones de audio en las que diferentes grupos de interactuantes conversan en un ambiente informal, pertenecientes a dos países distintos de habla inglesa. El objetivo de este proyecto es introducir esas transcripciones a un enfoque de Análisis de la Conversación, que se encarga de ver cuáles son las estructuras lingüísticas, y de analizar sus características, estudiándolas en condiciones naturales.

Mediante el uso de las prácticas organizativas básicas, se pretende analizar la construcción al interior de ambas sociedades, que comparten ciertos aspectos, siendo culturas occidentales que comparten un mismo idioma. Con ello se verificará que la gestión de la comunicación en cada caso sea cortés y recíproca, a pesar de las diferencias entre las dos comunidades en cuanto a estrategias de habla. La realización de interacciones orales en ocasiones puede pretender tener alguna desorganización superficial. Después de ser analizadas desde un marco de análisis de conversación, estas interacciones orales revelan que existe un orden dentro de un aparente desorden.

Palabras clave: análisis de conversación, interacción en el habla, organización por turnos, organización de secuencias, organización de preferencias.

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Introduction

Speech is understood as an essential human property, especially within social interaction, since a community is needed to carry out these communicative processes. This interaction is organized by systems that help its analysis, which follow a specific order. CA is investigated through different sporadic contributions such as audios or a recording of an online class. Although many studies focus on the educational field, this one in particular opts more for relaxed and sporadic conversation between friends. The context is very important in these analysis, because it is necessary to know what specific situation that conversation is holding in order to analyze it objectively. The participants are the ones who design this context, unconsciously, since they create the environment according to their degree of acceptance and sociability among them, taking into account whether it is a formal or informal environment. Thus, interactional competence is defined as “a relationship between the use of linguistic and interactive resources by the participants and the contexts in which they are used” (Hornberger & McKay 5). This shows that it is a group implication, since an individual would not be able to verse wrapped in a particular speech on his own foot. These specific recordings are unconscious and subsequently consented, since the interaction must be sporadic and fluid to correctly analyze the structure of language. Each audio comes from an English-speaking region: Wolverhampton, West Midlands, England; and San Francisco, California, USA. Despite both transcripts are coming from different places, the structures, repertoires and communication materials are used in a uniform way. These transcripts, despite their subjectivism, intend to contextualize the different structures to be treated, and to see whether or not they differ between societies. This is relevant in clarifying the results that, in a family context, shows us which methods or forms of language are most fruitful for socialization and interaction, in this case between people of the same culture, comparing both. These primary data (recordings) are identified as talk-in-interactive, which evokes a real situation, in this specific case it evokes two conversations in which there are friendly relations between the speakers, so studying these behaviors leads us to understand what a friendly interaction between members should be like.

Presentation of materials

To process this sporadic information, it is necessary to make a detailed transcription, introducing symbols and indications of the CA. First of all, when there is an overlap of speakers in the middle of the conversation, this symbol appears: $\left[\begin{array}{l} \\ \end{array} \right.$

(if two shifts start at the same time, the symbol is doubled written). If there are contiguous turns in which the first speaker stops speaking when the second begins to speak, = is used, and for the pauses between words or phrases (.) is applied. The intonation indicates the degree of excitement or interest of the speaker for the topic to be discussed, so when it is high it is symbolized with an arrow up, and when it is low, an arrow down. It must be taken into account that the speaker breathes, pauses, and says contractions, and these must be present in the transcription as they appear in the audio, so double parentheses are used for things that occur in the middle of the conversation (for example, the sound of a WhatsApp, or someone coughing). Words or phrases that are cut off abruptly by another speaker are identified with a - at the end (ex: that-). These are some of the elements that help the analysis of the transcripts, their operation must be explained to understand

the shape and how these transcripts are processed to, along with the classificatory characteristics, make a complete study.

Within the organizational practices is turn-taking and its rules, since speakers must take turns with respect and consideration for other speakers. For this, there are what are called “turn construction units” and it can take place in three ways: the current speaker selects the next speaker (asking him his opinion on the subject being discussed, for example); also the next speaker can choose himself/herself simply by speaking on his/her own; and finally, if no one takes a turn, the current speaker can continue speaking: “conversationalists inspect next turns to see if and how their own talk has been understood ... they exploit the systematic properties of conversation in reasoning about it” (Sert & Seedhouse 515). The longevity of the shifts is also important to see if the floor management (which is the control over the conversation) has one person or not. This shows if it is an open conversation or one a little more closed and monopolized by someone. It is also observed who has control of the topic, who changes or who maintains the topic and which topics are most relevant to the speakers. Within the organization of shifts, there is the Transition Relevance Place, which is the time that exists in the conversation between when one speaker stops speaking and another begins, and obviously in fluent and daily speech this is not always respected, so we must also identify overlaps (one speaker begins to speak lightly at the same time as another finishes) and interruptions (one speaker begins to speak before another finishes). The conversational structure in general and these organizational practices is what will tell us which model follows the correct exchange of words and if any needs improvement.

Transcriptions and methodologies

Transcript 1 (Wolverhampton, West Midlands, England):

P2: I want to spent time in your bar (**INFORMATION**) (**Current speaker select next speaker**)

┌┌
└└ P4: Oh (.) that's nice! ↑ (**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**)

┌┌
└└ P3: your bar

P2: I would like to do that, I may come in (**SUGGESTION - no acceptance**) (**Current speaker, after selecting another speaker with no response, continues talking**)

┌
└┌ P3: You can come to mine (**INVITATION- no acceptance**) (**Next speaker self- select**)
(.) I mean (.) it is close to the beach and like its -

┌
└┌ P4: yeah I don't have a beach ↓
- really nice -

┌
└┌ P2: and your family have a vinyard as well
- so it's sunny (.) I have a pool (**INFORMATION**)

P2: you have a pool? = **(QUESTION) (Insertion sequence of Information - Acknowledgement)**

P3: I have a pool = ↑ **(ANSWER)**

P2: and you're broke? You're a liar man **(ACKNOWLEDGMENT)**

┌
└ P3: no::

┌
└ P2: what sort of a broke person has a pool?

P3: my dad dogged it

P2: what about you, dude? = **(SUMMONS/ QUESTION) (Current speaker select next speaker)**

P1: for me I'm probably just gonna (.) take it slow you know **(ANSWER / EXPECTED ANSWER)**

┌
└ P2: take what?

P1: I am gonna take small steps you know, enjoy the little things in life and I'd probably work (.) that's about it really **(INFORMATION)**

┌
└ P3: oh:::: **(ACKNOWLEDGEMENT)**

P2: yo gonna be working harder? =

P1: not really... just average, you know

┌
└ P3: living the life

P2: we like it's a bit looking for fled the moment for all of this covid so: you know (.) I just think (.) I just want it to go so we can just plan what are we going to do **(COMPLAINT)**

┌┌
└└ P1: yeah

┌┌
└└ P3: yeah

P3: I think we will be able to travel in a bit **(EXCUSE) (Next speaker self-select)**

┌
└ P2: I just don't have faith...don't have faith ↓

TOPIC CONTROL: started by P1 (plans for summer) and continued by P2 (talk about a concrete place - the bar). It soon changes to P3 (about the pool) and comes back to P2 (asking for a concrete friend about his plans)

Transcript 2 (San Francisco, California, EEUU):

P1: Have you ever been to that? = **(QUESTION) (Current speaker select next speaker)**

P2: no (.) I've heard quite a bit about Lisbon paused over (.) I don't know anything about Lagos but um::: (.) I've heard Lisbon is good for the food (**EXPECTED/UNEXPECTED ANSWER**)

┌
└ P1: Oh yeah I've heard bacalao (.) oh you mean bacalao and all that stuff

P2: yeah and portugese tarts (.) they're good =

P1: oh Yeah, and bread is su:per good too. ↑ (**INFORMATION**)

┌
└ P2:Really? (**QUESTION**) (**Insertion Sequence of Information - Acknowledgement**)

┌
└ P1:Yes (**EXPECTED ANSWER**)

┌
└ P2: Yeah (**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**) (**Next speaker self-select**) I was thinking about going to the Canary island and get to La Gomera for (.) maybe a month and staying at my gaff (.) there (.)um:::

P1: That would be sick - ↑

┌
└ P2: that would be sick but ↓

┌
└ P1: what's what's over there? (**QUESTION**) (**Next speaker self-select**)

P2: There's the forest on one side of the island and then (.) um: yeah (.) kind of like loads of surfing and stuff on my side of the island (.) but I don't know if my dad is renting the place out (.) for that month - (**EXPECTED ANSWER**)

┌
└ P1: mm:

- but if not maybe you could join, I don't know (**OFFER**) (**Current speaker select next speaker**)

P1: oh: that'd be sick dude! (**ACCEPTANCE**) ↑ Is it expensive to go there or no?

TOPIC CONTROL: P1 firstly controls it (asking a friend about if he had gone to Portugal), but soon P2 takes the control (by introducing another place and another plan)

Exploration of Organizational Practices

The analysis of these transcripts is responsible for providing practical rules from an interactional perspective, always within the subjectivity of the context.

First of all, both audios fit very well the understanding that is intended to be achieved in a conversation between friends. In transcript 1, overlaps and interruptions have served to reinforce the meaning of the phrase. For example, the "Oh (.) That's nice" supports the former speaker's decision to spend time at his bar. However, there is a large overlay in which P3 is interrupted several times by P4 and P2 in which the interest of these speakers exceeds the limits of the interaction, since communication is impossible and not all meanings are acquired as such. They have also been used to request information that is considered incomplete, such as "take what?" Used by P2 when P1 tells

him about what he intends to do on his vacation. Most interruptions and overlaps are used in a polite manner that encourages and facilitates speech, with little or no misunderstanding

Regarding transcript 2, despite having fewer people, there are quite a few overlaps and interruptions, since it is easier to take turns, so the next speaker knows that when the first one stops, time will come to him. Overlaps appear to reinforce information, such as "Really?" which answers P2 to the question of bread. There is a constant succession of overlaps that begins with that "really?" and ends with the phrase "That would be sick" that formulates P1, but appears simply to reinforce understanding, there is no problem when interacting. The question asked by P1 "what's what's over there?" interrupts the information that P2 was about to give about the place they are talking about and that information is lost, since it is not certain whether it comes to light later on or remains hidden; For this reason, this specific overlap does have an important meaning, since it has disabled communication for a few seconds.

Concerning the Turn Construction Units, it is difficult for the participants in the conversation to know when is the right moment to enter the conversation or to let themselves be carried away by others. "The basic organizational problem that participants have to solve each turn anew is to determine when the speaker will complete the current turn" (Mey 135). The person who listens, apart from being attentive to the information that is being given, has to know how to determine when it is better to enter the conversation or be entered by someone. As for transcript 1, P2 begins by choosing who he wants to be the next speaker, talking about his bar, but when he does not get a strong response, he continues speaking for himself. P3 appears throughout the conversation selecting herself, going in on her own without being mentioned. This does not mean that they want to be left out of the conversation, but that they have not found a way to involve her directly, so she does it herself by inviting her friends to her house and talking about the possibility of a nearby trip despite Covid-19. P4 appears rarely in the conversation so it is not part of the turns. Ultimately, it is P2 that handles the threads of the Turn Construction Unit, since most of the speakers' reactions have depended on their own, so he has the Floor Management, which is the control of the conversation in general

Regarding transcript 2, both select the other speaker at the same time that they also select themselves when they believe they have something crucial to contribute. P1 begins to select P2 by asking a question, which P2 continues to change the subject and choosing himself to provide information that he thinks will be relevant to his friend. Then P1 chooses himself by cutting off the information that P2 was giving, so the conversation takes a turn; and finally P2 selects P1 when he invites him to his house on the island. The Floor Management is shared in this situation.

Adjacency pairs are exchanges of information that contain two parts, the second being a response to the first. In both transcripts they are indicated (for example, when a "question" appears, it can be resolved through "preferred answer" or "non-preferred answer", depending on the attitude and understanding of the speaker). The goal is coherence and organization between sequences, since reactions can be appropriate or inappropriate, and there is never a sure result. Adjacency pairs also serve to find out what speech methods have been used and the variety that each conversation contains

First, in transcript 1, there is abundance of pairs: the Information - Acknowledgment pair appears three times, and Question - Expected answer twice. This means that the speaker's reaction is

expected and the information he gives is what he is looking for. They also contain others such as Summons - Answer and Complaint - Excuse, which also offer a conventional answer. However, there is a Suggestion and an Invitation with no acceptance, as they remain in the air, no one rejects or affirms them. This occurs due to the speed of the conversation, or because, being a close environment, those answers are taken for granted by the rest of the classmates.

In transcript 2 there are three pairs of Question - Expected answer, one of Information - Acknowledgment and one that does not appear in the first transcript and that is Offer - Acceptance, all three with their respective answers, which is not a problem.

Finally, among the Adjacency Pairs, there are also Insertion Sequences, which "locally suspends the interactional expectation to deliver the second pair part in the turn following the one with the first part" (Mey 155).

This occurs when information is given, and before understanding it, **it** is necessary to ask a question about that information to be sure that the comprehension process is carried out correctly. In the first transcript, the insertion sequence that appears is "you have a pool?" and the repetition of the phrase "I have a pool", before reaching complete understanding. This can occur not only because the listener has misperceived what the speaker has said, but also because the listener was not expecting the speaker to say that in response to that question, as happens in this situation. Also in transcript 2 there is a similar Insertion Sequence in which P1 is talking about the quality of the bread and P2 asks the question "Really?" which is answered with a "Yes" before continuing with the understanding. This occurs as a form of verification of the information, in which P2 is sure that what P1 says is true, but gives it more emphasis, since he does not understand why that person knows that type of information.

Results

The ultimate goal of Conversation Analysis is not to analyze language itself, but rather our choices about how and when to express that language. The construction is not important, what is important is how those people coordinate it so that it has a meaning, "these approaches focus ... on how people structure and coordinate their actions to produce a coherent interaction" (Garcia 6). In both transcripts an understandable mode of interaction is maintained, respectfully integrating into the conversation, although some were integrated by the community more than others (P3 in the first transcript was constantly entering the conversation by herself). The few problems that have arisen between the speakers regarding lack of understanding (marked by the insertion sequences in these specific cases) have been solved, and the expectations have been fulfilled, since an open and spontaneous conversation has resulted in the one that everyone has expressed in their own way. Despite the differences between participants regarding the topic controls, turn taking and floor management, in which it seemed that one of the speakers controlled the situation more, which is demonstrated in the variety of actions and topics that these conversations have been constructed among all, and that if each one of the speakers had not been added to the conversation, it would completely change its meaning. Despite the belonging of the audios to two different cultures, it could not be differentiated except for some typical expressions of such sites, which shows that intelligibility and comprehension is not more powerful in one of the two societies, but varies depending of the context of each situation.

Conclusion

As a student learning about conversation analysis, this study has served as a personal improvement regarding the perception of speech of people with English as their mother tongue and regarding the communicative skills that have been studied here. The composition of the investigation has been quite balanced (between the two transcripts) in terms of the search for problems that the speakers have been able to cause, and we have found that they have been two respectful and mature conversations in which there have been no uncomfortable moments, and even if some of them appeared unintentionally, they have been solved together with ease. There are no favorable or detrimental results, this analysis is based on observation and data collection so that these data contribute to society, as Conversation Analysis claim: "The theories that conversation analysts develop are based on detailed analysis of actual interactions, rather than hypotheses that are developed prior to examination of the data" (Garcia 27).

What has been tried to demonstrate is that social interactions, whether informal as in this case or formal as in educational settings, no matter how disorderly and spontaneous they may seem in front of others, will always follow an order and an understandable and concrete structure in these two western cultures . There is no more valid distribution than another, they are simply different structures, which will vary depending on the way each person or community speaks. The transcripts of these two regions have simply been selected with a personal objective, since I was lucky enough to live interactional experiences in both regions and I perceived a lot of disparateness when maintaining an oral conversation. This experiment has served to show that, apart from intelligibility, which is quite important when maintaining any conversational relationship, politeness should be sought to develop a mutual correspondence. Paying attention to the listener's reactions and thoughts is crucial to create an interpersonal relationship with the listener, and to demonstrate that order exist amid apparent disorder.

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