CONVERSATION ANALYSIS IN A MULTILINGUAL SETTING

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1. Introduction
To gain insight and perception into pragmatic phenomena, Levinson (1983) opines that one ought to look to conversation as it is obviously the classic example of language use, it being the mode of our first exposure to language. In its most common usage, the term “conversation”, or as Psathas (1995) prefers to call it, “talk-in-interaction”, is defined as that informal average type of spoken dialogue or talk between two or more people/participants who freely take turns in speaking. Several components of pragmatic organization like presuppositions, implicatures, different types of speech acts and illocutionary force, including aspects of deixis, can be shown to be intrinsically organized around usage in conversation. In explaining why it is an important but a difficult subject matter to study, citing Fillmore (1981), Schiffrin states that conversation has been referred to as the genre where “the most straightforward principles of pragmatics” can be revealed in such a way that “other types of discourse can be usefully described in terms of their deviation from such a base” (Schiffrin 1988:251). For all practical purposes, one could say that almost all pragmatic concepts relate closely to conversation as the primary and most elemental type of language use.

Two of the major approaches to the study of conversation, discourse analysis and conversation analysis, are usually contrasted with each other in view of the fact that these two approaches principally are concerned with providing information as to how sequential organization and coherence in discourse are produced and understood. However, some issues are particular or specific only to the study of conversation. In spite of the fact that certain problems appear to be parallel at first, these same problems result in different solutions.
Discourse is usually defined as any linguistic unit beyond the sentence, while on the other hand, conversation refers to any discourse produced by more than one person. Thus, while discourse includes both spoken or written dialogues and monologues, conversation involves spoken dialogue only.

Actually a revision of an earlier paper written back in 1994 when taking a course in Pragmatics, this present paper focuses on the organization of conversation, specifically turn-taking and adjacency pairs, applying conversation analysis to a multilingual setting such as the Philippines where the majority, if not all, of speakers are multilingual, or at the least, bilingual. On the whole, in urban areas like Metro Manila, Baguio, Cebu and Davao, and one might add, even in rural areas, Filipinos speak two or more Philippine languages, usually the regional lingua franca, besides their own native tongue, in addition to one or more foreign languages like English, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, among others.

1.1 Conversation Analysis

Conversation analysis (CA) is a term used in linguistics and related disciplines to refer to a method of studying the sequential structure and coherence of casual everyday talk. The study of conversation or talk-in-interaction, CA represents a systematic mode or approach to the study of ordinary social action in situ, in the simplest of backgrounds, scrutinizing precise details in the most common, usual activities which we as social beings do nearly everyday, that is, talk or converse with other people.

A rigorously empirical approach, which draws its theories, models, concepts and methods from several related disciplines, i.e. sociology, linguistics, anthropology and philosophy, CA avoids premature construction of theory. It was started in the early 1970s by a dissident group of sociologists, usually known as ethnomethodologists, who reacted to the quantitative techniques and the arbitrary imposition of seemingly objective categories on the data, which were characteristic of mainstream American sociology. They resolved to replace the predominantly deductive and quantitative methods of sociological studies prevalent at the
time. As Schiffrin says, with the focus on real spoken dialogue being of vital importance to all conversation analysts, the speaker/hearers' own procedures for constructing talk are what one tries to explain, and there is simply no other way to do this without having access to their actual structuring of talk.

With a methodology that is basically inductive, its data consist of tape recordings and transcriptions of conversations that take place naturally. These are analyzed in order to look for recurring patterns across many records of real conversations and to establish the properties, which are systematically used by people when they interact linguistically.

1.2 Transcription of the data

CA's focus on actual spoken exchanges between participants gives rise to unavoidable questions of transcriptions. As with any endeavor which entails data composed of conversation, it is inevitable that a great deal rests on transcriptions. It is necessary to describe the details of interaction to be able to present adequate information to both the analyst and/or the reader in order for him to appreciate what and how the participants were speaking while interacting with each other. Basically, the transcription should capture the phenomena relevant to the organization of talk, e.g. pauses, sound stretches, emphasis, intonation, start of speech as well as latched and/or overlapped speech, etc.

For the purposes of this paper, standard orthography is used for words and partially completed words or utterances in the presentation of the data. Although phonemic in the Philippine languages used in the data, stress is not indicated when it falls on the penultima. Lines are numbered for easy reference; line numbers are not intended to be measures of timing or number of turns or utterances. Free translations in English of the data in languages other than English are given in parentheses. Except for English, the languages used are indicated at the start of the utterances, i.e. Filipino (Fil.), Ilokano (Ilk.), Spanish (Sp.). (See Appendix for the details and diacritics in the transcription used here.)

With the exception of telephone conversations, all the data presented here were covertly tape recorded by myself,
therefore ensuring reliable spontaneous data for analysis. Due to unavoidable constraints, the telephone conversations were not actually recorded. Exerting all effort to be faithful to the key features of talk, these were transcribed by me as soon as the said conversations were uttered.

2. CA in a multilingual setting

Although most of the literature reviewed are based on English data and therefore the findings may be partially culture specific, as mentioned earlier, this paper aims to apply CA methodology to data in the multilingual situation of the Philippines and to explore the structure of natural conversation in this cultural milieu. In this paper, we will limit and focus the discussion on two specific phenomena, namely, turn-taking and adjacency pairs.

As mentioned earlier, the Philippines is an example of a multilingual society. It is inevitable that in a country with more than a hundred different local languages and dialects, and taking into account its colorful history, most Filipinos, whether in urban or rural areas, whether schooled or unschooled, know and speak at least one more language other than their mother tongue. It would be very interesting to see how informal everyday conversation is structured and made coherent and intelligible by interacting participants amidst such a rich historical and linguistic background.

2.1 Turn-taking

Doubtlessly, the most obvious observation we can make about conversation is the fact that when people talk with each other, they take turns in speaking. Put simply, one participant (A) talks, then stops; another participant (B) starts to talk, then stops resulting in the formula A-B-A-B-A-B, "a specification of the basic rule for conversation", that is, "one party at a time" (Schegloff 1986). Although this seems simple enough, the coordination of turn-taking remains one of the basic problems in conversation. How do people actually take turns in speaking? In their article, Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) have reported that turns are exchanged with minimal gap where a speaker generally starts to talk soon after