

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 paper¹ written back in 1994 when taking a course in Pragmatics, this present paper¹ 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 Schifffrin 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

another has stopped, and minimal overlap. Despite the fact that there are times when two or more talk simultaneously, turn-taking mechanism somehow results in one person speaking at a time. They posit that such mechanism governing turns from one speaker to another is a set of rules whose ordered options function on a turn by turn basis. Applying at different transition relevance places (TRP) in a current speaker's turn which are marked syntactically and prosodically, usually by means of a rising or falling intonation, as possible points where speakers may change, these rules allow, first, for the speaker currently talking to select the next speaker, second, for the next speaker to self-select, and third, for the current speaker to continue talking. These rules are recursive; in other words, they are applied again at each TRP in the same order. Let's look at some illustrations.

1 ((Acquaintances meeting along the corridor))

1 A: [Fil.]((smiles a greeting))

2 Anóng nangyari sa inyó↑(.5) (What happened to you?)

3 B: ((grins)) Natapilók↓(.) (I tripped.)

4 A: A::H↑(.5) a SPRAIN↓ (Oh! A sprain.)

5 B: ((nods confirmation))

2 ((Friends going opposite directions meeting along the way))

1→ A: [[Hi::]]↑

2→ B: [[Hi::]]↑(.)

3 A: [Fil.] Kumustá↑ (How are you?)

4 B: A::Y↑ NAKU↓(.) ang (Oh my! There's so much
5 ↑DAMING↓ trabaho↓(.) work to do.)

6 A: ↑Sino ba ang wala↓(.5) (Who doesn't?)

7 B: Buti pa ang EDSA↓(.) (EDSA was better.)

8 A: Sabi ko nga sa estudyante ko (In fact I told my student,
9 (.) akala ko(.))magtátapós tayo "I thought we'd finish
10→ ng klase sa ED[SA↓ our classes at EDSA.")

11→ B: [Sa:na (How I wish it was

12 hinabá:haba:an pa:: (.) longer!)

13 A: Ikáw ↓ talagá↑ (Oh really, you!)

Notice that the turn-taking set of rules cited above takes care of the basic observations noted earlier. It seems clear that with only two participants engaging in conversation, only one speaker talks at a given time. We see that in both cases above, the gaps between turns are micro pauses, taking about two-tenths of a second to half a second. In (2) there is only one instance of simultaneous utterances, i.e. the first two turns (lines 1 and 2) and one instance of overlap at the end of the seventh turn and the start of the eighth (lines 10 and 11).

Now consider the following conversation of four participants speaking in Ilokano and Filipino.

- 3 ((A professor and her students taking their lunch break))
- 1→ V: [Ilk.]↑Santi↓(.) kaanu ka (Santi, when are you
2 nga agawid ↓(.) going home?)
- 3 S: Hmm(.) itá nga rabií: ↓(.5) (Hmm, tonight.)
- 4 V: Mabalín nga gatáanganak (Can you buy me
5 ti bagnet² some *bagnet*
- 6→ [ken longganisa³↑(.5) and *longganisa*?)
- 7→ C: [Fil.][[↑WO::W (.) bagnet↑](.) (Wow, *bagnet*!
8 pakain ha↑ Let me eat, huh?)
- 9→ T: [[↑ANG SARÁP↓](.) (How delicious!
10 di ba kumain na tayo↑(.) Didn't we already eat
11 some?)
- 12→S: [Ilk.] ↑Wen Mam↓(.) anyá nga (Yes, Ma'am. What kind
13 longanisa ti kayát yo↑(.) of *longganisa* do you
14 diay at- diay atiddóg↑(.) like? The long ones?)
- 15 V: Hmm(.) diay ↑babassít↓(.) (Hmm, the small ones.
16 kaslá diay impakán just like the ones that
17 ni Fa:ther kanyami Father fed us
18 idiáy pa:rish↓(2.0) at the parish.)
- 19→S: [Fil.] E-ewan ko (.) bakit yung (I don't know why
20 mga matatandá (.) gustó old people like
21 ng bagnet↓(.5) yung mga *bagnet*. The
22 kasama ng misis ko companions of my wife
23 sa Ateneo (.)la:ging at Ateneo always
24 nagpápabili ng bagnet↓(.) asked her to buy them
25 *bagnet*.)

- 26 V: Ibig sabihin (.) (That means
 27 matandá na akó↓(1.0) I'm already old.)
 28 ((laughter))
 29 C: Bastá Mam::(.) kain tayo (Ma'am, be sure that we
 30 sa inyó ha:↑(.) eat at your place, huh?)
 31→V: Bastá akó (.) nilálagáy ko (Well, as for me, I put
 32 s-sa::= it in)
 33→S: =Pinakbét⁴↓(.) (*Pinakbét*)
 34 V: sa pinakbét (.) oo↓ (.5) (in *pinakbét*, yes.
 35 ↑Santi↓(.) gustó ko yung Santi, I like the ones
 36 waláng taták ha↑(.) without any brand, huh?
 37 yu::ng homemade↓(.) The homemade ones.)
 38→C: [[Gustó ni Mam yung galing (What Ma'am likes are
 39 sa merkado] the ones that come from
 40 the wet market.)
 41→T: [[Yung gustó nya yung bilí (What she likes are the
 42 sa palengke](1.0) ones that are bought in
 43 the wet market.)
 44 S: Kasí (.) mey suki kami (It's because my wife
 45 ng misis ko (.) and I have a regular
 46 yung nag-eexport↓(.) source. One who
 47 exports.)
 48 V: Bahala ka na↓ (I leave it to you to
 49 decide.)

The set of rules governing turn-taking still applies. Generally, only one speaker talks at any given time. Of the thirteen gaps between turns, eight TRPs were in micro pauses of less than two-tenths of a second (.), two TRP each of (.5) and (1.0), and only one that measured (2.0). Here we see two instances of simultaneous utterances (lines 6, 7, 9 and 38, 41), one of which overlapped with the previous speaker, and one instance of latching (lines 32-33).

Notice too the occurrence of code switching which is natural and quite expected in multilingual settings. The dialogue starts with the current speaker (V) asking a question in Ilokano of the next speaker (S) whom she selects calling him

by name (line 1) who replies also in Ilokano (line 3). V and S's interaction continue in the same language, but is intercepted by the simultaneous overlapping turns in Filipino (lines 7 and 9) of the other two participants in the group who do not speak Ilokano but who recognize the Ilokano word *bagnét*. Guessing what is being talked about, they contribute to the conversation switching to Filipino, the national lingua franca. It is interesting to note that in talking to each other, the Ilokano speakers talk in Ilokano, but when the non-Ilokanos joined in and were included in the conversation, a switch to Filipino was initiated by S (line 19) and continued till the end.

Just like code switching, borrowing is also prevalent in the Philippine languages used in the data. Usually single words or short idiomatic phrases, loan words from other Philippine languages, as well as from foreign languages like English, Spanish are incorporated into the grammatical system of the borrowing languages. These are considered part of the lexicon, adopt its morphological features and enter into its syntactic structures. Some of the loan words seen above are: from Ilokano to Filipino, *bagnét*, *pinakbét*; from English, *sprain*, *father*, *parish*, *misis* (< Mrs.), *homemade*, *nag-eexport*; from Spanish, *kumustá*, *trabaho*, *estudyante*, *klase*, *gustó*, *bastá*, *merkado*.

2.2 Adjacency pairs

The other local management organization which ethnomethodologists concentrated on in CA is the adjacency pair, a term used in sociolinguistics referring to a single stimulus-plus-response sequence by participants in a conversation. As a technique for selecting a next speaker, adjacency pairs are quite interconnected with the system of turn-taking. Studied in terms of their role in initiating, maintaining, and closing conversations, examples of such paired utterances are question-answer, greeting-return greeting, invitation-acceptance/declining, offer-acceptance/declining, complaint-apology/justification, compliment-response, etc., some of which we have seen in the illustrations above.

Although called adjacency pairs, thus implying that such sequences should be next to each other, evidence show

that insertion sequences (lines 3-5) often occur like in the following conversation where a question-answer pair is embedded within another such pair.

4 ((Mother and child talking))

- | | | |
|----|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | C: [Fil.] Na:y↑(.) pwede puntá | (Mother, may I go |
| 2 | akó sa park↑(.)) | to the park?) |
| 3→ | M: Natulog ka ba ngayong | (Did you sleep this |
| 4 | hapon↑(1.0) | afternoon?) |
| 5→ | C: °Hindí po↓°(.) | (No, Ma'am.) |
| 6 | M: Sorry (.) hindí pwede.↓ | (Sorry, you can't.) |

Or in the following telephone conversation where in the first seven turns, again a question-answer pair in addition to a temporary exit and acceptance are embedded within another question-answer pair. Another type of adjacency pair, this time a request-acceptance pair, a number of preliminaries are inserted between the first part, i.e. a request which is in the form of a statement (lines 12-14), and its corresponding second part, the granting of the request (lines 20-22).

5 ((telephone rings))

- | | | |
|----|--|--------------------------|
| 1 | R: Hello::↑(.)) | |
| 2 | V: Hello (.)↑ this is Veca Hernández of Linguistics↓(.)) | |
| 3→ | may I speak to the chair↑(.)) Professor Bautista↑(.5) | |
| 4→ | R: [Fil.]↑Si: no po silá↑ | (Who is this?) |
| 5→ | V: Hernández↓(.)) dito sa | (Hernandez, here at the |
| 6 | Linguistics Department↓(.)) | Linguistics Department.) |
| 7→ | R: Sandali [lang po↓ | (Hold on a minute.) |
| 8→ | V: [Salamat↓(2.5) | (Thank you.) |
| 9 | E: Hello::↑(.)) | |
| 10 | V: [Sp.]↑Holá=Erwin↑(.)) | (Hello, Erwin. |
| 11 | Veca=aquí↓(.)) OYE↓(.)) | Veca here. You know, |
| 12 | [tengo un alumno que | I've a student who |
| 13 | tiene que tomar el | needs to take the |
| 14 | proficiency exam↓ | proficiency exam.) |
| 15 | E: [hmm(.) si:: ↑ | (Hmm, yes) |

- | | | | |
|-----|----|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| 16 | V: | se llama Rodney | (His name is Rodney |
| 17 | | Jubi[lado↓ | Jubilado.) |
| 18 | E: | [Y tiene que tomar | (And he needs to take |
| 19 | | el proficiency↓(.) | the proficiency) |
| 20→ | | bueno↓(.) <u>má</u> ndamelo↓(.) | (Well, send him to me |
| 21 | | y voy a ver como puedo | and I'll see how I can |
| 22 | | ayudarle↓= | help him.) |
| 23 | V: | =↑Gracias mil↓(.) | (Thanks a lot.) |
| 24 | E: | De nada↓ | (You're welcome.) |

As we can see, a number of levels of embedding may occur, so a question-answer pair (lines 3 and 7) may actually be several utterances apart. Nonetheless, the answer is only held in abeyance while preliminaries are sorted out which are restricted by insertion sequences (lines 4-6). Thus, replacing the criterion of adjacency with the notion of conditional relevance is preferable.

Just like in (3) above, note that code switching again takes place, characteristic of a multilingual society. The dialogue starts in English (line 1), then at the third TRP, a switch to Filipino is initiated by the one responding to the call (line 4), continuing until the object of the call answers (line 9) after which another code switch takes place, this time to Spanish (line 10).

The range of possible second parts corresponding to a first part of adjacency pairs poses another problem. There are lots of other responses to questions other than answers which could be considered as acceptable seconds, like for example, assertions of ignorance, re-routes, or even refusals/unwillingness to give an answer, etc. Nevertheless, the problem can be resolved by the notion of preference organization. The main point here is that not all possible second parts to a first part of an adjacency pair are of equal footing. Alternative seconds are ranked such that there is at least one preferred and one dispreferred category of responses. Rather than referring to psychological preference, what is being referred to is a structural notion which almost corresponds to the concept of markedness. In short, preferred

second parts are unmarked, while on the other hand, preferred ones are marked. Let's look at the following illustrations.

6 ((Request granted without hesitation))

- 1 A: [Fil.] Pe::nge namán (May I have
2 ng sigarilyo (.)) a cigarette?)
3 B: ↑O:: ba↓ (Sure!)

7 ((Response to request delayed))

- 1→ C: [Fil] Hindí pa ba tayo (Aren't we
2 uuwi↑(1.5) going home yet?)
3 V: Ha:↑ [eh:: (Huh, eh...)
4 C: [Akala ko pagkatapos (I thought that after
5 ng Housing (.)) uuwí na:(.5) Housing, we're going
6 home already.)
7 V: Eh:: (1.0) me ginágawa pa (Eh, I am still doing
8 akó (.))binabasa ko pa something. I'm still
9 yung papél ni Irma (.)) reading Irma's paper,
10 tapos yu:: yung textbook↓(.) and then the textbook.)
11 C: Akala ko kasi::(.5) (Because I thought)
12→V: Mga:: (1.0) ah-ah::(.) (About, ah,
13 6 o'clock na lang↓(.) Let's just go around 6
14 o'clock.)
15 C: O=si:ge(.) (Well, okay.)
16 V: O sig=↑bye↓ (Okay, bye.)

Notice that in (6), the request is granted immediately, without delay. While on the other hand, in (7), a dispreferred answer, i.e. going home has to be delayed (line 13), is four turns away from the question (lines 1-2), marked by a significant delay in responding, a series of hesitations, reasons for the delay, etc.

3. Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, the present paper is focused only on two phenomena specific to conversation, i.e. turn-taking and adjacency pairs, using data gathered in a multilingual setting like the Philippines. The prevalent occurrence of

borrowing and code switching in the multilingual environment of the Philippines adds color to the study. Although a lot more languages were used in the recorded conversations, only four languages, i.e. Filipino, Ilokano, English and Spanish, are used in the illustrations given.

There are of course other types local management organization in conversation, for example, repair and pre-sequence, that were not tackled here in this paper. Outside the scope of the paper, these would be interesting topics for future study.

Notes

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² *bagnét* 'deep fried chunks of pork'

³ *longganisa* 'native sausage'

⁴ *pinakbét* 'a vegetable dish consisting of all kinds of vegetables (chiefly eggplants, balsam apple, okra, string beans, etc., mixed with meat and fish, or both, and seasoned with tomatoes, onions, ginger, and fish sauce.'

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Appendix: Transcription Symbols

- [[utterances starting simultaneously
 [start of overlapping utterances
] end of overlapping utterances
 = latching, i.e. no interval between the end of a prior and start of a next part of talk
 (.) micro pauses of less than two-tenths of a second

- (0.0) pauses or gaps measured in seconds and tenths of a second
- :
- ::: prior sound is prolonged
- more prolonged sound
- cut-off of prior word or sound
- CAPS particular loudness of that part of a unit
- °X° quietness of X
- X particularly stressed X
- ↑X↓ raised pitch height and lowered pitch height of X
- ˘ stressed vowel
- ((X)) details of conversation scene
- to call reader's attention to particular parts of transcript