

CONVERSATION ANALYSIS: COMMUNICATION ACROSS CULTURES

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ABSTRACT

The study of intercultural communication continues to grow in importance in response to greater population mobility, migration and globalization. Communication across culture explores how cultural context affects the use and interpretation of language. It provides accessible and interdisciplinary introduction to language and language variations in intercultural communication. This is done by drawing on both classic and cutting-edge research from pragmatics, discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, anthropology and politeness study. This study aims to discuss the variety of linguistic and non-linguistic features generated by participants in social interaction. The first part will examine turn-taking dynamic in a conversation between three students who have different cultural backgrounds. Later, the last four sections of the study also take into account power relation among the participant, the collaboration, politeness strategy employed as well as embedded speech act in the conversation.

Keywords: Intercultural Communication, linguistic features, non-linguistic features, cultural background.

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever witnessed a conversation in which only one person is dominating the talk? Or have you ever offended by someone because you misunderstood the intended meaning of a particular utterance? In fact, these phenomena are clear examples of a discourse dynamic in everyday life. The discourse dynamic in conversation, naturally, prompts participants in social interaction to use their rapport management in using language to maintain social relationship or vice versa (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). In using the language, it is necessary to examine the relationship between the language and context including the linguistic feature embedded in a particular situation. (Paltridge, 2012). This relationship would be better examined through an approach that has been called as discourse analysis.

Through the lens of discourse analysis, this paper aims to discuss the variety of linguistic and non-linguistic

features generated by participants in social interaction. The first part of the paper will examine turn-taking dynamic in a conversation between three students who have different cultural backgrounds. Later, the last four sections of the paper also take into account power relation among the participant, the collaboration, politeness strategy employed as well as embedded speech act in the conversation.

RESEARCH METHOD

Participants

This paper analyses a recorded conversation between three international students of University of New South Wales; Abdullah (A), Badril (B) and Toni (T). All of them comes from different major: Master of Evaluation and Assessment, Master of Teaching English as Second Language and Master of Special Education & Educational Leadership, respectively.

Setting

Abdullah's cultural background is Arab and he has been in Sydney for 1.5 year while Badril and Toni are Indonesians. Although both Toni and Badril are Indonesians, they do have different cultural background, the former is Sasak and the latter is Javanese.

Abdullah and Toni have known each other for more than two semesters so that Toni wanted to introduce his Indonesian colleague as they enrolled in the same course. Three of them, in the recording, was discussing the assignment in one of their enrolled courses. The conversation was recorded in the evening, in a nearby park of their residency.

Data Collection

Event recording is used to document the language patterns used by the three speakers. Event recording procedure was selected as it provides a representation of the speakers' actions and language patterns under all conditions (Kennedy, 2005). Apart from carrying out conversation analysis, individual interviews were also conducted by using recall interview and follow-up interview with the three participants. The audio recordings were coded following patterns that have emerged through out the conversation. The conversation analysis component of the data then is counter-checked by another analyst, a native speaker of English.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Turn-Taking Dynamic

A : now there's new model
: new model
: and all the school
: and high school or primary school in modern country
: because before that
: just only the student going in the classroom

Excerpt 1 (line 9 – 15)

2. Giving up the floor

A : = I don't have any
: experience before but
: about why I read (.)

Conversation constitutes of highly structured activity (Bowe, Martin & Manns, 2014) with which people manage their turn in order to interact and to share information through several conventions (Paltridge, 2012). The conventions include (1) one person talk at a time (2) speakers organize the conversation transition (3) articulations are built so as to demonstrate coordination of turn exchange and speakership (Bowe et al., 2014). These conventions of turn taking is not only found in spoken language but also found in a conversation between deaf people – with sign language (Coates & Sutton-Spence, 2001). Therefore, it is clear that turn taking dynamic is universal regardless the mode and speakers differences (Heydon, 2005). Despite the fact that A, B and T come from different cultural background, it is clear that there is a broad window to see turn-taking dynamic in their conversation:

1. Keeping the floor

Early in the conversation, A holding the turn by not pausing too long at the end of his utterance. Line 9 - 15, for example, demonstrate the strategy used in keeping the floor by a very short pause, repetition of the utterance's element (e.g.: new model), and the use of conjunction (e.g.: 'and', 'now' and 'because'). Additionally, Paltridge also explains that the participants in conversation use conjunction as utterance launcher (2014, p.155) that function as signal for speakers and interlocutor as the beginning utterances or link between them. See the following short excerpt:

The excerpt above is one of the examples of how A gives the turn by a pause at the end of utterance. In line 34 and 67, for example, A gives the floor to both B and T by ending the sentence and gives longer pause. In addition, giving up the floor is also reached by completing utterance in falling intonation (line 1) as explained by Paltridge (2014, p.95).

3. Claiming the floor

Excerpt 1 further describe the strategy used in turn-taking dynamic for claiming the floor. Both B and T compete to claim the floor by uttering the similar response – overlap. Through overlap, speaker could take the turn as well as preventing someone else from doing so (Paltridge, 2014; Hofstede, 2010). In this case, B speaks first to provide adjacency pair (question-answer sequence) for A’s utterance and overlapped by T. According to Bowe and colleagues (2014, p.97), such responses from both B and T are conditionally relevant that relied upon the utterance from A. In addition, A utilize louder pitch to claim the floor as in line 9.

4. Back-channeling

Conversation seems to be fabricated if there is no back-channeling in it. Back-channeling, as noted by Bowe and colleagues (2014, p.101), is acknowledgement from conversation participants who are not holding the floor to indicate that they are listening to speaker’s utterance. In English, the acknowledgement is generally ‘mmm’

B : which is basically I need (((incomprehensible)))
 : ((laugh)) so that I can get HD ((laugh))

Excerpt 2 (line 32 – 34)

and ‘uh-huh’ while from Javanese point of view it could be ‘ya’ or ‘iya’ means ‘yea’ or ‘yes’ (Bowe et al., 2014). Regarding the description, it can be drawn from the conversation that there are several back-channel devices used; ‘mmm’ and ‘yea’. The intended meaning of those back- channels varies based on the context. ‘yea’ as an agreement could be found in line 3, as to terminate the topic in line 96, as to acknowledgement in line 152, and as expression of regret if the intonation is falling as in line 259 (Koentjaraningrat, 1989). Meanwhile ‘mmm’ only represents the acknowledgement for the attention from the listener, for example in line 16, 100 and 145.

5. Laughter.

In a conversation, laughter could be interpreted in two perspectives; (1) hearer-initiated laughter and (2) speaker-initiated laughter (Bowe et al., 2014). Similar to that of back- channel device, the function of laughter also varies. In terms of laugh initiated by the hearer, there are several representations that is embodied through the strategy includes acknowledging humor, showing politeness and respect, to laugh at conflict or ridicule and also to represent solidarity. On the other hand, speaker-initiated laughter serves as encouragement to others, irony, humor, modesty, uncertainty line and anxiety. The following example show how laughter in the speakers’ utterance represent uncertainty on getting HD in an assignment:

Excerpt 3 (line 54 & 55)

Table 1

No	Laughter	Function	Line
1	Hearer-initiated	Show respect and politeness	281
		To laugh at conflict or to ridicule	311
		Show solidarity	52, 223, 233

2	Speaker-initiated	Encouragement to others	282
		Irony	264
		Uncertainty	122

Participant Cooperation in Talk

Mutual effort in a conversation is not only be found in turn taking strategy but also be identified in the collaboration in conveying implicature. The implicature is governed by the conversational maxims which is extended from Grice Cooperative Principle (Bowe et al., 2014). The Principle's fundamental idea is that people assume and

interpret what is said by the speaker in order to keep the conversation flow. Cooperative Principle falls under four maxims:

(1) Quantity (as informative as possible), Quality (evidence based and truthful), Relevance (no ambiguity, brief and orderly). The following example from the conversation show how this principle describe the phenomenon:

Table 2

No	Utterance	Line	Maxim	Flouted Y/N
1	A : =//yea	65 – 67	Relevance	Yes
	B : are//you talking about this rubric↑			
	A he not mention about this just just only example			
2	B : = what do you mean?	81 – 82	Relevance, Quality	No
	T : the self assessment with Chris Davidson ((incomprehensible)			
3	B : a new one ↑	113	Relevance	No
	A : yea a new one	114	Quality	
4	B : if	146	Relevance	Yes
	: it means average right ↑	148		
	A : i think this after when you giving the self assessment =			

Identity and Power Relation

1. Identity

The casual conversation between A, B and T explains that this type of social interaction, albeit the style, encompasses complex structure. As noted by Eggins and Slade (in Paltridge, 2012) that participants in a casual conversation extend, negotiate and clarify their social relationship. Thus, from the topic they discuss, it is clear that they are colleagues and carries certain identity as university students. However, despite the fact that the talk between them is casual, the power dynamic between them is apparent. This issue will be discussed below.

2. Power Relation

The idea of power is rather socially undetermined and depend on the context in which the interaction occurs (Bowe et al., 2014). Meaning that power relation in social interaction is depend on the context. The context of the conversation in the recording is casual and informal between A, B and T discussing their upcoming assignment. Through the recorded conversation flow between three of them, it is clear that one person dominates the talk as Wang (2006, p.531) noted that the control of power means that the person has the freedom

to achieve particular preset goal. The control of power is unquestionably salient as seen from line 8 – 34 in which A monopolizes the talks in almost continues flow. B only uttered ‘mmm’ and ‘yea but’ as a confirmation that he was listening meanwhile T kept silent. The silence of B and T in this conversation could be examined through Weberian concept of power. Power, from the Weberian perspective is perceived to have negative influence towards behavior of the interlocutor or covertly impose them to perform undesirable acts (Bowe et al., 2014); silence in this case. By dominating the conversation, one analysis could be drawn that the

phenomenon occurs as a result of the difference in the expertise level. Spencer-Oatey, related to this case, stated that ‘if a person, A, has special knowledge or expertise that another person, B, wants or needs, A can be said to have expert power over B’. Teacher, for example, has expert power over their student. From the long talks by A, it can be drawn that he has the expertise in the field as he explained the current state of education assessment in the world (see line 8 – 34). In addition, he also provided example to B and T by simplifying the assignment requirements in line 55 – 56, 58 – 59, and 61 – 62.

A : now there’s new model
 : and high school or primary school in modern country

Excerpt 3 (line 9 & 12)

A : like establish a new one
 : from your experience

Excerpt 4 (line 58 & 59)

A : a new one like for example in mathematic
 : how can using (incomprehensible) for the
 : link between achievement of the student and judgement //about the student

Excerpt 5 (line 61 – 62)

Politeness Strategy

Early model of politeness strategy was proposed by Lakoff based on Gricean Cooperative Principle and the four maxims. He further argued that in order to reduce damage in interpersonal relationship, people will employ their pragmatic competence: be clear, be polite, don’t impose, give options, and make your hearer feels good (Bowe et al., 2014). Five years later, Brown and Levinson introduced new model on politeness model stated that the idea of face refers to people’s desire to protect and manage their self image and other’s: (1) positive face and (negative

face). Positive and negative face aspects in the conversation, face threatening act in particular, will be examine in the discussion below (Kecskes, 2013).

1. Positive face

Face threatening act for hearer’s positive face includes the act of raising taboo topics, criticizing, disagreeing and complaining. Meanwhile, threat for speaker’s positive face including accepting compliment, confessing and apologizing. In this case, and apology from A could be face threatening act for the speaker’s positive face.

279 T : I know that you are on your diet
 280 A : thanks a lot
 281 : because I mention before ((laugh)) 282 B : ((laugh))
 283 A : I’m using diet really 284 T : yea

Excerpt 6 (line 279 – 284)

The apology from A in line 283 ‘I’m using diet really’ is face threatening act for speaker’s positive face because he need to explain as that he is on diet as an apology to reject the offer.

2. Negative face

Face threatening act for the hearer’s negative face including negative face ordering advising threatening and

A : this in my opinion
 : //just only
 B : yea but//=
 A : = I don’t have any
 : experience before but
 : about why I read

warning while FTA for speakers’ negative face are accepting an offer and accepting thanks. In the case of hearer’s negative face, advice from A (line 27 – 46) may be face threatening act towards T and B. However, later after his long utterance, A utilizes redress strategy in order to overcome any possible FTA. The FTA strategy is such:

Excerpt 6 (line 29 – 34)

SPEECH ACT

Austin and Searle stated that through utterance, speakers convey their intention and the effect of the intended meaning towards hearers. This, later, termed as Speech Act. Speech Act characteristics are further explained by Austin (1962) and

Searle (1969) as (1) Locution what actually said, (2) Illocution as the intended meaning of the utterance (3) Perlocution as the interpretation of the hearer from the intention of the speaker. The analysis for the Speech Act in the recorded conversation is as follow:

1. A’s statement as an advice

Utterance	Line 8 – 22
Locution	Statement
Illocutionary force	Advice: A advice to B and T that they could write their assignment in a particular approach
Perlocution	B and T may take the advice

2. T’s statement as offer

Utterance	Line 279
Locution	Statement
Illocutionary force	Offer: T offers food to A and B
Perlocution	In the conversation, A politely rejected te offer while B accepted it

3. Thanking as rejection

Utterance	Line 280
Locution	Statement
Illocutionary force	Rejection of an offer
Perlocution	The hearer (T) may be offended because of the rejection

4. A's statement as apology

Utterance	Line 283
Locution	Statement
Illocutionary force	Apology
Perlocution	The offensive action from the previous rejection may be resolved

CONCLUSION

Linguistic and non-linguistic features during social interaction have been provided throughout this conversation analysis. The features cover turn-taking dynamics, the participants' cooperation in talk, identity and power relation, politeness strategies, and speech acts. There are three participants in the conversation recorded, all of them comes from different cultural as well as language backgrounds. This conversation analysis comes up with the conclusion that although the recorded conversation was informal, yet the discourse features are complex. Such a complexity emerges since the conversation consists of varieties of discourse features.

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