

VISSP 08

Some notes to accompany John Local's presentations

1. Conversation analysis and parametric phonetics

The purpose of the research is to advance understanding of the ways speakers and listeners use clusters of phonetic parameters in shaping and interpreting talk in natural conversation. In doing this we aim

- to gain an understanding of the relationships obtaining between objects such as turn constructional units (TCUs) and turns and the actions they implement.
- to reconfigure our understanding of the categories and architectures of linguistic-phonetics and phonology.

Why Conversation Analysis?

Many conventional approaches to the analysis of speech assume that it is unordered, random, too messy to work with, too susceptible to individual variation, etc. Many of our current understandings of the 'meaning' of eg. intonation are based on the analyst's intuition, or the informant judgements of native speakers, rather than an observation of the empirically demonstrable behaviour of speakers in real talk.

One reaction to the real problems of working with spontaneous speech is to collect large corpora and conduct statistical analyses. This can provide rigorous, formal models; but it can also leave much data unaccounted for, and does not necessarily provide us with a linguistically perspicuous analysis. Another is to adopt a qualitative approach to the analysis of such data. Conversation Analysis (CA) is an empirically grounded methodology which has its roots in ethnomethodology, and has recently come to the fore in the study of linguistic phenomena. It offers linguists a way of looking at spontaneous (unscripted, casual, normal, real, etc) speech, and provides us with a set of analytic tools with which it might be possible to know what the countables are. In doing work on phonetics using CA we are able to compare like with like interactionally and phonetically.

Data in CA

- CA is committed to using data from real-life situations; the primary purpose of talk is not for the analyst's convenience, but to achieve some goal of the participants.
- Data is an integral part of the context it occurs in: it is 'context shaped' and 'context renewing' (Heritage 1984).
- Data is emergent in real time. Analysis needs to be sensitive to this.

Methodology in CA

- CA is a qualitative form of analysis. It pays as much attention to individual cases

as to the aggregate (see Schegloff 1993 for a critique of quantitative analysis). Its practitioners argue that analyses of larger samples of data are reliable only to the extent that they are well grounded in the analysis of smaller samples. The categories of a piece of conversation analytic work are established with reference to the orientation of the participants as seen in the data itself. Analysts should not impose their own categories on data, but motivate categories from within the data.

Evidence in CA

One of CA's main goals is to work out the interactional function achieved by particular devices. CA uses five major types of evidence (Wootton 1989):

1. Relationship of the device to the prior turn: how does the phenomenon under consideration relate to earlier talk?
2. Co-occurring evidence with the turn: are there other events in the turn which support the proposed analysis?
3. Subsequent treatment of the device: is there evidence from what happens later for the proposed analysis?
4. Discriminability of the device: what other terms does it co-occur with, and what terms does it contrast with?
5. The analysis of deviant cases. An 'analytically coherent set of cases' is assembled, and systematic features identified. Deviant cases must be explained.

Phonetics in talk-in interaction

- Conduct the phonetic enquiry parametrically employing impressionistic and acoustic techniques
- Do not make a priori assumptions about the importance or otherwise of phonetic features
- Conduct the phonetic analysis alongside an interactional-sequential analysis.
- The focus on some particular phonetic characteristic reflects the outcome of the analysis (in terms of the relevance of that particular characteristic as demonstrated by participants orientations), rather than reflecting a restriction on the details explored.

Speakers systematically draw on bundles of phonetic features which cut across the traditional classification of phonetic parameters into 'prosodic' on one hand versus articulatory (or 'segmental') on the other. This suggests that phonetic parameters are best treated as falling into functional bundles or clusters, irrespective of their 'prosodic' or 'segmental' characteristics, on the basis of how speakers deploy them to achieve particular interactional goals. If the analysis is conducted in these terms, it becomes possible to document systematically the ways in which speakers and listeners manipulate phonetic parameters in managing the moment-to-moment flow and interpretation of ordinary conversation.

2. Turn-taking, overlap, silences

2.1 Turn-taking

- (1)
- 1 Lot: u how are you
2 Emm: fine how are[you
3 Lot: [eh heh heh what do you know
4 Emm: .hhh just got down last night eh
5 Lot: oh you di[d
6 Emm: [.hhh we been to Palm Springs
7 (0.2)
8 Lot: oh god I bet it's [ho [t
9 Emm: [.hh[hundred and fifteen.h
10 (0.2)
11 Lot: oh:.gosh
12 (.)
13 Emm: guys the guys played golf over there about a hundred and
14 fifty of them and oh man was it ever hot (.) they rode
15 carts but .hhhhhh so we came down uh people were
16 gone from here and they left it pretty clean [so]
17 Lot: [uh] huh

Some observations which apply to (1) as well as conversation more generally:

- most of the time, only one person is speaking
- when there is overlap, it is brief
- one person can start their talk immediately on another's completion
- the size of turns varies: it may be a single word, a phrase, a clause, a sentence
- speakers are in the first instance assigned a single **turn-constructive unit** (TCU; a possibly complete unit)

At the end of a TCU is a **transition relevance place** (TRP): a place where speaker change (i.e. change from one speaker to a next) may occur.

At a TRP certain 'rules' apply (adapted from Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974):

Rule 1. Applies initially at the first TRP in a turn.

(a) If C (current speaker) selects N (next speaker) in current turn, then C must stop speaking and N start up at the next TRP after N-selection.

- (2) Sara: Jo you want some
Jo: no

(b) If C does not select N, then any other party may self-select, first speaker gaining rights to the next turn.

- (3) Rob: but I found them quite (0.2) you know I had to keep
reminding them to be quiet
Les: .hhh I know.

(c) If C has not selected N, and no other party self-selects under 1.(b), then C may (but need not) continue (i.e. claim rights to a further turn-constructural unit).

(4) Rob: that's right
(0.4)
Rob: who else

Rule 2. Applies at all subsequent TRPs.

When rule 1.(c) has been applied by C, then at the next TRP Rule1.(a)-(c) apply, and recursively at the next TRP, until speaker change is effected.

(5) Roger: and it's the president's assassin you know
(0.9)
Roger: they're wonder[ful].
Louise: [hm- now they're not even sure

Note that these 'rules' aren't rules in a prescriptive sense (like rules of etiquette, for instance). Rather, they are rules which arise from, and help to account for, the structure of naturally occurring conversation.

2.2 Overlap

Overlap in conversation is where two speakers speak simultaneously. Thinking just about the **onset** of overlap (the point at which simultaneous talk begins), we can note three positions where talk in overlap systematically occurs:

1. immediately after one TCU and before the next
2. immediately before the end of the first TCU
3. immediately after the beginning of the next TCU

(6) Emm: I do too I should've had him drop me off but I didn't know
whether you were home or not [and uh
Nan: [oh Emma e-why don't you
call

(7) Nan: well I'll be da[rned]
Emm: well [ye]ah

(8) Emm: .hhhhh well kid [that's tough]
Nan: [he better kno]ck it off yeah
Emm: you keep your nose clean

2.3 Silence

There are different kinds of silence in conversation. Some of the most common:

(a) **Intra-turn silences/pauses** (silences where there hasn't been a point of possible completion)

(9) Emm: they- we stayed at uh Indian Wells you know they give
you a deal with the (0.2) company

(b) **Gaps** (silences between turns before someone self-selects)

(10) Lot: .hh and then uh we got another one by the mouth at the
jetty
(0.2)
Emm: mm[:::
Lot: [a halibut

(c) **Attributable silences** (silences between turns where a particular something is observably/accountably 'not happening')

(11) Gor: .hhh She could've been a little bit more subtle
(0.5)
Gor: .hhhhh[hh [do you t h i n k]
Dan: [she[should she let it]get out of hand

3. Sequence organisation: Adjacency pairs, ‘preference’

3.1 Features of base adjacency pairs

- two utterances
- adjacently placed
- produced by different speakers
- ordered as a first part (‘first pair part’— FPP) and a second part (‘second pair part’— SPP) typed, so that a FPP requires a particular SPP, or a range of SPPs
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Some examples of adjacency pairs

- (1) MAR: ·t ·khhhhhh how you doing
JOA: oh pretty good
- (2) Emm: hh were you busy last night
Lot: yeah
- (3) Emm: uh will you call him tonight [for me
Bar: [yeah
Bar: yeah
- (4) Ros: hh why don't you come and see[me some[t i m e s]
Bea: [hh [I would li]ke to
- (5) Gor: do you want to come up
Jan: I'd like to come up yeah
- (6) Kar: you can all come up here
(0.3)
Vic: no that's alright we'll stay down here
- (7) Emm: uh will you call him tonight [for me
Bar: [yeah
Bar: yeah
- (8) MAR: bye-bye
JOA: mbye-bye

Offers/invitations

- (9) Gla: and now I've got (.) to wash my hair and get the goop out of it and everything .hh and I have the paper here I thought you might like to have it hhhh[h
Emm: [th[ank yo]u
Gla: [and then] you could return it ub (.) oh along about noon
- (10) Les: do you want me to ring you ba[ck h
Kat: [yeh it's still cheap rates until nine o'clock ()
Les: [alright is it three one one one one,
Kat: yah that's right
Les: .hhh shall I do it now,h[h
Kat: [uhyes please
- (11) A: oh I was gonna sa:y if you wanted to.hh you could meet me at UCB and I could show you some of the other things on the computer (.) maybe even teach you how to program Basic or something .hh
(0.6)
B: well I don't know if I'd want to get all that involved hh.hhh
- (12) Edg: oh:hh lord and we were wondering if there's anything we can do to help
Mic: [well that's]
Edg: [I mean] can we do any shopping for her or something like that
(0.7)
Mic: well that's most ki:nd Edgerton .hhh At the moment no because we've still got two boys at home
Edg: of course

Assessments

- (13) B: it's supposed to be really really pretty
A: oh it's supposed to be gorgeous
- (14) Nor: sh[e seems such a n]ice little[l a dy]
Bea: [(since you keh)] [dawful]ly nice little person

(15) Pat: they already called. they said they're going to replace every gift that they gave us. hhh[hh
 Pen: [oh wow so
 Pat: so [I thought that] was really nice
 Pen: [yeah]
 Pen: that's very nice yeah.

(16) Wen: I think she's really attractive actually
 (0.5)
 Mar: she's a bit plump

3.2 Sequence expansion

FPPs and SPPs may not be exactly next to each other, and the sequence may be augmented in various ways.

(17)
 FPP1 Har: hello Mrs Field .hh uhm .t.h would you be available for supply on Thursday
 FPP2 Les: sorry thursda[y
 SPP2 Har: [thursday this week
 SPP1 Les: yes yes

3.3 Relevant next actions

When we say that a FPP 'requires' a particular SPP it is not just a matter of social etiquette: what we mean is that people are held accountable for not producing a relevant SPP. On the production of a FPP, a SPP is said to be **made relevant**. If the SPP is not forthcoming, then it may eventually be pursued.

(18) Gor: .hhh she could've been a little bit more subtle
 (0.5)
 Gor: .hhhhh[hh [do you t h i n k]
 Dan: [She[should she let it]get out of hand

Two points can be noted about the silence after Gordon's assessment: D is not speaking; also, that there is a particular thing which she is not saying — she is withholding the reciprocal assessment. We can tell this because we know that the FPP makes particular kinds of actions from B relevant (see Pomerantz paper), and also in that G solicits her reciprocal assessment (which, note, she is supplying: she is also treating a reciprocal assessment as being relevant).

Second follow-up point: what do we mean by ‘range of SPPs’?

- (19) Ros: and uh the if you'd care to come over ans visit u
little while this morning I'll give you[cup of coffee
Bea: [khhh
Bea: uh-huh hh well that's awfully sweet of you I don't
think I can make it this morning, hheeuhh uhm (0.3)
'tch I'm running an ad in the paper and and uh hh I
have to stay near the phone

Compare (19) with (4). So, we can talk about invitations making relevant acceptances or rejections. Likewise, requests can be accepted or refused, etc.

But notice the differences in design of talk between the acceptance in 4 and rejection in 19. The rejection in 19 begins with nonlexical restarts followed by ‘well’; followed by an appreciation which goes into an account. It has the format of what we call a *dispreferred* response. these kinds of features (turn initial ‘well’, appreciations etc) regularly go around with e.g. refusing a request as opposed to accepting it; disagreeing with an assessment rather than agreeing with it. and so on.

Note that this notion of preference isn't to do with private desires of speakers, but to do with the format of their talk/actions. so, in (4) above, it doesn't matter whether Bea actually wants to accept the invitation or not: the fact is, she accepts it, and formats her talk like other preferred responses.

3.4 Preferred and dispreferred responses

Regular features of preferred SPPs:

- no delay (placed contiguously with FPP)
- simple acceptance
- end the sequence

Regular features of dispreferred SPPs:

- delay
- anticipatory accounts
- pro-forma agreements
- pre-emptive reformulation

- Delay

- (19) Edg: I mean can we do any shopping for her or
something like that
(0.7)

Mic: well that's most kind Edgerton .hhh at the moment
No because we've still got two boys at home

- Anticipatory accounts

(20) Emm: you coming down early
(0.2)
Bud: hh well I got a lot of (.) things to do before I get
(.)
cleared up tomorr I don't know I w probably won't be
too early

- Pro-forma agreements

(21) Emm: no one heard a word hah
Nan: not a word
(0.2)
Nan: hah ah
(0.2)
Nan: n not (.) not a word h
(.)
Nan: not et all except Roul's mother got a call

- Pre-emptive reformulation (trying to remedy what might be the reason for the perceived upcoming dispreferred SPP)

(21) C: well you can both stay
(0.4)
C: got plenty of room

(22) Cla: and livers and and gizzards and stuff like that makes
it
real yummy.h
(1.5)
Cla: makes it too rich fer me but
(0.3)
Cla: (makes) it yummy

3.5 Intersubjectivity

Every turn at talk is built on, and displays, an analysis and understanding of the other speaker's prior turn. Speakers have this sequential organisation as a resource to inspect others talk to see what sense it made of their own prior talk and may, if they find that sense making problematic initiate repair work. Consider for instance the following:

Mother: is everybody (0.2) [washed for dinner
 Gary [yah
 Mother: daddy and I have t- both go in different directions
 and I want to talk to you about where I'm going
 tonight
 Russ: mm hmm
 Gary: is it about us
 Mother: uh huh
 Russ: I know where you're going
 Mother: where
 Russ: to the uh (eighth grade)
 Mother: yeah right
 T1 Mother: do you know who's going to that meeting
 T2 Russ: who
 T3 Mother: I don't know
 T4 Russ: oh probably Mrs McOwen (and) and probably Mrs Cadry
 and
 some of the teachers (0.4) and the coun[sellors
 Mother: [Mrs Cadry went to the-
 I'll talk to you

T1 'Do you know who's going to that meeting' is the 'trouble-source' here. Two different analyses of it are displayed in the two difference responses at T2 and T4. T1 is first understood by Russ to be a sort of 'pre sequence' (a sequence produced to be specifically preliminary to determinate actions, projecting their occurrence contingent on the response to the pre-sequence initiator). Russ's 'who' displays that he takes T1 to be a preannouncement to be followed by some (news) telling. Mother's turn T3 shows Russ that his analysis of her T1 utterance was incorrect and he reanalyses it and now at T4 displays an understanding of it as a request for information concerning individuals who might be going to the meeting.

So by always looking at the next turn, we can begin to see how the participant's themselves are treating each other's talk: just as importantly we have what we can think of as a NEXT TURN PROOF PROCEDURE for the analytic claims we are making. We are not just asserting that 'that is an invitation' or 'that is a complaint' or whatever, but we are tapping into the participant's own displayed understandings of what is going on. This is one of the ways in which APs provide a useful analytic resource. Another reason is that this kind of organisation, much like the organisation of turn-taking and repair, transcends individual interactions and has a much more general domain of application.

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