

A Discoursal Analysis of Conversation

Keiko HAYASAKA

1. Introduction

Since the 1994 curriculum reform was announced by the Government for the high school English programs, more emphasis has been laid on communicative ways of English learning/teaching in high schools in Japan. The curriculum reform was realized by adding three courses: Oral Communication Courses A, B, and C, focused on speaking, listening and debating, respectively in order to enhance students' communicative skills especially in oral/aural comprehension. This significant change of the high school curriculum was very influential in the English education of Japan because English was acknowledged as a tool for communication (Okano, et al. 2000, 36).

Then this question came out: what do we teach in Oral Communication classes? And how do we teach them? Are concocted dialogues whose main concern is lexico-grammatical features sufficient to teach interactive conversation and enhance communicative skills? The answer is of course 'No.'

Textbook writers and publishers have made efforts to edit Oral Communication textbooks to meet the needs of these courses according to the guidelines. In order to teach interactive and communicative English, authentic features based on natural talk should be included in the teaching materials. Using authentic materials like TV/radio programs or newspapers is one way of choosing materials. In a situation where exposure to authentic materials is limited, however, teachers/learners have to depend on textbooks designed and compiled to meet the demand. In such a case, a pedagogical theory of spoken English is vital because "spoken language pedagogy cannot simply just proceed from the same assumptions as written language pedagogy with regard to language use." (McCarthy 1998, 47). Have the writers and editors taken into account this kind of theory when they compiled the textbooks? If they have, how?

A discourse analytical approach can be a way to apply pedagogical theory of spoken English to the compilation of the textbooks for communicative language use. Hayasaka, et al. (2000a, 2000b) and Okano, et al. (2000) examined model conversations of the Oral Communication A (OCA hereafter) textbooks from the point of discoursal features to examine their authenticity as natural conversations. They found that many of the conversations were concocted for teaching lexico-grammatical and structural features rather than teaching natural conversation, although there were some exceptions.

Spoken corpora, collections of naturally spoken data in the real world also give us deep perspectives of spoken English and its unique features, which do not necessarily

coincide with written English. CANCODE (Cambridge-Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English) is one of those spoken English corpora which compiles of 5 million spoken words recorded and transcribed in several genres. Since the spoken corpora are the collection of data from real settings, examining conversations of the textbooks using corpus criteria is believed to add impetus to the study of authentic teaching materials for English learners.

The objective of this paper is to analyze conversations from the viewpoint of spoken discursal features according to the findings by 1)Hayasaka, et al. (2000a, 2000b), and Okano, et al. (2000) and 2)individual and co-authored CANCODE publications written by R. Carter and M. McCarthy.

This introduction is followed by a brief summary of the findings of both 1) and 2) above in Section 2. In Section 3, a selection of dialogues from the OCA textbooks and from author's data are analyzed. Finally in Section 4, some implications for future dialogue writing will be suggested.

2. Criteria for measuring authenticity of textbooks

2.1 Criteria and findings of OCA textbooks

Rather than showing just the references, the author will devote some space here to the summary of the studies by Hayasaka, et al., 2000a, 2000b and Okano, et al., 2000 mainly to show the criteria they applied to their studies in the hope of applying them to further discussions in the following sections of this paper.

The criteria used for the measurement of authenticity are the following 8 items:

1) structural repetition

Word (s)/phrases/sentences are repeated by the speaker or the listener to stress or to confirm what the speaker said.

A: I arrived here only yesterday.

B: Yesterday?

2) incompleteness of sentences

Sentences are not completed because of the listener's interruption or the speaker implies the rest.

A: Would you like some chocolate?

B: Thank you but actually I'm ...

A: Oh you are on a diet.

3) turn-taking

Turns are taken, stolen, yielded and interrupted in natural settings, while turn-taking is rather rigid and put in order in concocted conversation.

4) quantity of utterances

In a common setting of conversation between NS and NNS, NS is thought to talk more than NNS because of his/her English proficiency and strategies he/she has.

5) discourse markers

Discourse markers such as *right* or *well* (Schiffrin 1984) are often used in natural conversation to mark boundaries between one topic and the next.

6) adjacency pairs

Two utterances which are produced in an anticipated way and show reciprocity. The production of a second pair part by the next speaker completes an adjacency pair sequence. (Schegloff & Sacks 1973).

A: Could you do me a favor?

B: Of course, if I can.

Some of these pairs are phatic, for example greeting-greeting. The term also includes question-answer, request-acceptance/refusal, etc.

7) formality

The authors limited this study to the examination of 'request forms' used in conversation. The main concern was how the formality of requesting varies depending on the context of situation: hyponym and beneficiary between the addresser and addressee.

8) text patterns

Generic Structure Potential in Service Encounter, Telephone, Opinion and Narrative / anecdote were examined and measured according to the patterns from Eggins and Slade (1997) and modified by Okano.

(1) GSP of Service Encounters

Greeting*>Initiation>Request>Compliance>Service Giving>Service
Receiving>Service Closure>Coda [Enquiry*, Others*]

(2) GSP for Telephone Calls

Calling>Addressing>Receiving>Confirming>Minor Exchange> Main Topic>
...>Preclosing Exchange>Confirming Turn Change>Reconfirming for Hanging
Up>Coda

(3) GSP for Opinion

Initiation*>Opinion>Evidence*>Reaction>[{Agreeing (Evidence)}, {Non-Agreeing
(Evidence)}]>Resolution*

(4) GSP for Narratives/Anecdotes

Abstract*>Orientation>Complication/Remarkable
Event>Evaluation/Reaction>Resolution>Coda* [Enquiry*, Others*]

* optional

> the stage to the left precedes the one to the right

[] recursive elements

The results showed that most of the model dialogues and conversations found in the OCA textbooks did not show features of authenticity in general. The conversations were more pedagogically structured with complete phrases/sentences. Speakers took

turns and each character spoke more or less equal numbers of words. Discourse markers were rarely used. Adjacency pairs which represent a rather structural frame of unit were applied in some situations. Extended study of request forms of those textbooks (Okano, et al. 2000) revealed another feature of pedagogical and concocted conversations. That is, 294 examples of request forms were, generally speaking, composed of polite expressions with the use of modal auxiliaries. Variations depending on who takes the benefit, or on hyponymy were not very prominent. Textbook conversations were created for teaching structures essential to functions of genres.

2.2 Features of Spoken English based on CANCODE

Based on the corpus of spoken conversation, most prominent grammatical features of spoken English can be summarized as follows. (McCarthy & Carter 1994, Carter & McCarthy 1995, Carter 1997, Carter, Goddard, Reah, Sanger & Bowring 1997, Carter & McCarthy 1997, McCarthy 1998).

1) ellipsis

The omission of elements which are considered to be required in a structure but can be easily recovered from the context. Carter & McCarthy (1995) write that ellipsis in spoken English is situational and not structural, by which they mean ellipsis which affects people and things in the immediate situation. The omission of personal subjects is an example of this type of ellipsis frequently involved in conversation.

A: (Would you like) a cup of tea?

B: Thank you.

2) deixis

Deixis involves words which point backwards and forwards in an immediate environment such as *this* or *that* to locate an utterance, *now* and *then* to relate to the current moment, and *we* and *you* to relate to who is speaking, etc. In such a context as action-in-speech, deixis is frequently used because the phenomena is obvious to the speakers.

"Could you please hold *this* for a second?"

3) heads

Heads are words or phrases positioned before the words or phrases co-referential with the subject/object of the sentence, meaning to identify key information to listeners.

My brother and his wife, they are coming to see me next week.

4) tails

Tails are positioned at the end of a clause. Co-referential word(s)/phrase(s) that are put at the end of the phrase/sentence reinforce(s) the meaning:

We have a class to attend tomorrow, *the visiting scholars*.

Other features which coincide with the criteria in 2.1 such as discourse markers and adjacency pairs are excluded from the exemplification above to avoid redundancy.

Discoursal features of conversation are frequently shown in the data collected in spoken corpora, and show difference from the written one in many ways. For example,

word orders are more flexible in spoken English depending on the topic and the speaker's intention. Reinforcement of the word(s)/phrase(s) are expressed by the left-relocation or relocation to the end of the sentence. Omission of the word(s)/phrase(s) is intentionally done in certain situations. It produces different meaning from the structural omission, which is frequently found in written English.

Since pedagogical concern in teaching English has shifted toward the communicative use of the language, empirical data from the real world are very useful because they show different grammar from the written data. Corpora represent spoken grammar which learners need to know and need to acquire for their communicative use of the language.

In the next section, some conversations both from textbooks and real data will be analyzed using the criteria and discoursal features mentioned in this section.

3. Conversation Analysis

3 (1) This is an excerpt from an OCA textbook model conversation.

Jenny and Ichiro, both are high school students.

1 Jenny: How do you get to school, Ichiro?

2 Ichiro: By school bus. What about you, Jenny? How do you get to school?

3 Jenny: I take a train from Higashi Station.

4 Ichiro: Do you have to change?

5 Jenny: Yes. I change at Komatsu Station to the City Line.

6 Ichiro: How many stops is it from Higashi Station?

7 Jenny: It's five stops.

8 Ichiro: How long does it take?

9 Jenny: About half an hour.

(Yashiro, et al. 1998)

This is a dialogue conducted by two young students of different nationalities, perhaps an American girl and a Japanese boy. Their relationship and the place where this conversation took place are not mentioned. Without any greetings or initiation, the conversation starts with a question by Jenny. This dialogue shows a typical question-answer pattern of interview-like conversation. Most of the questions here start with 'how' and those questions are followed by answers exactly to hit the point like 'How? - by bus', 'How many? - five' and 'How long? - half an hour.' Nothing is said to follow up the answer. Although Jenny starts the conversation, in line 2 Ichiro yields his turn to Jenny by asking 'What about you?' which seems to be a very common turn-giving phenomenon among Japanese speakers. He then becomes an interviewer and Jenny an interviewee till the end of the conversation. Jenny's answer to the question 'How many stops is it from the Higashi Station?' on line 7 sounds unnatural. It could have been '*Only* five stops.', for instance, with ellipsis (it's) and also with an adjective to make the response more subjective and opinion-like.

Ellipsis occurs only in the structural frame, for example, 'How do you get to school? - By school bus.' or 'How long does it take? - About half an hour.' Ellipsis is avoided and complete sentences are given in the pair of 'How do you get to school? - I take a train...' In spoken grammar, situational ellipsis of the subject tends to occur where a speaker is clearly understood by the listener.

The following conversation is conducted in a similar situation to 3 (1) but more spoken English features are included.

3 (2)

Akio tells Jane about his hometown.

1 Jane : Oh, you come to school by bike?

2 Akio : Yes, sometimes.

3 Jane : How far is your house from here?

4 Akio : Well, ... it's about 15 kilometers.

5 Jane : I see. How long does it take you to get here?

6 Akio : It takes about an hour.

7 Jane : Oh, that's good exercise. Where do you live?

8 Akio : I live in Soka City.

9 Jane : Soka City? Where is it?

10 Akio : It's in Saitama, to the north of Tokyo.

11 Jane : Is it a large city?

12 Akio : No, not so large. The population is about 200,000.

13 Jane : 200,000! You live in a big city. Our city has only about 50,000 people.

(Jinbo, et al. 1998)

As in the previous example, the question-answer pattern is evident. Jane asks questions and Akio answers, but this conversation sounds much more natural than 3 (1) because Jane not only asks but reciprocally comments on Akio's answers, for example, 'I see.' (line 5), 'Oh, that's good exercise' (line 7). The use of discourse markers *Oh* (line 1) and *Well* (line 4), repetition for confirmation (line 9), ellipsis (lines 2, 12, 13), and word order (line 1) adds natural flavor to this conversation.

Question-answer adjacency pair sequences are found in a service encounter, too.

3 (3)

Ichiro is ordering food at a restaurant.

1 Waitress : What would you like to have?

2 Ichiro : First of all, I'd like to have corn soup.

3 Waitress : What will you have for your main dish?

4 Ichiro : I'll have a steak.

5 Waitress : What kind of salad would you like?

6 Ichiro : Tomato salad, please.

7 Waitress : Would you like some dessert?

8 Ichiro : Yes, please. I'll have some cheesecake and a cup of tea.

9 Waitress : Thank you.

(Yashiro, et al. 1998)

Again no situation is stated except 'Ichiro is ordering food at a restaurant.' One can assume that this conversation was conducted in a good restaurant in America, where they serve starters and main courses.

This model dialogue includes lessons on the structural level of English, making a request and ordering food at a restaurant. Turns are taken very clearly and equally between the waitress and the customer. Generic Structure Potential would require greeting (Good afternoon, sir) and initiation (Are you ready to order?), etc. It is not natural that the customer never makes enquiries like, 'What kind of soup (salad) do you have?' or questions like 'How would you like your steak?' 'What dressing would you like?' are not asked by the waitress. The customer never hesitates what to eat and is very determined. In natural settings, ordering dessert will come later after the main course is finished. Here this dialogue proceeds in a rhythmic way of recurrence of question and answer (what would/will you...?), which makes this dialogue less authentic.

However, continuous occurrence of question and answer sequences can happen in such a context as follows.

3 (4)

At a coffee bar on a university campus at lunch time.

Attendant: female, native English speaker

Customer: female, Non-native English speaker

1 Attendant : Next please.

2 Customer : Can I have a soup, please?

3 Attendant : Large or small?

4 Customer : Small, please.

5 Attendant : Parsnip or leek and potato?

6 Customer : Potato, please.

7 Attendant : Leek and potato. [Customer: yes] And a baguette?

8 Customer : Yes, please.

9 Attendant : White or brown?

10 Customer : Brown, please.

11 Attendant : All right.

12 Customer : (Pointing at the tray of her friend). All together, please.

13 Attendant : That's 4.15.

14 Customer : Thank you.

15 Attendant : Thank you. Next please.

(author's data 2000)

This dialogue is conducted between a native English speaker and a non-native English speaker and shows some context-bound features. The dialogue was composed

of short question and answer sequences for a number of reasons. Lack of context makes the customer wait to be asked by the attendant. The first question by the attendant "Large or small?" is an example. The customer had no idea that there were two different sizes. Next, the customer did not know that there was a choice from the two kinds of soup. In addition, the customer was not familiar with the name of the vegetables the attendant mentioned. Rather than asking questions to confirm, the customer automatically repeated the only word she could catch. That was 'potato.' (line 6). The attendant corrected the customer's request by saying, 'leek and potato.' (line 7). The same type of A or B question was asked by the attendant about the bread (line 9). If the customer often went to this coffee bar, she might have asked "Can I have a small cup of leek and potato soup with a brown baguette, please?" Then the attendant would have needed to ask fewer questions, which may make her happier waiting on the customer at busy lunch time of the day. This real conversation includes ellipsis in utterances of both participants, for example, "(Would you like) parsnip or leek and potato (soup)?" by the attendant and "(could you charge me) all together, please?" by the customer.

The following dialogue fulfills generic structural elements of service encounter (p.79).

3 (5)

At the post office in the customer's neighborhood.

Attendant: male, native English speaker

Customer: female, non-native English speaker

1 Attendant : Hello, how are you?

2 Customer : Hello, fine thank you.

3 Attendant : Can I help you?

4 Customer : Could you please send these for me 1st class? One to London and another to Japan.

5 Attendant : OK. 40 for this and 27 for this. It's 67 pence, please.

[The attendant licks the stamps. Then he finds a spider crawling on the envelope.

He picks it up and throws it over his right shoulder.] Money spider.

6 Customer : Is it a magic word or something?

7 Attendant : Money spider. I will become rich.

8 Customer : Oh. [laughs] Here it is, thank you.

9 Attendant : Lovely. Here. 70, 80, 100. Thank you.

10 Customer : Thank you.

11 Attendant : Bye.

12 Customer : Bye.

(author's data 2000)

The customer often uses this post office and is friendly with the attendant. So, this conversation starts with friendly greetings of 'How are you? Fine.' (lines 1,2)

followed by initiation (line 3), request (line 4), compliance and service giving (line 5). A chat about a 'money spider' breaks in (lines 5,6,7) and the conversation is closed by service closure (lines 9, 10) and coda (lines 11, 12). Use of deixis (this, line 5) contributes to the naturalness of this dialogue.

A study of request forms of 19 textbooks by Okano et al. (2000) has revealed some unique features of the concocted dialogues in the school textbooks. Their main findings are:

- 1) Several patterns of request forms were found: from a direct one to a least direct one in the form of imperative to the expressions with modal auxiliaries.
- 2) More concerns were put to express request in more polite way with the use of modal auxiliaries rather than the use of imperatives.
- 3) Polite expressions with the use of modal verbs were welcome even in the conversation between high school students. This is perhaps because teaching structure with the use of modality was the priority of the lesson.
- 4) Difference of directness was not clearly distinguished depending on the beneficiary of the speaker/listener. Examples are shown below.

3 (6)

Lee comes to Midori who is busy.

1 Lee : Hi, Midori. What are you doing?

2 Midori : I'm arranging a party.

3 Lee : I love parties.

4 Midori : It's for senior citizens.

5 Lee : Doing something for senior citizens is a fine thing.

6 Midori : I wish more people felt that way. Could you help us then?

7 Lee : Sure.

8 Midori : We have a ton of things to carry. Would you give us a hand? It wouldn't take long.

9 Lee : I'd be happy to.

(Ando, et al. 1998)

Two request forms that appear here are both uttered by Midori asking Lee for his help (lines 6 & 8). According to Leech (1983, 108), *could* is more indirect and polite than *would*. Does Midori distinguish this difference and express a more polite expression at first, and then a less polite expression in her second request? More natural interpretation of the use of '*could*' and '*would*' can be attributed to a pedagogical reason. The lexico-grammatical point of this lesson is to learn requesting expressions of 'Could you ...?' and 'Would you ...?'

Some textbook authors, however, have deep concerns about this and realize the degree of politeness considering the cost or benefit of the addresser and addressee. The following excerpt is a good example to show the sequence of politeness.

3 (7)

Mary and Peter are classmates.

- 1 Mary : Can I ask you a favor, Peter?
2 Peter : What is it?
3 Mary : My family's going on vacation for a week. Could you look after Rover while I'm away?
4 Peter : I didn't know you had a pet. OK. I've always wanted a pet myself. No problem.
5 Mary : Also, could you take him out for a walk every morning? He needs exercise.
6 Peter : Every morning?... Well. All right. I could get up early and take a walk with him. It'll keep me fit, too.
7 Mary : Thanks, Peter. And...well... I was wondering if you could do one last thing for him.
8 Peter : Sure. What is it?
9 Mary : I think he'll want to stay with you in your room at night. Would you mind?
10 Peter : In my room at night? Well ... I ... No ... that's OK.
(Here Mary's mother brings Rover.)
11 Mary : Ah! Here comes Rover. Could you take him now?
12 Peter : That's Rover?!
13 Mary : Isn't he cute?
14 Peter : I thought Rover was a dog! I didn't know he was a monkey...
(Takebayashi, et al. 1988 (Hayasaka, et al. 2000). underlining by author)

In this conversation, Mary's first request was expressed by 'Can you?', followed by more indirect and more polite terms intentionally. Excessive use of 'would' and 'could' may sound too polite between the classmates but Mary surely uses these modals to ask Peter a special favor to take care of her pet without telling him what it is. The cost is laid heavily upon Peter's shoulders, while the benefit is on Mary. "...the more indirect the illocution is, the more diminished and tentative its force tends to be." (Leech 1983, 108)

Realization of the directness is carefully varied depending on the cost/benefit of the sender/receiver in the following examples.

3 (8)

You might find it convenient to use my e-mail address as listed above.
(author's data, 2000)

3 (9)

Do visit us. (author's data, 2000)

3 (8) and 3 (9) are quoted from a letter. Although these are not orally uttered, they are good examples to show the use of the request form. Both are politely expressed but in a different way. In 3(8), request/suggestion is very indirectly expressed (You might...) because the sender knows it is more beneficiary to her if she receives e-mail, although the writer says, "you might find it convenient." On the contrary the benefit of 3(9) is much more for the receiver. So the directness expressed by *do visit* can be a very polite expression in this case.

Next is an example to show the degree of modality in a short utterance.

3 (10)

A student wants to make a comment in class, but the professor tries to ignore him because he comments too often. This was done in a joking manner.

1 Student : May I say something?

2 Professor: (no answer)

3 Student : May I? Can I? Could I?

4 Professor:...

(author's data, 2000)

Even such a short utterance like 3 (10) shows that the speaker gradually increased the indirectness in his use of modals to show politeness and benefit to the speaker. Talking about modality, the pattern observed in 3 (6) seems to be more frequently adopted in the textbooks, especially when pedagogical features of lexico-grammatical teaching have priority. Use of indirect expressions with modals such as *would* or *could* are primarily encouraged in order to show higher level of politeness, while imperative forms are thought to be less polite to make a request. Real data show, however, cost and benefit of the addresser and addressee affect appropriate politeness in a given context.

4 Conclusion

The author has examined both concocted and real conversations from a discoursal point of view. Some made-up conversations are well-written and share spoken features with real data but others are composed for teaching lexis and grammar and do not represent utterances in real life. Real conversations show different grammar from the written one and include features of spoken grammar as shown in Section 2.

In teaching English for communicative purposes, spoken English grammar is necessary. Discourse analysis and collection of natural data have proposed unique spoken English features which are not assumed from the written grammar. Everyday, informal talk offers the best data for a pedagogical theory of spoken languages (McCarthy 1997, 47). Textbook writers and teachers as well would be recommended to actively and positively use the spoken data for the teaching materials they use.

[REFERENCES]

- Carter, R. (1997) *Investigating English Discourse: Language, Literacy and Literature*. London:Routledge
- Carter, R. & M. McCarthy. (1997) *Exploring Spoken English*. Cambridge:Cambridge University Press.
- Carter, R & M. McCarthy. (1995) Grammar and the Spoken Language. *Applied Linguistics* 16.2. 141-158.
- Carter, R., A. Goddard, D. Reah, K. Sanger & M. Bowring. (1997) *Working with*

- Texts*. London:Routledge.
- Eggins, S. & D. Slade. (1997) *Analysing Casual Conversation*. London: Cassell
- Hayasaka, K., S. Okano, T. Kobayashi, T. Oda & M. Yoshida. (2000a). "An Analysis of Dialogues from Oral Communication A Textbooks – Towards Their Authenticising—" *AILA 12 Proceedings*. AILA.
- Hayasaka, K., S. Okano, T. Kobayashi, T. Oda & M. Yoshida. (2000b). "Nonauthentic Features of Dialogues in English Textbooks" Orally presented paper. TESOL 33rd Annual Convention in Vancouver, CANADA. March, 2000.
- Leech, G. (1983). *Principles of Pragmatics*. New York: Longman.
- McCarthy, M (1998) *Spoken Language And Applied Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McCarthy, M & R. Carter. (1994) *Language as Discourse*. New York: Longman
- Okano, S., M. Yoshida, K. Hayasaka, T. Oda & T. Kobayashi. (2000) "Koto Gakkoyo Oraru Komyunikeishon A Kyokasho ni okeru Irai Hyogen no Tokucho—Danwa Bunseki no Shiten kara — (Characteristics of Request Forms in Oral Communication A Textbooks)" *Gakuen Ronshu*. Sapporo: Hokkai Gakuen University.
- Schegloff, E. & H. Sacks. (1973). Opening Up Closings. *Semiotica*, 8, 289-327.
- Schiffrin, D. (1984). *Discourse Markers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[OCA Textbooks quoted]

- Yashiro, K., et al. (1998) *On Air Communication A*. Tokyo: Kaitakusha
- Jinbo, N. et al. (1998) *Hello there! Oral Communication A*. Tokyo: Tokyo Shoseki
- Ando, S., et al. (1998) *Mainstream Oral Communication A*. Tokyo: Zoshindo.
- Takebayashi, S., et al. (1998) *Lighthouse Conversation*. Tokyo: Kenkyusha.