LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF SPOKEN DISCOURSE IN EDUCATIONAL CONSULTATION SESSIONS

by

YEO JIJN YIH
(11232)

This project is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Science with Honours (TESL) Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development University Malaysia Sarawak

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ABSTRACT

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Yeo Jiin Yih

A case study was conducted to examine spoken discourse in educational consultation sessions. Educational consultation is a transactional interaction that could resemble an enquiry on one hand and an “educational treatment” session is similar to a doctor-patient consultation on the other hand. The objectives of the study were to: (1) identify the speech functions associated with obtaining and supplying goods and services in the context of transactional encounters. (2) examine the purposes of educational consultation sessions and how they are structured to achieve their various purposes; and (3) find out the roles of turn-types used by consultant and client in order to prevent unwanted misunderstanding and miscommunication in educational consultation sessions. Twenty sessions of educational consultation sessions involving two consultants and twenty clients were audio-recorded and transcribed. The findings revealed that the consultants used the speech functions, such as, to introduce, to convince, to explain, to encourage, to suggest and to probe and clients used speech functions such as to refuse and to accept in educational consultation. The structures of educational consultation differed based on 3 client-types which are categorized based on clients’ knowledge of educational consultation and educational plans, namely, clients who were familiar with educational consultation and were certain of their educational plans, clients who were not familiar with educational consultation and were uncertain of their future plans and, clients who were familiar with educational consultation but were unsure of their educational plans. The third category of clients who knew educational consultation but were uncertain of what they wanted is the most similar to doctor-patient consultation. The study of turn-types revealed that consultant tended to take control over the turns which may lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding.
ABSTRAK

ANALISIS LINGUISTIK BAGI WACANA LISAN SEMASA SESI PERUNDINGAN AKADEMIK

Yeo Jiin Yih

Satu kajian kes telah dialakukan dengan tujuan untuk mengkaji wacana lisan dalam perundingan akademik. Perundingan akademik ialah suatu interaksi yang merangkumi pertanyaan dan sesi “rawatan berkaitan pendidikan” yang hampir sama dengan perundingan antara doktor dan pesakit. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk (1) mengenal pasti fungsi ucapan yang berkaitan dengan produk dan perkhidmatan. (2) menyelidik struktur perundingan akademik dan mengenal pasti bagaimana struktur tersebut menyampaikan tujuan tersendiri. (3) mengkaji peranan jenis giliran perbualan (turn-taking) yang digunakan oleh perunding dan klien untuk menyelak daripada masalah komunikasi dan salah faham. Dalam kajian ini, dua puluh sesi perundingan akademik telah direkod secara audio and ditranskripsikan. Dua puluh sesi perundingan ini melibatkan dua perunding dan dua puluh klien. Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa terdapat fungsi ucapan tertentu yang digunakan oleh perunding, seperti, mengenal, menyakin, menggalak, mencadang dan menjelas manakala klien dalam perundingan akademik menggunakan fungsi ucapan, seperti, menolak dan menerima. Ini telah mencerminkan peranan dan perhubungan antara konsultan dan pelanggan. Struktur konsultansi akademi adalah berlainan mengikut perbezaan klien, iaitu, klien tahu akan fungsi perundingan akademik dan pasti akan kehendak sendiri, klien tidak tahu akan fungsi perundingan akademik dan tidak pasti akan kehendak sendiri dan, klien tahu akan perundingan akademik tetapi tidak tahu akan kehendak sendiri. Klien yang mengetahui fungsi perundingan akademik tetapi tidak pasti akan kehendak sendiri mempunyai struktur yang paling hampir dengan perundingan antara doktor dan klien. Kajian ke atas giliran perbualan (turn-taking) pula menunjukkan bahawa perunding lebih cendurung untuk mendominasi perbualan tersebut. Keadaan ini mungkin mengakibatkan salah faham dan masalah komunikasi.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the setting of the research problem. It also explains the purpose and objectives of the study, operational definitions of terms and significance of the study.

1.1 Setting of the Research Problem

In everyday life, we spend much of our lives talking or interacting with other people. Interacting is not just a mechanical process of taking turns at producing sound and words but it is a semantic activity which is a process of making meaning (Slade & Eggins, 1997, p. 6). We negotiate meanings (Long, 1996) about what we think is going on in the world, how we feel about it and how we feel about the people we interact with (cited in Chapelle, 1998, p. 24). This process of exchanging meanings is functionally motivated. We interact with people in order to accomplish a variety of tasks or achieve certain social purposes. We talk to buy, to find out information, to make appointments, to get jobs and to jointly participate in practical activities (Slade & Eggins, 1997, p. 6). Added to this, we are also socially interacting with people in
order to obtain or supply goods and services in our daily life. This kind of interaction is called transactional encounters (Eggins, 1990). For example,

**G= Grocer  C= Customer**

**Discourse**

G : Can I help you?
C : Yes I’d like some batteries
G : What kind?
C : Two double As thanks.
G : Ok. That’ll be $1.20
C : Thanks (handing over money)
G : There you go. Bye
C : Thanks. See ya.

**Stages**

(Sales initiation)

Sales request

Sales compliance

Purchase closure

Finish

(Burns, Joyce & Gollin, 1996)

In this situation, the customer and grocer interact in order to obtain and supply goods and services. When they are interacting, there are a few significant features of spoken discourse such as structure, speech functions and turn-taking taking place in the conversation.

Nevertheless, it is claimed that spoken discourses analysis has frequently been fragmentary, dealing only with selected features of talk. The limitation is that such partial analysis cannot describe the ways in which patterns from different levels of language (such as words, clause and turn) interact to produce the meaning of talk.
(Halliday, 1978). Thus, spoken discourse should be analysed at a variety of linguistic levels in transactional encounters.

1.2 Overview of Previous Research

Spoken discourse analysis has been a common theme in the study of linguistics. Many theories have placed varying importance on the spoken discourse analysis that could be used in the teaching of English as a second language to adult immigrant learners. Previous researches have analysed on casual conversation based on Francis and Hunston's (1995) model. In their studies, the researchers investigate how teachers deal effectively with the dialogues of a prescribed textbook that appear frequently and take a considerable amount of classroom time (Farooq, 1999), how to have learners concentrate on various listening and speaking tasks, and how to prepare learners so that they can take part in conversations outside the class. Apart from that, previous researchers have contrasted classroom spoken discourse with casual conversation using Hymes's (1979) ethnomethodological framework. The comparison was done based on the seven features of discourse proposed by Hymes in “Ethnography of Speaking” which not only sets out the view of communicative competence but also facilitates the examination of oral discourse from various genres (Moritoshi, 2000).

In addition, it was found that tone can actually signal turn-taking with respect to the function of tone choice (Kato, 2000). The research revealed that tone conveys
the speaker’s message and plays a significant role in turn-taking. Previous researchers have investigated the turn-taking that adult learners of English use to start their teacher-assigned, task-focused dyadic interaction with their peers in an ESOL classroom (Hellermann, 2005).

Nevertheless, most of these studies have been done to analyse casual conversation in classroom settings. Although there are researchers providing evidence and suggestions on how to utilise the spoken discourse data in order to teach English to second language learners and adult immigrant learners, there is little attention on spoken discourse in transactional encounters. It is essential to have in-depth studies into transactional encounters because in transactional, both the service provider and service receiver need to communicate in order to achieve the purposes of the transaction. In addition, limited research has been done to analyse a variety of linguistic levels such as structures and speech functions of spoken discourse. Although previous researchers have studied the turn-taking of spoken discourse that help to elicit learners’ second language learning, turn-taking can be analysed in different ways, such as how people adjust turn-taking and turn length. To deal with the limitation, this study will analyse the structures, speech functions and types of turn-taking in spoken discourse, particularly in transactional encounters.
1.3 Statement of the problem

In the Malaysian context, there are a lot of consultation and counselling services available. The services encompass a variety of areas including education, business, tourism and marketing. Most of the transactions take place in spoken mode where spoken language plays an essential role in order to communicate and interact between consultants or counsellors and their clients when they are partaking such services. Nonetheless, one of the critical problems found in most transactional encounters is the unclear expressions of clients’ desire and service providers’ sincerity to help (Erickson & Shultz, 1982). Miscommunication and misunderstanding then occur:

There is a gradual recognition of a misunderstanding, which may be indicated disturbances in the flow of the conversational course, in signs of incoherence, by detours or recyclings (repetitions, paraphrases, circumlocutions, 'talking down'-effects), by unresponded repair initiations, by suddenly or gradually developing traces of verbal, nonverbal, or paralinguistic insecurity, or, simply by the indication or registration of 'uncomfortable moments,' until the misunderstanding is somehow recognized.

(Hinnenkamp, 1992, p. 36)

The consequences of miscommunication and misunderstanding is communication breakdown (Gumperz, 1982). However, “misunderstandings can be dealt with, they can be revealed, cleared up and removed” (Hinnenkamp, 1992, p. 37). This can be done by recognizing the existence of misunderstanding and reconstructing misunderstood segments (ibid). Therefore, there is a need to analyse the features of spoken discourse between the service providers and receivers in transactional
encounters for better mutual understanding and communication. An analysis of such encounter at different linguistic level would prevent unwanted misunderstanding and miscommunication by identifying the misunderstood segments.

1.4 Purpose of the study

This study aimed to analyse the spoken discourse in educational consultation sessions involving students who intend to further their tertiary studies.

The objectives of the study were to:

1. identify the speech functions associated with obtaining and supplying good and services in the context of educational consultations;
2. examine the structure used by consultant and clients to achieve communicative purposes; and
3. find out the roles of turn-types used by consultant and client to prevent unwanted misunderstanding and miscommunication in educational consultation sessions.
1.5 Operational Definition of Terms

*Transactional encounters*

Interactions between consultants and clients in educational consultation sessions which involve obtaining and supplying goods and services (Burns, Joyce & Gollin, 1996). The students who intend to further their tertiary studies look for consultants for educational advice. On the other hand, the consultants give services by providing information on different courses and universities to the students.

*Educational Consultation Session*

A session where there is a conversation between a consultant and a client. The consultant’s role is to give information, advice, suggestions and recommendations on the courses offered by different local and overseas private universities to the clients. For instances, Swinburne University in Kuching, Curtin University in Miri, Monash University in Australia and Canterbury University in New Zealand. The clients are made up mainly of Form Five and Form Six students. The clients look for educational consultation because they have the intention to pursue higher education after their Form Five or Form Six. During the sessions, the clients are free to ask any questions regarding the courses, fees and universities. The consultant introduces, recommends, suggests and convinces the clients on certain courses offered by certain university which matches clients’ interest.
**Spoken discourse**

The language organization beyond the sentence level. The features of spoken discourse are speech functions, turn-types and structures that are used by consultant and clients in educational consultation sessions.

(Halliday, 1994)

**Speech function**

It is an action performed by means of language where there are four basic speech functions. These four basic types of interactants are most likely to exist in transactional encounters. The speech roles and commodities in interaction are categorized as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speech role</th>
<th>Commodity exchanged</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Giving</td>
<td>Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demanding</td>
<td>Question</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Halliday, 1994)
1.6 Significance of the Study

There are still a number of local students who do not seek advice for tertiary education from an educational consultant. Such students in general have little idea what the functions of educational consultation are. Although it is not in popular demand, the importance of education consultation cannot be denied. A survey conducted by ABC consultant service, Sibu, Sarawak (2005) showed that less than 10 percent of students who have entered tertiary education did so through recommendation from education consultants. The survey showed that from the 10 percent who seek education consultation before they further their study, 95 percent of them responded that they did not regret taking the course at the higher institution introduced by the consultant. From the 90 percent of students who did not seek education consultation, as many as 80 percent were not satisfied with the course they chose. Based on the results of this survey, it is important to seek professional advice for tertiary education and to inform students of the function of educational consultation.

Through a study of speech functions used by consultant and clients in educational consultation, the variety of actions performed by language can be discovered. For instance, to introduce courses and universities, to convince and to persuade clients to take up certain courses offered by certain universities. The structure of the conversation between consultants and clients can be clearly shown by referring to the speech function stated initially. People would have better insight into
the functions of educational consultation as to whether it is merely an enquiry about a service or an educational “treatment” session, similar to medical consultation.

Furthermore, this study also looks into the micro and macro-level of discourse feature, such as the structure of educational consultation and turn-taking from linguistic perspective. It will illustrate how these discourse features are used by consultants and clients to achieve communicative purposes in educational consultation; the natural interaction between consultants and different client-types; and how clients’ knowledge of educational consultation and educational plans contribute to the effective communicative purposes.

Apart from that, there are practical benefits of conducting such a study. Sometimes, the service provider might not be alert to the principles of establishing a conversation. They may not know the pauses between the turns which indicate certain meaning that sometimes lead to misunderstanding (Burns, Joyce & Gollin, 1996). Moreover, the service provider might talk excessively to the extent that they neglect the needs and feelings of their clients. Through the study of turn-taking between the consultants and clients, it may alert speakers to the importance of responsive turn taking in a conversation in order to sustain a relationship. The results may be important for both consultants and clients to have productive and satisfying educational consultation session.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the concepts related to spoken discourse in transactional encounters. It describes the aspects of speech function, structure and types of turn-taking of spoken discourse in transactional encounters, and makes references to related research on these aspects.

2.1 Spoken discourse in transactional encounters

Spoken discourse is defined as the language organisation for beyond the sentence level when we speak (Halliday, 1989). It rests on the basic premise that linguistic items cannot be understood without reference to the context, both linguistic and extra-linguistic, in which they are used (Grenoble, 1996). The spoken discourse ranges from the micro patterns of the grammar, semantics (for example, word choice) to the macro discourse structure (for example, turn-taking) and text-type or genres (Slade & Eggins, 1997). Nevertheless, different contexts of spoken interaction contribute to the diversity of spoken discourse in terms of linguistic levels. For example, the topic of conversation is reflected in choices of content words through...
verb selection (action verbs or verbs of feeling, thinking), nouns and nominal groups and circumstances (expressions of time, place and manner which are realized through prepositional and adverbial phrases) (Malinowski, 1935).

Furthermore, spoken interactions fall predominantly into two main categories and sub-categories as follows:

![Diagram of spoken interaction types]

*Figure 1.*

Table 1

*Categories of spoken interactions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conversation</td>
<td>Casual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conversation where the participants have equal power in the interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conversations where there is unequal power between the participants in the interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encounters</td>
<td>Factual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interactions which are predominantly oriented towards giving or seeking information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transactional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interactions which involve obtaining or supplying goods and services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 1 shows that spoken interactions fall predominantly into two categories: conversation and encounters. Conversation is driven by interpersonal motivations which are motivated by the creation, maintenance or exploration of affective bonds of attitudes, inclinations and obligations. It can be further categorized into casual conversation and formal conversation. Casual conversation is the conversation where the participants have equal power in the interaction whereas formal conversation is
the conversation where there is unequal power between the participants in the interaction. The participants may know each other but they have different social roles, such as teacher and students.

Encounter is primarily pragmatically motivated. It can be categorized into factual encounter and transactional encounter. A factual encounter is an interaction which is predominantly oriented towards giving or seeking information whereas a transactional encounter is an interaction which involves obtaining and supplying goods and services.

Spoken discourse can be approached from a number of different theoretical perspectives, such as Conversation Analysis (CA), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Systemic Functional Linguistics that lead to different models of discourse analysis. Nevertheless, the focus of this study is to specifically analyze the spoken discourse in terms of speech functions, structure and turn-taking in transactional encounters using Conversation Analysis (CA) that will be reviewed in the next section.

2.2 Speech functions

Speech function, also referred to speech act, is a concept of linguistics, an act that a speaker performs when making an utterance (Austin, 1962). It is often not difficult to understand what is meant if one knows the meaning of a word or phrase and the rules of how words are put together to form sentences. In particular, there are
a number of verbs which are used to perform certain public acts which leave no doubt about the intended meaning (Searle, 1965). It can be described as “in saying something, we do something”. For instance, when a minister says, “I now pronounce you husband and wife”, it is an action performed by means of language, describing something (“It is snowing”), asking a question (“Is it snowing?”), making a request or giving an order (“Could you pass the salt?”, “Drop your weapon or I'll shoot you!”), or making a promise (“I promise I’ll give it back”) (ibid). These verbs show that language can be used not just to talk about, but to do things. In addition, certain sentences differ from other declarative, or constative sentences that they do not assert truth values or have informative communicative value. They do not say things but rather do things (ibid). These classes of performatives include sentences such as I promise, I give my word and I apologize. In uttering such sentences, one performs a certain act.

Apart from that, Halliday (1994) claimed that there are frequencies of rejoinders that relates to their potential to sustain the interaction. There are lists of sustaining rejoinder speech functions, but only those relevant to the study on transactional encounters are selected, as shown in Table 2.