Zeitschrift: Studies in Communication Sciences : journal of the Swiss Association of Communication and Media Research

Herausgeber: Swiss Association of Communication and Media Research; Università della Svizzera italiana, Faculty of Communication Sciences

Band: 1 (2001)

Heft: 1

Artikel: Report on "working with dialogue"

Autor: Freddi, Maria

DOI: https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-791146

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. Mehr erfahren

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. En savoir plus

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. Find out more

Download PDF: 16.10.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, https://www.e-periodica.ch

Studies in Communication Sciences 1 (2001) 281-289

MARIA FREDDI*

REPORT ON "WORKING WITH DIALOGUE"

(University of Birmingham, 7-10 April 1999)

The 7th biannual IADA conference, held in April 1999 at the University of Birmingham, hosted by Malcolm Coulthard, had as its theme *Working with Dialogue* and as its subtheme *Dialogue at Work*. The papers presented at the conference address themselves to both themes: some are either theoretical approaches to the analysis of dialogue, or descriptive studies of transcripts and/or written records of real or of fictional dialogue, others are concerned with the work that dialogue does in different professional settings. Although relating to a wide variety of contexts, these others have in common the fact that they are interested in dialogue and interaction as part of people's working life, that is, in how people use dialogue in their workplaces.

Wider methodological and/or theoretical concerns were the scope of the five plenary sessions. In her opening plenary lecture Edda Weigand (Münster) addressed the question of how analysis should account for so complex an object of study as dialogue. She warns us against the analyst's temptation to restrict their object by their methodology. By posing the problem of the relation between data and modelling, she sees the risk of a misleading abstraction which does not correspond to the complexity of the object. After tracing a brief history of Dialogue Analysis (from Conversation Analysis, with its focus on empirical data, to the Birmingham School of Discourse Analysis, which had the merit of pursuing a functional analysis

* M. Freddi, Università Cattolica di Milano, Milan (Italy).

of action sequences, to the Dialogue Grammar, as developed in Germany by Franz Hundsnurscher), she then proposes her model of the *Dialogic Action Game* which accounts for the communicative purpose of dialogue without overlooking its cognitive and inferential components, nor the rhetorical and the emotional ones. In other words, she stresses the human side of any exchange, highlighting the roles played by participants, their will to co-operate in reaching mutual understanding and producing meaning, and advocates a more "human" linguistics which tries "to explain what human beings are doing when they try to negotiate their positions in social communities" as social beings. The action game is thus a cultural unit of action involving world experience and background knowledge of the interlocutors, their capacity to infer and co-operate to the realisation of meaning, their emotions, and finally persuasion which, she notices, play a major role in dialogue as a praxis.

Ron Scollon (Georgetown) in his plenary lecture on the second day of the conference, *Hidden Dialogicality. When infelicity becomes fear of Infringement*, showed how there is a hidden dimension of dialogicality which pervades various kinds of discourses ranging from commodity-laws-dominated types of discourse such as news and public discourses to taboos, from political censorship intervening in texts to self-censorship. All these kinds of non-explicit interventions correspond to a plurality of voices somehow submerged in the text, yet emerging as hidden interlocutors of a silent dialogue. Scollon develops Bachtin's concept of hidden dialogicality within a frame of Critical Discourse Analysis by spotting an ongoing dialogue between a hidden or silent voice and other "talking" voices in various kinds of texts. Today's practice of trademarking is seen by the author as a common example of how a hidden voice can have strong discursive power. The voice of the commodity and of the law protecting intellectual property against infringement is there, though hidden, each time a producer of public discourse

avoids it in their discourse, thus generating a register or speech genre of avoidance.

The third day was opened by Paul Hopper's plenary lecture and closed by Jim Martin's one. Paul Hopper (Carnegie Mellon) in *Conversation and Argument Structure: The Significance of Dialogue for Grammatical Explanation* presented his model of grammar and interaction reversing the isolated sentence perspective. If considered from such a perspective, languages tend to lavish grammatical constructions onto the verb and its argument because these give information about actions and their participants. Basing his claim on some transcribed conversations from the Santa Barbara corpus, Hopper showed that when spoken discourse is studied, exactly the opposite is the case: patterns of grammaticalisation take place in low-information environments, and the paucity of grammatical marking in adjuncts and other extra-clausal elements is a result not of their redundancy but of their especially prominent role in discourse.

Jim Martin (Sydney), expanding on some contributions within Systemic-Functional Linguistics, develops a model which accounts for various types of exchanges, both the pragmatic register dominated ones (interaction in institutionalised settings), and casual conversation with a view to reconciling some disjunctions which have arisen in Australian work on dialogue within the framework of SFL. Martin points out the structural complexity of exchanges. He observed how recognition of such complexity should start raising questions about the adequacy of other models, for example the adjacency pair of conversational analysis. He suggested that exchange structure can be usefully factored out as *tiers*, or motifs, namely, the orbital motif of obligatory and optional moves, the serial motif of turn-taking, the periodic motif of an initial burst then wane of information, and the prosodic motif of *telos*. Focusing on the interpersonal dimension of exchanges, and its *prosodic* realisations, he identifies the *telos* of the exchange as unit of meaning, distinguishing two different pulses, mood telos (mood and

modality) and appraisal telos (evaluation). While the first precipitates closure, the other keeps the exchange open propelling expansion, thus suiting pragmatic and casual registers respectively. On the basis of this analysis, Martin argues for further research into Dialogue Analysis to move into a dialectic with lexicogrammar and social context seeing meaning as function in context.

In *Musical Dialogue* Theo Van Leeuwen (London) showed how dialogue can occur in other language codes such as music with rules and principles governing it very similar to those regulating verbal exchanges. Offering various examples ranging from Bach's Fugues to Gershwin's opera Porgy and Bess, to contemporary jazz music, he shows how musical events often begin as sequential interactions, forms of antiphonal or 'call and response' dialogue and duets, which then evolve into simultaneous ones, with a degree of overlap between musical turns.

Four parallel sessions every day including three symposia, gathering participants from many European countries, the U.S., Canada and South America, allowed for the richness of about a hundred contributions to be fit in. However, for want of space it is here impossible to mention all.

The three symposia on *Language in the Courtroom*, *Expert Talk*, and *Activity-Based Interactions in Various Institutional Settings* respectively, move within the scope of *Dialogue at Work*. The first, which includes work by Jane Cotterill (Anglia Polytechnic), Bruce Fraser (Boston), Keller Magenau (Georgetown) and Frances Rock (Birmingham), takes the criminal trial courtroom as its setting to explore the role of language in creating meaning in a variety of monologic (e.g. jury deliberations) and dialogic (e.g. testimony) courtroom genres. The second, held by Chris Candlin's group (Hong Kong), tries to explore the linkage between expertise and discursive practice from an interactionist perspective asking whether discourse can be a measure of professional expertise particularly in the domain

of health care. Finally, Paul Drew's research group (York) explores the properties of some interactional devices, practice or kinds of sequence to see how they are engaged in given institutional settings. The analysis is carried out in conversation analytic terms, and takes a comparative perspective drawing on data from broadcast talk, industrial employer-employee negotiations and psycotherapy.

Forensic Linguistics is also the ambit of Malcolm Coulthard's analysis of a famous courtroom case, the Bentley case, where the author was asked to act as linguistic consultant. By close analysis of some textual features, he shows how linguistic evidence brought against the suspect had been manipulated by the police by transforming a piece of dialogue, namely police questioning, into a monologic statement of the aacused.

In the frame of *Dialogue at Work* were also works by Gina Poncini (Lugano), Marianne Doury (Lyon), and Joanna Channel (Birmingham/Channel Associates). Poncini explored the use of the personal pronouns *we*, *you* and *I* linking their use to exclusive vs. inclusive strategies and negotiation of individual and group identity at international business meetings. Doury presented some of the reflections developed within the GRIC (Groupe de Recherche sur les Interactions Communicatives, CNR/Université Lyon 2) on multiparty conversation in service encounters. Channel reported on her training programme which had been devised to help receptionists at a main council office to be more effective and efficient, within the frame of plain language and good customer service policies adopted by councils in the UK. She shows how, given the nature of the problems linked with effective communication, some of the points made by theory from applied linguistics and conversation analysis proved applicable and useful in this consultancy and training task. In particular, the fact of considering the unfolding nature and sequencing of conversation, the idea of a turn as a move, and the possibility to apply a pragmatic framework

(Grice, Brown and Levinson) proved of some help to understand the interaction of context and what occurs linguistically.

A similar interest in specific type of service encounters occurring within a public institution was shared by Luis Perez Gonzalez (Madrid) who analysed emergency calls, and by Boris Pritchard (Rijeka) and Damir Kalogiera (Zagreb) dealing with conversation in VHF maritime communications. Carla Bazzanella and colleagues (Turin) examined the form and function of both self- and allo-repetition in telephone conversation presenting data from human-machine dialogues. Veronique Traverso (Lyon) showed how in shop encounters complementarity of tasks and interactional roles is to be seen as a structuring element of exchanges. Robert Maier (Utrecht) was more interested in informal conversations taking place at work to detect those dialogic strategies aimed at avoiding argumentation, which strategies are used to make other participants become equal partners in a discussion. Similarly, Almut Koester (Nottingham) described some lexical and grammatical choices made by speakers in spontaneously-occurring conversation in an office setting. One session gathered studies of discourse in psychiatric institutions: Branca Telles Ribeiro (Rio de Janeiro) and Michèle Grossen (Lausanne) investigate features of interaction in clinical interviews.

A number of papers were devoted to the study of academic discourse: among others, Anna Mauranen (Joensuu) introduced her project aimed at identifying metadiscursive/reflexive practices in some genres of spoken academic English including lectures, dissertation defences, advising sessions, etc. Julia Bamford (Siena) discussed some dialogic aspects of university lectures such as the questions-answers sequencing, their linguistic markers, and pragmatic status. Maria Freddi (Milan) in contrast, chose a written genre of academic discourse - textbooks-, and the discourse community of linguists. Basing her analysis on the sender-receiver relationship, she highlights the polyphonous nature of this genre where the voices of the

participants in the dialogue (the writer's, the student-reader's and the peer-reader's one) are variously lexicalised in the text.

Classroom interaction was the object of study of several contributions: Antonia Sanchez (Valencia) centred her research on teacher questions as means of facilitating learning; Margaret Cargill (Adelaide) and Marina Mozzon-McPherson (Hull) coped with non-traditional classroom contexts, and compared the pedagogic role of dialogue between adults in postgraduate supervision and language advising sessions.

Children's acquisition of dialogic competence was the theme of Martine Karnoouh-Vertalier's paper (Paris III) on adult-child dialogues and their implications for language learning, and of Emmanuelle Canut's case-study (Paris III) on the evolution of narrative strategies in 3 to 6 years old children dialogues with adults, which, according to the author, depends on the kind of verbal interaction that exists between child and adult.

John Sinclair (Birmingham) and Gunther Kress (London) set out with more methodological concerns. The main argument Sinclair put forward in his presentation was that prospection is one of the most powerful means of interpreting utterances, and each instance of prospection is prompted by signals in the text. He set up a framework for the interpretation of prospections which moves in stages from the immediately forthcoming text to broad features of the context of situation (using Firth's term). According to a reader/listener's sensitivity to the various stages, interpretation can vary. Kress introduced in his paper the concept of *multimodality*, the assumption that communication involves several semiotic modes at the same time having functional specialisation. Taking some school-children writing reports, he integrates the verbal part of the message with the drawings arguing that meaning is to be found only in the dialogue that each modal element in the message engages in. Michael Toolan (Birmingham) also raised some methodological issues. Expanding on speech act theory and the Birmingham School model of hierarchy of acts, moves and exchanges, he

proposed an evaluation of dialogues as developed by Integrational Linguistics.

Corpus-based analyses included papers by Karin Aijmer (Goteborg), and Rosamund Moon (Cobuild and Birmingham). Aijmer, the systematiser of Swedish corpus linguistics, highlights some grammaticalisation phenomena retrievable in the use of the marker *OK* comparing two spoken corpora. Moon uses corpus evidence to compare features observed in spoken interaction with tendencies in fiction in order to assess the naturalness or verisimilitude of fictional dialogue. Liliana Ionescu-Ruxandoiu (Vienna) also compares fictional/literary dialogues with dialectal mainly non-fictional ones recorded on spot with a view to posing methodological questions such as: "what are the possibilities and limitations when using two categories of dialogues?".

A number of presentations dealt with literary dialogues. Among these, Chiara Molinari (Milan) explored the role of prosody in a corpus of French, Canadian, and African novels; Henning Westheide (Leiden) analysed forms of reflexive language such as metadiscursive and deictic expressions in Thomas Bernhard's *Auslöschung*; Franz Hundsnurscher (Münster) discussed some reporting expressions in a corpus of German novels diachronically juxtaposed; Adina Abadi (Jerusalem), drawing from novels by Abraham Yehoshua, dealt with the question of whether the theme-rheme division of utterances in dialogues is similar to their division in regular texts; Dorota Pacek (Birmingham) dealt with the problem of translating Lewis Carrol's dialogues into Polish.

The focus of other contributions are mass-mediated forms of talk as opposed to uncontrolled everyday dialogue, such as, for example, Martin Montgomery's (Strathclyde) detailed analysis of face-threatening strategies employed in the popular British chat-show *Mrs Merton Show*; or Lilie Chouliaraki and Louise Phillips's (Copenhagen and Roskild) presentation of Danish television debate shows; and Svetla Cmejrkova's (Prague) exam

of the strategies adopted by participants in TV dialogues of a triadic form, i.e. one interviewer and two guests-interviewees, who looks at how they manage to maintain a non-overt dialogic framework of their diversive monologues. Carmen Gregori Signes (Valencia) focused on turn-taking procedures in Tabloid Talk-Shows on American television, arguing that genre specific activities have a real basis in turn-taking. Marina Bondi (Modena) identified ways of reported argument and constructed dialogue in the news coverage of the Anglo-Irish talks at Stormont arguing in a framework of metapragmatics.

Some papers were more interested in investigating the emotional side of the relationship between interlocutors, such as the one by Karen Malcolm (Toronto) who proposes phasal analysis as a useful exploratory tool to describe casual conversation among friends. She argues that phases or structures of exchange relate to the interpersonal relationship of the interlocutors, and vary according to that. Ze Luis Meurer (Santa Catarina) considered the function of contradiction in various written genres, noticing that it foregrounds the interpersonal metafunction of language, while Andrea Ghita (Bucarest) explored another aspect of the emotional dimension of interaction, namely the way in which participants in a dialogue create and destruct intimacy in a selection of English plays of the sixties ad seventies. Carmen Rosa Caldas-Coulthard (Birmingham) raised the issue of confessional dialogue in popular press problem pages as encoding gender messages.

It seems to me that the two main concerns voiced by the conference contributions are, on the one hand, the need for transferring research into professional training, on the other, the emphasis on what spills away from language, and yet takes place in any exchange, with dialogue being more than language itself. It seems as if researchers into Dialogue Analysis are saying "it all started with speech acts and now it is moving towards something different".