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## **Analysis of Multi-Party Talk-in-Interaction at a Model United Nations Simulation**

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Participation in a Model UN simulation provides high school and college students the opportunity to simulate councils within the United Nations. Participation also provides students with and opportunity to develop important life skills such as negotiation, public speaking, and research. Caucusing for the purpose of drafting resolutions offers some of the best chances to use and display negotiation skills.

While speech making and position paper writing are quite successfully performed, it is in the politically crucial area of caucusing and informal debate that Japanese student participants seem to falter. In order to better understand the requirements of the task of caucusing, a project was designed to observe, record and analyze caucusing sessions among 1) native speakers of English (MUN New York, March 2008), 2) highly proficient non-native speakers of English (DueMUN Germany, June 2009), and 3) Japanese speakers of English (MUN Japan, July 2009). The caucusing sessions reported on in this paper are of the first group, native speakers of English.

Conversation Analysis (CA) has been selected as the analytical framework since it studies the orders of talk-in-interaction regardless of its character or setting (ten Have, 1999). There has been a strong tradition of CA research with attention to institution-based interactional materials such as meetings, courtroom proceedings and a variety of interview formats in order to show how these institutions were “talked into being” (Heritage, 1984a, p. 290). More specifically Heritage states,

There are, therefore, at least two kinds of conversation analytic research going on today, and, though they overlap in various ways, they are distinct in focus. The first examines the institution of interaction as an entity in its own right; the second studies the management of social institutions *in* interaction. (Heritage, 1997, p. 162)

The second type of CA research, sometimes called ‘Applied CA’ is what the present study aspires to. Paul ten Have suggests that within applied CA there are two different interests:

On the one hand, there can be an interest in the institutional arrangements as

these pertain to the organization of an interaction, such as turn-taking, the distribution of speaking rights, etc., in relation to various aspects of the institution's functioning. On the other hand, the interest may be in studying the specific institutional activities, the specific interactional situation, its local, interactional requirements and especially the ways in which the interactants show their orientations to these situations and requirements. (1999, p. 8)

In other words, 'applied CA' focuses on setting- and institution-specific interactional practices and may have wider concerns (i.e., the organization of *in situ* conduct) than just the study of talk-in-interaction. Applied CA is situated within 'qualitative social research', which strives:

- to address phenomena that are socially significant in some way,
- to be relevant to social theory, either directly or indirectly,
- to be based on or incorporate large amounts of appropriate evidence, purposefully collected, and
- to result from some form of systematic analysis of this evidence. (Ragin, 1994, p.23)

Furthermore, CA research provides an *emic* description of data (a particularist viewpoint based on studying behavior as from within the system) as opposed to an *etic* (and in principle, universal) viewpoint (see Pike, 1967 for the origin of this distinction). Ten Have (1999) describes three phases for analysis for the type of inductive qualitative inquiry, which characterizes CA as:

1. establishing a regular pattern of (inter)action;
2. describing the normative orientations of participants, as demonstrated in 'deviant cases'; and
3. providing a functional specification of the organization, discovered in 1 and 2, in the wider matrix of interaction. (p. 40)

## Data Collection

As noted by ten Have, CA recommends that data collection recordings "should catch 'natural interaction' as fully and faithfully as is practically possible" (p. 48). The data collection recordings from which this study draws were captured on video using a hand-held camera during informal debate/caucusing sessions at the MUN held in New York in March 2008. Although the use of a tripod would have made the video

image more stable, the researcher felt that the smallness of the room made it impractical and possibly disturbing to the participants. Every effort was made for the camera operator to be as unobtrusive as possible so we are confident that the participants were not particularly aware of her presence. At the end of the session however, the participants were asked for their consent for the video to be viewed and analyzed by the research for this project. There were no objections to the use of the audio/video images collected for this project.

### **Use of Audio and Video**

During data collection, audio-tapes and video recordings of various meetings, caucuses and interactions were made. Audio transcripts are at the core of CA research yet video analysis is also used in a complementary way because “verbal production by the participants is taken as a baseline for the understanding of the interaction, with selected visual details being added to this understanding to make the analysis more completely an analysis of face-to-face interaction” (ten Have, 1999, p. 9). Among the types of visual details of focus are the direction of eye gaze and specific marked gestures. Ten Have suggests to start with an audio transcription and then later to add descriptions of the visual details under consideration.

If audio recordings are ‘incomplete’ what can video recordings specifically offer? For one thing, eye gaze can indicate who is being addressed in face-to-face interactions. Furthermore, important aspects of the interaction and local action might be related to the physical environment-the interactants might use objects or their bodies in specific ways while talking with each other and these aspects may become relevant over the course of the interaction. Heath (1997) notes however that visual conduct does not fall into tidy turn-by turn organization. Nevertheless, video data is very helpful especially in settings with more than two or three speakers.

However, one of the drawbacks of using video materials is the lack of anonymity afforded the participants. Heath and Luff note that although the lack of anonymity may be an obstacle to obtaining participant consent,

...it has been found that people in a wide variety of settings are often willing to allow researchers to record both the audible and the visual aspects of their conduct if they are guaranteed a final veto on whether the recordings should be preserved. (1993, p. 308)

## Sampling Issues

According to Ragin (1994), “sampling is the process of selecting a representative set of cases from a much larger set. Researchers sample because they often confront a wealth of potential cases and do not have the time or resources to study them all” (p. 191). In the case of CA, the phenomenon to be studied will “be directly observable in the specimens at hand” (ten Have, 1999, p. 50) and “any specimen is a ‘good’ one, that is, worthy of an intense and detailed examination” (p. 51). Furthermore, ten Have asserts that, “if your project is an exploratory one you might use whatever data you can lay your hands on, especially at the start of the project” (p. 52).

## Transcribing the Data

The creation of a transcript based on the repeated and careful listening to a recorded interaction is central to conversation analytic work. It is necessary for the analyst to write down not only what has been said but how it was said. Ten Have states, “a transcript might best be seen as a *translation*... of the actually produced *speech* into a version of the standardized *language* of that community, with some selective indication of the actual speech production” (p. 76).

Ten Have also discusses formatting issues that arise during the process of transcribing. There are several systems: the vertical system favored by Jefferson in which the turns of each speaker is placed one under another in the order of occurrence; the column system in which each speaker has a parallel column; the partiture system (similar to musical notation) in which many different stimuli or channels are captured in their own lines in order to show “simultaneous utterances or actions” (Edwards & Lampert, 1993, p. 11).

In the data presented here, the traditional vertical system has been selected. It was also necessary to determine the level of unit to put on each line. According to ten Have (1999, p. 90, citing Psathas & Anderson 1990, pp. 85-86), units can consist of

- ‘breath units’, what ‘the speaker could produce in one breath’;
- ‘phrasal or clausal units’, ‘distinct or partial phrases or clauses as semantic/-grammatical units’;
- ‘turn constructional turn completion units’, ‘turns or turn constructional components which may or may not become “turns” as a result of the next

speaker beginning or not beginning to talk'.

For the most part in this data I will make line breaks at TCU's unless another unit is shorter. This will enable more flexibility later on in the analysis if there is seen a need to add other layers of information such as eye gaze direction or other movements and gestures.

### Analysis

One of the main precepts about CA is that the early stages of research are "characterized as *unmotivated looking*" (Psathas, 1995, p. 45). Of course, Psathas (1990a) also acknowledges the paradox in this since all research is motivated to some extent. What such a comment is trying get at is the idea that the research should go into the analysis of the transcript without any preconceived notions about what he or she might look for or might find. Schegloff (paraphrased here by ten Have, 1999), nevertheless suggests a three step routine that will help ensure a systematic way of working through the data:

1. Check the episode carefully in terms of turn-taking: the construction of turns, pauses, overlaps, etc.; make notes of any remarkable phenomena, especially on any 'disturbances' in the fluent workings of the turn-taking system.
2. Then look for sequences in the episode under review, especially adjacency pairs and their sequels.
3. And finally, note any phenomena or repair, such as repair initiators, actual repairs, etc.

(ten Have, 1999. p. 104)

Once the transcript has been worked through in this way, Pomerantz and Fehr (1997, cited in ten Have, 1999, pp. 105-106) suggest five tools to apply to the data:

1. Select a sequence.
2. Characterize the actions in the sequence
3. Consider how the speakers' packaging of actions, including their selection of reference terms, provides for certain understandings of the actions performed and the matters talked about. Consider the options for the recipient that are set up by that packaging.
4. Consider how the timing and taking of turns provide for certain understandings of the actions and the matters talked about.

5. Consider how the ways the actions were accomplished implicate certain identities, roles and/or relationships for the interactants.

### **The MUN Data: Excerpt 1**

#### **Selecting the Sequence**

As mentioned earlier, MUN informal caucusing sessions were captured on video with a small hand held camera in March 2008 in New York. The researcher who shot the video footage has been working to prepare students to participate in MUN events for the past 20 years so is very familiar with the range of sequences that occur. Therefore that researcher was asked to select two or three sequences from the collected footage based on an intuitive (i.e., non-analytical) sense that something interesting was going on. As Seedhouse (2004) states,

CA is interested in how social acts are packaged and delivered in linguistic terms. The fundamental CA question ‘Why this, in this way, right now?’ captures the interest in talk as social action, which is delivered in particular linguistic formatting, as part of an unfolding sequence. (p. 2)

One of these sequences is the focus of the following analysis, and was presented at a data session in June 2009 during which many cogent observations and suggestions were made to the analyst regarding possible avenues of interpretation. Because of space limitations, the other sequences will be dealt with in a separate paper. The entire transcription of the sequence to be analyzed is in Appendix 1.

Ten Have (1999) describes a data session as “an informal get-together of researchers in order to discuss some ‘data’-recordings or transcripts” (p. 124). The session in June 2009 began with repeated seeing/hearing and reading of the data along with a description of background information. This was followed by opportunities for each of the session participants to offer their own observations and commentary on what they found to be ‘interesting’ and then their understandings of the excerpt.

#### **Characterizing the Actions in the Sequence**

In Model UN simulations, delegates may simulate a meeting of one of the various UN bodies such as the General Assembly, the Socio Economic Council or the Security Council. Each meeting has a designated Chair, delegates representing the

various countries and sometimes aides to collect and gather notes to be delivered to the Chair. During both formal and informal debate, the Chair has the role of turn allocator, time keeper and interaction monitor/arbiter. However, once an informal caucus has been called, the Chair is expected to relinquish control of the meeting during an agreed span of time. The delegates are then free to move around the meeting room and engage in diplomatic conversation at will. Thus, typically there are multiple clusters of synchronous interactions taking place during a caucusing event.

In this informal caucusing sequence, there are 12-13 people in the room, which is dominated by a large central table (see Figure 1). There are large sheets of paper on the wall at the front of the room on which points, acronyms and ideas to be included in a written resolution have been collected. The task in which the group is engaged is to build consensus on the contents of a written resolution.



Figure 1. Still Frame 27:08

At the beginning of the segment, the chair is engaged in pinning more poster paper at the front of the room. Two delegates (China delegate 1 and Indonesia delegate) are standing at the front of the meeting room. The delegate from China suddenly takes



the floor (line 1) and over the course of the ensuing sequence the delegates eventually turn their attention towards her (lines 8-13). It has been suggested that this may be understood as a phenomenon that functions as the *opposite* of “schisming” where a larger group having a unified discussion breaks away into smaller synchronous interactions (Komter, 1983, cited in Auer, et al. 1999, p. 22).

The transcript of the interaction between the delegate to China 1 (Ch1), initially off-screen delegates (Slovakia, Peru and China 2) and a delegate initially standing on the right side of the screen (Belgium) but who during the sequence moves towards the delegate to China 1, is in normal type; the characterization of the actions is in *italics* (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Overview of the interaction**

Segment 1		
1	Ch1	Ok
2		(.) ((hands apart))
3		can everybody? kind of give me your attention for (.) two seconds?
4		would it be possible fo:r,
5		cuz I there just seems to be some confusion about what we need to do
6		maybe just give Peru ((points off screen)) and Slovakia ((points off screen)) who are the main authors?
7		(.)a chance to say something?
8		(.)and [try to]
9	Slov	[or perhaps]
10	Ch1	explain the paper when it is time to deal with it in depth=
11	Slov	=or perhaps to even rea::d the paper as it is=
12	Ch1	=>something like that<, ((D2 starts to walk towards Ch and front of room))
13		cuz I don't think were going to get anything done until we have a complete explanation of what (.)((turns; Ind also turns and looks at poster))
14		C3MG ((gestures to poster paper)) and EC ((gestures to poster paper))
		(.) [((Ch1 turn back to face group

	again))]	
16	Ind [((Ind turn back to face group Ind mirrors Ch1 again))]	
17	Ch1 and [CAP] and all of the [others will do]	
18	Belg [((hand clap))]	<i>Gets attention of the Chair</i>
19	Ind [yeah] ((nodding head))	
20	Belg ((points hands towards chair)) [we::ll] ((looks at Chair))	<i>initiates disagreement</i>
21	there was one other solution too,	<i>Reframes the assessment and possible solution</i>
22	where Slovakia ((points)) and Peru ((points)) both had the id[ea]	<i>Confirms Chair's assessment</i>
23	Ch1 [yeah]	<i>Chair acknowledges Belg</i>
24	Ch2 as oppo::sed to having inspections	<i>Ch2 elaborates Belg's point</i>
25	I think that's what most people are opposed to	<i>Makes personal assessment</i>
26	Peru the bold point=	<i>Co-completion</i>
27	Slov =the bold point((26:55-27:03 too much camera movement, so it is hard to determine speakers from this point))	<i>Repetition and acceptance of co-completion</i>
28	Peru about wordings of the xx getting clarified [xx] getting presented	
29	Slov [yeah]	<i>Overlap to take floor; affirms that wordings of the resolutions need to be clarified</i>
30	Slov [and I would love]	<i>Pre-sequence start</i>
31	(Peru) [xx Seattle in five minutes]	<i>Overlap</i>
32	Slov and I would love you for the sake of lines, I mean yeah note that <u>mi::ne</u> is finished	<i>Repeats pre-sequence start; Affirms the Chair's concern about the efficient use of caucusing time</i>
33	Slov and I think if you have any concerns you want to know about wording?	<i>Pre-sequence, pre-request</i>
34	Ch2 wordings of the xx=	<i>Confirmation</i>
35	Peru =Well uh again=	<i>Overlap</i>
36	Slov =these concerns about reading, please come read it	<i>Overlap; request</i>
37	Ch2 [xx ((words inaudible but voice heard overlapping))]	<i>Overlap</i>
38	Ind ((hands apart)) can we speak to it all together?	<i>Takes over role as adhoc chair from Ch 1-uses same hands apart pose as Ch1 did at beginning of sequence; Request for full attention of the group</i>

Excerpt (1) contains a pre-pre-sequence (line 1) in the word "ok" which can be

used by speakers to finish a sequence or to begin another.

A pre-sequence is a sequence, which includes a turn recognizable as a potential initiation of another specific type of turn, such as a request by prefiguring an upcoming action. Pre-sequences invite collaboration in that action (as in pre-closings) or collaboration in avoiding explicit action.

(1)

- 1 Ch1 Ok  
2 (.) ((hands apart))  
3 can everybody? kind of give me your attention for (.) two seconds?  
4 would it be possible for, ((Ch2 turns to face Ch1))  
5 cuz I there just seems to be some confusion about what we need to do,  
6 maybe just give Peru ((points off screen)) and Slovakia ((points off screen)),  
who are the main authors?  
7 (.) a chance to say something?

The pre-pre-sequence here was followed by two pre-conditions (“kind of” and “two seconds”) for a pre-request (“give me your attention”) leading to a request in line 6-7 (“maybe just give Peru and Slovakia...a chance to say something?”). Also there is a pre-sequence (“would it be possible for”) before the request, which comes in lines 6-7.

Another point worth noting here is the packaging of the actions. For instance, the delegate to China 1 refers to the participants by the name of the country that they represent-she points at the delegates from Peru and Slovakia as she refers to them by the name of their country. This reference to roles (country delegates) endows upon her, for the moment, a role as an ad hoc Chair of the meeting and gives her temporary license to steer the ensuing interactions and topic focus in what would otherwise be an informal un-chaired episode of multiparty talk.

### Timing and Turn-taking

As mentioned earlier, turn-taking is at the heart of conversation analysis because most often in conversation only one person speaks at a time and when another speaker takes the floor it is usually accomplished with very little gap or overlap, which is a remarkable and continuous accomplishment by the participating interlocutors. In this segment, the timing/taking of turns, the various gaps, overlaps and

latching “provide for certain understandings of the actions and matters talked about” (Leiminer & Baker, 2000, p. 141).

For example, in excerpt (2) China 1 points to the delegates Peru and Slovakia and refers to them by name and then there is a gap at the beginnings of lines 7 and 8. A gap can be an indication that the current speaker is ending their turn or that another speaker may bid to take the floor. Since China 1 pointed to and named Peru and Slovakia there was a possibility for a change of speaker—it could even be interpreted as an attempted speaker nomination (other selection). However, this first gap (line 7) passes with no attempts from floor-takers but right after the gap in line 8, Slovakia overlaps with a first attempt to take the floor (line 9), which is not successful. Slovakia does, however, temporarily “steal” the floor (line 11) by a perfectly timed latching at a projected/possible transition relevance place (at the end of line 10). China 1 “steals” the turn back in line 12 by another perfectly timed latching and a temporary increase of speech rate in which she affirms/acknowledges Slovakia’s contribution.

(2)

- 6 Ch1 maybe just give Peru ((points off screen)) and Slovakia ((points off screen))  
 who are the main authors?  
 7 (. )a chance to say something?  
 8 (. )and [try to]  
 9 Slov [or perhaps]  
 10 Ch1 explain the paper when it is time to deal with it in depth=  
 11 Slov =or perhaps to even rea::d the paper as it is=  
 12 Ch1 =>something like that<, ((D2 starts to walk towards Ch and front of room;  
 general chatter in room reduces in volume from this point))

### **Actions Implicate Identities, Roles and Relationships**

How actions were accomplished implicate certain identities, roles and/or relationships for the interactants. As mentioned earlier, the delegate to China 1 assumes the role of ad hoc Chair. A still frame (see Figure 2) shows that when she begins her turn, the other delegates are engaged in multiparty talk.



Figure 2. Still Frame 26:20

From line 11 (when Slovakia succeeds in taking the floor and speaks to China 1), the generalized chatter ceases and by line 13 the participants orient their attention towards China 1-reinforcing her (temporary) role as Chair.



Figure 3. Still Frame 26:40

This role is ratified by another delegate (Indonesia) who stands at the front of the room with her on the right side. Indonesia mirrors China 1's actions-for example she matches her gaze direction and turns simultaneously towards the poster paper and then turns back towards the group (see figure 4). She takes on the same body pose that China 1 started with at the beginning of this segment (see figure 5) as she eventually takes over the role as ad hoc Chair by the end of the segment analyzed here.



Figure 4. Still Frame 26:42



Figure 5. Still Frame 27:22

## Conclusion

There has been scant research on how delegates successfully interact during informal caucusing sessions at MUNs. By analyzing segments such as these, it is possible to examine closely the ways that interactants participate in these session and even move towards explaining why they do what they do.

In this multiparty conversation, the analysis demonstrated how one delegate of China was able to accomplish a bid to be an ad hoc chair during an interaction that should ostensibly have no chair at all. This kind of skill is important for all delegates to learn how to do in order to represent their countries effectively. Unfortunately the usual classroom is not particularly amenable to this kind of training.

According to Poole (1992) “language socialization theory views interactional practices as culturally-embedded phenomena through which members of a social group create, reflect, and sustain orientations toward a given context and its constitutive social roles” (p. 593). Poole gives examples of a “range of possible turn-taking experiences students may have prior to their encounters with the L2 classroom” (p. 593) based on the premise that these previous encounters will affect future turn-taking behavior regardless of the context.

In Japan, English is mostly encountered in a classroom settingsso extrapolating from Poole’s article, it might be fair to assume that the socialization patterns and norms of the classroom might limit or affect interaction patterns in general. Specifically, it will be important to explore whether or not the kinds of turn-taking experiences of Japanese students resemble the kinds of interactional/turn-taking behaviors that occur in the MUN examples cited in this study that teachers/trainers might wish their students to emulate. That will be the topic of the next set of analyses based on MUN data.

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## Appendix: Transcript of Segment 1

1) Security Council: Making a plan to share information in order to write a draft resolution

Roughly starts at 26:19 "Can everyone give me your attention for two seconds..." until about 27:33 "5 minutes and we will come back together"

Ch1= China delegate 1

Ind= Indonesia (standing to right of Ch1)

Slov= Slovakia delegate (off-screen initially but later seen on left side of table near Congo placard), female voice, low

Belg= Belgium delegate right side of room, walks to front-she claps hands to get attention in earlier segments

Ch2= China delegate 2 (off-screen initially, later seen standing behind cluster of delegates at the left side of the table near the front), male voice-China

Peru=Peru delegate (off-screen) female voice, mid-high

1 Ch1: ok  
2 (.) ((hands apart))  
3 can everybody? kind of give me your attention for (.)  
two seconds?  
4 would it be possible fo:r, ((Ch2 turns to face Ch1))  
5 cuz I there just seems to be some confusion about what  
we need to do,  
6 maybe just give Peru ((points off screen)) and Slovakia  
((points off screen)) who are the main authors?  
7 (.)a chance to say something?  
8 (.)and [try to]  
9 Slov [or perhaps]  
10 Ch1 explain the paper when it is time to deal with it in  
depth=  
11 Slov =or perhaps to even rea::d the paper as it is=  
12 Ch1 =>something like that<, ((D2 starts to walk towards Ch  
and front of room; general chatter in room reduces in  
volume from this point))  
13 cuz I don't think were going to get anything done until

we have a complete explanation of what (.) ((turns; Ind also turns and looks at poster))

14 C3MG ((gestures to poster paper)) and EC ((gestures to poster paper))

15 [(.)] ((turns to face group again))

16 Ind [((turns to face group again))]

17 Ch1 and [CAP] and all of the [others will do]

18 Belg [((hand clap))]

19 Ind [yeah] ((nodding head))

20 Belg ((points hands to Ch1)) [we::ll]

21 there was one other solution too,

22 where Slovakia ((points)) and Peru ((points)) both had the id[ea]

23 Ch1 [yeah]

24 Ch2 as oppo::sed to having inspections

25 I think that's what most people are opposed to

26 Peru the bold point=

27 Slov =the bold point

((26:55-27:03 too much camera movement, so it hard to definitively determine speakers from this point; also more general chatter resumes from this point))

28 Peru about wordings of the xx getting clarified [xx] getting presented

29 Slov [yeah]

30 Slov [and I would love]

31 Peru [xx settled in five minutes]

32 Slov and I would love you for the sake of time, I mean yeah note that mi::ne is finished

33 Slov and I think if you have any concerns you want to know about wording?

34 Ch2 wordings of the xx

35 D4 Well uh again

36 Slov [these concerns about reading, please come read it]

37 Ch2 [xx ((words inaudible but voice heard overlapping))]

38 Ind ((hands apart)) can we speak to it all together?