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Conversation and Culture

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Abstract

Conversation analysis is a method for the systematic study of interaction in terms of a sequential turn-taking system. Research in conversation analysis has traditionally focused on speakers of English, and it is still unclear to what extent the system observed in that research applies to conversation more generally around the world. However, as this method is now being applied to conversation in a broader range of languages, it is increasingly possible to address questions about the nature of interactional diversity across different speech communities. The approach of pragmatic typology first applies sequential analysis to conversation from different speech communities and then compares interactional patterns in ways analogous to how traditional linguistic typology compares morphosyntax. This article discusses contemporary literature in pragmatic typology, including single-language studies and multilanguage comparisons reflecting both qualitative and quantitative methods. This research finds that microanalysis of face-to-face interaction can identify both universal trends and culture-specific interactional tendencies.

Turn-taking:

the basic practice of conversational interaction in which speakers or signers alternate producing turns in a conversational sequence

Adjacency pair: the basic unit of sequential CA, a two-part structure upon which larger sequences are built, consisting of a first pair part and a second pair part with a relation of conditional relevance, for example, the relation between a question and its answer

Repair: how people deal with problems of producing and perceiving turns to maintain the continuity of the conversation, including practices of self-repair and other-repair

Politeness: the management of interpersonal issues of “face” in interaction, including affiliation and disaffiliation with others, directness and indirectness, and related issues

Interactional diversity: the cultural variation in conversational practices allowed for by flexibility in the basic universal infrastructure of the turn-taking system

1. CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN CONVERSATIONAL INTERACTION

Conversation is cross-culturally universal in that members of every society participate in back-and-forth interactional turn-taking, in which conversational turns are produced not in isolation but instead are fit structurally within sequences of other turns. In the 1960s and 1970s, a group of sociologists introduced key concepts for the study of conversation analysis (CA), particularly in an important article by Sacks et al. (1974). These concepts include the two-part adjacency pair instead of the individual sentence as the basic unit of analysis; the relationship between the two pair parts, known as conditional relevance; the management of who performs which parts of sequences, or speaker selection; and structural elements of conversations like openings and closings and the repair of interactional trouble (see Goodwin & Heritage 1990, Levinson 1983, Sidnell 2010, Sidnell & Stivers 2012). Inspired by sociologists like Goffman (1964), who called for attention to “the neglected situation” of face-to-face interaction, and Garfinkel (1967), who pointed to the “members’ methods” by which people organize their interactions, CA began as a radical departure from macrolevel sociology that looked instead for the empirical foundations of social organization at the microlevel of social interaction. CA has historically been influential beyond its roots in sociology and today is practiced in linguistics, anthropology, and other disciplines.

The original data considered in CA were from North American English speakers, and CA has continued to focus largely on conversation in English and a few other languages; but because its claims did not mention any specific language or society, one way to understand them is as an implicit proposal of cross-cultural universals. Is this turn-taking system something we find only among speakers of English, or does it apply to other speech communities as well? This question has been debated off and on (e.g., Schegloff 2009), but the transformation of traditional sociological CA into a full-fledged cross-cultural field has been hindered in part by lingering ideas that research beyond one’s native language is problematic [e.g., “Ideally, people work on their own language and culture” (Schegloff, quoted in Wong & Olsner 2000, p. 115)]. This intuitionist-like approach may seem to concern only neutral methodological issues in principle, but in practice it can lead to conversation from only a handful of speech communities being considered.

There are enough examples going back to early studies by Moerman (see Section 2) to demonstrate that it is by no means impossible to apply CA beyond one’s own native language and culture. Other early adopters of CA beyond English conversation were Brown & Levinson (1987), who anticipated some of the future program of comparative CA in their discussion of cultural diversity within universal trends of politeness. However, despite the centrality of questions of cultural diversity to anthropology, research on aspects of what we might call interactional diversity reflected in the cultural variation observed in conversation remains relatively peripheral for anthropologists. The original motivation for CA in sociology, to empirically ground the study of society in face-to-face interaction, might have been lost to some extent for anthropologists, who may not see the big-picture social issues behind the microanalysis of turn sequences.

In linguistic anthropology specifically, the influence of CA is somewhat more visible than in anthropology more broadly. Classic linguistic anthropology concepts such as the act sequence, the “A” in Hymes’s (1974) well-known SPEAKING model, would seem to provide natural entry points into the sequential aspects of speech events. However, the influence of CA on linguistic anthropology has been mainly at the level of data representation, and while CA transcription conventions are used to some extent by many linguistic anthropologists, it is much less common to find studies that engage directly with CA concepts within ethnographic research. Such studies do exist, such as Duranti’s (1997) analysis of conversational overlap in Samoan ceremonial greetings, but they are relatively rare. The trend in linguistic anthropology has been to relate speech events to external sociocultural and political issues rather than to focus on their internal sequential structure, meaning that this area of cultural and linguistic diversity is still only partially explored.

As the research reviewed below illustrates, while there may indeed be universal aspects of conversation that play out nearly identically across different speech communities, this cannot always be assumed to be the case, so we must consider the role of cultural variables in shaping social interaction. For example, conversational openings occur in all cultures, but greeting sequences vary greatly across them; and question–answer sequences can be found in any society, but knowing how to answer appropriately is specific to particular speech communities. The studies reviewed here represent a small but growing literature on conversation that looks across a much broader range of speech communities than those traditionally studied during the first decades of CA. Similarly to grammatical typology, which only became possible once enough descriptive work had been done on world languages, the growing body of research on interaction in different speech communities increasingly makes it possible to make progress in analogous questions of pragmatic typology. Doing this kind of typology means systematically comparing conversation across languages and speech communities, extending the crosslinguistic comparative approach of grammatical typology beyond language structure to language usage (Dingemanse et al. 2014, Floyd et al. 2020, Rossi 2020a). As research of this type uncovers more aspects of diversity within sequential interaction, the perspectives of anthropology may become increasingly necessary in order to interpret the observed cultural variation.

2. SOME BACKGROUND IN INTERACTIONAL DIVERSITY

Early on in the development of CA, a UCLA colleague of the sociologist founders of CA, anthropologist Michael Moerman (1977, 1988, 1990), made advances in the cross-cultural study of interaction by applying methods of CA in a non-English, non-Western setting among speakers of the Lue language of Thailand. Moerman's research came before its time, and although it successfully addressed the “native intuitions” problem by showing that it is possible to approach non-Western conversational data by drawing on the in-depth cultural knowledge of the ethnographer based on long-term experience in a community (Moerman 1996), the ethnographic CA approach would not be quickly taken up by other researchers, and anthropological applications of CA to data from more diverse communities have been sporadic since then. Meanwhile, traditional CA remained narrowly focused on English data until relatively recently. Only in the past 15 years or so have we seen an increase in crosslinguistically comparative research (Sidnell 2007, 2009) and, in particular, innovations in Moerman-style ethnographic monographs on conversation (e.g., Mihás 2017, Rüscher 2020, Sicoli 2020, Sidnell 2005) (see Section 3.5, below).

Another notable development in the cross-cultural study of conversation occurred in the 1990s, when one of the discipline's founders, Gail Jefferson, visited the University of Helsinki, where she influenced a generation of Finnish conversation analysts, leading to a series of major crosslinguistic comparative studies in CA (e.g., Haakana et al. 2009). Today, Finnish is the second-most-studied language after English in CA. However, while the fact that Finnish is not an Indo-European language speaks to linguistic diversity, it is a major national European language, studied mainly by its own speakers, and we have yet to see the Finnish CA school expand to local indigenous minority languages like the Saami languages.

More generally, during the last several decades a great deal of research in linguistic anthropology, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and related fields has looked at language usage in sociocultural contexts, sometimes considering conversational data, but in most cases this research has not explicitly applied CA methods of sequential analysis. In linguistic anthropology, work on language ideology connects conversational turns to broader social attitudes, and work on poetics can analyze a turn's form in terms of a speech genre, but neither consistently analyzes that turn at talk in light of the next turn.

Transcription

conventions: in CA, a way to transcribe conversational turn-taking that represents important details like overlap (with brackets), pause lengths (seconds noted in parentheses), the lack of a pause (with an equal sign), and other elements, sometimes also including annotations of visual bodily behavior

Conversational

opening: how people begin a conversational interaction, as in a face-to-face greeting or the beginning of a phone or video call

Pragmatic typology:

the comparative study of multimodal interaction across languages and cultures, using the sequential control method to compare structurally similar conversational examples

The cross-cultural pragmatics approach asked many of the same questions as comparative CA, but often using methods like discourse completion tasks and surveys that remove linguistic formats from their interactional context (e.g., Blum-Kulka 1989; see also Ogiermann 2018). Sociolinguistic survey-based methods, while achieving quantitative power, can also suffer from some of the same issues of ecological validity. Here, the scope of this discussion extends only to CA work more narrowly, meaning research that includes explicit sequential, turn-based analysis.

Because the use of CA is so eclectic across disciplines, today narrowly conversation-analytic studies of this type may be found in many different places, and their orientations to cross-cultural issues can vary. Mainstream CA in the sociological–ethnomethodological tradition still places little emphasis on studying more diverse speech communities. For example, in a prominent journal that publishes traditional CA studies, 87% of papers published in the last 10 years are studies of English speakers, 7% are about Finnish speakers, and the other 6% account for the rest of the world, although there are several studies of more diverse speech communities like Australian Aboriginal and sign language communities. By comparison, research in linguistic anthropology represents a much broader sample of speech communities than does traditional CA, but it only rarely addresses issues of conversational sequences directly. As mentioned above, while considerable research in linguistic anthropology follows some of the norms of CA in transcriptions, a look at work in major linguistic anthropology venues over the last decade shows that basic concepts of CA (e.g., those found in Sacks et al. 1974, such as the adjacency pair) are only marginally mentioned and applied. Transcription conventions have been an important contribution of CA to the social sciences more generally, and are outlined in the practical manual *Transcribing for Social Science Research* (Hepburn & Bolden 2017), which features a chapter titled “Transcribing for Languages Other Than English.” However, transcription conventions alone do not make a turn-based analysis; the research reviewed below was selected because it features both transcription and analysis in the CA tradition.

The studies discussed here are included because (a) they analyze conversational data from diverse speech communities (in other words, not just English conversation), (b) they feature CA proper that explicitly analyzes turn-taking, and (c) they appeared recently (i.e., in the last 3 or 4 years). Some start with a sequential concern, such as repair sequences or question–answer sequences, and others start with a social setting for face-to-face interaction, like dinnertime, and then examine the conversational sequences that occur in that context. They are scattered across a broad range of disciplinary venues, including journals that publish discourse analysis or linguistic pragmatics, as well as general science journals. Their authors come from many different disciplines and include linguists, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, and researchers from adjacent fields like communications and education. However, although CA studies do not form a fully consolidated research program, here brought together and summarized, it is apparent that such studies of speech communities from the Global South and of speakers of more diverse languages, including indigenous languages and sign languages, have continued to increase in number over the last several years—perhaps even more rapidly than at the time of Sidnell’s (2007) similarly themed article which assessed the state of comparative CA more than a decade ago. This seems to indicate promising developments in cross-cultural CA as well as potential for further advancement in our understanding of interactional diversity.

3. RECENT RESEARCH IN INTERACTIONAL DIVERSITY

Cross-cultural CA research can be roughly categorized into two groups. First, there are studies that apply sequential analysis to conversation in an individual, lesser-studied language. Second, there are multilanguage studies involving conversation in small groups of languages (two or three,

generally) as well as larger-scale comparisons which compare and contrast interactive practices among many different speech communities. All of these types of studies can be either qualitative or quantitative, but the larger-scale studies tend to rely more on quantitative coding. The subsections below first review studies looking at conversation in individual languages, organized by region, and then turn to comparative studies, which begin to develop the program of pragmatic typology more explicitly.

3.1. Conversation in Major European Languages

Contemporary single-language studies beyond English cover mainly Northern European national languages, and, as expected, research on Finnish conversation continues to stand out. Topics studied in recent years among speakers of Finnish include invitations over telephone calls (Routarinne & Tainio 2018); uptake in repair sequences (Koivisto 2019); reformulation of a prior turn (Sorjonen 2018); the interactional usages of second person (Suomalainen & Varjo 2020); conversational usages of “think” and “know” verbs (Laury & Helasvuo 2020); syntactically insubordinate recruitment formats (Lindström et al. 2019); “response cries” and alignment (Pehkonen 2020); functions of other-repetition (Stevanovic et al. 2020a); conversation in a mental health treatment setting (Stevanovic et al. 2020b); and openings and closings in technologically mediated encounters (Ilomäki & Ruusuvaara 2020), an increasingly relevant area in current times when virtual conversations are taking the place of face-to-face meetings.

French and German conversation is frequently studied in CA. Research on French conversation includes topics of question–answer sequences (Persson 2020b), self- and other-repetition (Persson 2020a), relative clauses used as increments (Stoenica & Pekarek Doehler 2020), giving praise to children (Aronsson & Morgenstern 2021), and recruitments on a cooking show (Golato 2020). Studies of German conversation discuss the usage of formats like insubordinate conditional clauses (Günthner 2020), right-dislocated complement clauses (Proske & Deppermann 2020), and *eben* (Betz & Deppermann 2018) or *okay* (Oloff 2019) as response tokens; issues of alignment (Zinken 2020b) and interaction during card games (Taleghani-Nikazm et al. 2020) and while driving (De Stefani et al. 2019, Deppermann 2019); and formats for second-person reference (always interesting in languages with *tu/vous* distinctions) (Droste & Günthner 2020). These studies also include some timely research on changes to greeting practices during a pandemic, when traditional practices may face restriction (Mondada et al. 2020).

Finland’s importance as a center for CA may be rubbing off on its neighbors, and there are now studies of interaction in Estonian on topics like epistemic management (Keevallik & Hakulinen 2018) and the organization of spoken turns within sequences of bodily movements (Keevallik 2020), and in Swedish on topics like insubordinate grammatical formats (Lindström et al. 2019) and other-repetition (Huhtamäki et al. 2020). Russian conversation has also received considerable attention, with work on repair (Bolden 2018b), recruitments (Baranova 2020a,b), and language-specific formats in responses (Bolden 2018a). Conversation in fellow Slavic language Polish has also been the focus of compelling research by Zinken (2020a) on topics like recruitments.

Other Northern European languages are analyzed fairly often with CA methods. Contemporary research on Danish conversation has looked at issues like turn-initial particles (Heinemann & Steensig 2018). Research on Dutch interaction has included comparisons of sequences of talk versus practical action (Mazeland 2019); studies of telephone calls (e.g., Stommel & te Molder 2018); and comparisons between face-to-face and virtual conversation (Stommel et al. 2019), a trending topic in these times of online interaction. A thorough review of recent sources will find several more studies of interaction in these and other Northern European languages, and most of the languages mentioned above have CA traditions in their respective countries, some emerging and others more established.

Recruitment: a type of conversational sequence in which one party enlists the action or collaboration of another; concept similar to a request or order

Outside of Northern Europe, we find fewer recent CA studies, even on conversation in major national languages. Several studies have been done on conversation in Mediterranean languages such as Greek, on topics like questions in TV interviews (Gialabouki & Pavlidou 2019) and preference in requests and offers (Karafoti 2021), and Italian, on question–answer sequences (Bongelli et al. 2018), the format *nel senso* ‘in the sense’ (De Stefani 2020), dinnertime interactions (Galatolo & Caronia 2018), and reasons given for calling in telephone calls (Margutti & Galatolo 2018). Research by Rossi on Italian conversation is particularly notable in the ways that it emphasizes interactional dimensions of elements of the Italian linguistic system, such as its specific morphosyntactic constructions (Rossi 2018) and its intonation (Rossi 2020b), and considers how such resources are used in specific sequential contexts like recruitments (Rossi 2020c).

3.2. Conversation in Spanish

An encouraging development in the area of Romance language studies has been an increase in CA of interaction in Spanish, a major world language that until recently was almost entirely unstudied with these methods (although some pioneering earlier studies exist, e.g., Placencia 1997). Research by scholars like Gonzalez Tèmer (2017) on assessment sequences in Chilean Spanish, Raymond (2018) on turn-initial particles, Vázquez Carranza (2016, 2020) on particles and on actions like greetings and leave-takings in Mexican Spanish, and Bolaños-Carpio (2017) on Costa Rican Spanish 911 calls indicates a growing Spanish CA community.

The research by Bolaños-Carpio (2017) illustrates what types of issues cross-cultural CA may highlight. Place reference has been a central topic of CA since Schegloff’s (1972) influential article on “formulating place,” and in Costa Rica there is a specific cultural practice for place reference that contrasts with that of many other countries, since Costa Ricans use a landmark system instead of street names for addresses. Excerpt 1 shows how the parties orient to the Costa Rican landmark convention in a repair sequence:

- (1) Costa Rican Spanish (Bolaños-Carpio 2017, p. 168)
- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | A | <i>La dirección es cien metros de la escuela La Esperanza.</i>
‘The address is 100 meters from the school of La Esperanza.’ |
| 2 | | (0.7) |
| 3 | | <i>A la segunda casa color papaya.</i>
‘To the second house, papaya colored.’ |
| 4 | | (0.5) |
| 5 | B | <i>Y los cien metros hacia dónde?</i>
‘And the one-hundred meters towards where?’ |
| 6 | | > <i>norte sur</i> [<i>este oeste</i> ?]<
>‘north south’ [‘east west’]< |
| 7 | A | >[<i>Hacia el sur.</i>]<
>[‘Towards the south.’] |

A proper Costa Rican address includes a landmark and neighborhood, the location and color of the house, the number of meters from the landmark, and, crucially here, the cardinal direction relative to the landmark, for example: *San Francisco de dos Ríos, Parque los Sauces, esquina sureste, 20 metros al sur, casa verde, mano derecha*, or ‘San Francisco de dos Ríos (neighborhood), Los Sauces Park, southeast corner, 20 meters south, green house, right-hand side’ (this review’s author’s own address in San José in 1999). In extract 1, the 911 caller has formulated every required element except for the cardinal direction, so the repair initiation offers the four cardinal

directions as candidate solutions. The caller chooses the appropriate one (in overlap immediately after it is proffered), resolving the problem (Dingemanse et al. 2015). In a US English interaction, things would play out differently, and comparable repair sequences might deal with different expected information like street names and numbers instead, which are absent from Costa Rican place reference.

In light of the linguistic diversity of Latin America, Spanish CA stands to be a new major area of growth, along with CA on Portuguese and other languages of the region. A Spanish-language CA textbook (Raymond & Olguín 2022) will be published in 2022, another indicator of the growing importance of CA in Latin America. Research on Portuguese conversation is relatively rare in comparison to Spanish, but some CA research is being conducted in Brazil on classic topics like question–answer sequences (Konrad & Ostermann 2020). In addition to collaborating on studies of Brazilian Portuguese conversational data (e.g., Gago & Sant’Anna 2017), Gago has recently made a valuable contribution in this area by translating some of Garfinkel’s (2018) key ethnomethodological writings into Portuguese.

3.3. Conversation in Non-European National Languages

The bulk of the CA research done on conversation in non-European languages has been on national languages of Asia. Contemporary work on conversation in Japanese, probably the most-studied Asian language in CA, has included the interactional uses of specific formats like demonstratives (Morita & Takagi 2020) and epistemic markers (Hayano 2017, Kaneyasu 2020), questions and affiliation in interviews (Iwasaki 2018a), repair in a heritage language situation (Burdelski 2020), and sequential issues like agreeing in overlap (Endo et al. 2018) and suspensions of talk (Iwasaki 2018b). Japanese interaction has historically been cited as a cross-cultural counterpoint to the types of interaction observed in English and other Western languages since the formative research on politeness (Brown & Levinson 1987), and CA studies of Japanese conversation often mention how the specific formats provided by Japanese grammar come into play for the management of interpersonal relations (or “face” work).

More studies are being done on conversation in other major languages of Asia like Mandarin Chinese, and recent articles have looked at issues like language-specific formats (Li & Luo 2019), preclosings of telephone calls (Dong & Wu 2020), interactional uses of “think” and “feel” verbs (Wang & Tao 2020), “second questions” (Li & Li 2020), positive assessments (Zhang & Yu 2020), interactions in Chinese immigrant households (He 2016), and aspects of multimodality (Li 2019; see Luke 2019 for a general summary of CA of Chinese interaction). More research on Korean conversation is also appearing, including studies of person reference (Song 2019), the usage of particles (Chung 2019), and self-repair (Park 2018). With regard to the lesser-known languages of the region, Hamdani & Barnes (2018) have examined polar questions in Indonesian; Sidnell (2019) has looked at issues of reference in Vietnamese conversation; and Enfield has carried out a long-term investigation of interaction in Lao, most recently on the topic of recruitments (Enfield 2020), with a sustained focus on multimodality (e.g., Enfield 2018).

There are a few examples of recent research on conversation in other major Asian or Middle Eastern languages like Persian, looking at tag questions (Ghasemi 2020) and telephone call closings (Kazemi 2019), or Arabic varieties like Syrian (Martini 2020) or Saudi (Mahzari 2019). More and more studies are investigating Hebrew conversation, covering topics like interactional usages of in subordinate clauses (Maschler 2020) and the format *ha’emet (bi) she-* ‘the truth (is) that’ (Polak-Yitzhaki 2020). While the Japanese and Chinese schools of CA are fairly well developed, the rest of Asia and the Middle Eastern region stand to be areas of discovery of new dimensions of interactional diversity in the coming years.

Multimodal

interaction: a way of thinking about conversation that recognizes the semiotically composite nature of conversational sequences

3.4. Conversation Beyond Spoken Languages

Enfield's research, mentioned above with respect to interactional diversity, also relates to what might be called semiotic diversity by emphasizing how language, gesture, and other elements are brought together in multimodal interaction, often in ways that resonate with particular cultural contexts. For example, in a recent study Enfield (2018) used the tools of sequential analysis to understand cooperative weaving of traditional Lao mats. Current CA studies often use the term multimodal interaction to emphasize the embodied, semiotically composite nature of face-to-face conversation, and researchers use a combination of video clips, screenshots, and visual transcription styles to study the actions that participants engage in with their hands, faces, and bodily postures along with the transcribed talk. Such methods are widespread in linguistic anthropology and gesture studies, but they are not always applied in a cross-cultural CA framework.

Much current CA research focuses on nonverbal behavior, and many of the articles mentioned above discuss gesture and other visual–bodily communication. Some recent studies focusing primarily on the visual domain have analyzed topics like postrepair holds (momentary suspensions of movement) in Italian, Argentine Sign Language, and Cha'palaa conversation (Floyd et al. 2016); gestural repetition in Japanese conversation (Hauser 2019); eye blinking in Dutch conversation (Hömke et al. 2017); and the organization of collective eating in Korean interaction (Choe 2019). A recent volume expands beyond the usual topics of gesture and eye gaze to examine interactional dimensions of touching others in different speech communities (Cekaite & Mondada 2020; see also Cekaite & Goodwin 2021 for a review).

Studies looking at interaction in the visual modality are increasingly also applying CA to sign languages. de Vos et al. (2015) have argued convincingly that, in most respects that do not directly depend on modality differences, signed and spoken conversations reflect the same basic turn-taking system. Recent CA studies of sign languages include an analysis by Beukeleers et al. (2018) of how visual elements like gaze help to organize turn-taking in Flemish sign language. In her research on repair in Argentine Sign Language, Manrique (2016, 2017) points out that, while it is first necessary to modify the traditional definition of repair as addressing “speaking and hearing” to “producing and perceiving” in order to encompass all modalities of language, sign language repair sequences can be described in the same basic sequential terms as spoken sequences. Skedsmo (2020) investigates repair for Norwegian Sign Language, also finding broad overlap with spoken repair, as well as some more sign-specific tendencies. Girard-Grober (2020) investigates repair sequences in Swiss German sign. Byun et al. (2019) find similar repair sequences in cross-signing interactions, when signers in situations where not everyone knows the same language use an emergent combination of international sign language and their native sign languages. An interactional practice sometimes used in repair in both signed and spoken languages (Floyd et al. 2016), the hold, has been studied in various sign languages like Swedish Sign Language (Cibulka 2016).

While the application of CA methods has identified broad similarities between signed and spoken languages in areas like repair sequences, the modality-specific interactional capacities of sign languages have only begun to be explored. These questions are also beginning to be studied for tactile sign languages used by Deaf Blind signers, with recent CA studies of Tactile Aulsan (Iwasaki et al. 2019), Tactile Norwegian and Swedish Sign Languages (Mesch et al. 2015), and Tactile Japanese Sign Language (Bono et al. 2018). Here again researchers find that the basic mechanisms of turn-taking are at work, but sometimes with tactile-specific aspects that Iwasaki et al. (2019) discuss under the term “multi-sensoriality” as a complement to multimodality.

3.5. Conversation in Minority Indigenous Languages

Studies that consider conversation in the languages of minority indigenous peoples are much rarer than studies of major national languages. Australia may be the most advanced continent in this respect, as pioneering scholars there have developed a long-term research program applying CA methods to interaction in Aboriginal Australian languages over more than a decade. Blythe's research on Murrinhpatha conversation has covered topics like reference (Blythe 2009), laughter and prosody in conversation (Blythe 2011), multimodality and connections to kinship in interaction (Blythe 2012), and the relation of grammatical elements to interactional dimensions (Blythe 2013). Mushin & Gardner (2009) have looked at issues of silence in interaction in Garrwa, and the studies in a special issue of the *Australian Journal of Linguistics* introduced by Gardner & Mushin (2010) investigate conversational topics in a range of Australian languages. One topic these studies address is the sometimes-heard claim that speakers of Australian languages infrequently ask or answer direct questions, which turns out to be something of an exaggeration, with perhaps a small degree of truth. Other recent research includes a study looking at epistemic stance in Murrinhpatha conversation (Mansfield 2019) and a paper on speaker selection in Murrinhpatha, Garrwa, Gija, and Jaru (Blythe et al. 2018).

There has been very little research on indigenous minority languages from areas like the Pacific, New Guinea, much of Asia and the Middle East, and Africa; few recent studies could be found, aside from noteworthy examples like Levinson's (2015) analysis of interaction in the Yélí Dnye language of Rossel Island, Papua New Guinea (for example, on repair). Another rare example is Williams's (2017) study of place reference in the Kula language of Indonesia. One study (Dundon 2019) looks at the classic topic of telephone call openings in the Eurasian Turkic language Rushani of Afghanistan and Tajikistan. CA studies of Africa are also rare; notable exceptions include those by Dingemanse (2020) on Siwu in Ghana and Rüsçh (2020) on Acholi in Uganda, discussed below.

As for the Americas, there appear to be no recent CA studies of North American indigenous languages, and it is almost impossible to find any such studies at all. An exception is a study by Spielmann (1998) that includes some CA applied to Ojibwe interaction. Mesoamerican languages fare a bit better. Brown (2010) has looked at different conversational topics in Tzeltal Maya over the years, including question–answer sequences, and de León (2019) has analyzed Tzotzil Maya child language socialization from a conversational perspective. Haviland (2017) summarizes interaction in Mayan languages, with a focus on Tzotzil. Sicoli's research is particularly noteworthy as a long-term program of study looking at many aspects of Zapotec interaction, covering both classic topics like place formulation (Sicoli 2016a) and fascinating new topics like repair in whistle speech (Sicoli 2016b), and culminating last year in an ethnographic CA monograph (Sicoli 2020, discussed further below). For South America, there have been a few recent studies in a CA framework that have looked at indigenous languages, including Floyd's (2020) research on the Cha'palaa language of Ecuador, for example, on recruitments, and Mihas's (2017) book on interaction in the Arawakan Amazonian language Alto Perené, described further below.¹

Ethnographic monographs that provide detailed descriptions of conversational interaction for different speech communities continue to be rare but are becoming more common. Moerman's (1988) *Talking Culture: Ethnography and Conversation Analysis* can be considered the first

¹ Researchers like Nick Williams and Kristine Stenzel (personal communications) have made a case for working with conversational interaction from the side of language documentation and description, which has traditionally recorded monologic “text collections”; they point out that conversational data should also be part of a well-rounded documentary corpus.

ethnography of conversation; it showed that even in a very distinct cultural setting some of the same sequence types previously identified for English could be found, but sometimes with local twists. Sidnell (2005) made a similar argument in his book on interaction in a Caribbean creole, *Talk and Practical Epistemology: The Social Life of Knowledge in a Caribbean Community*, which appears to have been the first book-length ethnography of conversation since Moerman's. Three similar volumes have recently been published. The first, Mihas's (2017) *Conversational Structures of Alto Perené (Arawak) of Perú*, is an interesting interactional complement to the more traditional grammar of the same language by the same author (Mihas 2015). The second, Rüsç's (2020) *A Conversational Analysis of Acholi: Structure and Socio-Pragmatics of a Nilotic Language of Uganda*, argues that conversation is "multidimensional," reflecting both crosslinguistically similar sequence types and language-specific resources. The third, Sicoli's (2020) *Saying and Doing in Zapotec: Multimodality, Resonance, and the Language of Joint Actions*, brings CA ideas into dialogue with current anthropological theory. While each volume has a unique perspective, all three include ethnographic information about the society in question and about the languages spoken there, and do not simply look at conversational sequences alone. In this sense they are following Moerman's (1988, 1996) model for ethnographic CA, and the monograph format allows for more extended rich descriptions of interaction illustrated by many more conversational excerpts than are possible to include in an article format.

3.6. Comparative Studies of Conversation

Single-language studies contribute much to our knowledge of interactional diversity, but multi-language studies directly apply the methods of pragmatic typology by arriving at cross-cultural observations through comparison. While studies looking at several languages together are not entirely unprecedented, some of the first larger-scale comparative studies began to appear in the last decade.

Some recent CA literature explores in detail the same sequence or format types in two languages, for example, comparing historically cognate epistemic markers in Finnish and Estonian (Keevallik & Hakulinen 2018); looking at deontic constructions in Italian and Polish (Rossi & Zinken 2016); doing a multimodal analysis of "body torque" in English and French (Kamunen 2019); or discussing issues of conversational politeness in German and Portuguese (Renner 2020). A few multilanguage studies include non-European languages, such as Dingemanse et al.'s (2014) analysis of repair in Siwu, Murrinhpatha, Dutch, and other languages; incidentally, this study was the first to use the term "pragmatic typology" in the sense applied here (see also Dingemanse & Floyd 2014). Several other, smaller-scale comparative studies including lesser-studied languages have already been mentioned above (e.g., Blythe et al. 2018, Floyd et al. 2016).

Somewhat surprisingly, no matter what conversational data in which diverse languages are compared, such comparisons tend to identify the basic structures first outlined by Sacks et al. (1974), which makes it possible to apply the "sequential control" method (Dingemanse & Floyd 2014) by comparing similar sequence types across conversations in different languages. For example, one can first find comparable question–answer sequences or repair sequences in each language, and then look at the diversity of formats used in similar sequential positions across different languages, sometimes reaching a considerable level of statistical power if enough data points are included for quantitative analysis.

One of the first groundbreaking large-scale quantitative studies in pragmatic typology looked at question–answer sequences across 10 languages (Stivers et al. 2009). While this study found broad similarities, it also identified cultural variations; for example, Danish speakers were on average slower to answer and Japanese speakers quicker. Another early large-scale comparison (Enfield

et al. 2013) looked at the initiators of repair sequences across 21 languages and found similarities of form across their different interjections, as well as elements of diversity. For instance, in almost all cases, the interjection's intonation was rising, but in two languages, Icelandic and Cha'palaa, it was falling.

Other examples of large-scale studies that apply this method are an analysis by Dingemanse et al. (2015), which looked at general principles of repair across 12 languages, and a special issue of *Open Linguistics* (Dingemanse & Enfield 2015) that featured individual studies of conversational repair in each language. One finding that is robustly universal across these and all other known speech communities is that they use both open-class and closed-class repair formats, although their relative frequencies can vary. Open-class repair initiators (e.g., "Huh?", "What?") tend to occasion full repetition in repair solutions, and closed repair formats (e.g., "John who?", "He did what?") ask for partial repetition or clarification of the previous turn; a subtype called candidate formats can occasion confirmation (e.g., "John?" "Yeah, John."). It has been claimed that some speech communities do not use candidate formats to avoid imposing on others by guessing about their thoughts, but it may be that candidate repair is infrequent rather than entirely absent in those cases (Dingemanse & Floyd 2014, p. 463).

An edited volume featuring individual studies of recruitments in conversation in each of eight different languages (Floyd 2020) illustrates that, while similar formats for recruitments can be found across conversation in every language, they are used in different proportions, so speakers of English may prefer question formats (e.g., "Do you have the salt?") whereas speakers of Lao or Cha'palaa may opt more for imperatives (e.g., "Pass the salt."). Comparative research on recruitments has also looked at the expression of gratitude, or thanking, in a study comparing recruitment sequences across the same eight languages, finding that it is much less frequent in most other languages than in English (Floyd et al. 2018).

Another recent large-scale study of universals and variation (Enfield et al. 2019) looked at polar responses to questions in 14 languages, including languages as diverse as Yéli Dnye from Papua New Guinea, Tzeltal from Mexico, ǀĀkhoe Hailom from Namibia, and Dutch Sign Language. Again, this study found that speakers of each language considered use the same basic formats, answering polar questions with either agreements (e.g., "Yeah.") or repetitions ("It is."). However, while most speech communities tend to use agreements very frequently, speakers of ǀĀkhoe Hailom, Tzeltal, and, to a lesser degree, Brazilian Portuguese had relatively high rates of repetition formats.

Kendrick et al. (2020) compare 12 diverse speech communities, ranging from Turkmen speakers in Turkmenistan to Yurakaré speakers in the Bolivian Amazon, and ask whether a large set of basic sequence types identified by CA exists in all of them. They find that specific sequence types like presequences, insert sequences, and postexpansion sequences occur across all the languages considered, but not without some degree of variation (see the next section on Cha'palaa). The results of these large-scale studies showing both general similarities and local differences in the conversation of different speech communities raise theoretical questions, taken up in the next section.

4. CONCLUSIONS: CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN CONVERSATION

While it may not be explicit in every study of micropractices, all the literature reviewed above in one way or another speaks to the question posed at the outset of this review: Are these turn-taking structures and conversational actions relevant for only one language and speech community, for many, or for all? This debate is often framed around the concepts of universality and cultural diversity, which can be helpful as long as these two dimensions are not regarded as a mutually

exclusive dichotomy. Instead, they should lead us to research questions about how both can exist together: culturally specific practices on one level and universal trends on another, or, in Sidnell's (2007, p. 240) terms, "generic organization, local inflection." Nobody has seriously proposed that there exists a society where one cannot find basic conversational sequences (e.g., question–answer, repair initiator–repair solution, recruitment–fulfilment/rejection, openings and closings), but beyond such basic similarities, interactional diversity can be extreme.

Take the example of openings. All speech communities must begin conversations somehow, and we can often expect to see some kind of reciprocal acknowledgment of the beginning of a conversation that we might call a greeting practiced in all societies. However, sequential analysis alone cannot anticipate the diversity of greetings; in some traditions they may be questions (e.g., English "How are you?"), in other cases commands (e.g., Italian *salve* from Latin 'be well'), or in still other cases statements (e.g., Zulu *sawubona* 'I see you'). Each of these formats has sequential consequences, in that question forms take answers ("Fine,") while other formats might call for other types of responses, like reciprocal repetition (e.g., "Hello.").

In one Acholi greeting sequence (extract 2) described by Rüsch (2020), we see a reciprocal exchange of a format that, interestingly, translates as "I appreciate" followed by a question–answer sequence somewhat similar to English "How are you?" sequences. However, the sequence is unique in that, before these other elements occur, it begins with a pregreeting request to be greeted, a practice which does not yet appear to have been observed in any other speech community:

(2) Acholi greeting sequence (Rüsch 2020, p. 231) ²					
1	A	<i>k'</i>	<i>i-môt-à dō</i>	(0.15)	[<i>i-tyé nínín</i>]
		POL	2SGS-greet.IMP-1SGO	(0.15)	2SGS-COP INTR.how
		'Please greet me!'			['How are you?']
2	B				[<i>à-pwóyò</i>]=
					1SGS-appreciate-PRS
					['I appreciate!']=
3	A	<i>=mh</i>	[<i>à-pwóyò</i>]		
			=1SGS-appreciate-PRS		
		<i>=mm</i>	['I appreciate.']		
4	B		[<i>i-tyé 'á-beŕ</i>]=		
			2SGS-COP REL-good=		
			['Are you well?']=		
5	A	<i>=à-tyé</i>			
		1SGS-COP			
		'I am.'			

In addition to distinct linguistic formats and sequential structures, languages' diverse grammatical features can play into sequential outcomes. For example, Rüsch (2020, pp. 217–26) describes interactive usages of ideophones, which are known to be prominent elements in many African languages. Turning to an example from Zapotec, we can see how a sequence showing information uptake through other-repetition is accomplished not through repetition alone but through the elaboration of a grammatical affirmative marker, taking a strong personal epistemic position referred to as Knowledge Plus (K+) in the literature on conversational epistemics (Heritage 2012), which means that the relevant information is part of the speaker's personal domain of knowledge.

²COP, copula; IMP, imperative; INTR, interrogative; POL, polite; PRS, present; REL, relative pronoun; SGO, singular object; SGS, singular subject.

The nonverbal behavior recorded in extract 3 additionally shows speaker B's orientation toward the affirmative K+ response to speaker A's statement, gazing at A while repeating and then nodding just after producing the final affirmative marker:

- (3) Zapotec sequence (Sicoli 2020, p. 161)³
- | | | |
|---|---|----------------------------------|
| 1 | A | <i>Waxxhi beè endò' ndxò.</i> |
| | | ----- B head turn L to R |
| | | waxhi bè endò'=ndxò |
| | | much PL child=3F |
| | | 'She has many children.' |
| 2 | B | <i>Waxxhi beè endò' ndxò ri.</i> |
| | | ----- B nods |
| | | waxhi bè endò'=ndxò=ri |
| | | much PL child=3F=K+AF |
| | | 'She has many children, indeed.' |

Collateral effects:
different conversational outcomes made possible by different interactional resources across languages and cultures; a conversational dimension of linguistic relativity

The possibilities for the type of specific morphosyntactic operations like the repetition plus grammatical elaboration shown in extract 3 will depend on the linguistic resources available. Sidnell & Enfield (2012) theorize this type of interplay between the diversity of action format inventories and their patterns of sequential deployment as a “third locus” of linguistic relativity, in addition to the traditional Whorfian school and the later indexical approach of Silverstein (1976). In this third type of relativity, “different grammatical and lexical patterns of different languages can provide different opportunities for social action” (Sidnell & Enfield 2012, p. 303). What is in one sense the same type of conversational action from language to language may lead to different outcomes or “collateral effects” (p. 304). It is often quite easy to find examples of basic actions in any language—greetings, questions, recruitments, offers, tellings, references to people and places, repair, displays of affiliative or disaffiliative uptake, and so on—but these interactional practices do not always play out the same way in every society.

While Kendrick et al. (2020, p. 132) have recently shown that basic sequence types can be found pervasively across languages, the Cha'palaa language of Ecuador stands out in that it does not show specific presequences commonly used to manage politeness by checking preconditions, like asking “Do you have any water?” before requesting some. Cha'palaa speakers also have some of the highest rates of direct imperative recruitment formats (“Give me water.”), versus the indirect interrogative (e.g., “Could you give me some water?”) or declarative formats (e.g., “I need some water.”, “I'm thirsty.”) observed in other languages (Floyd 2020). They also have the lowest rates of thanking; there is no format for “thank you” in the language at all, something that is quite common in non-European languages (Floyd et al. 2018). Grammatically, Cha'palaa is radically different from most Western languages in that it does not obligatorily mark categories like person or tense but instead encodes epistemic–interactional meanings, for example, a suffix dedicated to next-turn disagreement (Floyd 2016). Cha'palaa interaction does not progress sequentially exactly like English does in terms of concepts like “face,” politeness, and affiliation, and its direct imperatives without any “please” or “thank you” would sound conflictive in English but neutral in Cha'palaa. Such findings recall Brown & Levinson's (1987) observations that speech communities vary with respect to their politeness-oriented practices, and suggest that “face” management may prove to be one of the most important dimensions of interactional diversity.

³ K+AF, affirmative; L, left; PL, plural; R, right; 3F, third-person feminine.

Universality in sequential structure is usually not conceptualized as innate, as some schools of linguistics claim for syntactic universals (although see discussion in Levinson 2006). Instead, it is conceived of as more like the emergent universal tendencies conceptualized in usage-based, typological approaches in linguistics: Interactional practices do not resemble one another across languages because of innateness, but rather because humans in interaction in any society face similar problems and arrive similarly at good solutions. Beyond the basic sequence types that allow us to do universal human things like coordinate joint action and socially affiliate with others, interactional practices and formats vary greatly. While the apparent universality of many conversational structures is striking, the degree of cultural variation is by no means trivial, and the only way to better understand the dynamic between these two tendencies is to continue to apply CA methods in more speech communities, and to do so in interdisciplinary combination with ethnographic methods. The research reviewed above represents many important contributions to this emerging program of study at the intersection of conversation and culture.

SUMMARY POINTS

1. Conversation analysis (CA) is an influential methodology for studying social interaction in terms of conversational turn-taking; it is arguably an implicit program for identifying universal aspects of interaction.
2. While still in the minority compared with studies of English, CA studies are being done in languages from all over the world, including indigenous languages and sign languages.
3. Pragmatic typology is an explicitly cross-cultural comparative approach that includes both qualitative and quantitative studies of conversation in smaller and larger sets of languages.
4. The results of comparative CA indicate broad similarities in basic conversational sequence types across languages and cultures, but also considerable room for interactional diversity.

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