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Naming an activity: Arriving at recognitionals in team-teacher planning talk

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Abstract

Based on a video-recorded corpus of pre-class planning sessions, this study focuses on how team-teachers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds accomplish the interactional task of identifying and explaining pedagogical activities they will later teach together during an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lesson. Since a basic issue for these teachers is arriving at a recognizable name for the proposed task that can be understood by both parties, we analyze the interactional practices involved in *naming an activity*. We draw on Conversation Analytic (CA) research on word choice to show how sequential, categorical, epistemic and bilingual practices are brought to bear on the joint accomplishment of a recognitional formulation of an activity. We identify several interactional practices in which recognitionals play a key role in planning talk between language teachers. Speakers can treat the activity name as potentially unrecognizable through post-formulation explanations or initiating epistemic questions, or use a known recognitional to explain a new activity. Additionally, after a speaker lists the sub-steps involved in a proposed task, a recipient can proffer a name for the activity. These generic interactional practices are put to use in this intercultural workplace to make the plan accessible to all parties. The data are in English and Japanese.

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1. Introduction

When an emergency nurse calls “Code Blue!” or a waitress shouts, “Works, hold the mayo!”, the people that work with them recognize these terms as shorthand ways of referring to an activity or a series of tasks that must be completed, often involving multiple actors functioning in a team to produce some recognizable outcome. Embedded in such workplace scenarios is the implicit understanding that recognizing and acting on the tasks indexed by the term is part and parcel of the professional competence required to do that job. In Conversation Analysis (CA), a recognitional is a word (or term or name) that is familiar to both speaker and recipient(s), or that will become so in the ongoing talk. This study explores the way pairs of teachers use such recognitionals as they co-plan English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lessons that they will later teach together. In these settings, the team-teachers come from two different language backgrounds (Japanese and English) and often the Japanese teacher has little experience teaching (or even speaking) English, meaning that the

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planning talk can be in Japanese, English or a mix of both languages. Since interactants in intercultural work settings like these can have a limited lexicon in common, choosing the right word to refer to a proposed pedagogical activity promotes understanding by indexing its constituent procedures, and therefore making them implicit, since claiming understanding of a classroom activity name like “survey” or “quiz” preempts the need for further explanation of the steps involved in carrying out that activity in class.

This paper uses conversation analysis to examine several interactional practices in which recognitionals play a key role during planning talk between language teachers. Speakers can treat the activity name as potentially unrecognizable through post-formulation explanations or initiating epistemic questions, or use a known recognitional to explain a new activity. Additionally, after a speaker lists the sub-steps involved in a proposed task, a recipient can proffer a name for the activity. Throughout our analysis we will show how these generic interactional practices are put to use in a particular intercultural workplace context to make the planning talk accessible to all parties, and consider how this aspect of recipient design allows these participants to accomplish their planning despite the limitations of their ability to communicate in each other's language. We begin by reviewing some of the relevant CA literature on recognitionals.

2. Literature review

When designing a turn to fit into a particular sequence for a particular recipient, speakers regularly select from a range of possible expressions in order to describe people and things and ultimately accomplish the actions they are undertaking. Sacks (1992:19) terms such expressions *formulations*.² The CA research on formulation is related to issues of word choice, reference, and turn design. Formulations are selective, contingent, relevant, and inference-rich, and the way a speaker chooses to formulate a turn reveals their understanding of the situation and their assumptions about the person to whom they are talking (Deppermann, 2011).

Ever since Sacks and Schegloff's seminal work on person reference (1979), the vast majority of work on recognitionals has looked at word choice in relation to the way interactants describe people (e.g., Betz, 2015; Enfield and Stivers, 2007; Lerner, 1996; Lerner et al., 2012; Whitehead and Lerner, 2009; Schegloff, 1996a), and therefore much of the research on reference is related to membership categorization (Schegloff, 2007; Stokoe, 2012). However, there has also been a small but growing number of papers that have examined formulation with regard to other sorts of references, including the names of places (Heritage, 2007; Kitzinger et al., 2013; Schegloff, 1972), colors (Goodwin, 1997), and objects (Egbert et al., 2009; Kim, 2012). The current study builds on research into word choice by focusing on the interactional practices available to participants for referring to an activity, specifically a proposed pedagogical task and the steps that constitute it.

Sacks and Schegloff (1979) identified two preferences for referring to people: a preference for recognitional reference, and a preference for minimization, both of which are satisfied through the use of names. In short, the first involves using a description that the recipient will understand and the second involves explaining no more than is necessary. Heritage (2007) sees the first of these preferences as a subset of a broader preference for intersubjectivity and accounts for the second in relation to the interactional principle of progressivity (Schegloff, 1979). That being the case, the lessons that have been learned from CA investigations into ways we refer to people are highly applicable to other categories of description, including the words teachers use to talk about pedagogical activities.

Interactants orient to these preferences via the practices of interactional repair. When an initial reference is not met with tacit or explicit uptake from the recipient in the ongoing talk, Heritage (2007) notes the speaker soon works to make it clearer by rewording it or clarifying it, such as through self repair in the transition space, try-marking, declarative questions (“You know X?”) and interrogatives (“Do you remember X?”). Both speaker and recipient are responsible for co-achieving recognition, either by displaying lack of understanding or by clarifying unknown references, and thus enabling the talk to move forward. Writing in regard to both person and place reference, Heritage (2007) notes that “speakers operate under the assumption that recognitional references are recognizable and recognized” (p. 279), fostering progressivity both within the turn and within the sequence. Svennevig (2010), for instance, found that interactants can preempt problems of reference by embedding pre-positioned TCU expansions like “what we call” or “there's something called” within a turn, such that progressivity is maintained and the reference issues are addressed within the main sentence frame.

Examining how speakers reformulate an initial reference can reveal what it is that they deemed inadequate about their use of that word in that instance (Kitzinger et al., 2013). On occasion, speakers may choose to refine a recognitional reference in order to be more (or less) specific, and this will invariably have repercussions for the ongoing talk. Lerner et al. (2012) demonstrate how a “recalibration repair” can be used to focus (or broaden) a prior formulation without negating it, and therefore propose a precision-adjusted version of the reference. Recalibrating a reference is often linked to the speaker's current interactional goals, since a revised version can be used to accomplish a range of interactional practices. Kim (2012) showed how second language speakers make use of such interactional practices to co-accomplish

² While there exists a body of CA scholarship that looks at formulation as rewording, upshots, or *reformulation* (e.g., Heritage and Watson, 1979), that work is not the focus of the current paper.

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