

Agenda meetings: topic progression in negotiating activity

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ABSTRACT

This article reports the findings of a research project carried out in order to investigate negotiation transactions as interactional conversational achievements, trying to reveal through a detailed analysis of topical progression within this type of discourse, how far it partakes of the conventions of the generic matrix of conversation, and also how far it also displays some sub-generic structural regularity. We start from the assumption that the social distance operating between speakers, which is accounted for in terms of power relationship and more specifically asymmetry in professional status, will govern the turn-taking mechanism in what concerns both turn construction and turn distribution, whereby we rely on the concept of topic understood both as an expression of the speakers' content contribution to the thread of discourse and as a discourse organizational unit *capable of distributing content significantly within discourse*. The study is based on a corpus of thirty-one samples of dyadic negotiation encounters, which can all be referred to in terms of agenda meetings unfolding in institutional academic contexts. The results of the research reveal that differences in the power relationship affect discourse structure significantly. We found the introduction of new topics into the thread of negotiation transactions and its distribution within and across turn units to be highly determined both by the variables of sex and power. On the other hand speaker status and sex could not be found to influence significantly turn length or proportion between turn length and the number of acts conforming a turn, nor between the number of acts within a turn and speaker topics introduced to it.

1. THE STUDY OF NEGOTIATION: REVIEW

The literature devoted to the concept of negotiation is so extensive that it is not uncommon to find assertions stating that "...the full scope of negotiation is too broad to be confined to one or even a group of the existing behavioural sciences" (Nierenberg 1977: 2). As a type of social activity, negotiations cover practically all environments, ranging "...from such examples as discussion of the daily distribution within an office, through an inter-firm disagreement over an ambiguous contractual detail, to organising a massive sales campaign aimed at an overseas market..." as Mulholland (1991: xi) observes. Yet, as Strauss claims (1978: x), the development of negotiations should not be limited to contexts almost exclusively related to political or economical areas; rather, they should be considered to take place in all areas of life.

In fact, as the review of the literature around the concept of negotiation reveals, the tendency to establish an almost one-to-one correspondence between the negotiating activity and a political or economic context has largely influenced the treatment negotiations have received. This has led the linguistic approach to negotiating activity to often disregard the nature of the communicative activity *per se*, failing to allow for an approach to negotiations as a decontextualized discourse phenomenon, as well as to negotiations as a conversational activity subject to context-specific pressures in every area of life.

Insights into the nature of negotiation behaviour start to be gained from non-linguistic approaches both from an economic and a social-psychological viewpoint. Firstly, negotiations are conceived as a problem-solving activity, which the existence of a problem or any issue requiring a solution triggers off (Lampi 1986: 25). Largely based on Game Theory, as outlined by Wittgenstein, negotiations are regarded in terms of games, which develop according to strategic decisions which participants make in the course of interaction. The idea is that the shape the process takes will depend on the interactional basis that has previously been established. In other words, the rules of interaction, analogous to the rules of a game, will affect speech behaviour in terms of speaker choices. This approach has allowed for negotiations to be classified under two main headings, depending on the type of strategic conduct that has been implemented, and which are often referred to in terms of "integrative bargaining" where interactants tacitly accept in advance to steer conversation towards compromise, versus "distributive bargaining" where interactants pursue above all the satisfaction of their own conversational objectives¹.

From the viewpoint of social psychologists, negotiations are linked to Need Theory, whereby the communicative process at issue is justified by an

individual's need that seeks to be satisfied. As Nierenberg (1977: 2) claims, "...every desire that demands satisfaction —and every need to be met— is at least potentially an occasion for people to initiate the negotiation process." This viewpoint does as well involve a strategic approach to negotiations, and brings about the notion of conversational tactics, to be considered as "...devices to implement the strategy" (Nierenberg 1973: 147). The dynamics of negotiations are considered to develop according to tactical choices the speakers make in the course of interaction.

Both economical and social-psychological approaches to the study of negotiations have led to the development of a series of studies clustering around the general concept of "principled negotiations". In terms of Fisher and Ury (1981: xix), "Every negotiation is different, but the basic elements do not change...Principled negotiation is an all-purpose strategy." What is essentially understood by a negotiation 'principle' is a kind of general assertion made in terms of an advisory behavioural pattern which can be followed to maximize the objectives of a language user, and which are of a type that can best be described as follows: "...under low time pressure, people with stronger needs will make larger demands than those with weaker needs (...); under high time pressure, stronger needs will lead to smaller demands" (Pruitt 1981: 233).

Alongside studies related to negotiation principles, an important body of research has gone into the analysis of negotiation strategies. This approach is based on the idea that the implementation of certain tactics depends on linguistic requirements. Analyses in fact evolved into the establishment of one-to-one correspondences between certain syntactic calculi and the strategic tactical behaviour inferable from their use in specific discourse environments. Authors such as Graham (1984), Putnam & Jones (1982), Lampi (1987), Donohue (1982a, 1982b), Donohue & Díez (1985) have relied heavily on this tactical approach to negotiations.

The main criticism which has been addressed to this way of dealing with negotiation behaviour makes reference to the strategic component, which is beforehand made inherent to negotiating activity itself. The fact that negotiations are viewed as a strategic type of behaviour also implies that competitive interaction is assumed to take place (see Johnston 1982), and as Putnam and Jones (1982: 275) themselves claim, "...communication is the activity that ultimately defines the conflict..." (our emphasis). In other words, it is the negotiation process itself which will ultimately reveal whether a competitive or cooperative type of negotiation has taken place. On the other hand, assessing the degree of competitiveness or delimitation of conversational instances of cooperativeness versus competitiveness can be thought of as critical issues that can be objectively accounted for. One of the main criticisms that this tendency has received is the widespread idea of considering "negotiation as a phenomenon which has already been adequately defined and described" (Walker 1994: 5).

Walker urges in fact for negotiations to be analysed as a discourse phenomenon. The conversational process at issue should be accounted for alone, as a decontextualized conversational activity, subject to context-specific pressures.

In the late eighties negotiations start to be looked at from this discursal perspective, and the body of the literature tends to cluster around three main areas of interest. Some authors (see e.g.: Fant 1989, 1990, 1992, 1993; Marriott 1993; Bülow-Møller 1993) are interested in highlighting intercultural differences in speech behaviour while studying structural regularities in the conversational construct. Another area of interest is represented by the studies that approach negotiations as conversational behaviour subject to variables which hold for specific workplaces or conditions at a workplace. The studies of Firth (1992, 1995b), Walker (1995), or Wagner (1995) are representative examples of this trend. Another group can be singled out, inasmuch as discourse-level regularities of negotiation activity are considered². The work of Lampi (1986), Mulholland (1991) and Bülow-Møller (1992) is typical of this approach.

One important contribution that allows for a closer focus on the interactive nature of negotiations is the distinction that Firth (1991) proposes between “negotiating activity” and “negotiation encounter”, in an attempt to resolve the general concept of negotiation. He defines the latter as “...a single location encounter, formally- and physically-defined, involving parties with potentially conflicting wants and needs...” On the other hand, “...negotiating activity is interactionally-defined, being contingent on the parties’ mutual discourse actions” (Firth 1991: 8). The interesting point that Firth makes is to enhance the fact that interactants gathering with the purpose of negotiating, even in a typical negotiating context as a meeting might be, cannot be relied on as a premise from which one could draw the conclusion that the outcoming conversational process can be referred to as negotiating activity. Negotiation encounter and negotiating activity are not interdependent, and what turns a conversational process into negotiation activity are particular aspects of the conversational process itself. According to Firth, negotiating activity can be defined as follows:

...[an activity initiated by one party’s display of misalignment with a substantive proposal, offer, request, or suggestion of the opposing party, and terminated when definitive agreement on one or more substantive issues is reached. The demonstrable end-goal orientation for the parties involved in negotiating activity is thus mutual alignment (Firth 1991: 145).

Accordingly, negotiating activity can be referred to as a conversational process which unfolds as an action sequence bracketed by some starting point and final stage. Following the Birmingham group of discourse analysts this

characterization allows for negotiating activity to be identified with a transactional unit (see for example: Sinclair and Coulthard 1975, Coulthard and Brazil 1981, Coulthard 1992), occupying the slot between an exchange and a lesson unit.

This definition allows us to reach a characterization of the interactional nature of negotiating activity itself, in terms of a decontextualized discursive phenomenon, in order to establish in the first place the criteria which would determine the characteristics of the object of analysis we are aiming at for our research.

Most authors taking a discourse perspective on negotiation behaviour (see e.g.: Lampi 1986: 6, Merritt 1976: 321, Mulholland 1991: 40-41) do in fact agree that negotiating activity corresponds to a conversational process displaying specific identifying features, which can be summarized as follows:

- The conversational process is triggered off by some issue, problem or aspect which calls for a solution/resolution.
- This type of end/goal orientation justifies the development of the conversational process (independently of the fact that a solution is eventually reached or not).
- The conversational process ends when compromise is reached, mutual alignment, or when the issue that has triggered off the negotiation process is abandoned.
- The conversational process does not necessarily imply a conflictive relationship between the interacting parties.

2. THE PRESENT STUDY: RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS AND OBJECTIVES

Our purpose in analysing the discourse of negotiation is motivated by an interest in gaining an insight into the generic nature of the activity at issue, starting from the notion of topic as a dynamic category capable of revealing a dynamic structural pattern typical of this interactive conversational process. The collaborative discourse construction is analysed under constraints operating at the level of the discursive nature of negotiating activity itself, and at the level of the speakers' institutional role and power relationship while collaboratively constructing the discourse process at issue.

We start from the assumption that the social distance operating between speakers, which is accounted for in terms of power relationship, governs the turn-taking mechanism in what concerns both turn construction and turn distribution within the interactive conversational process.

Our hypothesis rests on an observation made by Ventola (1979: 267) with reference to discourse structure understood as a semiotic sign. In terms of the

author, "...structure varies according to the social distance between the interactants." The discursual activity is taken to structurally reveal a social order of some kind, constituting a formal sign of the societal order at issue. Our starting assumption is that, as there is an asymmetrical relationship between our interactants in what concerns the variable of power³, this can be expected to be traced in the structural configuration of the negotiating activity, which we expect the choices in topic made by the interactants throughout the conversational process to formally display. As O'Donnell (1990: 211) observes, we expect that "...the power semantic is realized in asymmetry in speech choices."

Asymmetry in power relationship can influence turn-taking. Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson (1974: 711) do in fact claim, that even though it is true that turn distribution in the interactive process is not pre-established, "...it is sometimes suggested in the literature on small groups that relative distribution of turns (or some similar measure) is an index of (or medium for) power, status, influence, etc." Based on this observation, we consider the possibility of this potential asymmetry in topic contribution and distribution to bear a relationship with interactive turn construction.

As stated above, we rely on the notion of topic both in terms of speakers' content contribution to the thread of discourse and content distribution within the conversational process. We also resort to the concept of topic for its potential as a discourse organizational unit, as such capable of displaying a structural conversational pattern corresponding to the interactants' progressive topic choices in the course of negotiating activity. Authors such as Maynard (1980: 284), Gardner (1987: 129), Sigman (1983: 174), Schegloff (1990: 51), Hazadiah (1993: 61) emphasize the importance of considering the notion of topic as a unit capable of displaying a discourse structure based on the interactants' information distribution in the course of the interactive process.

We start from the notion of discourse topic, —as opposed to sentence topic—, the expression of which should capture "...the concern (or set of concerns) the speaker is addressing." (Ochs Keenan & Schieffelin 1976: 343). We agree with Brown & Yule's (1983: 68) approach to the concept of topic in terms of propositional content representation at the utterance level. Following their criteria, in order to prove our hypothesis, we consider it important to take into consideration their distinction between *discourse topic*, referred to in terms of shared information between interactants, and *speaker topic* as one speaker's contribution of new information to the thread of discourse (1983: 88).

Our expectation of a possible asymmetrical interactive behaviour to be structurally displayed, which we consider to be determined by the unbalanced power relationship that holds between interactants, is checked against quantitative and qualitative criteria of *which information* each speaker

contributes at *which conversational instance* to the negotiation process, and *how this information is interactively projected* in the course of the negotiating activity.

These things considered, we can at this stage refer to the more specific hypotheses which we derive from our general hypothesis, and make explicit reference as well to the study objectives we have established to prove our assumptions.

1. Bearing in mind that negotiating activity unfolds prospectively, that interactants steer the conversational process towards a solution or agreement, we expect the information contained in an utterance expressed in terms of speaker topic (from now on T2) and discourse topic (from now on T1), to progress prospectively, which is translated into a progressive actualization of T1 in accordance with the T2 that are being introduced into the discourse. We consider the possibility of speakers falling back on their own T2 they previously introduced themselves, instead of resorting to their interactants' T2, starting from the assumption that speakers will provide their own information while arguing for a position that is being held. We also expect to find this attitude displayed differently depending on the status of the interactant.

2. A speaker topic, referred to in terms of new information, has the potential of being resorted to in the course of interaction as discourse topic, when treated as known information. We assume that the numbers of T2 introduced into the discourse, which are taken up in the unfolding of the conversational process as T1, will depend on the status of the speaker. We expect the speaker that displays more power to resort to a higher number of T2 than his/her interactant, as this conversational behaviour confers better argumentative possibilities. We believe that the speaker with more power will, due to his/her status, be given the chance of introducing more facts and consequently more information into his/her argumentation.

3. As to what regards interactive turn construction, we take up Sacks et al.'s observation (1974: 700-701) of considering turn length as variable and hypothetically dependent on issues of social structure such as power.

- (a) Starting from the asymmetrical relationship in what concerns the variable of power, we expect this to be formally displayed in turn length. We tentatively assume the possibility of the speaker of less status constructing longer turns and with more T2 than his/her interactant, bearing in mind that he/she may be required to introduce more new information to make his/her point than the speaker with a higher status.
- (b) The turn as a structural slot allows for topical progression within the unit, where one communicative act can be said to involve a T2, which the same speaker treats as T1, that is to say as known information, in

the subsequent act within the same turn unit. We consider that the proportional relationship between the quantity of communicative acts within a turn and topical progression will depend on the variable of internal status.

The specific objectives for analysis we have divided to test our hypotheses are as follows:

1. Measurement of the frequency with which each speaker interacts with passing turns⁴, contrasting this figure with the total number of turns that each speaker resorts to in the process of interaction. This will allow us to trace differences between the speakers in what concerns the contribution of information-bearing turns into discourse as opposed to turns without information.

2. Measurement of the frequency of communicative acts each speaker resorts to. This will reveal which speaker constructs longer turns.

3. Measurement of the frequency of communicative acts that do not carry information⁵. This figure is contrasted with the frequency of communicative acts which do carry information.

4. Measurement of the frequency with which T2 are taken up as T1 to find differences between interactants in what concerns presenting new information as known information in the course of interaction.

5. Measurement of the frequency with which the previous point can be said to happen *within* a turn unit or *across* two turn units.

6. Measurement of topical progression within a turn unit in proportion with the number of communicative acts the turn comprises.

7. Measurement of topical progression in adjacent positioning of turns, and quantification of *when* and *how often* a speaker, while constructing his/her turn, falls back at all on a T1 of the previous turn, and in that case, *when* it is the case and for which speaker that the initiating act of a turn takes up the T1 of the last act belonging to the previous turn.

2.1. Procedure

Around fifty samples of dyadic negotiating transactions were tape-recorded, many of which had to be discarded for various reasons, either for poor sound quality, for intrusions of other speakers from outside the meeting room that would interrupt the negotiation process, or for undecipherable instances. In order to guarantee homogeneity in the data, several factors were considered: Recordings were selected where only one issue at a time could be identified to trigger off the negotiation process. Contractual conditions linking conversationalists together were also observed in an endeavour to preserve homogeneity. In both institutions from which we gathered our data the speakers representing the higher status held a managerial position, their respective

interactants of a lower status sharing a contractual position which could be considered to be of similar standing. In all our samples both interactants' age ranged from thirty to forty years.

Our corpus comprises thirty-one samples of dyadic negotiation transactions, which recreate the following characteristics:

- All the samples have been (audio-)recorded in institutional settings
- All the samples have been obtained from academic contexts
- All the samples have been extracted from dyadic agenda meetings between managing director and staff member
- Twenty-four samples are transactions between members of female gender; seven samples are between members of male gender.
- In all samples the same routinized formula of agenda meeting can be observed, following this sequence of procedure: one of either interactants proposes the starting issue, problem or aspect, which initiates the negotiating process. When one or both of the interactants judge the negotiation process to have concluded, a new starting matter is proposed, or else the meeting comes to an end.

The following grid lists the samples that were considered for analysis, providing the length of each transaction measured in minutes, as well as the subject matter which in every case caused the negotiating activity to take place.

NEGOTIATION	TIME	SUBJECT
B.I.1	1:15 min.	teaching in blocks of three hours
B.I.2	0:58 min.	curriculum design in Spanish
B.I.3	2:05 min.	need for elaborating curriculum
B.I.4	3:05 min.	time required for curriculum design
B.I.5	3:48 min.	parts which a curriculum is composed of
B.I.6	2:46 min.	possible changes in choice of textbook
B.I.7	3:30 min.	preparing final exams
C.H.8	1:25 min.	working on a musical theme for kids' party
C.H.9	1:45 min.	timetable adjustment
C.H.10	3:02 min.	allowing for more conversational practice in Spanish
C.H.11	2:13 min.	encouraging more reading activities
C.H.12	5:32 min.	timetable adjustment
C.H.13	1:50 min.	timetable adjustment
C.H.14	2:53 min.	adjusting subjects and teaching

NEGOTIATION	TIME	SUBJECT
C.H.15	3:52 min.	taking on voluntary mothers to help out in class
C.H.16	6:33 min.	newcoming children and their distribution in the classes
C.H.17	7:24 min.	preparing some hot chocolate for kids' party
C.H.18	3:56 min.	distribution of children in the classes by age groups
C.H.19	1:55 min.	staggering intake of children at the beginning of the course
C.H.20	2:58 min.	purchase of s.th. to give shade in the courtyard
C.H.21	1:18 min.	contracting new teacher staff
C.H.22	2:16 min.	distribution of milk among the children
C.H.23	1:05 min.	ordering new textbooks
C.H.24	3:02 min.	changing the textbook
C.H.25	3:25 min.	social security rights of teacher staff
C.H.26	2:33 min.	fire alarm
C.H.27	2:40 min.	children leaving their classes earlier
C.H.28	1:55 min.	using type-written material for first year
C.H.29	2:55 min.	elaborating information letter for teacher staff
C.H.30	1:25 min.	parents picking up their children after party
C.H.31	4:06 min.	school subscription to charity organization

* B.I. and C.H. stand for the two institutions the data were obtained from.

3. ANALYSIS

Following the ethnomethodologists' conversation analytical framework, every transaction was first divided into turns, and these further into communicative acts. To trace the projection of discourse topics and speaker topics in the discourse process we relied on the dichotomy *known* versus *new* information as established by Chafe (1976) or Clark & Haviland (1977), whereby Brown and Yule's (1983) conception of the discourse topic as expressing shared information can be paralleled with Chafe's and Haviland's known information.

We agree with Geluykens (1989: 130) in considering as analytically not operational both Chafe's and Clark & Haviland's conception of known information in terms of a state of consciousness or as a knowledge-based state of mind (see Prince 1981: 226-230). As Geluykens observes "...this makes them inherently unverifiable, as there is no way we can have direct access to

the assumption the speaker makes". Gelyukens proposes instead "...the more operational, complex concept of Recoverability...which classifies elements in terms of their derivability from the previous discourse record" (1989: 129). Gelyukens thus satisfies Halliday's (1967) requirement of making the concept of new information coincide with what "...the speaker *presents* as not being recoverable from the preceding discourse (1967: 204)." As van Dijk (1981: 184) points out, "...new information in principle can be processed only in relation to *old* information."

To serve our analytical purposes, two main issues have been raised. On the one hand, the fact of considering discourse topics as shared information inasmuch as they are recoverable from the discourse record itself, makes them accessible from the surface level of discourse. On the other hand, an inter-dependence between speaker topic and discourse topic is established in terms of co-referentiality, as the possibility of tracing a discourse topic and referring to it as being shared information requires that a referential connection be previously established with where in the discourse it is presented for the first time in terms of new information. We therefore rely on Halliday and Hasan's (1976) concept of cohesion, inasmuch as cohesive elements take on a deictic function of establishing a link between propositions underlying utterances. Yet we do especially rely on discourse markers as deictic elements operating at the ideational level, where the discourse structure is considered in terms of "...its organization of topics and subtopics —what is being talked about" (Schiffrin 1987: 26).

3.1. Sample analysis

B.I.1: Teaching in blocks of three hours

Speaker	Utterance act	coherence relation	(T1: discourse topic)	[T2: speaker topic]
1. A:	<i>Is it possible to put it all together?</i>			[putting three hours together] a
2.	<i>it would mean... coming in for say three hours on Monday...</i>	reference (1)	(putting three hours together) a	

Speaker	Utterance act	coherence relation	(T1: discourse topic)	[T2: speaker topic]
3. B:	<i>well...ehm...let's say that originally I was in favour of <u>that</u></i>	reference (1)	(putting three hours together) a	
4.	<i><u>because</u> I thought people would get more work done / in three hours than in an hour and a half. [but...</i>	cause (1)	(putting three hours together) a	[people getting more work done in 3 hours] b
5. A:	<i><u>as</u> you want] substitution cover...</i>	cause (4)	(people getting more work done in 3 hours) b	
6. B:	<i>you're perfectly free to talk to John or to Joe about <u>it</u>.</i>	reference (1)	(putting three hours together) a	
7. A:	<i>hmm...they won't want <u>it</u> will they?</i>	reference (1)	(putting three hours together) a	
8.	<i>but...it's just... it's just ridiculous an hour and a [half.</i>			[working an hour and a half being ridiculous] c
9. B:	<i>I know]</i>	sentence ellipsis (8)	(working an hour and a half being ridiculous) c	
10. A:	<i>by the time you settle down to something...</i>	sentence ellipsis (8) + ellipsis of conjunction (cause) (8)	(working an hour and a half being ridiculous) c	

Speaker	Utterance act	coherence relation	(T1: discourse topic)	[T2: speaker topic]
11. B:	<i>hmm</i>	_____		
12. A:	<i>I mean I think <u>that</u> should still stand.</i>	reference (1)	(putting three hours together)	a
13. B:	<i>I'll put <u>it</u> in the... I put it in...It'll go on...It'll go on...</i>	reference (1)	(putting three hours together)	a
14.	<i>and I'm making minutes of <u>all this</u> anyway or a list or whatever.</i>	reference (1) + reference (4) + reference (8)	(putting three hours together) a (people getting more work done in 3 hours) b (working an hour and a half being ridiculous)	c
15.	<i>so <u>this</u>'ll go on John's desk.</i>	reference (1) + reference (4) + reference (8)	(putting three hours together) a (people getting more work done in 3 hours) b (working an hour and a half being ridiculous)	c
16. A:	<i>yeah</i>	_____		
17. B:	<i>but...no I mean / I can understand <u>that</u>.</i>	reference (4)	(people getting more work done in 3 hours)	b

Speaker	Utterance act	coherence relation	(T1: discourse topic)	[T2: speaker topic]
18.	<i>I think it's much better for people to do a solid three hours where you can get into something</i>	sentence ellipsis (4) + ellipsis of conjunction (cause) (8)	(people getting more work done in 3 hours) b	
19.	<i><u>than</u> to do an hour and a half.</i>	reference (5)	(people getting more work done in 3 hours) b	
20.	<i>but...<u>it's not my err...decision.</u></i>	reference (1)	(putting three hours together) a	[not taking a decision] d
21. A:	<i><u>okay</u></i>	agreement (20)	(not taking a decision) d	
22. B:	<i><u>so...there's not a lot I can do about that /</u></i>	relexicalization (20)	(not taking a decision) d	

3.2. Description of layout:

Each negotiation sample was split into its constituent utterance acts, which in turn were numbered according to their sequential position within the thread of discourse. Each box contains one turn contribution of either speaker A or speaker B, whereby A is taken to represent the speaker with higher institutional power than B.

In order both to trace topical progression and to follow the analytical procedure we have applied to establish the coherence relationship, we have considered two columns next to the speakers' oral contribution on the left-hand column. The column on the right displays in propositional terms both the speaker's contribution of new topics to the thread of discourse (right-hand side, in square brackets) and the discourse topic that is presented at the utterance level in terms of shared information between interactants (left-hand side, in

round brackets). An alphabetic indexical system is used in order to trace when a speaker topic of some kind is taken up as a discourse topic and by whom in the course of interaction.

The central column shows the coherence relation on which grounds we have analyzed a speaker topic as having been taken up as a discourse topic. The number in brackets refers back to the sequential position of the utterance act in which what is presented as discourse topic was initially introduced as a speaker's new contribution (speaker topic). We have underlined the expression(s) at the level of speech behaviour on the left-hand column, which we take as the surface elements which linguistically prove the coherence relationships that have been traced between speaker and discourse topics throughout the negotiation process. The language elements typed out in bold focus on the oral contribution from which we derive the speaker topic.

For passing turns, which do not contain propositional content information (e.g. acts 16. and 17.) we have provided a dash. Cases of indeterminacy, as what co-referentiality concerns, have been considered as well. For instance in act 15., the pronoun *this* does not refer back to one specific co-referent, but could make reference to the three speaker topics listed.

4. RESULTS

Once the data of our corpus were analysed, we resorted to the software programme SPSS for Windows in order to realise the statistical quantifications for each of our particular analytical objectives. The resulting figures were subjected to the statistical chi-square test, whereby the following independent variables were considered: sex of interactants, group of transaction⁶, and power of interactants, while as dependent transaction variables, turn, act, discourse topic, speaker topic and topical progression were considered.

The findings reveal that differences in the power relationship affect discourse structure, inasmuch as an asymmetrical conversational behaviour can be considered, although only with regard to particular aspects. In negotiation transactions between speakers of male sex, the speaker with the higher status is found to resort twice as much to passing turns as his interactant. The contrary holds for transactions between female speakers, although only with 12.5% difference between both interactants⁷.

Differences can also be spotted as to the use of speaker topics, where the speaker with higher status is found to introduce a larger number of speaker topics into the discourse than his/her interactant. With reference to topical progression, considering the possibility of a speaker topic to be taken up further in the discourse as discourse topic, speaker status reveals itself as an influential variable. The conversational behaviour that is less represented is

that in which the speaker with lower status proposes a speaker topic, which is afterwards taken up by his/her interlocutor as discourse topic. On the other hand, the conversational attitude that is mostly represented is that where the speaker with higher status introduces a speaker topic, which he/she him/herself takes up as discourse topic further in the transaction. This occurrence is followed by examples where the speaker with higher status proposes a speaker topic and his/her interactant takes it up as discourse topic. It can be concluded that it is usually the speaker with higher status who succeeds in having the proposed speaker topics projected in the interactive process. This result concerns both negotiating transactions between male and between female speakers. It is furthermore the case that the speaker that proposes a speaker topic takes it up as discourse topic within the same turn unit when interactants are of female gender, while between speakers of male gender this process is found to take place more often across two turns. As we observed before, this can only tentatively be taken as a tendency that is being observed, due to the limited samples of transactions between male speakers.

Speaker status, on the other hand, can not be found to influence turn length, according to our study. Not even a proportional relationship between the number of acts conforming a turn and quantity of speaker topics introduced in the turn can be observed. As to an expected relationship between topical progression within a turn and the quantity of communicative acts, the results show that status is not an influential variable⁸.

NOTES

¹ The concept of "distributive strategy" (Lampi 1986) is termed differently, and can be found to mean the same under headings such as "competitive negotiation" (Pruitt 1981) or "win-lose mode" (Karrass 1970) or "hard approach" (Nierenberg 1977). On the other hand, instead of "integrative bargaining", expressions like "coordinative behavior" (Pruitt 1981) or "win-win style" can be said to be synonymous.

² Those studies centered around intercultural aspects or conditions at the workplace should be considered as belonging to the third group as well, as they focus on structural regularities which hold for negotiating behaviour too. The reason why we have decided on singling out a possible third area of interest is due to the fact that, although most studies are based on business negotiations, the findings are not claimed to correspond to some specific contextual variables.

³ We think of the variable of power in terms of speaker status, regarded from a professional perspective. In terms of Cheepen (1988: 24) what is meant is "...[the] status internal to the encounter, i.e. that adopted by or assigned to a speech participant in a particular encounter with regard to a particular topic under discussion, vis-à-vis his/her conversationalist;" The reason why we make power coincide with this characterization of status is because the concept of power is too broad to make it analytically operative, regarding the difficulties its measurement entails, which the concept of status on the other hand makes possible.

⁴ The concept makes reference to a type of turn construction whose communicative act serves the sole function of expressing secure uptaking of the interactant's information and confers the interactant the right to go on talking, i.e. to go on holding the floor (see eg. Levinson

1989 for a more specific treatment of this concept). Examples of passing turns are one-act, and more specifically one-word turn constructions of the type 'yeah' or 'hmm'.

⁵ We referred to passing turns as typically containing one single lexical item, whose function it is to express secure uptaking and acceptance of the interactant's previously stated information and which also yields the interactant the right to go on talking at the expense of his/her own right of information contribution. This single act which this type of turn comprises is referred to in terms of not carrying information, as the speaker does not contribute known or new information to the thread of discourse but only communicates his/her wish that the interactant continues speaking, thereby yielding the right to talk.

⁶ We have considered transactions as belonging either to group I, when both speakers are of male gender, or to group II, when they are of female gender.

⁷ Due to the fact of there being only seven samples of negotiation transactions between male speakers, we can't generalize this outcome. What we can state is that there is a tendency for this asymmetrical conversational behaviour to hold.

⁸ See Dolón, R. (1996: 436-496) for detailed discussion of statistical results and supporting graphical visualization.

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