

**Collaborating through Talk:  
The Interactive Construction of Task-Oriented Dialogue in English and in Spanish**

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The present thesis is a study of connexity and coherence at all levels in conversation. Both inter-turn and intra-turn relationships are studied in a bilingual English-Spanish corpus of task-oriented conversations between dyads of two speakers each. The interlocutors have two conflicting agendas that cover a two to four week period, and are told to agree on an appointment within those two to four weeks. The speakers try to find a date on which they are both free to meet. I considered these conversations as texts, and thus set out to explore the discourse characteristics that hold them together.

The main framework of study is the analysis of speech genres (Bakhtin 1986). These conversations are an instance of a genre, as a "staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture" (Martin 1984, p.25). As such, they are divided in clear stages, the main three of which are: Opening, Task Performance and Closing. For these stages to be distinguishable, they need to contain different patterns of linguistic realizations. The linguistic and discourse characteristics studied include: Thematic Progression, Rhetorical Structure Analysis and Cohesion. These three types of analysis are unified under the textual metafunction of language, in the Hallidayan tradition. Halliday and Hasan (1976, p.29) divide the textual metafunction into structural and non-structural components. The structural one, at the clause level, is the thematic structure of the clause. The non-structural one is cohesion. One of the elements of cohesion is conjunction, which I represented here not through Halliday's and Martin's conjunctive relations, but through a similar theory, Rhetorical Structure Theory (Mann and Thompson 1988).

This study is, then, one of text, textual metafunction and texture in a spoken genre. The study shall shed light onto how two speakers create a text interactively. The second goal of this work is to find out whether—and if so, how—that process is different in English and in Spanish.

The tools used stem from traditions in the analysis of English. Some of them have been applied to other languages, sometimes not without controversy about their suitability. I have, consciously, avoided adaptations or reformulations of the original theories. One obvious reason is that the methods needed to be constant, if any rigorous comparison between the results for the two languages was to be carried out. The other main reason was that I decided to explore a possible English bias in those theories. By applying exactly the same types of analysis, we shall discover the suitability of the methodologies for the analysis of Spanish.

The research questions for the study are summarized in: (1) corpus-based characterization of a dialogic genre consisting of scheduling conversations; (2) compilation of a body of analysis tools for generic analysis; (3) application of English-based analyses to Spanish; and (4) comparisons between English and Spanish text-building strategies.

I describe the results of the three types of analysis: thematic realization and progression, rhetorical structure, and cohesion. The description covers the English and the Spanish data, with comparisons between the two. Finally, I provide a computational modeling of the structure of the dialogues, divided into stages and speech acts found in each of the stages. The computational

model is based on the generic structure of the dialogues. It formalizes the sequencing of stages, and the sequencing of speech acts within those stages. The complete characterization of the stages is used throughout the study, in order to delimit the stages as units in the conversations within which I will explore the different phenomena.

## **References**

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