



Discursive Analysis of Medical Spoken Texts in English and Persian

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ABSTRACT

This article presents some tools of discourse analysis through twenty spoken medical texts, ten in English and ten in Persian. The main objective of this article is to explain and exemplify different concepts regarding the field of discourse analysis in order to study these spoken texts in two languages to find the points of difference between them. First twenty spoken medical texts were recorded and transcribed. About one hundred sentences in each language that contained these features were chosen. Then they were compared from the perspectives of fourteen features, including turn-taking, different types of interruptions, back-channel support, filled pauses, spoken discourse markers, intonation, repetition and false starts. The transcriptions were analyzed for the points of difference in each language and it was found that English speakers use more turn taking, silent interruption, filled pauses and intonation markers in their speech. Persian speakers are more active in using spoken discourse markers, repetition, back channel support and false start. Chi-square was used to see whether these differences are significant and meaningful or not. It was estimated through chi-square that there was a significant difference between the two groups in turn taking, silent interruption, back-channel support, filled pauses, Falling-rising intonation, Rising intonation, Level intonation, and repetition and false starts in the way that English speakers are more inclined in using these features than Persian ones.

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Introduction

In people's daily life, communication is a tool for expressing and exchanging ideas. This is 'the most basic and widespread linguistic means of conducting human affairs' (McArthur as cited in Pridham, 2001.p.1). Speech is the primary and universal method of communication and plays important role in our lives than the other way such as reading or writing. This is because most people speak much more than they write or read. In addition, almost everyone learns to speak, but not necessarily to write or read. Therefore, the importance of speaking in clear for every one and it make us to think how people communicate with each other by talking. Researchers work with spoken discourse to analyze its different features and functions. For example, Sacks et al, assert that conversational analysis is 'a first step towards achieving a naturalistic observational discipline to deal with details of social interaction in a rigorous, empirical and formal way' (Coulthard, 1994. p.59).

When comparing two languages, these features become more prominent. It is through spoken discourse analysis that a variety of features and functions, which are not explicit to many people are summarized to explain how people communicate effectively in two different languages with these hidden rules. There are formal and informal kinds of speech in all almost languages. But some people may still think that speech, especially the informal speech is something formless and unstructured because it is quick, impermanent and sometimes less formal. If that is the case, so our daily life faces with a lot of problems because we can not understand each other by talking. In an effort to refute these mis- understandings, the purpose of this essay is to analyze two formal spoken texts in medicine two find the differences from seven perspective.

Literature Review

Before analyzing some of the characteristics of spoken language found in the subject's oral speech, it is important to state some terms such as discourse analysis and the notion of text. McCarthy (1994, p. 5), in his book *Discourse Analysis for Language Teachers*, clearly explains that "discourse analysis is concerned with the study of the relationship between language and the contexts in which is used." This branch of linguistics deals with how people construct their ideas in a cohesive and coherent way in order to communicate their message by means of written and spoken texts. Aitchison (1992, p. 97) has written that "when we use language, we do not necessarily do so in a random and unconstructed way. Both texts, conversation and written have different devices for joining together disconnected utterances into a cohesive whole." Therefore, discourse analysis studies language in use focusing on important elements such as coherence (unity of the text) and cohesion (tools that tie together sentences, e.g. pronouns). For the purposes of this paper, the writer will emphasize spoken discourse based on seven features of speech. Although oral speech contain plenty of meaningful elements that illustrate key discourse tools. Discourse analysis depends on many components of language such as lexicon, phonology, grammar, for instance, help linguists identify and interpret samples of spoken texts. McCarthy (1994, p. 9) discusses that "discourse analysis is not entirely separate from the study of grammar and phonology, but discourse analysts are interested in a lot more than linguistic forms." This explains that discourse analysts take into account the study of the functions of the language and on how they are used in order to establish oral communication rather than analyzing the grammatical structures of the language. To understand the meaning of what is being said, the receiver listener appeals to the forms and functions of the language. Moreover, intonation patterns are also essential to

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infer the meaning of a specific idea unit, e.g. rising, sustained or falling intonation help the receiver decipher the meaning of a message or an oral text according to the context in which a certain utterance is used.

Another important term which is necessary to be explained is the notion of text. The word text can be defined as any type of linguistic or non-linguistic communication that can be interpreted in some way. Brown (1991, p. 11) define text as "a verbal record of a communicative act." In this study, the researcher is going to use a sample of spoken data based on a transcription of an oral narrative delivered by an English native speaker. McCarthy reported that "with written texts, some of the problems associated with spoken transcripts are absent" (1994, p. 25). It means that analyzing a spoken text is more difficult and time-consuming since the speaker does not follow the same rules of organization that are frequently used in building up a text in written form. As a result, spoken texts have a wide number of significant features that are not usually found in examples of written texts. These features may be influenced by different variables like the speaker's educational background, his age, occupation, literacy in his or her target language, or even personality traits.

The spoken form of speech includes a large variety of features that should be taken into account before analyzing an oral text. For example In terms of paralinguistic clues such as body language, facial expressions or proxemics (personal space), the speaker has more resources for conveying meaning. Also some other features have to do with supra-segmental elements of language including sentences and word stress, rhythm, and intonation. Brown and Yule (1983, p. 4) state that "the speaker has available to him the full range of 'voice quality' effects (as well as facial expressions, postural, and gestural systems. Armed with these, he can always override the effect of the words he speaks." If a discourse analyst records the oral speech using a video camera, those aspects can be easily observed in order to see how they reinforce meaning. However, when transcribing a spoken text, the reader will not have the chance to see how those elements contribute to the message unless "a fine-grained phonetic transcription" is prepared (p. 9).

Along with these aspects that characterize the spoken mode, interruptions can take place at any time. Moreover, the speaker can paraphrase his or her message by giving some examples. He or she can also relate the content of the message to his or her listener's background knowledge. Also, he can adjust the speech or delivery. Brown and Yule (1983) point out that "in a spoken interaction the speaker has the advantage of being able to monitor his listener's minute-by-minute reaction to what he says" (p. 5). Therefore, both interlocutors can easily negotiate meaning and give feedback to each other. Here the listener or receiver, who is more active in this communicative process, has more opportunities and chances to comprehend what he or she is being said

Statement of the Problem

It is repeatedly seen that Learners of a languages are able to use different grammatical forms and lexical items but still unable of conveying their message because they do not have necessary pragmatic or functional information to communicate their intended meaning. (Wolfson, 1989). The study on language learning has begun to focus on strategies for teaching speech acts to second language learners (Bardovi-Harlig & Mayhan-Taylor, 2003). While this trend is influential, we have seen little parallel focus on the strategies for learning and using speech acts, especially speech act of thanking through web-based instruction and learning. It is an important area of

language instruction to still within learners a sense of appropriate language behavior, and especially speech act behavior. The present study attempts to provide another alternative for EFL learners for improving their pragmatic use of speech act of thanking in EFL settings by using web- based instruction.

RQ: Is there a significant difference between English and Persian medical spoken texts in turn-taking, different types of interruptions, back-channel support, filled pauses, spoken discourse markers, intonation, repetition and false starts?

H0: There is no significant difference between English and Persian medical spoken texts in turn-taking, different types of interruptions, back-channel support, filled pauses, spoken discourse markers, intonation, repetition and false starts..

Methodology

Participants

The first step in analyzing some of the most special features in a spoken text is to record an example of natural and spontaneous speech. The first task was to look for two spoken texts one in English and one in Persian. The speakers were male and female native speakers of these two languages. They were doctors of medicine and cardiologist of relatively the same age from Iran and the United States. The doctors were being interviewed about a danger-of-death experience as a result of smoking. In this case, HIV and many other diseases. The researcher recorded their speech and transcribed them for the analysis.

Procedure

Transcription of the text

Cameron states that 'speech cannot be processed the same way as writing can be' because 'it consists of waves in the air which begin to fade away as soon as they are produced' (Cameron 2001. p.31). Therefore it is not possible to analyze a conversation without a transcribing it. The whole conversations were transcribed and described for the purpose of explanation and interpretation. After transcription of the extracts, they were analyzed from the perspectives of 14 features, including turn-taking, different types of interruptions, intonation back-channel support, spoken discourse markers, filled pauses, repetition and false starts.

Statistical analysis

All data collected for this study were analyzed quantitatively and were entered and analyzed using Statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) Version16. The frequency of occurrence of feature and its percentage was estimated. As the inferential statistics, Chi- square was used to see whether the English and Persian speakers were significantly different in using these features.

Results

Descriptive and Inferential statistics

The results of the analysis were shown in numerical way by counting the frequency of each feature. The percentage of each feature's frequency was estimated. In addition Chi-square was used to see whether the difference between two groups was meaningful or not.

Discussions

Turn-taking

The most essential and important rule in spoken discourse is turn-taking because it can tell people when to talk, when to be silent and thus, avoid interruptions. According to Coulthard, turn-taking means 'the roles of speaker and listener change' collaboratively with remarkably little overlapping and few silences (Coulthard, 1994. p. 59).

Table 1. Chi-square table for comparing the significant difference between two groups

Features	ENGLISH		Persian		Chi-square	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	² X
Turn taking	36	37.1	23	23.7	.04	4.11
simple interruption	20	20.5	16	16.5	.46	.54
butting- interruption	16	16.5	13	13.4	.54	.36
silent interruption	21	21.6	9	9.9	.01	5.67
back-channel support	27	27.8	14	14.4	.02	6.22
filled pauses	36	37.1	20	20.6	.01	6.42
discourse marker	46	47.4	40	41.2	.38	..75
Falling intonation	13	13.4	12	12.4	.83	.04
Rising-falling intonation	14	14.4	16	16.5	.69	.15
Falling-rising intonation	26	26.8	14	14.4	.33	4.53
Rising intonation	22	22.7	10	10.3	.02	5.38
Level intonation	22	22.7	7	7.2	.03	9.12
repetition and false starts	43	43.3	27	27.8	.01	5.72
Overlap	18	18.6	14	14.4	.43	.59

The transcribed texts were analyzed in both languages and the number of times used was counted. It was found that English speaker had thirteen times more turn-taking than Persian speaker.

Different types of interruptions

There are three types of interruption including simple interruption, butting-in interruption and silent interruption in addition to overlaps (Beattie, 1983 cited in Graddol et al, 1994. p.170).

Simple interruption: happens when the attempted speaker interrupts successfully, and the first speaker's utterance has not been completed with simultaneous speech presented (Beattie, 1983 cited in Simple Graddol, 1994. p.170). In this study English speaker uses it four times more.

Butting-in interruption: A butting-in interruption happens when the attempted speaker does not interrupt successfully but with simultaneous speech between them e.g. Uh.... (Beattie, 1983 cited in Graddol, 1994. p.170). Here again the English speaker use this feature more.

Silent interruption: Silent interruption will happen when the attempted speaker interrupts successfully, and the first speaker's utterance has not been completed yet without simultaneous speech occurred (Beattie, 1983 cited in Graddol, 1994. p. 170). The difference here is not significant.

Overlap: Overlap is a common feature in conversation. It is when one speaker ends his turn quickly, gaps between turns by another speaker begins his turn or simply indicating that his turn has begun and incorporating the silence into it' (Coulthard, 1994. p. 60). The English speaker is more inclined to this feature.

Back-channel support

Back-channel support refers to noises and short verbal responses made by listeners who acknowledge what the speaker is saying and react to it, without wishing to take over the speaking turn. (Anon cited from a handout, 2004). Some examples are mmm, yeah, oh, really, right. In this case Persian speaker used this feature Less. The difference is very meaningful

Filled pauses

Filled pauses refer to those small 'sounds like um, er, ah, like, you know, know what I mean' (Anon, cited from a handout 2004). They can give the speaker time to think what they are going to say next and as a result, many false starts and changes in grammatical structure may occur in informal language. According to Beattie, filled pauses can also protect the speaker from interruption for a short while (Beattie, 1977 cited in Graddol et al, 1994:172). It is obvious that the English speaker

is more interested in using filled pauses in his talks. Also the difference is meaningful.

Spoken discourse markers

By contrast, spoken discourse markers are generally employed at the beginning of a turn in order to mark boundaries in conversation between one topic or bit of business and the text (Anon, cited in a handout, 2004). Here The Persian speaker use this feature less mostly used by English speaker. But the difference is not meaningful..

Intonation

Speakers often use different forms of intonations to express their feeling, such as surprising, questioning, disappointed or emphasizing. McCarthy describes intonation as follows: 'at recognizable points in the utterance, the pitch level may rise, fall, or be carefully kept level' (McCarthy, 1991.p:105). According to some phonologists, five types of intonations are considered for practical purposes (McCarthy, 1991. p:105). They are: Fall, Rise-fall, Fall-rise, Rise and Level. As the table shows the English speaker follow intonational patterns more than Persian speaker, especially at last three level the difference is meaningful.

Repetition and false starts

Cameron states that it is not surprising if the speakers often make false starts and repeat themselves because they 'have to produce their contributions in real time, with minimal planning' (Cameron, 2001.p:34). Repetition can be a good way of gaining time to plan the next chunk of utterance. As presented Persian speaker used this feature less and the difference is significant.

Table 1 represents the frequency, percentage and chi-square output of SPSS As shown, there is a significant difference between English and Persian in turn-taking, silent interruption, back-channel support, filled pauses, falling-rising, rising-falling, level intonation, and repetition and false start.

Conclusion

Through the analysis the these seven factors of spoken discourse, we can conclude that there are a large number of rules and functions implied in every day conversations, which have made a basic and important contribution to their understanding. Because of this, it is strongly believed that casual conversation or informal speech is neither formless nor unstructured. On the contrary, it definitely contains a lot of rules and features which can form people's everyday speaking. Therefore we may use a variety of verbal communication, such as filled pauses, back-channel support and spoken discourse markers as well as adjacency pairs or employ non-verbal cues as well, such as gaze, facial expressions, and posture to get what we want to say or convey. Speeches, either formal or informal even, though, quick

and evanescent, are in some ways organized and structured. They play an important role in survival and effective functioning in society. Using spoken texts such as a short transcription, for instance, provide learners with a great opportunity to focus on useful aspects of the spoken mode. So discourse analysis provides instructors with cues in order to demonstrate for learners how spoken language works in authentic contexts. Hence, from the learners' and teachers' viewpoint, we should pay more attention to the rules and functions of spoken discourse, in order to benefit from them both languages learning and teaching.

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