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Talking Academic Writing: a Conversation Analysis of One-to-One Tutorials

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Outline

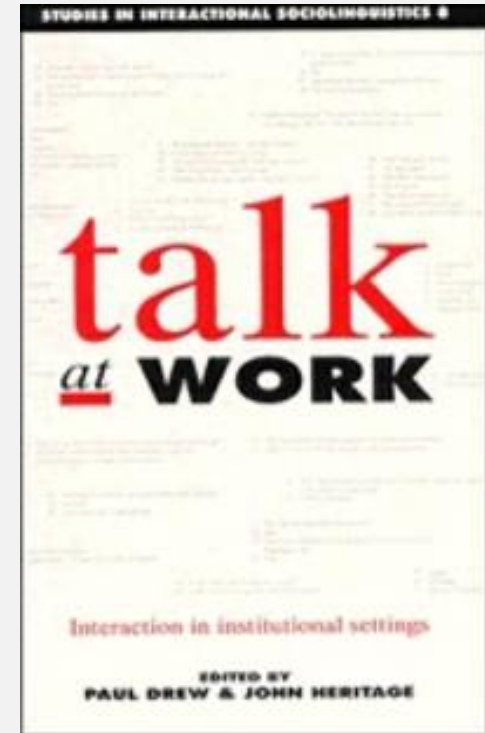
- Background to project
- Conversational Analysis (CA)
- Tutorial analysis - overall phases
- Giving feedback in tutorials
- General reflections and questions

Background to Project



Conversation Analysis (CA)

- Talk in interaction (institutions) from sociology
- Dynamic context
- Comparative/distinctiveness
- Sequencing/turn-taking
- Turn activity and design
- Lexical choice and formulation
- Detailed linguistic analysis
- Drew and Heritage (1992); Sidnell (2010); Sidnell and Stivers (2013)
- Little CA of academic skills tutorials



Tutorial analysis - overall phases

Openings

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graph TD; A[Openings] --> B[Responding to Problem/Task]; B --> C[Closings];
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Responding to
Problem/Task

Closings

Openings

So what are we looking at today then?

I've done part of it but I'm not quite sure I'm going in the right direction

I didn't finish my assignment cos I need a little bit of help from you.

She was saying we have to include theoretical aspects so it was a bit tricky for me.

Rapport building
Opening 1 (general)
Problem presentation (often with an account)
Establishing prior knowledge
Reference to previous tutorials
Practicalities/locating documents
Checking brief/identifying task
Student reports progress so far
Opening 2 (focus)
Problem reformulation

I'm struggling to linking up to um I'm struggling to link, to link up some words. It just becomes repetitive.

So before you came here what academic writing did you do?

So you're producing an action plan...and a commentary

So what would you like to focus on today?

So is there something specific you're unsure of?

Responding to Problem/Task

Tutor Activities

Questioning/eliciting

Formulation/reformulation (So...)

Preference (boundaries/roles)

(Schegloff, 1998, 2007; Stokoe, 2013)

Display (expertise) (Parry, 2004; MacKiewicz, 2005)

Evaluation (indirect, questions, tag questions)

Suggesting (mitigated, modal verbs)

Reader expectations

Modelling (academic conventions)

Praise

Directive/instructional (*You need to...*)

Reassurance (*Well I think you seem to be on the right lines*) and to start to signal closure

Student Activities

Continuers (*yeah*)

Agreement (minimal responses – *right, ok*)

Formulation

Reformulation of problem

Disagreement/challenge (less common)

Accounts (saving face after evaluation)

I ran out of time...

Just shoved it in today cos it came to my mind

...just a draft...



Closings

Summarise
Actions for student
Formulation/agreement
Display of gratitude

Arranging/negotiating
appointments

(preference)

General chit-chat

(sometimes)

Thanks

So, I think the main things you need to do then are to reduce this, make it clear what you're focusing on, what are the major issues..what are the theories. And make sure every paragraph is very clear..

*I'm sure it will be fine after we discussed last time. Um, and then if you've made those changes, **cos I can't do too much with one assignment because is has to be your work, so I can't...***

Giving feedback in writing tutorials

- How do tutors highlight issues in writing?
- How do solutions / corrections happen?
- How do tutors find the balance between being overly directive, or being too vague?
- How is rapport maintained?
- How does the tutor encourage the student to have the confidence and skills to self-correct?

Extract example

Academic Skills Tutorial: 1-1 (T & S)
Up to 45 mins

Tutor: experienced ESOL teacher /
teacher trainer

Student: final year undergraduate; near
native speaker; return visit to the tutor

The start of the tutorial...

So what would you like to focus on today?

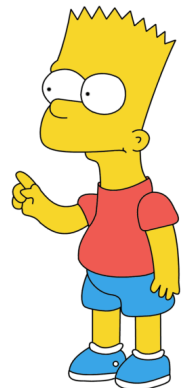
Erm I would like you to look at my work and correct my grammar and to see if...

Well remember that I can't correct your grammar, that's for you...

No not correct, feed, give me feedback.

Oh right, okay.

Sorry, I always say that.



The inferential path

Distance between
what people mean
and what they say

The shorter the path,
the more direct

(Mackiewicz & Riley
2003)

Longer paths are often
more polite, but have more
potential for
misunderstanding, esp
with L2s



Highlighting problems



T: this[↑] (2.5) I'm not su[↑]re[↓] abou::t (.5) that (1)
final sentence[↓] (.)

S: >the last one[↓]<

T: mmm::[↓][↓] °what do you think[↓]°
(2)

S: umm:: ((paper shuffling noises))
(6)

T: how does it link[↓]=

S: =OHkay >what[↑]< ih-ih- I was <just trying to
support> (2) dis what I put in[↓]

1) Signal the problem

"I'm not sure about..."

Inherent (mild) evaluation

(Mackiewicz 2005)

T implies problem is with reader, and not necessarily with text or student.

Evaluation is a face-threatening act, but mitigated by context – student is seeking feedback

2) T hands over to student

“What do you think?”

T tries to elicit problem from student (and implicitly tries to gain agreement that S there is a problem)

Empowering, student centred

Gives opportunity for S to respond

But – what happens if S can't see the problem?

(cf Kim & Silver 2016)

3) T prompts and guides

If S doesn't know what the issue is, T provides a more specific prompt

"How does it link?"

T may have to reformulate
- be more direct, and give a stronger evaluation

"Yeah, it doesn't link very well, in my eyes"

How do solutions happen?



Evaluations often followed by suggestions

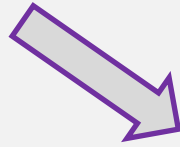
(Thonus 1999)

“In making suggestions, [tutors] insert themselves into the writer’s composing process and, consequently, may make writers defensive about changing their writing.”

(Mackiewicz. 2005, p. 365)

Finding (negotiating?) solutions

S quickly suggests deleting sentence



T not comfortable with this knee jerk reaction and suggests an alternative

If you were to, to keep it you'd have to sort of explain its...relevance a bit more

But... S still not sure how to do this

Agreeing on a solution

Evaluation and suggestion reformulated several times, T gets progressively more direct

but you need to make it clearer

So maybe you, it might be better if you put it at the beginning.

Until, T tentatively suggests a practical solution

(cf Stokoe & Sikveland 2016)

The tutorial path

- Feedback in tutorials highlights the effect of the writing on the reader.
- Lengthening the inferential path through elicitation of the problem scaffolds S in developing their skills in appraising their own writing
- Solutions become less important than process
- Time-consuming
- Must be done skilfully

General Reflections

- Did you recognise these phases and activities of the tutorial?
- How typical is the feedback example?
- How could this be used for Continuing Professional Development?
- Questions?

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