Conversation analysis

Đỗ Thu Thủy*

East Asia University of Technology

Abstract: *Conversation Analysis (CA) has been considered one of the critical approaches in Discourse Studies, which aims to understand how people maintain their interactions in daily spoken discourse (Paltridge, 2012). By carefully analyzing the transcriptions of audio and video recordings, CA examines the organization and development of spoken discourse that speakers perform in their everyday conversational interactions. Although this approach has contributed to language teaching and learning, it has attracted criticism with regard to the validity of the data. However, if CA combines with other methods such as ethnography and Critical Discourse Analysis, it would enhance the reliability of the technique. In other words, CA should be conducted in a kind of "multi-method" analysis which includes insights from CA and data from interviews, questionnaires, and participant observations (Wodak as cited in Paltridge, 2012). One major advantage of CA is to provide goals and practices for language teaching and learning, which help learners develop competent interactional outcomes. Therefore, teachers should employ CA findings in their courses, especially for listening and speaking classes.*

Keywords: *Conversation Analysis (CA), turn construction unit (TCU), transition relevance place (TRP)*

1. Introduction

Conversation Analysis (CA) has been considered one of the critical approaches in Discourse Studies, which aims to understand how people maintain their interactions in daily spoken discourse (Paltridge, 2012). By carefully analyzing the transcriptions of audio and video recordings, CA examines the organization and development of spoken discourse that speakers perform in their everyday conversational interactions. Although this approach has strong and weak points, it significantly contributes to learning and teaching languages.

2. Overview of Conversation Analysis (CA)

According to Paltridge (2012), CA focuses on the development of social relations through spoken discourse. CA aims to describe ordinary interactions in social contexts, which are performed from participant's perspectives instead of the views outside of the users (Flowerdew, 2013). Paltridge (2012) stated that CA considers everyday conversation the most primary form of talk, raising an issue when conversation analysts believe all other forms of talk as the same resource with ordinary conversation. Regarding the methodology, CA involves the detailed transcription of authentic audio or video recordings of occurring interactions (Jenks as cited in Flowerdew, 2013). The analysis includes many stages, and the tapes can be repeated many times until the analysts become familiar with the data. In addition, CA avoids starting with assumptions about the analysis; conversation analysis detail and carefully analyze the sequence, structure, and coherence of each conversational data instead of looking at the phenomenon that often occurs in the transcriptions (Paltridge, 2012). Thus, this approach is time-consuming and labor-intensive (Flowerdew, 2013; Paul, 1990). Another critical issue of CA is that it analyses the discourse using data as a primary source without focusing on the psychological motivation of interlocutors in turn-taking and other contextual factors that may be essential elements of the conversation (Paltridge, 2012; Paul, 1990). In terms of tools used for the discourse analysis, turn-taking is a starting point for CA. A turn is a basic unit in a conversation, and there will be no social interactions without turns (Wong & Waring, 2010). Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson (1974) hold a view of conversation turn-taking as a personally managed system in which interactants try to achieve "one speaker at a time" principle and minimize the gaps and overlaps between turns. The construction of different linguistics units, including words, phrases, clauses, or sentences, is called turn construction unit (TCU). A TCU is finished at a point that is considered a transition relevance place (TRP), which is not fixed because speakers can predict the completion of TCUs (Flowerdew, 2013). Speakers may take turns based on naturally acquired rules and automatically employed, but the way of turn-taking varies across cultures (Flowerdew, 2013).

3. Benefits of CA

The ultimate goal of language learning is communication, in other words, a conversation is as essential as a foundation for language use. Hence, CA has become a fundamental and innovative technique to achieve this goal, providing language teachers with the understanding of conversational constitution or talk-in-interaction, which refers to various types of talk from casual to institutional contexts (Wong & Waring, 2010). CA studies on aspects including openings and closing of the conversations, turn-taking, and sequences of adjacency pairs can help teachers and learners to become aware of the similarities and differences in the sequences and structures of the conversations between their first languages and English (Paltridge, 2012). For example, in the study of Hoa, Giang & Ket (2018), from the transcription of Vietnamese telephone recordings, the authors compared the model of the telephone conversation between English and Vietnamese, which helps teachers recognize the similar and different features of sequence and structure of a telephone conversation between English and Vietnamese cultures. A study like that can help teachers raise awareness of real conversation, which is the goal of speaking and listening skills in native and second or foreign-language contexts. It also helps textbook designers to recognize the differences among cultures and cross-cultural communication, potentially integrated into the syllabus and material development (Flowerdew, 2013).

Furthermore, CA has a great deal to offer to language pedagogy in providing learning goals and specific classroom practices. Wong (2002) found that the telephone dialogues in ESL textbooks are different from the real telephone interactions, which raises awareness of teachers and material writers about the mismatch between the conversation in the textbooks and the actual use in English-speaking countries. That finding can help teachers see the importance of authentic materials and a corpus of natural-occurring conversations. Then they can help their learners to have appropriate conversations in authentic contexts so that they can achieve communicative competency, which is one of the goals of language pedagogy (Hymes as cited in Wong, 2002). Specifically, teachers should not solely rely on a single textbook, but they should try to integrate authentic materials or authentic conversations in their classes. For instance, when applying a communication-based approach, teachers can invite native speakers to the class to talk with the students or employ online chat rooms as a suggestion

of Jenks (as cited in Olcay & Paul, 2011). Thus, the students can engage in a genuine conversation in which language is used outside the classroom setting. Additionally, Moreno & Peres (as cited in Olcay & Paul, 2011) noted that teachers should take advantage of DVD technology to facilitate learners' productive conversational skills. Otherwise, teachers can use video recordings of native speakers on the telephone or other types of face-to-face interaction and their transcripts from the internet together with textbooks to teach students how to communicate effectively in a particular discourse. According to McCarthy & Carter (as cited in Wong, 2002), it is time for language teachers and material designers to consider the systematic practices of natural-occurring contexts and focus on language through discourse and social process. Thorsten & Carmen (2006) also said that learners could explore L2 socio-pragmatics and be aware of sociocultural norms in the target language if they were exposed to authentic interactional moments. Therefore, integrating authentic recordings or authentic conversations in the syllabus can provide learners with exposure to the nature of talk-in-interaction, avoid cross-cultural misunderstanding. Gradually they can achieve interactional competence, which is the target of second or foreign language teaching speaking and listening skills (Flowerdew, 2013). Another activity could be a comparison between the transcripts of authentic recordings and the textbook dialogues. This exercise can help teachers and learners to evaluate the textbooks. One extra practice can be established in this activity is to have students discuss in pairs or groups the level of authenticity of the current textbook. After that, students can see the mismatch between the textbook dialogue and the authentic materials. This activity can help students become aware of the reality of authentic materials versus the inappropriateness of textbooks and help them be closer to the native-like purpose (Bowles & Seedhouse as cited in Flowerdew, 2013).

CA is not just a powerful tool to examine the native speaker's conversations; it can also be used to analyze second language acquisition. Markee (as cited in Paltridge, 2012) argued that it is essential to consider all participant's behavior and involvement in analysis. From this CA perspective, pair work or group work activities can be accomplished in an ESL classroom to identify the features of conversation and the nature of interactions that contribute to students' success in acquiring particular language items (Storch as cited in Paltridge, 2012). From this point of view,

one application that can be created in speaking classes is a portfolio of recordings. According to Olcay & Paul (2011), teachers can group students and give them particular topics, then students record their conversations, making a portfolio that teachers throughout the semester can monitor. Teachers can give feedback during the portfolio period. This portfolio can be used as an assessment at the end of the semester. This kind of practice can help students be aware of their L2 conversations' features and gradually improve their accuracy and fluency outcomes (Olcay & Paul, 2011).

4. Some limitations of CA

Although CA brings a significant contribution to discourse studies, it has been criticized about the methodology. CA relies totally on coding procedures, without concern in the interviews for participants' opinions and attitudes, quantitative data, or experimental methods. Moreover, the analysis of a large corpus of very detailed transcripts could be too much for researchers; they might select simplified transcripts based on their intuition, which may cause the problem with the validity of the data (Paul, 1990). Hammersley (as cited in Paltridge, 2012) also viewed a self-sufficient research tool of CA as problematic as it does not reflect the underlying context of a discourse when participants do not express their world view. Thus, this author argued that CA does not show us all about the social life of human beings if it does not combine with other qualitative and quantitative approaches. Other researchers such as Bucholtz, Moerman & Phillips (as cited in Paltridge, 2012) also agreed that CA should be conducted together with the ethnography method to understand contextual groundings of spoken discourse. Additionally, CA neglects to study speakers' social status and cultures, which are essential factors that may affect how they talk; thus, it might lead to invalid data. According to Kitzinger (as cited in Paltridge, 2012), CA will be not valuable if it does not work on the issues of power and political implications of discourse. Therefore, CA would be advantaged if researchers consider the power and cultures of the speakers in the discourse rather than just analyzing the text itself (Wetherell as cited in Paltridge, 2012).

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, CA is one of the critical methodological approaches in Discourse Studies that analyze verbal interaction, including face-to-face or telephone communication. Although this approach has contributed to language teaching and learning, it has attracted criticism with regard to the validity of the data. However, if CA combines with other methods such as ethnography and Critical Discourse Analysis, it would enhance the reliability of the technique. In other words, CA should be conducted in a kind of "multi-method" analysis which includes insights from CA and data from interviews, questionnaires, and participant observations (Wodak as cited in Paltridge, 2012). One major advantage of CA is to provide goals and practices for language teaching and learning, which help learners develop competent interactional outcomes. Therefore, teachers should employ CA findings in their courses, especially for listening and speaking classes.

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