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INTERRUPTION AND INTERRUPTED SPEECH

Introduction

A basic notion in linguistic interaction is that of turn-taking, ie the participants alternate to speak. Turn-taking can be said to be one criterion of conversation, without turn-taking no conversation. A model for the exchange of speaking-turns in conversation is presented by Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson (Language 50, 1974). They note that "overwhelmingly, one party talks at a time".

Aim

Although the passing of the turn from one speaker to another is generally a smooth process, this is seldom, if ever, the case throughout a whole conversation. Four types of 'unsmooth speaker-shift' were set up and tested: CUT OFF, OVERLAP, PARALLEL, and SIMULTANEOUS START. Further, how do the speakers react when they face interruption and joint talking. Two paralinguistic features, loudness and tempo, were selected to study this.

Material and Method

Three auditiely analysed and orthographically transcribed texts of conversational English were examined (The London-Lund Corpus of Spoken English). I collected all instances of 'unsmooth speaker-shift', recorded variation in loudness and tempo, and related this to the speakers.

Results

At the present stage, results have been obtained for only one conversation. Of the total number of speaker-shifts more than 1/3 were unsmooth ones. Of these SIM. STARTS and OVERLAPS were the most common. A participant who switched from listener to speaker before the current had stopped talking tended to deliver his utterance in a quicker or louder manner compared with his "normal" loudness and tempo. Also, these two features were occasionally employed by the current speaker as a technique for "defending" his right to continue.