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Using Conversation Analysis to Assess Speaking in Context: A Case of Korean Language Learners

Conversation Analysis (CA) is a predominantly qualitative method for studying the organization of interactive language use in context. Despite skeptics that the statistical results do not reflect the true nature of conversational phenomena, quantitative methods have been used to investigate interactional phenomena (Hoey and Kendrick, in press). This study is an attempt to examine certain aspects of Korean language learners' discourse in their unstructured interactions with native-Korean conversation partners outside the classroom. Those conversational aspects this study looks closely at include number of words, turn-taking, and code-switching to evaluate the effects of gender of the conversation partner, prior acquaintance with conversation partner, and heritage status of learner on the conversational aspects. Descriptive quantitative analysis of the conversational data collected from the 16 Korean language learners is initially examined and then in-depth interpretations of conversational data are provided to explicate the conversational characteristics.

CA of the interactions with conversation partners in this study reveal that those learners who had a female conversation partner were found to take more turns than those who had a male conversation partner. A prior relationship with conversation partners—relative to no prior relationship—resulted in a higher total number of words, and also more learner initiatives to switch from English discourse back into Korean. Also, heritage learners exceeded non-heritage learners on the total number of Korean words produced as well as on initiatives to code-switching from English to Korean. On the other hand, non-heritage learners exceeded heritage learners in initiating code-switching from Korean to English.

Key conversation characteristics are illustrated with transcripts from interactions to illustrate and amplify findings drawn from quantitative analyses in a qualitative fashion.

Finally, I discuss applications of CA to the assessment of speaking skills in foreign language learning and explore its implications of using CA as a tool for assessment.

References

Hoey, E. M. & Kendrick, K. H. (in press). Conversation Analysis. In A. M. B. de Groot & P. Hagoort (eds.), *Research Methods in Psycholinguistics: A Practical Guide*. Wiley Blackwell.