

Language-bound dialogic elements in Computer-Mediated and Face-to-Face Communication

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Introduction

The present study is designed to assess the contribution of dialogic elements to synchronous dyadic Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) as compared with Face-to-Face (FtF) Interaction and, secondly, to identify the basic contrasts between English and Polish in this respect. The elements analysed are (a) spatio-temporal conditioning of communication, (b) interactivity patterns in FtF and CMC, (c) topic-effect constraints, (d) discourse connection, (e) emotionality patterning, and (f) perception of interpersonal status roles.

The analysis involves samples of spoken conversational components of British National Corpus (BNC) and National Corpus of Polish (nkjp.pl) and the PELCRA corpora of Polish and English internet materials (PELCRA, Institute of English, University of Lodz). The internet language analysed comprises comments on online newspaper articles and to youtube presentations from the years 2011-2014.

The research methods applied are qualitative and quantitative. They include a study of the use of particular *discourse strategies* and *their linguistic realization* analyzed in terms of the type/token ratio, forms of address, metaphor and other figurative uses, utterance positive or negative polarity, axiology status expressed as valence associated with particular judgments and opinions, and their verbal manifestations. These occurrences are studied in terms of their frequencies of occurrence relative to dialogue topic, length and communication type.

Spatio-temporal conditioning

Both in CMC and FtF interaction the exchange is synchronous. The samples used for FtF discourse analysis are dyadic conversations, while in the case of CMC communication the general pattern are many-to-many exchanges, with frequent one-to-one (local) interactions between two individual users which are studied as materials in the present paper.

Typology of CMC and FtF Communication

Three types of online discourse practices involving comments on online newspaper articles are identified in Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (2014):

1. 'Ping-pong' communication between two, usually individual, interaction participants represents an autonomous and confrontational profile, targeted towards two polar judgments. It includes a relatively high number of feedback loops (replies, *likes*). It is framed in an argumentative, aggressive, discussion type.
2. 'Snowball' communication has a fully determined communicative profile with a clearly defined ultimate objective and an external opponent. The moves and turns are equally or more strongly confrontational than in the ping-pong type. The structure has an observable magnifying axis - stimulated by an increasing flow of energy present and rising, which leads to a climax, and not infrequently success, in real life (as e.g. in ACTA and OCCUPY movements).
3. 'String balloons' communication presents a looser interactional structure often around issues of social and moral value. This communication practice is weakly polarized and contains no one climax. It represents rather sets of interactional moves back and forth along a controversial theme, with frequent reminiscence of the individual's personal life experiences, in which users often digress from the main topic of the exchange.

It is argued in the present paper that some of the types (particularly ping-pong and loose-balloon types) correspond to the interactional dynamics of FtF discourses whereas some others (snowball communication) are shown to be more constrained and predominantly occurring in online many-to-many mass-communication exchanges. Furthermore, some of the relevant sub-types are preferably used in particular culture/language-bound contexts. The ping-pong type in both languages is schematic of a strongly confrontational two-party exchange:

National Corpus of Polish (dialogic)

A: namawiasz ją, by nie grała w drużynie narodowej Lit. 'you've been persuading her not to play in the national team'

B: - Bzdura - Jaki miałbym w tym interes?! Mnie zależy na tym, aby właśnie grała, wtedy wartość zawodniczkę idzie ostro w górę. Lit. 'Rubbish! What interest should I have in it? I just care for her to play, as then the player's value sharply increases'

Polish (internet comments)

Offensive, often vulgar ping-pong is more frequent in Polish CMC (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk in press)

A: A myślałem, że piłka nożna to gra dla ciot. 'And I thought that football is a game for gay people (offensive)'

B: a co? szukasz sportu dla siebie? 'Why, are you looking for a sport for yourself?'

A: oho, widzę, że kolejny siatkarz/piłkarz się obraził :) 'oh, I see that another volleyball/football player feels offended'

English

Ping-pong (internet – dialogic)

- Every single country in the EU needs a referendum; the people had no say, their governments joined in whether the people wanted it or not. Cameron's motive may be political but a good one anyway.

- Sorry, but clearly no. Where does this unflinching believe into the wisdom of referendums come from? I really feel the idea of "referendum" is almost exclusively brought up by those who realize their position on a single question has no representative majority.

Loose balloon (internet - dialogic)

A: I am a West Ham fan. When we are losing 4-0 with seconds left we sing: "5-4! we're gonna win 5-4!" It's an exquisite moment of gallows humour which, as you can imagine, I have enjoyed many times. To cut it short by blowing the whistle early is cruelty beyond words.

B: Ah, West Ham... wasn't there a football club that went by that name once? Such memories.

Topics

Although most of the topics discussed in FtF interaction overlap with those in CMC and present people, events or opinions, with a varying degree of reference to the commentators' individual lives and experiences, FtF interactions (private, non-surreptitious) are rarely observed to lead to effects on a global scale, present in the CMC snowball communication type.

Discourse Markers

The analysis identifies a number of discourse connectors which are used mainly in spoken FtF conversation and convey mainly negative meanings such as English modal-volitional-evaluative *Why x?* Pol. *Dlaczego x?*, *Oh no!* Polish *no nie!* (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2004, Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk & Tomaszczuk 2014), English *Not that*, Pol. *Nie (to), że(by)* (Schmid 2013) in some of their functions. In spoken Polish, and less often in CMC, a range of discourse connectors introduced by the particle *no* is used. The meaning of Polish *no* corresponds to a number of English sentence-connecting senses and approximates 'well / then/ all right' as in: *(No) tak* 'well yes', *(No) właśnie* 'just/precisely', *(No) dobra* 'well, all right'.

Emotionality

Strongly negative emotionality patterns are much more frequent in Polish CMC in the dyadic ping-pong exchange type (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk in press), and less frequent in English,

although this relation appears topic-sensitive (e.g. British presence in the European Union Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2013). Language-specific emotionality patterns are generated in the present work on the basis of the type and frequency of emotionally charged utterances, phrases and words.

Interpersonal status role perceptions

It is observed in both the CMC and FtF data that interactants perceive the hierarchical dominance of interpersonal roles in both languages, although in Polish CMC the interpersonal roles appear to play a less important part. Although this finding partly supports those research proposals which assume the presence of the impoverished social cues in CMC, the tendency is not seen to be universal (Ziegele 2014 for a discussion of dominant/subordinate roles in dyads).

Conclusions

Results comparing face-to-face (FtF) and synchronous CMC dialogues in cross-linguistic contacts indicate both inter-modal as well as cross-linguistic/cultural differences with respect to communicative preferences, as reflected in the investigated language structures. Worth further investigation is the amount and role of confrontational, negative meanings present in CMC dialogues, and asymmetrically distributed in English and Polish.

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Samples

British National Corpus

National Corpus of Polish nkjp.pl

Internet comments to online publications

UK *Telegraph*, European Football Championship EURO2012 finals between Spain and Italy on 3 July 2012 (**English**) <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/tomchiversscience/100168696/euro-2012-iker-casillas-spain-and-sportsmanship>

Volleyball player of the winning team in a match between Trentino and Rome *Osmany Juantorena's Funny Serve Insults Opponents* (**Polish**) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9YgyXFOZnMs&feature=player_embedded

UK EU Referendum: Huffington Post (Reuters) UK EU "Referendum: David Cameron Promises In-Out Vote In 2015" by Andrew Osborn and Peter Griffiths, published on 23 January 2013 (**English**)