ICIP14

Tracking the development of interactional competence:
Using longitudinal conversation analysis to understand situated learning

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The development of interactional competence has been studied by employing Conversation Analysis (CA) in a longitudinal design to reveal trajectories of change in individuals' interactional practices within a given speech-exchange system (SES). If an individual has the opportunity to participate in the same SES multiple times, s/he can modify certain interactional practices to achieve goals more effectively and efficiently. SESs are recurring, recognizable episodes of interaction with distinctive practices for turn-taking, turn design, repair, sequence organization, overall structural organization, and so on – practices which are co-constructed and oriented to by participants and which are constrained by functional needs and contextual factors (Schegloff, 1999; Drew & Heritage, 1992). It is the recurrent nature of these practices, and the fact that they are visibly displayed in situated discourse, that enables a newcomer to acquire them (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970; Kasper, 2009; Nguyen, 2012; Vygotsky, 1978). A question that arises is: what happens when a learner moves from one SES to another?

Using data consisting of classroom role-plays and workplace performance by a pharmacy student in the United States, I aim to explore the answer to the above question by tracking the learner's changes over time in patient consultations with respect to (a) sequence organization, (b) overall structural organization and (c) turn design in the formulation of key actions and referents. I first describe how the learner developed her competencies in role-play consultations in the classroom and then examine whether and how she carried these acquired competencies to consultations at the pharmacy.

The findings suggest that the transfer of interactional competence from training simulation to workplace performance is by no means a simple exportation of learned skills. Although there was evidence of direct competence transfer, some competencies that were developed in the role-plays disappeared, and some were adjusted, relearned, and even reversed while some new competencies emerged only in the clerkship consultations. Thus, competence development across SESs is highly sensitive to the constraints and demands of institutional settings. Further, learning is situated not only at the contextual level (cf. Lave & Wenger, 1992) but also at the interactional level. Based on the findings, I draw implications for communication training in professional settings and elucidate the challenges and promises in using conversation analysis in a longitudinal design to understand competence development.