Book review of Kang-Kwong Luke/Theodossia-Souala Pavlidou: Telephone Calls. Unity and Diversity in Conversational Structure across Languages and Cultures.

Barron, Anne

LINGUIST List 14.1666

Thu Jun 12 2003

Review: Pragmatics: Luke & Pavlidou, ed. (2002)

Editor for this issue: Naomi Ogasawara <naomilinguistlist.org>

https://linguistlist.org/issues/14/14-1666.html

What follows is a review or discussion note contributed to our Book Discussion Forum. We expect discussions to be informal and interactive; and the author of the book discussed is cordially invited to join in.

If you are interested in leading a book discussion, look for books announced on LINGUIST as "available for review." Then contact Simin Karimi at siminlinguistlist.org.

Directory

- Anne Barron, [Telephone Calls: Unity and Diversity in Conversational Structure](#)

Message 1: Telephone Calls: Unity and Diversity in Conversational Structure

Date: Thu, 12 Jun 2003 14:26:40 +0000
From: Anne Barron <a.barronuni-bonn.de>
Subject: Telephone Calls: Unity and Diversity in Conversational Structure

Luke, Kang Kwong and Pavlidou, Theodossia-Soula, ed. (2002) Telephone Calls: Unity and Diversity in Conversational Structure Across Languages and Cultures, John Benjamins Publishing Company, Pragmatics and Beyond New Series 101.

Announced at http://linguistlist.org/issues/14/14-182.html

Anne Barron, University of Bonn (Germany)

OVERVIEW

The present volume is devoted to the study of language use in telephone calls across cultures. It has its beginnings in a panel of the same title organised by the editors, Kang Kwong Luke and Theodossia-Soula Pavlidou, at the 6th International Pragmatics Conference held in Reims in July 1998. Complementing those papers presented on this occasion are three further papers written by Emanuel A. Schegloff, Paul ten Have and Yong-Yae Park. The main aim of the

volume is, as the editors also state (p. 18), to "bring together studies of telephone conversations in different languages and cultures in order to facilitate comparisons across both linguistic and cultural boundaries". In so doing, they wish to highlight areas of cultural variation and also to arrive at reliable generalisations regarding telephone interaction across cultures.

The volume comprises an introduction, three main sections consisting of a total of nine papers written by an international group of ten researchers from three continents, and a subject and name index. While Cantonese, Greek, Japanese, Korean, and Persian are the primary languages under investigation, data from American English, Danish, Dutch, Ecuadorian Spanish and German is also discussed. The approaches employed vary, and include research from a conversational analytical and ethnographical, discourse analytical framework but the conversational analytical work conducted by Harvey Sacks and Emanuel Schegloff forms the starting point for most of the empirical papers. Finally, it should be noted that the majority of papers concentrate on the description of naturally-occurring telephone call data in one particular culture although Rasmussen and Wagner investigate aspects of international telephone calls.

The book begins with a comprehensive introduction by the editors in which they outline the aims and focus of interest of different approaches (sociological, methodological and intercultural) which have been taken to the study of telephone calls. A short overview is also given of previous research on telephone calls, particularly in view of universal and culture-specific aspects of such interactions. Gaps in the research are also highlighted and the agenda for the edited volume set.

Section one is the longest of the three sections, encompassing 106 pages and four papers. It is devoted to the opening phases of telephone calls, the most comprehensively researched aspect of telephone conversations to date. The first contribution in section one is entitled "Recognition and identification in Japanese and Korean telephone conversation openings." Here, in an analysis of 120 Japanese and 120 Korean telephone openings, Yong-Yae Park focuses on the identification/recognition sequence, one of four sequences found by Emanuel Schegloff to occur in the opening section of telephone calls. Park's particular focus is on self-identification but she notes that contrary to prescriptive work in Japanese, and also contrary to Korean folk-etiquette, other-recognition does also occur in both languages when the relationship between the caller and recipient is very close. Self-identification is, however, strongly preferred, particularly in Japanese. Park identifies two types of self-identification in Japanese and Korean. The first type involves the use of "nuntey" or "kedo", linguistic particles in Korean and Japanese respectively, which mark a projected subsequent action. This type of self-identification is found to give an interaction a business-like tone since the use of "nuntey" or "kedo" marks self-identification as a preliminary action to an action to a subsequent action (i.e. giving the reason for the call or performing a switchboard request). In the second type of self-identification, on the other hand, "kedo" or "nuntey" are not present. Consequently, it is the self-identification itself which is portrayed as the primary activity in such cases. In this way, the interaction achieves the status of an informal, "just to say hi", exchange.

The starting point of Maria Sifianou's paper, "On the telephone again! Telephone conversation openings in Greek", is also Schegloff's research on American telephone calls. Her analysis is based on 121 telephone openings in Greek recorded from five adults and 675 recordings

collected by students of their own interactions. This data base consists predominantly of personal or familiar conversations. Unlike Park's analysis, Sifianou analyses her data in terms of all four core sequences of the canonical opening identified by Schegloff (summons-answer, identification or recognition, greeting and lastly, initial inquiries and responses to these). She finds that while all four sequences can occur, they do so only rarely in Greek telephone calls and only in cases of social distance. Moreover, in such situations the sequences tend to be organised in an interlocking manner rather than according to the principle of serial organisation - in other words, a number of sequences may be compressed into one turn. Sifianou also shows that the most common sequence between close interlocutors in her data is a two-sequence canonical pattern, consisting of a summons-answer and a how-are-you. Preemptive/ situation-specific moves which introduce the first topic prior to the end of the opening phases are also a feature of her data. In conclusion, Sifianou argues that it is not possible to identify the same order in Greek telephone openings as in North American openings given a large degree of situation-specificity in the canonical structure in Greek which she finds linked to a high level of spontaneity and verbal play. These findings are suggested to relate to the strong interpersonal role of telephone calls in Greece (cf. also Antonopoulou/Sifianou 2003 on humour in Greek telephone calls).

The third contribution in this section, "Telephone conversation openings in Persian" is written by Carmen Taleghani-Nikazm. Her data is drawn from a total of 87 telephone interactions from seven individuals located in Iran, and includes both formal (characterised by social distance and social dominance) and informal (close relationship between interlocutors) conversations. Similar to Sifianou, Taleghani-Nikazm employs Schegloff's framework to structure her analysis. She focuses on the differences between formal and informal interactions from the point of view of "taarof", a politeness behaviour in Persian according to which each participant employs verbal and non-verbal means to indicate their own lower status relative to that of their interlocutor and to show their interlocutor's relative higher status. Differences motivated by "taarof" are found to exist between formal and informal telephone interactions on the level of the identification/ recognition, greeting and how-are-you sequences, as, e.g., in the choice of linguistic routines. In addition, lengthy, ritualised how-are-you sequences directed towards the co-participant and his/her family are found to be a feature of both formal and informal interactions.

The fourth and last paper in this section on openings, "Language choice in international telephone conversations" by Gitte Rasmussen and Johannes Wagner, differs somewhat from the previous three in that it concerns language choice in telephone openings in an international business context. Data is drawn from telephone conversations made by employees in a Danish company to employees of various other companies in Belgium, France, Germany, Iceland, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The choice of language is found to be made quickly and very early on in the call. Most frequently, it is the language of the answerer which dictates the language of the call. However, in cases where the caller's language competence is insufficient, e.g., s/he may reject the answerer's choice and instead switch to his/her preferred language of communication, hoping that his/her interlocutor will recognise and be competent in it. Another possibility is when participants communicate a wish to draw on a previous language choice by simply identifying themselves. The authors rightly caution that these results may not apply to telephone interactions initiated by native speakers of major languages, such as English or German. Further research is required.

Section two concentrates on problem solving, topic management and closing phases in telephone interactions. Yotsukura's chapter, "Reporting problems and offering assistance in Japanese business telephone conversations", is the first contribution in this section. The paper provides an analysis of the reporting of service-related problems by two employees in Japan, experienced in institutional interactions. Openings are addressed and indeed, complement Park's paper in this volume, but Yotsukura's main focus is on the way in which problems are reported in her data and the manner in which solutions are offered. Yotsukura finds that there is a tendency for her callers to avoid producing an FTA bald on the record when reporting problems. Instead callers engage in linguistic framing of important details relating to the problem at hand in order to guide the service provider to infer the nature of the problem him/ herself. Yotsukura comments that such linguistic behaviour is also in line with the Japanese notion of "enryo-sasshi" according to which the direct expression of thoughts and feelings is dispreferred in favour of anticipation of such thoughts and feelings by others. Despite previous experience of institutional calls, misalignments are, however, found to occur between the participants due, in Jefferson/Lee's (1981) terms, to "interactional asymmetry" in the expectations of the participants.

The second paper in this section, "The initiation and introduction of first topics in Hong Kong telephone calls" by Kang Kwong Luke, shows topic organisation in telephone conversations in Hong Kong (105 calls between family and friends + 28 business calls) to be strikingly similar to previous descriptions of American English. Kang Kwong Luke finds, namely, that the reason for the call is usually the first topic in his Cantonese data and that this is also introduced at the anchor position. In addition, in most cases, it is the caller who introduces the reason for the call although the recipient may also be involved in this process, i.e. either in topic initiation ("dim aa?" (what's up?)) or introduction (e.g. when returning a call). Preemptions and deferrals of the reason for call are, however, also found possible in both cultures but these are of an exceptional nature. Finally, Luke notes that the topic markers employed in Cantonese and American English are semantically and functionally similar.

"Moving towards closing. Greek telephone calls between familiars" is the final paper in the second section. Here, Theodossia-Soula Pavlidou addresses the need for research on the closing phases of telephone calls with an investigation of the transition from last topic to closing section in Greek. She analyses 65 naturally occurring informal calls between friends and relatives recorded at home by nine young adults (undergraduate or postgraduate students of hers). Pavlidou finds that while the canonical closings identified by Schegloff, which show a clear-cut distinction between the closing part and the last topic, do occur in Greek telephone interactions, they represent the marked case, only occurring in exceptional situations where there is a demand for an "interactionally economical solution". Such situations include those characterised by urgency or by situational constraints (e.g. a non-work-related conversation in the office). Rather, the unmarked case in Greek telephone conversations is to "move towards the closing" gradually. This is done, Pavlidou finds, by employing a wide variety of devices which focus on interactional aspects. Interactants are found, e.g., to highlight any agreement existing between them, and also to use possible pre-closings along with other conversational features, such as latching, simultaneity, or particles of familiarity -- all strategies to prepare the closing and to assure the co-participant that termination of the call is not a sign of rejection. While the findings here echo previous research on the importance of building relationships and showing solidarity in Greek language use and also point to a contrast between telephone language use in Greek and Ecuadorian Spanish on the one hand and

Finnish or German on the other, Pavlidou warns of the dangers of forming premature generalisations and instead underlines the need for further research in different cultures with similar informants.

The last section, section three, is the shortest of the three sections, encompassing only two papers and covering a total of 48 pages. It is concerned with theoretical and methodological considerations of the analysis of telephone calls. In the first contribution here, "Comparing telephone call openings: Theoretical and methodological reflections", Paul ten Have, taking the case of telephone openings, cautions against comparing research undertaken within different frameworks and under differing assumptions. Specifically, and with direct reference to a number of papers in the volume under discussion, he criticises a tendency to take Schegloff's canonical descriptions at face value. In this context, ten Have, with reference to previous research findings on Dutch, in particular, suggests that the current focus on structural issues of telephone calls should be replaced by a functional perspective according to which the analysis of telephone openings would focus on three functions, also identified by Schegloff, namely connection work, relation work and topic work. Ten Have argues that while there will be variation in forms across culture and time, these functions will remain constant.

Similar to the contribution by Paul ten Have, the final paper in the volume, "Reflections on research on telephone conversation: Issues of cross-cultural scope and scholarly exchange, interactional import and consequences" by Emanuel A. Schegloff, presents a critical assessment of the empirical papers in the present volume and indeed of recent research in the analysis of telephone calls. Schegloff first stresses the value of a template, such as the canonical opening, in guiding analyses of telephone interactions in different cultures, arguing that the literature to date, while revealing variation across culture, also points to the existence of a common underlying structure. Indeed, the function of presenting the canonical opening in Schegloff (1986) was, he explains, not to claim universality but rather to guide further analysis by highlighting the default option, and in so doing alerting analysts to the importance of departures from this structure in particular interactions. Recent research has, however, Schegloff notes, ignored the importance of analysing single phases of a telephone conversation, e.g. openings, with regard to their function in the particular interaction as a whole and instead tended to engage in contrastive analyses of openings or closings in their own right with the sole intention of highlighting national characteristics or cultural differences. An appeal is made for further research to concentrate on the role of particular forms (or the absence thereof) in the particular interaction and cultural context under analysis. Only when such research exists for a number of cultural contexts, can comparisons be made. Finally, Schegloff addresses aspects of presentation in research articles concerned with languages other than the language of the article. He argues that while translations and glosses are necessary, caution should be exercised in the choice of equivalent and research on language use consulted.

OVERALL EVALUATION

Telephone communication has been the subject of much research to date, with an increase in contrastive analyses since the late 1980s, concentrating in particular on telephone openings. The volume at hand continues this trend towards cross-cultural analyses by contrasting findings for one culture with those of other investigations in the same volume and also with

previous research findings for other languages and cultures. Although the research prejudice towards openings is clearly seen (four of the seven empirical papers dealing with opening sequences), closings and topic organisation, both areas which have only received limited attention to date, are also addressed in the present volume. This contribution to the existing knowledge of differing conversational structures in different cultures is of particularly invaluable benefit in today's world in the light of the recent growth in communication between different cultures in Europe and indeed internationally since although it may not be necessary or even desirable for a particular party to adopt a native-speaker norm in communication with interactants of other cultures (cf. Enomoto/Marriott 1994:155f, House/Kasper 2000:113f, Kasper 1998:200), an awareness of differences is a valuable aid to avoiding potential misunderstandings. Indeed, it is also suggested that foreign language teaching materials should embrace such descriptions and contrastive findings particularly in the light of the sparse attention paid to pragmatics in foreign language teaching to date (cf. Judd 1999), the imprecision found in the representation of pragmatic issues in teaching materials (cf. Bardovi-Harlig 2001, Bardovi-Harlig et al. 1991, Hassall 1997:154ff), and importantly in the light of research revealing the general teachability of pragmatics (cf. Kasper 1997, 2000:388f, 2001:17).

Not only do its contrastive focus, the wide applicability of its findings or the wide coverage of languages analysed make this volume a worthwhile collection of papers. Rather, the particularly unique aspect of the book is the breath of perspectives which it offers on telephone communication. Particularly admirable and noteworthy in this regard is the editors' inclusion of a criticism of the volume's empirical papers by Paul ten Have and Emanuel Schegloff, both eminent researchers in the field of conversational analysis. These researchers pose important questions regarding the assumptions and methodology employed in the empirical papers of the volume and in previous telephone research, and propose suggestions for approaching further research. There is no doubt but that telephone research can only benefit from such an exchange of perspectives and the interesting discussion which results.

Some issues I would like to comment on:

Firstly, it is disappointing that none of the papers take the effect of recent developments in telephone technology, such as caller number display (or caller name display), into account. Such developments, it is suggested, will increasingly influence the structure of telephone calls since caller display, e.g., will make the identification/ recognition sequence superfluous at times and also possibly change the nature of the summons-answer sequence. Further research is required on this issue. Related to this matter is the volume's somewhat narrow concentration on traditional telephone interactions despite the fact that the editors note in the introduction to the volume that "More recently the cellular telephone has become widely available and is taking over many countries by storm" (p. 4), suggesting subsequently that this fact contributes to the claim that "telephone calls have become another primordial site of speech communication and fully deserve to be studied extensively and in depth." Indeed, caution should be advised in equating mobile/ cellular phone communication with traditional telephoning since the high cost per minute, the frequent lower quality reception and the variable location may, e.g., trigger changes in conversational structure. An opening phase may, e.g., involve routine requests for information (e.g. "Where are you?") and reports on actions (e.g. I'm in a traffic jam). In addition, lack of speaker identification is a further frequent feature given the caller display function, as Bodomo has found for mobile phone

interactions in Cantonese (cf. Bodomo 2001).

A further drawback of the volume, in my opinion, is the lack of information or discussion concerning how recordings were actually carried out -- in the interest of replicability this would have been welcomed (cf., e.g., references such as Engdahl 2001). Papers either make no mention of the technology employed or reference is only made in passing, as is the case in Yotsukura's paper ("? tape recorders were connected directly to the incoming telephone line with a special adapter?) and Park's paper ("The recording device I used recorded both outgoing and incoming calls automatically"). No further information is given on such "special adapters."

Finally, with the exception of the paper by Maria Sifianou, the conversational structure of telephone conversations in a particular culture is largely viewed in a vacuum without reference to the structure of face-to-face communication in that culture (cf. e.g., research by Aston 1995, House 1982, Laver 1981, Lï¿½ger 1993 on, e.g., openings and closings in everyday communication). This is understandable given the focus of the present volume on cross-cultural issues. However, it is suggested that such a comparison would aid in highlighting the specificities of telephone communication.

CONCLUSION

Notwithstanding these criticisms, this is a first-class volume, representing an important contribution to the study of language in use, and to the contrastive study of telephone calls in particular. The editors should be credited for a very well edited volume not only on the level of style and format, but also of content, the overall coherence achieved by a commendable focus and extensive cross-referencing between papers. All contributions are well-written and comparatively easy to read, making the volume accessible to a wide range of audiences. The book is of particular interest to those students and researchers of language use across culture, but its findings may be applied to the foreign language classroom.

REFERENCES

Antonopoulou, E./Sifianou, M. (2003), Conversational dynamics of humour: The telephone game in Greek. Journal of Pragmatics 35, 741-769.

Aston, G. (1995), Say 'thank you': Some pragmatic constraints in conversational closings. Applied Linguistics 16, 1, 57-86.

Bardovi-Harlig, K. (2001), Evaluating the empirical evidence: Grounds for instruction in pragmatics? In: Rose, K. R. & Kasper, G. (eds.), Pragmatics in language teaching. NY: Cambridge University Press: 13-32.

Bardovi-Harlig, K., Hartford, B. A. S., Mahan-Taylor, R., Morgan, M. J. & Reynolds, D.W. (1991), Developing pragmatic awareness: Closing the conversation. ELT Journal 45, 1, 4-15.

Bodomo, A. (2001), Linguistic features of MPC [mobile phone Cantonese] - Voice. Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong. Retrieved 2003-06-02 from the World Wide Web: http://www.hku.hk/linguist/research/bodomo/MPC/Vfeatures.html

Engdahl, T. (2001), Telephone line audio interface circuits. Espoo: Helsinki University of Technology. Retrieved 2003-06-09 from the World Wide Web: http://www.hut.fi/Misc/Electronics/circuits/teleinterface.html

Enomoto, S. & Marriott, H. (1994), Investigating evaluative behaviour in Japanese tour guiding interaction. Multilingua 13, 1-2, 131-161.

Hassall, T. J. (1997), Requests by Australian learners of Indonesian. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Australian National University.

House, J. (1982), Opening and closing phases in German and English dialogues. Grazer Linguistische Studien 16, 52-82.

House, J. & Kasper, G. (2000), How to remain a non-native speaker. In: Riemer, C. (ed.), Kognitive Aspekte des Lehrens und Lernens von Fremdsprachen. Cognitive aspects of foreign language learning and teaching: Festschrift fuer Willis J. Edmondson zum 60. Geburtstag. Tuebingen: Narr: 101-118.

Judd, E. L. (1999), Some issues in the teaching of pragmatic competence. In: Hinkel, E. (ed.), Culture in second language teaching and learning. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 152-166.

Kasper, G. (1997), Can pragmatic competence be taught? (NetWork #6) [HTML document]. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, Second Language Teaching & Curriculum Center. Retrieved 2003-06-09 from the World Wide Web: http://www.nflrc.hawaii.edu/NetWorks/NW06/

Kasper, G. (1998), Interlanguage pragmatics. In: Byrnes, H. (ed.), Learning foreign and second languages: Perspectives in research and scholarship. NY: Modern Language Association: 183-208.

Kasper, G. (2000), Unterrichtsforschung zur Lernersprachenpragmatik - eine Forschungsluecke. In: Helbig, B., Kleppin, K. & Koenigs, F. G. (eds.), Sprachlehrforschung im Wandel: Beitraege zur Erforschung des Lehrens und Lernens von Fremdsprachen. Festschrift fuer Karl-Richard Bausch zum 60. Geburtstag. Tuebingen: Stauffenburg: 383-402.

Kasper, G. (2001), Learning pragmatics in the L2 classroom. In: Bouton, L.F. (ed.), Pragmatics and language learning, vol. 10. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Division of English as an International Language: 1-25.

Laver, J. (1981), Linguistic routines and politeness in greeting and parting. In: Coulmas, F. (ed.), Conversational routine. Explorations in standardized communication situations and prepatterned speech. The Hague, etc.: Mouton: 289-304.

Lï¿½ger, H.-H. (1993), Routinen und Rituale in der Alltagskommunikation. Fernstudieneinheit 6. Berlin, etc.: Langenscheidt.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Anne Barron is Assistant Professor in the English Department of the University of Bonn, Germany. Her main research interests include interlanguage pragmatics, cross-cultural pragmatics (particularly pragmatic variation within English), sociolinguistics and language in the media. She has recently published the monograph "Acquisition in Interlanguage Pragmatics. Learning how to do things with words in a study abroad context" with Benjamins (2003).