

Daniela Mereu & Silvia Dal Negro
(Free University of Bozen-Bolzano)

Different methods for spontaneous speech elicitation: conversational and linguistic issues

This contribution aims to discuss some methodological issues related to the influence of the different techniques of spontaneous data elicitation on the conversational and linguistic structure.

The notion of spontaneity refers to the mode of speech production in relation to the conditions of data elicitation (Warner 2012). Spontaneous speech covers a wide range of speech production modes, because it includes anything that is not read or prepared, such as Map Tasks, interviews and conversations. However, different data elicitation strategies will produce changes in the speech event; consequently, we expect that different types of spontaneous speech show linguistic differences due to the strategy used.

To investigate this hypothesis, we focused on three recordings of Italian spontaneous speech, obtained in different ways: a semi-structured interview (duration: 36'57''; effective speech: 32'1''; tokens: 5635), a dialogue (duration: 33'02''; effective speech: 27'; tokens: 4713), and a Map Task (duration: 11'54''; effective speech: 9'4''; tokens: 1636). To limit the sources of variation, the same pair of speakers has been recorded for the three events: two 50-year-old friends, native speakers of Italian, born and living in Bolzano.

First, we analyzed some indicators considered as cues of spontaneity, such as the amount of silence, speech overlaps, disfluencies (interruptions and repetitions), laughter and speech laugh, speech rate (Kouwenhoven et al. 2018). The values obtained were normalized for the duration of each recording or the amount of effective speech, depending on the parameter examined. We found significant differences among the three conversations, related to their structure. We will give here only an example.

The highest amount of interruptions (1.83%) and overlaps (5.14%) for the Map Task, especially compared to dialogue (0.89% and 1.49%, respectively), can be explained with the different tasks requested: while in the first the speakers have a specific goal to reach and they need to be precise with the indications to their interlocutor, in the dialogue, speakers had plenty of time to manage the conversation and there was no a specific task, except that of talking about different topics.

Secondly, we will provide an analysis on the distribution of discourse markers (DMs) in the three conversations, distinguishing among different functions, i.e. interactional, metatextual and cognitive (Bazzanella 1995). An exploratory investigation showed that among the interactional DMs, in all conversations, turn-taking devices and back-channel expressions are used (e.g. *allora* 'so', *capito* 'understood'), but in the Map Task we reported the absence of connectives with a phatic function underling a shared knowledge (e.g. *sai* 'you know'), used both in dialogue and interview. Furthermore, the metatextual connectives, related to the organization of the ongoing discourse (Fraser 2009), tend to be used much more in the dialogue and interview rather than in Map Task. As the results seem promising, we will extend the conversational and DMs analysis to a larger dataset including three recordings for every speech event.

Although preliminary, these results show that the data elicitation method can be a relevant factor in the analysis of the distribution and the frequency of certain linguistic phenomena related to the conversational structure.

References

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