Conversation: From description to pedagogy
Conversation: From description to pedagogy

Scott Thornbury and Diana Slade
Contents

Thanks and acknowledgements viii

Introduction 1

1 Characterizing conversation 5
   Introduction 5
   1.1 The nature of conversation 5
   1.2 Approaches to the analysis of conversation 27
       Summary 37

2 The vocabulary of conversation 40
   Introduction 40
   2.1 Lexical size 42
   2.2 Lexical density and lexical variety 43
   2.3 Lexical frequency 45
   2.4 Lexical repetition 49
   2.5 Vague language 54
   2.6 Fillers 56
   2.7 Discourse markers and other inserts 57
   2.8 Routines and lexical phrases 62
   2.9 Appraisal and involvement 65
   2.10 Implications 69

3 The grammar of conversation 73
   Introduction 73
   3.1 Complexity 75
   3.2 Heads and tails 80
   3.3 Grammatical incompletion 83
   3.4 Ellipsis 83
   3.5 Deixis 85
   3.6 Questions 86
   3.7 Tense and aspect 90
   3.8 Modality 94
   3.9 Reporting 98
   3.10 What do learners need to know? 100
Contents

4 The discourse features of conversation 107
   Introduction 107
   4.1 Cohesion in conversation 108
   4.2 Interaction in conversation 113
   4.3 Topic management: Topic development, topic change and topic choice 127
   4.4 Discourse strategies 130
   Summary 137

5 Genres in conversation: Storytelling and gossiping 142
   Introduction 142
   5.1 Chat and Chunks in conversation 142
   5.2 Genre theory 145
   5.3 Storytelling genres 151
   5.4 Lexico-grammatical features of storytelling genres 159
   5.5 Storytelling genres: Summary 168
   5.6 Gossip 170
   5.7 Lexico-grammatical features of gossip 177
   5.8 Gossip genre 180
   5.9 Classroom implications 180
   Summary 182

6 Acquiring L1 conversational competence 186
   Introduction 186
   6.1 Conversational competence 186
   6.2 Turntaking 188
   6.3 Child-directed speech 190
   6.4 Formulaic language 192
   6.5 Repetition 194
   6.6 Scaffolding 196
   6.7 Syntax: Vertical constructions 197
   6.8 Cohesion 198
   6.9 Coherence 199
   6.10 Functions, genres and speech acts 200
   6.11 Pragmatics 203
   6.12 Educated discourse: Talk at school 204
   6.13 Sociocultural theory and ‘instructional conversation’ 206

7 Acquiring L2 conversational competence 214
   Introduction 214
   7.1 Fluency 214
   7.2 Formulaic language 218
   7.3 Communication strategies 219
# Contents

7.4 Pragmatic competence 223  
7.5 Transfer 224  
7.6 Acquisition vs learning 230  
7.7 Classroom talk 238  

8 Teaching conversation: A history 247  
Introduction 247  
8.1 Pre-reform and reform 247  
8.2 Direct method: Learning-through-conversation 249  
8.3 Audiolingualism: Drills, dialogues and the conversation class 251  
8.4 Situational English: Conversation in context 252  
8.5 Oral English: Conversation as speaking practice 254  
8.6 CLT: Conversation as communication 255  
8.7 Task-based learning: Conversation as a task 266  

9 Teaching conversation: Approach, design, procedure and process 274  
Introduction 274  
9.1 Approach 275  
9.2 Design 281  
9.3 Procedure 295  
9.4 Process 307  
Conclusion 318  

Task key 326  
References 342  
Author index 358  
Subject index 361  

© Cambridge University Press  
www.cambridge.org
The idea of co-authoring a book on conversation emerged, appropriately enough, out of a conversation. Through conversation, we discovered a mutual interest in conversation – and in its description and its teaching. The combination of our two specialisms – linguistic description, on the one hand, and teacher education, on the other – seemed to represent a plausible, even original, vantage point from which current research into spoken language could be surveyed and evaluated. That initial conversation has been prolonged and nourished over many years, albeit mostly at a distance, and against the backdrop of our separate, and often demanding, professional and personal lives. Credit for encouraging us to keep talking the talk, and for helping turn the talk into a book, must go to Mickey Bonin, previously of Cambridge University Press, for whose enthusiasm, support and extraordinary patience, we owe an incalculable debt. We would also like to thank the publishing team at CUP, and Jane Walsh in particular, as well as our indefatigable editor, Sylvia Goulding. Special thanks are due, too, to Jane Evison for her careful reading of the manuscript and for her insightful suggestions: these were an invaluable aid in the preparation of the final draft.

Diana Slade would also like to thank the following: Christian Matthiessen, who has been a constant source of support and inspiration about spoken language; Susie Eggins, the co-author of her previous book on conversation, for the many insights that she gained from her; and Helen Joyce, who read and commented in detail on drafts of some of the chapters: Helen has always been very generous with her time and made many helpful suggestions. She would also like to thank four other colleagues for their support and the many discussions on aspects of applied linguistics: Hermine Scheeres, Tim McNamara, Erich Steiner and Solange Vereza. And she thanks her colleagues both within and outside the University of Technology, Sydney, and her friends, for their endless patience and for putting up with conversations about this book for far too many years.

Both authors are grateful to the UTS and Macquarie University’s OZTALK team for their permission to use the spoken language corpora, and especially to Penny Biggins, for her painstaking work on the transcriptions.
Thanks and acknowledgements

Scott Thornbury thanks his colleagues at International House, Barcelona, as well as the many students and trainees who have unwittingly helped both shape his thinking and pilot many of the activities. Particular thanks are due to Jessica Mackay and Patrick Obregon for permission to use transcripts of their classes.

On a more personal note, the writing of this book would not have been possible without the unconditional support of Piet, Philip, Olivia, Georgia, and Gwen: we thank you all.

The authors and publishers are grateful to the following for permission to use copyright material. While every effort has been made, it has not been possible to identify the sources to all of the material used and in such cases the publishers would welcome information from the copyright owners. Apologies are expressed for any omissions.

The publishers are grateful to the following for permission to reproduce copyright material.

For the text on p.6: ‘Hail Shatters City’ which appeared in *The Sydney Morning Herald* 15 April 1999. Used by permission of *The Sydney Morning Herald*.


Thanks and acknowledgements


For the text on p.261: ‘Closing a conversation’ and for the text on p.322: ‘Changing the topic’, from Beach Street: An English Course for Adults (Student’s Book 2), © NSW Adult Migrant English Service, 1998.


For the text on p.306: Common European of Reference for Language: learning, teaching assessment, © Council of Europe.
To the memory of John Slade