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CHAIR'S MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE: GOVERNING THE FLOW OF THE INTERACTION IN THE DISCUSSION SESSIONS OF A SPECIALIZED CONFERENCE

Abstract

This paper examines a section of the *Multimodal Academic Spoken Corpus* (MASC), which contains the video recording and transcription of the presentations and subsequent discussion sessions that took place at a specialized international conference on chemistry held at the Universitat Jaume I. The study focuses on the subcorpus of discussion sessions. The relationship between the participants is the point of departure in the analysis of interaction. The macrostructure of the discussion session is also studied to identify the chairs' discursive functions. Finally, a closer multimodal analysis of the chairs' turns is conducted, which provides insight into how the discussion unfolds with the chairs' participation.

Key words

English for Academic Purposes, discussion sessions, interaction, interpersonal meaning, chair's discourse, multimodal discourse analysis.

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Sažetak

U ovom radu se istražuje jedan deo multimodalnog akademskog govornog korpusa (MASC), koji sadrži video snimke i transkripte izlaganja a potom i diskusija na specijalizovanoj međunarodnoj konferenciji iz oblasti hemije održanoj na Univerzitetu Jaume I. Rad se posebno bavi potkorpusom konferencijskih diskusija. U analizi interakcije polaznu tačku predstavlja odnos između učesnika. Analizira se i makrostruktura diskusija kako bi se uočile diskursne funkcije moderatora. Na kraju se sprovodi detaljna multimodalna analiza turnusa moderatora da bi se stekao uvid u način odvijanja diskusije uz njegovo učešće.

Ključne reči

engleski za akademske potrebe, konferencijske diskusije, interakcija, interpersonalno značenje, diskurs moderatora, multimodalna analiza diskursa.

1. INTRODUCTION

49

A conference paper presentation is a spoken academic genre that has been analyzed from a variety of discursive and linguistic angles. Ventola, Shalom and Thompson (2002) did a seminal study in the field, which focuses, among other aspects, on the language of conferencing. Nevertheless, conference discourse is more than words, like any other spoken genre. In the complex multimodal semiotics of the conference, research attention has been paid mainly to the interaction of extralinguistic aspects, such as the use of slides and other visuals (Dubois, 1982; Charles & Ventola, 2002; Carter-Thomas & Rowley-Jolivet, 2003; Rowley-Jolivet, 2002, 2004), or the use of handouts (Yakhontova & Markelova, 2010). However, the non-linguistic aspect that accompanies the linguistic message has been widely acknowledged to have an effect on the interpersonal meaning of the communication (Cook, 1995). Conversation analysis scholars, who paid much attention to the multimodal nature of interaction, are also interested in the communicative value of what is called kinesics, e.g. gesture, facial expression, gaze, and head movement (Bavelas, Hagen, Lane, & Lawrie, 1989; McNeill, 1992; Kendon, 2002, 2004), and paralanguage, e.g. voice quality and voice differentiators (Poyatos, 2002).

The discussion sessions that follow the presentation of the research, understood as a conference genre (Räisänen, 2002), are in focus of this study. Little research has been done on discussion sessions at conferences (DSs). Shalom's (1993) work was the first to explore DSs in plenary lectures as well as the chair's

discourse, suggesting ten different speech acts in the discussion. Webber (2002) also focused on the discussion sessions in a workshop, studying the different types of questions and participants' reactions, and comparing the interactive features of the discussion session with those of the presentation, and casual conversation. In their analysis of a specialized conference in linguistics, Wulff, Swales, and Keller (2009) also considered discussion sessions in order to analyze linguistic patterns in the presentation and the discussion, the chair's utterances, and episodes of laughter. A multimodal discourse analysis approach has been taken in more recent studies on evaluation in discussion sessions of specialized conference paper (Querol-Julián, 2011; Querol-Julián & Fortanet-Gómez, 2012), based on systemic functional linguistics (O'Halloran, 2004) and conversation analysis. The latter will be the starting point of our analysis.

In this paper we discuss a small part of the *Multimodal Academic Spoken Corpus* (MASC)[1], namely the chairs' discourse in the discussion sessions at a specialized conference, *Isotopes 07*, held in Spain in 2007, where 37 papers were presented in four days. The conference was part of a series of biannual multidisciplinary international conferences on the chemistry and biology of isotope effects, which brought together top scientists in the field. The meetings started in 1999, and in 2013 the eighth edition was organized in Poland. The presentation and the DSs were videotaped and transcribed with the speakers' permission. The corpus examined in this paper consists of 10 discussion sessions. It comprises over 1 hour of discussion time and approximately 8,000 words. The chairs' participation represents around 5% of the discussion. The organization of turn-taking in this specialized talk-in-interaction situation is done in a total of 102 turns: 34 dialogic exchanges between the discussant and the presenter, 40 turns taken by the chair, and 4 turns by unknown or several speakers.

2. AN ANALYSIS OF THE LEVEL OF INTERACTION: BUILDING UP RELATIONSHIPS

These small specialized conferences, where most of the participants know each other, offer a potentially good environment for establishing a rapport, but also, following Räisänen (1999), for confronting, discussing and confirming meaning. At this type of conference, with a single conference room where all the participants share a similar conferencing experience, the level of interaction between the attendees is expected to be higher than the level of interaction in larger meetings, where different research topics are presented simultaneously. In such a setting, the relationships between the researchers, before and during the conference, may influence the discussion. Querol-Julián (2011) already mentioned participants'

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[1] Collected by the research group GRAPE (Group for Research on Academic and Professional English) at the Universitat Jaume I (Castellón, Spain).

relationships as one of the five factors that can influence the interpersonal meaning of DSs, the other four important aspects being: the purpose of the conference, cultural and personal features, environmental factors, and the other participants' turns.

We believe that the study of these relationships can shed light on the level of interaction in our corpus of DSs, where differences in the number and length of the dialogic exchanges are observed (see Table 1). The exchange, as described by Sinclair, Forsyth, Coulthard, and Ashby (1972), is the basic unit of the interaction, since at least two participants make a contribution. A dialogic exchange refers to the dialogue established between the discussant and the presenter, which can be unfolded as a two-turn exchange (i.e. discussant's turn followed by the presenter's turn), or a more-than-two-turn exchange (when there are follow-up turns). However, a simple look at the average 6-minute discussion time reveals that the discussion time can range from 2 to 13 minutes. Considering that 10 minutes was the time initially allotted for each session, a close analysis is needed to understand these differences.

Our first concern regarding the relationships between the participants is the dissimilarities observed between the presenters in terms of the academic reputation they have. Presenters 1, 2 and 7 were plenary speakers, which gives them a special position in the conference, in relation to the rest of the participants. Although both the organizers and the audience expect interactive discussion to follow the plenary sessions, it is not always the case. However, potential discussants may avoid entering into discussion with plenary speakers when discussants' academic status is different from theirs, e.g. undergraduate students, PhD students, or junior researchers. The reasons why this part of the audience is not inclined to ask questions or make comments could be a lack of background knowledge in the field of research and conferencing experience; and, what is more important, the fact that they are not the members of the specialized scientific community may result in their lack of confidence, since they may even feel like intruders. However, Lave and Wenger (1991) saw learning as a process of social participation, where initially newcomers join communities and learn at the periphery. It is when knowledge and skill are mastered that newcomers move from legitimate peripheral participation to full participation in the community. Accordingly, the passive role of these newcomers in the discussion could be understood as a self-protection strategy. We could describe these participants as the "passive audience" in the DSs, though interaction with the speakers may occur, but in a more private context. In addition, the fact that the presentation is delivered by a novice researcher may also determine the participation of the most experienced researchers.

51

Discussion Session	Total			Exchanges discussant-presenter	Chair		
	Time	Words	Turns		Turns	Words	Verbal discourse (%)
1	8'05''	1,126	16	4	5	43	3.8
2	13'12''	1,812	17	6	8	54	3.0
3	2'33''	304	4	2	2	7	2.3
4	3'14''	364	6	2	2	9	2.5
5	7'44''	1,195	15	3	2	32	2.7
6	7'25''	1,014	13	5	3	15	1.5
7	8'17''	1,315	10	5	6	114	8.7
8	1'27''	104	2	1	2	43	41.3
9	5'59''	905	13	4	3	63	7.0
10	2'11''	210	6	2	2	32	15.2
Total	58'47''	8,349	102	34	35	412	4.9

Table 1. Corpus of discussion sessions

Generally speaking, not only in plenary DSs, the other members of the audience, who are already part of the scientific community, may have different reasons for choosing to be involved in the public discussion. Their participation could be determined by: a) personal reasons (a researcher may wish to avoid being, or on the contrary, seek to be, the focus of attention); b) the personal and/or academic relationship with the presenter before the conference; or c) the situational relationship, with the presenter or members of the audience, created during the conference. Regarding this last aspect, Querol-Julián (2011) described the complexity of the social construct built up in the DSs, where the roles taken by the participants can be reversed during the conference, and consequently in the DSs. In different sessions, a speaker can be the chairperson, the presenter, the discussant, and part of the "passive" audience. In this conference, the plenary speakers did not assume the role of chairs, but 3 out of the 15 chairs were also presenters; all of them were part of the passive audience at some time; one plenary speaker and one presenter also took the role of discussant (this identification was possible because the chairs used their first names to allocate turns). Figure 1 shows the roles of the participants in this corpus. Speaker 1 plays both the role of a presenter and discussant; speaker 6 is presenter, discussant and chair; and speakers 9 and 10 are presenters and chairs. Possibly, some of the other presenters also became discussants at some point, but we were not able to identify this.

The social interaction described above could also have an influence on the discussion. Whether presenters accept discussants' comments and questions or not may influence, in some cases, their subsequent participation in the DS of the

discussants' research. Additionally, the opposite can also occur: the fact that some members of the audience will become presenters at some point during the conference could limit their participation in the DSs, since both the research and the researcher will be evaluated later. This could be an interesting talk-in-interaction situation to explore, to shed some light on the flow of the interaction in DSs from an ethnographic perspective of the social relationships established there.
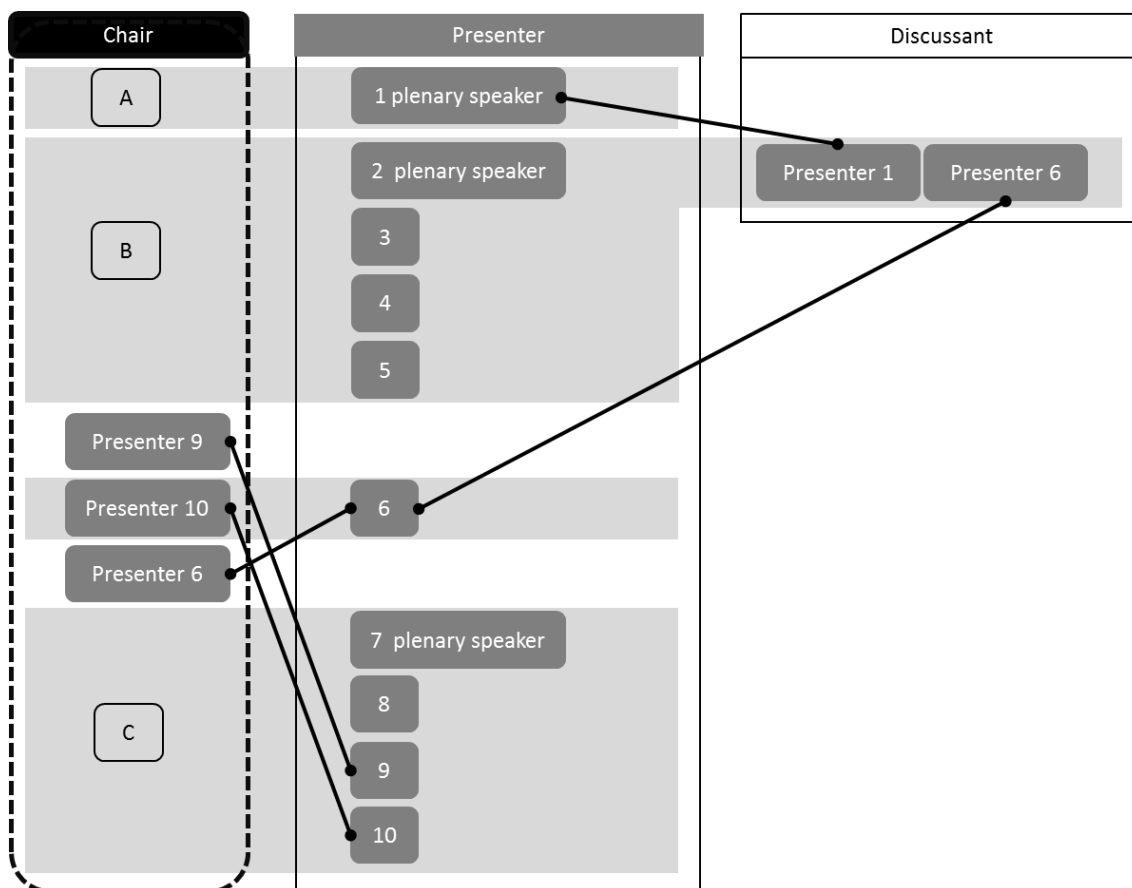

Figure 1. Participants' roles

53

The level of interaction in the corpus can be determined by the number of dialogic exchanges between discussant and presenter, since these are at the core of the DS. The present data show that the average interaction is 3.4. Meeting expectations, the three plenary DSs, 1, 2 and 7, are above the average, with 4, 6 and 5 dialogic exchanges respectively. However, there are two other DSs, whose presenters are not key note speakers, with an interaction of 4 and 5. Apart from the speakers' academic prestige and the relationships established during the conference, there are the other aspects which may have a considerable influence on the level of interaction. The research presented should be the major reason for the discussion, with two possible effects on the audience. First, the presentation raises interest

and consequently interaction in the DS, leading to discussants' comments (to agree with the presenter or to criticize the research), or forward or backward questions (Querol-Julián, 2011); forward questions refer to information-eliciting questions about the talk, and commonly do not demand a high degree of reflection; however, backward questions are more challenging questions since they extend beyond the scope of the research presented. Second, the presentation leads to a low interactive DS because the contribution may not be considered sufficiently relevant to be worth discussing, or the discussion may lead to harsh criticism and the discussants choose not to take part in it. The decision to remain part of the passive audience could be made because of the presenter's reputation or the relationship between participants, in an attempt to help the presenter save face.

3. UNFOLDING THE FLOW OF THE DISCUSSION: CHAIR'S FUNCTIONS

In the previous section we tried to rationalize the level of interaction in the DSs. We saw that the central actors in this interactive genre are presenters and discussants, but we cannot leave aside the third voice in the DS, the chairs. Their participation and interaction go beyond the discussion on the research presented, since the chairs are responsible for running the DS.

54

Speaker & addressee	**CH: chair** P: presenter D: discussant	SS: two or more speakers SU: unknown speaker/s AUD: audience
Type of turn	Discoursal turns	Metadiscoursal turns
	C: comment Q: question R: response	**OC: opening comment** TB: turn bid **TA: turn allocation** **RI: repair interaction** **TO: turn organization** **MC: middle comment** **CC: closing comment**
Position of the turn	S: start the exchange	FU: follow-up turn

Table 2. Tags used in the description of turns in DS

We adopted a system to annotate the macrostructure of the DS, as described in Querol-Julián (2012), based on Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1985) and Conversation Analysis (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). We identified each turn with the information represented in the following string: "speaker: type of turn _ position of the turn ~ addressee". Table 2 shows the tags used for each type

of information. The position of the turn refers to discussant and presenter's turn position, i.e. if it is the first turn for the discussant and for the presenter in the exchange, or if it is a follow-up turn.

The study of the dynamic variation of discourse unfolded in the DS of conference presentations (Ventola, 2002) distinguishes the two types of turns, discoursal turns and metadiscoursal turns (Querol-Julián, 2011). Discoursal turns concern, in general terms, the dialogue about the research between the discussant/s and the presenter; the types of turns are comments, questions and responses. Metadiscoursal turns, however, are the chairs' realm. Two main functions can be attributed to these turns: a) framing the structure of this part of the conference, with *opening comments* (to open the floor for discussion), *middle comments* (to announce the end of the discussion and give the opportunity for final questions and comments), and *closing comments* (to close the discussion); and b) management of the session to take care of the flow of the discussion and facilitate interaction; three types of turns are found here: *turn allocation comments* (addressed to the discussants to let them take the floor), *repair interaction comments* (to solve, mainly, auditory problems), and *turn organization comments* (to control discussion turns in terms of length and order). Additionally, there is one type of metadiscoursal turn that belongs to discussants, *turn bid comment*. Figure 2 illustrates the types of turns and stresses the chairs' role in the DSs studied. Surprisingly, in the data analyzed here there are no examples of discoursal turns taken by the chairs. However, these could be expected particularly when the research presented is close to their own interests or when no questions are coming from the audience.
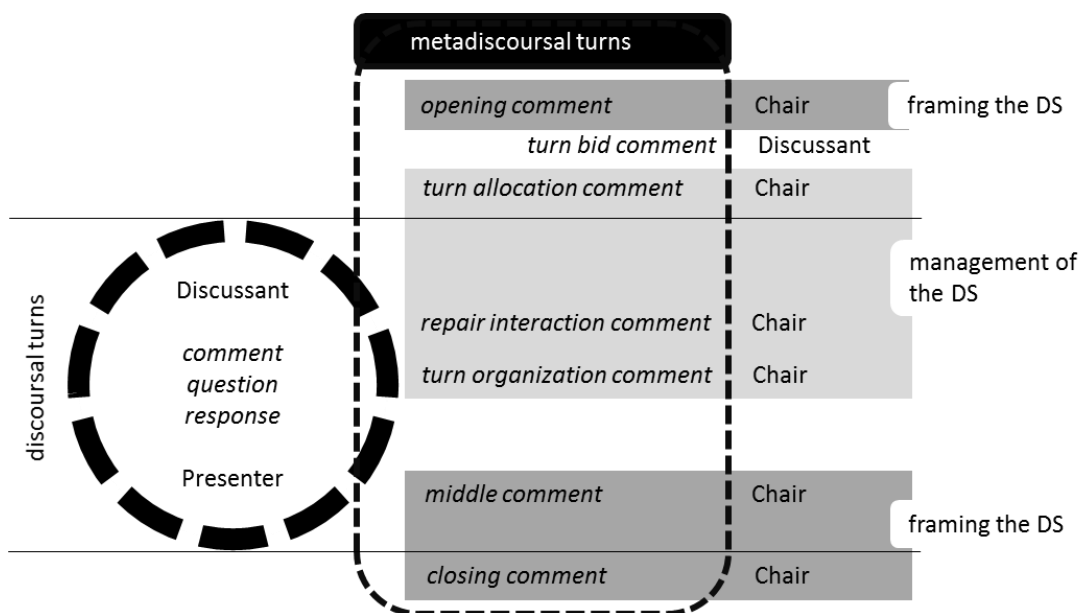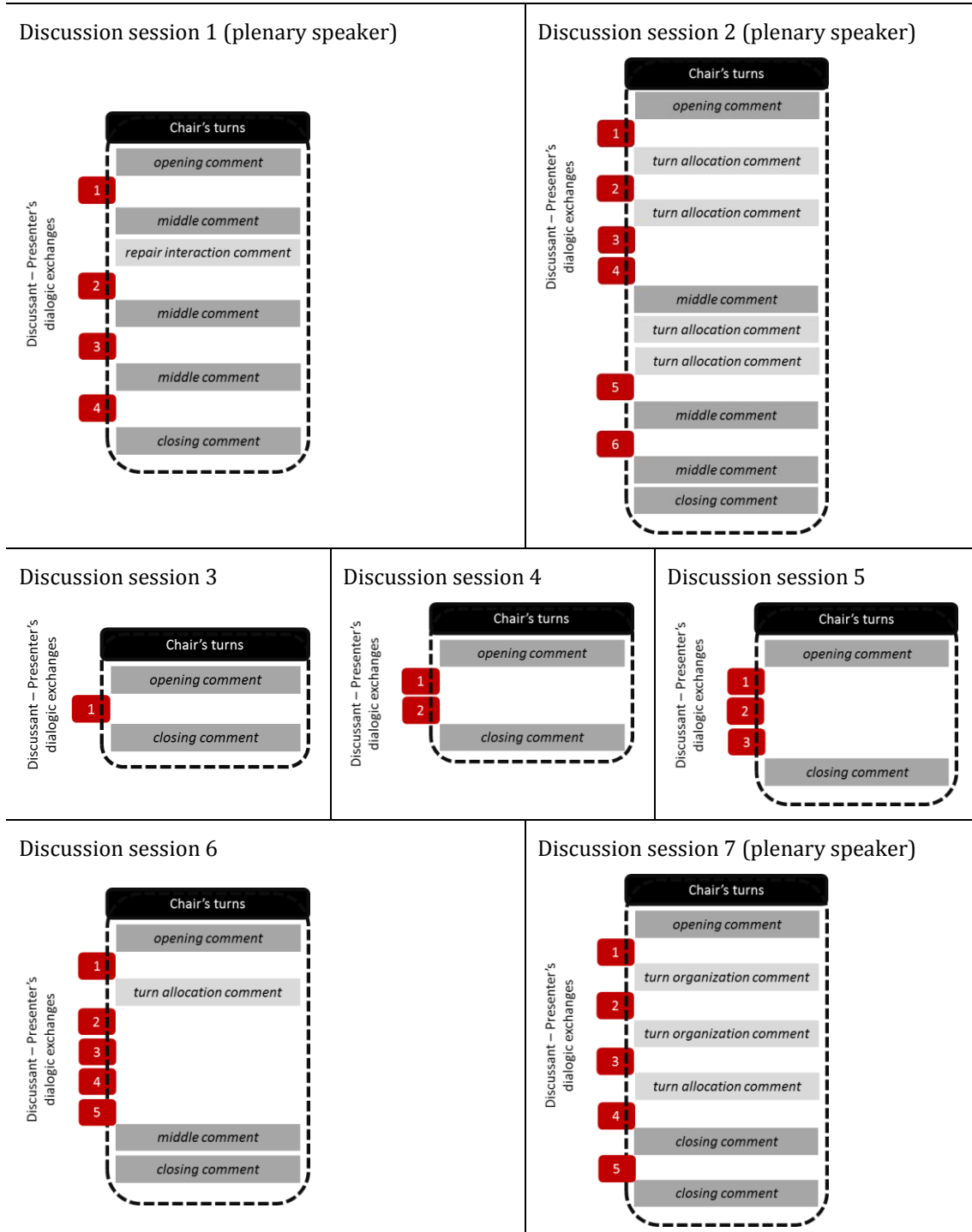
55

Figure 2. Type of turns and chairs' functions in DS

In the corpus analyzed, the chairs open and close all the DSs, and there are nine middle comments announcing the end of the discussion. Regarding the management of the DS, there are six turn allocation comments and three turn organization comments. There is only one example of repair interaction turn.
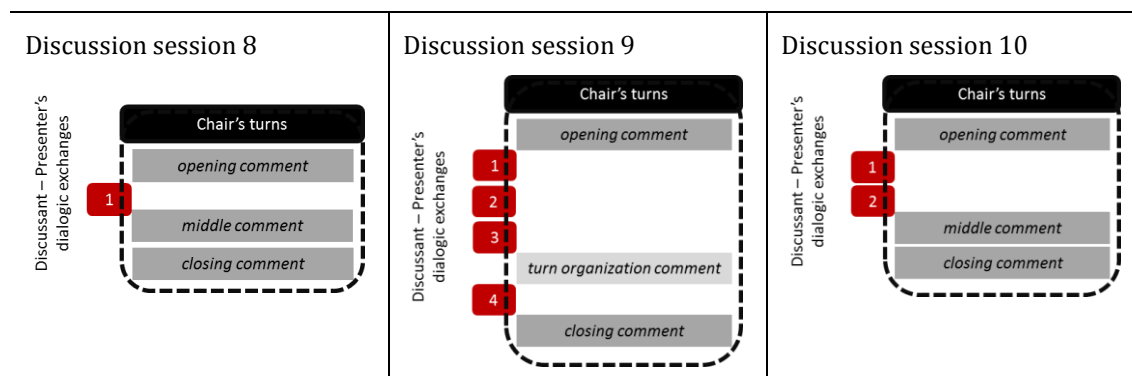
Discussion session 1 (plenary speaker)

Discussion session 2 (plenary speaker)

Discussion session 3

Discussion session 4

Discussion session 5

Discussion session 6

Discussion session 7 (plenary speaker)

Figure 3. Chairs' turns in the flow of the DSs

Figure 3 illustrates chairs' turns in the flow of the ten DSs. The dialogic exchanges, which represent the interaction between discussant and presenter, have been numbered on the left. This visual representation shows how in the least interactive DSs, containing from 1 to 3 dialogic exchanges, the chairs limit their participation to structuring the session. It also shows that the two regular DSs (6 and 9) are as interactive as plenary sessions, when interaction is measured by the number of dialogic exchanges. Yet, if we also consider the chairs' participation in the discussion, a difference between plenary and regular DSs emerges: as the level of audience interest is higher in the plenary DSs, this involves a larger number of turns by the chairs in the management of the discussion. In the three plenary DSs the average number of turns taken by the chairs is 7, whereas in the two interactive regular ones it is 3.5.

57

4. CHAIR'S DISCOURSE: BEYOND WORDS

Given the fairly limited size of the corpus and the problem of correspondingly low frequencies of patterns, we did not use any corpus analysis tool for a frequency analysis but a close reading of the chairs' discourse. Moreover, we took a multimodal discourse analysis perspective to describe and understand how the chairs express different metadiscoursal turns. We used the open source tool ELAN (EUDICO Linguistic Annotator) to examine the corpus of DSs. This software allows the synchronization of video and audio files, and the transcription of the chairs' discourse. Besides, the type of turns (already identified in the analysis of the macrostructure) and the gestures, facial expressions and head movements, were also tagged in ELAN to carry out the multimodal analysis. We complemented data gathering with the use of an observation sheet, which was essential for this part of the analysis, since not everything could be captured by a camera whose focus was mainly on the presenters and the chairs, which made the audience only partially videotaped.

In this section, we study in detail the most relevant turns in the corpus, opening comments, turn allocation and turn organization, and middle and closing comments. We applied Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1978, 1985) for the analysis of linguistic evaluation, an interpersonal feature which is especially relevant in DS (Querol-Julián, 2011; Wulff et al., 2009). In order to perform a more in-depth analysis, we also drew on the APPRAISAL model (Martin, 2000; Martin & White, 2005), which divides evaluative resources into three broad semantic domains: attitude, engagement, and graduation. Attitude has to do with "evaluating", and it can be of three types according to the object of evaluation: affect (expressing feelings), judgment (judging character), and appreciation (valuing things). Engagement has to do with the negotiation of other voices in addition to the authorial voice. Finally, graduation refers to strategies used to express how strongly we feel about something or someone.

4.1. Opening comments

In the examination of DSs of a specialized conference on linguistics, Wulff et al. (2009) also focused on the intertextual links that chairs' utterances create in the discussion. In their study, chairs regularly opened the session with a remark about the amount of time remaining. The pattern found, "we have x minutes for questions", was understood as a phraseological spanning ("semiotic spanning", after Ventola [1999]), to refer to its intertextual origin over the span of the conference. This pattern, however, was not used in our corpus, which may confirm the explanation proposed by Wulff et al. (2009) about its origin. Moreover, though time reference is also present, it is not always for the same purpose as indicated by these authors. Utterances such as "alright within one second" (DS6) and "is it time already?" (DS2) seem to show that it is time to finish the presentation, and to mark the beginning of the DS. Yet, the word "question" is recurrent in this opening turn, e.g. "questions?" or "we are open for questions discussion?" (DS3). Only two chairs appear to be concerned about the time remaining for discussion, as in:

(1) "quick question" (DS4)
(2) "uh thanks (presenter's name)
    we've got time for one or two questions for (presenter's name)
    if there are any on the floor...[2]
    any questions?" (DS8).

The study of evaluation reveals that (1) the adjective "quick" negatively evaluates the time remaining which is short and therefore there is time only for a "quick question". In (2) the chair expresses gratitude to the presenter by his first name, a

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[2] ... Ellipses indicate a pause of 2-3 seconds.

strategy used in another three sessions. The use of first names was also found by Wulff et al. (2009) in the closing segment of DS. Mauranen (2004) also identified informal features that characterize the discourse of invited presenters or designated chairs as a strategy to mitigate their authority. We could add that in this small specialized conference, first names may also be used with the intention of showing familiarity between participants. The chair then uses a conditional sentence. In the first part, the chair asked for questions, communicating the time remaining, "we've got time for one or two questions", and naming the addressee "for (presenter's name)". The *if*-clause, in "if there are any on the floor…", can act here as a polite exhortation to the audience to ask some questions, since there were no hands up and the discussion was jeopardized. Previous studies have already observed that the roles of "if", in the presentation phase are to express different politeness strategies such as to signal the structure of the talk and to direct the audience's attention (Carter-Thomas & Rowley-Jolivet, 2008; Rowley-Jolivet, 2007). After that, there is a pause of 2 or 3 seconds in which the chair looks for a potential discussant in the audience while moving his head from one side to the other. The co-expression of these two non-verbal resources, the head movement and the gaze during the "silent period", could have two functions. The gaze seems to work to invite the audience's response (Bavelas, Coates, & Johnson, 2002), and this apparent invitation seems to be intensified through the head movement, expressing a pragmatic function of the modal type (McClave, 2000). Then, there is a second attempt by the chair to promote discussion with "any questions?". This time one single and short dialogic exchange emerges. It seems that the discussant's turn does not reflect an initial interest in the research. Rather, he understands the uncomfortable situation of the talk not having generated any kind of discussion. It is possible that without the chair's persistence the interaction would not have taken place. Therefore, we can see that the role the chair plays in this session is crucial. In section 4.3, we look at the closing comments in more detail. Here, we will only mention that after this short dialogic exchange, the audience's lack of interest in engaging in discussion with this presenter makes the chair close the session, as in (3). He uses "I think", an expression of engagement named "dialogic expansion" (Martin & White, 2005), to indicate that his position is but one of a number of possible positions, thus mitigating his authorial voice; the modal verb "should" (Martin & Rose, 2003) and the inclusive personal pronoun "we" (Fortanet, 2004) play a similar role:

(3) okay I think we should stop (DS3)

Utterances in the opening part are short, between 1 and 7 words in seven sessions. In these cases only one function is expressed: reference to time or inviting questions. In more elaborate openings, however, two more functions were identified: expressing gratitude to the presenter and/or the audience, and evaluating the research and/or the conference organization. These four discursive

59

intentions, or at least more than one of them, are expressed in the same turn, as the analysis of (2) has already illustrated, and as is brought to the fore in the study of (4) and (5), where opening comments of about 45 words are made by the same chair.

(4) thanks (presenter's name) for a very interesting talk
    we showed we showed that science can be fun as well it can be a bit also (xx)[3]
    can we open up next for questions?
    it appears there's been a number of questions on the floor (DS7)

Several functions are expressed in (4). First, the chair thanks the presenter by his first name. Second, an evaluation of the research is done. He shows his attitude towards the research by uttering "interesting" that expresses positive appreciation intensified with "very", in "very interesting talk". Mauranen (2002) identified "very" as one of the most common intensifiers in academic speech, which tends to combine with positive items, such as in the cluster "very interesting". This appreciation is followed by an explanation "we showed that science can be fun as well it can be a bit also (xx)". Unfortunately the last word is unintelligible and the comparison cannot be analyzed. The chair uses the integrative personal pronoun "we" to mitigate the speech. His authority is also mitigated when he opens the discussion with a question and the personal pronoun "we", in "can we open up next for questions?" Finally, the chair seems to justify the need to start the discussion because there are some potential discussants with their hands raised. However, in the description of this situation, he mitigates the authorial voice with the opening "it appears", an expression of dialogic expansion which could be understood as a strategy of self-protection of positive face.

(5) thanks
    and I think everybody in the room would benefit from those comments
    as well everybody I've spoken to have been very pleased with the way the meeting's been organized
    it's been like proper it ought to be Switzerland <LAUGH>
    thank you very much for being here (DS9)

In (5) the discourse starts again with an utterance that expresses gratitude, "thanks", and the positive evaluation of the presentation. The authorial voice is mitigated, since the chair chooses to speak on behalf of the audience in the utterance "I think everybody in the room". "I think" shows dialogic expansion. Besides, the chair mitigates the authorial voice with the modal verb "would". This strategy was also observed by Hyland (2005), in his study of evaluation in

[3] (xx) indicates one or more words that are completely unintelligible.

60

academic written discourse. The organization of the conference is praised as well. Once more the chair involves the participants in the evaluation with "everybody", but avoids a generalization, mitigating with "I've spoken to". In this evaluation we find the expression of affection, "have been very pleased with the way the meeting's been organized". The speaker grades the intensity of the feeling, "pleased", intensifying force (Martin & Rose, 2003) with "very". After that, we find an episode of laughter. The speaker refers to a possible different conference venue in "it's been like proper it ought to be Switzerland". He mitigates the evaluation of the decision not to have held it in Switzerland, since it has been "like proper", rather than "proper". We can see that the adverbial meaning of "like" is similar to Poos and Simpson's (2002) exploration of the use "kind" and "sort of" as hedging in academic spoken discourse. Besides, "ought" mitigates the speaker's voice (Hyland, 2005). Finally, the chair expresses gratitude to the audience for attending the conference by "thank you very much for being here", intensifying his gratitude by "very much". This last part of the turn can only be understood in the context of the DS, since it was the last DS in the morning that day. This comment could be a farewell commonly expected as a closing comment. The chair closes the DS with a shorter comment "thanks a lot (presenter's name) thanks for everything (xx)".

4.2. Turn allocation and turn organization

61

As mentioned, this was a small specialized conference and many of the participants knew each other. Therefore, the common linguistic expression the chairs use to allocate a turn is the discussant's first name. A confirmation utterance such as "yeah" is also used on two other occasions. However, turn allocation needs further attention, since while there was a total of 34 discussants, only six turns involved allocation by a linguistic utterance from the chair. This does not mean that the chairs did not take this responsibility in the DS but in 20 cases turn allocation was not verbal. We observed that turn allocation by the chair followed a pattern: staring at the discussant, while nodding and/or pointing at him with his hand. Significant work on conversation analysis has described the regulatory function of gaze in turn allocation (Hayashi, 2013). In DSs there is not a context-free organization but the chair's directing his gaze towards a potential discussant could be understood as an explicit way of addressing him, as in conversation. However, Lerner (2003) showed that even in multiparty conversations the success of gaze is contingent on the gazing practices of the other participants. In DSs, the chair uses an elaborate non-linguistic strategy to ensure turn allocation, where his gaze co-expresses with a head movement and a hand gesture. On the one hand, the head nods seem to show acceptance of the potential discussant's request; therefore, they express a pragmatic function of the performative type, described by Kendon (2004) as representing the speech act the speaker is engaged in. On the other hand, the hand gesture is a deictic one. These gestures, according to McNeill (1992), are

commonly known as pointing gestures, which refer to a concrete aspect or to an abstract process. Here, it refers to the potential discussant and has an interactive function. Bavelas, Chovil, Lawrie and Wade (1992) identified four types of interactive functions: to mark the delivery of the information, to cite the other's contribution, to coordinate the turn, and to seek a response. The deictic gesture that is part of the turn allocation strategy seems to deliver information, rather than just mark it, which can be paraphrased as "the floor is yours". Nonetheless, this discursive function is not exclusive to the chairs: the presenter also gives the floor on one occasion with the utterance "yes", staring at the discussant and moving his right hand forward.

The interaction in DS starts when the audience manifest their willingness to take the floor. It can be only one or several potential discussants competing for the turn, but what is interesting to observe is how they express their desire to take part in the discussion, as well as to see if these discursive strategies help them to succeed in their attempt. The usual practice is to signal their interest by raising their hands. This strategy commonly works, but sometimes it needs to be reinforced by a turn bid comment to call the chair's attention, as in (6), DS2.

(6) <D5:TB1~CH> I have a question.[4] that's good?
    <CH:TA~AUD> yeah
    <D5:TB2~CH> I have a question. over here I have a question over here
    <CH:TA~D5> ok yeah alright <LAUGH>

62

Discussant 5, in this DS, raises his hand, but as the non-verbal strategy does not work, he states his desire to take part in the discussion and asks for permission with "that's good?". The chair agrees with "yeah" allocating the turn. The intonation of this token reveals that its discursive function is to mark agreement but it could also be interpreted as a politeness strategy to play for time while he tries to discover who his interlocutor is. This blind allocation can be done probably because there are not more requests on the floor; but meanwhile the chair is still trying to find the discussant among the audience. The discussant could have taken his turn, but he chooses to do so at the proper time. This could be understood as a sign of respect for the chair's authority in the DS. In a second attempt, the discussant repeats twice "I have a question" and "over here" while waving his right hand. Eventually, the chair identifies the discussant and, raising his eyebrows, nodding and pointing at him with his right hand, allocates the turn with the utterance "ok yeah alright". This multimodal expression stresses the meaning beyond these words. This was not an easy turn allocation. As a result, an episode of laughter occurs.

In other cases, potential discussants do not signal their desire to take the floor but simply take it. There are six dialogic exchanges that are opened by the

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[4] . indicates a pause of 1 second.

discussant himself. These are called self-allocation turns. Here, the chair does not take part in the turn allocation and the presenter has to look for the discussant among the audience. The presenter's eye movements are accompanied, on five other occasions, by his head moving from one side to the other. Meanwhile, the discussant goes on with his question or comment, rather than using a turn bid comment. In all cases where the discussant tries to self-allocate a turn, this strategy is successful.

A problem could arise when there are several potential discussants following a self-allocation strategy at the same time. However, in the corpus this situation was resolved quite easily since they followed the more organized allocation dynamics, raising hands, as in (7):

(7) <CH:TO~D3> uh you will do the next one
    <D3:TB~CH> alright?
    <D2:TO_~D3> uh you will do the next one
    <P:TO~D3> alright?

The chair has to organize turns. First, he allocates the turn to Discussant 2 with a non-verbal expression, nodding. Then, he organizes turns, addressing Discussant 3, with "uh you will do the next one". But it seems Discussant 3, though there is not an overlap, attempts to take the floor with a turn bid, asking for permission "alright?". However, it seems Discussant 2 is not willing to cede his turn, and he makes sure that Discussant 3 knows it by repeating the chair's words "uh you will do the next one". This response seems to be mitigated by the presenter, when he also takes part in the turn organization to ensure Discussant 3 agrees with this arrangement, with "alright?". Discussant 3's reaction was not registered, but it is non-verbal and appears to satisfy the presenter who smiles at him in return.

If we look at turn organization in more detail, we can see that the chairs also control turns that are too long, as in (8):

(8) and then we need to move on to the next question (DS8)

Similarly, in (9) from DS7, where after the discussant's second follow-up turn, the presenter decides not to go on with the discussion. It seems that they do not manage to reconcile their positions. The presenter signals this by his silence and by looking at the chair, a look that seems to be interpreted as the presenter's desire to finish interaction with that discussant, and asking the chair to intervene.

(9) okay you need to stop speaking so can we at least move on
     there are three people right back (way back) with their hands up
     so if we could hear from (next discussant's name)
     and then move on to the next speaker please

63

The chair states that it is time to go on with the session and to give the floor to other discussants. At this point, he is quite direct, "okay you need to stop speaking", though the modal verb "need" mitigates the command. And he continues with an explanation, "so can we at least move on". The expression "at least" is meaningful, since it reveals that they had got stuck in the discussion. This, together with the fact that "there are three people right back (way back) with their hands up", seems sufficient justification for the chair to use his authority in the session to stop the discussion. Then, the chair addresses the audience to organize turns with "so if we could hear from (next discussant's name)". After that, he makes a middle comment to announce the end of the discussion with "and then move on to the next speaker please". He ends by mitigating his authority with "please".

4.3. Middle comments and closing comments

Chairs use middle comments to signal that the end of the session is approaching and to give the audience a chance for final questions and comments. In plenary DSs 1 and 2, middle comment turns, followed by a dialogic exchange between the discussant and the presenter, are taken. In all of them evaluative language is used to assess the time remaining, as in (10), (11), (12), and (13).

(10) we just have time for a couple more (DS1)
(11) last one (DS1)
(12) ok one thirty second question (DS1)
(13) last question (DS2)

In (14), the chair makes a more elaborate middle comment. First, he announces that the time is over, mitigating the authorial voice with the metaphor "the screen's gone red". Then, he explains the situation. There is plenty of time because one previous talk was cancelled and there are still questions on the floor. The chair may feel forced to justify the decision of giving more time for this DS to avoid further misunderstandings, and mitigates his decision with an utterance of dialogic expansion "I think":

(14) okay we_ the the screen's gone red
      but since we've lost one talk this morning and we've got two more questions to come
      I think we can just persevere with that (DS2)

However, middle comments are not always followed by a dialogic exchange. The pattern "any other/more comments/questions?" used on three occasions in the corpus is followed by a closing comment in order to finish the discussion. On two occasions the chair waits for 2 or 3 seconds for the audience's reaction before

closing, as in (15) and (16); and once, there is no pause between the question and the closing, as in (17):

> (15) any more questions?...
>   okay well then in the interest of time
>   we should move on but thanks again (Presenter's name) for an interesting talk (DS8)
> (16) any more questions?...
>   well since time is getting on
>   it just leaves me to thank all of this morning's speakers. so thank you very much again for a really inspiring session (DS10)
> (17) any other comments? if not let's thank (Presenter's name) again (DS6)

If we look at Wulff et al.'s (2009) findings, in their study the chairs adopted two strategies in the closing segment: offering a simple "thank you" to the speaker followed (or not) by the first name, and then referring to the whole room; or explaining that time has run out, which is followed by the first gratitude strategy. Although we may confirm these findings in our small corpus, there are also some differences. We can see the first strategy in the following examples:

> (18) okay if we can thank (Presenter's name) once again, thank you (DS2)
> (19) (xx) thank the speaker (xx) (DS4)
> (20) okay thank you if I could thank again (Presenter's name) (DS7)
> (21) thanks a lot (Presenter's name). thanks for everything (xx) (DS9)

65

The same pattern is followed in (17), where the closing comment is part of a conditional sentence. However, the chair does not actually give time for further comments as asked in the middle comment, and he closes the session.

Four examples were found of the second strategy. Here the references to time in (22) and (23), "we're out of time" and "it's time to wrap up", are preceded and mitigated by "I think".

> (22) I I think we're out of time?
>   let's uh give (Presenter's name) another (xx) (DS1)
> (23) okay. ah, I think it's uh, time to wrap up,
>   if I can get everybody to join me and thank all the speakers (DS5)

In (15) and (16), the chairs open the closing comment with a self-repair device signalled by the discourse marker "well" (Chaudron & Richards, 1986). The evaluative meaning conveyed by this rhetorical strategy is manifested when the chair, due to the fact that there are no questions, shows positive face protection to close the session, a strategy completed by the time expression that leads to the

gratitude part, as in (15) ["in the interest of time we should move [...]]", and (16) ["since time is getting on it just leaves me to thank [...]]".

The chair thanks the speaker, as in (15) and (22), or all the speakers who participated in the morning or afternoon sessions, as in (16) and (23). Evaluative language is also present here to express positive appreciation of the talk or the session ["an interesting talk" and "a really inspiring session"].

We find two other rhetorical aspects in the closing comments. In three DSs the chair does not simply thank the presenter or all the speakers, but invites the audience to join him in expressing gratitude, as in (17) and (22), with "let's thank" or "let's give", followed by the presenter's name, or with "if I can get everybody to join me" in (23). The second aspect is the use of the adverb "again" following the gratitude expression in five DSs. This could be understood, when the chair in the opening comment of the session has already thanked the presenter, as a strategy to make the audience aware of it and protect face. But the presenter is only thanked twice in three DSs.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the discussion sessions of a small specialized conference to focus on the flow of the discussion and the role taken by the chairs. The research has been organized in three parts. As a point of departure, we opted for a wide perspective to show how previous relationships between the participants, and those established because of the different roles occupied during the DS, may affect the level of interaction. We showed how the differences in the academic status of the participants could foster or constrain interaction. Nonetheless, discussion in these academic forums should indisputably be generated by the contribution made by the research presented to the academic community represented in the audience. However, further empirical and ethnographic research is needed to verify or reject our approach.

The second part of the study focused on the macrostructure of the DS to establish how interaction is not only determined by the dialogic exchanges between discussants and presenters, but also by the contribution of the chairpersons. Two functions were performed by the chairs: structuring the session and managing the discussion. Results revealed that in this specialized conference the chairs always structure the DS, whereas other participants in the discussion can also play the second role, that of managing it.

The third issue explored in the study was the chairs' discourse. We used a video corpus and a sophisticated software to examine the verbal and non-verbal strategies used to express the different types of turns. Some discursive functions and linguistic and non-linguistic patterns have been found in each type of turn, showing their multimodal nature. Our results have also confirmed some previous research on the use of linguistic devices to mitigate the chairs' authority. We have found that

66

their speech is characterized by the use of the presenters' and discussants' first names; utterances of appreciation as well as affect; and dialogic expansion with "I think", modality with "should", "ought", or "would", and the inclusive personal pronoun "we". Regarding non-linguistic features, turn allocation is generally done through a non-verbal discursive strategy, and kinesics seems to be used to express mainly three functions: interactive, pragmatic, and regulatory.

Finally, the study focused on the examination of a small corpus from a specialized conference; therefore, caution should be expressed regarding the results which might be extrapolated or used for pedagogical purposes. The paper, however, has attempted to be a methodological contribution to the study of this academic research genre from a multimodal discourse analysis perspective. Further work in this field might investigate linguistic and non-linguistic features used by all the participants involved in the discussion as well as their relationships and roles in order to shed some light on the understanding of their multimodal discourse. The use of ethnographic research methods in the gathering of results would no doubt be found interesting as well.

[Paper submitted 16 Mar 2014]
[Revised version accepted for publication 26 Apr 2014]

Acknowledgements

67

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68

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69

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70