

ENGLISH AND PORTUGUESE CLOSINGS: A CONTRASTIVE STUDY

by

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This study examines structural features of real English and Portuguese service encounter interactions and conversations in contrast with the written dialogues of EFL Textbooks. Since EFL Textbooks claim to teach real English, the analysis checks whether EFL Textbooks conversations present the same or similar features of natural conversation. Through a detailed contrastive analysis of the two kinds of dialogue, this study intends to show that EFL Textbooks conversations are not communicative but pseudo-interactive, since they only have features of the inner structure of classroom discourse. The inner layer of classroom interaction consists, according to Willis (1987), of the target forms that the teacher selects as learning goals. Real interaction only happens in the 'outer' layer, whose structure is (according to Sinclair and Brazil 1982) the mechanism used by speakers to control and stimulate utterances in the inner layer. The role of written dialogues in EFL materials is questioned, since they do not seem to fulfill the communicative function the authors claim they do. The theoretical basis of this work relies on recent findings in Conversational and Discourse Analysis. Finally, it suggests that the concept of 'communicative teaching', as currently used by EFL practitioners, should be rethought.

1. Introduction

Brazilian learners of English interested in conversation usually complain about their learning because they are not understood or are thought to be rude when they are required to talk in the foreign language in a real situation. The language acquired in a classroom environment does not seem to be suitable. The students get the feeling that they do not *know* the language, despite attending many hours of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Brazil. Apparently, the problem lies in the fact that they have not learned the appropriate language. In fact, what happens is that students know about the code, but do not

really know how to use it, and how to communicate in the foreign language.

One of the possible causes of this problem, as I try to show in this study, is the fact that EFL dialogues are not really communicative, although textbook authors claim they are.

A language classroom has two separate layers of communication: an inner one and an outer one. According to Willis (1987), the inner layer consists of the target forms of the language that the teacher has selected as learning goals for that lesson. For Sinclair and Brazil (1982), the outer layer controls the utterances in the inner layer. Thus the inner layer depends on the outer layer, and it is in the outer layer that real communication occurs.

Textbook dialogues have features similar to the inner layer, that is, students produce the correct sentence forms, but do not really exchange information. Discourses, however, are only interactive when related to the exchange in the outer layer. In the inner layer, it does not matter whether students tell the truth or not (Willis 1987). This is due to the fact that the major focus is on form and not on the information. For Willis (1987), this characterizes most conversations in language teaching as being 'pseudo-interactive'.

1.1. Aims of the study

This study aims at verifying whether EFL textbook dialogues have the same or similar properties as does natural conversation. It does this through the analysis of their organizational and interactional features in order to check whether EFL dialogues are communicative or not.

Firstly, I intend to analyze the structural organization of closing and opening sections of conversations; more specifically, the organization of closing and opening selections of real talk. These items are not considered relevant in conversation because they are not thought to convey information through the meanings of the words; instead, they convey a metamessage.

According to Tannen (1986:29), the metamessage consists of 'what is communicated about relationships – attitudes toward each other, the occasion, and what we are saying'. Although closings and openings do not convey meaning through their messages, they are crucial to the interaction because of their metamessages.

I first examine closings, as these were the first sections analyzed by the theorists who later stated the principles for the analysis of organizational features of other conversational sections.

I analyze the data according to the following theoretical aspects: the overall structural organization of closing and opening sections, based on Schegloff and Sacks' (1973) theory of closings, and Schegloff's (1979) theory of openings. Since conversation as an interactional category has many facets and since not all features of conversation can be included in this analysis, I intend to focus only on the above-mentioned aspects of natural conversation, as they have a crucial importance in any interaction and exhibit specific and easily identified characteristics.

My study comprises: the presentation of the theory, the presentation of the contrastive data, the analysis of these data, the comparison of the data analysis revealing similarities and differences found, and my conclusions on the comparisons.

1.2. The Data

The data analyzed in this study were taken from samples of three EFL Textbook series (*Strategies*, by Abbs and Freebairn; *Streamline*, by Hartley and Viney; *Interactions*, by Kirn and Jack). The natural data both in Portuguese and in English were taken from Zornig (1987) and Freitas (1990). Some English data were borrowed from Schegloff (1979) and Levinson (1983). I collected additional Portuguese natural data.

In this study, the dialogues are numbered and classified as EN (English natural), PN (Portuguese natural) and EFL (EFL textbook).

The EFL data analyzed are limited to these three series of textbooks, as they are among the ones that claim to be communicative.

The data are further limited to service encounter conversations, as these forms of talk occur very frequently. I restricted the analysis to the written features of the dialogues (with a few exceptions, viz. stress and intonation markers), since the majority of the data were taken from written sources. Variables such as age and social/cultural status are not considered, since it is impossible to check these variables in textbooks.

Finally, this study does not aim at analyzing or questioning methodologies, programs, approaches, textbook activities, or teacher/student performance in class. It only questions the language appropriacy of the conversations presented in the textbooks.

2. *Claims of EFL Textbooks*

In this part, I will discuss the communicative claims made by the authors of the EFL textbooks I have chosen for analysis in this paper. Basically, all of the authors say their books are 'communicative' and present 'natural language'. I want to comment here on the assumptions behind these claims in order to see if they are in accordance with the concepts of discourse analysis.

2. 1. Communicative Claims of EFL Textbooks

The textbook *Interactions I* (Kirn and Jack) suggests in the preface that 'these books use lively natural language from a variety of context – dialogues, interviews, lectures, and announcements'.

On its back cover, *Streamline English Departures* (Hartley and Viney) proposes to give students 'a practical command of simple spoken English so that they can communicate at a basic level in an English speaking environment'.

Streamline English Connections (Hartley and Viney) says that

emphasis is on the development of oral/aural skills, and units of everyday conversation have been included to underline the practical nature of the language being taught. Students who complete this course successfully will have covered the basic structures and vocabulary of English which need to be learned actively if a reasonable level of communicative competence is to be attained.
(back cover)

Opening strategies (Abbs and Freebairn) claims that 'new language is presented through lively dialogues. Structures and functions are linked to communicative settings so that the students can see the practical application of the language they are learning' (back cover).

Building Strategies (Abbs and Freebairn) affirms that 'it takes the communicative needs of the learner as its first priority' (back cover).

These textbooks' claims suggest that students will deal with real conversations, as the books present 'lively natural language', 'lively dialogues', 'everyday conversation'. At this point, we can question the criteria adopted for considering dialogues from textbooks as 'natural language'. Through these dialogues, the textbooks guarantee that students will achieve 'a reasonable level of communicative competence'. What is understood by 'communicative competence'? Textbooks provide students with a language 'linked to communicative setting', and search for its 'practical application'. Does this language have features of language used in real interactions? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to review some basic concepts of conversation and discourse analysis.

2.2. Conversation Analysis

2.2.1. Communication

Richards and Schmidt (1984:4) define communication as 'the exchange and negotiation of information between at least two individuals

through the use of verbal and nonverbal symbols, oral and written/visual, in a production and comprehension process'.

Based on Widdowson (1978), the characteristics of communication are listed by Richards and Schmidt (1984) as follows:

- (a) Communication is a form of social interaction and is therefore normally acquired and used in social interaction;
- (b) Communication involves a high degree of unpredictability and creativity in form and message;
- (c) Communication takes place in discourse and social cultural contexts which provide constraints on appropriate language use and also clues as to correct interpretations of utterances;
- (d) Communication is carried out to under limiting psychological and other constraints, fatigue and distractions;
- (e) Communication always has a purpose (for example, to establish social relations, to persuade, or to promise);
- (f) Communication involves authentic, as opposed to textbook contrived language;
- (g) Communication is judged as successful or not on the basis of actual outcomes. (pp. 3-4).

These features show that communication involves more than what textbooks propose. According to Caldas-Coulthard (1988:30-31), 'in a real interaction, people communicate for a variety of reasons: to exchange information, to accomplish specific purposes or simply to make contact (phatic communion)'.

One of the most important types of interaction is conversation. It is important here to discuss the concept of conversation, since the broad

concern of this study is the comparison between natural conversation and textbook conversations.

2.2.2. Conversation

According to Goffman (1976:264), conversation is defined as 'talk occurring when a small number of participants come together and settle into what they perceive to be a few moments cut off from (or carried out on to the side of) instrumental tasks'. It is also defined as talk in which every participant can contribute with turns without any previously established organization; the topic to be discussed is determined, in the last instance, by the participants themselves without any need to compromise. Thus, conversation is understood as something to be settled without planning. It is rather impromptu.

Even so, conversations are ordered: i.e. they have a structural organization, as Sinclair and Coulthard (1977; 1985) and the ethno-methodologists Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) have pointed out. One of the basic structural features of conversational interactions is that they start and finish. *Closings* and *Opening* (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974) are, therefore, the elements crucial to any interaction. They are also the ones I will concentrate on.

2.2.3. Openings

The opening section is the part of a conversation where a participant breaks the silence and produces a first attempt to communicate with another participant. Generally, an opening section is constituted by an initial greeting term, which can be accepted or rejected by the other participant. The opening section appears only in conversations in which participants do not share a certain intimacy and thus, are not in a state of incipient talk. Service encounters and telephone talks often present

an opening section. Here is an example from my data (in the following, C stands for 'Customer', S for 'Server'):

S: Hello!

C: Hello! (gives S prescription)

S: Thank you. / Would you like to wait?

C: Unhum.

(Drugstore (EN) Text 01. (Freitas 1990:199))

As can be observed in this opening section, the participants produce a rather informal adjacency pair (greeting-greeting) in order to open the channel and establish the conversation.

2.2.4. Closings

Closing sections differ from openings in that they are generally the part of the conversation where the participants, having nothing more to say, choose to close the conversation. It should be noted that conversations cannot just stop, i.e. they have to be closed, except for those in which participants are in a continuous state of incipient talk.

According to Schegloff and Sacks (1973:290), 'closings are to be seen as achievements, as solutions to certain problems of conversational organization'.

Closings, just like openings, appear very explicitly in service encounter conversations and telephone talks. Here are some examples of closing sections from the Portuguese data:

C: Tudo bem, eu volto a ligar mais tarde, 'brigada.

'OK then. I'll call you later, thanks'.

(Telephone Caller (PN) Text 02. Dalacorte 1991)

S: Era só isso aqui?

'So that'll be all for now?'

C: Só sim.
'Yes'.

[C gets goods from S]

C: Obrigado.
'Thanks'.

S: Obrigado.
'Thanks'.

(Pharmacy (PN) Text 03. (Freitas 1990:210))

In the telephone example, the caller makes an arrangement and thanks the answerer, thereby closing the conversation. In the pharmacy example, the server utters a pre-closing 'era só isso aqui?' which is accepted by the customer 'só sim', thus initiating the closing section which is ended with the adjacency pair 'obrigado-obrigado'.

3. Classroom Interactions versus Real Interactions

Lectures, interviews, meetings are some of the different types of interaction.

Because conversations are normally unplanned and unpredictable, the teaching of 'talk' is a difficult task, as the formal language classroom does not seem to provide an appropriate environment for the occurrence of real conversation. In other words, conversation requires spontaneous and truthful negotiation of information achieved through the participants' ability to deal with the turn-taking system, which consists of the organization and distribution of turns worked out by participants. The turn-taking system is based on two major features of conversation as described by Schegloff and Sacks (1973:293): '(1) at least, and no more than, one party speaks at a time in a single conversation; and (2) speaker change recurs'.

A major feature of language teaching discourse, however, is that the teacher is normally in charge of the students' performance in class, i.e. the teacher generally controls the students' utterances.

Another important characteristic of language teaching, as mentioned in section 1 above, is that the discourse of a foreign language classroom has two separate layers of interaction, an inner one and an outer one.

For Willis (1987:2), the inner layer consists of the forms selected by the teacher as the goals for the lesson; these sequences of utterances bear 'little or no resemblance to possible sequences in normal discourse'.

On the other hand, 'the outer structure [layer, MCF] provides the framework of the lesson, the language used to socialize, organize, explain, and check, and generally to enable the pedagogic activities to take place' (Willis 1987:2).

Willis (1987:7) also presents a set of features of the inner layer, some of which I consider as the same as the features that are characteristic of EFL textbook conversations: students produce the correct sentence forms, but do not really exchange information; the discourses of the inner layer are not coherent on their own (Willis 1987:4) and they are only interactive 'in so far as they are related to the exchange on the outer layer' (Willis 1987:4-5); 'it doesn't really matter whether the student tells the truth when replying' (Willis 1987:5).

Sinclair and Brazil (1982:24) provide a good example of a foreign language class in which there is a change in layers:

T: Tell me, when did the boys put up their tent?
When?

[says the name of the student]

P: Late in the afternoon.

T: Late in the afternoon, yes.

Is it late in the afternoon now?

[names student]

P: No.

T: No.

What is this?

Is it in the afternoon now?

No, when is it?

- It is in the...
- P: In the afternoon.
- T: No, no.
Sit down.
Is it in the afternoon now?
You.
- P: No, it is morning.
- T: It is in the...
- P: It is in the morning.
- T: Now once again.
- P: It is in the morning.
- T: It is in the morning.
Now, sit down.

Sinclair and Brazil (1982:24) explain that in the utterance 'In the afternoon' the student 'may have misunderstood the teacher's use of the template "It is in the afternoon"'. According to the authors, the student 'assumed that he was to make up a phrase on the inner level, which, of course, need not have information value'. For Sinclair and Brazil (1982), the utterance 'It is in the...!', elicited by the teacher 'is an example of the switch from outer to inner'.

According to Willis (1987:5), the focus on form, and not on the information exchanged, is a characteristic of most conversations in language teaching and this makes them 'pseudo-interactive'. Even so, for Willis (1987) the inner layer depends on the outer layer to exist in a classroom setting.

For a dialogue to be really communicative, therefore, it should have not only structural organization (formal closings and openings, for example) and a systematic order of turn-taking; it also needs to have all the other interactional features pointed out by the theoreticians of interaction. In other words, participants should be engaged in a social context where information is exchanged: the conversation should have a purpose and an outcome. This does not seem to happen when students are 'practicing' a dialogue from a textbook.

4. *Comments on the EFL Textbook Claims*

Because EFL textbook conversations are *written*, they belong to the inner layer of discourse: they are not really interactive (as the authors claim), but 'pseudo-interactive'. The 'turn-taking' is allocated by the author; the structural organization is not overtly marked; there is no passing of real information; the topics are determined by the aim of the lesson; there is no negotiation between participants; and, as Willis (1987) suggests, it does not matter if the participants are telling the truth or not.

Textbook conversations, in a sense, are very similar to fictional dialogues. However, while fictional dialogues have a narrative purpose, EFL talk has a pedagogic aim. Although those two types of written interaction seem to be the same, both are simplified and reduced forms of ordinary oral talk. According to Caldas-Coulthard (1988:42), they are distinguished by their functional outcome.

As for the textbooks' claim that they aim at teaching communicative and cultural competence through the dialogues, I believe that the main focus is still on teaching linguistic production. Considering that communicative competence is the ability to communicate successfully in the target language, whereas cultural competence is the knowledge of the cultural background of the language learned, I question whether EFL textbook conversations are really concerned with teaching such competence, or at least try to make the students aware that there are differences among languages and cultures. As the lessons' presentations follow a selection of grammatical structures to be taught, in reality, the conversations have, as their first task, to fulfill the linguistic needs of the lessons. I intend to discuss this through a comparison of real and pseudo-dialogues.

5. *Analyzing Closings*

In this section, I analyze the structure of the closing sections of real Portuguese and English interactions, as contrasted with the structure of closing sections of EFL textbook dialogues. The analysis is based on Schegloff and Sacks's (1973) theory of the overall structural organization of closing sections.

The data analyzed here consist of closing sections of service encounter interactions in a pharmacy and a travel agency setting.

Based on the contrastive analysis, I will try to answer the following questions: Are there similarities and/or differences between the closing sections of the natural data and the closing sections of EFL textbooks data? Do the closing sections of EFL dialogues follow the overall structural organization as described in the theory? What are the problems for a Brazilian learning English through EFL textbook dialogues?

5.1. The Structural Organization of Closings

Schegloff and Sacks (1973:289ff) have analyzed the closing sections of single conversations. Based on natural conversations, the authors propose to develop a 'technical basis for the closing problem' through the description of features of 'the organization of speaker turns', in order to solve the problem of the closing sections. In their analysis, the authors resort to the 'organization of topic talk' and the overall structural organization of the unit 'a single conversation'. The authors assume that the materials they are dealing with exhibit a certain order. They intend to 'explicate the ways in which the materials are produced by members in orderly ways that exhibit their orderliness and have their orderliness appreciated and used, and have that appreciation displayed and treated as the basis for subsequent action' (Schegloff and Sacks 1973:290).

The authors consider the closing sections as part of the overall structural organization of single conversations (Schegloff and Sacks 1973:293). For this reason, the reference to the order of organization of conversation is necessary. So, two basic features of conversation are suggested: 'at least, and no more than, one party speaks at a time in a single conversation' and 'speaker change recurs' (1973:293). Assuming that these features activate the turn-taking system, the transition from one utterance to another, or from one speaker to another, is marked by a 'transition relevance of possible utterance completion' (Schegloff and Sacks *ibid.*). This completion is placed within the utterance, and so the transition becomes relevant to a next speaker. These two features, fundamental for conversation, 'make no provision for the closing of the conversation' (Schegloff and Sacks 1973:294). So, the authors raise the basic problems concerned with closings. A first question then is asked: 'how is the transition relevance of possible utterance completion lifted?' (Schegloff and Sacks 1973:295). An answer to this question is suggested: through the use of 'terminal exchanges' which are composed of conventional parts, e.g., an exchange of 'good-byes' (Schegloff and Sacks *ibid.*). Thus, a terminal exchange is an adjacency pair which is defined as having the following features: '(1) two utterance length, (2) adjacent positioning of component utterances, (3) different speakers producing each utterance' (Schegloff and Sacks *ibid.*). The utterances that constitute these sequences are related to each other due to the 'operation of a typology in the speakers' production of the sequences' (Schegloff and Sacks 1973:296).

The typology operates in two ways: the utterance types can be 'first pair parts' (i.e. first parts of pairs, the first 'good-bye' for example) or second pair parts (the answer to the first 'good bye'); a first pair part and a second pair part form a 'pair type' (Schegloff and Sacks 1973: 296).

One recognizes a first pair part, the authors suggest, through the syntactic construction and through the 'use of conventional components' (Schegloff and Sacks 1973:297). At this point, a possible solution to the problem of where to lift the transition relevance is

given: 'transition relevance is to be lifted after the second pair part's occurrence' (Schegloff and Sacks 1973:298).

The next question raised by the authors is related to the 'placement of the first part of terminal exchanges' (Schegloff and Sacks 1973:299). Apparently, the placement of the first part of terminal exchange is 'organized by reference to a properly initiated closing section' (Schegloff and Sacks 1973:300). In order to do this adequately, the authors refer to some aspects of the overall organization of conversation. A relevant aspect is the organization of topic talk. From this aspect, it is possible to understand the ordering and distributing of talk in conversations by participants, i.e. the positioning of mentionables in the conversation, the concept of mentionables being explained by the authors as 'what gets talked about in a conversation' (Schegloff and Sacks 1973:300). The authors conclude that 'one central feature of proper initiations of closing sections is their relationship to hitherto unmentioned mentionables, and some methods for initiating closings seem designed precisely for such problems' (Schegloff and Sacks 1973:304).

So, they suggest that the 'first proper way of initiating a closing section' (Schegloff and Sacks *ibid.*) is the 'pre-closing'. The pre-closing can also be called 'possible pre-closing', as in the examples 'well', 'OK...', which may only serve to indicate that the speaker 'has not now anything more or new to say, and also to give a "free" turn to a next who...' (Schegloff and Sacks 1973:304). The authors note that topical coherence refers to 'considerations relevant to conversationalists in ordering and distributing their talk about mentionables in a single conversation' (Schegloff and Sacks 1973:300).

However, and this is another possibility, a participant may have nothing else to add, and in this case the closing section is initiated. 'OK' is an example of a possible pre-closing that is placed after 'a close, or the closing down of a topic' (Schegloff and Sacks 1973:312) and such exchanges 'as "OK, OK" respect in their placement certain local orders of organization' (*ibid.*). In contrast, the example 'I gotta go' is an overt announcement which can interrupt a topic and does not respect the

order of organization of conversation. In Portuguese, a closing section can be initiated by pre-closings as in 'Que mais?' 'Mais alguma coisa?' 'Algo mais sr. [senhor]?' ('What else?' 'Anything else?' 'Anything else, sir?'). A closing section may be initiated in other parts of the conversation. Questions such as 'Did I wake you?' may appear in the beginning of a conversation. In this case, they are called 'pre-topic closing offers' (Schegloff and Sacks 1973:314). Making arrangements are also possibilities for closing a conversation.

A conversation can be re-opened at any of its parts, so 'getting to a termination therefore involves work at various points in the conversation's, and the closing section's course; it requires accomplishing' (Schegloff and Sacks 1973:324).

In my analysis, I will consider only the cases in which the closing sections of the conversations 'end a state of talk' (Schegloff and Sacks *ibid.*). Therefore, I will not take into account those cases in which participants are in a 'continuing state of incipient talk which need not close segments with closing sections and terminal exchanges' (Schegloff and Sacks *ibid.*).

The closing section involves also a preparation of actions when ending a conversational event. That is, action plays an important role in the event's ending as well.

5.1.1. Portuguese and English Data

The following items of this section show the results of the analysis of Portuguese and English closing sections of real interactions.

5.1.1.1. Turn-Taking System

From the analysis of the closing sections of service encounter interactions, it can be observed that they present the two major features of conversation, i.e. one party speaking at a time and the recurrence of

speaker change. The following are examples of Portuguese and English natural data:

- C: Tens alguma coisa pro estômago?
'Do you have anything for the stomach?'
- S: Estomazil. Queres tomar já?
'Estomazil. Do you want to take it now?'
- C: Queria. Obrigado.
Olha o copo. Obrigado.
'I'd like to. Thank you'.
'Here's the cup [back]. Thank you'.
(Pharmacy (PN) Text 04. (Zornig 1987:119))

- C: Would you have batteries?
- S: Yes. / they are just where you're looking.
[C: keeps looking at batteries]
- C: Sorry / you don't have the one I want.
- S: Okay.
(Drugstore (EN) Text 05. (Freitas 1990:199))

5.1.1.2. Questions as Transition Relevance

The transition relevance of a possible closing section can be expressed through the use of questions, as in the example 'mais alguma coisa?' in the Portuguese conversation:

- S: Você?
'You [wish]?'
- C: Uma aspirina.
'An aspirin'.
- S: Mais alguma coisa?
'Anything else?'

C: Só isso.
'Just this'.
(Pharmacy (PN) Text 06. (Zornig 1987:117))

In English, questions are also used in utterances where the transition relevance to a closing section is lifted. The raising intonation in 'all right?' makes it a question, as in the next example:

C: [gives S prescription]
S: Thank you / are you going to wait for it?
C: Yeah.
S: Are you going to pay for it?
C: [nod of the head]
S: two sixty please.
C: [gives money]
S: Thank you.
[long pause]
S: Miss ()? / here you are. /
[gives goods to C]
thank you. / all right /
C: Thanks.
S: Bye.
C: Bye.
(Drugstore (EN) Text 07. (Freitas 1990:202))

5.1.1.3. Actions as Transition Relevance

The transition relevance to a possible closing section can also be lifted through the participants' action or a combination of actions and words. Schegloff and Sacks (1973:323) say that 'in face-to-face interaction, a whole range of physical doings and positionings, ruled out by the priorities of maintaining a show of attention and interest (cf. Goffman 1961, 1963, 1967), become available and/or required upon termination'.

According to the authors, to bring a conversation to an end 'has to do with the organization of conversation as constituent part of an occasion or interaction' (ibid. 325).

Thus, action as a constituent part of an interaction also influences in the closing of conversation. The following Portuguese examples have the transition relevance to a possible closing section lifted by actions:

- S: Oi!
'Hi!'
- C: Blumenau. / Amanhã. 1 e 40.
'Blumenau. Tomorrow [at] 1:40'.
- S: 1 e 40?
'1:40?'
- S: [fills in the ticket and telephones to book] Pode ser 36?
'Could it be [1:]36?'
- C: Pode.
'OK'.
- S: É 1.055.
'That's 1.055 [reais]'.
- C: [fills in the check and gives it to S]
- S: [gives ticket]
- C: Obrigado.
'Thank you'.
- S: De nada.
'No problem'.
- (Travel Agency (PN) Text 08. (Freitas 1990:157))

- S: Pois não?
'OK then?'
- C: Passagem pra Itajaí?
'A ticket to Itajaí?'
- S: [books / fills in / checks price] 683.
'683 [reais]'.
- C: [pays]

S: [gives change and ticket] 'brigada.
'Thanks'.

C: [no words / leaves]
(Travel Agency (PN) Text 09. (Freitas 1990:158))

In the example above, almost all of the closing section is constituted by actions, except for the utterance 'brigada' ('thanks') produced by the female server.

S: Você o que era?
'And for you?'

C: Eu queria comprar uma passagem pra Balneário Camboriú.
'I'd like to book passage to Balneário Camboriú'.

S: Pra quando?
'For when?'

C: Dia 7 às 15 e 15.
'For the 7th at 15:15'.

S: [books, completes tickets] 544.
'544 [reais]'.

C: [pays]

S: [gives C change and ticket] Vou ficar te devendo um, tá?
'I'll have to owe you one [real], OK?'

C: Tudo bem.
'That's all right'.

S: Obrigada.
'Thank you'.

C: De nada.
'No problem'.

(Travel Agency (PN) Text 10. (Freitas 1990:159))

In English, the transition relevance to possible closing sections also concerns present actions, besides other conversational components, as in the next example:

- S: Hi. / Can I help you?
C: A ticket from the University of Birmingham. / And then New Street?
S: Er. / When would you like to go?
C: On Thursday. / the ninth.
S: [fills out ticket]
Do you want to go back to New Street?
C: Yes, please.
S: It's three twenty five. / Paying by cash?
C: Yeah. [pays]
S: Thank you very much.
C: Thanks.

(Travel Agency (EN) Text 10. (Freitas 1990:174-175))

5.1.1.4. Conversational Markers as Transition Relevance

The transition relevance to a possible closing section can also be lifted by conversational markers. Here is an example in English:

- S: Can I help?
C: Just some information. / I've already got my tickets. / But I've got to make my booking now. / I wonder if it's possible to make it through here.
S: Sorry. / Can I just look at your ticket, please?
C: Yeap.
S: Right. / We can do it. / But it'll cost you 10 pounds.
C: 10 pounds?
S: Yes.
C: Oh dear.
S: Yes. / Because in booking the responsibility will be ours so...,
C: Right. / I see but...
S: It's best for you to go to London and do it directly.
C: That's what I think. / Anyway. / Thank you very much.

S: Thank you.

C: Bye bye.

S: Bye.

(Travel Agency (EN) Text 12. (Freitas 1990:197))

In this example, the customer's utterance 'that's what I think. / Anyway. / Thank you very much' has the conversational marker 'anyway' lifting the transition relevance to the closing section. Here's another example in English:

C: Do you have any aspirins?

S: Aspirin, yes, sir. D'you want Bayers?

C: I do want Bayers.

S: All right then, what'd you want? Hundreds, fifties, or // (())?

C: Fifty.

S: Fifty. O.K. [goes to get]

(Drugstore (EN) Text 13. (Zornig 1987:126))

The server's utterance 'All right, then, what'd you want? Hundreds, fifties, or // (())?' presents the conversational marker 'All right, then', raising the transition relevance. However, in this example, the server in the same utterance introduces a new topic 'what'd you want? Hundreds, fifties, or // (())?' The introduction of a new topic according to Schegloff and Sacks (1973) can appear in any part of the conversation. Let's examine the next example:

S: Can I help anybody?

C: Yes, please. / Can I have a railcard and. / Er. / I already want to make use of it. / I mean. / I want a ticket. / Birmingham London.

S: Right. / First. / Have you got two photographs with you?

C: Yeah. / Here you are.

S: [gets card]

Could you fill in with your name please?

- S: Yes sure.
 S: Can I see your Guild card please?
 C: [gives S card]
 [pause]
 S: It's four pounds fifty.
 C: Yes. / Can I have the ticket from Birmingham to London as well?
 S: Oh, yes. / Sorry. / return or...?
 C: Return, please.
 S: That'll be er. / Are you traveling today?
 C: Tomorrow.
 S: Right. / So that'll be 14 pounds all together.
 C: [pays]
 S: [gives change / ticket and card]
 C: Thank you very much.
 S: Thank you. / Bye.
 C: Bye.

(Travel Agency (EN) Text 14. (Freitas 1990:196))

Here, differently from the other cases, a transition relevance is first raised by the assertive 'It's four pounds fifty' in which the server assumes that the customer does not have anything else to say. However, in the customer's next utterance a new topic is introduced 'Yes, can I have the ticket from Birmingham to London as well?' The use of 'as well' shows that the customer understood the previous utterance as a possible initiation of a closing section. This is confirmed by the server's next utterance 'Oh, yes. / Sorry' in which the server makes an excuse for trying to initiate a closing section. The transition relevance to the closing section of this conversation is lifted by the conversational markers 'Right. / So...' in the utterance 'Right. / So that'll be 14 pounds all together'.

5.1.1.5. Closing Sections

After talking about how and where the closing sections are initiated, I will comment on other components of the closing sections themselves. In service encounter interactions, closings generally present a possible component part described by Schegloff and Sacks (1973) as a 'thanking'.

Greetings may be also used in service encounter conversations, as for example, exchanges of 'goodbye'. Here is an example in Portuguese:

C: Tudo bem? Paga esses condomínios.

'Everything OK? Paying for these condo bills'.

S: Já vou buscar a pastinha.

'I'll get the file'.

[S checks the file on his screen, does the transfer and tells C that his order has been completed]

C: Deu? Muito obrigado, hem!

Tchau.

'Seriously? Thanks a lot, then!

Bye!

(Bank (PN) Text 15. (Zornig 1987:127))

5.1.1.6. Power Relations

In the previous examples, closing sections are introduced both by customers and servers. However, both in Portuguese and English the servers are responsible for the initiation of the closing sections in most cases. The fact that servers introduce closing sections may indicate that they want to show condescension, i.e. that they know that they hold the control of the interaction, but they give the customers the chance to accept or refuse the initiation of the closing section. The servers' strategy is generally very subtle, and participants are not aware of who is in control.

5.1.2. EFL Textbook Data

The results of the analysis of EFL textbook closing sections will be presented in the next sections.

5.1.2.1. Turn-Taking System

The EFL textbook conversations present the two major features of the turn-taking system, just as do the natural data. However, overlaps or interruptions of turns, which can occur in normal interactions, are never present in EFL materials. This is an example:

S: May I help you?

C: Yes, could you tell us the fare to San Diego?

S: The round-trip fare is \$29.50.

C: When will the next bus leave?

S: Let's see. It's 5:25 now. You might still catch the 5:30 bus.

(Travel Agency Text 16. (*Interactions I:110*))

5.1.2.2. Questions as Transition Relevance

In some EFL textbook conversations, questions are used to raise the transition relevance to a possible closing section, as the following example shows:

C: Could I have a tube of toothpaste, please?

S: With fluoride or without fluoride?

C: With fluoride, please.

S: Is that all, sir?

C: Yes, that's all, thank you.

S: Shall I put it in a bag?

C: Please.

(Pharmacy Text 17. (*Streamline Connections*, Unit 9))

In this example, the server asks 'Is that all, sir?' as an attempt to lift the transition relevance to a possible closing section, similarly to what occurs in the natural data.

5.1.2.3. Actions as Transition Relevance

In EFL textbook conversations, one finds the omission of a transition relevance point leading to a closing section. Here is an example:

C: Excuse me...

S: Yes, can I help you?

C: Yes, I'd like some information about trains please.

S: Where to?

C: ... to London.

S: When?

C: Tomorrow.

S: Morning or afternoon?

C: In the evening. About six o'clock.

S: There's one at 6.40.

C: Thank you.

(Travel Agency Text 18. (*Streamline Departures*, Unit 15))

In this dialogue, there is no apparent transition, i.e. the conversation closes abruptly by the customer's production of the first pair part of the adjacency pair 'greeting-greeting', in this case not followed by the expected second pair part. This abruptness sounds rude in natural conversations, because when a participant lifts a transition relevance to a possible closing section, actually s/he is trying to be polite, following the politeness rules suggested by Lakoff (1973:298):

1. Don't impose.
2. Give options.
3. Make A feel good – be friendly.

In this case, intonation would help to soften the rudeness of the sudden use of 'Thank you'. However, the omission of a transition relevance point is the problem here and it makes this closing section sound strange.

5.1.2.4. Conversational Markers as Transition Relevance

Conversational markers also lift the transition relevance to possible closing sections in EFL textbook conversations, as in the following interchange:

- C: Good afternoon.
S: Good afternoon. Can I help you?
C: Yes, I've got a terrible headache.
S: How long have you had it?
C: Only about two three hours.
S: Well, try these tablets. Take two with water every three hours.
C: Thank you very much.
(Pharmacy Text 19. (*Streamline Connections*, Unit 9))

In this conversation, the conversational marker 'well' followed by the suggestion 'try these tablets', lifts the transition relevance to the closing section. However, in many cases I observed that EFL textbook dialogues do not present conversation markers to indicate an introduction to a possible closing section.

5.1.2.5. Closing Sections

In many cases, EFL textbooks conversations lift the transition relevance, but omit the other components of the closing section. The following is an example:

C: Have you got any seats left for the Stratford excursion?

S: Yes, sir. There are a few seats left.

C: Is that the one that goes to Oxford as well?

S: That's right.

C: How long does the whole excursion take?

S: Approximately ten hours, sir.

C: Shall I pay now?

S: If you don't mind, sir.

(Travel Agency Text 20. (*Streamline Connections*, Unit 46))

In this conversation, the customer lifts the transition relevance to the closing section, which is accepted by the server; a learner might think that this is how one closes a conversation. The omission of a proper closing makes the conversation end abruptly, and this sounds rude. The same happens as in the next example:

C: Can I cash this check?

S: Sure. Will you please sign your name on the back?
And may I see two pieces of identification?

C: Here are my driver's license and a credit card.

S: How do you want it?

C: I'm sorry – could you repeat that?

S: Do you want ten dollar bills, twenties...?

C: Oh, I'll take it in tens.

(Bank Text 21. (*Interactions I*: 110))

The inclusion of a component part of a closing section, a greeting term, for example, would make these dialogues sound less rude.

5.1.2.6. Power Relations

In many examples of EFL textbook service encounter interactions, closing sections are introduced by customers, who thus often are made responsible for closing the dialogues. This may indicate that servers are viewed by EFL textbook authors as passive participants. Apparently, textbooks try to make customers the ones responsible for controlling the conversation. This is not the case in reality, as the natural data show.

5.2. Contrastive Analysis

Closing sections of EFL Textbooks are similar to real ones in the following aspects: they present the two major features of the turn-taking system and the transition relevance points are lifted to initiate closings. However, real closings are different in many respects. Firstly, despite the fact that transition relevance is lifted to initiate the closing section, the purposes for doing so are not the same as in the natural data: textbooks lift the transition relevance to end the written dialogue and not for the communicative purpose of ending an interaction. Secondly, closings are introduced without transition relevance, which is not common in real interactions. Thirdly, interactions such as service encounters, which normally require a closing, do not present any closing sections. Fourthly, there is an apparent inversion of power relations between participants in service encounter interactions.

These differences make EFL textbook dialogues different from natural conversation in relation to their closings. It seems that these differences interfere with the structural organization.

Despite the similarities, a Brazilian learning English would have some problems when faced with real situations. First, the student would not lift the transition relevance to a closing section adequately in English, because textbook dialogues do not emphasize the communicative function of lifting the transition relevance point to a

closing. Second, the student would find it natural to end a conversation without the appropriate closing, even when it is required (as in the case of service encounter interactions) and would be considered impolite by a native speaker. Third, the student would not be able to define the power relations existent in the English environment because EFL textbook dialogues do not reflect this reality.

6. Conclusion

In this study, I have examined the closing sections of service encounter interactions and telephone conversations in real interactions in both English and Portuguese and compared them to EFL dialogues. The analysis consisted of the comparison of the data according to the overall structural organization of closings.

This contrastive study was carried out in order to test my initial hypothesis that EFL textbook conversations – as part of the inner layer of discourse in a language classroom – are 'pseudo-interactions'. The differences found between EFL dialogues and natural conversation in relation to organizational and interactional features support this hypothesis. Below, I point up a few of these differences.

The overall structural organization of closings in some EFL textbook conversations show structural features that are different from those of natural conversations. For example, the transition relevance points leading to closings are used inappropriately. Also, EFL dialogues differ from natural conversations in the structural organization of closings in relation to the way the turn components are displayed in the sequences.

The results suggest that EFL dialogues are not interactive. They may have features of real interactions; however, their major function is not communicative but pedagogical.

It should be noted that the conclusions drawn from this study do not imply that EFL textbooks should teach language through natural conversation. This would probably be unfeasible. It only suggests that

textbook writers should be more careful when claiming that they teach real language through EFL dialogues.

I believe that efforts should be made to improve EFL textbook conversations by attempting to bring the inner language layer closer to the outer one. The ideal would be not to have the two layers of discourse in a language classroom. However, this is not possible, as the classroom limits the environment in which subjects interact. EFL textbooks should, at least, show learners the interactional characteristics that distinguish the first and the target languages. In summary, EFL dialogues should provide communicative tools that will assure learners a reliable conversational competence in the target language.

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