

MAJOR NOTATIONAL SYMBOLS PROPOSED FOR ANALYZING ORAL BUSINESS NEPALI: A FUNCTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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A general model of conversation analysis may not equally work to meet the purpose of a given analysis and the typical characteristics of a given language. This article proposes a model of notational symbols, both adapted and developed, to match the functional features of conversations drawn from oral business Nepali.

Keywords: Context, conversation, linguistic functionalism, symbol, text

1. Introduction

Functional linguistics strongly views that we, human beings, need language to carry out certain purposes. Such purposes manifest themselves as categories of verbal behavior, such as, requesting, offering, asking and so on. The functional perspective holds that a form (structure) is a means used to perform functions (Chanturidze, 2018). Linguistic formalism, by contrast, emphasizes the formal characteristics of language. By doing this, linguistic formalism ignores the communicative functions with which the forms are associated. Yet, linguistic functionalism combines the investigation of both forms and functions (Trask, 2007)

Contextual appropriacy, as a catalyzer, bridges linguistic forms and communicative functions. Therefore, unlike linguistic formalism, linguistic functionalism also keeps contextual appropriacy at the premium. According to this view, what is structurally accurate may not necessarily be appropriate for use in the given situation, both socio-physically as well as textually. Socio-physical context is even a more significant variable as regards oral communication. From this perspective, context is the force that drives linguistic symbols into action. In other words, when it comes to oral communication, linguistic symbols alone may not always fully suffice unless they are supplemented by contextual variables. As Poudel and Acharya (2019) observe, linguistic

symbols come into play "only when they are put into the actual context of practice" (p. 11). Oral communication in its natural setting becomes functionally meaningful because interlocutors almost continually apply contextual clues to linguistic symbols as they speak and hear. However, although writing/transcribing is better facilitated with textual context, it is deprived of the natural mechanism of the socio-physical dynamics of context which is available in oral communication. Because a comprehensive analysis of conversation/discourse is nearly impossible without context representation, there is a need for notational symbols to be followed as conventions. To quote Liddicoat (2007), "the study of language in purely linguistic terms could not adequately account for the nature of language-in-use" (p. 4).

Several names have been used in the literature to refer to what, in this article, has been termed notational symbols. Some of them, for example, are 'transcript symbols' (Jefferson, 2004), 'conventions' (Kowal & O'Connell, 2014). Whatever the names, they are a set of symbols which are used to capture at least those features of talk and interaction that are deemed interesting and relevant rather than attempting to fully represent what is heard and seen in the data recording (to follow the closed system as opposed to the open system) (Jenks, 2011)

Linguists, specifically discourse/conversation analysts, have developed various models of notational symbols and applied them to analyzing conversations occurring in the natural setting. Regmi, Allwood and Uranw (2012) synthesize such models under the Conversational Analysis (CA) model and the Activity-based Communication Analysis (ACA) model. According to them, the former is inclined to a sociological approach to conversation whereas the latter "is pragmatically oriented and based on social activities" (p. 171). The ACA model is

quite close to the present proposal in the sense that it, unlike the former, accounts for vocal-verbal contributions as the basic unit of analysis. Applying the ACA model, they analyze Nepali spoken interaction concentrating on overlap.

However, a given model developed for analyzing certain language data may not equally apply to all contexts mainly because of the purpose of the analysis/research and the typical characteristics of the language from which the recorded data are drawn. This article proposes a model of notational symbols developed by the author/research for analyzing an oral business Nepali (OBN)-based language corpus. In developing the model, the author/researcher has drawn on the conventional symbols used widely for discourse/conversation analysis (D/CA) as far as they are applicable to the OBN data, and proposed a set of others to represent the cases which demand for originality to match the typical features grounded in the data.

In this article, the term 'business' has been employed to refer to the selling or/and buying of goods and services. By the same token, OBN refers to the Nepali language as it is used in its natural setting for business transactions.

2. Methodology

The approach on which this study was based is qualitative. By the qualitative approach to research, we mean a non-numerical one. To quote from Howitt (2016), qualitative research is “research which is based on rich textual rather than numerical data” (p. 534). Consistent with the spirit of the qualitative approach, the data were obtained in the verbal form and analyzed and interpreted textually rather than statistically. In this sense, the process ultimately aligns with the interpretivist research paradigm.

Methodologically, the study approximates the grounded theory method. Although the entire research process was underpinned by the functional perspective, no preconceived theoretical lenses were applied as a 'priori' or model in an attempt to interpret the data. In fact, the study process began with data collection, followed in parallel with their analysis. The notational symbols were adapted as far as they were available in the extant literature. However, if

not, they were borrowed from various sources, and, after all, developed as appropriate to match the gap(s) and, at the same time, to meet the purpose of the study.

The study builds solely on a corpus of oral business Nepali (OBN) including a total of 24,000 words collected from various 'sites' and 'hubs' from the major business centers within Nepal, where the medium of transaction is relatively 'pure' Nepali. Words, utterances and expressions were audio-recorded in the natural settings where the interlocutors, adult speakers of Nepali, were pragmatically involved in oral business communication. Memos were prepared simultaneously to remind the context in which the expressions had taken place so as to facilitate the analysis later on.

As stated earlier, the notational symbols illustrated in this study are the closed system, one that concentrates on functionally significant features, thereby excluding the punctuations commonly used in the orthography of the English language, and intonation that could be a significant variable particularly in the oral form of language. Besides, many features considered significant under the sociological approach to Conversation Analysis have been excluded from the scope of this study. A point worth mentioning here is that although translation is not central to this study, the principle followed for translating the Texts is the maximal effort to preserve the structure of the source language (Nepali) while maintaining the intelligibility of the target language (English). For this reason no separate glosses have been applied.

3. Results and interpretation

In this section, the major distinctive contextual features that have influenced the functional conveyance of the OBN data have been considered.

Table 1. Major notational symbols illustrated from OBN

Contextual variables	Symbols used
That, action only is taking place with no utterance(s), as a result of what had verbally taken place previously	{ }
English words elided in their near-Nepali translation.	[]
Analyst's clarification of word/phrase meaning and grammatical features in the conversation	()
Low honorific	(Hon.↓)
High honorific	(Hon.↑)
Said/say/says to	→
English translation of Nepali expressions phonemically transcribed	→
Overlapping/interrupted speech]]
Self-interruption	∅
Lengthening	..
Personal information (name, phone number etc.) hidden (for an ethical reason)	#
Look at	☞
Short pause (up to five seconds)	(...0.3), here, roughly, a 3 second pause
Long pause (more than five seconds, up to minutes]	(...0.7), here, a 7 second pause
Turn truncation	⊥
Sentence truncation	⊞
Clause truncation	⊟
Word truncation	⊠
Automatic sense-inference from co-text	[auto-sense:]
Laughter (a single person)	Haha!
Laughter (group)	Hahaha!
Meaning/linguistico-cultural explanation of an SL term	Footnote: 1, 2, 3 etc.
Phonemic transcription within the Text	Transcription

Text 1

Context: In this text, the seller (S) is hawking about the kiwi fruit at his stall which is crowded when the buyers (B1 and B2) arrive. Then Bs and S talk.

B1: Here, here! Let me also see by tasting.

B2: How awn-covered! The awn is not for eating, is it?

S: The skin [is] to be peeled [and]; the kernel [is] to be eaten.

B2: The kernel [is] to be eaten?

S: Its juice)

B2: Perhaps, this (tea dust) is also from Ilam, brother?

S: [Yes] From Ilam, from Ilam.

In this conversation, Bs and S are talking about the kiwi fruit, and tea-dust towards the end. Bs are asking about those things and S is telling about them in the context in which the things are present.

The conversation illustrates four symbols. Turns 3, 4 and 7 indicate that the words were elided in Nepali but if they were in an English conversation they would most probably be uttered. Turn 5 and 6 show that B interrupted as soon as S started taking his turn. In Bhadra's (2004) terms, the interruption occurs because the "next speaker self-selects" without considering the "transition relevance place (TRP)".

Text 2

Context: Here, B (male aged twenties) has already got a t-shirt from S (female aged thirties) and paid with a five hundred rupee note whereas S still insists on 650 rupees. Now S and B talk.

S: No, no. [Please] add 150 rupees.

B: OK, take [it]. {He gives a hundred rupee note}

S: Because [it] does not really come brother, you see!

B: I [will] take and go. Surely, [it] does (will) come.

S: If the rate of the profit is not even one rupee, even lower than the principal, there is (would be) no benefit by sitting here.

- B: Well, do I have to put (add) 150 rupees anyway? (...0.3). The price of that one and this one is the same, isn't it?
- S: Yes, this one is also the same. You can take this very one.
- B: [I] have to add 150 whichever [I] take, no? (Don't I?)
- S: Yes, whichever [you] take (...0.8). [I] had to push-sell [it] at any cost by making brother (you) exhausted. [You] had to take due to my compulsion. Haha!
- B: So, [you] kept me tired. What could [I] do?

In this part of the conversation, bargaining is the central function. Initially, the interlocutors are involved in a post-transaction bargain followed by B's choice seeking. Finally, the text ends with S's reflection on the transaction.

A set of notational symbols have been applied to the Text. The parentheses have been used to indicate the distinctions of grammatical features (4, 5, 8 and 9) whereas a lexical distinction has been indicated in 6. These distinctions were apparent while attempting to translate the near-Nepali usages into the ones in near-English. Similarly, B took a short pause (3 seconds) for calculating in his head (6) before he put another query regarding the choice, whereas S paused for relatively long (8 seconds) at the transition between the key business language and the language of reflection on the transaction (9). As a business strategy, of course, she neutralized the tension created by the bargain by first reflecting on her activity; so, it exemplifies language used for maintaining necessary formality. In fact, functionally speaking, she used the last utterance in a phatic manner. Finally, she laughed for further scaffolding her reflection as a clue to business socialization.

Text 3

Context: B buys some potatoes at Balkhu Vegetables and Fruits Market, Kathmandu. B and S talk.

- B: How [much] is this potato a dhak¹?
- S: This 170. OK, do 160.

- B: [Please] weigh one dhak.
- S: {Weighs one dhak}
- B {Gives a five hundred-rupee note.}
- S: Take [the refund back]. Take [it].
- B: Didn't you say 160?
- S: *An..* yes. Take [a ten rupee note].

The key function underpinning this conversation is getting someone to do something including getting the addressee to remember (8).

Some symbols have been applied to this Text, too. The term 'dhak' is not accurately translatable into English because it is typical of the Nepalese business culture. Explaining such cultural meaning within the text will sometimes be dull, so, the footnote will help (1). Sometimes, the meaning of what is being said may highly depend on what has just been done. In such a case mentioning the action in some way is important, as in 4 and 5 in the Text. Similarly, in this example, the Nepali expression 'An' was lengthened by the speaker to concentrate to remember (8), i.e. language functioning cognitively

Text 4

B, a subordinate to S, seeks to buy a half bottle of Khukuri rum at a 'liquors' on the outskirts of Kathmandu. It occurs that B is a regular and familiar buyer and is slightly thick skinned to S.

- B: Is [there] 'Khukuri'?
- S: [Yes, there] is. Full or half?
- B: Half. How much?
- S: 700 for the half.
- B: Shall I bring [one] at 600?
- S: Iss..² you brought! Where [on earth] do you get and bring?! (Hon.↓)
- B: OK, give [one] then.

This Text basically illustrates two functions: exchanging information (the communicative) in the beginning and expressing annoyance (the

2 An expression usually passed with the crescent shaped hand to indicate insult.

¹ A weight of 5 kg.

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emotive) towards the end. It typically exemplifies the low honorific usage addressed to the subordinate (S) by the superordinate (B) (6).

Text 5

Specific context: B1 and B2 (B1's companion) are conversing at a stall at the Road Festival in Dharan.

S: How [much] of this butter shall [we] take Madam?

B1: Give one kg [please].

S: One kg only? /sar pāts kedzi t_Λ lisjo n_Λ/ → Take 4–5 kg [please] (Hon. ↑).

B2 Weighing 5 kg, subtract 4 kg, hahaha!.

Text 5 starts with exchanging information (the communicative function) and finally turns towards creating humor, particularly repartee, (i.e., the aesthetic function), in which B2 applies repartee - he deliberately insists on his own point in different words meaning the same (Abrams & Harpham, 2012).

Because of the absence of the Nepali-specific high honorific suffix '-siyo' in English, the phonemic representation of this feature in the utterance is deemed necessary in the translated Text (3). As opposed to the low honorific usage, S addresses B1 with the high honorific usage (3), perhaps, as a business strategy. Because all those present in the speech situation laugh (i.e., group laughter), it should be understood that the words have a meaning (and function) other than the ones denoted otherwise (4).

Text 6

Specific context: Dashain is at hand. A bus ticket is rather hard to get. B needs a ticket for two. S, a ticket clerk, and B talk at a bus counter in Kathmandu.

S: We have one ticket [left].

B: For what date?

S: For the fifth [of Ashoj]. € if it suits [you].

B: I have come from Dhading. §. We are [those] who got on your vehicle first. Therefore, [we] have come searching [for this counter]. †.

S: Your mobile number, brother?

B: #####69784

S: #####9784?

B: Yes, ₩.

S: OK, telephone (call) us after 4 o'clock.

Throughout the conversation, S inquires about things he needs as a ticket clerk. The predominant function underlying this conversation is, therefore, taking information (the heuristic) by means of queries.

A number of symbols, mainly related to the truncation of irrelevant/repeated linguistic units, have been used in the conversation. A clause has been truncated (3) because its sense can somehow be inferred from the co-text itself, i.e. auto sense (☞ Text 7). Similarly, a clause, a sentence, a turn and a word, which are irrelevant to the illustration of the given function have been truncated (3, 4, 5 and 9 respectively). This Text also exemplifies that the speaker's personal information has been hidden (7 and 8) because it should not be publicly exposed for some ethical reason.

Text 7

Specific context: B1 knows that there's a kitchen grocer's in Pokhara where she got some kitchen-based items a couple of weeks ago. B1 and B2 are talking about and searching for the grocer's stall as they happen to turn up just at its front.

B1→B2: I am puzzled where ø oh, this one!. §.

B1→S: Is this (are these) the only potato (potatoes) you have?

S: Yes. Good potato (potatoes) has (have) ceased coming this season. §. Get by choosing the better ones, OK.

B1: Um.. But [auto sense: I don't like them, either].

The interlocutors in this text are talking first about the grocer's stall and then the potatoes which are not just the way B1 likes. In other words, talking about something (the referential) is the mainstream function implied in the Text.

Three additional symbols are observed in Text 7. In communication, who speaks or listens to whom counts a lot. Therefore, while analyzing the text, the specification of the speaker and the hearer should be made clear in some cases, as in this

Text (1 and 2). Also in this conversation it is observable that B1 finds herself in a place new to her. Because of the change in context her utterance loses its relevance, so she suddenly shifts to another utterance. In doing this she interrupts herself (1). On the other hand, sometimes, co-textual meaning gets said without being uttered at all. In this text, B1's reservation in the given co-text suggests that she does not like the potatoes (4).

4. Concluding remark

Linguistic symbols alone can't always comprehensively capture the communicative intention of the speaker at the time of speaking. A comprehensive analysis of oral language data, therefore, needs to represent such intentions by applying the clues of some sorts in the form of transcripts. Some systems of oral communication may be common to more than just one language whereas some of them may be typical of a given language; and so is true about Nepali, too. This study has both adapted from conventional notations and developed the others that can't transcribe and explain the OBN data fairly accurately and give a fuller account of them. A total of 24 symbols have been identified within the scope of the data. In this article, they have been applied, illustrated and explained in seven texts recorded from the natural setting of business-situated oral communication. In doing this, the functional perspective has been focused. As a future direction, the number of the symbols may extend, depending partly on the purpose and perspective of the project and partly on the nature and amount of the data.

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