EXPLORING EFL LEARNERS' CASUAL CONVERSATION

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Abstract

Casual conversation is a fundamental activity in human life. The people are not able to avoid themselves from conversing with others. By this reason, this study attempts to explore the EFL learners' casual conversation. The exploration is limited to only analyzing spontaneity, interactivity, interpersonality, coherence and appraisal. The data are naturally occurring data which are collected in three main steps. The first is recording the conversation. It is followed by transcribing the conversation. Lastly, the data are qualitatively analyzed. The analysis of spontaneity finds that the speakers produce a lot of pauses, repetition, false starts and backtracking, sentence tail and also chunks. Furthermore, the analysis of interactivity reveals that turns are often overlapped by each speakers. Additionally, the analysis also figures out that one of the speakers is not interpersonally involved in the interaction. Meanwhile, the analysis of coherence shows that the casual conversation between both EFL learners have good control of coherence since the utterances are relevant one another. However, the findings still indicate that both EFL learners still need guidance from their teacher to increase their speeds and reduces their pauses in order to achieve fluency in casual conversation. The teachers also need to assist the EFL learners how to interpersonally involve in the interaction.

Keywords: *Appraisal, Casual conversation, Coherence, Discourse markers, Interactivity, Interpersonally, Spontaneity.*

Introduction

This present study aims to present the analysis of EFL learners' casual conversation. Casual conversation is a basic people's activity which is conducted most of the time (Thornbury & Slade, 2006). The people are not able to avoid themselves from conversing with others. For instance, the teachers are required to establish a successful conversation with their students, the sellers in the market are mandatory to form a clear interactional talk with their customers, or simply friends make a small dialog. These conversations have the same objectives, namely expressing ideas, opinions, goals, and

feelings one another (Gabor, 2001). However, conversation is not merely about transferring words and sentences. It essentially consists of the speakers' common senses of acting, relating, feeling, and dwelling together (Carbaugh, 2005). In the other words, casual conversation is a semantic activity that negotiates social identity dimension (Eggins & Slade, 1997). This complexity of casual conversation makes it important and no wonder researchers are interested in it (Liddicoat, 2007), including this present study.

In more detail, this present study analyzes four features of spoken texts of the casual conversation between EFL learners proposed by Thornbury (2005), namely spontaneity, interactivity, interpersonality and coherence. These four features are avoidable in casual conversation since spoken language has a major difference with written language. Unlike writing, the speakers in casual conversation indeed do not have preparation before about what they want to say. Additionally, casual conversation is an interactive activity where the speakers and interlocutors interact one another in the same moment. The interaction does not simply mean transferring words and sentences, but further, it also emphasizes how to recognize and respond the feelings in order to create a harmony in the conversation. Furthermore, casual conversation is successfully done if the speakers and interlocutors construct a clear relationship among their dialogs. By these reasons, this present study concern more on analyzing the casual conversation which is one of types of spoken language.

Spoken language is considered as individual's linguistic development (Thornbury, 2005). Also, the language learning and its effectiveness are assessed based on how much the learners feel they have improved in their spoken language proficiency (Richards, 2008). No wonder, teaching speaking has become an important part of the language curriculum (Luoma, 2004). Study dealing with spoken texts therefore is regarded essential since most of the EFL learners put it as the goal of why they learn English.

Additionally, according to Brown and Yule (1983, cited in Richards, 2008) "speaking serves to establish and maintain social relations, and the transactional functions, which focus on the exchange of information". Furthermore, the learners need good communication not only in study at college or university but also in everyday life (Barras, 2006). Speaking skill is used frequently and no wonder has a crucial role both inside and outside the classroom. In sum, the most useful skills in the world beyond the classroom is speaking and what the graduates must be able to do successfully is communicating (Palmer, 2014). Thus, through this paper, how fluent the EFL learners are, how interactive they are, how relevant the conversation is, and the interpersonal function of the conversation are revealed.

Literature Review

The preceding explanation has presented that spontaneity, interactivity, interpersonality and coherence are important and no wonder attract many researchers' attention (Liddicoat, 2007). The examples are Taboada (2006), Meredith (2019), Huabin

(2018), Manipuspika (2014), and Dossoumou (2018). These previous research inspire this present study to explore EFL learners' casual conversation.

In "Spontaneous and Non-Spontaneous Turn-Taking", Taboada (2006) deals with two different sets of Spanish conversations. The core of her research is analyzing how the turn-taking process develops in both conversations. Through her study, it is found that both conversation reveal a different result, particularly in term of turn taking. In the first group of conversations, spontaneity plays a big role as the speakers take turns spontaneously. In contrast, in the second group, the spontaneity does not plays a significant part. The turns are mechanically controlled, and communication is one-way. In summary, it can be inferred that spontaneity in taking turn differ from one conversation and others.

In "Conversation Analysis and Online Interaction", Meredith (2019) conducts a review about research which concern on analyzing online interaction using conversation analysis. The data of this review are taken from American English, British English, and German. Her review reveals that there are some areas that are explored by this types of research. The examples are turn taking, sequence organization, repair, openings, and embodied conduct. These features are analyzed in term of how they are organized online and how the interactional practices are achieved. In her paper, it is concluded that conversation analysis is useful to provide in-depth evidence about the nature of online interaction.

In "Interpersonal Meaning of Code-switching: An Analysis of Three TV Series", Huabin (2018) collects the data from three popular TV series to analyze the interpersonal meanings of code-switching using Systemic Functional Linguistics, particularly appraisal theory and tenor in register. These theories are used with the purpose to evaluate emotions and deals with the roles and relationships between different participants. This study infers that interpersonal meanings in daily life is reflected by the use of code-switching. The codes are switched to express emotions and negotiate the interpersonal relationships between different participants.

In "Accomplishing Coherence in Talk Shows: A Comparison between English and Indonesian", Manipuspika (2014) discusses conversational coherence in English and Indonesian talk shows, especially strategies used collaboratively by the host and interviewee to achieve coherence. This study finds that there are some differences between both talk shows. Unlike English talk show, Indonesian talk show offers a longer answer pair. Additionally, the speakers in Indonesian talk show more hesitation than those in English talk show. However, both talk shows also have several things in common. It is found that one of marker of coherence, namely overlap onset, occurs many times during the conversation in both talk shows. Besides, both talk shows have the identical indicators and employ similar strategies to achieve coherence across the talk show sessions. This study eventually concludes that the participants in both talk shows are able to achieve mutual understanding successfully.

In “Appraising the Impacts of Cohesion and Coherence in Benin SS3 EFL Learners’ Writing Productions: A Linguistic Perspective”, Dossoumou (2018), unlike the previous studies, focuses on cohesion and coherence in written language. This study investigates linguistic coherence and cohesion in Benin EFL learners’ writing productions through involving sixty (60) English language learners in Senior Secondary Three (SS3). The analysis shows that many students in the classroom do not succeed to produce understandable writings effectively because of their little knowledge to write coherent and cohesive texts.

By these previous studies, spontaneity, interactivity, interpersonality and coherence attract many researchers attention, including this present study. However, the research focusing on analyzing these four features in EFL learners’ casual conversations has received less attention. Therefore, this present study aims to explore that scope to broaden the knowledge of casual conversation.

Methods

The data of this study are naturally occurring data, defined as “naturally occurring text-based materials which have been selected by a researcher with the intention of using them for research purposes to address a research question” (Kiyimba et al, 2019). These data are taken from casual conversation between two EFL Learners who are coded as S1 and S2. This present study conducts three main steps to analyze the spoken text. The first is recording the conversation. The second is transcribing the conversation using the theory of Eggins and Slade (1997). Finally, the data are analyzed using theory proposed by several experts, such as Thornbury (2005), Eggins (2004), and Martin & White (2005), to reveal the spontaneity, interactivity, interpersonality and coherence of the spoken texts. The data later are elaborated in rich verbal descriptions as qualitative methodology is employed in this study (Ary et al, 2002). Qualitative methodology also is used because the data are taken from the actual words or action of the participants (Fraenkel et al, 2012).

Discussion

A. Spontaneity

The analysis of spontaneity is divided into some elements. Those are filled pauses, repetitions, false starts and backtracking, sentence tail, and chunks. The analyses are based on Thornbury (2005) and presented separately below.

B. Filled Pauses Analysis

The casual conversation conducted by these two EFL learners consist of 122 turns and each turn contains various number of clauses that are indicated by the symbol of (i),

(ii), (iii). Unfortunately, the conversation does not run smoothly as both speakers produce pauses in almost every clauses in their turns. Below is one of examples when both speakers produce pauses. The filled pauses are indicated by the symbol of

Turn	Speakers	
4	S1	(i)Um ... Nothing ... (ii)I'm just doing nothing here. (iii)What about you?
5	S2	(i)Um ... ya ... not much ... (ii)I'm just ... Um ... trying to ... Um ... doing some of these tasks. (iii)Ya, actually I want to go somewhere. (iv)So ... have you seen the new Deadpool movie? (v)Have you seen that?

The excerpt above shows that the speakers produce a lot of pauses, even only in producing one clause. There are several reasons why this phenomena occur in the conversation. The first is probably the speakears are nervous. Even, the fluent presenters possibly produce a lot of pauses because of the nervousness. The second is probably the speakers hesitate to speak because they do not know the topic of the conversation. Third, the existence of pauses causes a failure in achieving one of the speaking functions, namely making the interlocutors understand with the topic of the conversation (Richards, 2008). In the case of this casual conversation, the pauses are not the indication of nervousness because the speakers are best friend, which means they have a good control of the tenor defined as the role relationship between the interactants (Martin & White, 2005). The pauses are also not the indication that the speakers do not know the topic as they talk about their favorite movie. In the other words, they have a control of the field defined as the ongoing activity or subject matter (Halliday, & Matthiessen, 2004). Therefore, the pauses in this case tend to indicate that the speakers are not fluent enough to speak English (Thornbury & Slade, 2006).

C. Repetition Analysis

The conversation between these two EFL learners also contains another element of spontaneity, namely repetition. However, it does not appear as many as pauses since it only emerges sixteen times in this casual conversation. Nine of them are produced by speaker 2 and the rest of them is produced by speaker 1. Below are the excerpts that show repetitons and they are underlined.

Turn	Speakers	
14	S2	(i)Ya, here ... (ii)I mean ... (iii) <u>this this director</u> ... (iv)he has um ... hilarious mind to create such hilarious movie
14	S2	it says that (viii)it's directed by bad guy (ix) <u>who kill ... who kill</u> a dog ... a dog in John Wick movie.
15	S1	(i)Yes of course ... (ii)and from <u>the ... the</u> concept ... I have ...

		familiar with the song
29	S1	(ix)but but ... it's a good ... creativity (x)I think

Unlike writing which sees the repetition as an error, repetition in the casual conversation does not aim that way. It can be considered as the strategy conducted by the speakers to run the conversation smoothly. It allows the speakers to relate their turn with the previous ones and eventually to keep the conversation flow (Thornbury and Slade, 2006). However, the findings in this study shows that repetition occurs in two situations. The first is purely repetition without pauses and the second is the ones with pauses. The first type tend to be a good sign, as presented before. The second types meanwhile tend to be a sign of a failure in delivering another function of spoken language, namely delivering an image of dynamic aspect of reality (Halliday, 1989), as the speakers are not fluent enough to speak and need long process to utter something.

D. False Starts and Backtracking

Another element of spontaneity found in this study is false starts and backtracking. This study finds that there are ten moments when the speakers produce false starts and backtracking. Below are the excerpts that show false starts and backtracking. They are underlined.

Turn	Speakers	
46	S1	... (ii)so it's like ya ... (iii)you can go back to the past ...
51	S2	(i)what about the other ... (ii)like? ... (iii)do you like ... the quotes from this movie?
56	S1	(ii)it's just ... (iii)look at Deadpool (iv)and look at Batman
66	S1	...(ii) he's some kind of ... (iii)he's actually good guy

False starts and backtracking can be identified as a moment when the speakers change their utterances because they feel it is not the right ones to begin their conversation (Thornbury, 2005). Then, it can be seen from the findings above that the speakers in the casual conversation produce false starts and backtracking in the same numbers. They directly change their mind about what they are saying because they think the utterances are not the ones that they really wanted say before. The findings also show that the speakers directly correct their utterance expressed unintentionally as it contains errors. This indicates that both speakers have good awareness regarding self repair in the conversation.

E. Sentence Tail and Chunks

It is also found that the speakers in this casual conversation produce sentence tail by saying "right?" at the end of their utterances. Based on the analysis, this sentence tail appears eight times in the conversation. Below is one of the examples.

Turn	Speakers
13	S2 (i)It's .. a cool movie, right?

Through this finding, it can be inferred that the casual conversation between both speakers occurs naturally since sentence tail is identical with natural spoken language, that is when the speakers simply turn their utterance into interrogative. Unfortunately, the intonation of the speakers are not analyzed and that is why the real indication cannot be surely predicted. The rising intonation is usually used when it is the real question and falling intonation is used when it has a function only to ask for agreement as the speakers actually know the answer.

The speakers additionally produce a lot of chunks in the casual conversation. Those are *how are you, what about you, not much, I mean, how come, do you think, I think so, what about the other, of course, something like that, and that's why*. The use of chunks indicates that the speakers make processing on the part of listeners easier (Thornbury, 2005).

F. Interactivity

The analysis of interactivity concerns on several elements of the casual conversation proposed by Thornbury (2005). It presents the analysis of how the speakers interact, such as taking turns to speak, keeping silent when the interlocutors are speaking, and interrupting. In addition, how they signal amusement is also analyzed. Lastly, this point presents the phenomena of backchannel and the use of discourse markers to manage the cut-and-thrust of interactive talk smoothly.

Almost all elements in this casual conversation occur as in the other common conversation. Both speakers take turn to speak, even though there are several moments when they interrupt each other by overlapping the turn. Also, they know when to keep silent and when to produce backchannels. Sometimes, they signal their amusement by grunts, laughs and chuckles. Therefore, it can be concluded that the speakers know their role in the conversation and they know how to be a cooperative interlocutors.

G. Overlapping the Turns

Most of turns in this casual conversation run effectively without interruption as each speaker takes turns when the interlocutors finish talking. However, it is found that both speakers overlap some interlocutors' turns. Based on the analysis, there are nine moments that show these overlapping phenomena. The analysis of the casual conversation indicates that both speakers overlap by interrupting in two different way. The first is as the excerpt below.

Turn	Speakers	
20	S1	(i)which part that this tomorrow play ==in this movie?
21	S2	== (i)Um when the Deadpool ...

The example above is only one piece of conversation that contains overlapping. It shows that speaker 2 begins to talk before speaker 1 finish talking. Speaker 2 start to talk exactly when speaker 1 finish saying the word *play*. On the other words, the utterance of speaker 2 is uttered at the same time when speaker 1 say *in this movie*. It indicates that speaker 2's turn at talk does not begin at an appropriate transition. Hence, his utterance is considered as a willful interruption. Then, below is another excerpt showing the second way of overlapping.

Turn	Speakers	
52	S1	(i)Ya of course, (ii)which one is your favorite quotes? ==(iii)your favorite quotes
53	S2	==(i)Um ... I think ... (ii)the favorite quotes is

The case of overlapping in this example is different with the previous one. Indeed, speaker 2 begins to talk before speaker 1 finish talking. Speaker 2 begins to utter his utterance at the same time when speaker 1 say *your favorite quotes*. However, the reason of overlapping in this situation is obviously different. Speaker 2 expects that the turn of speaker 1 is over when the question is delivered. That is why the overlapping happens. This case indicates that speaker 2 does not have any intention to willfully interrupt speaker 1. The overlapping talk occurs because speaker 2 have misjudged an upcoming transition of the turn. In sum, these findings shows that there are two reasons why overlapping happens. The first is because of the desire to make a particular contribution while it is relevant and the second is because of uncertainty towards whether or not the turn is over.

H. Backchannelling

Shows that is another element of interactivity that is found in this casual conversation. Based on the analysis it is found that there are ten moments when the speakers produce backchannel in their turns. Below is one of examples.

Tur	Speakers	
n		
9	S2	(i)And ... the quotes are wonderful ... (ii)and the story is .. like ... (iii)it's little bit of strange (iv)because so many super hero appear in this movie ==like
10	S1	==ya

The casual conversation in this study is a unique phenomena, particularly in the aspect of backchannelling. It is because most of backchannels are produced by speaker 2. It seems that only speaker 2 who shows that he is indeed interested in what the interlocutor utters. Meanwhile, speaker 1 shows the opposite. Backchannelling is an important element in the casual conversation as it indicates that the listeners follow the speakers' drift (Eggins & Slade, 1997). Therefore, listeners are suggested to produce it to show that they follow the conversation, even though they are actually not interested in the topics. They do it at least to show their respect to the interlocutors.

I. Discourse Markers

A number of discourse markers is also used by the speakers in this casual conversation with various functions. First, they use *I mean* repeatedly. It indicates that the speakers want to signal that some clarification is going to follow (Eggins, 2004). Second, they also use *but* repeatedly. It shows that they want to signal that this clarification is going to contrast with what has gone before (Gerot & Wignell, 1994). Then, the last discourse marker is *you know* which indicates that the speakers want to appeal to the shared knowledge of the other speakers as a new topic is introduced (Thornbury, 2005).

J. Interpersonality

The conversation can be labelled as the one which fulfills the aspects of interpersonality if it contains some elements. Those are hedges, discourse markers, exaggeration and repeating other's words (Thornbury, 2005). In terms of discourse marker, the previous explanation has presented it. The other element of interpersonality in this casual conversation is the existence of exaggeration. Below is the excerpt and the exaggeration is underlined

Turn	Speakers	
28	S1	(xi)but how come it's so far ... to John Wick. (xii)It's really <u>hilarious</u>

The speakers actually can say *funny* instead of *hilarious*. They decide to exaggerate their utterance by saying *hilarious* instead of *funny* with the aim to flag the speaker's attitude to what is being said (Thornbury, 2005). Furthermore, it is found that both speakers repeat a lot of words each other. Below is one of examples.

Turn	Speakers	
6	S2	(i)Ya, I have seen the movie. (ii) I think (iii)that's a <u>good movie</u> .
7	S1	(i)Ya really (ii)so ya it's a <u>good movie</u> . (iii)So, which part do you like the most?

They repeatedly utter *good movie*. Repetition is employed in conversation to demonstrate empathy (Thornbury, 2005). In the other words, the speakers are able to

negotiate the social relations in the conversation. They are really aware of the interpersonal resources, such as how to interact and share feelings (Martin & White, 2005). Besides, it is also found that sometimes the speakers produce laughter in this casual conversation. The excerpt below is one of the examples.

Turn	Speakers	
74	S2	(i)But [laughter] in the end ... of the movie ... Deadpool save .. them all (ii)and ... all of the team is ... live again.
75	S1	(i)Ya ya ya ya, I remember. (ii)So, when ... Deadpool finally () (iii)this time machine (iv)then he go back to the past (v)and he ... save all his friends, his x-force team ==, yeah.

The speakers in any casual conversation often produce laughter. This also occurs in this casual conversation. It indicates that the speakers enjoy the conversation and interested in the topic that is being talked. Even, when the speakers disagree, they do it in such a way to not threaten the face of other speakers (Thornbury, 2005). So, laughter has an essential role to achieve the interpersonal function, particularly to create and keep the solidarity (Thornbury, 2005).

K. Coherence

The coherence of the text can be seen through the analysis of some elements. Those are lexical repetition, lexical chain, referring expression, substitution, linker, topic, texture, and distraction (Thornbury, 2005). In terms of lexical repetition, it has been presented in the previous explanation. Then, in terms of lexical chain, there are some words related to superhero movie. Those are *superhero*, *superpower*, *director*, *setting*, *story*, *character*, and *act*. Substitution and referring expression also are found in this casual conversation. The excerpt below is one of the examples.

Turn	Speakers	
5	S1	(iv)So ... have you seen the new Deadpool movie? (v)Have you seen <u>that</u> ?
6	S2	(i)Ya, I have seen the movie. (ii) I think (iii)that's a great movie.
7	S1	(i)Ya really (ii)so ya <u>it's</u> a good movie. (iii)So, which part do you like the most?

The example above shows that the word *that* substitutes *deadpool movie*. Meanwhile, the reference *it* is one of examples of referring expression and it also refers to *deadpool movie*. Beside those elements, the speakers in this casual conversation also often use linkers, such as *and* and *but*. In addition, there are also some moments in this casual conversation that contain distraction. The excerpt below is one of the examples.

Turn	Speakers	
3	S1	(i)I'm fine. (ii)So what are you doing?
4	S2	(i)Um ... Nothing ... (ii)I'm just doing nothing here. (iii)What about you?

From the explanation above, it can be inferred that the conversation is coherent. It can be labelled as the conversation that makes sense (Thornbury, 2005). The reason is because all of the aspects of coherence are fulfilled, such as repetitions, lexical chain and key words in the conversation. Moreover, the topic of the conversation is always about one topic, namely superhero movie which is the speakers' favorite movie. The conversation never goes out of that topic. With all of these analyses, it also can be concluded that the utterances are relevant and they are therefore coherent (Thornbury & Slade, 2006).

L. Negotiation

Negotiation is divided into two types. The first is called as interpersonal negotiation. It is when one responds to the Mood of the clause to negotiate feelings. The second is called as logical semantic negotiation. It is when one responds to the Residue to negotiate the messages or contents (Egins, 2004). Therefore, the analysis of negotiation in this casual conversation also concerns on those two elements. Below is the chart showing the emergence of both negotiations in this casual conversation.

Chart 1. Negotiation Percentage

In this casual conversation, the speakers use all types of negotiation. Interpersonal negotiation emerge seventeen times or 61%. Meanwhile, logical semantic negotiation emerge eleven times or only 39%. These numbers indicate that the conversation can be labelled as the normal casual conversation because the interpersonal negotiation is more dominant than logical semantic negotiation.

M. Appraisal

This study finds that both speakers use almost all appraisal elements. In speaker 1 utterances, there are only in/security of affect and enrich of amplification which do not

emerge. In speaker 2 meanwhile, there are dis/satisfaction, social esteem and enrich which do not appear. All of the elements are summarized in the table below.

Table 1. Summary of Appraisal

	Speaker 1	Speaker 2
Appreciation		
Reaction	18	23
Composition	3	5
Valuation	2	6
Total	23	34
Affect		
Un/happiness	1	2
In/security	0	2
Dis/satisfaction	1	0
Total	2	4
Judgement		
Social sanction	3	3
Social esteem	1	0
Total	4	3
Amplification		
Enrich	0	0
Augment	2	16
Mitigate	4	10
Total	6	26

Table 1 above shows that speaker 2 produce appraisal elements more than speaker 1. This number indicates that speaker 2 is the dominant and most expressive (Martin & White, 2005). In contrast, speaker 1 can be labelled as the speaker who is least interpersonally involved in the interaction. Also, it can be seen that speaker 2 produce augment of amplification quite often. It indicates that he frequently augments his attitudinal expressions, suggessting the assertiveness which he puts his opinion forwards (Martin & White, 2005).

Conclusion

This paper has presented the analysis of casual conversation between two EFL learners. Four features of casual conversation are analysed, namely spontaneity, interactivity, interpersonality, and coherence. Then, the analysis of appraisal systems closes the explanation.

The analysis of spontaneity reveals that both speakers produce a lot of pauses and repetition. Similarly, the analysis of interactivity figures out that in many moments speaker 2 overlaps turns as a result of the long pauses produced by speaker 1. The

existence of pauses and also repetition is the sign of a fluency problem (Thornbury & Slade, 2006). Additionally, the analysis of interpersonality and appraisal reveals that speaker 1 is least interpersonally involved in the interaction. Meanwhile, the analysis of coherence reveals that the casual conversation between both EFL learners are coherent since the utterances are relevant one another. However, the findings still indicate that both EFL learners still need guidance from their teacher to increase their speeds and reduces their pauses in order to achieve fluency in casual conversation. The teachers also need to assist the EFL learners how to interpersonally involved in the interaction.

Through this study, it can be seen that spoken and written discourse are different. It is found that spoken discourse is context dependent (Halliday, 1989). No wonder, this is the challenge for English language teachers to assist the EFL learners to be proficient English users. They have to begin to put more emphasis on the spoken language. Most of the goals of learners, particularly EFL learners, in learning English is to be fluent in spoken language (Thornbury, 2005).

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