10   Communicative interaction

Summary   10.1 Discourse markers. – 10.2 Turn taking. – 10.3 Back-channeling. – 10.4 Repairs.

Communicative exchanges are based on the way in which participants organise and manage their interaction. Interactive communication between two or more participants is generally subdivided into reciprocal turns of dialogue. Turn taking can be signalled by specific turn-taking cues which occur at the end of the turn and allow the interlocutor to understand that a part of an interaction is concluded. Such interaction cues are called *turn-taking signals*.

During conversations, there are specific moments in which it is possible to take the turn: these moments in a discourse are generally defined as *Transition Relevance Place* (TRP). A TRP, which offers the possibility of changing the turn, can be marked by lexical or prosodic devices, such as discourse particles [PRAGMATICS 5]; [PRAGMATICS 10.1] or some specific modifications in the intonational contour. When a signer takes the turn and no signals have previously been established, this act is considered as a turn interruption.

Moreover, in a communicative exchange, the addressee can provide response, feedback, signals of confirmation or refusal. This behaviour, which is called *back-channelling*, is functional to the process of building a conversation among participants [PRAGMATICS 10.2].

Finally, a participant can add some contribution to the discourse made by the turn-holder, by correcting some information, repairing

a content, providing comments or clarifications. These attitudes are known as *actions of repair* [PRAGMATICS 10.3].

10.1 Discourse markers

Discourse markers are those overt or covert linguistic signals which fulfil the function of supporting discourse management, enhancing the textual coherence, and revealing the signer's attitude toward the conversation [PRAGMATICS 5]; [PRAGMATICS 7]. Discourse markers may serve as landmarks in signalling how the conversation is being structured and how the turns are being regulated. In the example below, the sign WELL fulfils the function of marking the initial part of a turn.

WELL IX$_2$ HOPE IX$_{2pl}$ UNDERSTAND IX$_1$ EXPLAIN
'Well, I hope you understood what I explained.'

10.2 Turn taking

A turn is considered as a period in the conversation in which one of the participants actively signs. The temporal organisation of a conversation is based on the alternation of turns between participants. The ability to take and manage conversation turns is known as turn taking.

10.2.1   Types of turn taking constructions

Turn-taking processes are distributed along a continuum in which the two extreme poles display two specular situations. The first pole concerns a conversation in which the signer keeps the turn and the addressee just watches, before the turn is allocated to another participant. The second pole refers to a situation in which two or more signers overlap continuously in the conversation resulting in either a competitive or a cooperative exchange.

In the following sections, three types of turn-taking patterns are discussed: i) smooth turn taking [PRAGMATICS 10.2.1.1], ii) turn taking with pause [PRAGMATICS 10.2.1.2], and iii) overlapping turn taking [PRAGMATICS 10.2.1.3].

10.2.1.1 Smooth turn taking

In a smooth turn-taking situation, one participant holds the turn and when s/he finishes to express her/his contribution, the turn is allocated to another participant. Such transfer happens in a very smooth way, without pause or strong overlapping between signers, as shown in the example below.

A: YESTERDAY PARK IX$_1$ DOG IX CL(curved open V): 'be_at'++ IX$_1$ SEE
B: MAYBE BROWN HAIR_ALL IX$_1$ SEE DONE IDENTICAL IX$_1$ SEE DONE ✋
'Yesterday, in the park I saw a few dogs.' 'Maybe I saw the same brown dogs.'

What follows is the schematic representation of a smooth turn-taking.

A: SIGN SIGN SIGN
B: SIGN SIGN SIGN

10.2.1.2 Turn taking with pause

A different case arises when the turn transition among participants in a conversation is mediated by a pause or a linguistic element which fills the pause, such as YES, WELL, GOOD. The example below shows such case.

A: TODAY WORLD STRANGE WORLD IX DANGEROUS
B: YES TRUE SEE EXAMPLE IX
RIVER WATER CL(5): 'water_rise' CL(5): 'water_overflow' PAST FEW ✋
'Nowadays the world is strange, it's dangerous.' 'Yes, true, for example the water in the rivers rises and overflows, but it was infrequent in the past.'

The following schema summarises the pattern of turn taking with a pause.

A: SIGN SIGN SIGN
B: [pause filling material] SIGN SIGN SIGN

10.2.1.3 Overlapping turns

The third type of turn taking concerns those situations in which two or more signers communicate simultaneously and overlap each other. There are various possible reasons for such overlapping behaviour. It can happen, for example, when two signers both contribute to a dia-

logue resulting in a joined turn construction, as in the example below.

A: FINALLY WORK FINISH IX$_2$ RELAX IX$_2$ RELAX
B: IX$_1$ RETIREMENT IX$_1$ KNOW IX$_1$ SLIDE FIVE IX$_1$ FINALLY

A: IX$_2$ YEAR$^\wedge$FIVE DOCUMENT HOW
B: IX$_1$ GO_OUT YOUNG   BEFORE

A: YES   KNOW$++$
B: IX$_{1\ 1}$EXPLAIN$_2$ IX$_{1\ 2}$COME$_1$ HOUSE POSS$_1$

'Finally you stopped working, now you can relax!' 'I am retired, I know, thanks to the policy of the "5-year slide". Finally! I retired earlier and I'm still young.' 'How did you sort out the papers for the 5 years?' 'I will explain it to you at my place'. 'Yes, that's fine.'

A different situation arises when the two signers compete for taking the turn. An example of such competitive dialogical construction is presented below.

A: Q$_{artichoke}$ POLITICS$^\wedge$AREA IX$_1$ TRUST ZERO IX$_1$ BE_FED_UP
B: IX$_1$ BE_FED_UP SUCK IX$_1$ TRUE

A: IX$_1$ VOTE IX$_{3pl}$ NO_MORE
B: BETTER VOTE NEED EXIST.NOT   BUT IX$_1$ NEED LAW HUNDRED$^\wedge$FOUR
                                                  Q$_{artichoke}$

A: Q$_{artichoke}$ C'MON EXIST EXIST.NOT IX$_1$ IMPOSSIBLE_NO_WAY
B: Q$_{artichoke}$ NEVER APPROVE   PE

'I've no trust in politicians!' 'I'm fed up! It sucks!' 'I'm fed up!' 'Well, it's better not to vote.' 'I don't vote for them anymore!' 'But I need the law 104, so when?' 'When?!' 'When? It will never be approved!' 'C'mon, no way!'

Regardless of the reason for the overlapping turn taking, the general model for this type of dialogue is reported below.

A: SIGN SIGN SIGN
B: SIGN SIGN SIGN

10.2.2   Turn taking signals

In dialogical exchanges, turns are regulated by turn taking signals. These cues may be produced by either the turn-holder or the interlocutor and may fulfil a variety of pragmatic functions.

10.2.2.1 Different turn taking signals

People who hold the turn may send several cues to their interlocutors. A signer can send a turn-yielding signal alerting the addressee that he/she is ready to allocate the turn. Moreover, the signer can send attempt-suppressions signals showing that s/he does not intend to pass over the turn. In other cases, the signer can show within-turn signals which should evoke feedback or back-channel signals by the interlocutor.

On the other hand, the dialogue partner can send back-channel cues or turn-claiming signals in order to show her/his attitude toward the dialogical exchange. As for back-channel signals, the addressee may provide some response to the communicative contribution of the signer, without showing the intention to take the turn. On the contrary, in case of turn-claiming signals, the addressee clearly calls for taking the turn in the communicative exchange.

10.2.2.2 Turn-yielding signals

Turn-yielding signals have the function of informing the dialogical partner that the turn-holder is ready to pass over the turn. Various elements may be involved in conveying such message, both manual and non-manual [PRAGMATICS 5]. As for manually produced signals, discourse particles can be used with the function of marking the conclusion of a turn. In the example below, the discourse particle ANYMORE fulfils the function of marking the end of the communicative turn.

> IX_1 DOCUMENT EVERYTHING $IX_{1\ 1}$CL(flat open 5): 'give'$_3$ DONE ANYMORE
> 'I gave (them) all the document, that's enough.'

The signer can also display variation in the speed and the amplitude of the signing, for example reducing the speed of signing and the signing space. In this way, the partner is encouraged to take the turn. An example of this strategy is reported below: in the first part of the utterance (from the beginning to CL(unspread 5): 'search_pockets') the rate of signing is high, but it clearly decreases in the final part of the sentence (from the sign BACKPACK to the end).

> IX_1 BE_SCARED IX_1 BUS IX_1 CL(curved open V): 'get_on' IX_3 MAN CONTROL TICKET. IX_1 POCKET EMPTY CL(unspread 5): 'search_pockets'. BACKPACK IX_1
> CL(flat closed 5): 'grab_ticket' THEN $_1$GIVE$_3$ VALIDATE$_3$ IX_1 RELAX
> 'I was scared, as soon as I got on the bus, the inspector was controlling the tickets. I looked for my ticket, but my pockets were

empty. I looked in the backpack, I found it! I gave it to the inspector. He validated it and I felt relieved.'

10.2.2.3 Turn taking signals

In LIS, it is possible to mark a TRP in several ways. More commonly, the position of the hands communicates the intention to participate or not in the conversation. Some of these positions are displayed in the pictures below.
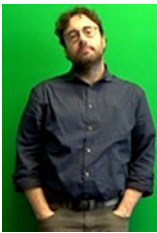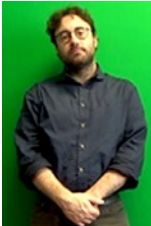
Figure 1 Hands in pockets

Figure 2 Hands at rest

Figure 3 Arms crossed

Hands in pockets, hands at rest, and crossed arms signal that the participant is not interested in taking the turn.

Another strategy for sending turn-taking signals consists in touching the partner as a way to call her/his attention and start a new turn, as exemplified in the picture below.

Figure 4 Turn-taking tactile signal used to start the turn

A third type of strategy concerns the use of cues which can explicitly signal the point of a turn taking. These cues may concern prosodic changes in the speed or size of signs, especially at the end of a turn. The possibility to allocate the turn to another participant may also be marked by non-manuals produced by the signer at the end of an utterance, such as eye blink and head nod. Some of the abovementioned turn-taking signals are illustrated in the example below.

$$\overline{\text{eb}}$$

A: YESTERDAY UNIVERSITY STUDENT CL(5): 'crowded' IX LESSON START DONE
B: <hands at rest>

A: <arms crossed>

$$\overline{\text{eb}} \ \overline{\text{hn}}$$

B: TRUE IX$_1$ ROOM LITTLE NEED OTHER BIG SIT++ ALL   ✋

A: 'Yesterday, at the university, it was very crowded, when the
                                                        class started.
B: 'True, the classroom is little. We need another bigger classroom,
                                                so that everyone can have a sit.'

The example displays various turn-taking cues. Signer A, for example, crosses his arms at the end of his turn. While watching, signer B' hands are at rest, he decides to intervene to contribute to the conversation. The eye blink is a non-manual cue used to end both Signer A's and Signer B's turn.

10.3 Back-channeling

As mentioned before, back-channel cues serve to signal the addressee's attitude toward the communicative exchange. The addressee's response can be of various types: for example, the interlocutor can express an affirmative (a-b) or refusing (c) attitude toward the conversation content.

a. PE

b. YES

c. HOLD_ON

Other functions of back-channelling signals concern the possibility for the addressee to comment on a statement, clarify an information, complete an utterance, and so forth. Back-channelling is also used for showing a phatic behaviour with respect to the interaction, displaying interest in the communicative exchange.

Back-channelling involves both manual and non-manuals strategies. The example below shows a short stretch of communicative ex-

change in which Signer A shows interest and confirms the content of Signer B's comment.

A: YES   YES
B: KNOW IX$_1$ TEACH BUILDING++ VARIOUS. IX$_1$ $_1$GO++ IX$_1$ TEACH

A: KNOW++
B: DONE RUN $_1$GO++ IX$_1$ EXIST.NOT BE_FED_UP IX$_1$ EXIST.NOT ANYMORE

A: WELL   UNDERSTAND++
B: IX$_1$ PE NOT IX$_1$ MUST $_1$ASK$_3$ T-R-I-B-E-L-L-I$_3$ IX$_1$ CHANGE

A: 'Yes'   'Yes'
B: 'You know, I teach in several buildings, I keep running around.'

A: 'I know, I know'
B: 'When I finish teaching in a place I have to run to another one. No way!'

A: 'Right' 'I see, I see'
B: 'I'm fed up, no way! I have to ask Tribelli for a change.'

10.4 Repairs

Conversational repairs are used for several reasons and fulfil various communicative functions. Generally, repairs serve to correct a statement which is considered wrong by the signer or the addressee. Repairs can also be used to add a comment to the content expressed by the turn-holder. Moreover, repairs occur when the signer is looking for a specific sign or when s/he tries a self-rephrasing. Repairs can be realised manually (e.g. a manual negation) or non-manually (e.g. a head shake). A strategy which is common in sign languages is represented by repairs connected with the signing space. An example of corrective repair capitalising on the signing space is presented below.

A: TWO TWIN IX$_1$ BE_FAMILAR IX$_a$ S-A-R-A$_a$ IX$_b$ M-A-R-C-O$_b$

A: IX$_{3b}$ HAIR BLACK IX$_{3a}$ HAIR BLOND
B: NOT, IX$_{3a}$ BLACK IX$_{3b}$ BLOND CONTRARY

A: 'I know two twins: Sara and Marco, he has black hair and she is blond.'
B: 'No, she has black hair and he has blond hair. It's the opposite.'

Information on Data and Consultants

The descriptions in these sections are based on the references below and on grammatical judgments. The video clips and images exemplifying the linguistic data have been produced by LIS native signers involved in the SIGN-HUB Project.

Authorship Information

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