

THE DYNAMICS OF QUESTION / ANSWER MOVES IN ELF SPOKEN DISCOURSE IN CROSS-CULTURAL MIGRATION DOMAINS

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Abstract – In this paper we will analyze question and answer moves in a corpus of approximately eight interviews taken from transcripts published on the site *Storie migranti* (www.storiemigranti.org). Our focus will be the different ways questions are employed and formulated to elicit ideational information (Halliday 2004) and also the way in which answers to these same questions are formulated. A major point of interest within cross-cultural migrant domains (Guido 2008) and in particular in the context of asylum seekers using ELF is how the delicate balance of the demands of questioner and answerer are negotiated and satisfied, or not, as the case may be. In addition to purely lingua-structural concerns, we also consider pragmatic considerations within the specific theoretical contexts of relevance (Sperber, Wilson 1986) and conversation implicatures (Grice 1975). With an in-depth analysis of individual cases, we will seek to identify the instances where answers satisfactorily provide the information elicited by the question in view of being able to describe successful strategies both from the perspective of questioner and answerer within the specific context of spoken interaction between ELF users in cross-cultural migration domains.

Keywords: discourse moves in ELF; cross-cultural migration domains; relevance.

1. Introduction

In this paper, we discuss the dynamics of question / answer moves in ELF spoken discourse involving interviews between non-EU migrants and journalists asking them about their typically frustrating, sometimes traumatic, experiences as migrants and asylum seekers, whose motives and accounts are often viewed with suspicion by those in authority.

The discourse domain of official interviews, undertaken by border police or other gate-keeping officials, is one where there is an inherent power asymmetry between those applying for assistance and those in a position to grant it (Guido 2008). It is also a domain that, in the last few years, has existed against a background of stretched resources on the part of the authorities, in the face (until very recently) of rapidly rising numbers of asylum seekers and would-be migrants. Italy lies at the centre of the Mediterranean. This puts it at the crossroads of the some of the world's main

migration routes. It is directly north of countries like Libya and Tunisia, from which many migrants from North and Sub-Saharan Africa try to make their way into the European Union, and also just west of the Balkans, from which many migrants and refugees from the various conflicts in the Middle East (e.g. Afghans, Iraqis, Syrians, Kurds, Yazidis) have also arrived with similar objectives.

The system to deal with such arrivals has had to be put in place at short notice and in a manner that even its architects would probably recognize as improvised and only partially fit for purpose. This situation has of course led to tensions between various officials and politicians in Rome and the rest of the EU¹ because the former believes that it has been swamped by applicants and received too little aid, material or otherwise, from its EU partners.

At the level of individual applicant, the problem can be illustrated by these words of three asylum seekers (A, B, and C) who tell a journalist of the inadequacy of the whole system by which asylum seekers' applications are processed in particular during the final hearing where they were supposed to be able to put their cases:

C: they are using us, trading us! And I want to say something more about these commissions, I don't understand these commissions: what are they thinking? If you are going to make one mistake in your commission, you are done, they give you negative. We are not normal people, living normal life, we make mistakes, we have families, problems, we are not as lucid as you are. People make mistakes for example with dates: on your report you said that something happened on the 19th and during the commission you say it happened on the 21st: it's a straight denial.

A: But even their own spelling mistakes give you denials, their spelling mistakes with your names. And if you should correct them for their own spelling mistakes, then it's negative: straightforward. They do spelling mistakes of my own name, and I am correcting them and say 'this is not the way we spell my name' then they give me negative because what they have in their computers is unchangeable. If your name is spelled a different way you get a denial.

A: the [sic] downfall all the denials is because they don't talk good English. We don't believe them also because some of the translators are filled with the blood of racism. Don't forget how it is: in the US, someone from Oklahoma doesn't like someone from Texas, and it's racism. We've got the same sickness in the blood of the black race and that is passed along with the translators who translate for you into Italian. And we don't trust they are doing a fair job.

B: let me tell you my story. I went in front of the commission last month and as I was starting to embroid my story they tell me: this is enough, sing [sic] your paper!

¹ Especially in the period between June 2018 and September 2019 when Matteo Salvini of the *Lega Nord* served as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior.

How long was your meeting?

B: I spent 5 hours but they translated only 45 minutes. Because most of the time they are distracted, they disturb you. Understand? You enter the commission and they tell you, wait now I am going to smoke, then they come back after a long time and you want to start telling your story and they interrupt you again saying: now I am going to urinate leaving you there. And then they chat with their friends and you are there waiting. And your interview lasts 5 hours but you got to tell you story only for 45 minutes. And after two hours they ask you the same stupid question again and you are frustrated and you.²

The problem then is not merely linguistic but also regards funding, training, procedures, attitudes of officials, and, last but not least, the level of linguistic competence in English of those involved in the process (whether migrant or official). No doubt, a contributing factor is also the fact that, as with any other group of human beings in any context, not all migrants are what they claim to be. Inevitably, some will try to abuse the system in order to gain entry to the EU (among them, those directly involved in smuggling, people trafficking, other criminal activity or worse). Officials may consequently be more preoccupied in identifying such cases than helping those with a legitimate case to be allowed in. This is shown by the fact that the first interviewee in the extract (C) above laments that the members of the commission seem to attach a lot of importance to details that s/he considers minor and seems to leap on each and any apparent contradiction in his or her account. It is almost as though they are being treated more as a suspect than as an applicant.

In this article, we will focus on the dynamics of the discourse that takes place in interviews between journalists and migrants with a view to identify those strategies that would seem most effective at reducing an imbalance between participants in more official contexts (such as that described in the quote above). It is hoped that such strategies would allow each to get the most from the interaction in terms both of getting the information required and of having a chance to tell their story (including any details that the applicant deems relevant, but which otherwise may not be enquired about) and to make their application also on the basis of facts and events chosen by the applicant in question and not only on those specifically elicited by an official.

² Interview with three asylum seekers at the processing centre in Mineo, Catania (Mineo, Catania-Gela State highway, December 2011): *Storie migranti* (www.storiemigranti.org).

2. The corpus

In this study, we will use published transcripts of interviews between journalists and migrants published on the site *Storie migranti* (www.storiemigranti.org). In all, nine speech events, comprising approximately 15,200 words, were analysed.

This is an admittedly small dataset by the standards of corpus linguistics. By definition, almost all the speech events constitute “successful” interactions between the speakers involved by the simple reasoning that, had they not been so, then presumably they would not have been published. In this sense, it is impossible to say how representative they are of the genre of journalistic interviews of migrants as a whole, but this is not a major concern for the current study.

A greater problem is the fact that the transcripts provided were written not by trained transcribers like those who compiled, for example, the VOICE Corpus (2011). However, given the nature both of the discourse and of the settings in which it takes place, adequate quality recordings and transcripts are hard to come by. Labov (1994, p. 11) famously described historical linguistics as “the art of making the best use of bad data” and added that historical documents typically “are riddled with the effects of hypercorrection, dialect mixture, and scribal error.” The same observation is often applicable to studies such as this that look at the ELF variations³ that spontaneously occur in specific speech events involving participants from quite different linguacultural backgrounds. Like the historical linguist, the researcher looking at ELF in migrant domains cannot afford to be perfectionist.

A relatively small corpus does make it possible to thoroughly analyse the data and explore different means of classifications, which is important in this kind of study that is principally explorative in nature. Any investigation of the pragmatics of discourse, especially that realized through ELF variations, which are by their nature, improvised, transient and not norm-oriented, is something that, for now at least, requires a human interpreter. Such a process involves much trial and error, given the fact that the dynamics of discourse moves are not easily modifiable into discrete and objective categories. Furthermore, no discourse, norm-oriented or not, is easily analysable using the tools of corpus linguistics for the simple reason that, unlike text (its physical product), discourse is not something tangible: comprising as it does, the process itself of interaction (Christiansen 2011; Cornish 1999; Widdowson 1984). A small corpus then, given these

³ See Widdowson (2015).

limitations, is an advantage. Future studies on larger corpora may however be planned to test and refine the system of categorization proposed here.

3. Theoretical concerns

Some approaches view spoken discourse as a well-defined series of moves each constituting a specific element in the discourse structure, for example: Question – Answer, or Initiation-Response-Feedback (Sinclair, Coulthard 1975). Such schemes tend to focus on interaction as a series of “adjacent pairs” (Schegloff, Sacks 1973), where moves are interlaced with what immediately precedes or follows them, neglecting the fact that within a discourse more complex, subliminal patterns may hold (Levinson 1983, pp. 303-304).

The latter observation finds confirmation in even the most cursory glance at a text that manifests a discourse. In Example 1, different colours are used to highlight the different topics being discussed in each turn (e.g. plain white related to one topic, light grey to another – the colours having no significance in themselves). It can be seen how the initial request for information (Turn 1) does not receive a reply until Turn 4: after it has been rephrased and repeated (3). Within Turn 4, the speaker (the migrant) returns to the topic of Turn 2 (the unfilled reply to the question in Turn 1).

1)

Turn	Text
1	Q: But do they put you always in the same prison?
2	A: If you have money you can go in the better cell, but only for one week. When you buy the flight ticket you are put in one of these cells for two weeks up to the time of the departure. People who are arrested could pay (for instance, someone who had a business and and so had a little bit of money, or Syrians who have a bit of money) for better conditions of detention, and are then moved to barracks in the vicinity.
3	Q: But is it still the same structure?
4	A: Always at Al Wardia, but not in the same building. Cells are part of the same complex but they are located in another building, in barracks. A section of the building is or the Garde Nationale, and then there is another building. Besides: since Syrians have a little bit more of money, the police increases the price and in this way they have to pay more, and they have to pay in dollars, not in dinars. Syrians have to pay 300 dollars. During the time I was there, the following deportations happened: 240 Syrians deported to Algeria and 180 to Turkey; it is more than 300 people in total—I will search for the piece of paper where I wrote all this information and I will tell you the exact details.

In Example 2, it can be seen that when the interviewer poses two questions, the interviewee may choose the answer the last first and vice versa, thereby creating at once an adjacent and a non-adjacent pair:

2)

1	Q: Is this what happened to the Somalians who were in jail with you? What happened to them afterwards?
2	A: Some of them got lost and died, while the Nigerians who were with them walked a lot but finally they ended up in Tunisia again, and came across some Tunisian policemen. As far as the Somalian people who were in the cell with me, they have been deported;

In Example 3, by contrast to Example 1, the questioner, when faced with an unfilled reply to their initial question (Turn 1), lets the topic drop so to speak, and instead asks a new question directly related to the unelicited information that the interviewee has provided (Turn 3). This shows how, if given the freedom to do so, as typically happens in an interview with a journalist but not in an official hearing, the interviewee can be allowed to set the agenda and volunteer relevant information, which the interviewer may wish to follow up on.

3)

1	Q: Could you describe the center where you have been detained in Tunis? We would like to understand if we could maybe do something to denounce this situation and to help other people who are still detained there.
2	A: Tunisian policemen arrest foreigners in the street, and they force them to pay the ticket for their own repatriation.
3	Q: Are there only migrants at the center of Al Wardia are there, migrants who were arrested in the street, and others who arrived directly from prison?

The above three examples give some idea of the difficulties of analysing the pragmatics of discourse of the kind manifested as text in our corpus. There is often a mismatch between the information that the interviewer wants the interviewee to provide and the information that the interviewee wants to give. Reading the entire corpus, we are struck by the sense that many interviewees see these interviews as a rare chance to tell their story to an outsider (someone who is not a fellow migrant / asylum seeker or immigration official) and are therefore eager, desperate even, to recount what has happened to them and what they have seen, often viewing the actual questions asked by the interviewers not as requests for specific information but rather as general invitations to speak about what concerns them.

That which we have could be described, not as a single discourse, but rather as a set of different discourses that coincide and converge only at

certain points. Such a situation can best be investigated, not only through the lens of conventional corpus linguistic analysis of texts, but by experimenting with an array of different approaches that take into account the more complex and multi-dimensional nature of discourse in cross-cultural migration domains.

Wittgenstein (1889-1951) in the later stages of his career introduced the technique of the “language-game” as a means of investigating language (Wittgenstein 1953). This involved the invention of imaginary (sometimes implausible) situations in which language is used for some “tightly defined practical purpose”:⁴ The idea of language-game, where meaning is inextricably linked to use in a given situation, and of language use as a kind of game, is an interesting metaphor that can be used in ELF because games are an example of a set of items whose members, rather than sharing the *same* characteristic feature, all resemble each other in *different* ways, drawing *different* features from a *common* pool of items like members of the same family.⁵ In another analogy, Wittgenstein likens language to a box of tools. Language can be used for different purposes. Using tools is essentially performative, as is playing a game. Language users are, like players, involved in different games, each with its own rules.

In the context of cross-cultural migrant domains, the analogy of games is appropriate because ELF users typically come from a vast variety of different linguacultural backgrounds. These may resemble each other in diverse ways. It is of course also important not to assume that even being fully familiar with a participant’s socio-cultural and ethnic background, as well as their first language, will necessarily remove all obstacles to understanding their objectives and strategy. As van Dijk controversially states (2009, p. 4):

[...] *contexts – defined as the relevant properties of social situations – do not influence discourse at all.* There is no *direct* relationship between aspects of the social situation (such as Blair’s role as Prime Minister, etc.) and discourse. This is a widespread determinist fallacy, also prevalent in sociolinguistics when it assumes that gender, race, age or status influence the way we speak. *There is no such direct influence, simply because social properties of the situation are not directly involved in the cognitive processes of discourse production and understanding.* These are phenomena of a different kind, of different levels of analysis and description. Only cognitive phenomena can directly influence cognitive processes. Moreover, if such a direct influence between social situations and discourse were to exist, all people in the same social situations would probably speak in the same way,

⁴ Monk (1990, p. 330)

⁵ Wittgenstein used the analogy of family likenesses as an alternative to the Aristotelian theory of categories.

which they obviously don't. Whatever the social influence of the "context," there are always (also) personal differences: each discourse is always unique.

To answer these and other questions, I have taken a rather obvious theoretical decision: contexts are not "objective," but "subjective." They are not a relevant selection of "objective" social properties of the situation, but a *subjective definition* of such a situation. This is perfectly compatible with the notion of *relevance*, because this notion is also inherently *relative*: something is (ir)relevant *for* someone. In other words, *a context is what is defined to be relevant in the social situation by the participants themselves.*

To many researchers, especially those working in the field of sociolinguistics, this view may be extreme, but in van Dijk's assertion that each discourse is unique we find echoes of the observation by Benedetto Croce, the idealist philosopher, that each text is a unique unrepeatable speech event wherein meaning is inextricable from the specific context of use.⁶ Such a realisation implies that any means of analysis and system of categorization has to be at once general enough to allow the comparison of different discourse events yet specific enough to capture the distinctive features of individual events which may not be directly comparable to anything encountered elsewhere. Van Dijk also stresses the role that relevance plays in establishing what constitutes context and this is something decided by the participants themselves. The extract quoted in Section 1 complaining about the way application proceedings are conducted clearly highlights how the distribution of power between participants in much interaction in cross-cultural migrant domains is unequal. As a consequence, it must be concluded that the context is something over which migrants and asylum seekers in such situations have little control. This obviously puts them at a disadvantage as they are being judged on their ability to provide pertinent and clear answers, without knowing what *pertinent* and *clear* mean in the unique discourse of the unique speak event.

Furthermore, in the specific context of the processing of migrant and asylum seeker applications for entry visas, there is ample scope for different participants to have quite different agendas and to have quite different perceptions of the discourse that they are engaged in. This poses the question of whether participants in such ELF discourse events are even playing the *same* game, let alone playing this same game by the *same* rules. A glance at the extract quoted in 1 raises this suspicion clearly.

These are two considerations not normally considered within *Speech Act Theory* (Austin 1962; Searle 1975) as it assumes that participants in an interaction have fixed predetermined roles and that they share objectives and work towards similar outcomes. SAT foresees three clearly defined moves:

⁶ (1908, p. 23) "Ogni espressione è espressione unica" [every expression is a unique expression].

the locutionary act (the utterance); the illocutionary act (the desired effect envisaged by the addressor); the perlocutionary act (the actual effect on the addressee) and recognises only certain types of illocutionary acts (five in all). For Sperber and Wilson (1986), Occam's razor argues against SAT (especially Searle's concept of indirect speech acts). SAT can only be made to work through a complex system of coding and codes within codes (and codes within codes within other codes and so on *ab infinitum*).

In contrast to the complexities of SAT, Grice (1975) offers a simpler solution, introducing the concept of *conversational implicature* that shows that communication is based not only on *what* is said but also on *how* it is said. Grice identifies the key cooperative principle that underlies all communication, which can be broken down into four specific maxims. These are not so much rules but conventions by which addressors and addressees "play" their part in the interaction, rather like the way in which poker players play their cards in ways which, though not exactly rule-defined, are interpretable in the context that each wants to win as much as possible from the game and cannot see each other's cards and knows that the other players are there for the same reason.

However, the four specific maxims, as laid out in Grice's very brief yet seminal paper, are clearly only relevant to certain cultures and speech communities. It is not clear, even within the specific social contexts he talks about, which maxims take precedence, and whether the list of maxims that he provides is exhaustive. Relevance theory (Sperber, Wilson 1986) provides a broader, more universal principle, but the very concept of *relevance*, even if it can be given a precise cognitive basis (*mutual manifestness*), is still relative to the individual speaker and their own objectives.

4. Tracking the dynamics of question / answer moves

One way that we can look at the speakers' different perspectives, and the different narratives that they want to air, is to compare what they say, taking the perspective of the questions that the interviewers asked (i.e. the information that they appear to be looking for) and the answers that the interviewees give: whether and how far they answer the questions (i.e. to what degree they provide the information required / elicited) and how far they volunteer unelicited information, thus contributing actively, pro-actively even, to the interaction.

For our analysis, we look not specifically at *speaker* turns, but at what we will call *topic* turn (TT). As the name suggests, a topic turn is a distinct stretch of discourse (uninterrupted by any other similar stretch of discourse) produced by a single speaker and dedicated to a readily identifiable topic. For

instance, in Example 2 (slightly modified below as 4), above, we have two speaker turns, but four different TTs, which we number for convenience:

4)

1	Q: [1] Is this what happened to the Somalians who were in jail with you? [2] What happened to them afterwards?
2	A: [3] Some of them got lost and died, while the Nigerians who were with them walked a lot but finally they ended up in Tunisia again, and came across some Tunisian policemen. [4] As far as the Somalian people who were in the cell with me, they have been deported;

Topic turns 1 and 4 and 2 and 3 deal with the same topics but neither pair are considered to be part of the same TT, because in the first case, the different contributions are separated by two other TTs and are also uttered by different speakers. Topic Turns 2 and 3 are adjacent but are uttered by different speakers, so they constitute different turns.

In Table 1, we give a brief summary of each interview⁷ focusing on the number of TTs produced by interviewers and interviewees:

Interview	No. interviewer TT	No. interviewee TT	Ratio interviewer TT to interviewee TT (to 2 decimal places)	Average length in words of interviewee TT (to nearest whole number)
1	14	12	1.17	158
2	3	4	0.75	57
3	2	3	0.67	30
4	25	26	0.96	64
5	5	5	1	74
6	9	9	1	37
7	11	22	0.5	320
8	10	33	0.33	67
9	29	39	0.74	32
Correlation coefficient <i>r</i> ratio: interviewer TT to interviewee TT and average length of interviewee TT				-0.19

Table 1
Summary of interviews.

⁷ The interviews can be found online at the following addresses:
 Interview 1: www.storiemigranti.org/spip.php?article104;
 Interviews 2 and 3: www.storiemigranti.org/spip.php?rubrique128;
 Interviews 4, 5 and 6: www.storiemigranti.org/spip.php?article1080;
 Interview 7: www.storiemigranti.org/spip.php?article650;
 Interview 8: www.storiemigranti.org/spip.php?article1020;
 Interview 9: www.storiemigranti.org/spip.php?article62.

It can be seen from Table 1 that in six of the interviews there were fewer interviewer TTs than interviewee TTs. However, with an r value of only -0.19,⁸ there is no correlation⁹ between average length of interviewee TTs and the ratio of interviewer to interviewee TTs. In other words, the number of topics brought up by the interviewer does not affect the number of topics brought up by the interviewee, or vice versa.

Once the various TTs in the corpus had been identified, the next stage was to go through them all and label each individually. Labels were applied not only to the TTs themselves (e.g. “Comment on immediately previous topic”; “Returns to topic of previous unfulfilled reply”; “Initiates topic shift by eliciting story”) but also to elements within them (“Injects humour”; “Translanguaging”; “Mimesis”). As we explain in Sections 2 and 3, this involved the reading of the texts on the part of a human interpreter (the author). Then, following the principle of Occam’s razor, these different labels were grouped into as few general categories as possible. Below in Table 2, we list the 36 different categories of TTs and 14 diverse discourse features that, after much trial and error, we succeeded in identifying in this particular corpus. We do not of course claim that this list is exhaustive or necessarily directly applicable to other corpora. Our analysis, includes the category of “ambiguous”, which was allocated to the relatively few cases where we were unable to label or classify the TT in question either because it could be interpreted in different ways or because the utterance showed such divergence from standard norms that it was, for us at least, impossible to decode with a reasonable degree of certainty.

⁸ Calculating the correlation coefficient involves a complex set of calculations. It can be done automatically using a special tool in Microsoft Excel (which uses the classic Pearson formula).

⁹ The correlation coefficient r ratio is a value between -1 and +1 which shows how strongly two variables are related to each other. A score of ± 1 indicates a perfect correlation; above ± 0.70 , a strong correlation; above ± 0.50 a moderate correlation; and above ± 0.30 a weak correlation. Any figure below ± 0.30 , as is the r value that we calculated, indicates no correlation at all.

Topic Turns	
1. Acknowledgement of indirect request	19. Initiates topic shift by volunteering unelicited information
2. Closer	20. Justification for comment
3. Comment on new topic	21. Justification for question
4. Comment on immediately previous topic	22. Partially fulfilled reply
5. Comment on non-immediately previous topic	23. Rephrases question
6. Delayed indirect reply	24. Request clarification related to immediately previous topic
7. Delayed reply	25. Request confirmation
8. Fulfilled reply	26. Request confirmation related to immediately previous topic
9. Indirect open question framed as request specific information related to immediately previous topic	27. Request confirmation related to non-immediately previous topic
10. Indirect reply	28. Request for opinion
11. Initiates new topic by means of indirect open question framed as request specific information	29. Request specific information related to immediately previous topic
12. Initiates new topic by means of open question	30. Request specific information related to non-immediately previous topic
13. Initiates new topic by requesting specific information	31. Returns to topic of previous unfulfilled reply
14. Initiates topic shift by eliciting story	32. Scene setting
15. Initiates topic shift by means of indirect open question framed as Request specific information	33. States opinion
16. Initiates topic shift by means of open question	34. Unfulfilled reply
17. Initiates topic shift by requesting confirmation	35. Volunteers unelicited information
18. Initiates topic shift by requesting specific information	36. Volunteers unelicited information related to previous topic

Discourse Features

1. Ambiguous
2. Expresses fear
3. Expresses frustration
4. Expresses personal ethos
5. Expression of difficulty expressing themselves
6. Injects humour
7. Injects pathos
8. Interrupted
9. Lengthy elaboration
10. Makes accusation
11. Makes complaint
12. Mimesis
13. Rhetorical question
14. Translanguaging

Table 2
Different TT types and Discourse Features as identified by an interpretative analysis of corpus.

In the next two sections, we will compare the frequency of these two different sets of categories in the contributions of interviewers and interviewees with a view to identifying any correlations between the occurrences of any pair of features in the same way that we did in Table 1.

4.1. Analysis of topic turns

In Table 3, we contrast the frequency of the different types of Topic Turns for both interviewers (IR) and interviewees (IE). The figures given are weighted according to the size of the interview in question (measured in words).¹⁰ The weighted values for each interview were added up so that we could compare frequencies across the whole corpus.

▼ Topic Turn type ▼	IR	IE
Acknowledgement of indirect request	0.00	23.47
Closer	0.00	10.44
Comment	2.76	51.34
Comment on immediately previous topic	22.53	121.49
Comment on non-immediately previous topic	0.00	4.36
Delayed indirect reply	0.00	3.78
Delayed reply	0.00	13.14
Fulfilled reply	0.00	983.60
Indirect open question framed as Request specific Info related to immediately previous topic	3.78	3.78
Indirect reply	0.00	80.61
Initiates new topic by means of indirect open question framed as request specific information	31.10	0.00
Initiates new topic by means of open question	5.52	0.00
Initiates new topic by requesting specific information	38.26	0.00
Initiates topic shift by eliciting story	3.78	0.00
Initiates topic shift by means of indirect open question framed as Request specific information	49.71	0.00
Initiates topic shift by means of open question	28.43	309.28
Initiates topic shift by requesting confirmation	10.37	0.00
Initiates topic shift by requesting specific information	428.99	0.00
Initiates topic shift by volunteering unelicited information	0.00	832.35
Justification for comment	0.00	4.36
Justification for question	8.20	0.00

¹⁰We did this by applying the equation of $(X / Y) \times 10,000$, where X is the number of times a given item occurs, Y the number of words in that specific interview. The 10,000 is an arbitrary number adopted purely to avoid figures so low that they contain too many zeros after the decimal place. For example, the “Closer” topic turn occurs once in Interview 4. The later consists of 2601 words so that one occurrence is weighted as $(1/2601) \times 10,000$, which equals 3.84 (given to two decimal places).

Partially fulfilled reply	0.00	12.95
Rephrases question	17.31	0.00
Request clarification related to immediately previous topic	10.14	14.18
Request confirmation	0.00	14.08
Request confirmation related to immediately previous topic	192.46	3.76
Request confirmation related to non-immediately previous topic	7.59	0.00
Request for opinion	8.60	0.00
Request specific Info related to immediately previous topic	173.02	0.00
Request specific information related to non-immediately previous topic	163.71	0.00
Returns to topic of previous Unfulfilled reply	0.00	4.84
Scene setting	0.00	157.69
States opinion	0.00	14.08
Unfulfilled reply	0.00	28.85
Volunteers unelicited information	0.00	145.60
Volunteers unelicited information related to immediately previous topic	0.00	9.28
▲ Topic Turn type ▲	IR	IE

Table 3
 Frequency of different TT types as produced by interviewers and interviewees.

It is immediately obvious that interviewers and interviewees produce quite different TT types. This can be seen quite clearly looking at the two graphs below (Figures 1 and 2) showing the ten most frequent types of Topic Turns for both interviewers (Figure 1) and interviewees (Figure 2):

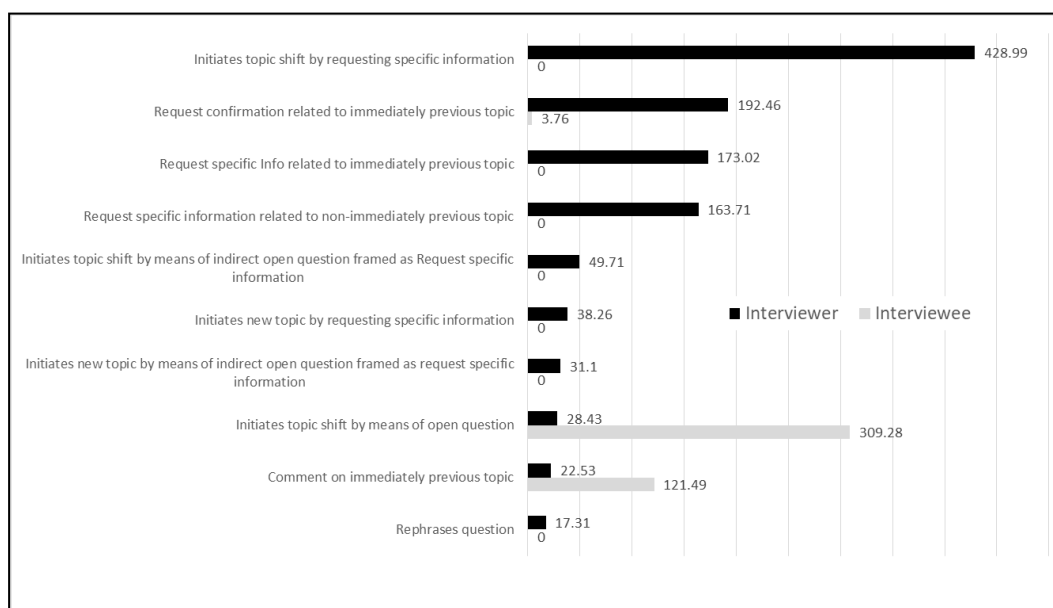


Figure 1
 Ten most frequent TT types for interviewers compared with frequencies of same TT types for interviewees.

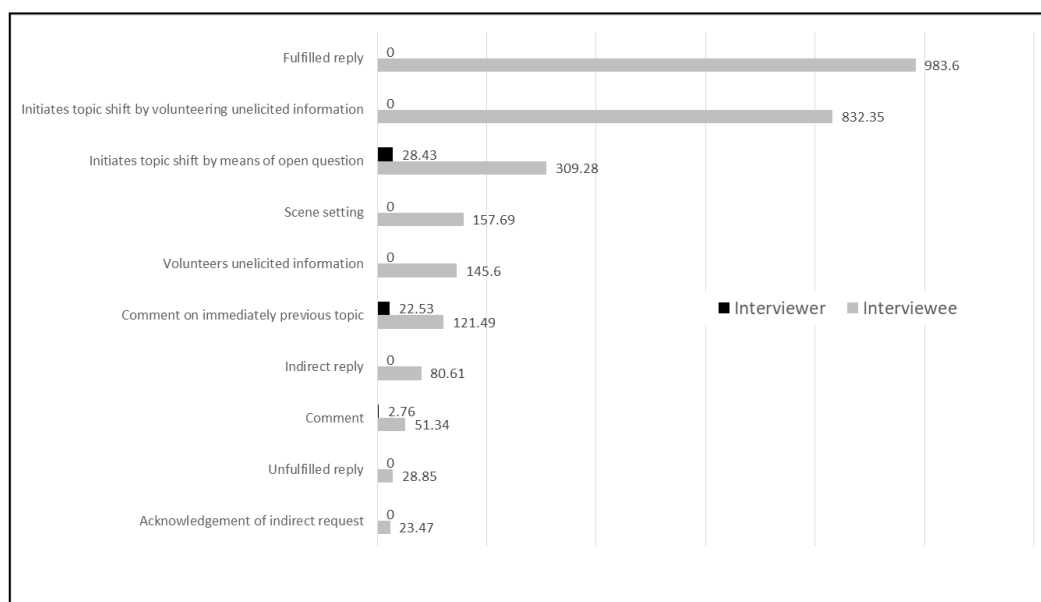


Figure 2

Ten most frequent TT types for interviewees compared with frequencies of same TT types for interviewers.

It can be seen that for almost every TT type, the list of the most frequent for interviewers and interviewees is completely different. The only two items which occur on both lists are “initiates topic shift by means of open question” and “comment on immediately previous topic.” It is also worthy of note that the figures for interviewees are much higher than those for interviewers – for example the top item for the latter is 428.99 (Figure 1) while for the former, it is more than double, 983.6 (Figure 2). This is indicative of the fact that, in the interviews analysed, the interviewees contributed much more of the discourse than the interviewers did.

Also evident on Figure 3, is the fact that the interviewees are not only cooperative – the highest category is fulfilled reply (i.e. providing the information required)¹¹ – but also play an active role in the discourse, the next two most frequent categories both involving their taking the initiative (i.e. “initiates topic shift by volunteering unelicited information”; “initiates topic shift by means of open question.”). In fifth position, there is also “Volunteers unelicited information”, where the interviewee adds something to the discourse that has not been requested by the interviewer, thereby taking

¹¹ It would of course be naive to assume that all such information freely given is in fact truthful and not intended to deceive (see following footnote about DOD). However, we do not have the tools here to ascertain objectively whether interviewees are in fact telling the truth or not. Nonetheless, in general, it can be said that an openness to answer questions and to volunteer information is usually taken as a sign of sincerity and a willingness to cooperate, which is of course, paradoxically, precisely why a proficient liar will probably try to pretend to adopt this behaviour.

an active, even leading, role in plotting the course of the discourse, so to speak.

The fact that “unfulfilled reply” also occurs in the ten most frequent types of interviewee TT type may not so much be a sign of a lack of cooperation on the part of the interviewee, as a sign that often they will use interviewer’s questions not as *instructions* on what their contributions should contain but more as *indications* as to the general topics they may take up next: that is if a given question raises another related issue that the interviewee views at that point as more relevant, then they may ignore the specific question and pursue that topic instead.

It is this phenomenon that we see clearly in Examples 1-3 above, where we show that the classic model of adjacent pair does not really hold in this corpus, and especially in Example 3, where there is a clear case of an unfilled reply. It is notable that at no point in the corpus does the interaction break down because of this apparent non-compliance on the part of interviewees. The interviewers never interrupt interviewees demanding a precise answer, as an official in a hearing may do to an applicant, but let the interviewee finish. Often, the interviewee does return to answer the question originally asked by the interviewer of their own accord (Example 2). Alternatively, if the interviewer does feel the need to repeat the question (Example 1), the interviewee does not diverge from a fulfilled reply a second time. This shows that if the interviewees are given some freedom to manage their part of the interaction, they are also perfectly able to select and furnish much relevant information of interest to the interviewer without the need for the strict specific question / specific answer format that an official might be more used to.¹²

4.2. Analysis of discourse features

In Table 4, similarly to Table 3, we contrast the frequency (which has been weighted in the same way) of the different types of discourse features for

¹²Some interrogation techniques used by Police Forces and other interrogators are based on the traditional, and rather crude, procedure of posing of specific questions, repeated until they are answered, and then repeated again and again at various intervals to see whether the interviewee’s replies change. Other more recent methods are more sophisticated (but not always more effective). For example, there is the three-stage, nine-stepped *Reid technique* (which permits such strategies as deceiving and cajoling suspects into confessing on the premise that an innocent person would never under any circumstances do so, and has been blamed for some documented false confessions). Still others, employed within the broad scope of the new field of Detection of Deception (DOD), allow interviewees more freedom to put their side of the story in their own way, but with the object of analysing closely what they actually say (or do not say as the case may be). The investigators here closely analyse the actual expressions and structures that they use for signs of inconsistency within the narrative that they construct (Vrij 2008).

both interviewers (IR) and interviewees (IE). Again, the weighted values for each interview have been added up:

▼ Discourse Feature ▼	IR	IE
Ambiguous	46.06	154.36
Expresses fear	0.00	3.84
Expresses frustration	0.00	114.09
Expresses personal ethos	0.00	14.15
Expression of difficulty expressing themselves	0.00	6.59
Injects humour	0.00	16.96
Injects pathos	0.00	11.92
Interrupted	0.00	19.78
Lengthy elaboration	0.00	446.69
Makes accusation	0.00	27.43
Makes complaint	0.00	21.80
Mimesis	0.00	57.16
Rhetorical question	0.00	18.44
Translanguaging	116.47	347.49
▲ Discourse Feature ▲	IR	IE

Table 4

Frequency of different Discourse Features as produced by interviewers and interviewees.

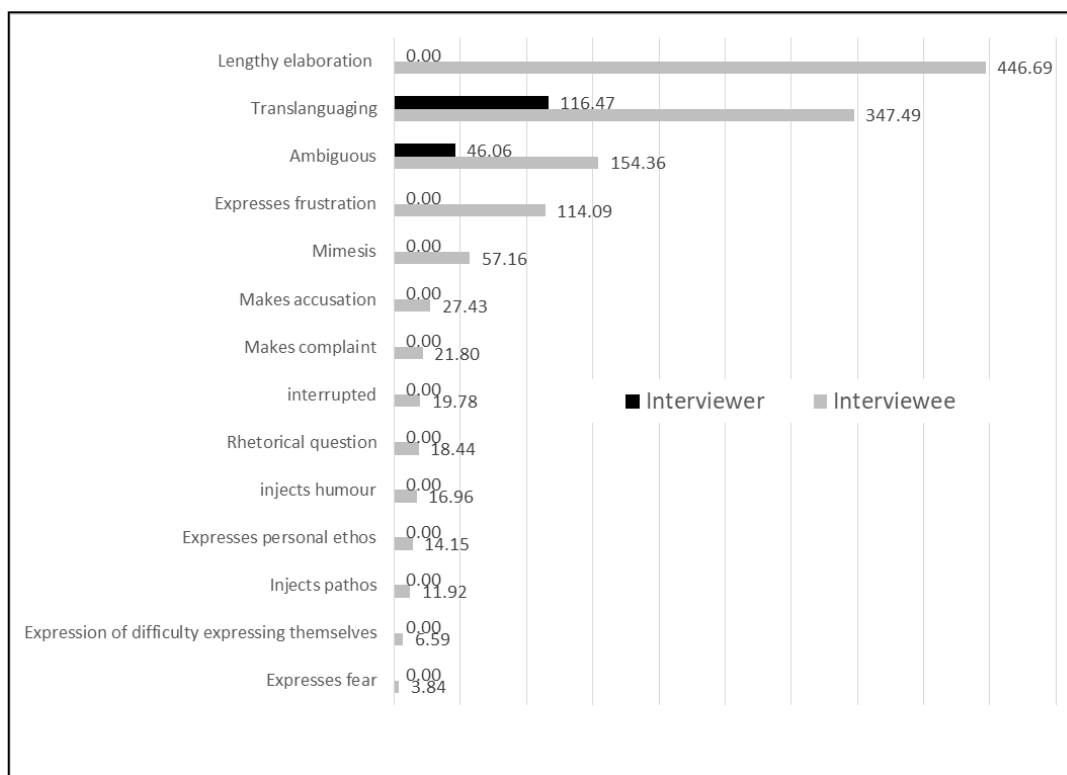


Figure 3

Discourse Features for interviewees compared with frequencies of same Discourse Features for interviewers.

Figure 3 shows that most of the discourse features found in the corpus relate to what the interviewee says, not the interviewer. This is not too surprising seeing that, in the classic interview scenario, the interviewer tends to restrict themselves to asking questions (*initiation* in the terms of Sinclair and Coulthard 1975 – see 3) and maybe adding feedback to the interviewees' responses. The interviewees do also contribute much more to the discourse than the interviewers: by our calculation over thirteen times more.¹³ It is interesting how the two discourse features that both interviewers and interviewees use are “translanguaging”¹⁴ and of the production of utterances deemed “ambiguous” (i.e. impossible to interpret with enough certainty to classify). If one takes into account the fact that interviewers only produce about one-thirteenth of the discourse that the interviewees do, then it transpires that, proportionately, the interviewers use translanguaging more than interviewees and produce utterances that are ambiguous more frequently than them too.

This fact is also echoed in the comment in the extract about commission hearings to decide asylum seekers' and migrants' applications for visas in Italy, quoted in Section 1, namely that “they [the commissioners] don't talk good English.” In the context of an interview with a journalist, such a phenomenon is not so serious, as the interviewee can either ask for clarification or answer in whichever way they like in the expectation that if the interviewer is not satisfied then they will ask again, perhaps rephrasing or clarifying. However, during an official hearing, where the applicant is expected to provide clear, precise, and, not least, prompt answers (at the risk otherwise of appearing uncooperative or untruthful), not being completely sure of what one is being asked is obviously a problem of a much greater magnitude.

The most common discourse feature found in this corpus is “lengthy elaboration”: TTs that were over 50 words in length. In fact, the longest such contribution amounted to 1,422 words and the average length of the contributions categorised as “lengthy” was 143.47 (two decimal places).¹⁵ The fact that this is the most common discourse feature that one can attribute to the interviewees' contributions is of course indicative of the fact that they

¹³In the corpus, the interviewers produce approximately 921 words, the interviewees 12,325. Dividing the latter by the former gives a result of 13.38.

¹⁴A strategy often used by plurilingual users who may, sometimes use whatever linguistic resources that they have at their disposal (be these L1, English, or some other language) – see Garcia and Li Wei (2014).

¹⁵It should be noted that there was a relatively large amount of variation between the number of words in these “lengthy contributions”, the standard deviation (the average difference between the figures for the individual lengths and the figure – 143.47 – calculated as the average of the whole selection) being 181.28.

prove to be open and cooperative in the answers that they provide. That said, we have to remember that, as these interviews were published, they must constitute, as we say in Section 2, successful speech events. What the interviews which never made it to publication (where perhaps interviewees were less forthcoming) were like or how many of them there were, we have no way of knowing.

Among the discourse features related to personal psychological discomfort that are common in the contribution of interviewees are frustration, the making of accusations and complaints, the injection of pathos, and the expression of fear: all understandable given the extra-linguistic context in which the discourse occurs. Related to these, perhaps, is also the expression of difficulty in expressing oneself, which may be associated merely with a lack of sufficient linguistic competence to speak about certain things but may also be associated with stress (if not, in extreme cases, with such specific conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder: PTSD).¹⁶ Studies into trauma discourse (Sarkar 2009) have shown that it is often difficult for subjects to conceptualize and make sense of traumatic experiences. Indeed, one very common psychological effect is that the subject subconsciously disassociates themselves from the events in question. This means that sufferers do not process such memories in the same way that they do other less traumatic memories. Such stress makes it very hard to memorize traumatic events clearly (especially the chronology of what happened), and indeed false memories may even be created. Such confusion at a cognitive-psychological level will naturally make it very difficult to communicate such events to others, especially in periods shortly after they have occurred. Unfortunately, taking their lead from criminal investigations, consistency over details and about the times and orders of different events, is conventionally what immigration officials are trained to look for when assessing so-called claimant credibility (another point which is highlighted in the extract quoted in Section 1).¹⁷ Because of this, sufferers of various kinds of trauma may come across as unreliable or even as mendacious, precisely because of their inability to, as the expression goes, “keep their story straight.”

¹⁶ Many researchers have argued that such psychiatric categories as PTSD based on the Western experience and its sociocultural norms (often, as in the case of PTSD, those of the US military) are inadequate in describing refugees’ and migrants’ mental states – see Guido 2008, Gojer and Ellis 2014 – and may actually hinder rather than assist the applications of asylum seekers and migrants who genuinely have suffered or witnessed events that have left them traumatised or psychologically dysfunctional in some way.

¹⁷ Sarkar (2009, p. 9): “Someone who has not experienced such trauma may not understand the trauma experienced by the survivor. Accounts then can easily be discarded as false. In the United Kingdom, official immigration guidelines state that ‘discrepancies, exaggerated accounts, and the addition of new claims of mistreatment may affect credibility’ of survivors.”

It is interesting also to see the use of mimesis (the use of direct speech to re-enact speech events), humour and the expression of personal ethos. These latter two may be seen as indicators of a more positive mind-set: on the one hand, the desire to make light of things, to step back and find some relief in looking at the funny side of something; on the other, the sense of self-esteem that leads one to want to set out one's own value system even at the risk of the disapproval, or even the ridicule, of others. It is also interesting (and a relief) to see that the most negative of emotions, fear, comes last on the list of discourse features in these interviews.

5. Conclusion

In this brief explorative study, we have shown how it is possible to analyse and categorise various features of spoken discourse in cross-cultural migration domains in a manner that avoids using models of analysis based purely on contexts that are quite different to those where ELF variations of the kind found in this corpus would be used, namely norm-oriented native speaker varieties of English. Our approach – which is based on description and avoids assumption based on preconceived ideas of how a “typical” participant may behave in such a speech event – has been aimed primarily at the collection of objective data which may be used, eventually, for comparison with other objective data collected in other more or less similar or comparable studies. It is hoped that such future work will allow practitioners of all kinds working in cross-cultural migration domains to be able to participate more effectively in interaction with migrants and asylum seekers using ELF variations in the interest of all concerned.

In particular, as we have outlined in our analysis of moves (Section 4), it requires a flexible and multi-model approach taking into account the different goals that the participants have and the ways that they hope to achieve these: i.e. the “games” that we spoke about in Section 3. It is our belief that no single analysis, which can be consistently applied to different discourse events, will ever be comprehensive to give the whole picture. It is therefore important for researchers to be open-minded and to recognise that other interpretations and alternative analytical frameworks may also exist.

For the time being, it should be a priority for researchers to work on ways to obtain objective (i.e. observable and measurable) data with a view to eventually being able to compare results and see which specific techniques and conceptual tools provide the most relevant and interesting answers in the widest varieties of contexts in which the same may prove useful.

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