

ACQUISITION OF ORAL FLUENCY IN THE ORGANIZATION OF CONVERSATION: ANALYSIS OF THE PRODUCTION OF SOME NONNATIVE SPANISH SPEAKERS

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Abstract : This paper focuses on one aspect of the notion of discourse fluency in the acquisition of Spanish as a second language. Specifically, on the analysis of some aspects of learners' ability to carry out a conversation: the type of interaction that takes place between the speakers, the development of the topic and the dynamics of the presentation of information in the turn exchange. The empirical material consists of several conversations with native Spanish speakers recorded by a group of learners. The qualitative analysis of the data reveals the following: (a) at the lowest level of oral fluency the learner's speech production is characterized by a fixed structure of question-answer turns and very simple speech acts such as asking, confirming or incrementing information; (b) at the next level, oral competence allows for the production of more complex speech acts by the nonnative speaker, with or without the question-answer pattern; (c) at the most advanced level, the learner is able to carry out more complex speech acts in more dynamic turn exchanges so that an almost equal amount of information is provided by both speakers, roles are interchanged in question-answer turns and other structures such as declarative statements are used.

Key words: Fluency, Second language acquisition, discourse analysis.

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to contribute to the understanding of the notion of communicative fluency in the acquisition of Spanish as a second language, continuing with the research already begun in a former paper (Morales-López, 1997). The empirical material used as a basis for these two studies was compiled by students in a class of advanced oral Spanish offered by the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of California at Berkeley, in the Fall of 1990. This consists of eight audio tapes (about 15 min. long each), selected from the total number of recordings compiled and recorded by the students themselves. These students were asked to have a spontaneous conversation with a native Spanish speaker; however, due the difficulty of this task, they were advised to prepare a set of questions on specific topics in order to facilitate the fluency of the interaction.

In this study, my main purpose is the analysis of the linguistic units and communicative strategies that the learners employ in the process of negotiating the topic in turn exchanges. A more in-depth analysis of this aspect in terms of the students different levels of production can contribute to the development of the notion of conversational fluency in nonnative speakers of a language (*NNSs*, henceforth).

THE PHENOMENA OF PRODUCTION IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

In psycholinguistics, the phenomena of speech production has been set aside in favor of comprehension and development (Levelt, 1989: Introduction).¹ Likewise, research in second language acquisition has neglected production studies and, more specifically, discursal production. Nevertheless, interest in this field is growing as it becomes more widely recognized that knowledge of a language does not automatically imply accurate usage of this language (Crookes, 1991:114). In fact, other processes that, up until recently, have been relatively unknown also seem to play a key role (for different proposals, see Wilson and Sperber, 1986:583; Faerch and Kasper, 1984:216-217; and Lyons, 1996:28-29).

From the perspective of research in the area of second language acquisition, Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993:3) consider that processes of usage fall within the realm of interlanguage pragmatics: an interdisciplinary approach, the aim of which is the analysis of both discourse strategies and the acquisition of *NNSs*' pragmatic knowledge (see also Kasper, 1996:145; Kasper and Schmidt, 1996:150).

Up until now, this analysis of usage has received much attention from the fields of ethnography of speaking, interactional sociolinguistics, and intercultural pragmatics (Gumperz, 1982a,b; Tannen, 1985; Blum-Kulka and Scheffer, 1993). However, less attention has been paid to the phenomena of pragmatic development. As Kasper and Schmidt (1996:149) point out, very few studies have examined the acquisition of pragmatic knowledge in nonnative adult speakers, in contrast to the amount of research on the development of pragmatic competence in a first language. This type of research calls for (as Crookes, 1991:125, proposes; also Kasper and Schmidt, 1996) an approach that draws on all the perspectives and integrates the different empirical analyses, as well as psycholinguistic theories about the cognitive processing of linguistic production.

Nevertheless, considering the pragmatics of interlanguage exclusively from the cognitive point of view would be a great mistake, since the development of strategies used by *NNSs* of a language in the linguistic action are too closely linked to social and cultural factors (Faerch and Kasper, 1984; Bialystok, 1993:51; Kasper and Schmidt, 1996:165; and Morales-López, 1997). For this reason, research on aspects of pragmatic development necessarily constitutes an interdisciplinary field, given the cognitive and social character of its object of study.

Another important point to consider in terms of the nature of pragmatic fluency, is whether this is a conscious or unconscious process. Researchers such as Carlson, Sullivan and Schneider (1989) support the notion that it is automatic, while this is questioned by other authors such as Schmidt (1992). In this paper, Schmidt refers to different studies in first language acquisition (Ochs, 1988, among others) as well as in second language acquisition (Blum-Kulka and Scheffer, 1993, for example), which have demonstrated a certain degree of metapragmatic awareness about the target language on the part of learners. This has important implications not only for second language teaching, but also for second language research, if we consider this awareness another factor in the learning process.

COMMUNICATIVE FLUENCY: PROGRESSION IN THE NEGOTIATION OF MEANING IN THE TURN EXCHANGE

In a paper devoted to this notion of fluency, Fillmore (1979:92) considers that is important to distinguish "between HOW people speak their language and HOW WELL people speak their language". The notion of fluency is related to the second aspect and covers a wide range of language abilities.

From the point of view of the NNS of a language, this notion of fluency can be interpreted in two ways (as Lenon, 1990:388ff; and Schmidt, 1992:357-359). In a broad sense, fluency, as a synonym of *proficiency*, refers to the NNS's global ability to use a specific language. More precisely, it is an indication of the extent to which the NNS approaches near-native competence in contrast to the notion of *disfluencies*, a term which refers to those traits that reflect the limitations of nonnative competence: long pauses in transitions, filled pauses, restarts etc. (Butler-Wall, 1986, and Riggenbach, 1989).² In a narrow sense, it refers to competence at each level of the communicative process. In other words, NNSs achieve different degrees of fluency in terms of the diverse aspects involved in the communicative process that correspond to phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic or pragmatic level.

In an attempt to better understand this concept of fluency, this paper examines the notion of, what has been termed, discursive fluency. In particular, it focuses on the NNS's ability to carry out the free negotiation of meaning in turn-taking exchanges which is one of the fundamental characteristics that defines the activity of spontaneous conversation.

As Wilson and others (1984:159) explain "talking in turns is a fundamental structural feature of social life". In some forms of oral speech, turns are allocated by specific institutional arrangements, such as in interviews, court discourse, debates and so on. However, in spontaneous conversation, these constraints are absent and participants in the interaction must deal with them by freely alternating during the course of the interaction itself (see also Levinson, 1983: 284). In developing the topic, a certain balance between the participants in turn taking as well as in the amount of information communicated in each intervention is usually respected. When this does not occur in conversation among native speakers it is usually due to other factors, not related to communicative ability, such as a lack of interest in the topic, tiredness on the part of one of the interlocutors, etc.

Given this characteristic feature of spontaneous conversation, the analysis of the learners' production I propose will look at the following three aspects: type of interaction between both speakers, development of the topic and the dynamics of the presentation of information in the turn exchange.

In my analysis of the data collected for this study, I have observed that, in most cases, the empirical results do not yield what could properly be classified as a conversation of the kind that takes place among native speakers (NSs henceforth), even though the students were asked to have a conversation with a native speaker. Instead, we find exchanges between NNSs and NSs that are characterized by a series of questions and answers and long responses from NSs in

a way that is similar to an interview. In my data, this question-answer format is the most frequent structure used by the learner at the lowest level of communicative competence; it becomes less frequent the higher the learner's communicative competence. Taking this into account, an initial hypothesis could be that, considering the different levels of a learner's ability to develop the topic in the interaction between NNS and NS, the ability of the NNS to use structures other than the question-answer format is an indication of his/her higher level of oral fluency.

The terminology applied in reference to the units used in the analysis can be summarized as follows. The first speaker's turn may include the activity of asking or adding a comment about a specific topic. In the case of the question activity --in my data this structure is almost exclusively used by NNSs since they play the most active role in the interaction with the NS-- the input may consist of various "turn constructional units" (*TCU*) (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1978:12; and Heritage and Roth, 1995:14).³ These TCUs convey different kinds of speech acts --greetings, opening moves, prefaces, questions (*wh*-questions, *yes-no*-questions, alternative questions), declarative statements, among others-- that the speaker combines in order to construct his/her turn. The other speaker's response may include several TCUs that also carry out speech acts (answering, confirming, adding another comment and so on).

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

In my analysis, I have followed the qualitative approach which is common in Conversation Analysis. In the studies on oral fluency from a psycholinguistic perspective, a quantitative methodology has been more widely used (Butler-Wall, 1986; Riggensbach, 1989, 1991; Lenon 1990, House 1996, etc.). However, some of these authors' conclusions point to the need for qualitative research that supports this quantitative analysis of conversational data in order to provide a more comprehensive account of the notion of fluency.

From my initial analysis of the production of a total of eight speakers, I have selected four fragments of interaction in order to examine the different stages of development identified. The **first** one corresponds to the conversation that takes place between Anny, a NNS, and Manuel, a NS who is a Mexican resident in Berkeley. If we focus exclusively on the learners' ability to develop the topic in turn exchanges, Anny's level of competence is the lowest. The NNS had studied Spanish in high school and for several semesters at college; she has never lived in a Spanish speaking country.

The **second** fragment is from the dialogue between the NNS, Mathew, and the NS, Liliana, an Argentinian-American, also a student at the same university. Mathew studied Spanish in high school and college, and lived in Madrid for one semester in a Spanish program for foreign students. Throughout the dialogue, Mathew does not have any problems understanding his interlocutor, and his own speech is more complex and elaborate than Anny's.

The **third** dialogue takes place between a NNS, Ann, and Beatriz, a Spanish NS. In this case, there is one characteristic that is not present in the other interactions; the two are friends and they also share knowledge of the same cultural context (in the rest of interactions, the participants knew each other only indirectly): Beatriz was a student in Berkeley that term and Ann had studied Spanish in Madrid for a semester. Ann is at an intermediate level, between the first two speakers mentioned above and the fourth, as the analysis of their speech production will demonstrate.

The **fourth** conversation takes place between Francisco, a NS, and Peter, the NNS with the highest level of oral fluency. Peter is an Asian-American who lived in Argentina as a child, but he had not had much chance to practice his Spanish since moving back to the United States. He chose Francisco as his interlocutor, a Mexican resident in California who was studying in

- 15 M: *then, I've been here for seven or eight years,*
ah bueno, y pero ¿recuerdas algo de:: de tu país
cuando estuviste allí?
ah well, and but do you remember something about:: of your country when you were there?
- 16 L: no sé, no sé si me acuerdo de estar allí
I don't know, I don't know if I remember being there
- 17 M: ¿sí
- 18 L: ¿o si me acuerdo por haber vuelto,
[17] yes
[18] *or if I remember something because I've been back,*
19 pero sí, bueno, me acuerdo de cosas, pero era bastante pequeña,
but yes, well, I remember things, but I was a little child,
20 pero de- pero, como viajab- viajamos a la Argentina casi todos los años,
but of- but, because we trav- we travel to Argentina almost every year,
21 me acuerdo bastante,
I remember a lot,
22 aparte está toda mi familia allí,
besides all my family is there,
23 M: sí, sí sí, y bueno ¿qué-
yes, yes yes, and well, what-
24 bueno, ¿te gusta- te gusta aquí los Estados Unidos
well, do you like- do you like the United States
25 y y de vivir aquí y y funcionar,
and and to live here and to function,
26 porque tú eres en parte americana,
because you are part American,
27 pero en parte de Argentina no Arg-
but part Argentinian, aren't you? Ar-
28 L: sí sí,
yes yes,
29 M: sí, pero me estoy preguntando si
yes, but I am wondering if
30 si tiene usted ganas de:: de volver a Argentina para vivir o
if you want to go back to Argentina to live or
31 L: hmm
- 32 M: para estar con con tus parientes y-
to be with your relatives and-
33 L: no sé, me parece que siempre he pensado
I don't know, I've always had the feeling
34 que en algún momento de mi vida iba a vivir en un país hispano,
that, at some time in my life, I was going to live in a Hispanic country
35 M: sí,
yes,
36 L: no necesariamente en Argentina,
not necessarily in Argentina,
37 M: sí,
yes,
38 L: porque la situación está tan mal en Argentina,
because the situation is so bad in Argentina,
39 que es muy difícil re-con- económicamente vivir ahí
40 M: ¿sí entiendo, entiendo,
[39] *that it is so difficult, in economical terms, to live there*
[40] *I understand, I understand,*
41 L: pero en algún país hispano,
but:: in a Hispanic country,
42 en algún momento de mi vida,

Berkeley. From the group of learners studied, Peter proves to have the highest level of oral competence.

In this paper, the transcripts of the dialogues follow ortographical conventions almost entirely; the division of speech in information units is maintained; each speaker's turn is marked by his/her first initial, directly followed by the English translation. The following symbols are still used:

[...]	an omitted fragment of speech
()	inaudible speech
..	small pause
::	lengthening of sounds
-	truncation of speech
└xxxx	overlappings
└xxxx	

FIRST DIALOGUE: ANNY AND MANUEL

- 1 A: .. Yo soy una estudiante de la Universidad,
 I am an undergraduate
- 2 y tomo español en mis clases
 and I'm taking Spanish classes
- 3 y para un proyecto de español necesito hablar
 and for a class project I need to speak to
- 4 con nativo de un país hispanoamericano
 a native speaker from a Hispanic country
- 5 y ahh necesito hablar de tu experiencia en los Estados Unidos,
 and ahh I need to talk about your experience in the United States,
- 6 M: bueno, mis experiencias en Los Estados Unidos han sido de:: mucha variedad [...]
 well, my experiences in the United States have been very varied [...]
- 7 A: okay, vamos a empezar
 okay, let's start,
- 8 ¿cuándo ahh tu vine- usted vine a los Estados Unidos? ¿qué año?
 when ahh did you com- did you come to the United States? which year?
- 9 M: vine en el año de 1984,
 I came in 1984,
- 10 A: cuatro
 four
- 11 M: por primera vez, en septiembre,
 for the first time in september,
- 12 exactamente siete años- seis años
 exactly, seven years, six years
- 13 y:: pues vine por motivos de que-
 and:: then I came because
- 14 pues en mi país es un poco-
 my country is a little-
- 15 un poco pobre y necesita uno trabajo y conseguir
 a little poor and people need a job to get
- └dinero [money]
- 16 A: └¿no no tiene un trabajo en México?
 don't don't you have a job in Mexico?
- 17 M: sí tengo, pero no:: me dan la oportunidad de de
 yes, I do, but I don't get the chance to make
- 18 A: └mucho dinero
- 19 M: └trabajar y ganar mucho dinero,
 a lot of money
- [18]

- [19] work and make a lot of money,
 20 bueno no mucho,
 well not a lot,
 21 pero mejor dinero que que voy a ganar aquí
 but more money than I will make here
 22 porque México es muy- el pago esss muy muy bajo
 because Mexico is very- the salaries are very very low
 23 y entonces, pues, decidí- y también pensaba ir a la escuela
 and then I decided- and I also thought about going to school
 24 porque cuando yo estuve trabajando en México
 because when I was working in Mexico
 25 no pude trabajar y estudiar al mismo tiempo,
 I couldn't work and study at the same time,
 26 porque me absorbía todo el tiempo.
 because work took up all my time.
 27 A: Pues aquí en los Estados Unidos
 So here in the United States,
 28 ¿tú ahh usted trabaja y::
 are ahh you working and::
 29 M: voy a la escuela,
 I am going to school,
 30 A: voy a la escuela
 I am going to school
 31 y ahh ¿dónde estudia?
 and ahh where do you study?
 32 M: en L. College,
 in L. College.
 33 A: ¡Qué bueno!
 That's good!
 34 M: Sí, estoy tomando una clase de electricidad,
 Yes, I am taking a class in electricity,
 35 A: sí,
 yes,
 36 M: me gusta mucho, apenas empezamos hace un mes
 I like it a lot, we just began a month ago
 37 y que- pues quiero superarme, ser algo por mí
 and that- so I want to do well,
 38 y ganar más dinero;
 and earn more money;
 39 A: y ahh ¿cuando.. cuando ahh se gradúa?
 and ahh when do you ahh graduate?
 40 M: pues el curso va a durar un año,
 well the course lasts one year,
 41 A: ¿un año,
 42 M: Lo sea, es como un un entrenamiento para el trabajo,
 [41] one year,
 [42] I mean, it will be like job training,
 43 no es como un un un diploma que va uno a sacar ()
 it's not like a a a diploma that one just gets
 44 A: perdón,
 sorry,
 45 M: es como un entrenamiento de trabajo el que estoy tomando,
 it is like a job training, what I am doing,
 46 así me entiendes ¿no?
 you understand, don't you?
 47 A: no, repítalo, por favor,

- 48 M: *no, say it again, please,*
es entrenamiento
it is training,
- 49 A: en- no sé,
tra- I don't know,
- 50 M: 'entrenar' eh es es aprender un trabajo,
'training' eh is is to learn a job,
- 51 A: y ahh después de esta clase ahh
and ahh after this class ahh
- 52 M: posi-
may-
- 53 A: eh eh eh ¿va a un electricista?
eh eh eh are you going to be an electrician?
- 54 M: elec- voy eh pienso sí,
elec- I am going eh I think so,
- 55 o sea, estoy ahorita estudiando eh eh lo que se llama (encablado) de casas en electricidad,
I mean, right now I'm studying eh eh what it is called "electrical wiring of houses" in electricity,
- 56 traducido al español,
translated into Spanish,
- 57 A: ¿hhh
- 58 M: ^Lentonces es que:: pues, como voy a tomar esa clase,
puedo- después de que yo tome mi curso,
[58] *then that is, well, because I am going to attend this class, I can- after finishing this course,*
59 puedo transferirme yo mismo a una Universidad del Estado como Hayward o
I can transfer to a state university like Hayward or
- 60 A: ¿San Francisco
- 61 M: ^LSan Francisco eh puedo entonces este::
[61] *San Francisco eh I can then, well,*
- 62 pero ahorita lo estoy- lo lo primero que quiero sacar es mi mi entrenamiento de trabajo
but right now what I am- what I want to do first is get my my job training
- 63 A: ¿ahá
- 64 M: ^Lpara poder para poder hacer trabajos en construcción,
[66] *in order to be able to be able to work in construction,*
- 65 A: hhh
- 66 M: instalar sistemas eléctricos.
to install electric systems.
- 67 A: Y ahhh sí yo sé ahhh por qué vine a los Estados Unidos
And ahhh yes, I know, ahhh why I came to the United States
- 68 y ahhh es para ganar más dinero
and ahhh it was to earn more money
- 69 y tener un vida más ahhh lleno
and to have a better ahhh life
- 70 y ahh tener un trabajo ahhh que que es más-
and ahh to have a job ahhh that that it is-
- 71 ¿cómo se dice? que es más bueno, sí,
how do you say it? that it is better, yes,
- 72 y ahhh cuando sale de México- salió de México
and ahhh when you leave Mexico- you left Mexico
- 73 ahhh ¿qué son ahhh sus sentimientos ahhh personales?
ahhh [...]
ahhh what were ahhh your ahhh personal feelings? ahhh

The analysis of this dialogue reveals the following features:

1. Type of interaction: question-answer format.

As explained above, one of the characteristics that defines a conversation is that it is a kind of talk in which two or more participants freely alternate in the exchange of information. In this case, the analysis of the interaction between the two speakers shows how Anny's level of oral fluency does not allow her to develop a conversation; that is, her level of oral fluency is insufficient to permit her to engage in the dynamics that this type of discourse requires (as I will explain in dialogue four). Consequently, the result is a very constrained structure consisting of, on the one hand, a series of questions that Anny asks her interlocutor about very specific aspects of his life and, on the other, a series of answers by the NS to these questions, with no interchanging of roles.

2. Development of the topic.

2.1. Disconnected development of the topic beginning with the NS's intervention. From the beginning of the dialogue, Anny is not able to build on the first comment by the NS in line (6) - in response to inquiry in lines (1)-(5) (most of this response has been omitted)— and in the following turns Anny opts for asking subsequent questions in order to accomplish her discursive task.

In this way, in lines (1) to (5), Anny begins with an opening statement (Blum-Kulka, 1983:135) where she introduces herself and the purpose of her dialogue with Manuel. The NS interprets this statement as a request for information and, in line (6), he responds to it. In (7), Anny asks her first question and she does not go on to expand this topic which has been introduced since she considers that the interaction has not yet begun, as she explicitly says.

2.2. Increments and pseudo increments of information. After Anny's turn in line (8) --a *wh*-question where she solicits information about a very specific detail of Manuel's life-- she goes on to develop the initiated topic by inserting several increments of information (Heritage and Roth, 1995:24-25). However, some of these contributions are actually only pseudo increments since they are simply reformulations of the information the NS has already stated and they do not provide new information.

One instance in which new information is added in order to continue the conversation takes place in (31) and (39). Here, Anny inserts very specific and simple *wh*-questions that allow her to advance the topic following the NS's response. The first instance of the second type of interventions --the use of pseudo increments-- takes place in line (16) and again in lines (27)-(28) and (51)-(53). In each case, Anny asks a *yes-no* question that summarizes the information that Manuel has provided in his previous responses. Finally, her interventions in lines (18) and in (60) constitute two comments, the meaning of which partially coincides with Manuel's response.

The most complex turn is found at the end of the fragment selected, line (67). This turn includes two TCUs: in the first, lines (67)-(71), she sums up the information Manuel has provided, which serves as a strategy that facilitates a smooth change of topic; in the second, lines (72)-(73), she changes the topic by asking her interlocutor a different type of question, in this case an open question.

3. The dynamics of presenting the information in the turn exchange

One characteristic of Anny's production is the frequent use of *passing turns*, following Weiner and Goodenough's (1977:217ff.) terminology. These turns do not provide a substantive contribution to the topic; they postpone the speaker's option to take the turn (see also Yngve, 1970:567). These features are also present in the NS's production; however, in Anny's case they seem to be indicative of her lack of turn-taking ability as well as her inability to contribute to the development of the topic with different speech acts. This results in a long response from the NS in each intervention. Backchannels and other similar units usually appear in these turns as seen in lines (10), (33), (35), (41), (57), and so on.

4. Problems of listening comprehension

In a former paper (Morales-López, 1997), I pointed out how the definition of the notion of oral fluency cannot be understood only in terms of production, but, also, needs to take into account comprehension skills. Both processes seem to be involved in the organization of a conversation and both factors make it possible for the conversation to progress --Fillmore (1979:92) also mentions how the ability to get along in a language involves both production and reception; however, he only develops the first of these notions).

This learner has difficulty understanding the NS and she needs to interrupt the conversation as in line (44). The next few lines involve the subsequent clarification of this metalinguistic problem. In line (50), Manuel simplifies his answer in order to explain the meaning of the particular lexical item unknown to Anny.

SECOND DIALOGUE: MATHEW AND LILIANA

- 1 M: Hola, Liliana, ¿qué tal?
Hello, Liliana, how do you do?
- 2 L: ahh, bien ¿y tú?
ahh pretty well, and you?
- 3 M: Bueno, estoy bien, y bueno me estoy preguntando cómo
well, I am okay, and well I am wondering how-
- 4 bueno ¿cuándo ya has llegado aquí en los Estados Unidos?
well, when have you arrived here to the United States?
- 5 L: hmm, bueno, nací en Estados Unidos
Hm, well, I was born in the United States,
- 6 pero.. de pequeña mis padres se fue- volvieron a la Argentina de donde son,
but.. when I was a child my parents we- went back to Argentina, where they're from,
- 7 M: sí,
yes,
- 8 L: y volvieron a la Argentina en el 72 o por ahí
and:: they went back to Argentina in 72 or close
- 9 y luego se tuvieron que ir otra vez en el 77 por el Golpe de Estado,
and then they had to leave again in 77 because of the Coup d'État,
- 10 M: entonces, ahh bueno, entonces ¿viviste allí por cuatro o cinco años?
then, ahh well, then did you live there for four or five years?
- 11 L: cuatro o cinco años, sí, estuvimos viviendo,
four or five years, yes, we were living there,
- 12 y luego volvimos- volvemos casi todos los años a la Argentina a visitarla,
and then we came back- we go back to Argentina almost every year to visit,
- 13 M: ¡ahh
- 14 L: ¿entonces hace unos siete o ocho años que estoy aquí,

- 15 M: *then, I've been here for seven or eight years,*
ah bueno, y pero ¿recuerdas algo de:: de tu país
cuando estuviste allí?
ah well, and but do you remember something about:: of your country when you were there?
- 16 L: no sé, no sé si me acuerdo de estar allí
I don't know, I don't know if I remember being there
- 17 M: ¿sí
- 18 L: ¿o si me acuerdo por haber vuelto,
- [17] yes
- [18] *or if I remember something because I've been back,*
- 19 pero sí, bueno, me acuerdo de cosas, pero era bastante pequeña,
but yes, well, I remember things, but I was a little child,
- 20 pero de- pero, como viajab- viajamos a la Argentina casi todos los años,
but of- but, because we trav- we travel to Argentina almost every year,
- 21 me acuerdo bastante,
I remember a lot,
- 22 aparte está toda mi familia allí,
besides all my family is there,
- 23 M: sí, sí sí, y bueno ¿qué-
yes, yes yes, and well, what-
- 24 bueno, ¿te gusta- te gusta aquí los Estados Unidos
well, do you like- do you like the United States
- 25 y y de vivir aquí y y funcionar,
and and to live here and to function,
- 26 porque tú eres en parte americana,
because you are part American,
- 27 pero en parte de Argentina no Arg-
but part Argentinian, aren't you? Ar-
- 28 L: sí sí,
yes yes,
- 29 M: sí, pero me estoy preguntando si
yes, but I am wondering if
- 30 si tiene usted ganas de:: de volver a Argentina para vivir o
if you want to go back to Argentina to live or
- 31 L: hmm
- 32 M: para estar con con tus parientes y-
to be with your relatives and-
- 33 L: no sé, me parece que siempre he pensado
I don't know, I've always had the feeling
- 34 que en algún momento de mi vida iba a vivir en un país hispano,
that, at some time in my life, I was going to live in a Hispanic country
- 35 M: sí,
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not necessarily in Argentina,
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- 38 L: porque la situación está tan mal en Argentina,
because the situation is so bad in Argentina,
- 39 que es muy difícil recon- económicamente vivir ahí
- 40 M: ¿sí entiendo, entiendo,
- [39] *that it is so difficult, in economical terms, to live there*
- [40] *I understand, I understand,*
- 41 L: pero en algún país hispano,
but:: in a Hispanic country,
- 42 en algún momento de mi vida,

- 43 *in some time in my life,*
estoy segura que quiero vivir,
I am sure I want to live,
44 que no quiero vivir ^Γtoda mi vida en Estados Unidos.
45 M: ^Γsí,
[44] *that I don't want to live my whole life in the United States.*
[45] yes
46 sí, entiendo, entiendo,
yes, I understand, I understand,
47 pero Argentina hay hay una-
but Argentina has has one-
no no he estado allí nunca,
I have never been there,
48 pero me estoy preguntando si ahh si hay muchas diferencias entre
but I am wondering if ahh if there are many differences between-
49 bueno, hay diferencia- diferencias claro,
well, there are difference- differences, of course,
50 pero ¿hay muchas o::?
but are there many or::?
51 bueno, ¿crees que que es difícil para u-
para ti ahh cambiar ()
well, do you think that it is difficult to o- to you ahh to
change ()
52 L: y vivir aquí,
and live here,
53 M: sí,
yes,
54 L: m- bueno,
m- well,
55 M: o::
or::
56 L: diferencias hay muchísimas,
differences, there are a lot,
57 M: sí claro,
yes, of course,
58 L: más que nada cultu- culturalmente ¿no?
mostly cultural, aren't there?
59 diferencias ^Γculturales,
60 M: ^Γsí,
[59] *cultural differences,*
[60] yes
61 L: pero:: [...]
but::
62 M: ah sí, y tú también tienes que volver ¿no?
ah, yes, and you have too to go back, haven't you?
63 si si no vuelvas vuelves entonces::
if if you don't go go back then::
64 L: ya, yo siento que tengo que volver más que nada por no perder la iden- partede la identidad ^Γno
65 M: ^Γsí,
[64] *okay, I have the feeling that I have to go back more in order not to lose part of my identity, you*
know,
[65] yes
66 L: y aparte para ver a toda mi- mis abuelos y mis tíos,
and besides to see all my- my grandparents, my uncles and aunts,
67 M: si claro, pero y allá tiencs todos tus abuelos y y tíos y-

- yes, of course, but and there you have all your grandparents and your uncles and your aunts and-
- 68 L: están todos todos,
- 69 M: mucha familia allí ¿no? [...]
- [68] they are all all
- [69] a lot of family there, isn't there?

The analysis of this interaction reveals the following features:

1. Type of interaction: question-answer format.

As in the previous dialogue, the main characteristic of Mathew's production is that the question and answer format is almost always present, with relatively long answers on the part of the NS. However, although some questions also request very specific information from his interlocutor, a higher level of communicative fluency is observed in contrast to the previous learner. This is particularly evident in terms of the characteristic feature discussed next.

2. Development of the topic.

2.1. Different types of speech acts used in order to increment the information. Mathew employs a greater variety of speech acts in his turns including different types of questions (the type most often used is the *yes-no* question format, although the *wh*-question and the alternative question are also used) and other resources such as declarative statements. The latter are semantically quite complex, and, from the pragmatic point of view, carry out different functions, such as providing a counter argument, (Heritage and Roth, 1995:40) or B-event type of information (a declarative statement that provides information associated with one's interlocutor; see Labov and Fanshel, 1977:62-63).

After the greeting in the first three lines, in (4), Mathew begins the dialogue with a *wh*-question about a specific event in Liliana's life. This first question and the development of the topic in the following interventions up to line (14) are pragmatically very similar to the previous dialogue (although Mathew shows a greater level of grammatical competence than Anny). For instance, in line (10), he asks a *yes-no* question in order to develop the interaction, but the question does not add any new information because it is, in fact, simply a reformulation of Liliana's previous answer.

In lines (15) to (44), we see how Mathew's level of oral fluency is greater than Anny's, because of his use of a more variety of speech acts. His turn in line (15) includes an open question that functions as an increment of information. Similarly, his intervention in (24) is a new increment which consists of two TCUs; first, a *yes-no* question in (24)-(25); and then in lines (26)-(27), a B-event declarative statement about Liliana's response which ends with a tag question. In line (28), Liliana confirms this information. In the next turn, beginning in line (29) through (32), Mathew reformulates his previous question by asking a new alternative question, without waiting for her to respond to the former.

2.2. Truncation of some speech acts. Although he shows no difficulty understanding his interlocutor and the conversation is not interrupted in this way, his statements are sometimes truncated. This disfluency demonstrates that he has not completely mastered the skills that would allow him to carry out a conversation in the target language without constantly interrupting himself.

The first instance of this disfluency takes place in (47)-(51). This turn includes three questions truncated by the speaker himself. The first inquiry, in (48)-(49), is an indirect *yes-no* question, also followed by a declarative statement presented as a counter argument of his

previous question and in preparation for the next one. The second, in (50), is an alternative question in which the second option is immediately truncated in order to formulate another, an open question; the latter is finally completed by Liliana in line (52). Finally, in line (55), Mathew seems to reformulate his question again, but Liliana interrupts him and goes on with her response.

3. The dynamics of presenting the information in the turn exchange.

As in the previous dialogue, passing turns are also frequent in Mathew's production. In this case, they also seem to be indicative of his lack of ability to negotiate meaning in turn exchanges. In this way, different backchannels are used all over Liliana's long interventions; for examples see lines (7), (13), (35), (37), and so on.

THIRD DIALOGUE: ANN AND BEATRIZ

- 22 A: .. porque cuando cualquier tiempo
because when whenever
- 23 que queria ah llamar a mis padres
I wanted ah to call my parents
- 24 neces- necesitaba ah
I ne- needed, ah
- 25 B: nueve horas
nine hours
- 26 A: ah contar las ho ras y
- 27 B: ^Lah sí sí
ah to count the hours,
ah yes yes.
- 28 A: planear;
to plan,
- 29 porque necesitaba ir al- la Te lefónica
- 30 B: ^LTelefónica
because I had to go to the Telephone Company.
the Telephone Company.
- 31 B: uh
uh
- 32 A: entonces es-
then it's-
- 33 B: pero tú sabes que es horrible
but you know it's horrible,
- 34 porque desde España
because from Spain
- 35 llamar a Estados Unidos
- 36 A: ^Lsí
to call the United States
yes
- 37 es muy caro,
is very expensive,
- 38 sí, pero aquí-
- 39 B: ^Laquí llamar a a España no es caro,
yes, but here-
it isn't expensive to call Spain.
- 40 A: es la razón que necesitaba ir al- al Telefónica
That's the reason I had to go to the Telephone Company office
- 41 porque allá hay un un teléfono ah particular;

- 42 *because there was a private ah telephone;*
 !es es increible!
 It's incredible!
- 43 B: sí,
 yeah,
- 44 A: *!ridículo!*
 It's ridiculous!
- 45 *es es un gran problema,*
 It's a serious problem,
- 46 *porque en el resto de Europa*
 because in the rest of Europe
- 47 B: sí,
 yes,
- 48 A: *ah es posible usar ah la tarjeta*
 ah it's possible to use ah the card
- 49 B: sí
 yes
- 50 A: *ah de algún teléfono,*
 ah from a telephone,
- 51 B: sí,
 yes,
- 52 A: *pero en España no es posible sólo*
 but it's not possible in Spain only
- 53 *entonces pero entonces jajaja*
 then, but then hahaha
- 54 *cuando llegué en Francia,*
 when I arrived in France,
- 55 *el el primer cosa que jajaja*
 the the first thing that hahaha
- 56 *porque quiero quería usar mi tarjeta*
 because I want I wanted to use my card
- 57 *de un teléfono (random) jajaja*
 from a telephone (random) hahaha
- 58 *y no necesitaba ir jajaja*
 and I didn't need to go hahaha
- 59 B: *a la Telefónica,*
 to the Telephone Company,
- 60 A: sí,
 right,
- 61 B: *muy bien,*
 very well,
- 62 A: *porque solamente en Madrid,*
 because only in Madrid,
- 63 *solamente dos teléfonos*
 only two telephones
- 64 *y entonces siempre cuando ah fui*
 and then every time ah I went,
- 65 *hay un línea*
 there was a line
- 66 B: *hay una cola muy*
 there was a very big line
- 67 A: *hay cuatro;*
 there are four;
- 68 *ah algunas veces ah*
 ah sometimes um
- 69 *esperé*

- 70 *I waited*
dos horas y media, creo,
two hours and a half, I think,
- 71 B: ¡qué horror!
how awful!
- 72 funcionan aquí muy bien los teléfonos,
the phones work very well here,
- 73 no como en España.
not like in Spain,
- 74 A: ^Lsí.
yeah.
- [73]
[74]
- 75 B: Que es increíble,
It's incredible,
- 76 A: jajaja jajaja
- 77 B: ^Lfuncionan fatal.
hahaha hahaha
- [76]
[77]
- 78 A: Siempre mi ah mi señora ah
My landlady ah always ah
- 79 hablaba sobre el socialistas,
talked about the socialists,
- 80 "¿qué hac- qué hacía nuestra sistema de teléfono?"
what does it happen with our telephone system?
- 81 B: de teléfono.
our telephone system;
- 82 ¡es que es un horror!
It's terrible!
- 83 A: Jajaja es.. muy malo [...]
Hahaha It's very bad.

The analysis of the selected fragment of the dialogue highlights the features discussed below.

1. Type of interaction: declarative statements.

A distinctive feature of this dialogue is the fact that the question-answer structure is not used; instead, the dialogue includes a series of declarative statements made by both speakers.

According to the hypothesis presented above, the use of structures other than the question-answer pair can demonstrate the NNS's higher ability to engage in the dynamics of a conversation, and contributes to freer alternating in turn exchanges, as we will see in the next interaction. However, as previously explained, we need to take other variables into account: in this case, the fact that there is a certain degree of friendship between the two speakers. They had friends in common and often saw each other socially; at the moment of the conversation, they were speaking in English and switched to Spanish to make the recording Ann needed. This could explain in part the absence of this type of structure: Ann already knows information about her interlocutor so she does not need to rely on it, which is not the case in the previous dialogues.

2. Development of the topic.

As explained above, Ann contributes to the negotiation of meaning through declarative statements which add to the information provided by Beatriz. The NS begins this dialogue with an anecdote about their experience with telephones in both Spain and the United States --the

beginning of this dialogue, lines (1)-(21), has been omitted. The fragment selected includes Ann's subsequent comments on the topic which demonstrate that she is able to provide new information to her interlocutor. In this way, we see how the negotiation of meaning advances more spontaneously, without being so constrained by the question-answer structure as in the previous two dialogues, with both speakers freely providing comments about their experience.

In her first intervention in lines (22)-(29), Ann recounts her experience in Madrid when she had to deal with the telephone system. Beatriz cooperates by contributing metalinguistic comments such as in (26) and (30) that help Ann complete her utterances. In the second intervention, lines (36)-(37), Ann returns to the same topic, providing more details about it. This explanation ends with a long comment, from lines (40) to (70), although there are various interventions by the NS, which I will analyze in the next section.

Ann's most complex intervention takes place in lines (78)-(80) where she adds a final comment which functions as irony. She freely paraphrases the words of her landlady in Madrid criticizing the Spanish Government. With this rhetorical strategy she produces a more functionally elaborated intervention (although not syntactically correct).

3. *The dynamics of presenting the information in the turn exchange*

As noted earlier, this dialogue is characterized by long interventions on Ann's part and short contributions from Beatriz. The NS's turns carry out different functions: adding metalinguistic comments; supplying the correct term in Spanish as in (26) and (30); completing or adding to the information provided by her interlocutor as in (59); allowing for passing turns in order to facilitate Ann's intervention, although the NS declines taking the turn (Yngve, 1970:575), as in lines (43), (47), (51).

These examples demonstrate how Beatriz is aware of Ann's lack of fluency and attempts to help her accomplish her discursive task by allowing her to intervene with long turns. The fragment also demonstrates that Ann's competence is insufficient to enable her to add information in more dynamic turn exchanges in such a way that a certain parity is achieved, as is required in a conversation.

FOURTH DIALOGUE: PETER AND FRANCISCO

- 1 P: *Hola, yo me llamo Peter,*
 Hello, my name is Peter,
- 2 F: *Peter,*
 Peter,
- 3 P: *y estoy tomando una clase de español*
 and I am taking a Spanish class
- 4 F: *ahá,*
 hm,
- 5 P: *y ahh estoy haciendo un un proyecto para mi clase que es*
 and ahh I am doing a project for my class that is
- 6 F: *ahá,*
 hm,
- 7 P: *grabar una conversación con un- ahh con una persona que habla español [...]*
 recording a conversation with a- ahh a person that speaks Spanish [...]
- 8 *y a:... eres un estudiante de Berkeley*
 and are you a student in Berkeley?
- 9 F: *sí,*
 yes,
- 10 P: *¿verdad?*

- really?
- 11 F: sí, es mi cuarto año; estoy estudiando sociología,
yes, it is my fourth year; I am studying sociology,
- 12 P: ¿sociología?
sociology?
- 13 F: y me voy a recibir en dos años.. jejeje
and I will graduate in two years.. hehehe
- 14 P: bueno
well
- 15 F: (h) dos (h) años,
(h) two (h) years,
- 16 P: yo esto- estoy estudiando bioquímica
I a- am studying bioquimistry
- 17 F: sí
yes
- 18 P: y y tengo un año más
and I have one more year
- 19 F: ahh
- 20 P: para graduarme.
to graduate.
- 21 F: .. Quiero ir a- yo quiero ir a la escuela de leyes,
.. I want to g- I want to go to law school,
- 22 a estudiar leyes,
to study law,
- 23 P: ahh muy bien,
ahh, pretty good,
- 24 F: abogado, un día jejeje,
lawyer, one day, hehehe,
- 25 primero quiero regresar a do- a los Angeles d- donde estoy viviendo allí,
first I want to go back to los Angeles, w- where I am living there
- 26 P: ahá
hm
- 27 F: a mi escuela, la (preparia), para ser un maestro uno o dos años,
to my school, (pre-paria) school, to be a teacher for one or two years,
- 28 P: bueno, es una buena idea;
good, it is a good idea;
- 29 F: sí,
yes,
- 30 P: tus padres ¿también están en Los Angeles ahora?
your parents, are they also in los Angeles right now?
- 31 F: sí; somos de México,
yes; we are from Mexico,
- 32 P: ¿de México?
from Mexico?
- 33 F: todos, yo nací en México, todos.
all of us, I was born in Mexico, all of us.
- 34 P: Y ¿cuántos años tenías cuando viniste?
And how old were you when you came?
- 35 F: uhh unos tres años,
hm about three years old,
- 36 P: ¿unos tres años?
about three years old?
- 37 F: tenía tres años jejeje de edad,
I was three years hehehe old,
- 38 P: pero ¿hablas español con tus padres y tus amigos?
but do you speak Spanish with your parents and friends?

- 39 F: sí,
yes,
- 40 P: ¿hablas tam-
do you also speak-
- 41 F: lo hablo más cuando estoy en mi casa,
I speak it more when I am home,
- 42 pero aquí en la escuela, con unos amigos,
but here at school, with some friends,
- 43 de vez en cuando no nomás nos ponemos a hablar
from time to time, we decide to speak it
- 44 P: (h) (h) (h)
- 45 F: para (h) para que no se nos olvide jajaja ɾJaJaJa
- 46 P: ɿJaJaJa
- [45] in (h) order not to forget hehehe hehehe
- [46] hehehe
- 47 P: sí, es muy importante hablar mucho;
yes, it is very important to speak a lot;
yo vivía en la Argentina por tres años y medio,
I have lived in Argentina for three and a half years,
- 48 F: ¿ah sí?
oh yes?
- 49 P: sí, por eso puedo hablar,
yes, that is why I can speak,
- 50 F: lo hablas bien jejeje
you speak it well hehehe
- 51 P: pero yo lo olvido muy ɾrápidamente
- 52 F: ɿsí
- [51] but I forget it very quickly
- [52] yes
- 53 P: porque cuando vine a los Estados- a los Estados Unidos
because when I came to the States- the United States
- 54 F: ahá
hm
- 55 P: no tengo p- oportunidad de hablar
I don't have any chance to speak
- 56 F: sí,
yes,
- 57 P: ɾcon las personas.
- 58 F: ɿQué- ¿Por qué quieres ap- aprender español?
with people.
- [57] Wh- Why do you want to l- learn Spanish?
- [58] ¿qué qué vas a hacer ɾ()
- 59 P: ɿahora, solamente,
- 60 solamente porque pienso español es muy práctico
What are you going to do ()
- [59] now, only only, because I think Spanish is very convenient
- [60] hhh
- 61 F: hhh
- 62 P: y:: es un idioma muy interesante,
and:: it is a very interesting language,
- 63 F: es uno de los más fáciles también ɾJaJaJa
- 64 P: ɿJaJaJa
- más fácil de hablar, más fácil de::
it is also one of the easiest HaHaHa
- [63] HaHaHa
- [64] easier to speak, easier to::
- 65 pero más fácil de decir algo bien no creo,

- 66 F: *but easier to say something correctly I don't think so,*
 sí,
 yes,
 67 P: *creo que es bastante difícil;*
I think it is very difficult;
 68 F: *los verbos JeJeJe*
the verbs HeHeHe
 69 P: *o escribir, es bastante difícil* [escribir bien;
 70 F: [claro,
 yo tengo muchos problemas con los acentos ()
 [69] *or writing, writing well is very difficult,*
 [70] *of course, I have many problems with the accents ()*
 71 P: *¿qué tipo de acentos?*
What kind of accents?
 72 F: *no, no, digo cuando estoy escribiendo*
no, no, I mean when I am writing
 73 P: [ahh
 74 F: [los acentos escritos
 [74] *the writing stress*
 75 P: *las tildes y::*
the writing stress and::
 76 F: *sí es- ese es mi problema jejeje*
yes, that is my problem hehehe
 77 P: *jejeje [...]*
hehehe

The analysis of the fourth learner's production shows the following characteristic features:

1. Type of interaction.

The main difference between this learner and others in this study is that his speech production combines the two kinds of interaction previously identified. The development of the topic is achieved through the use of declarative statements on the part of both interlocutors, as we saw in the third conversation, but also with question-answer pairs. The use of the question-answer format in this dialogue usually signals a change of roles in speech acts that involve questioning and answering. This structural feature demonstrates the learner's ability to adopt the role of speaker as well as that of listener. (I will refer to this aspect below).

2. Development of the topic and dynamics of presenting the information in the turn exchange.

In my analysis of this fragment I will link these two points, given their relationship during the entire interaction.

The dialogue begins with Peter's greeting and an opening statement where he explains the purpose of the conversation, since, as mentioned above, both interlocutors knew each other indirectly. Next, in line (8), he initiates the topic with a *yes-no* question about a very specific aspect of his interlocutor's life. This type of question and the following interventions in (10), (12) and (14) work to reinforce Francisco's responses. In terms of function, they are very similar to the structures employed by the other two learners, Anny and Mathew.

However, in line (16), we begin to observe differences. Here, Peter adds information about himself with a declarative statement. At this point, the NS changes his role from that of speaker

to listener and confirms Peter's interventions through diverse backchannels. In line (21), they exchange roles again when Francisco adds new information.

In the same way, after Francisco's response in (41)-(45), in line (47) Peter provides new information. In the following turns, through line (57), both Peter and Francisco intervene with comments that elaborate on Peter's first statement in (47). Next, Francisco asks Peter another question in (58). Peter's answer begins in line (60) and this new topic is developed with both speakers freely alternating turns. As previously indicated, this dynamics involved in the exchange of communicative roles between speaker and listener are a characteristic feature of conversation. Peter's ability to engage in this process indicates that he has achieved the communicative skills required for this task.

In order to advance the dialogue, Peter increments the information through the use of *yes-no* questions or *wh*-questions --see (30), (32) and (36), and from (71) to the end of the fragment. Here, the rhythm of the interaction is faster than in the previous three dialogues analyzed. The reason for this is that there is a balance in terms of the amount of information provided by the two speakers. As previously indicated, this balance or parity in turn exchanges is one of the main features that distinguishes conversation from other types of oral discourse.

The analysis of the interaction that takes place between the two speakers indicates that, as a whole, this interaction may be considered very similar to spontaneous conversation. The dynamics involved in the exchange of communicative roles between the participants in the question-answer activity and the parity achieved in terms of the amount of information provided by each speaker are two main features that characterize this type of discourse.

CONCLUSION

The study of the oral interaction that takes place between this specific set of Spanish learners and NSs seeks to provide greater insight into one of the many different ways of being fluent in a language (Fillmore, 1979:101); concretely, greater insight into one aspect of the notion of discursive fluency: the negotiation of meaning in turn exchanges in conversations.

The qualitative analysis of the data provides information about the discursive skills required in order to accomplish this task.

First, we find that the learner with the lowest level of oral fluency is characterized by the production of a fixed structure of question-answer turns and very simple speech acts that involve asking for, confirming or incrementing information.

The second learner's level of oral competence is marked by the use of more complex speech acts by the NNS, although these occur within the question-answer structure. However, neither the first nor the second learner is able to successfully engage in the dynamics of presenting information in turn exchanges. In both cases, the result is long answers on the part of the native speaker as opposed to a balanced exchange of information.

At the next stage, more complex strategies and structures appear, as in the conversation between Ann and Beatriz. In this case, the NNS contributes to the progression of the interaction by providing successive increments of information through declarative statements, although the presentation of information in the turn exchange is not balanced between both participants yet.

Finally, at the most advanced stage of oral fluency the fourth learner is able to accomplish the following tasks: carry out complex speech acts in very dynamic turn exchanges with a relatively equal amount of information being provided by both speakers at each turn; participate in the interchanging of roles in the question-answer turn; and combine this structure with others, such as declarative statements. Given that, as we have seen, the different definitions

proposed agree that these are the features that characterize spontaneous conversation, it follows that the fourth learner has achieved the skills required to carry out this kind of discourse.

To sum up, this analysis has shown that the dynamic negotiation of meaning required in spontaneous conversation is not accessible to beginners. A high level of oral fluency is necessary in order to master this skill. However, further analysis of data from conversations by advanced learners in other situations, talking about a variety of topics, may also reveal different levels of production. Some of the topics might be prepared in advance as an oral exercise in the classroom, in order to determine the extent to which awareness can improve this skill. This paper leaves the door open to further research in this direction.

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NOTES

1. According to the Chomskian tradition, the phenomena of production has been considered part of "performance" and has been separate from "linguistic competence". This could be one of the reasons for its secondary role in linguistics as well as psycholinguistics.
2. However, different studies based on Conversation Analysis have demonstrated that these disfluencies are also present in native speaker discourse and serve many communicative functions. The difference between fluent speech and nonfluent speech may reside in both number and function of disfluencies (Butler-Hall, 1986:29).
3. According to Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (op.cit.), turn-constructive units are the "various unit-types with which a speaker may set out to construct a turn" and may include sentential, clausal, phrasal, and lexical constructions. The completion of a turn-constructive unit constitutes a transition-relevance place or transfer of speakership.