REVISITING THE METHODOLOGICAL DEBATE ON INTERRUPTIONS: FROM MEASUREMENT TO CLASSIFICATION IN THE ANNOTATION OF DATA FOR CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH[1]

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Abstract

This paper considers issues relating to the identification and categorisation of interruptive acts for cross-cultural study, as revealed by the conflicting methodological requirements of a medium-scale project involving contrastive analysis of confrontational native speaker and non-native speaker talk in French and English. The paper opens with a brief introduction to the project, followed by a review of issues from the conflicting ends of corpus annotation and Conversation Analysis, the main locus of information about, and research into, sequential aspects of talk and interruptive phenomena. It then uses two examples from the project data for native English and French respectively to reveal and discuss tensions between diverging requirements in the categorisation of interruptive acts. It shows that, while categorising interruptive phenomena inevitably entails a degree of arbitrariness - minimised in either very large corpora or small scale situated analysis -, medium-size data are peculiarly vulnerable to issues of empirical validity, but that their function and the options they create to derive critical findings from the tensions between approaches make them an important tool for research, notably cross-cultural research.

Keywords: Interruptions, Cross-cultural study, Corpus annotation, Conversation analysis.

1. Introduction

This paper takes up the long-standing debate about the measurement of interruptions in talk-in-interaction and revisits methodological issues associated with the annotation of corpora. In a study investigating two measurements of interruptions, West and Zimmerman's (1983) syntactic measurement and Murray's (1985) context-sensitive measurement, Okamoto et al. (2002) show that both types by and large capture the same underlying constructs. They do identify subtle variations likely to affect certain kinds of (meaning-based) studies, but conclude that researchers can be reassured by these results, at least for the coding of very large bodies of data. Their inquiry, in other words, validates West and Zimmerman's frequently disputed, but simpler and more objectively

reliable, measurement method for the coding of large corpora, at least in relation to Murray's method. The extent to which what West and Zimmerman's propose is inclusive enough, even by objectively verifiable standards (or conversely, in some instances, restrictive enough) is not queried *per se* in Okamoto et al. There may be grounds for doing so. Data for English and French, to be reviewed below, suggest, for instance, that their measurement is not sufficiently discriminating for applications to cross-cultural or contrastive analyses.

However, it is not the intention in this paper to challenge Okamoto et al.'s empirical findings, nor to dispute the attributes of West and Zimmerman's system of coding (ease of application, cross-coding reliability), other than to (re)illustrate issues about the identification of interruptions. Its main concern is to harness the debate to the closely related issue of the categorisation of interruptions, specifically in its application to the annotation for cross-cultural analysis of medium-size multilingual data, i.e. multilingual data modest in size by the standards of corpus studies, yet large enough to justify coding. Size is a crucial factor. Medium-size studies are poised awkwardly between methodological options, and comparing data in different languages in this case peculiarly underscores resulting concerns. But this also makes them a fitting tool for exposing issues, and gives them, it will be argued, a distinctive critical edge.

The discussion will be informed by a pilot study which has involved annotating a corpus of multi-party adversarial interactions in NS French and NS English, as a first step in a larger project, and has drawn on Goldberg's 1990 CA-driven model for differentiating between interruption types – (affiliative) relationally neutral interruptions and (non-affiliative) relationally loaded rapport and power interruptions. It will start with a brief presentation of the overall project and its coding requirements, and a review of the issues involved, from the conflicting points of view of conversational analysis and corpus annotation. The discussion will then shift to the assessment of Goldberg's adapted scheme against the diverging demands of these two domains, with the analysis of two examples from the data, and reveal both issues involved in categorising interruptive phenomena, and concerns peculiar to this type of study. While categorising interruptive phenomena inevitably entails a degree of arbitrariness - minimised in either very large corpora or small-scale situated analysis -, medium-size data are peculiarly vulnerable to issues of empirical validity. But it will also be proposed that their function, and the opportunities they create to derive critical findings from the tensions between approaches, make them an important tool for research, notably cross-cultural research.

2. Background

2.1. *Description of the project*

The project that prompted this paper is a two-part cross-linguistic and psycholinguistic inquiry involving contrastive studies of turn-taking and interruption patterns and strategies in multi-party conflict talk in samples of NS and NNS French and English. It has two related sets of aims: To identify factors inhibiting advanced FL learners' involvement in confrontational group interactions, notably in French; and to assess development in linguistic and interactional practices at different stages of acquisition.

The paper itself relates to the pilot stages of the project, which focused on NS data in French and English as a first step in testing learners' perceptions of difficulties.

Feedback reports from advanced learners of French about their experience of multi-party argumentative exchanges *in situ*, during extended periods of residence abroad, point to similar pressures: Managing to take and hold turns, coping with fast simultaneous talk, interruptions and violations of turn-taking rules, and generally keeping pace with native speakers and the topical development of exchanges. What is also implicit in comments (e.g. everyone speaks at once, interrupts all the time, no-one listens, etc.), and gives an edge to the issue of non-native speakers' inhibitions in this kind of talk, is that there is something typically French about the features perceived to impede participation. To what extent are these perceptions justified? And to what extent are NNS inhibitions a function of pressures resulting from limited overall proficiency and ability to operate interactionally in the FL (cognitive pressures), or a by-product of differences between native and target language norms in the way talk is interactionally organised and verbal conflict managed? What difference does an extended period of residence make in these respects?

The overall hypotheses are a) that these perceptions exaggerate cross-cultural differences, yet also give too simple a picture, and b) that limited linguistic and interactional proficiency, and resulting cognitive pressures, remain on balance the main factors inhibiting involvement in adversarial group talk, affecting in particular response times and sequential timing. Dealing with interruptive phenomena has been a key issue in addressing these questions. Comparability of defining criteria across languages, types of subjects and acquisition stages were also critical.

The research has applied in the first instance to a particular type of institutionalised exchange, the TV-like panel discussion. Panel discussions, though different from everyday-type adversarial exchanges, are a common template for the practise of confrontational talk in FL classrooms. They have the built-in potential to produce, within a reasonable period of time, a comparatively significant volume of confrontational talk in full discourse context. Their replicable format makes them amenable to empirical comparison, including with real-life / naturally occurring NS TV examples, focus of the pilot phase of the work, and of this paper.

The data for this first part are two TV panel discussions in French and English (respectively 45 and 60 minutes, 8 and 5 participants, 13,438 and 14,821 words). The data for the second part will comprise sixteen 30-minute audio and video recordings of same format discussions among FLL participants (i.e. eight hours in all), and encompass French as a FL before and after an extended period of residence abroad, native French and English as a FL, native English, mixed native and non-native French, mixed native and non-native English.

The pilot comparison of TV panel discussions in NS French and English has considered turn-taking and interruption patterns and strategies from the points of view of sequential organisation, design/form (e.g. grammatical form) and discourse, with a dual purpose:

a) to review these features from a cross-cultural perspective, and test some of the assumptions mentioned above, albeit for this particular type of interaction, in naturally occurring data: Do speakers of French speak at the same time and interrupt more than speakers of English in similar contexts? How do they take turns? …

b) to identify recurrent or otherwise significant traits marking out interactional behaviour in the French and English data, and define a framework for the analysis of interlanguage and learners' native language data in the next part of the project.

This initial phase has thus been primarily exploratory, and contingent on the development of a workable scheme for annotating datasets to make comparison possible and to prepare them for treatment with text-processing software. This form of processing has been used both to secure access to quantitative information, a first basic step in addressing questions of frequency of occurrence, and to support qualitative analysis (e.g. identification and correlation of traits or patterns using concordancing).

2.2. *Coding requirements*

The preliminary work entailed identifying and coding a range of features, including onset and end of speakers' verbal contributions, types of turn selection (e.g. current speaker selection of a next speaker, self-selection), overlaps and interruptive acts, a task typically complicated by the methodological tensions between two of the fields which have informed the project for its basic methodology:

-   Conversation Analysis (CA), the main locus of information about, and research into, the sequential organisation of talk and attendant features, including so-called "interruptions", thus a natural methodological backdrop for the project, but resistant to the coding of data. CA is concerned with the study of intersubjective meaning as it is developed sequentially, and has demonstrated how the meanings participants attribute to interactional phenomena are closely dependent on the context in and for which they are produced. It has accordingly little time for systematic coding of (experimentally collected) datasets, and works instead with collections of similar phenomena (e.g. opening, repairs) observed cumulatively in naturally occurring data. These features also make CA methodology difficult to reconcile with the demands of longitudinal studies, acquisitional studies, for instance (Brouwer and Wagner 2004). Other related concerns will be exposed in subsequent sections. But CA is a most authoritative and invaluable source of findings about the use of, and orientation to, interactional resources, a key aspect of the research, albeit from a different perspective.

-   corpus annotation, the source of principles for the annotation of corpora and computer analysis, and methodologically equally relevant: The data, though modest in size by the standards of corpus work, were substantial enough to justify coding and electronic processing to support quantitative and qualitative analysis, complementary means in the project of tracing relevant phenomena in the different datasets and pinpointing variations across subjects, languages and acquisition periods.

As with large(r) scale studies generally (e.g. the kind of group processes studies of conversational behaviour that Okamoto et al. set against smaller scale CA work in their

2002 study), the conflicts of interest relate to size constraints and objectives in relation to means, and are in this instance compounded by the complexity of the data (samples larger than typical CA samples, comparatively larger number of participants involved - 5 to 8, an unusually large set from a CA point of view). The impact of these various factors - size, complexity and project demands -, on the preparation of the data, and of large quantities of data generally, comes down to two main standard practical issues: What, and how much, can reasonably, reliably and cost-effectively be taken into account in accounting for relevant phenomena, and in coding? But these continue to produce considerable theoretical questions.

3. Identification and coding of interruptions: Overview of issues

Small CA samples lend themselves to detailed transcription and forms of analysis which rely to a significant extent on interpretative procedures, based on the close observation of the situated verbal behaviour and orientations of exchange participants. Such practices, on which much of CA is methodologically contingent, are a key feature in Murray's (1985) criticism of West and Zimmerman's narrow focus on mechanistic criteria for defining interruptions (1975, 1983), and in his own proposal for a members' method for recognizing interruptive phenomena, which will be used here to illustrate main issues: Issues of interpretation, consistency and discrimination, limits of objectivity.

3.1. *Members' method vs. operationally-defined coding: Issues of interpretation, consistency and discrimination*

West and Zimmerman operationally define interruptions as incursions initiated more than two syllables away from the initial or terminal boundary of a unit type (West and Zimmerman 1983). In contrast to this "objective" measure, Murray's criteria involve judgements of severity of violation of completion rights and distributive justice which are dependent on fuller analysis of context and interpretation. Being superseded before making any point is thus deemed "clearly more serious a violation of speaking rights than being superseded before saying all one intended to say" (Murray 1985: 37). Other relevant aspects include "perceived apportionment of speaking time" and related factors (special claims to be heard [responses to queries, attacks; special expertise in a topic], subsequent repairs) (Murray 1985: 37); see also Tannen's notion of "high-involvement" characterising speakers who leave little or no inter-turn pause and frequently begin speaking while another speaker is speaking, and its conversationally facilitative or disruptive impact depending on the degree of convergence in the conversational style of the speakers involved in a conversation (Tannen 1994: 63). Identifying what is intended or understood as a "point", and assessing the impact of speaking time and related factors on the distribution of turns and members' perception of turn types, thus involves prospective and retrospective analysis of extended sequences. It is a long and complex process relying on interpretive procedures and, as Okamoto et al. (2002) confirm in their study, makes room for differences in analyses across individuals.

Individual consistency of approach and analytical discrimination are related issues, which tend to surface, explicitly or implicitly, in most discussions about the nature and/or classification of interruptions (see for instance Okamoto et al. 2002; but

also Drummond's 1989 or Talbot's 1992 reviews; also Beattie 1983). Talbot, herself a proponent of qualitative approaches, thus contends that while Murray's model is meant to depend on participants' own sense of distributive justice, "he does not clearly distinguish between his own and his informants' judgements; between what *he* thinks, on the basis of his framework of supposed 'members' own' judgements, and what his informants demonstrate [by their production of palliatives]" (Talbot 1992: 458; see also related comments, albeit of a general nature, in Ten Have 1990: 38 and 4.4 below).

Transcription and the question of what to take into account in assessing interruptive acts are further concerns. The impact of prosodic and non-verbal features (e.g. vocal amplitude, pitch, speech rate and changes thereof; gaze, hand/arm gestures etc.) on discoursal activities, interactants' perceptions and responses and the interactional organisation of talk is recognised as highly significant. Yet these features have often only selectively or peripherally been taken into account in studies of verbal interaction, even in small-scale qualitative studies. There is, for instance, just one reference to non-verbal features (eye contact) in Talbot's analysis of her data, none in Murray's of his. This is partly a function of early emphases on syntactic criteria (notably in CA; cf. Sacks et al. 1974). The demands of the task are no doubt another factor, not least for large amounts of data.

The general point here is that the degree of involvement with data advocated in qualitative approaches like CA, however justifiable from their point of view, and the degree of transcription detail warranted by attendant analyses, are unpractical for large datasets. They are labour-intensive and costly. The range of features to take into account, *a fortiori* in their interaction over full exchanges, makes heavy demands on producing and maintaining consistency of approach. This, and cross-coding reliability, are key principles in corpus annotation (Garside et al. 1977), calling for adherence to verifiable stable criteria, of the type seemingly used by Zimmerman and West and tested against Murray's in Okamoto et al.'s 2002 study. That a measurement as apparently so simple to apply as West and Zimmerman's should be shown to capture the same construct as what is, for Murray and others, a methodologically sounder, but undoubtedly more cumbersome measure, is therefore an appealing result

3.2. *Limits of "objective" approaches*

But this observation needs to be qualified. Okamoto et al. are themselves very cautious in their conclusions. They present their results as reassuring for group processes researchers who wish to code large bodies of data in terms of various speech acts. But they also warn that the results are considerably more complex for researchers focusing on the meanings of interactions for participants (such as Murray and Talbot, and CA analysts generally) (Okamoto et al. 2002: 52). Expedient though it may be for some projects, West and Zimmerman's two-syllable measurement is nonetheless recognised as essentially very basic. It has other limitations.

For one thing, West and Zimmerman's coding method is not entirely free from reliance on interpretative procedures. Because they were interested in interruptions as indicators and measures of power, control and dominance, the coding they used excludes all disruptions seen to ratify or otherwise support the talk of a current speaker (West and Zimmerman 1983: 104-5). The coding process thus involves making judgements about what has, and what does not have a facilitative warrant, which, as is

repeatedly pointed out in the literature, is problematic (see *inter alia* Drummond 1989; Murray 1985; Talbot 1992; Goldberg 1990; Tannen 1994). In any case, there is arguably no call for the exclusion. Strictly speaking, an interruption, if it can at all be defined by strictly objective criteria, e.g. of the "two-syllable" kind, is an interruption whether it is affiliative or not, or indeed whether it is perceived or treated as an interruption or not. On the other hand, such an overarching account of interruptions may be simply too vague and general to be analytically productive – as it would be for the purposes of the current project, and as is indeed confirmed by West and Zimmerman's need to narrow it down, by applying what is really a form of classification.

A related point made recurrently about West and Zimmerman's measurement, which strikes at the heart of the interruptions debate, concerns the relationship between speech overlaps at point of speaker change and interruptions. Overlaps are not necessarily, like so-called "interruptions", a challenge to a speaker's right to complete his/her turn. They may simply signal listener attention (as do, for example, backchannels, e.g. "yeah", "right", etc.). They may also result from a speaker's (not quite successful) attempt to get right the delicate timing involved in minimising gaps between turns by anticipating a transition relevance point [TRP] or the end of a turn constructional unit [TCU] (in keeping with the provisions of Sacks' et al. 1974 model of turn-taking, i.e. in projecting that a current speaker is about to complete a possible turn). Deciding whether an overlap is or is not a challenge to a speaker's right to complete a turn, hangs, in other words, on notions of completeness and end-of-turn projectability, and is contingent on the characterization of TCUs and TRPs). This involves accounting for the variable interaction of a range of syntactic, pragmatic, prosodic and non-verbal factors, as well as such factors as the incremental nature of turn construction (see for instance Ford 2003; Ford et al. 1996; Ford and Thompson 1996; Selting 2000; also Couper-Kuhlen et al. 2003). It is very complex, and requires close and painstaking qualitative analysis of comprehensively transcribed data.

An advantage of West and Zimmerman's measurement in this respect, then, is precisely that it circumvents the complex issues which arise as soon as a distinction is made between "simple" overlaps and possible "violations" of turn-taking rules. On the other hand, it also overlooks a critical fact: While not all overlaps are a challenge to a current speaker's right to complete a turn, conversely, and contrary to what the two-syllable measurement assumes, not all challenges to a speaker's right to complete a turn are necessarily initiated with an overlap. In the data for the present project, for instance, 13.2 % of what were counted as challenges to complete a turn (see section 4) in the data for English were produced without overlap and 12% in the data for French. This echoes Beattie's report, in his corpus of non-dyadic tutorials in English of the (slightly lower) figure of almost 10% for what he calls "silent interruptions", i.e. interruptions not involving any simultaneous speech, also defined in terms of current speaker's utterance completeness (Beattie 1983) (with the difference arguably attributable to the nature of the interactions - tutorials vs polyadic debate). More important however is the potential relevance of the difference in figures for French and English, albeit slight in these data (13.2 vs 12%), on its own and when correlated with figures for other variables (e.g. interruptions types). These differences draw attention to phenomena which would remain undetected were overlaps and different types of interruptive phenomena not treated separately (e.g. interplay of shared and contrasting features in adversarial verbal behaviour in French and English). They suggest accordingly that West and Zimmerman's measurement may obscure important features, in particular when applied

to multilingual data. The same limitation affects (later) qualitatively-driven approaches advocating dealing with overlaps, as observable phenomena, rather than with interruptions, whose identification is deemed to involve value judgements (e.g. Drummond 1989; Tannen 1994); these likewise make no reference to non-overlapped violations of speakers' rights.

3.3. *Issues for medium-scale studies*

Relevant though Okamoto et al.'s vindication of West and Zimmerman's measurement may be for very large corpora, medium-size studies of the kind which have prompted this review, are, in short, left in a crude kind of in-between methodological predicament, a critical point in this study. Simple operational criteria of the West and Zimmerman type are too reductive to capture anything other than broadly defined phenomena and differentiating features, and are not, in any case, necessarily immune from reliance on interpretative procedures. For coding purposes, qualitative analyses, such as situated analyses, are, on the other hand, too involved and potentially context-specific to constitute a realistic option when dealing with data beyond a certain size, and/or covering several different datasets.

　　　The debate about the identification of interruptive acts spills over into the closely related question of their classification, and is plagued by similar issues. These and the challenges of medium-scale multilingual data will be illustrated using two examples, one in English, one in French, from the data for the project described in 2.1, with first a brief outline of Goldberg's categorisation of interruptive acts (1990), i.e. the system used on a trial basis for annotating the project data. Goldberg's principles and criteria for classifying interruptions are based on situated analysis, but integrate operational elements which could be harnessed to the project's coding needs, and were used as a compromise option for coping with the methodological conflicts just outlined: Unlike others, the categorisation proposed by Goldberg is appropriately discriminating for the purposes of the project, without being unduly intricate and unmanageable, and does rely on sufficient stable criteria to be adapted to the project's coding demands.

4. Categorisation of interruptive acts: The test of data

4.1. *Goldberg's scheme*

Goldberg's scheme, a reaction to early content- and context-free studies equating interruptions with power (e.g. West and Zimmerman 1983) is predicated on the observation that "interruptions are not and need not be synonymous with power" and differentiates between interruptions "seemingly motivated by the *interactional rights and obligations* of the moment" and "those seemingly produced to satisfy *personal or interactional wants* or needs" (i.e. "power" driven) (emphasis added). It comprises the following main types:

- (affiliative) *relationally neutral interruptions,* i.e. arising from the listener's participatory rights and obligations (addressing immediate communicative needs, e.g. eliciting repairs; coded <INTN> in the data);

- (non-affiliative) *relationally loaded interruptions,* i.e. the by-product of the listener's participatory wants, further subdivided into:

    i)   rapport interruptions (with overlapping goal orientations, viewed as cooperative acts; coded <INTR> in the data)

    ii)   power interruptions (with divergent goal orientations, viewed as acts of conflict; coded <INTP> in the data)

(Goldberg 1990: 887-99).

Differentiating between types of interactional pressures is the first step in Goldberg's categorisation. This is then guided, on the one hand, by features characterising interruptive acts themselves, and by members' responses to interruptive acts on the other. Assessing members' responses is dependent on context and involves interpretive procedures. In contrast, however, the defining criteria for differentiating between interruptive acts in the first instance are not tied to members' own points of view, and include means of operationally distinguishing between power and rapport interruptions. This is based on the assessment of the coherent-cohesive ties between interrupting and interrupted utterances against a system of types of moves (i.e. re-introducing, progressive holding and holding moves, as defined by the presence or absence of shared referents in interrupted and interrupting utterances, or the (place of) introduction of new referents in the latter (Goldberg 1990: 891, 1983)). Thus, while Goldberg's approach is, in the CA tradition, governed by situated analysis and members' response, part of her categorisation scheme is independent of that and gives scope for more empirical applications.

Goldberg's model equates interruptive acts with speech overlaps, thus, like West and Zimmerman and others, discounts the fact that a non-negligible percentage of challenges to a current speaker's rights may be initiated without overlap (see 3.2. above). Overlaps and interruptive acts were, in the project, coded separately (as the electronic medium makes readily possible), and the latter defined in line with Beattie's 1983 scheme for the classification of "smooth-speaker switches" and interruptions in his study of non-dyadic tutorials.[2] Beattie's scheme itself falls short of differentiating between types of interruptions, a key feature for the current project. Combined with Goldberg's, however, it produces an appropriately inclusive system of coding, comparable in this respect to Roger et al.'s 1988 system for the classification of interruptions and simultaneous speech, with which it shares common features. The hybrid Beattie/Goldberg scheme has the advantage over Roger et al.'s 1988 17-layered system of being comparatively simple to apply; Roger et al.'s scheme also depends, as a

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[2] Beattie's scheme (itself adapted from Ferguson 1977) makes a distinction between "smooth-speaker switches"and "silent interruptions" (both successful speaker-switches involving no simultaneous speech, with the difference that the first speaker's utterance is complete in the smooth-speaker switches and not in silent interruptions); it encompasses overlaps, "butting-in interruptions" (the equivalent of false starts in Goldberg, i.e. turn or potential interruptions involving overlap and dropped immediately at or before the initial drop point), and "simple interruptions, i.e. involving simultaneous speech and assessed here again on the basis of utterance completeness. This is judged intuitively on the basis of intonational, syntactic and semantic features in the verbal channel and analysis of nonverbal behavior in Beattie (Beattie 1985: 115), and on the basis of unequivocal breaks in the previous speaker's last uttered word, in the syntax of the previous speaker's utterance and/or in the unit of meaning developed by the previous speaker in the current project.

first step towards characterising interruptions, on the notion of disruption, which is not defined, and is problematic. This issue was not entirely resolved in the current project, but has no direct bearing on the comments to be made in the discussion of the examples below. These will be handled from different perspectives, i.e. operational vs. situated members' end, thereby drawing attention to tensions between these divergent approaches and to limitations of each, but also, contentiously from a CA point of view, to the analytical merits of such tensions for this kind of cross-cultural study.

4.2. *Example 1 – Extract from the English NS data: TV panel discussion (BBC1)*

Transcription (see conventions in Appendix I; S1 is the host, S2 and S4 are panel members)

[…]
```
 1  S1 alright / ok / [onset of audience applause]  Sh-Sh- / I'll come to you  / Sh W /
 2  S4 well  [lets applause subside] / quick points / first / the Conservative party is `not committed to a
 3     referendum / so those of you who say that you want the British public to decide it / had better g-
 4     vote for the parties that believe the British public should decide / [audience "yeahs" and clapping]
 5     they {are the - Liberal Democ- //
 6→S3      {are you committed to a ⌒fair referendum /}
 7   S4 yes the Liberal {Democrats are commit-//
 8→S3              {a fair referendum /}
 9   S4 what do you / what do you mean by `fair /{of course it would be fair /--I mean /- I I/no/come on/}
10  S3                      {well because you're a- / because bo-/ no no I'm sorry /
11     but you're all / you're all thi- / } your party and R's party {put through} {Parliament //
12  S4                                {we haven't //
13  S1                                      {alright /} well let's
14     clarify the referendum point / right / Sh- / Sh W /
```
[…]

Annotated transcription (see coding conventions in Appendix II; overlaps are underlined and interruptions symbols included for ease of interpretation)

[…]
<S1><TSS> alright / ok / [onset of audience applause] Sh-Sh- / I'll come to you / Sh W / <CSS></S1>
<S4><PSS> well [lets applause subside] / quick points / first / the Conservative party is `not committed to a referendum / so those of you who say that you want the British public to decide it / had better g-vote for the parties that believe the British public should decide / [audience "yeahs" and clapping] they <OV> are the - Liberal Democ- </OV> // </S4N>
<S3><INTN><OV> **are you committed to a ⌒fair referendum** / </OV> </INTN></S3>
<S4><TCDN> yes the Liberal <OV> Democrats are commit- </OV> // </S4N>
<S3><INTN><OV> **a fair referendum** / </OV></INTN></S3>
<S4><TCDN> what do you / what do you mean by `fair / <OV> of course it would be fair / -- I mean / - I I / no / come on / </OV><CSS> </S4>
<S3><PSS><OV> well because you're a- / because bo- / no no I'm sorry / but you're all / you're all thi- / </OV> your party and R's party <OV> put through </OV></S3>
<S4><FS><OV> we haven't </OV> // </FS></S4>
<S3><TCDFS><OV> Parliament </OV> // </S3N>
<S1><INTN><OV> alright / </OV> [overlap with last overlapped section in S3 turn above] <OV> well let's clarify the referendum point / right / Sh- / Sh W / </OV></INTN><CSS></S1>
<S4><PSS>[…]
[…]

4.2.1. Background

This first example is a passage from about half-way through the panel discussion in English (*Question Time* [BBC1 broadcast]), i.e. a type of discussion which, like panel interviews, is mediated by a host, and a means of provoking debate while safeguarding the neutrality of the host/journalist. As Greatbatch (1992) demonstrates for panel interviews, the format provides a framework for the overt production, upgrading and escalation of disagreements, yet also their limitation, as this first example typically illustrates.

The extract begins with S1, the host, first acknowledging the end of one of the panel member's contribution, i.e. a response to the host's request for views about the constitutional implications of introducing the Euro in Britain (*alright / OK /* [line 1]), before turning to S4, one of the other four panel members, for comments about the same question (S*h- Sh / I'll come to you / Sh W /* [line 2]). This is in keeping with the format of the discussion. All participants' turns are, in principle, allocated by the host, with the consequence that participants' contributions are not, again in principle, produced in adjacent turns and in direct address mode, which mitigates disagreements. In contrast, disagreements produced in adjacent turns, which violate format requirements, are thereby escalated.

S4 is cut short by S3 even before she has finished with the first of the several points she has indicated she would make [see line 2], in a turn addressed to her *directly*, without mediation. Typically, this violation of the turn-taking system which governs the discussion, aggravated by the interruptive nature of the turn, escalates into a short unmediated (S4/S3) disagreement sequence [lines 6-12]; it is then abruptly brought to a close by the host shortly after in again, a typical act of containment [lines 13-14].

4.2.2. Discussion

The focus for this discussion, however, are two other features of conflict escalation in this short conflict sequence, i.e. S3's interruptive turns at lines 6 *(are you committed to a ()fair referendum)* and 8 (*a fair referendum*), both overlaps with the interrupted turns. The equivocality of these examples makes them particularly difficult to categorise and magnifies the issues involved in doing so.

i)　coding by operationally-handled criteria

Both interruptions have the characteristics of relationally neutral interruptions as defined by Goldberg:

- they are both seemingly eliciting either clarification (in the first instance) or repair (in the second) of the prior interrupted utterance;
- neither appears to be intended to wrest control of the discourse from the interruptee;
- in both cases, the interruptee defers to the requests for clarification and repair, albeit indignantly in the case of the repair [line 9].

By these general criteria, treated as operational, these interruptions are, to all intents and purposes, relationally neutral interruptions (and are coded as such in the annotated transcription). The situated analysis of the extract and of members' responses gives a different picture.

ii) situated analysis

S4's point of view

S3's reiteration of his initial question to elicit repair in the second interruption *(a fair referendum* [line 8]) suggests that he is not satisfied with the clarification S4 has begun to provide *(yes the Liberal Democrats are commit- //* [line 7]). The truncated form of this reiterated question - *a fair referendum -* , i.e. now without "are you committed to", makes clear why. It draws attention to what seems to have been the proper focus in the first question, i.e. "fair", and not "are you [the Liberal Democrats] committed", as was interpreted by S4. The first question, in other words, was, it seems, hardly a neutral request for (factual) clarification, but a covert accusation (presumably intended to expose the Liberal Democrats' assumed partisanship as regards the referendum issue).

This, at any rate, is how S4 appears to interpret it once the focus of the initial question becomes clear to her in its reiteration, as her angry reaction after the second interruption confirms *(what do you / what do you mean by 'fair* [line 9]). There were clues to the (possible?) intent of the first question/interruption, i.e. the use of "fair" to qualify "referendum" and a very faint stress on "fair" (see below), neither of which appears, however, to have been registered by S4, perhaps because of the overlap and her projecting into the next part of her turn.

From the point of view of S4, then, the first interruption, interpreted by her as a *bona fide* request for clarification - to which she duly defers -, is of the relationally neutral type. The second, on the other hand, is responded to as an act of conflict, a relationally loaded act with divergent goal orientations, i.e. as a power-type interruptive act.

S3's point of view

From S3's end, on the other hand, it looks as though the *first* interruption may in fact have been (intended as?) an act of conflict which, however, the interaction of various factors camouflages as a neutral query. Its form (a question), the volume of shared reference (thus joint goal-orientedness) with S4's preceding turn, and the fact that, at the onset of S3's turn, which overlaps with the end of S4's, there has been as yet no mention of the Liberal Democrats' intentions, combine to mask the two features that could have prevented the question from being interpreted as a neutral request and given clues to its (possible?) confrontational nature, i.e. the adjective "fair" and attendant faint stress. (Compare for instance with something like "the Liberal Democrats are not committed to a fair referendum", which would clearly bear the hallmark of a power interruption).

The use of "fair" to qualify "referendum" in fact makes S3's turn a "progressive-holding move" (at least as it is defined for differentiating power and rapport interruptions, i.e. as "sharing some of the same referents as its prior locution while

expanding or adding new referents not contained therein" (Goldberg 1983: 34)). It has the effect of breaking coherent-cohesive ties between interrupted and interrupting turn, and of shifting the interruption towards the relationally-loaded power end. The stress on "fair" possibly reinforces the shift. Although present, it is barely audible, and (deliberately?) so faint that the signal can hardly be picked up at all in the heat of overlaps. It was only detected as a result of repeated and intent audition (hence the initial coding, which disregards it), and raises transcription issues. Should features detectable only as a result of repeated and focused listening, unimpeded by interactional demands, be deemed to have been available to participants during online interaction and set in transcription as if they had been? Presumably not, from the point of view of S4, who does not register it. But should it be coded as a possible marker of S3's intentions?

Notwithstanding these questions, the evidence is sufficient to indicate that, from a S3 standpoint, this first interruption could qualify as a relationally loaded power interruption. As a result, the second interruption would be of the relationally neutral type: Since "fair" is, according to this view, part and parcel of the question from the start, the second interruption could be deemed merely to take up the initial question to elicit repair following S3's misapprehension.

4.2.3. Summary

Depending not only on what features are used (i.e. operationally-handled features vs. members' response-based features), but also on which member's point of view is considered, and on the weight assigned to features pulling towards contrasting interpretations, the analysis produces quite different classification paradigms, as summed up in Table 1.

	Operational criteria	Members' "response"	
		S4's viewpoint	S3's viewpoint (assumption of intentionality)
1st S3 interruption	Relationally neutral (INTN)	Relationally neutral (INTN)	Relationally loaded power (INTP)
2nd S3 interruption	Relationally neutral (INTN)	Relationally loaded power (INTP)	Relationally neutral (INTN)

Table 1: Categorisation of interruptive turns in Example 1

The situated analysis itself gives several different pictures, and is further complicated methodologically by issues of members' intentions, already briefly hinted at in the previous section. Was S3 deliberately disingenuous, i.e. did he deliberately produce mixed signals, e.g. to act as a wolf in a sheep's clothing, or was it accidental? Should this be taken into account in the situated analysis, i.e. in the light of other evidence in the full data? Evidence from S3's overall verbal behaviour in the debate would tip the balance towards intentionality and corroborate the analysis of his first interruptive act as a relationally loaded power act; it would also affect the analysis of subsequent turns and interactional episodes. The difficulty with this, however, is that

this evidence, like some of the extract's contextual details, is largely contingent on cumulative information obtained from the quantitative analysis of the data coded using Goldberg's feature from an operational end, in contravention of principles of situated analysis.

But the real question, at least in relation to the objectives of the project, is also the question of whose point of view to take into account. When what is being investigated is not meanings as constructed by participants themselves, and studied by analysts using the membership knowledge that they share with participants, but meanings as responded to by "outsiders" in terms both of actual interactions and of membership knowledge, what orientations or criteria should be deemed to be appropriate? These points will be taken up in section 4.4., after discussion of Example 2.

4.3. *Example 2 - Extract from the French NS data: TV panel discussion (TV5)*

Transcription (see conventions in Appendix I; S2, S4 and S5 are panel members, S1 is the host)

                                                            Back translation

[…]

1	S5 (non, bon) ben alors à ce moment là /	*(no, ok) so then if that's how it is /*
2	c'est une maladie /	*it's a disease /*
3	S4 moi je voudrais prendre la la défense de S.	*me I'd like to take S's defence*
4	parce que / {la liberté c'est réciproque }	*because / {freedom is something reciprocal}*
5	S2 {oui mais e- // [responds to S5]	*{yes but x- // [responds to S5]*
6	S4 =et c'est parce que les fumeurs ont `trop {`abusé}	*and it's because smokers have 'over {'abused}*
7	S2 {je je //	*{I I//*
8	S4 =de leur droit de fumeur / et qu'ils nous ont	*their rights as smokers / and have too much*
9	trop empestés qu'ils payent aujourd'hui / et	*stunk us out that they are paying today / and*
10	ça je suis complè(s)tement d'accord là-dessus/ -	*there I am in complete agreement on this / -*
11	{et - //	*{and - //*
12	S2 {quand j'étais} enceinte / dans plein de lieux /	*{when I was} pregnant / in many places /*
13	{les gens ne se sont jam- //	*{ people nev- //*

14→	S4{**bien sûr / et je crois qu'il y a pas eu //**	*{of course/ and I think that there hasn't been//*
15	S2 {là je viens de faire} une tournée théâtrale /	*{just now I've just done a theatre tour /*
16	S4 (b- ?) //	*(b- ?) //*
17	S2 = on était une quinzaine dans un bus /	*= there were about fifteen of us on the coach /*
18	y en avait dix qui fumaient / on avait parfois	*with ten who smoked / we were sometimes*
19	cinq six heures de route / j'étais malade /	*five six hours on the road /I was ill /*
20	on devait s'arrêter pour que je vomisse / voilà /	*we had stop so I could be sick/ there /*
21	{je trouve pas ça normal y en a pas //	*{I don't find this normal not one //*
22→	S4{**y a pas eu une prise de conscience //**	*{there hasn't been a realisation //*
23	S2 =y en a pas un seul {qui s'est arrêté de fumer /	*=not one of them{ stopped smoking /*
24	S4 {bien sûr / bien sûr / - {y a //	*{of course / of course/-{there//*
25	S2 {et}	*{and}*
26	et c'était moi qui étais : vraiment - {qualifiée / et	*and it was me who was: really- taxed /and*
27	et j'étais moi {qualifiée effectivement de de:://	*and I was me {taxed in fact with being a a::// *

28	S1 {c'est vrai que le fumeur / c'est	*{it is true that the smoker / it is*
29	vrai que le fumeur est plutôt mal […]	*true that the smoker is rather badly […]*

Annotated transcription (see coding conventions in Appendix II; overlaps are underlined and interruptions symbols included for ease of interpretation)

<S5><TSS> (non, bon) ben alors à ce moment là / c'est une maladie / </S5>
<S4><TSS> moi je voudrais prendre la la défense de Sophie parce que / <OV> la liberté c'est réciproque / </OV></S4>
<S2><FS><OV> oui mais e- </OV> // </FS></S2> [responds to S5]
<S4><TCDFS> et c'est parce que les fumeurs ont `trop <OV> `abusé </OV></S4>
<S2><FS><OV> je je </OV> // </FS></S2>
<S4><TCDFS> de leur droit de fumeur / et qu'ils nous ont trop empestés qu'ils payent aujourd'hui / et ça je suis complè(s)tement d'accord là-dessus / - <OV> et - </OV> // </S4P>
<S2><INTP><OV> quand j'étais </OV> enceinte / dans plein de lieux / <OV> les gens ne se sont jam- </OV></INTP> // </S2R>
<S4><INTR><OV> **bien sûr / et je crois qu'il y a pas eu** </OV></INTR> // </S4P>
<S2><INTP><OV> là je viens de faire </OV> une tournée théâtrale / </INTP></S2>
<S4><FS> (b- ?) // </FS></S4>
<S2><TCDFS> on était une quinzaine dans un bus / y en avait dix qui fumaient / on avait parfois cinq six heures de route / j'étais malade / on devait s'arrêter pour que je vomisse / voilà / <OV> je trouve pas ça normal y en a pas </OV> // </S2P> [26 :46]
<S4><INTP><OV> **y a pas eu une prise de conscience** </OV></INTP> // </S4P>
<S2><TCDP><INTP> y en a pas un seul <OV> qui s'est arrêté de fumer / </OV></INTP></S2>
<S4><TSS><OV> bien sûr / bien sûr / </OV> - <OV> y a </OV> // </S4P>
<S2><TCD><INTP><OV> et </OV> et c'était moi qui étais : vraiment - <OV> qualifiée / et et j'étais moi qualifiée effectivement de de :: </OV> // </INTP></S2P>
<S1><INTP><OV> c'est vrai que le fumeur / c'est vrai que le fumeur est plutôt mal élevé / - et c'est vr- </OV></INTP> // </S1P>

4.3.1. Background

The second example (i.e. specifically lines 14-27 above; lines 1-13 and 28-29 are included for contextualisation) is taken from the corpus's panel discussion in French (*Ciel mon Mardi*, [TV5 broadcast on the topic of anti-smoking campaigns]). It involves two of the seven participants, S2 and S4, and comes after a fairly long conflictual (i.e. unmediated) sequence predominantly involving S2 and another participant S5, with just one contribution from S4 [line 3 on] just before the sequence to be considered. S2 has been expressing her grievances about smoking and smokers (she is made physically ill by cigarette smoke) and S5 has been intent on exposing the personal dimension of her contributions all the better to minimise their relevance to the debate.

4.3.2. Discussion

The focus of the discussion in this second example is S4's two interruptions of S2 at lines 14 and 22, which illustrate now familiar concerns, but also highlights others.

i) coding by operationally-handled criteria

The first interruption (*bien sûr / et je crois qu'il y a pas eu* [line 14] ['of course / and I think that there hasn't been']), of S2's *quand j'étais enceinte / dans plein de lieux / les gens ne se sont jam-//* [lines 12-13] ['when I was pregnant / in many places / people nev-//'], has the characteristics of what Goldberg describes as a relationally loaded

rapport interruption, i.e. with shared goal orientations. The *bien sûr* ['of course'] and the ensuing *et je crois qu'il y a pas eu* ['and I think that there hasn't been'] are not allowed to develop. But they suggest, notably by virtue of the coordinating conjunction, that S4 concurs with S2 and that he is likely to add to S2's contribution in what can be anticipated to be an act of collaboration / cooperation.

　　　The second interruption (*y a pas eu une prise de conscience* [line 22] ['there hasn't been a realisation']) shares no referent with the preceding locution and introduces new ones, thus has few (if any) coherent-cohesive ties with the interrupted utterance. It thus qualifies as what Goldberg describes as an "introducing move" (Goldberg 1983: 34, 1990) and is, by virtue of this feature, again treated as operational, a relationally loaded power interruption.

ii) situated analysis

Here again, the analysis in context makes room for alternative accounts. The second interruption retrospectively casts doubt on the assumption of projected collaboration / cooperation in the first interruption. This second interruption (*y **a pas eu** une prise de conscience* [line 22] ['there hasn't been a realisation'] - which like the first, and like another attempt aborted into a false start [line 16], is cut short by S2 -, appears, in French, to take up the assertion S4 had to abandon in his earlier turn (*… et je crois qu'il y **a pas eu** //* [line 14] ['and I think that there hasn't been']). It reveals in the process that, in its earlier truncated occurrence, the locution strictly speaking qualifies, as in its second occurrence, as what Goldberg describes as an introducing move. The second interruption is thus unmistakably a relationally loaded power-oriented interruptive act in both types of analysis. But there could be cause, within a context-sensitive approach, to question the status of the first, and to shift it, too, despite the presence of features of rapport-orientatedness, towards the power end of the continuum. As in the first example, however, the co-occurrence of features characteristic of different types of interruptive acts has the effect of blurring categories and of generating a good deal of equivocality, which speakers arguably used very strategically in both examples.

　　　At the point of actual production of the first interruption, however, features of the second interruption could not have been anticipated. Yet the interruptee's response, too, leads to a different interpretation. This however is guided, by other factors. Revealingly, S2 herself is not taken in by the (apparent) rapport-orientatedness of S4's first interruption. Given that, unlike S5 in his earlier string of contrary turns, S4 appears at this point to be going along with S2's comments, S2 could have been expected to tolerate, if not welcome, S4's apparently supportive intervention. Instead, she cuts into S4's turn with what is unambiguously a relationally loaded power interruption (again by Goldberg's criteria, i.e. not sharing any referent with the previous locution, and in fact not even taking up her own earlier point). Indeed she does so with every one of S4's subsequent attempts to take the floor from her. In other words, she interprets S4's apparently affiliative first interruption as a full-blown violation of her speaker's right to speak and as an act of conflict, and sets herself accordingly on a course of conspicuously power-oriented interruptive / uncooperative turns.

　　　There are clues to S2's uncompromising response in the wider context of the example. She appears to have detected S4's intentions from his earlier intervention shortly before [starting at line 3], where he can be observed to adopt the role of the *tertius gaudens*, i.e. third person capitalising on disagreements between two other

parties to advance his/her own interest and impose his/her own agenda (Zamouri 1995). S4's cooperative / conciliatory (verbal) behaviour at this point is, moreover, completely atypical for him: All but two of his many interruptive turns in the discussion are power-oriented acts (as defined by operational criteria), and this is just one of the features of his adversarial behaviour in the discussion. S2's conflictual response appears, in other words, to be motivated by something akin to what Murray (1985) describes as distributive justice. It is all the more remarkable as it is also at odds with her own verbal behaviour in the rest of the discussion. She is, throughout, the most reserved, hesitant and unconfrontational turn-taker: She produces only 20 turns in all (as against 124 for S4 for instance), including 4 false starts and 1 insert; 9 of these turns *are* interruptions, and power interruptions at that, but they are all produced in the context of this example and the preceding conflict sequence with S5 under the same kinds of pressure.

In contrast with her, however, and in contrast, too, with the data for English, other participants are hardly as restrained in their self-selection as next speakers, with and without (affiliative or non-affiliative) interruptions. There is thus cause to build into the analyses a consideration of the degree of acceptability of certain types of turn-taking strategies, and of the degree of variability across speakers, in relation both to norms established within the interaction, in line with the precepts of situated analysis, and to external norms, including, in particular, cultural / "national" norms. This, however, supposes in both respects the possibility of comparing like with like in relation to a particular point of view, and therefore stability in the categorisation of the features to be investigated.

What the examples further draw attention to is that being ultimately guided by interruptees' responses in categorising interruptive acts risks obscuring significant facts, at least from a perspective looking to identify patterns or variations across data. These responses, as is manifest in Example 2, may well be guided not by the characteristics of the interruptive act at all, or only partially, but by a range of other possible (observable or non observable) factors in the wider context of the production of the adjacency pair. But this does not take away the fact that the interruptive act itself, at the point of its production, has overt formal features which make it what it is - whichever way these features may be defined -, regardless of what covert orientations may also be at play, detectable or not. That an interruptive act with the features of a relationally neutral act should be responded to as a relationally loaded power act does not take away the fact that the act as produced has the features of a relationally neutral act, for instance. Discrepancies of this kind are revealing, in their own right and in comparisons of data, not least multilingual data. In the case of this pilot study, covertness (as manifest in the data for English) was thus one of the most tangible features distinguishing confrontational behaviour in the two sets of data. And they, too, bring to the fore questions of point of view and membership knowledge. For individuals used to interactional contexts in which acts with the features of power interruptions are responded to as power acts, a high frequency of power acts is likely to be experienced as a particular type of behaviour, e.g. aggressive, belligerent. This may not be so for individuals used to contexts in which power acts are not necessarily oriented to as power acts, but treated as a normal feature of lively participation (as Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1996 suggests is often the case for interruptions in French (1996)). Identifying discrepancies conducive to observations like these in adjacency pairs is peculiarly dependent on the interplay between different methodologies.

4.3.3. Summary

Here again, as was to be expected, there are not just two but several interpretations, as summed up in Table 2, depending on what approach is being used, but also, within a situated approach, whose point of view is considered and what features are taken into account.

	Operational criteria	Members' response	
		S4's viewpoint	S2's viewpoint
1st S4 interruption	Relationally loaded rapport (INTR)	Relationally loaded power (INTP)? or rapport (INTR)?	relationally loaded power (INTP)
2nd S4 interruption	Relationally loaded power (INTP)	Relationally loaded power (INTP)	relationally loaded power (INTP)

Table 2: Categorisation of Example 2 interruptive turns

Examples such as have just been presented to illustrate the issues, i.e. conducive to divergent analyses and categorisation depending on the types of factors just outlined, are not entirely exceptional in the data, but they are not the norm. They are far less common than unproblematic instances in which analyses do coincide, and could well prove statistically non-significant overall in large corpora. But they still leave open critical questions about the status of results, their interpretation and their application, notably in the context of cross-cultural studies.

4.4. *Methodological paradoxes and research function*

That different methodologies should produce different results is not surprising, but the disparities magnify certain concerns, for this study and more generally. In some respects, what both the review of issues in Section 3 and the examples discussed draw attention to are familiar tensions between quantitative and qualitative approaches. The generalisations, oversights and arbitrariness that reliance on repeatable, objective, quantifiable information risk producing, as illustrated in the analyses, are a reminder of how much caution is called for in the interpretation of results that such information produces. They emphasize by contrast the merits of CA's commitment to the detailed analysis of individually situated conversational events and participants' orientations, as a fundamental step towards an understanding of the technology of talk-in-interaction (Mey 2001; Schegloff 1997; Ten Have 1990 amongst others). Indeed what the examples confirm is the extent to which each exchange defines its own parameters, and the impact this has on the verbal and turn-taking behaviour of participants, as discussed by Tannen (1994) for instance.

    Nonetheless, references to, or discussion of, turn-taking issues across data, evidenced in many studies, implicitly admit that some stable ground for comparison exists, and is made use of. Indeed the tendency of CA studies to generalise findings on the basis of relatively vague quantitative information and few examples has attracted its

share of criticism, as Ten Have again reminds us (1990: 42). This has other ramifications.

CA's fundamental assumption that events are viewed in the same way by researcher and participants (see *inter alia* Ten Have 1990; Hutchby and Woofitt 1998) seems, in the light of the discussion of examples of interruptive acts, difficult to uphold altogether, and to accommodate in generalising observations. It supposes that it is possible to assess how events *are* viewed. The example of S2 in Example 1 (English sample), and the question marks attached to interpreting what his composite view and orientation may have been in relation to his first interruption, as well as the issue of the potentially distorting effect on the perception of verbal features and events of repeated and focused listening during transcription (see 4.2.2.), suggest that this is not unproblematic. This assumption, together with a grounding of analysis in researchers' competence and membership knowledge (i.e. native expertise in the language / culture of participants in the data considered), also makes cross-cultural comparison problematic in situated analyses, as the examples further indicate. Conducting comparative inquiries from the point of view of one particular language and language community (e.g. French in relation to English), thus subordinating observations about one to observations about the other, and/or testing certain kinds of assumptions, e.g. that perceptions of interruptive acts in another language community may be misguided, is, on the other hand, contingent on comparing like with like, as noted in Example 2. It requires basing comparison on (some) stable, externally defined and readily applicable, but also to some extent arbitrary, yardsticks.

Whatever the approach, some degree of arbitrariness in the categorisation is unavoidable. Its effect is likely to be statistically less significant in quantitative studies based on very large corpora, and the falsifiability of studies based on short and few examples minimises its import in qualitative analyses such as situated analyses. Empirical investigation into modes of categorisation of interruptive phenomena along the lines of Okamoto et al's inquiry into their measurement could undoubtedly help to produce a clearer picture, and perhaps to resolve coding issues. As is the case for the question of the identification of interruptive acts, there is, however, a sense in which this would not necessarily make things any easier. Inescapable methodological and practical constraints make any study between the very large and the very small more likely to fall foul of issues of empirical validity. But this may be a necessary methodological evil, offset by other kinds of consideration, notably the function of particular types of research.

What the examples have highlighted, as a by-product of the comparison of different approaches to the categorisation of interruptive acts, is the complexity of what is involved in assessing manifestations of confrontational behaviour in multiparty interactions. They have also underscored the extent to which getting the measure of this complexity, thus being able to carry out effective comparison across data, notably across languages, is contingent not just on the complementarity of, but on the tension between, different types of evidence – sufficient and sufficiently discriminating form-related quantifiable evidence mitigated by members-related contextual evidence and vice versa, with the caveats this has been shown to present.

Implications for the wider picture of this particular study are significant. In contrast with the relatively sedate English panel discussion in this pilot, the French panel discussion comes across as relentlessly conflictual, with seemingly constant overlapping talk and interruptions. In this sense, it confirms traditional perceptions and

stereotypes about the confrontational garrulousness of French speakers in group verbal interactions, found so inhibiting by non-native speakers / learners of French.

While the analysis of the data, coded on a trial basis according to the principles outlined in section 4.1., would seem *globally* to lend credence to these perceptions, the detail of the (provisional) results provide a rather more equivocal picture. The pervasive impression of conflict appears to result not so much from marked, clearly identifiable contrasts, than from the cumulative effect of more subtle variations in the frequency of use, use in combination and distribution of features otherwise comparable in nature and form. It is further complicated by significant differences across speakers in both data, connected in no small measure to interruptive acts - to their distribution across categories and across speakers and their sequential organisation, for example[3].

The implications of these observations, for FL learners, for example, hardly need to be spelled out. The complex relationship between individual and cultural variations and the variable overlap between them across languages like French and English are a potentially significant source of communication anxieties and difficulties, even though differences may not be as great as global perceptions might lead one to believe, precisely because they are so difficult to apprehend in relation to sameness of verbal phenomena. These factors clearly need to be explicated, not least as a first step towards addressing other issues, e.g. of a pyscholinguistic nature.

There is no room here to detail, or expand on, the early results of the project so far, expect to confirm two things. The first is that there is reason to deal with the specificities of interruptive phenomena as distinct types and related features of verbal behaviour in conflictual interactions across languages; it is a key to exposing, and assessing the impact of, misapprehensions resulting from possibly deceptive global perceptions, amongst other things. The second is that such functions are given a unique critical edge with medium-size studies by a confrontation of methodologies, necessary to transcend the bluntness of very large quantitative studies and the idiosyncrasies of small-scale situated analyses.

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[3] Interruptive acts are indeed a case in point. Differences in their frequency of occurrence (only moderately greater in the French data, contrary to what might have been anticipated) are not as significant as differences in distribution across *types* of interruptions, with a noticeably larger percentage of "power" interruptions in the French data. The differences are to some extent a function of differences in the format of the discussions (fully mediated in English vs. mixed format in French). But comparable conflict sequences do show a greater density of power interruptions in the French data, - arguably one of the possible factors explaining why the French discussion is experienced as more aggressive. In both sets of data, however, both the bulk of interruptive acts and of "power" type acts is in fact produced by a small subset of dominant speakers (notably S4 in the data for French, and S2 in the data for English). Yet this too, needs to be qualified, now by reference to qualitative analysis. Thus, the majority of conflict (i.e. unmediated) sequences in the English discussion are in fact *initiated* by S3 (as was the case in Example 1, with what was shown to be a very equivocal contribution), who then forces into the role of verbal aggressor the interlocutor he has thus engaged into conflict, in most instances S2. The majority of S2's power interruptions are thus produced in the context of such S3 initiated S3/S2 conflict sequences. While S2 does as a result come across as the more confrontational of the two, S3 is arguably the real, if covert, conflict maker, as is also illustrated in Example 1. In contrast, and as was intimated in Example 2, S4, similarly a catalyst for conflict in the French discussion (see Example 2), is far more overt and consistent in his display of confrontational behaviour.

With these observations, the discussion has shifted from what was initially a question of coding and attendant concerns (reliability, consistency) to broader methodological issues, and shown how the inevitable empirical limitations of medium-size comparative studies of interruptive acts, as illustrated in this paper, need arguably to be offset against their functions and outcomes.

In the absence of any generally accredited framework for dealing with types of interruptive phenomena operationally, Goldberg's adapted categorisation has served the purposes of this pilot study well, and seems robust enough to be harnessed to the needs and function of the rest of the project, subject to a stricter definition of criteria to ensure project-internal validity, and to some streamlining to improve ease of application. Electronic data processing, and the options this creates to code data incrementally, give greater transparency and flexibility to annotating procedures and analysis, and can help to minimise issues of comparability across studies. It is hardly conceivable, however, that these can ever be entirely resolved.

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Appendix I - Transcription conventions

/	break between tonal groups
-	short pause
--	longer pause (number of - increases with length)
xx:	lengthened syllable
xx-	truncated word

//	interruption
{	overlapping speech
=	latching
[	simultaneous turn taking
[laugh]	nonverbal vocal sounds; prosodic information; contextual comments
<X>	unclear passage (<X> syllable/sound up to 1 word, <XX> 2 unclear words, <XXX> more than 2)
(xxx,xxy)	choice of spelling or words
(xxx?)	transcriber's best guess
`xxx	emphasis (noted at the beginning of words, including in cases where the accent falls on syllables other than the first [coding constraint])

Appendix II - Coding conventions

Speakers' turns

<S*>	e.g. <S1>, <S2> etc. - onset of a speaker's turn (full or insert)
</S*>	e.g. </S1>, </S2> etc. - end of a speaker's turn
<S?> </S?>	onset / end of an unidentifiable panel member's turn

Turn selection

<CSS>	current speaker selection of a next speaker
<PSS>	previous speaker selection of a next speaker
<TSS>	(beginning of a) turn allocated by self-selection
<RS>	(explicit) request for turn selection

Overlaps, Inserts, False Starts

<OV> </OV>	onset / end of overlapping segment of talk
<INS> </INS>	onset / end of an insert (e.g. backchannel)
<FS> </FS>	onset / end of a false start

Interruptions (see Goldberg 1990, 1983)

<INTN> </INTN>	onset / end of a relationally neutral interruption
<INTR> </INTR>	onset / end of a relationally loaded rapport interruption
<INTP> </INTP>	onset / end of a relationally loaded power interruption
<INT?> </INT?>	onset /end of an unclassifiable interruption (e.g. because inaudible)

Interrupted turns

</S*FS>	end of a <S1> or <S2> etc. turn interrupted by a false start
</S*N>	end of a <S1> or <S2> etc. turn interrupted by a relationally neutral int. interruption
</S*R>	end of a <S1> or <S2> etc. turn interrupted by a relationally loaded rapport interruption
</S*P>	end of a <S1> or <S2 etc. turn interrupted by a relationally loaded power interruption

Continuation of turns

<TCD>	turn taken up, after another speaker's turn, from a previous uninterrupted (but unfinished turn) (latching)
<TCDFS>	turn continued or taken up after the end of another speaker's false start
<TCDN>	turn continued or taken up after the end of a relationally neutral interruption
<TCDR>	turn continued or taken up after the end of a relationally loaded rapport interruption
<TCDP>	turn continued or taken up after the end of a relationally loaded power interruption.