



AMSTERDAM CENTER
FOR LANGUAGE AND
COMMUNICATION



TURNTAKING: CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

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BACKGROUND

The importance of turn taking?

Ever had the feeling of :

- not getting a word in edgeways?
- that the other person would rather you stopped talking?
- that the other person wants you to do all the talking

BACKGROUND

What is turn taking?

- Universal pragmatic principle: conversations involve different speakers who take the floor.
- The taking of turns is regulated:
 - behaviour to hold the floor
 - behaviour to give the floor to another

BACKGROUND

Regulators of turn taking

- Transition Relevance Place (*Sachs, Schlegloff & Jefferson 1974*)
- Verbal signals
- Vocal signals
- Somatic signals

All for *both* turn holding *and* turn yielding.

- Feedback or backchannels

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

The form of the signals

- **Verbal** signals
questions, syntactic completeness
- **Vocal** signals
intonation, speed of talking, vocalizations
- **Somatic** signals
eye contact, head movement, body contact

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

The use of the signals

- **Verbal** signals
 - is a direct question polite?*
 - what are the indicators of completeness?*
- **Vocal** signals
 - intonation contours vary*
- **Somatic** signals
 - is eye contact polite?*

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Simultaneous talk/sign

- Vocal/verbal feedback
tolerance/requirement varies
- Interruptions
tolerance varies
- Quick uptake
amount of time between turns varies
- Floor sharing
joint construction of talk

COMPARING TWO CULTURES

Variables

- Speed of talk
- Length of turn
- Length of pauses
- Turn at syntactic break
- Interruptions and overlap
- Feedback
- Type of feedback

COMPARING TWO CULTURES

Method

(Junefelt & Mills 1990; Baker & Junefelt 2007)

- Conversation between 4 people
- 2 men: 1 older, 1 younger
- 2 women: 1 older, 1 younger
- Topic: what is typical of your culture?
- Length 30 minutes

COMPARING TWO CULTURES

Video-clip of conversation: Dutch

COMPARING TWO CULTURES

Video-clip of conversation: Swedish

COMPARING TWO CULTURES

Results Dutch/Swedish comparison

Swedish

- Speed of talk
 - Length of turn
 - Length of pauses
 - Turn at syntactic break
 - Interruptions and overlap
 - Feedback
 - Type of feedback
- Slower
 - Fewer and longer
 - Longer
 - More at break
 - Fewer
 - Fewer
 - Fewer in total
 - More vocal, less verbal

COMPARING TWO CULTURES

Quantitative Results

Variable	Dutch	Swedish
Words per min	207	122 **
Turns per min	12.8	6.9 ***
ML turn <i>words</i>	13.5	28 ***
Pauses > 1sec	26%	37% *
ML pauses sec	1.2	2.1 **

COMPARING TWO CULTURES

Quantitative Results

Variable	Dutch	Swedish
Change at syn break <i>turns</i>	64%	93% ***
Interrupt <i>min</i>	2.3	0.4 ***
Overlap <i>min</i>	1.4	0.2 **
Feedback <i>min</i>		
verbal	4.4	0 ***
vocal	1.0	1.4 *
somatic	3.0	2.9

Gender differences

- Men in both cultures had more interruptions than the women
- Men had longer turns
- Older men more than younger.

The role of vision

- Somatic signals are mostly seen
- What happens in turn taking when you cannot see these?

e.g. telephone conversations?

in the dark?

if you are blind?

COMPARING TWO CONDITIONS

Video-clip of conversations
with blind adults: Dutch

COMPARING TWO CONDITIONS

Video-clip of conversations
with blind adults: Swedish

COMPARING TWO CONDITIONS

Results

Blind vs sighted

- Speed of talk
 - Length of turn
 - Length of pauses
 - Turn at syntactic break
 - Interruptions and Overlap
 - Feedback
 - Type of feedback
- Quicker
 - Longer
 - DU: shorter; SW: longer
 - More
 - Fewer
 - DU: more; SW: fewer
 - DU: more verbal;
 - SW: less vocal
 - No somatic

COMPARING TWO CONDITIONS

Quantitative Results

Variable	Dutch		Swedish	
	SIGHT	BLIND	SIGHT	BLIND
Words per min	207	224 **	122	184**
Turns per min	12.8	9.6 *	6.9	4.4*
ML turn <i>words</i>	13.5	19.6***	28	42***
Pauses > 1sec	26%	9% ***	37%	56%***
ML pauses sec	1.2	1.5 *	2.1	2.5 *

COMPARING TWO CONDITIONS

Quantitative Results

Variable	Dutch		Swedish	
	SIGHT	BLIND	SIGHT	BLIND
Change at syn break <i>turns</i>	64%	72% *	93%	98%
Interrupt <i>min</i>	2.3	1.4 *	0.4	0.2
Overlap <i>min</i>	1.4	1.85 *	0.2	0.0
Feedback <i>min</i>				
verbal	4.4	5.75 *	0	0.2
vocal	1.0	0.55	1.4	0.4 *
somatic	3.0	0.0	2.9	0.0

Explanations?

- Fewer and longer turns?

Visual cues missing, so continue longer.

- Turn at syntactic break more often?

More use of this non-visual cue.

- Fewer interruptions?

Two conflicting auditory signals more confusing

Why the cultural differences?

- *Dutch* blind shorter pauses than sighted;
Swedish blind longer pauses than sighted?
- *Dutch* more overlap; *Swedish* less?
- *Dutch* more verbal feedback; *Swedish* more vocal.

Why the cultural differences?

- Dutch shorter pauses; Swedish longer?
- Dutch more overlap; Swedish less?
- Dutch more verbal feedback; Swedish more vocal.

Swedish lack of tolerance for simultaneous talk and tolerance of silence

Dutch more pressure to grab floor.

Both follow feedback patterns of own culture.

What will happen in a blind-sighted conversation?

COMPARING TWO CONDITIONS IN A
BLIND-SIGHTED CONVERSATION

Video-clip of conversation: Dutch

COMPARING TWO CONDITIONS IN A
BLIND-SIGHTED CONVERSATION

Video-clip of conversation: Swedish

COMPARING TWO CONDITIONS IN A BLIND-SIGHTED CONVERSATION

Results *(Werkman 2006)*

Blind (vs sighted)

- Speed of talk
 - Proportion of turns
 - Length of turn
 - Length of pauses
 - Turn at syntactic break
 - Interruptions and Overlap
 - Type of feedback
- Quicker
 - DU: more; SW: fewer
 - Longer
 - DU: ns; SW: longer
 - ns
 - ns
 - More in sighted/blind pairs
 - More somatic from sighted

COMPARING TWO CONDITIONS IN A
BLIND-SIGHTED CONVERSATION

Quantitative Results

Variable	Dutch		Swedish	
	SIGHT	BLIND	SIGHT	BLIND
Words per min	190	221 ***	116	170***
Proportion Turns	36%	74%***	69%	31%**
ML turn <i>words</i>	12.8	24.6***	34.2	40.1***
Pauses > 1sec	14%	14%	35%	51%***

Quantitative Results

Variable	Dutch		Swedish	
	SIGHT	BLIND	SIGHT	BLIND
Change at syn break <i>turns</i>	60%	65%	90%	92%
Interrupt <i>min</i>	1.3	1.0	0.3	0.2
Overlap	28%	57% 15%**	11%	74% 7%***
Head nod/shake	Sighted more to blind ***		Sighted more to blind ***	
Headturn as turn claim	Sighted more **		Sighted more **	
Headturn speaker	Sighted more *		Sighted more *	

Results of Dutch survey

(Werkman 2006)

14 blind and 12 sighted in phone interview

- Blind talk longer and more: 94% agree.
- Sighted do not report using fewer gestures in mixed conversations but are aware that they behave slightly differently.
- Few reports of difficulties in mixed conversations.

Turntaking

- Eye gaze established from birth in sighted mother-child dyads.
- Vocalization linked to mutual eye gaze.
- Usually avoidance of simultaneous vocalization on the part of mothers with infants.
- Young children have to learn pattern of their culture: interruptions from children frequent in some cultures; much overlap between children.

Turntaking in blind children

- Because eye gaze is not present, sometimes difficulties in parent-child bond (*Fraiberg 1977*)
- Usually avoidance of simultaneous vocalization on the part of blind children. Mothers talk more.
- Young children use non-visual means to get the turn – e.g. pinching (*Mulford 1983*).
- Facial expression is muted in children and adults: smiling and head nods less frequent. (*Parke et al. 1980; Warren 1977*)

Method with children

(Janssen 1993)

- Conversation in group of 4:
 1. 4 blind children: 2 boys, 2 girls aged 10-11 years.
 2. 4 sighted children: 2 boys, 2 girls aged 10-11 years.
 3. 2 sighted girls, 2 blind girls.
 4. 2 sighted boys, 2 blind boys.Topic of own choice.

Results

Blind vs sighted

- Speed of talk
- Length of turn
- Proportion of turns
- Length of pauses
- Turn at syntactic break
- Interruptions and Overlap
- Feedback

- Sighted quicker

- **Blind longer**

- Sighted more

- No difference

- No difference

- No difference

- Sighted more

- **Blind boys more**

NB bold= same as adults

Conclusions

- Clear cultural differences
- In the absence of visual cues blind adults have learned to adapt to their cultural pattern leading to different behaviours.
- Blind children have to learn the pattern.

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