

How can a learner corpus help teachers and learners ...

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Background information

part of a bigger multidimensional project called “**Aspects of English Language Acquisition of Czech Students on the Onset of Teacher Education**” (supported by the Czech Science Foundation)

overall objectives:

- to compile a corpus of learner English of spoken communication
- to make an analysis of selected grammatical, discourse and pronunciation features with conclusions for second language acquisition processes, including the possible negative transfer of Czech grammar and pronunciation features into English
- to carry out an analysis of the data related to the learning histories; to identify critical incidents and people that influenced individual learning histories, in what way and in what phase of the individuals' lives
- to interrelate the above-mentioned analyses with the aim to modify the contents of university courses in order to improve future English teachers education

Motivation for the research

Why is spoken performance in focus?

- for future English teachers speaking skill is crucial in their profession
- speaking seems to have been neglected (for teachers in schools it is difficult to set transparent criteria of assessment)
- traditionally at all the levels of the educational system instruction is still based on written language
- discrepancies between:
 - CEFR – C1 criteria: shows **fluent** spontaneous expression in clear, **well structured** speech (“can express him / herself fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly”)
 - and findings of English as native language research - grammar of speech is dynamic: i.e. it is constructed and interpreted under real-time pressure (“correction and **reformulation** is possible only through **hesitation, false starts** and other **dysfluencies**”, Biber 1999:1066)

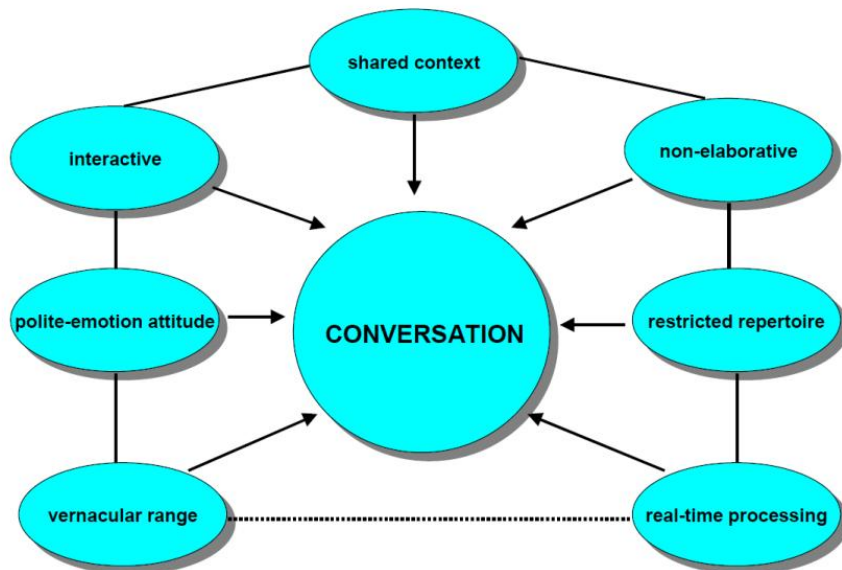
Description of the corpus

Corpus of Czech Students' Spoken English (CCSSE) - approximately B2 level of CEFR

- about 150,000 words
- 228 first-year students of TEFL Programme from 3 Czech universities at the beginning of their study – i.e. 114 interactions of pairs split into 570 separate files, (excluded recordings: not fresh secondary school graduates, not Czech native speakers),
- 3 parts of each recording (monologue – students introducing themselves – description of their learning history; dialogues – information gap; discussion – given topic)
- only the second and third part – subject to this research (228 information gap dialogue files + 114 discussion files)

Building a dialogue

Conditions operating in conversation:



Leech (1998, 12)

- it leads to a reduction of the repertoire in **certain** areas and an enlargement of the repertoire in **others**

Building a dialogue

conversational implicatures:

conversation has a general purpose or direction and the **contributions** of the participants are **intelligibly related to one another** and to the overall aim of the conversation (Schiffrin, 2008)

the cooperative principle:

Participants should make their conversation contribution such as is required at the stage at which it occurs, by the **accepted purpose or direction** of the talk (Grice's conversational maxims: maxim of quality; maxim of quantity; maxim of relation; maxim of manner).

(Cruse, 2004)

Conversational analysis (structural view)

a) interaction is **structurally** organized

b) contributions to interaction are **contextually** oriented

(Schiffrin, 2008)

Turn-taking exchanges

Effective conversation is dependent on applying turn-taking rules **appropriately** (transition-relevance place, frequency, control of contribution).

(Wardhaugh, 2005)

Adjacency pair as a type of turn-taking is a two-part exchange in which the second utterance is **functionally dependent** on the first.

(McCarthy & Carter, 1994)

In spoken language there is an **inventory of devices** with specific linguistic features that **maintain conversational coherence** by either signaling the transition in the progress of speech or indicating the interactive relation between speaker and hearer.

(Biber et al., 1999)

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pairs in focus of this presentation:

- **elicitor – response**
- **information – backchannel**

Distribution of response elicitors

structures functioning as information retrieval

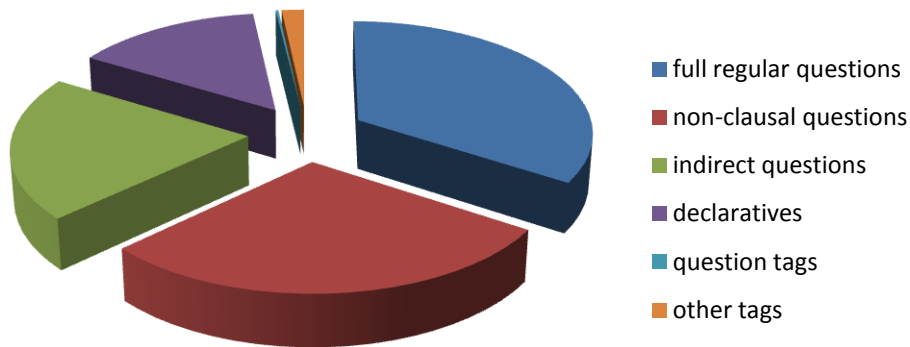
Type of elicitor	dialogue	discussion
full regular questions	34,1%	37,7%
non-clausal questions (with ellipsis)	28,9%	6,3%
indirect questions	20,6%	4,2%
declaratives	14,4%	50,6%
question tags	0,2%	0,0%
other tags (one-word: <i>right, okay</i> ; longer: <i>you see, I think</i>)	1,7%	1,2%
	100,0%	100,0%

Dialogue	2834
Discussion	672

four times more frequent in dialogues (absolute number of occurrences)
twice more frequent (per one thousand words)

L2 analysis - differences

Dialogues



Discussions



L2 analysis – examples of elicitors

2QBA_13034

<A> Ok, (er), if you start, (er), as a office administrator, (er), you'll give, (er), about twelve thousand Czech crowns. (+) (er), but, (er), your requirements, (er), would be a fluency in English and Czech language and, (er), you must, (er), motivated attitude. (+) And, (er), driving license would be an advantage for applicants. (+) **Do you have, (er), driving license?** (+)

 Yeah, I do. (+) And, (er), **how many hours week or month?** (+)

<A> (er), there it's a part-time job and, (er), there is, (er), eighty working hours. (+)

 A month? (+)

<A> A month. (+)

 So it's like twenty a week. (+) (er) [...] ok, that's interesting. (+) **What else?** (+)

<A> (er), **the next job is a street promoter.** (+)

 No, **I don't wanna do that.** (+)

<A> No? (+) But, (er), there is a salaries, (er), one hundred and fifty Czech crowns, (er), for hour. (+) It's a good for you. (+)

 That's good. (+) Ok, **so what would I do?** (+)

<A> (er), ok. (+) (er), next position is teaching assistant. (+)

 (er) no, what would I do exactly as a street promoter, **right?** (+) **Would I be dressed as a hamburger or something?** (+)

<A> Ok. (+) (er)...you must, (er), promotional street work. (+) (er), for example you give some, (er), paper with information to people or, (er)...you offer some, (er), products from company.

Backchannels

primary function of backchannelling is to express a listener's **comprehension and / or interest** (Bavelas & Gerwing, 2011)

backchannels are **optional, unnecessary, or superfluous**, viewed as supportive, but not central in conversation (Gardner 2001)

Addressees are seen as passive recipients of information, with backchannels being used to display addressees' acceptance of speakers' planned multi-turn utterances. (Tolins & Fox Tree, 2014)

forms:

- non-lexical (sounds with no referential meaning expressing listener's attention)
- phrasal (words or phrases which assess or acknowledge a speaker's communication)
- substantive (words or phrases which usually ask for clarification or repetitions)

Backchannels in interaction

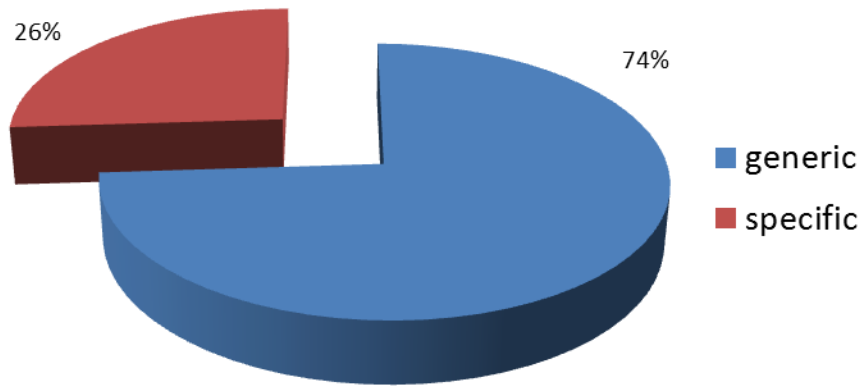
using collaborative principle ➔ backchannelling helps to **construct** the discourse ➔ type of backchannel used **navigates the development** of conversation and predetermines what reaction will follow:

- **generic backchannels**
 - viewed as indications that the previous talk has been received and comprehended, and taken by speakers as permission to continue (Bangerter & Clark, 2003)
 - what follows is continuation = any next turn that provides some new event

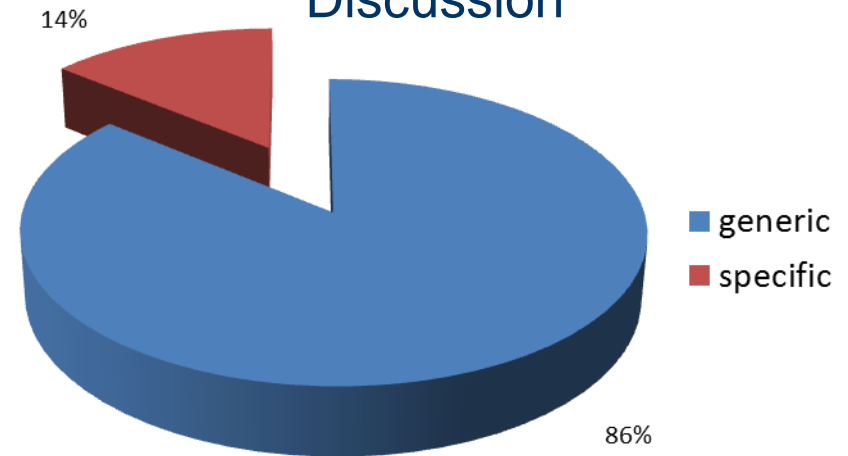
- **specific backchannels**
 - provide additional information, such as marking the speaker's talk as discourse-new or providing the addressees' affective response (Gardner, 2001).
 - what follows is elaboration = any next turn that provides additional information of the same discourse event that has been the focus of the speaker's turn prior to the critical backchannel

L2 analysis - differences

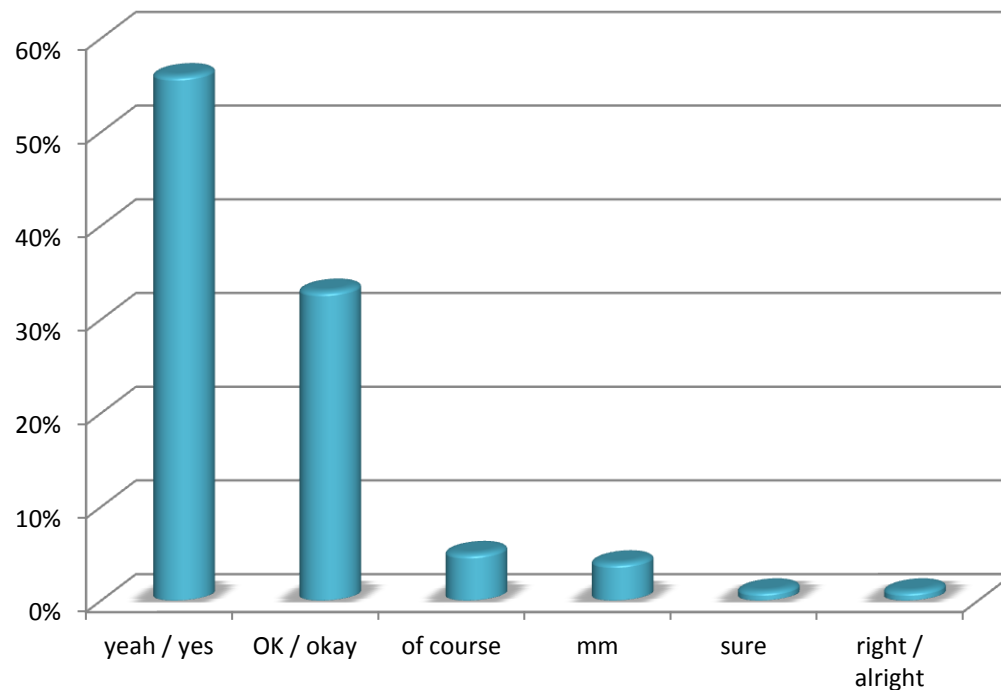
Dialogues



Discussion



Distribution of generic backchannels



- **rather limited range of backchannels**
- **identical discourse markers serve various purposes**

L2 analysis – examples of backchannels

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 And sometimes you can be misunderstood because when the other people don't see your facial expressions and so on. (+)

<A> **Yes.** (+) **Mhm.** (+) How much do you use social networks? (+)

 (er), I use them very often because it it's a good thing when you when you can get in touch with for example your class. (+)

<A> **Yeah?** (+)

 And find out homeworks and stuff when you're not at school. (+)

<A> **Yes, definitely.** (+)

 And but it's it's not very good because (er), when we were at the boarding school we we sometimes chatted even in the same room, which which is ridiculous. (+)

<A> **Yeah.** (+) [...] (er), well [...] (+)

 And now you don't see many-many kids (er), outside because of computers. (+)

2QBA_13051

<A> **And** you have to reserved books for your first visit. (+)

 So it's not possible to come and (er), take a book. (+) I have to make a registration, **okay?** (+)

<A> **Yes,** you have to make a reservation before. (+)

 Alright. (+)

<A> **(er)** [...] (+)

 Okay, so I hope I can do this and I think ... I have a lot of information from you. (+) Thank you. (+)

Concluding remarks

observations on elicitors:

- lack of certain groups of means (*you see, you know, I think*) / in many cases (esp. in discussions) a declarative structure without any overt signal of retrieving information is used instead
- distribution is not proportional
- the use is influenced by individual styles – topic for further research

observations on backchannels:

- rather limited repertoire (more than 80% yes / yeah, OK / okay)
- majority of backchannels are generic, not specific ???
- the same backchannel is used for three different functions: (a) signal of comprehension – followed by continuation; (b) affective function – followed by elaboration; (c) sometimes also used as turn-taking device – taking the floor



necessity to explain, teach and train students the strategies of interaction

Thank you for your attention