

## DEVELOPING NEGOTIATING COMPETENCE

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**ABSTRACT.** *This paper reports on negotiations as interactive skills that foreign language learners of English are exposed to in the context of EOP (English for occupational purposes). Approaching negotiations as a conversational sub-genre succeeds, as recent studies from a discourse analytical perspective have proved, in revealing structural regularities that allow for the development of awareness activities and for interactants to establish generic expectations of hearer responses. Yet, insights into the discursal characteristics of negotiations have also emphasized the contextual sensitivity of negotiation activity, which leads us to the conclusion that when handling negotiation skills, students' attention must be drawn to the observable regularities within specific context variables that apply to an appropriate corresponding negotiation.*

**KEYWORDS.** *Negotiating activity, English for occupational purposes, generic expectations, discourse analysis.*

**RESUMEN.** *El presente artículo se centra en el estudio de la negociación como destreza interactiva recreada en ámbitos profesionales de la empresa. La posibilidad de acceder al estudio de negociaciones en su calidad de sub-géneros conversacionales permite, como demuestran estudios recientes realizados desde una perspectiva analítica de análisis discursivo, poner de relieve regularidades estructurales que facilitan el desarrollo de actividades para fomentar una toma de conciencia de la tipicidad que subyace a dicha construcción discursiva, y que permiten a su vez establecer expectativas genéricas de respuestas del oyente. No obstante, la investigación de las características discursivas de las negociaciones también ha puesto de relieve la sensibilidad contextual de la actividad negociadora, lo que nos lleva a concluir que al tratar con destrezas negociadoras, la atención del estudiante se debe dirigir hacia las regularidades observables bajo limitaciones contextuales específicas que se ajustan a un contexto de negociación determinado.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE.** *Actividad negociadora, inglés en ámbitos profesionales, expectativas genéricas, análisis del discurso.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching English for professional purposes involves helping language users develop the language use that professionals need for their specific job area. Subject-specific knowledge is essential but so is the command or at least the handling of particular *activities* that language users engage in according to the specific context requirements. Communicative teaching approaches can be said to have succeeded in giving contextualized language use its deserved relevance in curriculum designs. In fact, it can be said that the acting out of language in its actual user-specific context managed to foreground communicative activities which would typically take place in real-life business contexts. Yet, teachers often find materials and related classroom tasks are either mismatched or inappropriate for *effective* communication in the long run. This has been particularly noticeable in the case of interactive skills where speakers must act and react to each other in a spontaneous and natural way while conducting a communicative activity of strategic nature as is the case of negotiation behaviour. In fact, as a recent survey reveals, (see Dolón 1995a), Spanish students of business English with a high proficiency level of English, claim to find the management of negotiation behaviour particularly difficult as opposed to other oral communicative skills like conducting telephone conversations, giving presentations or responding effectively to interview questions. It was our students' demand for more effective skills development in negotiation behaviour which led us to revisit the curricular treatment, and study a proposal starting from a research carried out into the discursal properties of negotiation as a conversational sub-genre.

## 2. CURRICULAR TREATMENT OF NEGOTIATIONS

A survey of text books and related material for intermediate and higher intermediate level students of English for Occupational Purposes from the 1980s until now, provides us with an accurate view of the curricular treatment of negotiation skills. A look at the sourcebooks reveals that most published text books do not consider a negotiation act of speech to be a form of discourse. Rather, discrete communicative functions are isolated in these books, which focus on the utterance level. White and Khidayir (1983), when dealing with negotiations, emphasize on requests and offers, which they consider to be the key communicative function; Fletcher and Hargreaves (1986) turn bargaining into the main function, while Hollett, Carter, Lyon and Tanner (1989) emphasize the act of explaining terms and conditions. Moreover, Knowles and Bailey (1987) enumerate a series of functions that typically occur in negotiations such as clarifying, requesting, accepting or confirming; and Cotton and Robbins (1993) expand the list, adding other functions such as interrupting, suggesting, showing agreement, showing disagreement, etc. Other authors, such as Hollett (1991) and Lees (1983), follow a similar approach.

Such an approach seems reasonable, especially if one takes into account that it is designed for students with an intermediate/higher-intermediate proficiency level. Learners become acquainted with the kind of linguistic forms and communicative functions used in various situational contexts. Another advantage these sourcebooks offer is that the tasks presented take into account the skills involved in negotiating acts of discourse; though, admittedly, the language learning objective is almost exclusively centred around communicative functions. For instance, students match a previously explained communicative behaviour with a corresponding conversational phase within the negotiation process (Hollett 1991); in other activities students reconstruct jumbled dialogues into coherent sequences of action, or complete the missing parts of a dialogue (White and Khidayir 1983; Fletcher and Hargreaves 1986; Knowles and Bailey 1987). Furthermore, interviews are used to develop an awareness of the various aspects related to the negotiation: Wilberg and Lewis (1990) question whether it is important to know the name of the interlocutor in order to create an appropriate atmosphere; or whether the particular environment of a restaurant is a suitable context for buyer-seller transactions; or if periods of silence have a negative effect on persuasion. Additionally, Cotton and Robbins (1993) propose a type of interview in which students are asked to rank a series of negotiation speech acts respectively from more to less important. Reading activities are also developed, where different types of negotiation are presented. Thus, in Hollett (1991: 150) the text shows how good negotiators are supposed to act; similarly, in Cotton and Robbins (1993: 64) a reading activity approaches negotiation behaviour in terms of an art.

As stated above, we find this approach to be correct for intermediate and higher-intermediate levels. However, at a higher proficiency level, when students are faced with negotiating effectively, it proves insufficient. For, as Lampi (1986: v) points out, the ability to use language functions does not necessarily mean a person can negotiate effectively. She holds that negotiating task activities should be geared towards developing discursual awareness in the teacher and/or material designer. Interestingly enough, McCarthy and Carter (1994) took up the issue that even today language functions are being introduced to learners as lists of communicative acts. On the other hand, they claim that there is a need to consider the interactive reality as a starting point for effective learning of a discursual activity<sup>1</sup>.

Any syllabus consisting solely of such a list would fail in two directions simultaneously: it would fail to provide the learner with a clear view of the interrelated and structured nature of elements of the language system..., and it would fail to show how apologies, enquiries, promises, and so on are actually realized in interaction...and how such realizations depended on higher-order constraints of genre. (McCarthy and Carter 1994: 177)

### 3. NEGOTIATION AS A CONVERSATIONAL SUB-GENRE

This takes us back to the concept of genre as the starting point for language pedagogy, especially when the learning/teaching objective involves the interactional management of a discursive activity. Swales' concept of genre is derived from the need to consider the different types of communicative tasks assigned to the ESP learner. He points to recurring communicative situations that convey types of tasks and of texts which are labelled genres. More precisely, the author refers to the notion of "real-life genres", which he defines as follows:

A genre is a recognized communicative event with a shared public purpose and with aims mutually understood by the participants within that event. A genre is, within variable degrees of freedom, a structured and standardized communicative event with constraints on allowable contributions in terms of their positioning, form and intent (...) (Swales 1986: 13)

Swales goes on to claim, "I am advocating a program of investigation into the characteristics of genres relevant to a curriculum...because genres are the most stable and the most solid of communicative events" (1986: 14). Research into different genres allows for an approach to the different types of discourse to be considered standardized, structurally typified texts. For text typology this means, as Dudley-Evans (1989: 72) points out, that in ESP pedagogy texts can be grouped according to the structural similarities they share as well as to the structural features that make them different from other texts. The strength of the concept of genre also lies in its potential to reveal structural patterns, which are of high pedagogical value, inasmuch as they are expected to be recurrent and therefore allow interactants to make predictions of the interactants' speech behaviour. These generic expectations will affect, according to Mulholland (1991: 39), the production, reception and understanding of the activities of a particular instance. Where genre analysis is used in ESP work, as Dudley-Evans (1989: 78) notes, "... one is merely extending and making more explicit for one's students the process of learning to operate in a genre." With reference to negotiations, the question is, can we approach negotiation as a genre, and if so, in what sense can negotiations be referred to as partaking of the same genre?

As a starting point negotiations are particularly well suited for genre analysis. Mulholland (1991: 40) refers to negotiations as conversational genres, which partake of many of the conventions of conversation, but which differ in displaying stricter rules of procedure and a defined goal. Other authors point to particular aspects that also reveal some structural idiosyncrasies that hold for negotiations. Regarding content, they represent a type of activity that is triggered off by the need to solve an issue that calls for a solution (Reiches and Harral 1974: 36), whereby the final stage of the activity is signalled by a joint decision taken with regard to this issue (Pruitt 1981: xi). Negotiations also may be seen as revealing a particular relationship between interactants, inasmuch as the activity is not restricted to institutionalized encounters, such as when buyers and sellers, or employers and employees meet. Some authors see the role language plays

during the negotiating process in terms of strategic persuasive behaviour, where either both interactants engage in mutual persuasion or one of them sets out to satisfy a specific conversational objective (Putnam and Jones 1982: 274). These aspects certainly allow for negotiations to be considered a sub-genre of conversation. Furthermore, they permit the grouping of discourse samples under a text typology heading for negotiation. Yet this kind of generic approach can not be taken as the final stage in the process of gaining a generic insight into negotiations, especially when we are concerned with teaching negotiation as a discursive skill, which calls for the negotiating activity itself to be explored for regularities in speech behaviour.

Several authors have recently studied negotiation as a discursive phenomenon. Lampi (1986) analyses its structural components (e.g., communicative acts, conversational moves, exchanges and topic distribution), which she derived from insights into buyer-seller transactions; and Mulholland (1991) looks at various structural aspects such as turn-taking mechanism, distribution of acts, conversational phase and politeness phenomena that can be systematically observed in negotiation behaviour. Francis (1986) on the other hand, is interested in topical coherence of utterances in adjacent position in the context of labour bargaining; and Bülow-Möller (1992) studies the way repetition is used as a strategic component in negotiating. Other research concentrates on negotiations at the workplace. Firth (1995) studies organizational aspects of telenegotiations, where technological means of communication affect the overall negotiation structure. Wagner (1995) considers the way negotiating activity evolves when solving technical problems through phone or fax. Other authors that focus on the discourse of negotiations include Fant (1989, 1990, 1992), Mariott (1993) and Bülow-Möller (1993), for whom intercultural speaker relationships is the main variable.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

These approaches to different kinds of discourse do certainly help both the teacher and researcher gain an insight into what really goes on in negotiating activities. Inasmuch as they are an important support for the elaboration of awareness exercises (James and Garrett 1991) that are geared towards the development of negotiation skills, these activities can be fully exploited in the classroom. Our brief survey shows that there is considerable diversification, which is useful, because different aspects of discourse are analysed, as are also different types of negotiation activities. It is important to note that as researchers and teachers, we cannot resort to just one concept of negotiation if we want to approach negotiations as a complex real life genre. Strauss (1978: 99-100) proposes the concept of "immediate negotiation context", to show that whatever the instance of negotiation being considered, it always corresponds to a highly specified set of contextual variables (e.g., the number and complexity of topics that are dealt with; the legitimacy of treating those topics; the degree to which speakers are ready to reach an agreement as a primary conversational objective; the power relationship that is

established between interactants). These variables are all factors that will influence the shape the negotiation process takes. To teach our students to negotiate would first require the study of enough samples of negotiations of a specific contextual configuration, so as to guarantee that discursual regularities will hold under the context-specific variables being considered. At this point it is worth reconsidering Swales' support for investigating the characteristics of genres, which are the most stable of communicative events. As for negotiations, once the genre specific features have been considered, context specific samples of discursual practices belonging to this genre should be characterized.

## 5. RESEARCH PROJECT

In a recent study<sup>2</sup> twenty-four samples of negotiation activity were analysed for structural regularities. The negotiations were obtained from agenda meetings, where an initial issue was proposed as requiring a solution, which would trigger off the negotiation process itself. The contextual variables holding for the whole corpus were as follows:

*Situation:* Dyadic face-to-face agenda meetings in an academic setting. The encounters take place in an office.

*Interactants:* As to their role-relationship, speaker B is the director of the academic institution in question, while speaker A is a representative of the staff. In these terms, speaker B can be said to represent a higher professional status than speaker A. As to the variable of power, speaker B can consequently be referred to as having more power than speaker A. Both speakers are women, their ages ranging from thirty-five to forty-five. Neither has been exposed to specific training in negotiating.

*Time:* No time constraints are established before the interactive event. Routinely, a half-an-hour is usually regarded as the time-span for each encounter, which takes place once a week.

*Number of items being negotiated:* In all samples the starting point of the negotiating process is marked by the introduction of a topic that is introduced into the thread of discourse. In the course of interaction, the number and complexity of issues that are dealt with varies.

In our research we applied the methodological framework of Conversation Analysis and discovered that in spite of the asymmetrical power relationship between interactants, there is no significant difference in the number of communicative acts the speakers resort to during the negotiating activity. For our analysis we relied on the notion of topic, both as a discourse organizational unit (e.g., Ochs Keenan and Schieffelin 1976; Stech 1982; Gardner 1987) and as a propositional expression of content that is introduced into the thread of discourse as new information, and that can be taken up at any other instance of

the discourse as known information. New information (irretrievable from the text) is what Brown and Yule (1983: 68) refer to as the speaker topic; while known information, as retrievable from previous discourse, is characterized by Brown and Yule as the discourse topic<sup>3</sup>. The analysis revealed that higher status speakers would use 10% more speaker topics than their interactants. On the other hand, the speaker who introduced a topic and further on in the discourse took it up as a discourse topic was usually speaker B. Speaker A proposing a speaker topic and taking it up later in the discourse was less common.

The topical progression within or across turn-constructive units was also noteworthy. Within the structural turn slot it was found that neither speaker held a proportional relationship between the number of acts and speaker topics being taken up as discourse topics. When considering turns in an adjacent position, it was found that only in 37% of the cases did the turn initiating act take up the discourse topic of the concluding act of the previous turn. This means that, when either of the speakers initiated a turn, the most common attitude was not to follow the interactant's topic.

## 6. ANALYSIS

Sample Analysis: topical progression within and across turn units from one negotiation extract.

The analysis reveals how speaker choices of introducing new and/or taking up previously presented information unfold in discourse, within and across turn units. These propositional content units are referred to in terms of speaker and discourse topic respectively. The analysis allows us to trace the coherence relation that holds between discourse topic and speaker topic, falling back on the textual clues that prove the type of coherence relation which has been established.

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Speaker      Communicative act      Coherence relation: sp. topic-disc.topic      Discourse Topic      Speaker Topic

1. A:	<i>yeah...I mean...I think sometimes the younger ones are losing out on...good Spanish conversation [because...</i>			[children losing out on Spanish conversation] a
2. B:	<i>hm...that's true]</i>	reference (1)	(children losing out on Spanish conversation) a	
3. A:	<i>because we've got people there working in reception / English people / without the Spanish at all .</i>	cause (1)	(children losing out on Spanish conversation) a	[reception teachers not speaking Spanish] b
4.	<i>I mean I know...Cristina speaks Spanish /</i>	identification (3)	(reception teachers not speaking Spanish) b	[Cristina speaking Spanish] c
5.	<i>but then she isn't Spanish .</i>	coordination (4)	(Cristina speaking Spanish) c	
6.	<i>I don't know how good her Spanish structure is and that .</i>	relexicalization (4)	(Cristina speaking Spanish) c	
7.	<i>but we understand that those in reception are having a good...Spanish / session and...</i>			[children having Spanish sessions] d
8.	<i>and they should have it really /</i>	reference (7)	(children having Spanish sessions) d	
9.	<i>because if they're going to... they're only just developing the language structures themselves as...</i>	cause (7)	(children having Spanish sessions) d	[children developing language structures] e
10. B:	<i>yeah</i>	polarity (9)	(children developing language structures) e	
11. A:	<i>as Spanish children .</i>	sentence ellipsis (9)	(children developing language structures) e	
12.	<i>you know / maybe they should have a little bit more...Lisa.</i>	identification (7) + reference (7)	(children having Spanish sessions) d	[children having more Spanish] f
13. B:	<i>hm hm .</i>	----		
14.	<i>but how if...reception / I'd be louth...I'd be very louth give the reception English teachers time out of class.</i>	coordination (12)	(children having more Spanish) f	[reception teachers getting extra time] g



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15. A: <i>no...but to do more...more of a group thing .</i>	coordination (14)	(reception teachers getting extra time) g	[doing group work] h
16. <i>I mean if...if Susana did some...</i>	identification (15)	(doing group work) h	[Susana doing group work] i

17. B: *yeah* ----

18. A: <i>a group thing with them /</i>	nominal repetition (16)	(Susana doing group work) i	
19. <i>and took a few for stories...</i>	coordination (16)	(Susana doing group work) i	[Susana doing stories] j
20. <i>that they could really listen to a story in Spanish...</i>	conclusion (19)	(Susana doing stories) j	
21. <i>and talk about the story in Spanish after with her /</i>	coordination (19)	(Susana doing stories) j	
22. <i>what would Susana feel about that?</i>	reference (16) + reference (16)	(Susana doing group work) i (Susana doing stories) j	[Susana's feelings] k

23. B: <i>does she feel she gets enough with them all or...</i>	verbal repetition (22) + reference (22)	(Susana's feelings) k	
24. <i>does she feel she'd like more?</i>	verbal repetition (22) + reference (22)	(Susana's feelings) k	
25. A: <i>as long as it's...as long as it's the right sort of approach /</i>	reference (16)	(Susana doing stories) j	[giving the right approach] l
26. <i>which is this side of err... getting the children to...to know more of their own language /</i>	reference (25)	(giving the right approach) l	
27. <i>to know more of their own background...</i>	conclusion (25)	(giving the right approach) l	

28. B: <i>hm</i>	----		
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<p>29. A: <i>just I mean...it's amazing how much we know...from what we were taught at school in the sense of...stories rhymes songs... conversation /</i></p>	<p>identification (25)</p>	<p>(giving the right approach) l</p>	<p>[doing stories, rhymes, songs, and conversation] m</p>
<p>30. <i>and that's what they're missing out on in their Spanish.</i></p>	<p>reference (29)</p>	<p>(doing stories, rhymes, songs, and conversation) m</p>	

<p>31. B: <i>well we can call the sessions...can't we /</i></p>	<p>nominal repetition (7)</p>	<p>(children having Spanish sessions) d</p>	
<p>32. <i>and then really / there's a lot of children to share err...precious hours with them .</i></p>	<p>lexical repetition (7) + relexicalization (7)</p>	<p>(children having Spanish sessions) d</p>	
<p>33. <i>year one and year two and year three...and reception .</i></p>	<p>nominal ellipsis (7)</p>	<p>(children having Spanish sessions) d</p>	
<p>34. <i>mind you / I suppose we don't want a very long time.</i></p>	<p>sentence ellipsis (7)</p>	<p>(children having Spanish sessions) d</p>	<p>[sessions not being long] n</p>

<p>35. A: <i>no we don't .</i></p>	<p>sentence substitution (34)</p>	<p>(sessions not being long) n</p>	
<p>36. <i>and really / if she's being asked to do things like...a story and not just talking to them...</i></p>	<p>reference (16) + repetition (16)</p>	<p>(Susana doing stories) j</p>	

<p>37. B: <i>yeah</i></p>	<p>----</p>		
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<p>38. A: <i>I'm not saying there's no preparation...</i></p>	<p>reference (16)</p>	<p>(Susana doing stories) j</p>	<p>[story needing preparation] o</p>
<p>39. <i>'cause you have to choose the story carefully / obviously .</i></p>	<p>cause (38)</p>	<p>(story needing preparation) o</p>	
<p>40. <i>but she's not got other pressures on her .</i></p>	<p>reference (16)</p>	<p>(Susana doing stories) j</p>	
<p>41. <i>it is purely just to go and...and do that sort of thing .</i></p>	<p>reference (16)</p>	<p>(Susana doing stories) j</p>	

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42. <i>it's not like one teaching...you know... the language [in the reading corner...</i>	reference (16)	(Susana doing stories) j
43. B: <i>just sitting there and reading] /</i>	exemplification (16)	(Susana doing stories) [sitting and reading] j p
44. <i>and...having children come to her...</i>	coordination (16)	(Susana doing stories) [having children come] j q
45. A: <i>yes...exactly</i>	polarity (43) + polarity (44)	(sitting and reading) p (having children come) q

(...)

## 7. PEDAGOGICAL APPLICATIONS OF RESULTS

The results of our study show that these structural regularities occur whenever the same variables hold. Moreover, they can be transferred to classroom activities in which students learn to identify large numbers of contextual factors. For the design of tasks geared towards developing negotiation skills, this study shows that interactive flow-charts or different kinds of discourse completion tasks can be established from a realistic perspective. What information is taken up by whom during the time line of discourse as a whole or within a turn slot, are aspects of the interactional construction of negotiating activity that can be described in accordance with real-life negotiation examples.

Discourse awareness tasks to develop negotiating skills: three examples.

Task 1: Complete the following negotiation sample, watching the discourse markers and links used to initiate the speakers' moves. Make sure you follow the guidelines as to what speaker topic and/or discourse topic must be contained in the speakers' contributions.

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	Discourse Topic	Speaker Topic
1. A: yeah...I mean...I think ..... .....		[children losing out on Spanish conversation]
2. B: hm... ..... .....	(children losing out on Spanish conversation)	
3. A: because ..... .....	(children losing out on Spanish conversation)	[reception teachers not speaking Spanish]
4. I mean ..... .....	(reception teachers not speaking Spanish)	[Cristina speaking Spanish]
5. but then .....	(Cristina speaking Spanish)	
6. I don't know ..... .....	(Cristina speaking Spanish)	
7. but we understand ..... .....		[children having Spanish sessions]
8. and ..... .....	(children having Spanish sessions)	
9. because ..... .....	(children having Spanish sessions)	[children developing language structures]
10. B: yeah	(children developing language structures)	
11. A: ..... ..... .....	(children developing language structures)	
12. you know ..... .....	(children having Spanish sessions)	[children having more Spanish]
13. B: hm hm .		
14. but how if... ..... .....	(children having more Spanish)	[reception teachers getting extra time]
15. A: no...but to ..... .....	(reception teachers getting extra time)	[doing group work]
16. I mean if... ..... .....	(doing group work)	[Susana doing group work]
17. (...)		

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Advantages of this type of task:

1. It allows for a great variety of awareness instruction tasks, depending on issues such as difficulty level, or the extent to which the activity is designed to be less or more controlled, or which aspect of discourse construction we want to focus on. The sample task provided here represents a controlled activity, which raises an awareness in the learner of how move initiating elements can limit the speakers contribution. Freedom is given as to what information to supply for each communicative act, as long as speaker and discourse topics at issue are respected. Other varieties of this task allow for more control in the message construction, providing a set of vocabulary items which should be mentioned in each move, or applying the cloze principle with gaps to supply with missing words, both activities, in any case, restricting the topical choices of the speaker contributions.
2. Students can, at an advanced level, develop an awareness of what really goes on in negotiations. Especially at the turn-constructural level, learners of an advanced proficiency level find it hard to construct multi-unit turns, while they are normally well acquainted with one-move turns. Conducting real negotiation processes requires an ability to argument effectively while holding a turn, and throughout the interaction process.
3. Learners are told beforehand about the speakers' role relationships that hold for the negotiation process, the communicative goals pursued by either speaker, and the topics (i.e. the propositional information used to achieve the conversational ends at issue). This way, students are provided both with a pragmatic knowledge and a structural layout to which they have to adjust their communicative choices.
4. Learners can compare their answers with an authentically outlayed sample of negotiation behaviour, and comment on their choices as well as ground them.

Task 2: Pairwork: Role-play a negotiation encounter between a buyer (B) and a seller (S).  
Speaker B is considering the possibility of purchasing new computers for the new subsidiary they have set up in Manchester. The only guideline you have is that you have to stick to the topic that is provided in your respective turn slots.

<b>B:</b>	<b>new subsidiary</b>	..... .....
<b>S:</b>	<b>the department store</b>	..... .....
<b>B:</b>	<b>computers</b>	..... .....
<b>S:</b>	<b>range of computers</b>	..... .....
<b>B:</b>	<b>range of computers</b>	..... .....

<b>S:</b>	advantages of computer	..... .....
<b>B:</b>	budget	..... .....
<b>S:</b>	policy of department store	..... .....
<b>B:</b>	payment	..... .....
<b>S:</b>	deadlines	..... .....
<b>B:</b>	deadlines	..... .....
<b>S:</b>	computers	..... .....

\* This task could well be adapted to a flow-chart format.

Advantages of this type of task:

1. This kind of task would be on the other extreme, and represent the least controlled type of activity starting from the notion of topic. Instead of resorting to the topic in terms of propositional content unit, it is here referred to in terms of a conceptualized item. The learner is here free to construct the speakers' turns, without restrictions as to information to be contained, lexical elements, markers and links to be respected or structural considerations within the turn construction.
2. The teacher provides this framework starting from a real negotiation sample, so that the student can check the communicative choices he/she makes against it.
3. Students are given beforehand the pragmatic information they require to complete the negotiation process according to some specific role relationship, end-goal orientation of the conversation and further variables that may be relevant for the unfolding of discourse.

Task 3: Speaker A negotiates with Speaker B in an agenda meeting the possibility of giving classes in blocks of three hours, to which proposal speaker B is highly reluctant.

1. Match the following contributions with the appropriate negotiation phase, in which they would typically be uttered.
  - a.) well...ehm...let's say that originally I was in favour of that...
  - b.) but...it's just ridiculous an hour and a half.
  - c.) but...no I mean / I can understand that.
  - d.) I think it's much better for people to do a solid three hours where you can get into something / than to do an hour and a half. but...it's not my err...decision.
  - e.) hmm...they won't want it will they?

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- f.) you're perfectly free to talk to John or Joe about it.
- g.) I'll put it in the...I put it in...It'll go on John's desk.
- h.) so...there's not a lot I can do about that.
- i.) and I'm making minutes of all this anyway or a list or whatever.
- j.) I mean...I think that should still stand.
- k.) by the time you settle down to something...
- l.) because I thought people would get more work done / in three hours than in an hour and a half.
- m.) is it possible to put it all together?
- n.) oh please, sit down.
- o.) okay...okay.

Phases:

1. Phatic communication	
2. Exploring positions	
3. Bargaining	
4. Decision taking	
5. Concluding phase	

- 2. Match each conversational move with the corresponding speaker.
- 3. Try to re-order the speakers' contributions into the correct sequence.

Advantages of this type of task:

- 1. Students are made aware of the existing link between what is said and the interactional instance for which it is functionally appropriate.
- 2. Learners grow aware of the structural and sequential restrictions the utterance construction and utterance content imposes on the interactional discourse construction.
- 3. Learners also develop an awareness of the close link between role relationship, speaker status and function at the moment of interaction, and utterance/word choice.
- 4. The answers are checked against the authentic negotiation sample, the design of the activity is based on.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

As we noted above, learners of English often find it difficult to conduct interactive discourse activities, especially when these are of a strategic nature as happens with negotiating encounters, where speakers are not only supposed to act and react in a natural and spontaneous way while interacting, but simultaneously they are required to construct and use utterances in their tactical dimension.

The study we have developed here reveals that looking into the discursal properties of negotiation, understood in terms of conversational sub-genre, helps the researcher to

identify some underlying structural pattern of discourse behaviour, whose predictive nature is especially suitable for further designing discourse awareness exercises geared towards the development of negotiation skills. The roles of teacher, researcher and materials designer overlap in an attempt to guide the learner's interactive competence, while drawing his/her attention to observable regularities we have managed to reveal in the discourse activity at issue.

It should be noted, however, that it is especially advanced learners of English as a foreign language who benefit from this type of research, as beginners or intermediate students of English often lack the language skills that would eventually enable them to use language strategically, in its tactical dimension. Awareness instruction exercises based on this type of studies should therefore not be implemented in a random way, but adapted to the right target group of learners.

Another point worth making refers to the complexity of negotiation as a sample of real-life genre (see Strauss 1978). Whatever discursal characteristics any study manages to reveal should tentatively be approached as corresponding to a highly specified set of contextual variables, which will influence the shape the negotiation process takes. This means that we as researchers, teachers and materials designers have to be aware that while approaching negotiation activity, we are actually choosing a sample negotiating activity, which displays discursal characteristics holding *only* under *certain* context-specific variables. The types of activities derived from such studies should consequently be taken as holding for a specific discourse activity within a complex real-life genre as is a negotiation, and this should be made aware to the learner as well.

## NOTES

1. This critical viewpoint was already taken by C.N. Candlin and H.G. Widdowson in the seventies. The point I want to make here, is that two decades later the need to look at the interactive nature of discourse as a starting point for the design of materials is *still* being claimed for.
2. The findings are the result of my PhD thesis, in which I approach negotiations from a generic viewpoint, looking for structural regularities in context-specific discursal practices that constitute samples of negotiation activities. The corpus in fact comprises thirty-one samples. Yet, I refer here to the findings that apply to those negotiations where the variable of speaker sex is homogeneous, which leads us to a total amount of twenty-four samples between female interactants, not taking into account seven negotiations that take place between male speakers.
3. See Dolón (1995b) both for an extensive revision of the notion of topic (1995: 44-71) and for the argumentation for the methodological approach adopted in the research of topical continuity in agenda meetings (1995: 137-158).



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