

# Speech Acts Produced in Ninorte Samarnon (NS) Conversations in English Task -Based Negotiated Interaction

Leonila A. Longcop

Faculty, College of Arts and Communication, University of Eastern Philippines

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## ABSTRACT

This is a qualitative study on how conversations are carried out in English among Ninorte Samarnon speakers' utilizing discourse analysis. It explored and analyzed subjects' utterances, sequences, and the organization of such sequences in their conversation structure grounding on Austin and Searle's Speech Acts Theory and Halliday's language functions.

The data of the study consisted of seventy-five (75) transcripts of audio-recorded task-based conversations of Ninorte Samarnon in ESL negotiated interaction elicited using conversation prompts consisting of communicative tasks designed to direct and motivate students to engage in oral interaction that trigger conversations among the participants.

The findings indicated that NS ESL speakers perform one or more social acts in an utterance as in the case of indirect speech acts. This concretizes that in the ESL communicative context, "language does not just produce utterances but they act upon and with others by means of speech, and each utterance is a speech act realizing its communicative intention." It supports the claim that speakers of a language do not just produce utterances on the basis of their grammatical competence but enter into a process of communicative interaction. The transcribed data revealed that four of the five categories, were present-- directives, representatives, commissives, and expressives, but declaratives, which Austin termed as declarations to avoid confusion with declaratives as a sentence structure was not in use. Likewise, it could be gleaned from the findings that the most commonly used speech acts were representational followed by heuristic functions. It indicated that conversations in English among NS ESL speakers were carried out via asking-giving information speech acts.

**KEYWORDS:** *conversations, negotiated interaction, conversational analysis, oral communication*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

English has been considered a second language among Filipino learners, it being used as the official communication in government and business transactions. It is also used as the medium of instruction in almost all subjects in the different levels of basic education. Alluding to this premise, it gives an impression that Filipino learners would have attained a certain level of communicative competence in English. But in reality, reports show that a number of Filipino learners are still reluctant using the English language in several instances like doing a report in class and they feel not comfortable as they engage in conversations.

As the nature of communication in spoken discourse context seems too complex and crucial, English as a second language (ESL) teachers are facing a dilemma on how to get their students off on the right path towards achieving the desired oral communication proficiency. Added to it, is the challenge of making individuals keep pace with the globalized modern world where English dominates both in the national and international market. In today's information age "those who are competent in it are expected to accrue the very real material advantage of having maximum mobility and social

prestige" (Kachru as cited in Lorente and Topaz 2002:20). This situation demands a more intensive instruction that stresses on providing adequate input towards quality language learning.

Yet, despite the emphasis on communicative language teaching (CLT) for several decades, experiences from the field suggest that ESL learners remain at low levels even after extended years of classroom study. Filipinos who for many years back had been known to be the most proficient speakers of English in Asia have also suffered a setback. This alarming decline among the Filipinos ability to communicate suggest deterioration in their quality of English, thus endangering the country's international competitive advantage. The University of Eastern Philippines (UEP), a state university in Northern Samar, has not been spared from such dilemma. During discussions the majority of ESL learners only listened to teachers and had less or virtually no interaction with other learners. This does not do well for proficiency in oral communication. ESL teachers oftentimes have noticed that language skill learning becomes fragmented and students continuously commit the same oral communication problems over and over. It is as if what they

have been doing has contributed less or worst did nothing to improve the learners' spoken fluency and communication strategies particularly along conversational structures and the use of function and meaning in conversation.

In an attempt to respond to this language teaching predicament, in the absence of naturally occurring conversations, the researcher considered it more profitable to explore communicative competence via task-based negotiated interaction towards describing and analyzing conversation patterns among Ninorte Samarnon (NS) speakers, to determine whether their language development work within the framework of how the learners negotiate meaning by taking part in conversations and how their communicative competence to include their knowledge on how to use and respond to different types of speech acts and social conventions exemplifying the functions of language.

In view of the above context, interactional competence could be attained by providing language learners opportunities to interact and practice the target language with their teacher as their conversational partner and create a learner centered classroom activities during which students learn to negotiate meaning. Van den Branden revealed that by interactional tasks, L2 learners enhanced performance is primarily determined not by their level of language but by the frequency of negotiation routines that they engaged in. He emphasized that during negotiations, which in this study refers to modification which triggers conversation output via task-based such as the use of communicative tasks as inputs, learners can be pushed to the production of output that is more complete and accurate (1997:630). Interaction as the key to teaching oral discourse views language development to be successful when a teacher not only provides an input with the features of a target language but when the "reciprocal interaction" occurs as well.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to describe and analyze oral communication discourse particularly conversations via task-based negotiated interaction among freshman ESL learners. Specifically, its objectives were to: 1) determine the speech acts produced in the NS conversations in English and 2) point out the language functions present in the NS conversations in English.

## 3. Methodology

This is a qualitative study on how conversations are carried out in English among Ninorte Samarnon speakers' utilizing discourse analysis. It explored and analyzed subjects' utterances, sequences, and the organization of such sequences in their conversation structure grounding on Austin and Searle' Speech Acts Theory and MK Halliday's language functions.

The research participants were the Ninorte Samarnon freshman students in the main campus of the University of Eastern Philippines, the first state university in the Visayas located at about 3.3 kilometers from Catarman, the capital town of Northern Samar in Eastern Visayas Region.

The data of the study consisted of seventy-five (75) transcripts of audio-recorded task-based conversations in ESL negotiated interaction gathered from sixteen (16) English III classes consisting of students belonging to a wide range of English proficiency from low to average to high which class size ranged from 40-45. These transcribed conversations were elicited using conversation prompts consisting of communicative tasks designed to direct and

motivate students to engage in oral interaction that trigger conversations among the participants. In addition, these communicative tasks were formulated showing a clear resemblance to situations outside classroom contexts to provide the participants an authentic setting.

The speech acts analysis was guided by Austin and Searle Speech Acts Theory characterized into locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary. As regards language functions, it adopted MK Hallidays' categorization: representational, heuristic, personal, imaginative, interactional, instrumental and regulatory.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### The Speech Acts Produced in Ninorte Samarnon (NS) Conversations in English

Following Austin and Searle's theory of "Speech Acts Analysis" comprising three acts – locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary, few utterances from the transcribed data were analyzed as examples of performatives as shown in the Table 1.

Austin and Searle's claimed that "by making an utterance, the language user performs one or more social acts" applies to NS utterances in ESL conversations. Take for instance, this conversation extract 12, line 1:

A: Can I ask for a cup of coffee?"

The utterance is a question, yet it also functions as an indirect request. The hearer may opt to answer the question instead of indirectly responding to a request, though on the other hand, the speaker's illocutionary force is to request rather than plainly ask as to the ability of the hearer to do the act.

Another example is observed in extract 47 lines 48-49:

D: Shall we talk to the other place? (supposedly in other place)

A: "Aren't you comfortable here?"

The utterance is in the interrogative form but it carries as well another social act. It has an illocutionary force of an indirect suggestion "*Let's look for another place*" rather than merely asking whether the other interlocutors want to move to another place. Thus, line 49 of the same conversation extract, speaker A replied "Aren't you comfortable here?" recognizing speaker D was suggesting to move to another place.

The preceding sample analysis of speech acts indicated that NS ESL speakers perform one or more social acts in an utterance as in the case of indirect speech acts. This concretizes that in the ESL communicative context, "language does not just produce utterances but they act upon and with others by means of speech, and each utterance is a speech act realizing its communicative intention" (Tayao 1998).

It further establishes the proposition that the interpretation of meaning is shaped by context – "meaning does not reside in the words per se but in the context of the situation" (Malinowski as cited in Tayao:1998). It supports the claim that speakers of a language do not just produce utterances on the basis of their grammatical competence but enter into a process of communicative interaction. They act upon means of speech and thus each utterance is a speech act realizing its communicative intention. When people communicate, they do two things at a time: they express a proposition of one kind (locution/form) aim at accomplishing a certain function (illocution/function) with

that proposition and how the interlocutor responds to the intended meaning (Tayao, 1998:282). Corollary to this, Talib explains that an utterance may vary in meaning depending on how it is viewed; the illocutionary and perlocutionary acts are virtually telescoped into a single concept: the illocutionary force that which does not seem to be a unitary concept as there may be a dysjunction between the

illocutionary force conceived by the hearer. The fact that the illocutionary force conceived by the hearer is reality indicates that another perlocutionary act is still applicable that is—the actual illocutionary force on the hearer which may be at variance with the speakers intended illocutionary force. In this context, there may be one illocutionary force whether intended or actual for some utterances (Talib:2006)

Table 1: Speech Acts in the ESL Task-Based Negotiated Interaction

Examples Extract No. and Line No.	(Locutionary Acts) Utterance	Illocutionary Act message function	Perlocutionary Act (expected response)	Speech Acts	Speech Acts Category
3-1	A: Hi Jerome! Excuse me, are you busy?	The illocutionary force is: Spare me your attention or Can I have your attention ( <i>requesting/seeking attention</i> )	The hearer gives attention (hearer may say: Yes, "anything I can do for you?"	Getting or seeking attention	Directive
17-1	A: I'm cold. I need a cup of coffee.	The message is: Can you get me a cup of coffee / Please give me a cup of coffee ( <i>requesting for a cup of coffee</i> )	The hearer may get a cup of coffee for her. Hearer I'll get a cup of coffee.	Requesting	Directive
17-2	B: Okay. I'll go to get coffee.	The message is: Your request will be granted ( <i>promising or giving the hearer an assurance of the granting of the request</i> )	The hearer will express her thank for the help extended her ("Thank you")	Promising or assuring	Commissive
30-15	B: Don't worry, I can (.) I will do my best to help you?	The message is: "I assure you I can help you" ( <i>giving assurance</i> )	The hearer will express his/her being grateful to speaker B maybe by saying "Thank you" or You saved my day".	Giving assurance	Commissive
15-2	B: Oh: sorry, but I have no enough money.	The message is: Sorry, I can't lend you because I too have nothing ( <i>apologizing</i> )	The hearer may accept the apology. "Don't bother, I can manage". or "It's alright."	Apologizing	Expressive
10-5	D: Don't lose hope. Lets pray that (.) that (.) God (.5) you'll be okay.	The message is: It will be alright. Lets hope for the best ( <i>expressing concern/support act of consoling</i> )	The hearer will get delighted Her/his grief will lighten, Being such may say. "Thank you. Hope so".	Expressing concern/support act of consoling	Expressive
30-9	A: Ah (.) when I went to CR I (.) put it there. When I came again (.) in the CR. I didn't see it. Ahh: ((pause)).	The message is: "I lost it" ( <i>narrating or explaining what happened</i> )	The hearer may offer help to look for it. Or, the hearer may console speaker A. the hearer may ask for confirmation "Really. Are you sure".	Narrating explaining	Representative
36-3	A: Uhm (.) let's talk	The message is:	The hearer may	Stating a	Representative

	<p>about him. My comment is (.) he is absenous you know (laughing) but he discuss good. But I am disappointed because he gave many, many questions and quiz.</p>	<p>“He’s not doing well” (stating a comment)</p>	<p>react, or agree, or disagree with speaker A. “Yeah, that’s true” or “I disagree. He’s good”.</p>	comment	
27-8	<p>C: By the way classmate, according to our president our Christmas party is on Friday. The (.) our is 75 pesos for our snacks.</p>	<p>The message is: (relaying a message)</p>	<p>The hearer may acknowledge the speaker for the information. Thank you for the information or may clarify “Really. Are you sure”?</p>	Relaying a message	Representative

(.5) pause .5 of a second

Further, using Austin and Searle categorization of speech acts the transcribed data of NS UEP ESL speakers revealed that four of the five categories, were present. These were directives, representatives, commissives and expressives. Declaratives, which Austin termed as declarations to avoid confusion with declaratives as a sentence structure was not in use.

Of these categories, directives appeared to be the most frequently used consisting of 232 instances or 34.63 percent. Directives included these speech acts: suggesting 21 or 3.14 percent; requesting for help with 25 or 3.73 percent; commanding 11 or 1.64 percent, asking for information 118 or 17.61 percent; soliciting comment or reaction 2 or .30 percent; inviting 1 or .15 of a percent; seeking permission or suggestion 9 or 1.34 percent; asking for confirmation and clarification with 15 or 2.24 percent; requesting or initiating a topic change with 24 or 3.58 percent and interrupting a conversation with 6 or .90 percent.

In terms of expressives, the transcribed data revealed that of the 205 cases or 30.59 percent; these speech acts were used in expressing gratitude or thanks with 22 or 3.28 percent; expressing displeasure with 2 or .30 percent; expressing concern or support with 9 or 1.34 percent; expressing doubts with 5 or .75 percent; sympathizing with 4 or .60 percent; admiring or appreciating with 10 or 1.49 percent; complementing with 3 or .45 percent; expressing feeling of surprise with 4 or .60 percent; apologizing with 12 or .60 percent; greeting with 65 or 9.70 percent; congratulating with 1 or .15 percent; parting or leave-taking with 31 or 4.62 percent; disapproving or rejecting a request with 2 or .30 percent and objecting an opinion with 2 or .30 percent.

Representatives were also found in the conversation in ESL negotiated interaction. Of the 192 cases or 28.66 percent belonging to this category, giving information was found dominantly in use it having 117 or 17.96 percent cases; explaining with 23 or 3.43 percent; narrating events with 6 or .90 percent; stating an opinion with 28 or 4.18 percent; stating a comment with 3 or .45 percent; giving reaction another 3 or .45 percent; revealing a secret with 2 or .3 percent; relaying message with 8 or 1.19 percent.

Commissives were the least frequently used among the categories. These speech acts were: promising or giving assurance with 23 or 3.43 percent; granting a request with 5 or .75 percent; accepting invitation with 1 or .15 percent;

: sound prolonged

\_:downward inflection

offering help with 8 or 1.19 percent; and accepting apologies with 4 or 3.60 percent.

The results indicated that similar speech acts which appeared in English conversations as pointed out in CA framework also appear or are present in the conversations in the NS ESL context.

These findings corroborate Ulit's study which concluded that as to language functions in Ilocano speaking communities, directives, representatives and expressives were found to be dominantly used when compared with commissives. This study's findings concur with Alaman's study pointing out the use of these language functions – representatives, directives, and expressives in written conversation discourse as well, they being reflected in the conversation gathered from 1990-2000 Palanca award winning short stories.

## Halliday's Language Functions in the NS Conversations in English.

The transcribed data revealed that of the seven functions proposed by Halliday, six were found existing in the conversations among the NS tertiary freshman ESL learners. These included representational, heuristic, personal, interactional, instrumental and regulatory. The imaginative function was not in use.

The most commonly used language function as revealed in the transcribed data was representational comprising 192 cases or 28.66 percent. Of these functions, informing consisted of 117 cases or 17.46 percent; explaining with 23 or 3.43 percent; narrating events with 6 or .90 percent, stating an opinion with 28 or 4.18 percent; stating a comment with 3 or .45 percent; giving a reaction with 3 or .45 percent; revealing a secret with 2 or .30; relaying a message with 2 or .30 percent and asserting with 8 or 1.19 percent.

The heuristic function data was found next to be the commonly used function. Of the one hundred seventy-four (174) or 25.97 percent speech acts classified as heuristic, asking information was found to be the most frequently used among NS ESL speakers. Other speech acts were: soliciting comment or reaction with 2 cases or .30 percent, seeking permission or suggestion with 9 or 1.34 percent; seeking for confirmation or clarification with 15 instances or 2.24 percent; requesting or initiating a topic change with 24 or 3.58 percent and interrupting in a conversation with 6 cases or .90 percent.

In terms of personal function of language, the data showed that 109 instances or 16.27 percent belonged to this classification. These were distributed among these speech acts: expressing gratitude or thanks with 22 or 3.28 percent; expressing displeasure with 2 cases or .30 percent; expressing doubts with 5 or .75 percent; sympathizing with 4 or .60 percent; admiring or appreciating with 10 or 1.49 percent; complementing with 3 or .45 percent; expressing anxiety with 3 or .45 percent; expressing surprise with 4 or .60 percent; apologizing with 12 or 1.79 percent; expressing goodwill or well wishes with 4 or .60; promising or giving assurance with 23 or 3.43 percent and expressing desire to help with 8 or 1.19 percent.

The interactional functions of the language consisting of 103 or 15.37 percent of the data were used to indicate greeting which consisted of 65 cases or 9.70 percent; congratulating with 1 or .15 percent; inviting with 1 or .15 percent; accepting with 1 or .15 percent; accepting apologies with 4 or .60 percent and parting/leave taking using strategies such as making arrangement for future contact and using excuses to ensure a positive face of the hearer, consisted of 31 cases or 4.62 percent.

The data showed that 54 or 8.51 percent of the total utterances or lines had instrumental functions. The distribution by speech acts were: suggesting 21 or 3.14 percent, requesting for help with 25 instances or 3.73 percent, and commanding with 11 or 1.64 percent.

The regulatory function was found least frequently used comprising only 35 or 5.22 percent of the total speech acts. These were used in the following instances disapproving with 1 or .15 percent; agreeing with 25 or 3.75 percent; granting a request with 5 or .75 percent; denying a request or information being asked with 2 or .30 percent and, objecting an opinion of the other interlocutors with 2 or .30 percent.

It could be gleaned from the findings that the most commonly used speech acts were representational followed by heuristic functions. It indicated that conversations in English among NS ESL speakers were carried out via asking-giving information speech acts. This implies that they had limited range of functions and strategies meaning they have not yet mastered the form and functions of the language.

The findings support Halliday's observation pointing out the common use of particular speech acts in conversations: greeting, parting, agreeing, disagreeing, inviting, accepting, invitation, requesting, interrupting topic changing, commanding, apologizing, sympathizing and others (1980). He claimed that communication may be regarded as a combination of act, a series of elements with purpose and intent and not merely an event that just happens, it is functional, purposive and designed to bring about some effect or some change however subtle or unobservable they are on the environment of hearers and speakers. Likewise, similar findings prove Austin's and Searle's theory that "when we use language we are not just saying something, we are doing something". Hence, conversations or communication per se is a series of connected communicative acts.

## 5. Conclusions

The study revealed that in NS ESL conversations there appeared the use of speech acts. However, these were carried most via asking-giving information implying that NS ESL speakers have acquired the language means for

performing actions in specific contexts but were inadequate to sustain communicative needs. This implies that the NS ESL learners have not yet mastered the form and function of the language. They can express only a limited range of functions and strategies. Thus they failed to fully express their ideas with appropriately in a given social context.

Based on the discussion, it could be gleaned that conversations may be drawn out from negotiated task-based interaction which imply to be a potential technique in enabling students to interact at a given context depicting real life situations.

## 6. Recommendations

The findings and conclusions of this study led to the following recommendations:

1. Since, language is basically for communication of speech acts; speech acts conventions must be emphasized. There is a need for ESL teachers to put emphasis on teaching both form and function of the language so as to improve these particular functional language needs of NS ESL learners. Language instruction to be more effective must follow functional-notional syllabus stressing on communicative competence development among learners.

Relative to the development of skills to sustain conversations, language teaching must allow the ESL learners to practice language both in forms and meanings utilizing meaningful strategies focused on linguistic and discourse competence. This further recommends, reconsidering and revitalizing language teaching methodologies applied in the UEP ESL instruction. The ESL teachers should be encouraged and involved in producing language teaching materials geared towards communicative competence development. Traditional classrooms where students rarely speak due to teacher dominance should give way to more student talk. Limiting teacher talk would provide ample time to speak English, thus practicing the target language following more directed authentic and meaningful language tasks.

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