"BUT ARE THEY SPEAKING THEIR OWN LANGUAGE?"

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ABSTRACT

In a corpus-based analysis of spontaneous naturally occurring conversations, the linguistic phenomenon of echoing is studied across genres and its frequency of occurrence noted. In the research undertaken, echoing, a seemingly redundant linguistic feature, which flouts Grice's Co-operative Principle, is found to be one of a repertoire of conversational devices regularly employed by participants in a range of spoken discourse genres, and that it is a marker of social relations as well as an index of the levels of familiarity and intimacy between participants. This paper argues that an inadequate performance of L2 speakers results in part from having followed concocted and artificial conversations that have excluded such linguistic features as echoing. The application of the findings to the teaching of the English language aims to narrow the gap between pedagogic and real-life conversations.

KEY WORDS

Echoing, frequency, interpersonal relations, Co-operative Principle, spontaneous, concocted, tenor, field, pedagogic.

RESUMEN

En un estudio analítico de un *corpus* de conversaciones espontáneas en inglés, el fenómeno de *eco* que se usa en diferentes tipos de conversación y su correspondiente frecuencia de uso es el tema de discusión. En este estudio se ha descubierto que el *eco*, un elemento que aparentemente no es necesario y que rompe las reglas del 'Principio Cooperativo', diseñado por Grice, es uno de varios elementos incluidos en el repertorio utilizado por los participantes en diferentes tipos de conversación. Este elemento también se usa para indicar relaciones sociales y como índice de diferentes niveles de familiaridad e intimidad entre los participantes de una conversación. El principal argumento de este artículo es el uso inadecuado de ciertas expresiones utilizadas por estudiantes que aprenden inglés como idioma extranjero, debido a

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que los ejemplos de conversación que han aprendido son rebuscados y artificiales, ya que no incluyen elementos lingüísticos como el *eco*. La aplicación de estos descubrimientos en la enseñanza del inglés tiene como objectivo reducir la brecha entre conversaciones reales y aquéllas que se presentan en clases de inglés.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Eco, frecuencia, relaciones interpersonales, Principio Cooperativo, espontáneo/a, rebuscado/a, tenor, campo, pedagógico.

RÉSUMÉ

Basée sur des corpus d'entretiens spontanés, cette analyse étudie le phénomène linguistique de l'écho à travers les genres, tout en notant sa fréquence. Selon ces recherches, l'écho, un trait linguistique apparemment superflu qui passe outre au Principe Coopératif de Grice, se trouve dans un répertoire de mécanismes de conversation qui sont employés régulièrement par les participants à travers une gamme de genres de discours parlé. Cela joue comme un marqueur de relations sociales autant que comme un index des niveaux de familiarité et d'intimité entre les participants. Cette communication soutient l'idée qu'une performance inadéquate des interlocuteurs en L2 résulte en partie d'avoir suivi des entretiens recherchés et artificiels qui excluent certains traits linguistiques tels que l'écho. L'application de ces résultats à l'enseignement de la langue anglaise vise à réduire l'écart entre les échanges effectués dans le cadre pédagogique et ceux produits en situations réelles.

MOTS-CLÉ

L'écho, la fréquence, les relations interpersonneles, le Principe Coopératif, spontané, recherché, teneur, champ, pédagogique.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is generally agreed that the ability to carry on a conversation in real life is one of the most sophisticated abilities of the speaker of a foreign language. Unfortunately, it has happened often enough that L2 advanced students, although grammatically, phonologically and lexically correct, come to an English speaking country and get completely baffled by the English they experience. One can often hear such bewildering questions as "but are they speaking their own English language?" Obviously the English they hear and read is not something they have been prepared for at home. On the other hand, L2 speakers may appear to be strangely silent to a native English speaker as they lack the ability to contribute to a conversation, which might cause some serious misunderstandings. This is due to a great extent to the fact that tradi-

tional pedagogic conversational materials are not a true reflection of everyday real life conversations. Rather than using real-life conversations to make students aware that all participants of a conversation must be able to fit individual contributions to the progress of a conversation, traditional language teaching uses contrived conversations for the exemplification of grammatical rules but pays little attention to pragmatic skills such as those needed in turn-allocation, topic changes and in social phatic communion. As a consequence, the learner, when in the role of a hearer, does not know how to contribute to a conversation except in the case of replying to a question, although in real-life conversations, participants alternate frequently between the roles of listener and speaker. As a result, the speaker has to remain in the role of speaker and often finds himself/herself talking to a wall of complete silence.

In reading excerpts of real-life conversational discourse collected in the School of English Studies, Nottingham University, the repeated occurrence of echoing is striking. Some genres in particular exhibit marked degrees of echoing. It is found to have specific interactional functions and that it is part of the communicative competence of an English native speaker. The following issues then have to be addressed: what can account for the impression of such a strikingly high frequency of occurrence of this seemingly meaningless, redundant feature in some spoken discourse contexts? In other words, what can account for the native-speakers' awareness and employment of this linguistic means in different generic activities? Does it contribute to the overall structure of a conversation? Does this linguistic feature play an important part in the construction of a coherent spoken discourse? Before these questions can be addressed however, a definition of "echoing" becomes necessary here.

2. Definition of echoing

Echoing in this study refers to **the speaker's immediate lexical or syntactic repetition of the previous speaker's most current utterance(s), sometimes exactly and sometimes with some variation**. It is considered to be one form of repetition, which can go across time and discourse, or simply several turns, and which can be the repetition of other's words as well as self-repetition.

Here are some examples of three of the most common types of echoing:

1.   **Verbatim echoing**: By verbatim (complete) echoing is meant the echoing of the previous speaker's utterances with no lexical or syntactic variation.

Examples (they are all taken from the excerpts used in this paper for analysis):

> 1.
> <SPEAKER 2>   *Where have we gone wrong?*
> <SPEAKER 1>   *Where have we gone wrong Mike?*
>
> 2.
> <SPEAKER 1>   *No pun intended.*
> <SPEAKER 2>   *No pun intended Mike no pun intended.*

2.   **Partial echoing**: The term partial echoing is used to refer to the kind of echoing that repeats part of what the previous speaker has uttered. The echoing has no variation with the part echoed. Typical examples are:

> 3.
> <SPEAKER 3>   What's *the extent?*
> <SPEAKER 1>   ((Whispered)) *the extent.*
> <SPEAKER 2>   Is it going to remain the same?
>
> 4.
> <SPEAKER 3>   How long does it take?
> <SPEAKER 2>   Erm
> <SPEAKER 1>   Oh that'll make a noise.
> <SPEAKER 2>   Takes about *thirty-five minutes* yeah that'll
>   that' that'll destroy your tape.
> <SPEAKER 3>   *Thirty five minutes.*

3.   **Echoing in synonyms or synonymous expressions**: The third type of echoing, echoing in synonymous words or expressions, with lexical or syntactic variation, is one of the largest groups within the category of echoing. It differs from the above two types in that rather than exact repetition of vocabulary and sentence structures, it echoes by using different but near-synonymous words or expressions. Typical examples of echoing in synonyms:

> 5.
> <SPEAKER 1>   … it was absolutely *fantastic.*
> <SPEAKER 3>   *Marvellous*
>   wasn't it.

6.
<SPEAKER 1>   Oh *that's brilliant.*
<SPEAKER 3>   Eh *that's really good* there look.

Example with syntactic variation:

7.
<SPEAKER 4>   Well *I'm very impressed.*
<SPEAKER 2>   Yeah *it's incredible* isn't it.

3. DATA DESCRIPTION

All the data used for this study are drawn from the CANCODE corpus (Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English) sited in the School of English Studies at the University of Nottingham. They are all transcriptions of the recordings from spontaneous conversational data in real contexts in the everyday lives of the participants.

In selecting the data, it is aimed that the 15 excerpts used cover variation in age, generation, gender, socio-economic background and nationality (within the British Isles), as well as different degrees of formality. The relation between the participants ranges from close family members to relatives, friends who meet frequently and friends who have not seen each other for some time, schoolmates, colleagues, teacher and pupils, hair-dresser and customer, and participants in a debate.

4. DATA ANALYSIS I – FREQUENCY AND DISTRIBUTION OF ECHOING

For the study in relation to the frequency of echoing, it is necessary to divide conversations into two speech contexts: formal or informal. The formal conversations are usually public speeches that can be (and often are) prepared in advance in writing and read out aloud to an audience: e.g., lectures, radio talks and TV news broadcasting. They are less interactive than the more informal conversations or sometimes not interactive at all. By informal conversation is meant in this study the verbal event that is impromptu or spontaneous between social equals, where the general function of much of the discourse may be phatic and social, and which is characterized by topic shifts and unnoticed transitions from one topic to another. Participant cooperation is a basic feature of the informal conversation. Excerpts 1 to 13 all take place in an informal atmosphere.

However, this division immediately gives rise to two problems: first, formality is a question of degree, and because there is a great difference in the degree of formality as the roles and relationships among the participants vary, it is difficult to be precise and any attempt to place any particular excerpt on the cline of formality is likely to be controversial. Some conversations are easier to be categorized, such as Excerpt 15 (a televised political debate with a panel of politicians and a chair person) which displays unambiguous formality, and Excerpts 1 and 2 (one between a married couple and one between mother and daughter), which are the most informal. There are, however, others that immediately cause trouble when an attempt is made to classify them, such as Excerpt 14, which is between an old woman reminiscing about her youth to her great niece. The atmosphere is informal and yet it is carried out in an interview style.

Secondly, it is also recognized that during the course of a conversation, the formality of conversation (formal or informal) and the relationship between participants (e.g. of equal or unequal social status) may change, as spoken discourse is a here-and-now joint venture. For instance the role and relationship between a teacher and his student in class will change when they meet in a pub. The type of conversation will also shift from a more formal one to a more informal one (e.g. from a serious discussion to an informal chat).

To cope with the first problem, excerpts in this study are seen on a scale of formality, and are thus "more" formal or "more" informal rather than being fixed. For the second problem, the formality of conversation and the relationship between participants are considered as they are at the time the selected spoken discourse is taking place. That is, this research studies the excerpts of conversations as they are appropriate to the setting: teacher and pupils in a classroom, not at a party; hairdresser and customer in the hairdresser's, not in a hospital.

The following table is a frequency account of echoing in the excerpts selected. It shows the relations of the participants, the numbers of turns of talk, the instances of occurrences and the percentage of echoing:

Excerpts	Turns of talk	Occurrences of echoing	Percentage
1. Between husband and wife	112	10	9
2. Between daughter and mother	76	4	5

Excerpts	Turns of talk	Occurrences of echoing	Percentage
3. Between close friends	183	19	11
4. Between pupils	62	3	5
5. Students chatting round tea table	54	10	18
6. Between relatives	42	7	17
7. Narration	42	9	22
8. Two friends chatting	15	3	20
9. Negotiation, publishers planning meeting	68	16	24
10. Language-in-action	47	5	10
11. Language-in-action	49	4	8
12. School discussion between teacher and pupils	65	13	20
13. At the hairdresser's	59	4	7
14. An elderly lady reminisces (Informal interview style)	19	1	5
15. Political debate	10	0	0

The excerpts range from very informal (e.g., the first two excerpts) to very formal (e.g., the last two). The analysis of the data reveals that echoing occurs most frequently in interactional conversations that sit in the middle of the formality cline, the two extremes being reflected in Excerpt 15, a political debate and in Excerpt 1, between husband and wife, as against Excerpts 6 and 8, between relatives and friends who have not seen each other for quite some time.

It is noticeable that frequencies of echoing vary to quite a considerable extent in informal conversations, as in Excerpt 1, mainly between husband and wife, and in Excerpt 9, among colleagues. Both of them are informal conversations about making some plans. The difference is also quite obvious in Excerpt 3 between two close friends who meet very often and in Excerpt 8, between two friends who have not seen each other for some time. Excerpt 4, between pupils and Excerpt 5, among university students, also exhibit some difference in the frequency of echoing.

To sum up, echoing mostly occurs in conversations that are neither formal nor too informal and within those more informal conver-

sations the tendency is that the closer the ties you have with the other participant(s), the fewer instances of echoing occur. It means that whether echoing occurs or not, and if it does occur, whether its frequency is high or low, depends on two factors: not only on the type of conversation, i.e., its degree of formality, but also on the roles and relationships between participants.

Another distinction has often been drawn in discourse analysis between the "transactional" and "interactional" functions of language (Brown and Yule, 1983): that function which serves in the expression of "content" is termed as *transactional,* and that function involved in expressing social relations and personal attitudes is described as *interactional.* This distinction is very useful as it serves to help the study of the distribution of echoing among participants of a conversation.

However, we should bear in mind that while a distinction between "transactional" and "interactional" language is being made, it is also to be noted that "it would be unlikely that, on any occasion, a natural language utterance would be used to fulfill one function, to the total exclusion of the other" (Brown and Yule, *ibidem,* p. 1). According to Carter and McCarthy, interactional language is language which is primarily personal and social in orientation. Its effective use normally allows social and interpersonal relations to be maintained. In some contexts such as service encounters or even sometimes in formal interviews it is combined with transactional language to soften and make less forbidding the business of getting certain tasks done (Carter and McCarthy, 1997, p. 17). Therefore the excerpts of conversations I have chosen for this purpose are better described as "more transactional" or "more interactional".

The transactional conversational excerpts chosen for comparison and contrast are Excerpts 12 and 13. One is between teacher and pupils and one between hairdresser and customer. In both excerpts, there is a goal –"solving problems of the real in terms of actually doing anything" (Cheepen and Monaghan, 1990, p. 27): teacher-pupil verbal interaction for pedagogic purpose; hairdresser-customer dialogue for getting the hair done properly. There is one person in control of the conversation and the teacher and the hairdresser are in authority. The interaction is asymmetrical in nature in terms of social and institutional status.

The similarity between the interactional conversations chosen for this purpose is obvious. Excerpts 5, 8 and 9 are all informal interactional conversations where participants are social equals (i.e. symmet-

rical in terms of social and institutional status), with frequent turn changes and topic shifts.

Data reveal that the greatest difference in relation to echoing is that to a considerable extent the echoer differs in these two different speech types. In Excerpts 12 and 13, which belong to the transactional conversation, the social relation is unequal. There is always one in authority. The teacher conducts the class, the doctor tries to get more information from the patient for the benefit of diagnosis and the hairdresser tries to get a clearer idea of the customer's request. All three of them are in control of the conversation. They want to pin down what the other has said, to draw a conclusion, to get more detailed, exact information from the other participant(s). Under such circumstances, the one enjoying the relatively higher social power and status is the one who echoes what the other participant(s) has said. Let us take a look at echoing in the two excerpts chosen for this purpose.

Teacher-pupils

In Excerpt 12 there are altogether fourteen instances of echoing. The teacher echoes seven times and seven echoes are uttered by the pupils. However the fact that pupils echo as well does not go contrary to the conclusion that the one in higher social power or status does most of the echoing because the echoings uttered by pupils are echoings of pupils rather than echoings of the teacher.

In a teacher-pupil interaction, the teacher is often interested not in the information pupils provide, but in the pupil's performance or utterance of the information. One of the linguistic means the teacher quite often employs is echoing with some variation, turning a statement into a question by using the pupils' expressions, to elicit more exact, specific answers from his/her pupils. Examples:

2.
Teacher: What do you have to do, then, in the evenings, if you want to go out, when …?
Pupil: *On the underground.*
Teacher: *Down the underground?* What's the underground?

3.
Teacher: What - in the arcade off John Foss Square?
Pupil: No - *underneath* Russell Sports.
Teacher: *Underneath?* That's … under the car parks.
Pupil: Yeah.

In these two segments, the teacher is responding encouragingly by turning the statements into questions, a strategy designed to make the students expand on a point.

Being the one in social power assigned by the genre, the teacher always controls and shapes the conversation. Three instances are found where the teacher draws conclusions from what the students have said, echoing them with some variation. Example:

4.

Teacher:	So what kind of things would you like to see in this building that you could have? Body-popping is one - a room for that…
Pupil (4):	Space invaders … stuff like that.
Teacher:	But you can't get these in … in arcades in town? Or do you have to be…
Pupil (4):	Yeah - *but you've got to be older.*
Pupil (5):	*You got to be 18.*
Pupil (4):	*You got to be over 18.*
Teacher:	***So you'd like to have an arcade where you could go … without having to be over 18.***

In this teacher-pupils exchange, pupils are trying to respond to the teacher's question. Although the teacher is outnumbered by his pupils, the teacher is in control of the discussion. Pupil 4 is trying to be informative: "… you've got to be older". But how much older? Pupil 5 comes in here: "You got to be 18". Pupil 4 provides more exact information: "You got to be over 18". The three turns go from "to be older", to "to be 18", to "to be over 18", each time making the information more precise. At the end of this segment the teacher makes a conclusion: "So you'd like to have an arcade where you could go … without having to be over 18". This often takes place in the genre of transactional conversation while one participant is in control of the conversation. It is usually the one in authority who makes the conclusion, by means of echoing on the semantic level what the other participants have said.

Not all lessons are exactly the same so the use of this example will vary. There is certainly variation between teachers, between subject areas, and variation and change across the years of schooling. However, I believe that this example is quite characteristic of the generic features shared by many lessons.

Excerpt 13 shares certain features with Excerpt 12. They belong to the genre in which texts are constructed by more than one participant, one of whom has significantly greater power (in terms of expertise and
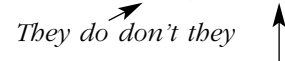
knowledge) assigned by the genre –the teacher and the hairdresser, the former imparting knowledge, the latter styling the hair. The more powerful participant controls and shapes the spoken discourse. In this excerpt, a conversation at the hairdresser's between a hairdresser and a customer, three instances of echoing are found and they are all undertaken by the hairdresser. The purpose of echoing in this case is that the hairdresser is trying to find the right word, or get more exact information from the customer, in order to meet the needs of her customer. The hairdresser constantly has to clarify (or rephrase the customer's utterances in more professional terms) and to draw conclusions from what the customer has said.

Let us now turn to the more interactional conversations. As was revealed earlier, in the more informal conversations occurrences of echoing are in direct proportion to the personal relationship between participants, which differs in terms of the amount of specific cultural or world knowledge they share. If the participants share a large amount of common ground (as between husband and wife, mother and daughter, close friends who see each other daily), echoing is seldom employed, while for colleagues, relatives, friends who have not seen each other for some time, echoing frequently occurs in order to establish, maintain and consolidate the relationship, among many other purposes. In conversations such as Excerpts 5 (students chatting round the tea table), 7 (narration to relatives) and 8 (between two friends who have not seen each other for some time), which belong to the interactional conversation in an informal atmosphere with frequent turn changes, no pre-set topics, equally distributed or shifting conversation roles, it is found that when the social relations between participants are neither too close nor too distant (friends, students, relatives, etc.), echoing not only occurs frequently but is also employed as a spoken discourse strategy by every participant involved. From the three excerpts I have chosen, fourteen instances of echoing occur, and they are employed by seven participants out of the total number of eight.

As has already been mentioned, an informal interactional conversation is always more than an exchange of bits of information. In this spoken discourse context, how people talk is at least as important as what is being talked about. The characteristics of an interactional conversation (conversation among friends, relatives, colleagues who share more or less the same norms and features) is that the distribution of power is such that the conversation does not provide anyone with the power to control the conversation in terms of topic and topic shift, or

turn allocation, and echoing is a linguistic resource for the establishment, maintenance and consolidation of the friendship, which every participant is responsible for. For example, in Excerpt 5, we find several instances of echoing in one segment:

> Excerpt 5, students chatting round the tea-table

<S 02>   Oh *those cherry Bakewells look lovely*

<S 03>   *They do don't they*

<S 01>   Oh *they were ... gorgeous ...* did you say you'd like a cup of tea

<S 02>   Yes

<S 03>   All right then

<S 01>   *Sound like a right mother* don't I

<S 03>   *You do*

<S 02>   But *they would go smashing* with a cup of tea wouldn't they

<S 01>   *They would* yeah

<S 03>   *Cup of tea and a fag*

<S 02>   *Cup of tea and a fag* Misses we're gonna have to move *the table* I think

<S 03>   Yeah d'you like *Sheila's table* she's constructed of erm boots and a book

<S 01>   Oh *that's brilliant*

<S 03>   Eh *that's really good* there look

<S 02>   I'll just put the Milky Way wrapper as the little extra support

<S 03>   I like Sunday nights for some reason, I don't know why

<S 02>   cos *you come home*

<S 03>   *I come home*

<S 02>   *You come home to us*

<S 01>   (([Inaudible])) go out

<S 02>   Yeah yeah

<S 03>   *Sunday's a really nice day I think*
                       ↑
<S 02>   *It certainly is*
                       ↑
<S 03>   *It's a really nice relaxing day*

The examination of the data therefore leads to the conclusion that the rule for conversations like the ones between teacher and pupil, hairdresser and customer, doctor and patient that belong to the transactional conversations is that it is overwhelmingly the one in authority (in terms of expertise and knowledge) who does most of the echoing, while in interactional conversations represented by Excerpts 5, 7 and 8, where there is no power difference and no participant assumes a differentiated directing role, every participant employs the strategy of echoing whether in a multi-party conversation or a conversation involved with only two. The following points can conclude this section:

1.   The occurrence of echoing depends to a large extent on the relationship between the conversational participants and the formality of the conversation.

2.   The relation of dependency works the other way round as well: echoing is one of the clues to the different social roles and different speech types that can be found in the linguistic choices conversational interactants make. The frequency and distribution of echoing thus provide insights into the norms and values of a speech community.

3.   The distribution of echoing between (among) participants of a conversation depends on whether the conversation is a transactional or interactional conversation. That is, the distribution of power in the interaction is important for the distribution of echoing.

4.   The more equally distributed the echoing in interactional conversation, the more convergence there is between the conversational participants.

5.   Data analysis II – social functions

But why does echoing occur more frequently in some interactions rather than in others? What is the possible explanation for all the dif-

ferences? In fact the questions themselves point to one of the social functions (for other functions echoing plays, such as its function in turn allocation, topic exchange, please refer to Zhang, 1998) echoing performs in the more interactional conversations: it makes a contribution to the establishment, maintenance or consolidation of social relations. As it is the underlying and overall function of echoing, it merits special attention in this section.

Brown and Yule (1983) maintain that in conversations, people use various strategies for interactional behaviour to achieve satisfaction of certain wants. This paper argues that the employment of echoing reflects the echoer's desire for making the other(s) feel good (in accordance with Lakoff's Politeness Maxims, 1973). By echoing, people are flouting on purpose one of Grice's well-known Cooperative Maxims –be brief– as echoing appears to have a very low focus on informational content, but aims at establishing and consolidating relations. Echoing, used deliberately, becomes what is referred to as *conversational implicature*, as it acquires a new meaning in addition to the literal meaning.

According to Giles and Coupland (1991, p. 75), interactions usually have multiple goals, and language behaviours often have multiple social meanings for hearers. Analysis of this data reveals that echoes of words, phrases and whole utterances appear more to be intended as contributions to a conversation in building and maintaining social relations than to be taken as instances of information-giving (see also Brown and Yule, 1983, p. 3). Indeed, on occasions, conversation can be seen as "uninformative" and "tells the hearer nothing" (Lyons, 1977, p. 33). It is to show attentiveness and agreement with the speaker, to establish common ground and to show they share the same perspective towards the world. Therefore echoing is far from a meaningless act. Echoing is not "saying" much, but is "doing" quite a lot. It is one of the means that conversationalists employ in order to maintain agreement, among many other functions, and the means by which speakers and hearers attempt to save face.

I agree with Stenström (1984) who believes that conversation is a social activity involving two or more participants who talk about something. Who they are, how well they know each other, their shared knowledge and what they are talking about is all reflected in the language they use and the strategies they adopt.

In a very formal conversation, like a political debate such as Excerpt 15, participants do not interact with the aim of seeking common ground.

Rather, they will try every means to emphasize their own social identity, to accentuate differences between them and dissociate from each other. Therefore, echoing, a strategy to seek common ground and to make the other(s) feel good, is rarely employed in formal conversations.

In the more informal conversations, it seems to follow from this that the greater the participants' awareness and need to seek common ground, to establish and consolidate their relationship, the higher the frequency of echoing there will be.

For people who have the strongest bonds, echoing for the purpose of establishing and maintaining their relation is found to be more frequently absent, as between wife and husband, or mother and daughter. On the one hand they share such a large common ground that there is little need for one to reinterpret what the other is saying and on the other, the relation between husband and wife, or mother and daughter, is solid or comparatively solid, so that there is little need to make an effort to establish or maintain the relationship, which already exists. (This might give some food for thought to social workers: will the relationship between man and wife be strengthened if each one of them shows more attentiveness to what the other is talking about, by echoing a bit?) It is interesting to note that this coincides with Stenström's discovery (*ibidem,* 243) that among the eleven transcribed texts she studied, the conversations between a married couple have far fewer follow-up moves than any other texts she studied.

This will also account for the near absence of echoing in conversations between close friends, who know each other very well, as in Excerpt 3. However, between friends who have not seen each other for some time as in Excerpt 8 rather than between friends who frequently meet as in Excerpt 3, and between relatives as in Excerpt 6 rather than between husband and wife as in Excerpt 1, the need to catch up with each other, to maintain and consolidate the relation already established becomes of great importance. Echoing then becomes one of the linguistic means by which this purpose is achieved.

The difference in the occurrence of echoing in Excerpt 4 between pupils and Excerpt 5 among university students might be explained by the fact that university students are more aware of social relations and face values than pupils who are several years younger.

Although both excerpts of conversations in Excerpts 9 and 1 are about planning (the publishers planning some publication [9] and husband and wife planning a holiday [1]), echoing occurs in the former over twice as many times as in the latter. (In fact, the few instances of

echoing in Excerpt 1 are not between the couple, but between either husband and the family guest, or wife and the family guest). The different relationships between participants account for this difference again. Between colleagues it is more important to seek common ground, to negotiate peer solidarity, to establish social relationship and to agree on points of view. People act in a more polite way. Face value is taken into more consideration. At the publishers' meeting, we find that the participants make more efforts to make the others feel good, to reassure, to mitigate or to show agreement by the means of echoing.

In conclusion, it is generally true of echoing in the more interactional spoken discourse in which participants are so strongly motivated to get along with each other that its normal function is not simply to facilitate the exchange of information but also to allow the formation of social relationships between the speaker and the listener(s). In other words, it contains information which is to be found not so much on the content level as on the level of social relationships. What matters is that the social relationships are consolidated and we can see clearly that the seemingly meaningless, redundant echoings of utterances that seem to go against Grice's Cooperative Maxims in reality make both sides feel that they are listening attentively to the other and that they share the same view towards the world, allowing the convergent progression of particular interactional conversations.

6. Raising the awareness of echoing

"Echoing" has been conventionally regarded as undesirable in conversation. English language learners are constantly discouraged to repeat, to echo, what the speaker has said. It is believed to slow down the pace of a conversation and speakers are accused of violating Gricean maxims and having little contribution to the propositional content of the utterances. Yet close observation of real-life everyday conversational discourse has revealed that a great deal of conversation contains echoing. It is in certain spoken discourse types a linguistic device, a mutually acceptable strategy, employed by conversational participants although variability in extent and frequency of echoing could differ with culture and individual style. Winter (1979, p. 101) rightly states "A common observation that everyone can make for themselves is that many clauses are repeated, either partially or (almost) entirely, in speech, and in writing, the most obvious kind of repetition being the very common partially repeated structures of the clause". Gillian Brown (1977, p. 113)

also believes that "the repetition of what someone else says, whether whole phrases or words abstracted from phrases, is a common feature of all sorts of dialogues, formal or informal". Hymes (1981), Becker (1984), and Bolinger (1961) all suggest that repetition is at the heart not only of how a particular discourse is created, but also how discourse itself is created. Tannen (1989, p. 46) claims boldly that: "repetition is at the heart of language", and Toolan calls repetition "the mother device of all expressive devices, the heart of rhetoric, the essence and the unmasking of language". (1996, p. 253)

The argument for enhancing an awareness of echoing for all L2 speakers is in line with the promotion of greater language awareness "which helps learners to develop good habits of noticing and observing language, especially through strategies of comparison and contrast" (Carter and McCarthy, 1997, p. 9). This paper argues that language learners should be made aware of this linguistic means of echoing which English speakers can resort to in participating in a conversation. They should realize at an early stage that language is essentially a social phenomenon. It takes two to converse and in the course of a conversation, either party (or, all the parties involved if it is a multi-party conversation) should contribute to its development by making access to the linguistic choices open to them in any given situations. A speaker who speaks with appropriate echoing of the other participant(s)' utterance(s) in appropriate contexts should be considered as signaling fluency, not as signaling hesitancy, or childishness.

Certainly it is not enough to raise language learners' awareness of this particular linguistic feature by exposing them to it in texts of all kinds. Language learners also need to be provided with pedagogic discoursal contexts to practice echoing, i.e. contexts should be created for learners to play the appropriate role. Exercises must also be devised which are meant to help learners of English to learn which type of echoing, or what combinations of echoing with its linguistic environment, are socially appropriate on a particular interactive occasion. They should be intended to help develop in learners the grammatical as well as the pragmatic skills necessary to use the right forms for the right functions in the right contexts.

6.1. Naturally occurring data as teaching materials

The fact that naturally occurring data is made available for extracting teaching materials is in close connection with the rapid progress of

corpora. The corpus that is growing larger and larger daily provides us with objective evidence and enables us, especially the trained analysts, to see linguistic features that traditional grammarians were not able to perceive in their days. It is one of the tools that enable researchers to work more scientifically.

However, some applied linguists doubt whether it is essential for language learners to learn such authentic linguistic features as echoing, as these people "mostly need English as a lingua franca for interpersonal and professional contact between non-native speakers of the language" (Prodromou, 1996, p. 89). Therefore the occasions on which they use the language will most probably be quite formal, such as doing business or delivering lectures.

This paper holds that conversational teaching materials should draw from a corpus of naturally occurring data. As language workers, it is a shame to continue to ignore the systematic linguistic features we get from real-life conversations such as echoing. It is our duty to introduce to learners the language of the real world. It should be considered a waste of time, learning something that one will never use in one's life on the student's part, and a sin on the part of the teacher, teaching students useless sentence structures that do not exist in real life.

This paper therefore holds that an awareness and understanding of "echoing" in spoken English is essential for all English language learners, although the learners' different purposes in learning the language should be taken into consideration. In other words, learners must be told how, when and above all why it is used in appropriate contexts. Therefore the argument between applied linguists should not be whether authentic language should be introduced in pedagogic materials, but rather, **who should learn it**, **at what stage should they start to learn it**, **and how should they learn it**.

This paper proposes that for English language workers, who will be working in the area of language teaching, linguistics, and who will have direct contact with native speakers of the language, it is not only necessary but essential to be aware of, to understand and also to acquire the use of it.

To sum up, it is important to expose the students, who aim to become language workers and who aim to study and work abroad, to carefully selected naturally occurring conversations, to provide them with real-life conversations in a range of different contexts and with commentaries on the selected conversations as well as exercises. It is a controversial issue at this moment: at what stage the students should

be using real-life conversations for language learning. However the teacher can isolate, present and exemplify certain linguistic features like echoing from naturally occurring data at an early stage, by drawing students' attention to its existence. Using whole excerpts of real-life conversations may come at a later stage (at an intermediate level) so that language learners will find it easier to understand how echoing can be used for a range of affective meanings.

One pioneering work in the use of real-life spoken English for pedagogic materials is undertaken by Carter and McCarthy (1997) in their *Exploring Spoken English,* in which they describe and comment on a collection of extensive samples of naturalistic conversational data.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper has sought to present a new set of linguistic features in spoken discourse, to probe deep into the relation between the linguistic manifestations and the functions they perform in social life, for a better understanding and analysis of conversational materials, and for providing a set of linguistic choices for language speakers. The application of the findings to pedagogic conversational materials aims at making a contribution to narrowing the gap between contrived conversations in traditional teaching materials and conversations from real life.

I feel uneasy about suggesting yet another area that overworked language teachers and learners should attend to. However, the pervasive feature of echoing in real life spoken discourse genres denies to be ignored. It is important to sensitise students to the appropriate use of echoing. If language teachers and language teaching materials designers could bear in mind the importance of instructing learners to behave in ways specified by the activity and where the goal is a simulation of "real life" discourse, where such linguistic features as echoing are extremely common but have so far escaped the attention of linguists and language teachers, and if echoing is appropriately considered in designing role-play and interactional activities, language learners' proficiency and development in a second language will be facilitated and supported.

Brief introduction of the excerpts

The first excerpt takes place between a married couple in their own home in the presence of a family relative who is a house guest. They are planning

their next holiday and thus making decisions. The atmosphere is therefore towards a more informal end between intimate family members.

In the second excerpt there are two speakers, a mother and her daughter. They are at home, talking about family matters and family arrangements in a relaxed and easy manner.

The third excerpt is between two young women, in their early 20s, traveling by car. They are very close friends who see each other frequently. In the excerpt they are talking about Speaker 1's forthcoming wedding.

In excerpt 4, two pupils are talking in one's house.

In excerpt 5, three female students sharing accommodation are chatting round the tea-table on a Sunday afternoon. It takes place in a relaxed atmosphere, with no fixed topic and no one is in charge of the conversation.

Excerpt 6 takes place among relatives. They are talking in an informal atmosphere about railway tickets and things related.

Excerpt 7 is mainly an excerpt of oral narration. In this narrative the initial action revolves around a key piece of information concerning Speaker 1, which is what she wears, almost all of the time.

Two old friends (adult British males) in excerpt 8 meet after not having seen each other for a few years. The conversation takes place in a pub garden on a hot summer's evening. They are trying to catch up with each other. Speaker 1 is Scottish and Speaker 2 is of Irish ancestry.

There are three participants in excerpt 9. They are colleagues attending a meeting held at the headquarters of Cambridge University Press, planning the production schedules for English Language Teaching books and the accompanying tapes. They are trying to arrive at a number of decisions, negotiate their way to the important decisions. However, since the people at the meeting know each other well and work closely every day the atmosphere is quite informal.

In excerpt 10, there is a group of 4 people who are assembling a portable baby's cot in the bedroom of a relative's house, where Speaker 1 and Speaker 3 are staying for the weekend with their young baby. Speaker 2 is husband of Speaker 4. This is particular because its language is what we call "language-in-action". That is to say, the language used is almost all dependent on what the people are doing at the moment.

Excerpt 11 was recorded in the kitchen of a family home; all the participants are members of one family. It is similar to Excerpt 1 in the sense that the language in both of them are language-in-action. The family are cooking rice for a family meal. The main focus of the talk is on the cooking of the rice and on the procedures involved in its cooking.

Excerpt 12 is a discussion between an English teacher and a small group of secondary school pupils. The social relation in this excerpt is asymmetrical, with the teacher in authority. The teacher has asked them to consider how they would spend £10,000 "for the benefit of the local community". Even though the teacher is outnumbered by his pupils, the teacher is in control of the discussion.

Excerpt 13 is between a hair dresser and her customer. They are talking in order to reach an agreement as to how the hair is to be cut and styled.

In excerpt 14, an 84-year-old English woman, brought up in Ireland, reminisces about her youth to her great niece, who asks her questions about herself in an informal yet interview-style conversation.

Excerpt 15 is taken from a televised political debate with a panel of politicians and a chairperson, where questions are set by members of the audience and answered in turn by each panel-member. Speaker 1 is the television presenter, Speaker 2 is a member of parliament taking part in the televised debate, Speaker 3 is a member of studio audience and Speaker 4 is a member of the panel. The atmosphere is very formal and there is a fixed topic.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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