

15. Conversation Patterns in Icelandic and Italian People: Similarities and Differences in Rhythm and Accommodation

Alessia AGLIATI, Antonietta VESCOVO, Luigi ANOLLI

Abstract. Conversation may be considered as a *universal communication system* which performs social and interactive cue of communication. Although it could appear casual, even chaotic and confused, due to its spontaneous nature, a deep and intrinsic organization, grounded on a shared social order, is involved in conversational stream which follows given cultural standards. In the present study a *sequence structural analysis* of conversation was carried out. In particular, rhythm and accommodation in conversation patterns in Icelandic and Italian people were focused to detect specific kinetic T-patterns by using the software THEME 2001.

Forty conversations between Icelandic and Italian couples of known and unknown individuals have been videotaped and analysed zooming on gestures, turn-taking and body movements displayed during the conversation flow. Data highlighted the country effect on conversation rhythm: number and frequency of time patterns were deeply different between Icelandic and Italian couples, as the former turned out to manage the temporal organization in a more synchronous and regular way than the latter. Furthermore, peculiar gestures were recognized for Icelandic and Italian couples, underlining systematic differences in the cultural framework.

Keywords: Conversation; rhythm; gestures; accommodation; cultural differences.

Contents

15.1	Introduction.....	224
15.2	Objectives and hypotheses.....	226
15.3	Method and instruments	227
15.4	Analysis and results	228
15.5	Discussion.....	231
15.6	Conclusion and future directions	234
15.7	References.....	235

15.1 Introduction

15.1.1 Variability and regularity in conversation patterns

Conversation is among the most pervasive form of human interaction [1]. Cherry [2] argued that “it [...] is the fundamental unit of human communication”, drawing attention to the practices through which conversation is organized, as such analysis enables to understand how human beings communicate each other in a given cultural framework. Generally speaking, conversation may be considered as a sequence of communicative turnovers, variable from few quips to hours lasting, involving two or more participants, who are speaking in a more or less formal way, referring to any kind of topic in nature. Due to this wide variability and flexibility, conversation comes to be a basic communicative activity suitable to a wide range of conditions in different contexts [3].

Although conversation might appear casual, even chaotic and confused, due to its spontaneous nature, a deep and intrinsic organization, grounded on a shared social order, is involved in conversation stream which follows defined cultural standards. As a rule, three main portions may be recognized in a standard conversation: a) the beginning (opening) in which identification and acknowledgment of participants occur; b) the topic's development; c) the end (closing) which points out the leave taking. Starting from this partition, conversation analysis enables to find out a comprehensive format in which regularities, routines and patterns are detectable and recognizable, so that it becomes a graspable and interpretable human activity [3]. Apparently disorganized and sometimes purposeless, conversation is actually organized and ruled out by cultural standards and norms that produce and reproduce social organization in a reflexive manner. In such a way patterns of repetitive action units may be taken in evidence and analysed.

The present study follows the *social pragmatic perspective* on conversation, according to which conversation is a sequence of exchanges based on defined rules. The pragmatics is the study of how people use language to communicate and accomplish their goals in interaction, in other words it is a speech act model. This perspective differs from others approaches to the study of language in that it focuses on how speakers design their talk to convey particular social actions and how participants organize their talk [4, 5]. The words used in conversation do not primarily and strictly reproduce internal concepts and mental representations; rather, participants, talking together, make conversation by uttering and answering to words; in such a way they co-construct their interaction by using words. In a similar manner, they co-construct images and representations of themselves, the interlocutor, their relationship, and their culture. As an outcome, participants in conversation co-construct their personal, social and cultural worlds [6].

15.1.2 Rhythm, accommodation and behaviour richness in conversation

Herein two main principles of the social pragmatic perspective on conversation will be briefly taken in consideration. First, conversation is ruled out by a given *rhythm of turnover* and *accommodation*. People need to coordinate their talk, *taking floor* (becoming speaker in interaction) in a well-timed way, so that actions of a participant dovetail with those of the other. By turns and in a sequence of turns, participants make their participation synchronous and accomplish action together. The synchronous rhythm of communication may be deemed as a basic feature of conversation, as it makes fluent and smooth turnover possible.

In this domain Accommodation Theory, sketched out by Giles [7], provides a useful device to analyse and understand the processes by which participants adjust their communicative action within the conversation stream, and by which they accommodate

each other via a gradual, continuous and mutual approaching. Such a theory foresees that, in case participants want to show agreement, harmony, and linking, or enhance the communication effectiveness, or else obtain social approval, they should accommodate each other. In the same vein, to produce, share and understand the meaning of utterances' flow, they should act together taking into consideration what the interlocutor communicates in verbal or nonverbal way, and participating to the development of a given meaning path.

Second, according to the social pragmatic perspective, conversation is distinguished by *behaviour richness*, as it consists of more than spoken language. Conversation is a basic social activity involving two or more participants ("having a conversation") who weave the sequence of their communicative exchanges ("speaking or conversing") in that, at the same time, they are made up. As social activity, conversation faces the issue of coordination and co-regulation. In this field, gesture, gaze, body posture, facial mimics, and other nonverbal expression are important and useful devices to promote and further the conversation coordination between participants. As an outcome, participants communicate much more than they say, as in an aware or unaware way they leave each other many cues about their communicational intention. So, in the conversation stream there is much room for inferential process in the ascription of given mental representations and intentions to speech of interlocutors [3].

To sum up, conversation may be regarded as a universal communication system which in a polyphonic way performs social interaction between participants through a wide range of situations, from very formal ones (like a trial in a court) to very informal (like an occasional talk with an unknown) [3].

15.1.3 Culture and conversation

As a relevant issue, the social pragmatics principles should be deepened to analyse whether they display (or not) some variability among different cultures. On the one hand, pragmatics [8, 9] seems to provide arguments in favour of a universal position, according to which there are many invariables features that define what is for behaviour to constitute interaction. For example, some scholars like Grice [9], Turnbull [6], Boden and Zimmerman [10] argue that everywhere each participant has to coordinate his/her action with the interlocutor's action. In every culture the conversation format shows more or less the same design and sequence of patterns, as greetings, turn-taking, leave-taking, and the like. On the other hand, it is presupposed that in conversation participants co-construct their personal, social, and cultural worlds, and, as a consequence, their mental disposition towards those co-constructed worlds thoroughly influences the global organization of conversation [11, 12]. According to other scholars like Ochs, Duranti, Goodwin, and Levinson, cultural format severely shapes the communicative process in nature, conversation included. As Grader [13] pointed out, a comparative conversation analysis among different cultures highlights how people manage the time use in a very different way during the conversation stream.

Within this domain, it is worthwhile to deepen time and word, as they are two key facets of conversation.

First, as regards *time*, within talk-in-interaction, a given culture provides people with standards and resources that may be employed both to manage time in the world being represented through talk, and to extrapolate future events in the current and future interactions. Such time management in the conversation stream is framed, among other cues, also by participants' movements. Through their gestures and body postures which are interactively arranged, they display crucial information about the temporal and sequential organization of their joint participation in the current interaction [14].

So-called *chronemics* analyses the way people manage and design their use of time in conversation setting. According to Hall [15, 16], only within certain societies time is a matter of great importance and significance. Some cultures, defined “slow cultures”, relate to time as a circular phenomenon, in which there is no pressure or anxiety about the future. In these societies, such as Asian, or African, or else South American ones, polychronic time use, in which many things occur simultaneously, is prevailing. As a consequence, for these societies there is no imperative need to achieve or create newness, or to produce more than absolutely necessary to survive. In these cultures, people slowly talk, slowly eat, and slowly walk. According to Hall, such societies have successfully integrated the past and future into a peaceful sense of present. Conversely, the so-called “fast cultures”, like Western societies, devise a linear perspective of time, ruled by the principle “one-thing-at-a-time”. In these societies, people are expected to lean more toward strict planning, time allocation, and prioritizing in attempting to meet their obligations. They have a monochronic time use, and, as a rule, they anxiously run towards the future and the progress. Usually, they fast talk, fast walk, fast eat, and so on.

Second, as for *word*, cultures display great differences referring to turn-taking, silence, and word use. In many countries in Africa, South America, Mediterranean area people are talkative and chattering, as they are prone to speak and gossip. Remarkably, in these so-called “word cultures”, a quick rhythm in uttering with short (full and empty) pauses occur in standard conversation. Likewise, speedy turn-taking and short transitional times take place. In opposite way, silence is deemed to be a kind of thread, as it becomes charged with negative meanings of indifference, resistance, mistrust, even hostility in some circumstances.

Conversely, there are cultures that do not like to talk and are much less loquacious. In these so-called “silence cultures” like Japanese, Apache, Navajos, and Paliyan, participants have long silence pauses in turnover, as a signal of cogitation and circumspection. For instance, in the conversation among Lapp some minutes of silence may occur between a plain request and the consequent reply. As a consequence, the conversation rhythm is rather slow, and silence is conceived as an evidence of trust, confidence, agreement, and harmony.

15.2 Objectives and hypotheses

Assuming culture as a general framework, the current research took into consideration how rhythm, sequential order of turns, word use, gestures and other nonverbal behaviours may be affected by culture during conversation in Icelandic and Italian people. The general aim was focused on analysing and describing the Icelandic and Italian style of interaction in a cooperative situation. In particular, we aimed at investigating how both the temporal management of conversation and non verbal behaviour as displayed by gestures and posture varied in conformity with cultural standards.

In this field three research hypotheses were outlined. First, in agreement with Moraro [17] study, it was hypothesized that nonverbal patterns were differently organized and managed by Icelandic and Italian people. Distinctly, according to the extant literature it was supposed that North European people would have coordinated their conversation following most regular shaped sequences of repetitive actions than Mediterranean one. In particular, it was expected that higher number of action patterns would be detected in Icelandic interaction than in Italian one. Second, according to the previous researches of Graham and Argyle [18], and in conformity with the cultural stereotypes, it was hypothesized that Icelandic and Italian people would have shown a great difference in gesture during conversation. Particularly, it was expected that Italian people would have

displayed a higher number of gestures than Icelandic ones. Third, in agreement with the studies of Goodwin [14], it was supposed that Icelandic and Italian people would have used different types of gestures. In particular, it was hypothesized that Icelandic people in conversation would have displayed gestures not available in Italian ones, and vice versa.

15.3 Method and instruments

15.3.1 Participants

Twenty Icelandic and twenty Italian couples of participants took part in this experiment. Icelandic subjects were recruited in University of Iceland in Reykjavik and Italian ones in Catholic University in Milan. All participants belonged to the middle socio-economic class. Half of couples were formed by individuals who knew each other, and half of them were composed by individuals who were unknown. Subjects' gender was balanced in the experiment, so that half of individuals were males and half of them females. All participants were between 20 and 30 years. Italian subjects' age was 23.75 years on average. In particular, the age mean for couples of individuals who knew each other was 23.35 years, while for individuals who were unknown was 24.15; males were 24 years old on average, while females were 23.5. The age mean for Icelandic subjects was 22.8 years. For couples of friends the age mean was 22.65, while in couples of unknown was 22.95; males were 23.10 years old on average, while females were 22.5. Videotaping each participant and the subsequent use of data for research purposes were approved and authorized by each of subjects.

15.3.2 Procedure

The present research was partly carried out in the Communication Psychology lab at Catholic University, and partly in the Human Behavior Laboratory of Reykjavik, both equipped with two cameras (split-screen technique). Each couple of participants was invited to enter the room accompanied by the experimenter. Before beginning the experiment, subjects who formed couples of friends were invited to compile individually a questionnaire about the characteristics of their friendship [19]. The experimental task was then introduced: the experimenter suggested a cooperative creative task to each couple. In particular, participants were asked to think up and to talk about an advertising of a bubble bath, as if they were creative and advertising experts, inventing the mood, the story, the leading character, the music, and the like for television advertising. Each interaction lasted 15 minutes and was video recorded. However, only a segment was taken into consideration for subsequent analysis: from second to seventh minute.

15.3.3 The nonverbal behaviour grid

To code the participants' behaviour a nonverbal grid, named *Variable Value Table* (VVT), was ad hoc developed. Forty-eight behaviour units (minimal coded action units), portioned in nine categories, were mapped into the grid: hands, arms, head, fingers, trunk, shoulders, gaze direction, face, turn-taking, as shown in table 15.1. The mostly behaviour units were taken from grids used in previous studies on nonverbal behaviour [20, 21].

Items	Description	Items	Description	Items	Description
<i>1. Hands</i>		<i>2. Fingers</i>		<i>5. Trunk</i>	
M1	Rotation	D1	Pointing	BU1	Trunk forward
M2	Hand contact	D2	Counting	BU2	Tilt trunk left or right
M3	Crossed hands	D3	Negation by fingers	BU3	Trunk back
M4	Hand on face	D4	Pianist	BU4	Swinging
M5	Hand on body				
M6	Hand on chair	<i>3. Arms</i>		<i>6. Face</i>	
M7	Hand on hair	BR1	Arms upward	SO1	Smile (AU6+12)
M8	Palm inward	BR2	Crossed arms	SO2	Laugh (AU6+12+25and/or26)
M9	Palm forward	BR3	Arms forward		
M10	Palm down	BR4	Open arms	<i>7. Gaze</i>	
M11	Palm upward	BR5	Dangling arms	S1	Avert gaze
M12	Palm back	BR6	Arms back		
M13	Palm outside	BR7	Bend arms	<i>8. Shoulders</i>	
M14	Fist			SP1	Shoulders shrug
M15	Bag-hand	<i>4. Head</i>		<i>9. Turn</i>	
M16	Mirror-hands	T1	Head forward	TU	Speak
M17	Rubbing hands	T2	Head down		
M18	Ax-hand	T3	Head back		
M19	Hitchhiking	T4	Tilt head l/r		
M20	Ring	T5	Tilt head up/down		
M21	Hands away	T6	Negation by head		
M22	Ball-hands				

Table 15.1 List of behaviour units included in the grid

The categories were then coded frame by frame using THEME Coder. The coding was done separately for each behaviour unit, that is, first of all occurrences of behaviour A were recorded, then all of behaviour B and so on. This procedure yielded a highly reliable scoring. Ten sequences were recorded by a second observer. Reliability was calculated according to McGrew formula [22] as an index of concordance: a reliability of 85% was found between the coders. The behaviour units were then analyzed with THEME [23, 24], by which T-patterns were detected. Each T-pattern is made of *events* that include the actor involved and the beginning or ending behaviour unit.

15.4 Analysis and results

15.4.1 Analysis of conversation rhythm

A univariate analysis of variance was conducted on the number and the length of T-patterns as dependent variable, in order to examine the temporal management of conversation in Icelandic and Italian couples. Significant differences were found both for number and length of T-patterns. Icelandic participants coordinated their actions and gestures through longer and more frequent T-patterns than Italian ones. In particular, on average in the Icelandic couples 412 types of T-patterns were detected, while in Italian ones 318 types of T-patterns were observed on average.

Moreover, the length mean of T-patterns in Icelandic couples was 14.80 events long (i.e. it included 14.80 behaviour units on average), while mean length for Italian ones was 11.70. Two occurrences of these T-patterns are described in figure 15.1. On the left of the figure 1, a T-pattern was detected in an Italian known couple during their conversation. Such a T-pattern included five events and, in particular, highlighted how often these two Italian fellows overlapped in their conversation. The first two events were related to turn-taking – actorA, b, talking; actorB, b, talking – and showed that the two Italian participants

simultaneously began to take floor ten times. The whole T-pattern recurred three times in the same critical interval of time and embodied a third event, the *bag-hand*, a typical Italian gesture, as shown in the picture. On the right of the figure 1, another T-pattern was detected in Icelandic known couples during their conversation. Such a T-pattern, longer than Italian one, encompassed twelve events and displayed how often each one of the two Icelandic known participants took turn only after his/her partner has stopped. The first two events in this T-pattern concerned turn-taking – actorA, e, talking; actorB, b, talking – and they repeated, in the same order, twenty-one times into the same critical period of time.

Three other events (the sixth, the seventh, and the ninth) comprised in this T-pattern regarded gaze direction: actorA, b, avert gaze from his interlocutor; actorB, b, avert gaze from her interlocutor. The last two events included in this T-pattern concerned the *pianist*, a typical Icelandic gesture, displayed in the picture by both the participants simultaneously.

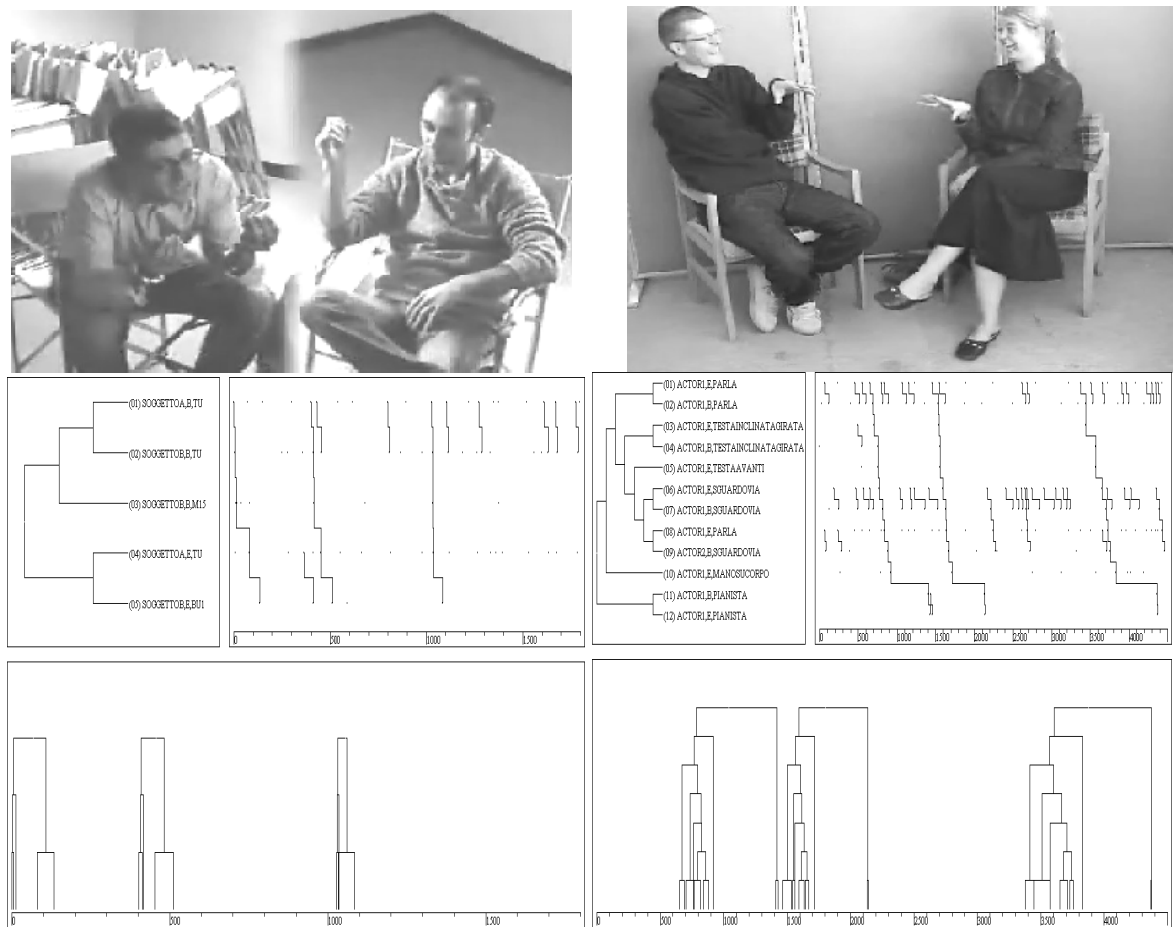


Figure 15.1 This figure includes a picture and a T-pattern both for Italians interaction and for Icelandic one. The picture on the left shows the “bag-hand”, the typical Italian gesture; the picture on the right presents the “pianist” displayed only by Icelandic subjects. The T-patterns show the different use of turnover displayed by Italians and Icelanders. The T-pattern on the left refers to an Italian interaction between friends, it includes five events ((1) *subjectA, b, turn*; (2) *subjectB, b, turn*; (3) *subjectB, b, bag-hand*; (4) *subjectA, e, turn*; (5) *subjectB, b, trunk forward*) and recurs three times in the same observation period. The T-pattern on the right refers to an Icelandic interaction between friends, it includes twelve events ((1) *subjectB, e, turn*; (2) *subjectA, b, turn*; (3) *subjectA, b, tilt head*; (4) *subjectA, e, tilt head*; (5) *subjectA, b, head forward*; (6) *subjectA, e, look away*; (7) *subjectB, b, look away*; (8) *subjectA, e, turn*; (9) *subjectB, b, look away*; (10) *subjectA, e, hand on body*; (11) *subjectA, b, pianist*; (12) *subjectA, e, pianist*), and it recurs three times in the same observation period.

15.4.2 Analysis of non-verbal behaviour in Icelandic and Italian conversation

To examine which kind of nonverbal cues Icelandic and Italian participants displayed in a cooperative interaction, a second analysis of variance was carried out on behaviour units frequency as dependent variable (48 items of the grid). Means and standard deviations are shown in table 15.2 and a comparison between Italian and Icelandic behaviour units is visible in figure 15.2.

Items	Icelanders		Italians		F	η^2	p ^(a)
	M	SD	M	SD			
Hand contact	1.55	1.83	2.85	2.43	7.391	.093	**
Crossed hands	.86	1.11	.64	.79	1.182	.016	
Hand on face	1.87	1.37	2.89	1.78	8.843	.109	**
Hand on hair	.22	.38	.82	1.21	8.493	.106	**
Palm inward	.31	.50	.68	.71	7.318	.092	**
Palm upward	.25	.52	.65	.81	7.222	.091	**
Palm back	.00	.00	.20	.44	8.592	.107	**
Bag-hand	.06	.18	.94	1.03	27.647	.277	**
Mirror-hands	.16	.36	.44	.69	5.314	.069	*
Ring	.01	.07	.10	.26	4.657	.061	*
Ball-hands	1.65	1.53	.03	.11	45.816	.389	**
Negation by finger	.04	.12	.00	.00	4.866	.063	*
Pianist	.43	.66	.03	.13	14.175	.164	**
Crossed arms	.09	.24	.07	.27	.231	.003	
Open arms	.06	.21	.18	.33	3.948	.052	*
Dangling arms	.05	.18	.05	.19	.019	.000	
Arms back	.11	.26	.00	.00	6.864	.087	*
Bend arms	.58	.63	.77	.65	1.875	.025	
Head forward	3.21	2.11	5.10	2.53	12.753	.150	**
Head back	.11	.24	.12	.33	.021	.000	
Tilt head left or right	1.68	1.47	.70	.61	15.903	.181	**
Trunk forward	.40	.71	.85	.95	6.988	.088	**
Swinging	.07	.25	.54	1.36	4.826	.063	*
Laugh	.90	1.11	2.17	1.52	17.987	.200	**
Avert gaze	7.78	3.29	6.27	2.26	5.792	.074	*
Speak	12.52	3.68	7.69	2.41	47.539	.398	**

Table 15.2 Means and standard deviations of behaviour units in Italian and Icelandic interactions

In the IR analysis, a significant main effect was found for Culture variable ($F_{1,29} = 14.01$, $p < .0001$). In the experimental cooperative interaction, Italian participants turned out to produce a higher number of gestures than Icelandic ones. In particular, Italian participants displayed self-contact gestures like *hand contact*, *hands on hair* and *hands on*

face more frequently than Icelandic ones. Moreover, they also moved their *palms inward*, *upward* and *back* more frequently than North European individuals.

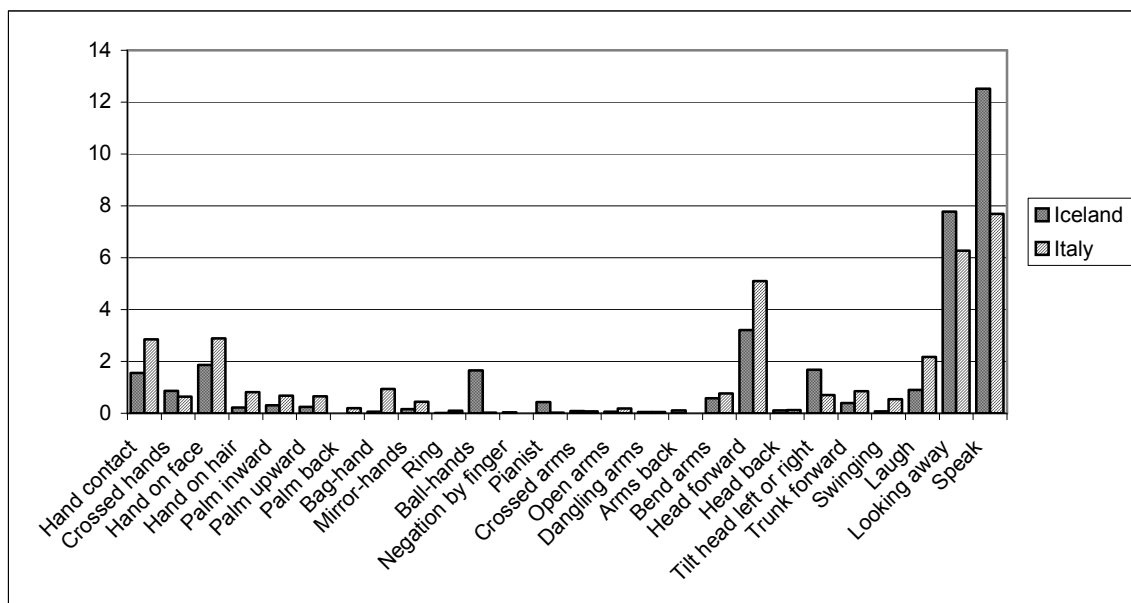


Figure 15.2 Comparison of Italian and Icelandic behaviour units.

Likewise, Italian and Icelandic participants resorted to different kinds of gestures, as only the former displayed the *ring*, the *mirror-hands* and the *bag-hand* gestures that were never used by the latter. Figure 15.3 illustrates these gestures. Conversely, Icelandic people displayed *ball-hands* and *pianist* gestures that were never present in Italian participants (see figure 15.3). Furthermore, Italian gestures turned out to be waver and opener than Icelandic ones, as *open arms* were displayed more frequently by Italian people, while Icelandic participants used more *arms back*. In a similar way Italian subjects often moved themselves on the chair and changed posture: they *moved trunk forward*, *swinging* and *tilt head forward* more than Icelandic ones. Eventually, Italian participants more frequently *laughed* than Icelandic ones. Significant differences were found also for *turn-taking* and *avert gaze*: Icelandic subjects seem to *avert gaze* and to *take-turn* more frequently than Italian ones.

15.5 Discussion

15.5.1 Icelandic and Italian conversation management: “gesture” vs. “word” style

The current research gives support to the social pragmatic perspective, as conversation appears to be a social activity ruled out by specific standards and expectations that are culturally defined. Although conversation as human activity holds general and universal features in its organization as a necessary interaction among two or more interlocutors, a temporal and formal partition in different phases (like opening, topic’s development, and closing), the data herein observed point out that conversation is culturally shaped in nature. Under the superficial appearance of a universal format, conversation displays different styles in conformity to the culture of reference. In the present study between North European and Mediterranean people, it was observed that Icelandic participants deeply diverged from Italian ones by producing longer and more regular sequences of turns.

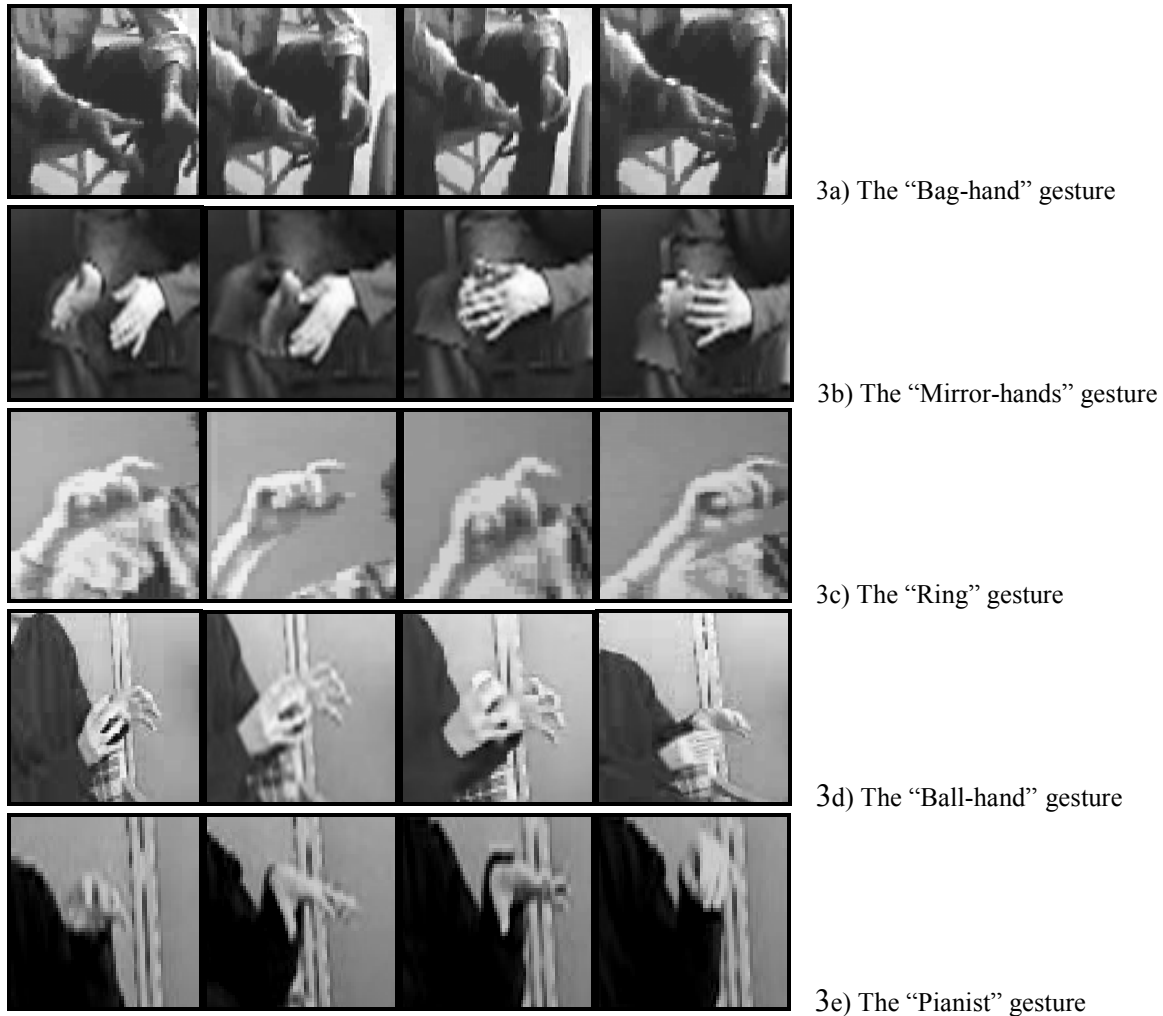


Figure 15.3 This figure shows the typical Italian (3a-3b-3c) and Icelandic (3d-3e) gestures. In the “Bag-hand” gesture (3a), hands are closed and fingers’ tips are joined. In the “Mirror-hands” gesture (3b), hands’ palms are facing and joining by fingers’ tips. In the “Ring” gesture (3c), thumb and forefinger are joined to form a ring. In the “Ball-hand” gesture (3d), hands are facing and move like a rolling ball. In the “Pianist” gesture, hand’s palm is downward and fingers move as playing piano.

In particular, Icelanders turned out to better manage and coordinate their actions in conversation than Italians since the former followed a smoother rhythm, as it was shown by a larger repetition of the same behaviour units in the same critical interval of time.

It is worthwhile to highlight that Icelandic participants showed a specific competence in managing their conversation in a plain and linear way both among known and unknown people. As a rule, they made recourse to few kinds of gestures and body movements during their conversation, and often they repeated them in the course of the same interaction. Furthermore, in conversation Icelandic participants did not move their body as much as Italian ones. Rather, they thoroughly relied on words and gave particular attention to what was said by interlocutors. Such word-based conversation seems to give a peculiar importance to the utterances and linguistic subject, less to the extra-linguistic aspects of conversation.

To put it in a nutshell, Icelandic conversation style may be regarded as more predictable and reliable, although rather monotonic. An Icelandic participant is likely to know which kind of moves he/she may expect from the interlocutor of the same culture, and what kind of answer he/she should communicate. In such a way adjustment and accommodation

between participants are made easy, and the conversation turns out to be a smooth and fluent social activity.

Conversely, the data of the current research pointed out that Italian participants produced a wider range of movements in a more chaotic way during their conversation than Icelandic ones. Usually, they moved more not only hands but also arms and trunk, assuming varied body postures in conversation. Moreover, when an Italian participant began to take his/her floor, he/she was prone to exhibit different kind of gestures in a continuous gesticulating manner in order to make what is said clearer and more understandable. In some way, they turned out to not actually trust words, as if words might be ambiguous and not always explicit. Rather, they gave more credit to gestures and movements, considering that these last ones were visible and self-evident. Such gesture-based conversation seems to attribute a specific significance to gestures and, generally, nonverbal actions in conversation, less to linguistic topics.

To sum up, Italian conversation style may be considered as more chaotic and unpredictable, although more affable and friendly. An Italian participant is likely to be interested in sharing a global perspective, in self-disclosing, as well as in displaying more goodwill and warmth.

15.5.2 Icelandic and Italian gestures: two different typologies

The results of the current study gave support to the cultural hypothesis, according to which Icelandic and Italian conversation would be deeply shaped by different typologies of gestures. In particular, usually, Italian participants regularly resorted to wider and more open gestures than Icelandic ones, as, for instance, they opened arms in large movements, put palms up of their hands, inclined their forward or backward, and so on. Conversely, Icelandic participants normally made recourse to close and spatially limited gestures, like folded arms, trunk backward, and so on.

Furthermore, Italian participants produced self-contact gestures more frequently than Icelandic ones. Such gestures may be explained on the ground of a restless and excited style of Italian people in conversation.

Finally, some kinds of gestures, like bag-hand, mirror and ring, were displayed only by Italian participants, while the pianist gesture and the ball-hand were shown only by Icelandic ones.

Summing up, these data seem to give support to the cultural perspective in social pragmatics, as the tangled network between language and body movements is formed in conformity to the cultural standards. In turn, such network comes to frame conversation as social practice, closely depending on the cultural context, as Hayashi [25] recently has pointed out. According to the social pragmatics perspective, participants draw from repertoires of behavioural practices those actions suitable to manage conversation and to jointly achieve coordination in their social interaction.

15.5.3 Gaze and overlapping in Icelandic and Italian conversation

With regard to the gaze and turn-taking, the data of the current research point out that in conversation Icelandic participants followed different patterns referring to Italian ones. In particular, as a rule, they took and left their conversational turn more frequently than Italian ones in the same critical interval of time. That means that their turns were shorter with a faster turnover, showing a high level of accommodation and attuning. Their conversations displayed a smooth flow as well.

Conversely, in the Italian conversation a more frequent occurrence of overlapping phenomenon happened. Italian participants often talked together, taking floor before the

interlocutor has stopped. It seems that they were able to anticipate the closure of utterance in course and the conclusion of his/her communicative intention. Such condition may suggest that Italian people showed an intense and great participation in conversation, as if the thought of participants would proceed in unison. What for other cultures (like German and Scandinavian) may be regarded as an unpleasant experience and a lack of politeness, in Italian as in French people means involvement and participation. As a matter of fact, for Italian culture overlapping may be interpreted as an advantageous way to make conversation more spontaneous and lively, sometimes rather chaotic and confused.

As regards to gaze, it was observed that in Icelandic interaction, in a similar way to the North and Japanese cultures, participants were used not to gaze the interlocutor in conversation, as it might be regarded as an impolite signal and a cue of challenge. Averting gaze is a way to take respect and show consideration towards interlocutors. In contrast, Italian participants displayed a consistent period of gaze during conversation. Habitually, Italian people, like Arabian and South American cultures, are used to ascribe great importance to gaze as a signal of confidence, sincerity, attention, and trust towards interlocutors.

15.6 Conclusion and future directions

Conversation, as basic social activity, is an intriguing topic due to the intrinsic mixture among universal and local features. Conversation follows a universal format on the whole, considering that essential elements such as temporal partition, turnover, turn-taking, topic sequence and the like occur in every culture. However, although being universal in general format, conversation seems to be shaped by cultural standards which make up a particular style in managing interaction. In the current research it was paid special attention to time management and body movements in conversation. As a main result, conversation turns out to be a domain-specific activity, as Icelandic and Italian participants, all things considered, displayed a deeply different style in conversation management at least as far as it concerns time allocation and gestures. Being a social and cultural practice, conversation should be regarded as a dynamic, multiparty process of production and interpretation of meaning through a sequence of interactions which extend in time [14, 26, and 27].

Needless to say that the current study is not without some limitations. For one, speech was not taken in consideration and, then, it was not possible to connect specific gestures to specific linguistic topics. Further, a limited range of conversation setting was analyzed, as formal contexts were not considered. Additionally, asymmetrical condition, such as teacher-pupil, doctor-patient relationship was not examined. Further limitations concern individual differences which are not taken into consideration in the present study. In particular, some scholars [28] have observed that the range of individual variability, including age, status, educational level, life histories and social factors play an essential role in conversation management. With these limitations in mind, there are, nonetheless, further research implications. A combined analysis of both linguistic and extra-linguistic components of conversation stream should be taken into account, as conversation is a whole activity and, thus, such totality should be recognized in analysis. Specifically, it may be important to consider contextual and individual assortment in conversation management, insofar as only focusing the domain-specific features promotes significant progress in understanding how conversation is organized and managed by participants to reach their personal and social goals.

15.7 References

- [1] C. Goodwin, *Conversational organization: Interaction between speakers and hearers*. New York: Academic Press, 1981.
- [2] R. D. Cherry, Politeness in written persuasion, *Journal of Pragmatics* **12** (1988) 63-81.
- [3] L. Anolli, *Psicologia della comunicazione*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002.
- [4] R. E. Nofsinger, *Everyday Conversation*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1991.
- [5] S. C. Levinson, *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- [6] W. Turnbull, An appraisal of pragmatic elicitation techniques for social psychological study of talk: The case of request refusals, *Pragmatics* **11** (2001) 31-61.
- [7] H. Giles, Accent mobility: a model and some data, *Anthropological Linguistics* **15** (1973) 87-105.
- [8] P. Brown and S. Levinson, *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- [9] H. P. Grice, Logic and conversation, in *Syntax and semantics: Speech acts*, P. Cole and J.L. Morgan, Eds. New York: Academic Press, 1975, pp. 41-58.
- [10] D. Boden and D.H. Zimmerman, *Talk and social structure*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.
- [11] E. Ochs, *Culture and language development: language acquisition and language socialization in a Samoan village*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- [12] E. Ochs, Indexing gender, in *Rethinking context: Language as an interactive phenomenon*, A. Duranti, C. Goodwin, Eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 336-358.
- [13] M. Grader, Expressive timing and interaction synchrony between mothers and infants: Cultural similarities, cultural differences, and the immigration experience, *Cognitive development* **18** (2003) 533-554.
- [14] C. Goodwin, Action and embodiment within situated human interaction, *Journal of Pragmatics* **32** (2000) 1489-1522.
- [15] E. T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1966.
- [16] E. T. Hall and M. R. Hall, Monochronic and Polychronic Time, in *The Nonverbal Communication Reader: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, L. K. Guerrero, J. A. De Vito, M. L. Hect, Eds. Waveland press, Prospect Heights, 1990, pp. 237-240.
- [17] F. Moraro, Communication by gestures in Italians and Danes, *Journal of Human Movement Studies* **25** (2000) 85-110.
- [18] J. A. Graham and M. Argyle, A Cross-Cultural Study of the Communication of Extra-verbal Meaning by Gestures, *International Journal of Psychology* **10** (1975) 56-67.
- [19] K. Bartholomew, L. M. Horowitz, Attachment styles among young adults: A test of a four category model, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* **21** (1991) 394-405
- [20] K. Grammer, K. B. Kruck, M. S. Magnusson, The Courtship Dance: Patterns of Nonverbal Synchronization in Opposite-Sex Encounters, *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior* **22** (1998) 3-29.
- [21] H. G. Wallbott, R. C. Givens, The measurement of human expression in *Aspects of nonverbal communication*, W. von Raffler-Engel, Ed. Lisse: Swets & Zeitlinger, 1980.
- [22] W. C. McGrew, *An ethological study of children's behavior*. New York: Academic Press, 1972.
- [23] M. S. Magnusson, Discovering hidden time patterns in behavior: T-patterns and their detection, *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments and Computer* **32** (2000) 93-110.
- [24] M. S. Magnusson, Hidden real-time patterns in intra- and inter-individual behavior: Description and detection, *European Journal of Psychological Assessment* **12** (1996) 112-123.
- [25] M. Hayashi, Language and the Body as Resources for Collaborative Action: A Study of Word Searches in Japanese Conversation, *Research on Language and Social Interaction* **36** (2003) 109-141.
- [26] C. LeBaron and J. Streeck, Gesture, knowledge and the world, in *Language and Gesture*, D. McNeill, Ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 118-138.
- [27] C. Goodwin, Time in Action, *Applied Linguistic* **43** (2002) 1-53.
- [28] P. Clancy, S. Thompson, R. Suzuki, and H. Tao, The conversational use of reactive tokens in English, Japanese and Mandarin, *Journal of Pragmatics* **26** (1996) 355-387.