

“Buffy sings to Cody”: A multimodal analysis of mother and pre-lingual-infant question–response sequences



Sylvia Sierra

Department of Communication and Rhetorical Studies, Syracuse University, 310 Sims Hall, Syracuse, NY, USA

Received 21 October 2016; received in revised form 5 January 2017; accepted 5 January 2017

Available online 9 February 2017

Abstract

This study examines how singer-songwriter Buffy Sainte-Marie and her pre-lingual infant son, Cody, engage with each other in the sequential turn-taking process of conversation on a 1978 episode of *Sesame Street*. A multimodal analysis demonstrates that Cody relies on the audible prosodic contours of his mother's questions to provide responses by producing cries and relevant embodied behavior at “transition relevance places” (Sacks et al., 1974). Buffy treats her son's responses to her questions as consequential parts of the interaction, and this in turn supports her son's language socialization. This study contributes to understanding how communication before language can occur through a reliance on prosody and via cries and relevant embodied behavior, and how turn-taking and sequencing can also be scaffolded through prosody and singing, which are ultimately conducive to language socialization.
© 2017 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Discourse analysis; Prosody; Embodied interaction; Turn-taking; Language socialization

1. Introduction

Recent multimodal work on childcare and family life has begun to document the ways in which pre-lingual children are capable of engaging in meaningful social interaction (e.g., Kidwell, 2005; Kidwell and Zimmerman, 2007; Lerner and Zimmerman, 2003; Lerner et al., 2011). These researchers and those at the Max Planck Institute research group on Communication Before Language¹ have demonstrated that children who do not yet have the ability to speak can still “read” social interaction by relying on multimodal elements such as eye gaze, body positioning, and various forms of embodied interaction, and can in turn participate meaningfully in interactions through the use of gestures (like points) and actions that are sequentially appropriate. Researchers have also been interested in the role of prosody in caregiver and infant interactions (e.g., Erickson, 2003; Gratier, 2000; Malloch, 2000), although as Esteve-Gibert et al. (2016) acknowledge, the exact role of prosody in caregiver–infant interaction has not been well understood.

Building on this work, this study examines a 1978 *Sesame Street* video of singer–songwriter Buffy Sainte-Marie singing to and asking questions of her pre-lingual son, Cody, while playing in a creek. Following Schieffelin and Ochs' (1986) conceptualization of “language socialization,” and considering a related process of what I call “music socialization,” I expand on previous work on spoken turn-taking norms of young children (e.g., Ervin-Tripp, 1978; Garvey and Berninger, 1981; Iwamura, 1980), analyzing how a pre-lingual infant relies on the audible prosodic contours and cadence of his mother's questions to take sequentially appropriate turns by producing cries and relevant embodied

E-mail address: ssierra@syr.edu.

¹ <http://www.mpi.nl/departments/independent-research-groups/communication-before-language>.

behavior at “transition relevance places” (Sacks et al., 1974) or occasions at which turn exchange occurs among interlocutors. In this multimodal analysis, I also demonstrate how Buffy treats her son's responses to her questions as consequential parts of the interaction, and how these processes support Cody's language and music socialization.

2. Communication before language

2.1. Multimodal conversational sequence and embodied interaction among pre-lingual infants

Conversational talk is turn-by-turn and contains sequences such as the basic two-part question–response sequence (Schegloff, 2007), which require an alternation between speakers. The originally described turn-taking system in conversation is conceived of as having no overlap and no gap between turns (Sacks et al., 1974). Rather than continuing to use the spoken turn as a unit, Goodwin (2011) expands on Goffman's (1981) term “the move” as the basic unit within communicative action sequences. “The move” is defined as “a unit contribution of communicative behavior constituting a single, complete pushing forward of an interactional sequence by making some relevant social action recognizable” (Enfield, 2011: 61). A particularly relevant analysis of such meaningful interaction is Goodwin's (2011) study of the interactions of Chil, an aphasic man with a three-word vocabulary, who uses gesture and prosodic variants of the word “no” at appropriate transition relevance places in question–response sequences to communicate meaningfully. Goodwin and Cekaite (2013) also use the move to examine the intertwined syntactic, prosodic, and embodied shape of directive response sequences among parents getting their children ready for bed. Using the move as the basic unit, then, encourages analytical attention to the “multimodal semiotic ecology” (see Goodwin, 2010: 391; Goodwin, 2013; Erickson, 2011: 181) which includes language structure, prosody, and embodied behavior, within which language is embedded and interwoven.

As Streeck, C. Goodwin, and LeBaron write in the introduction to their edited volume on embodied interaction, “multimodality has become a concern within more traditional fields such as childhood and family communication” (2011:11). Recent studies that have shown that even children who have not yet acquired the ability to speak are “capable of rather nuanced and sophisticated forms of social interaction” (Streeck et al., 2011: 12); they produce recognizable courses of action and show that they expect their actions to be recognized. Lerner and Zimmerman (2003) show how prelingual infants use two distinct gaze patterns of their caregivers, “the look,” or a fixed stare, and “the mere look,” a passing glance, and found that the children would continue their behavior if given a mere look, but stop what they were doing when they were given “the look.” In the same volume, Lerner et al. (2011) describe how pre-lingual children who have not yet acquired the ability to speak still manage to engage in interaction by relying on visible embodied behavior. The researchers parse the process of a caregiver serving food to a child into sequential structures where possibilities for participation emerge systematically. They find that one child in particular actively uses the visible embodied behavior of the caregiver and the child being fed in order to determine relevant moments (“task transition spaces”) in which to produce her own actions (points) to be interpreted by others. Thus the researchers show that this infant is able to attempt to join an activity in which she is not a ratified participant. In sum, pre-lingual infants have been shown to have the ability to interpret eye gaze, body positioning, gestures, and can communicate with gestures such as pointing.

2.2. Language socialization, prosody, timing, and music in caregiver–child interaction

Schieffelin and Ochs (1986) describe language socialization as an interactive process that “begins at the moment of social contact in the life of a human being” (164), with the stated goal of studying language socialization being “the understanding of how persons become competent members of social groups and the role of language in this process” (167); language can be studied as a medium or tool in this process, and the acquisition of the appropriate uses of language can be studied as part of acquiring social competence. From this perspective, processes of language acquisition and of socialization are integrated, with both processes affecting each other. Schieffelin and Ochs (1986) find that children usually acquire linguistic and social knowledge in either predominately dyadic or multi-party interactions, with American White Middle Class (AWMC) children being exposed to primarily dyadic verbal interactions. They suggest that the communicative environment is an important variable in children's understandings of social identities, and that turn-taking in conversation is one important dimension of this communicative environment.

Important to the social acquisition of turn-taking is prosody and musicality of speech, which play an important role in caregiver–child interaction, especially regarding marking transition relevance places. Magyari et al. (2014) have found evidence of a neuronal correlate of turn-end anticipation using EEG (electroencephalogram) and an experimental task with conversational stimuli, suggesting that prosodic cues provide listeners with information that enables them to anticipate turn-ends and transition relevance places. Fernald (1992) and Locke (1996) describe how early mother–infant interactions provide acquaintance with the prosodic features of language, as well as exposure to the prototypical and meaningful sounds and patterns of spoken language. Esteve-Gibert et al. (2016) found that 12-month-old infants rely on both prosody and gesture shape to make pragmatic inferences. Malloch (2000) uses sound spectrograph prints to identify cadence-like

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5042675>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5042675>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)