Dialogue in Spanish

Studies in functions and contexts

Edited by

Dale April Koike
University of Texas at Austin

Lidia Rodríguez-Alfano
Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, México

Table of contents

Introduction

Dialogue is essential in our lives, since no communicative activity is fulfilled without the participation of at least two interlocutors. Even in monologue, one speaks with an interlocutor (oneself). Through dialogue we identify with others from the moment of birth, and in this multidirectional process of linking to others we become educated, we mature and we realize activities in all realms of existence. Due to the broad conceptualization and varying, complex nature of dialogue, it is difficult to limit its study to a given area because such limitations would immediately restrict what such studies can discover about communication. At the same time, due to its breadth, complexity and multi-faceted nature, dialogue can be seen as a vastly rich area for linguistic and sociocultural investigation, which this volume intends to address by incorporating several approaches to its study. However, in order to present a cohesive set of studies, this collection centers on what we consider to be the guiding basis of dialogicity: the fulfillment of a 'communicative project', in its expression and interpretation by others who listen and respond. This term, originally coined by Luckmann (1995) but expanded upon by Linell (1998, 2009a), refers to the coordination of "mental and interpersonal activities" in which the interlocutors work together to bring about a resolution or understanding of a communicative 'problem' in the sense of a communicative task (Linell 1998:218). Such a focus takes the form of pragmatics study. The book contains investigations that approach dialogue largely from perspectives derived from a broad sense of pragmatics. It includes research where interaction among participants is studied in multiple contextual dimensions. The volume in its entirety seeks to comprehend dialogue in all types of communicative events, considering that there is always an interlocutor who completes the dialogical dimension of language.

The goal of this volume is to provide a strong theoretical and empirical foundation for the study of dialogic functions in various contexts in Spanish. In order to support such an endeavor, this book includes studies that address various contextual and functional dimensions of dialogue in Spanish. These dimensions encompass informal face-to-face, personal exchanges, as well as interactions in public, professional and learning contexts. The volume also includes a final chapter that reviews the findings of the studies and points to future research and issues. The distinctive and original contributions of this volume elucidate an understanding

of dialogue in its complexity, considering the wide range of its contexts and functions, in terms of linguistic theory, pragmatics and discourse analysis.

The belief that underlies this volume is that dialogue entails such a wide range of human communication that it must be studied from many points of view and in different contexts and functions. The researchers featured in this collection provide in-depth, complementary studies based on empirical data from the Spanish language and culture. The broad questions that the volume addresses in general are:

1. What do studies of dialogue reveal about language, with special reference to pragmatic / discursive approaches to communicative interaction in different contexts and functions?
2. How do intervening variables – specifically, context (participants, places, relationships), functions (activities) and intentions – affect the interaction?
3. How can these studies inform us about human communication, especially with regard to the Hispanic language and cultures?

The importance of such a collection is multi-faceted:

a. First, much valuable linguistic information is gained from studying linguistic elements in its natural context of interaction. This information contributes not only to the field of linguistics but also to such others as anthropology, sociology, philosophy, communications and education;
b. Second, given the increased contact between speakers of Spanish and other languages in the world today, the study of interaction is timely for increased efficacy of communication and sociocultural understanding of Spanish. Dialogue in the English language has been enriched with in-depth study, while dialogue in Spanish is an area that is propitious for more investigation, given the growing populations of speakers of this language throughout the world;
c. Third, since talk is a direct reflection of the members of the society who engage in it, through the study of various aspects of their dialogue one can come to understand the various cultural norms in the different Hispanic societies represented herein that guide their interactions;
d. Finally, by knowing more about dialogue, educators, students and others who are interested in language and communication can understand processes of talk, and interaction between and among people can be improved.

The volume is divided into two main parts:

Part I: Dialogue in informal, interpersonal contexts studied via approaches that focus on conversations between friends and acquaintances and on other types of interaction that reveal aspects of discrete markers of intentionality;

Part II: Studies of dialogue in public contexts – including political speeches and hypothetical service encounters – as well as professional interactions and educational discourse. The latter entails the examination of contexts involving relationships such as native and nonnative speakers engaged in personal conversations.

Although the two parts of the volume represent intersecting aspects of dialogic interaction, they approach their data in somewhat different ways, focusing on different elements of talk. A brief description of the contents is as follows.

Part I: Dialogue in interpersonal contexts of informal conversation

Based on theories of dialogue proposed by Bakhtin (1982), Halliday (1978) and Linell (1998), Rodríguez-Alfano (Chapter 1) presents a broad conceptualization of approaches to the study of dialogue. The author defines and discusses issues of dialogue and its categories such as 'dialogue versus monologue', 'interaction', 'context', 'framework', 'dialogic principles', 'communicative project', 'collaborative strategies' and 'co-construction'. She proposes a continuum in which the two endpoints correspond to dialogue studies based on micro and macro frameworks. Thus, she concludes that 'dialogue' includes all types of verbal and nonverbal exchanges and relationships among participants who are physically or virtually present and, to achieve a full understanding of dialogue, it is necessary to broaden the scope of its study, avoiding an exclusively micro or macro approach. Her contribution provides a backdrop for how the studies contained in the volume illustrate many of the various points on the continuum.

The following six studies examine talk in conversations among friends and acquaintances. The chapters investigate (1) contexts of personal narrations and anecdotes, which represent a rich source of dialogic information because narratives are at once monologic and dialogic in their co-construction with the listener, and (2) interactions that demonstrate discrete markers of intentionality. The three studies by Camargo Fernández, Padilla and Alvarado, and Kalbermatten address personal narrations and anecdotes. Inspired by work by Goffman (1974, 1981), Tannen (1986, 1989) and Grice (1975a), and concepts from Conversation Analysis, Camargo Fernández (Chapter 2) studies reconstructed dialogues reported within personal oral narratives, describing their internal structures and functions, as well as their pragmatic indicators.

Both Padilla and Alvarado's study, as well as that by Kalbermatten, explore irony in narrations and anecdotes, although their results show different intersections with other areas of pragmatics. Padilla and Alvarado (Chapter 3), basing their work on Brown and Levinson's (1987) Theory of Politeness, suggest that irony does not imply impoliteness. Kalbermatten (Chapter 4) argues that irony is

closely tied to the same implicatures used in humor, as proposed by researchers such as Attardo and Raskin (1991) and Norrick (1986, 2003). Irony is an area of pragmatics that has been studied very little as a separate category and it illustrates clearly how individual pragmatic categories closely intersect with each other.

The second group of chapters in this section includes three studies by Fonte and Williamson, Hernández and Solís, and Bravo Cladera. They are dedicated to the discrete markers of intentionality that are found in personal conversations. Fonte and Williamson (Chapter 5), who also work within the genre of narrations, examine the evaluative resources used in personal oral narratives to promote an interpersonal, co-constructive nature, such as intonational contours, images and vulgarisms. They base their study on work by Labov (1972), Halliday (1978) and Norrick (2000), and also spectrograms illustrating phonetic nuances that enter into the construction of these evaluative resources, to show a multi-layered depiction of how the evaluative resources contribute to building the narrative.

Hernández and Solís and Bravo Cladera examine discourse markers in various contexts. Hernández and Solís (Chapter 6) use ideas from researchers such as Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1991) on assertiveness, Schwenter (1996) and Schiffrin (1987) on discourse markers, and Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca (1994) on grammaticality and epistemic modality. From this theoretical basis, they study the discourse marker of "*verdad*" 'right?' that, they claim, has developed epistemic uses in conversations in a small town in Texas. In some cases the epistemic value is affirmed due to previously-known or newly-learned information, and an answer from the interlocutor is not expected. This marker, then, can signal different degrees of veracity as intended by the speaker. Bravo Cladera (Chapter 7) examines the backchannel cues of "mm" and "mhm" in the dialogue of bilingual and monolingual Spanish-speaking adolescents in Sweden, based on Schegloff's (1982, 1993) approach to conversational exchanges and Allwood's (1983, 1988) work on feedback. She not only discusses the various manifestations and meaning of such cues in their talk, but also contributes to knowledge of the bilingual communities in that context.

The studies of personal interaction are valuable because they reveal new aspects of how implicatures, which are heavily used in personal interactions, function in Spanish dialogues.

Part 2: Dialogue in public, professional, and educational interactions

The five articles in this section examine the broader functions of dialogue in the contexts of public, professional and educational interactions. In the first two articles by Bolívar and Czerwionka, respectively, the authors study the public venues