Where People Inspire Each Other in Group Discussion:
From the Design of “Answer-Answer Succession”

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Introduction

Goal and Data
It is widely recognized that, compared with two-party discussion, group discussion has some advantages. The most essential advantage is that it makes it possible for participants to stimulate each other and elicit a wider range of ideas that they have not realized or thought about before (Vaughn, et al. 1996; Morimoto, et al. 2006). This study is a preliminary attempt to locate some places where one participant in fact gets ‘inspired’ by their co-participant in actual group discussion. Our concern is not on when or how the cognitive shift occurs within an individual’s mind; rather, we aim to uncover when and how such a cognitive shift of an individual becomes observable and is shared by others during the course of interaction. This view is based on the perspective of conversation analysis that ‘cognition’ figures in the design and the sequential organization of utterances (e.g., Heritage 1984; te Molder and Potter 2005).

Our data is from focus group interviews (hereafter, FGIs), which are a qualitative research method undertaken in business marketing and social research. The data set consists of 3 interview sessions in Japanese, in which current cell phone use and the needs of customers are surveyed to develop new cell phone software. All the sessions are approximately 2 hours long, each with 6 interviewees each and a single professional moderator who has 18 years of experience with FGI moderation.

The Scope of the Analysis
The most basic activity in FGIs is the moderator (M) asking a question and one of the interviewees (A to F) responding to it, as in extract 1, lines 01-06 (marked by "→"). Interviewees can also voluntarily give an answer to the moderator's question to which someone else has responded, even before the same question is repeated (lines 11/13, marked by "⇒").

(1) G2_t11
→01M: .hh sakki no mittsu no kinoo? (0.9)
→02 tsuuwa (0.3) meerus (0.3) netto (0.2)
→03 igai no kinoo de (0.2) kore wa zettai
→04 hoshii (0.5) nokoshii tai (0.6) kondo wa
→05 tsuke tai to yuu no wa donna kinoo?
“The three functions of cell phones mentioned earlier? (0.9) call, (0.3) email, (0.3) and the Internet, (0.2) except those three, (0.2)"

We examine the latter phenomenon, what we call “answer-answer succession”, for it implies the spontaneity and immediateness of the second respondent to express their say about the ongoing topic. Any utterance in interaction is designed to show their relevance to the preceding talk (Schegloff 1996). We thus analyze how subsequent answers are designed to be built on to their preceding answers, and argue that particular designs of the subsequent answers may display the speaker’s cognitive shift of being inspired by the prior speaker.

Analysis

Three Types of Answer-Answer Succession
The analysis of 65 “answer-answer successions” found in our data shows that there are three ways in which the subsequent answer is tied to the preceding one. They are: (a) contrastive connection (21 cases), (b) analogous connection (22 cases), and (c) associational connection (7 cases; other 15 cases do not have an overt connection marker).

Type 1: Contrastive Connection
The subsequent answer which has a contrastive connection with the prior answer either submits the speaker’s opinion that somehow contradicts the prior speaker’s, or introduces a new topical item disjunctive from what has been talked about up to that point. Most typically, they are prefaced by the connective demo ‘but’ (extract 2), or by watashi wa ‘as for me, 1...’ (extract 3).
((D expresses her want to have a TV function on a cell phone so that she can deal with her child’s temper tantrum when going out. Then C starts:))

→01C: *Hmmm*, yappari umaku tsukawaneai to sugoi
   “But, if we are not very careful to use it well,”

((Agreement tokens from the co-participants omitted))

02M: un
   “Hmm”

→03B: ano::: kodomo no gakkou no jikanwari ga... “uh::: when the school schedule of my child suddenly changes...”

Type 2: Analogous Connection The subsequent answer with this type of connection conveys that the speaker has an opinion or experience similar to the one the prior speaker has just told. They are frequently accompanied by *wataishi mo ‘I, too,...’* in the utterance-initial position (extract 4, line 04 onwards).

(4) G1_t8:2

01C: ano desaki de tsukaeru(h) tte yuu no ga “Uh being able to use a cell phone when being out”
02M: un
   “Hmm”

03C: ichiban benri ya na to omou... “is the most convenient point, I think...”

((About 10 lines omitted in which C continues to detail how she uses *“is the most convenient point, I think...”*)

→04F: *wataishi mo* ano otonodachi to ne, 05M: un
   “Hmm”

→06F: natsuyasumi ni kazoku dooshi de, 07M: un
   “Hmm”

→08F: dokka iku toka yuu toki ni... “((lines 04-08)) I, too, have a similar experience, uh when I had a summer holiday somewhere with the families of friends...”

Type 3: Associational Connection This type of subsequent answer picks up some key word from the preceding talk (like tsuukin ‘commute’ in extract 5) and develops a talk with reference to the key word.

(5) G4_t5:1 ((C is being asked why she prefers fax to email))

01C: un, te yuu ka wataashi denasha nottari 02 toka ano sooyuu, koo, denwa o zutto miteru jikan ga annari nai node “Well, it’s rather because I hardly have time long enough to keep checking my cell phone, like on a train,”
04M: a: naruho do “Oh I see”
05C: hai “Yes”
06M: hai “Yes”