

Resolving a search for words as an interactional resource for achieving professional activity goals²²

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ABSTRACT

This is an analysis of several interactions arising during two multilingual professional meetings convened in two international companies, one in Paris and the other in Beijing. Through the compilation of word searching attempts during interactions in ELF (English as lingua franca) we shall show how the participants orient themselves individually or collectively to resolve their verbal difficulty. It has been observed that, in ordinary conversations, when a linguistic and interactional problem emerges (Schegloff et al. 1977; Gülich 1986), the participants use certain methods to solve difficulties such as lexical production (Goodwin & Goodwin 1986; Brouwer 2003), or the adequacy of the linguistic forms to the current interactive activity. These methods are primarily based on the preference for self-repair (Schegloff 1977) and for progressivity (Stivers & Robison 2006). The preference for self-repair can take different cooperation forms to resolve an interactional problem. The other-repair phenomenon becomes the collective form to ensure the progress of the activity, to which all participants contribute in an ordered way. It can have consequences for participation frameworks, which are modified to solve a specific problem, and resume the main activity.

Keywords: conversation analysis, multimodality, organizational settings, search for words

1. Introduction

Against the analytical background of Conversation Analysis (hereafter abbreviated as CA) this paper describes the structure of search for word sequences arising out of interactional issues while English is being used as a lingua franca. Sociolinguist and conversationalist scholars have exhaustively documented the question of how participants solve their “linguistic problems”. Studies such as Jefferson (1972) have defined these sequences in terms of “side sequences”. She was the first to stress the “shifting relationship” between the “course of on-going activity” and the activity of problem treatment “which appear[s] to be in some sense relevant” (Jefferson, 1972: 294). According to this scholar, the focus of attention for solving communicative issues should be considered as a suspension of initial activity or “a “break” in contrast to a “termination”; that is, the ongoing activity will resume”.

While considering multilingual conversation, Lüdi (1982, 1994), who calls it “the lateral sequence of lexical work”, points out the way speakers exercise a tighter control over utterances and make an effort to communicate with the best conversational expressions. Taking an interactional approach, Gülich (1986, 1994) examines “unfinished utterances” with a focus on the syntactic dimension. She highlights the specific characteristics of these utterances that show speakers’ particular attention to the discursive production of talk. These collaboratively constructed sequences aim to resolve problems of “discursive elaboration” (Gülich, 1994: 46). Discursive construction can be analyzed not only as an activity through which the participants

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themselves make linguistic diversity relevant, but also as a sequence reflecting the acquisition process of linguistic structure in the target language (Hammarberg, 1998). In sum, these language practices allow for the study of the temporary interruption of the action in order to treat verbal resources (or lack thereof) as a problem hindering continuation of the activity, or as an opportunity to learn or improve linguistic knowledge. In this sense, the word search sequences are interpreted in our study as specific interactions leading in a special way toward the resolution of activity previously initiated.

Other scholars have contributed to the study of the search for words from a multimodal point of view. Goodwin and Goodwin (1986), who speak of “the activity of searching for a word,” study the visual dimension of this type of activity. Word search activity can be observed through visual displays, which “obtains its meaning by virtue of its placement” (*ibid.*: 52) within the searching for words. The organization of gesture in this particular activity contributes to clarify the information provided vocally by “wh-questions, self-admonishments and pauses” (*ibid.*: 60) which usually appear when the speaker is involved in a word search. The gestures and gazes employed during word search events often show the way the participants use the meaningfulness of gestures as a constitutive feature of the social organization of the activity in progress (*ibid.*).

By studying the way participants, in the organizational settings, treat the “interactional difficulty” (Stivers & Robinson 2006), we will describe, on the one hand, the way the speakers make intelligible their involvement in a word search sequence, and on the other hand, how the co-participants engage in the treatment of this difficulty. We will then analyze the participants’ use of procedures designed to make the activity progress and to solve the interruption of a unit of talk. It has been observed that, in ordinary conversations, when a linguistic and interactional problem emerges (Schegloff et al. 1977; Gülich 1986), the participants use certain methods to solve difficulties such as lexical production (Goodwin & Goodwin 1986; Brouwer 2003), or the adequacy of the linguistic forms to the current interactive activity. These methods are primarily based on the *preference* for self-repair (Schegloff 1977) and the preference for progressivity (Stivers & Robinson 2006). The treatment of linguistic issues is an interactional endeavor which requires sensitivity with regards both to difficulties of linguistic competences and to the development of social interaction and its goals. Collaboratively addressed or unaddressed participants engage in the resolution of an identified linguistic difficulty by contributing to the progression of talk-in-interaction.

From a broader perspective, this article examines professional interactions. The examples we selected were extracted from a corpus compiled in two professional fields: a social professional network²³ in Paris and a social professional network in Beijing.

Below we will present briefly the field of CA as well as some notions, such as *preference*, developed in our research. Subsequently we will provide details about our data, and we will analyze a first example which summarizes the main methods used by speakers for solving interactional problems.

2. Analytical framework and data

²³ A social professional network is an online resource and technology which allows “the development of social and professional contacts, the sharing of information and services among people with a common interest” (social networking. Dictionary.com).

2.1. Analytical framework

The analytic mentality of CA allows us to study how the social order emerges during the action. By studying conversations recorded in situations of daily life, we can access the patterns of “ordinary knowledge of social structures” (Garfinkel 1967: viii). This way CA uses a bottom-up approach to analyze interactions where no prompt is used to elicit specific behaviors from social actors. This discipline aims to describe the social organization of talk-in-interaction through “a detailed inspection of tape recordings and transcriptions made from such recordings” (Ten Have 1990: 23).

CA scholars scrutinize two main dimensions of the talk-in-interaction. The first one is the so-called *temporality* and its two aspects of the conversation “time”: silence and simultaneous talk entailing successive actions during conversation. Gardner points out:

“[...] a silence can profoundly affect how some talk that precedes or follows it is understood, and simultaneous talk may be indicative of how speakers are understanding or feeling about each other. A consideration of time also opens up questions relating to how talk emerges moment by moment, is highly locally organized, with participants showing split-second sensitivities to others’ contributions. These are evident in, for example, the onset of a speaker’s turn, or a mid-utterance change in the formulation of an emerging turn.” (Gardner 2004: 263-264).

The second dimension is *sequentiality*. This is defined as an organized succession of talk turns. This dimension allows for the examination of “the turn-taking mechanisms, the categorization of turns into adjacency pairs and their classification into preferred and dispreferred [sic] seconds” (Fetzer & Meierkord 2002: 8). The organization or turn-taking can be analyzed from the composition of conversational exchanges. CA calls two turns produced by different speakers an *adjacency pair*. This unit of conversation, introduced by Schegloff and Sacks (1973), consists of “sequences which properly have the following features: (1) two utterance lengths, (2) adjacent positioning of component utterances, (3) different speakers producing each utterance” (*ibid.*: 295). Thereby adjacency pairs become “the building blocks for the interactional organization and construction of a conversation” (Fetzer & Meierkord 2002: 8). They include exchanges having a functional dependency between them. For instance, a question is followed by an answer, an offer by an acceptance, or a greeting by another greeting.

However, the notion of *turn* seems to be one of the most unclear notions in the CA field. A “turn” is sometimes defined similarly to the *turn-constructional units* (TCUs) concept introduced by Schegloff et al. (1974), which is often associated with the notion of *Transition Relevance Place* (TRP). In order to shed light on these concepts, Selting (2000) has proposed the clear separation between TCUs and TRP:

“TCUs end with points of possible completion of unit-types – the TRPs, which make turn transition relevant but not necessary. This means, as Schegloff insists (1996:55), that TCUs are potentially complete turns: “By ‘turn-constructional unit,’ it may be recalled, we meant to register that these units can constitute possibly complete turns; on their possible completion, transition to a next speaker becomes relevant (although not necessarily accomplished).” The TCU is thus a “unit” in conversation which is defined with respect to turn-taking: a potentially complete turn. The TCU is not defined as a linguistic unit.” (Selting 2000: 478).

These descriptions help us introduce the main sequential characteristics of our data (in the next sections, we will describe it in detail). The word search sequences usually involve a particular interactional trajectory initiated by the identification (as a preface) of a problematic item:

- one participant identifies a problematic item,
- the participant himself or co-participants recognize a problem to be solved,
- the participant(s) move towards its resolution.

The activity focused on a specific communicative element is intended to progress satisfactorily toward the exchange both on a thematic and formal point of view, which ensures social interaction. Initiation of this kind of sequence can lead participants to a "negotiation" of meaning and interpretations in which they will engage to facilitate the mutual understanding.

The peculiarity of our corpus lies in the fact that the actions are strongly related to organizational settings. While ordinary conversation is defined by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1978: 47) as "the basic form of speech-exchange systems" where interlocutors pursue practical purposes, according to Drew and Heritage (1992), an institutional interaction is oriented toward an activity, or task involving a specific organization. For Schegloff (1992), the "institutionality" of an interaction reveals itself less by the setting in which the interaction occurs than through, on one hand, the orientation of the participants toward relevant institutional or professional identities with regard to the activity and with regard to the members and through, on the other hand, the procedural consequentiality of the interactions. The interactional frameworks developed in the organizational settings that we will present involve a certain number of interactional and sequential constraints, which we will detail in our comments.

In this respect our paper, questions, to a certain extent, the notions of preference. In CA, the notion of preference is employed to explain the routine order of actions in the conversation. This is related to Schegloff's "conditional pertinence principle" (1968), which describes the implicit order of talk-in-interaction. According to the author, the tours of talk are organized and based on an adjacency relation: "given the first, the second is expectable" (*ibid.*: 1083). This way, the organization of talk turns presents a preferential structure which consists of selecting a conversational action projected among a sequentially limited and classified series of options (Schegloff et al. 1974) following an ordering principle. A question usually projects an answer, or a greeting another greeting. On the contrary, the delayed or missing answer in a question / answer adjacency pair sequence would generally constitute a *dispreferred* structuration of the course of action in progress.

We will particularly focus on the way preferred and dispreferred actions are structured and treated in our corpus. In fact, these actions are related to the contingencies of the activity we have investigated. Through our analysis we will show that these actions are carried out in order to maximize mutual cooperation between the participants (Heritage & Atkinson 1984), so as to achieve the purposes of the conversational activity and the goals of all participants in the specific organizational contexts.

2. 2. Data

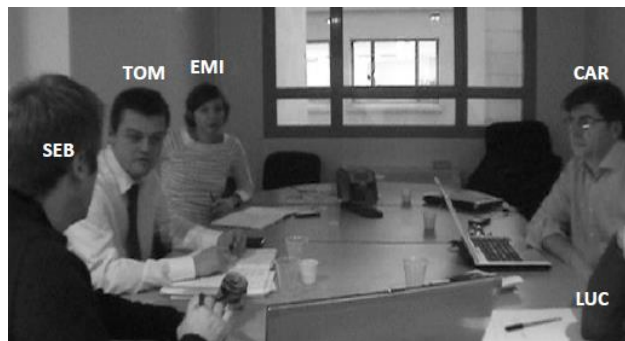
We will analyze interactions that have been drawn from a corpus of naturally occurring conversations in professional contexts in Paris and Beijing. Our compilation of audio-video data was recorded within multilingual meetings in professional situations. In each case the researcher took care to respect ongoing interactions. We avoid having an attitude and an intrusive gaze towards the observed speakers. Because of the size of some meeting rooms the researcher decided to keep away from the camera. An adopted bottom-up approach allowed us to observe, by the analysis of talk-in-interaction, the particular sequences where speakers make relevant linguistic contributions. On the whole, the recorded meetings consist of discussions about professional results and tasks achieved by the social actors. In these companies, social actors use English as a common working language because they do not have a common linguistic and

cultural background. English becomes the only option to work together, especially in Chinese company.

Our examples illustrate professional activities being carried on, during which one of the specialists in the professional network field uses English to manage the cultural and linguistic diversity of the international teams the companies are made up of. The sequences show a specific moment in a work situation interaction, namely the presentation in English of the results produced by each of the teams involved. When one of the points to be discussed is brought up, an interactional difficulty appeared.

Based on verbal and multimodal analysis, we will use the following figure to demonstrate how participants, after a turn-constructional unit interrupted by the speaker in search of a word, switch to another language, or to nonverbal resources in order to solve a particular interactional problem. In the following examples, the speakers are looking for a specific word.

Figure 1



Caption: #: Sebastian (SEB); Emilie (EMI); +: Carlos (CAR); *: Tommy (TOM); Luciano (LUC) ²⁴

²⁴ See appendix for a description of transcription conventions used in this paper.

1 SEB but it was sent by a:::::h (0.8) not by us/ (0.2) not
2 by emailvision (-visioner) it was s:ent by nextedia who's
3 the: (0.5) #&the::::&#
#turning towards TOM#
tom &raised eyebrows, mouth corners pulled down&
4 SEB #(.)°prestataire°/ °eu:h°#
provider hem
#closing his eyes-----#
5 EMI °°(mince) [xxx°°]
shoot
6 SEB [°(on a déjà eu une)°] [xxx]
we have already had one
7 CAR [e:h supp(.)lier]
8 EMI [°provider°]=
9 CAR =je(veux)dire [+supplier+]
+looking quickly at LUC+
I mean supplier
10 SEB [#SUPplier] yes [xxx]#
#turning slightly towards TOM#
11 CAR [+PROVIDER+]
+first looks at TOM & SEB+
12 SEB #provider [xxx]
#looking at CAR -->14
13 LUC [((coughs))]
14 SEB [provider (.) yeah]#
-->#
15 TOM [*it's it's the provider] what for/*
addressing to SEB----->

The first example begins with Sebastian, a French native speaker, producing a turn-constructural unit in English. The search for the problematic linguistic form is recognizable from the beginning of the interaction depicted in figure 1. Sebastian produces unfinished statements (“it was sent by a:::::h”), which are repeated throughout his turn. Line 3, a sound stretch at “the::::” and his gaze directed toward the recipient show clearly the speaker’s difficulty in finding the English word. Sebastian looks at Tommy, by this action requesting the missing word (line 3). But Tommy’s gesture (line 3) shows that he cannot help Sebastian to solve his interactional difficulty. This gesture drives Sebastian to supply the missing word in French (line 4). At this moment in the search, a minimal question in the form of a slot (De Stefani, 2005) shows the “interchangeable” nature of the problematic French word: “prestataire” (“provider”) (line 4). This word, which arises after a micro-break, takes the syntactic place of the missing element in English. The hesitation “eu:h” in a syllabic elongation sequentially projects the continuation of the turn and introduces a word search sequence.

The lowered voice of Sebastian in the form of a ‘byplay’ and the closing of his eyes then make clear his individual involvement with word searching (lines 3–4). The participants categorize the rising intonation on “prestataire” as a question. Sebastian then becomes the initiator of the word search and thereafter produces the first part of an adjacent pair. The recipients then achieve the completion of the second part of the pair through lexical replacement or by translation: “supplier” then “provider”.

The co-participants Carlos and Emilie will come close to a resolution of the difficulty through overlapping. From a semantic point of view, they will offer two similar lexical solutions by a procedure of repetitions and confirmations (lines 7–14). But Carlos’ orientation towards

Luciano (line 9) shows the search being continued by Carlos, who does not seem convinced by the word “supplier”. Sebastian confirms the suggestion "supplier yes" (line 14) while Carlos intervenes with the correct answer (“*provider*”) to Sebastian’s request. Carlos takes the word search “*provider*” as his own suggestion. However, line 8 shows that Emilie had already quietly produced it earlier on.

The collective resolution of the lexical problem allows the exchange, which Sebastian and Tommy had previously initiated, to resume. The double repetition of the proposed term "provider" (lines 12 and 14), as well as the use of the confirmative (“*yeah*”), indicate acknowledgment of the proposed word and signal the end of the collective word search. After that, Tommy, for whom the English word search was successfully completed, enters the term "provider" in line 15 and produces a start for Sebastian. This way, Tommy makes clear his lexical understanding and invites Sebastian to use the word at the semantic level by means of the inquiring formula "what for/" spoken with a rising intonation.

3. Results

From the previous investigation we can preliminarily show the point of interruption of the turn-constructional unit and the procedures involved in the resolution of interactional difficulties. From this initial analysis we also describe two kinds of interactional problem resolution:

- a) An individual finding of a solution. Initially, the participant in interactional trouble tries to solve his/her interactional difficulty on their own.
- b) A collective finding of a solution. The participants cooperate to find a solution.

Furthermore we show that participants produce a specific organization of units of talk showing a preference for the achievement of the goals of the activity in which they are engaged: presenting or discussing professional results.

In the following analysis, we shall also emphasize the point of interruption in a turn-constructional unit and the procedures used in sequential steps by the participants:

1. Turn-constructional unit interrupted by the speaker himself
2. Solution attempt through the use of different repair forms
3. Resolution of the interactional problem

This pattern is observable in two different ways when a linguistic and interactional problem arises. In figure 1 the participants seek an adequate linguistic construction in the ongoing interactive activity. The participants, in order to solve these difficulties, adopt different methods, which are geared to the manner in which the speaker displays his interactional trouble. In the next figure we see a similar example of looking for a word to resolve a lexical problem.

Figure 2



Caption: %: Ling (LIN); Yan (YAN); David (DAV)

```

1     LIN    a lot of people/ [(.) see the new one downloads/
2     DAV    [mhm
3     LIN    so (.) the::: °°anothe:%:r°°/
                                     %gaze goes up-->
4     YAN    °downloads°%
                                     -->%
5     LIN    downloads\
6     (0.8)
7     DAV    %yeah but [here when you look
lin     %turns towards YAN-->
8     LIN    [jian°°shao°°/
                                     reduce/
9     (1.5)
10    YAN    D- (0.8) reduce%
lin     -->%
11    LIN    %reduce that (and) (quiCK; quit)\
%.....points,,,,,looks at the screen-->>
12    DAV    okay\ but you look here when you look here/ (.) you see
13    that (.) the downloads/

```

Here, the lexical trouble appears after the noun “downloads”; just when the speaker (LIN) produces unfinished utterances accompanied by hesitations and a thinking face indicating her difficulty (line 3). By using an *other-repair* Yan provides a solution to the lexical problem that Lin repeats (line 5). After a brief pause, and while David is talking (line 7), Lin turns towards Yan and switches to Chinese. By this action, she shows her lexical problem and asks Yan for a translation (line 8). This prompts a brief translation which allows Lin to continue her explanations, and to close her turn (line 11).

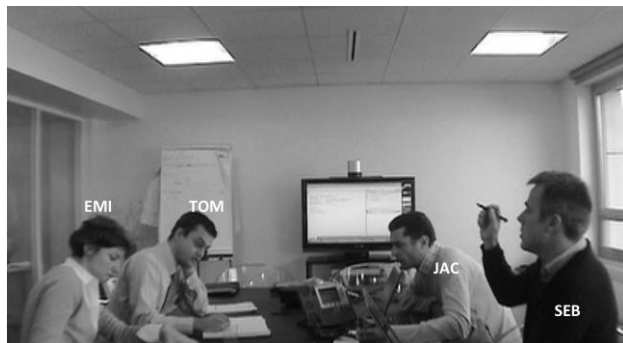
In these first examples (1 and 2), we have seen a tendency for the lexical problem to be resolved through a code-switching leading to a translation without an explicit and thematized²⁵ request being made. If we take into account only the search solution stage, the sequential development in both examples can be described as follows:

- Request for translation generated by the appearance of a lexical difficulty,
- Beginning of issue resolution by an individual or collective effort.

²⁵ To *thematize* means to make something (e.g., an idea) a theme or framework of discussion (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/>).

But sometimes the initiation of the lexical problem resolution can start with the deployment of resources different from those seen above. In the next figures we shall see how nonverbal resources such as gestures have a part in the lexical search, and trigger a collective engagement in the search for word.

Figure 3



Caption: \$: Jacques (JAC); +: Tommy (TOM), &: Sebastian (SEB), #: Emilie (EMI)

```

1    JAC    yes is the name of technology [of se]arch
2    TOM    [okay ]
3    JAC    engine of the viadeo (.) search engine=
4    TOM    =s l r: [e xxx ]
5    SEB    [ no ] [it's so- s L]
6    JAC    [ S O L ] $a:::h
                                     $sweeps quickly
                                     downward in the air-->9
                                     $turns towards SEB-->11
9    SEB    eh not$ &slash but +mmmmmm$
                                     hummmm
jac    -->$
jac    -->$
seb    &...sweeps quickly from right to left-->
tom    +looks at SEB-->
14   EMI    #euh+ °l'accen-° euh#
                                     hem the accen- hem
                                     #sweeps quickly downward in the air and turns towards TOM#
tom    -->+
17   TOM    dash r
18   SEB    #dash (.) yeah\#
emi    #draws the symbol on TOM's notebook#

```

Sequence 3 begins with a second part of adjacency pair. Jacques answers a question asked by Tommy, about the name of the new technology used in the search engine of the company's website. When Tommy spells the name of the "software" in English (line 4), Sebastian and Jacques in a collaborative way repair the mistake made by Tommy (lines 5 and 6). The *other-repair* of Jacques (Jacques's quick fix) in line 6 does not end with the complete formulation of the word being looked for. This is observable by the production of the token "a : : : h" in a lengthened form showing the lexical search for the problematic term in English. Jacques' leaning downward and his turn towards Sebastian are two ways he shows his difficulty. The gesture takes the syntactic place of the missing word and helps to keep the ongoing activity. But

Jacques' attempt to complete the English word with a multimodal turn is not understood. The interactional difficulty is then also raised by Sebastian (line 7) who mobilizes a semantic frame in contrast to the common term "not slash" accompanied by a stereotypical gesture showing his commitment to the word search. Jacques and Sebastian both come together in the multimodal turn, when Sebastian's attempt to solve the lexical problem fails. Thereafter, Emilie also displays her investment in the search activity with the unfinished statement "euh l' accen- euh" accompanied by a gesture more or less close to the form being searched (Jacques and Emilie indicate an apostrophe by their gestures, while Sebastian indicates a dash).

Tommy (line 17) recognizes and supplies the term that was being looked for and thus completes the sequence by a procedure of *self-repair* (look at line 4 for previous action), which allows the activity to continue. The production of the current form "dash r:" is followed by Sebastian's confirmation in the form of repetitions, confirmed by the token "dash (.) yeah\". At this moment, Emilie underlines the resolution of the lexical problem by writing the dash symbol on Tommy's notebook. Finally, this action has a double closing effect for the searching activity.

The following example will show a gesture figuring in efforts to track down the missing word.

Figure 4

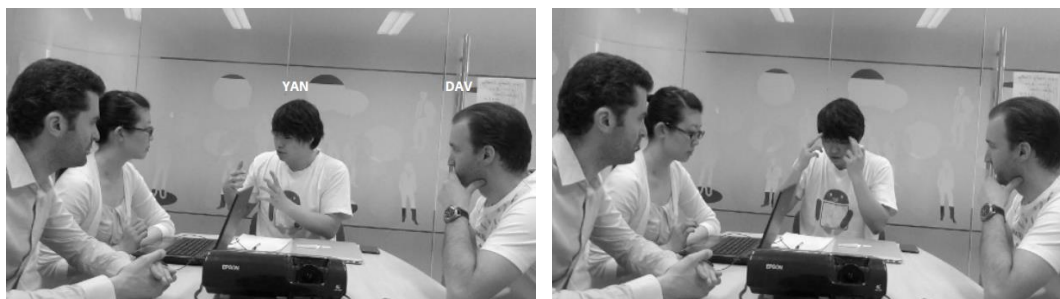


Image 1

Image 2

Caption: *: Yan (YAN); +: David (DAV)

```

1      YAN      *I HOpe (.) we can(s) (1.0) we can build our system to (.)
dav      *looking at YAN-->
2      +you know (0.7) it's it's (like) (.)
+.....closes eyes, turns head to the right, looks down
3      CONTINUE/
im      -im. 1-->
4      (1.0)+
im      --->+
5      DAV      +yeah\ continue+ situa[tion(s)\
im      +-----im. 2----->
6      YAN      [si- yeah\ [is °(my point)°\
7      DAV      [yeah\ exactly*
end im.2-->*
8      *but I think when we can do in a first step (0.5) it's
*.....gaze goes down,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,-->>
9      (.) you know (.) if you are able

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Here Yan is developing his turn in English more or less fluently until the moment when he

finds a lexical difficulty, which he makes clear by several verbal and nonverbal means (lines 1-2). The word being sought is eventually produced individually and accompanied by pauses, repetitions and interrupted utterances (“you know (0.7) it’s it’s (like) (.)”), which signal the speaker’s engagement in the search. At this moment Yan, with rising intonation, produces the first part of the missing utterance (“CONTINUE/”) indicated by a movement of his hands representing the meaning of the word being looked for (line 3. See image 1). The specific linguistic and multimodal environment of “CONTINUE/” as well as the successive pauses (line 4) trigger a collaborative resolution. The gesture progression carried out by Yan during his turns (first closing his eyes then touching his temples with both his index fingers. See image 2) clearly shows his effort to solve the lexical problem and to proceed with the discussion. David starts his turns by an agreement mark (“yeah\”) followed by the completion of the problematic word (line 5). Yan accepts the resolution of the word search and tries to continue the discussion (line 6). But David, in overlap, has already begun his turn and gradually continues its development (lines 7-9).

In some of these examples (1, 3 and 4), the speaker first engages in a solitary search for a word, which develops into a collective resolution in which the recipient is directly asked to provide the sought-for word. In examples 3 and 4 particularly, the initiation of the activity of a search for a word comes about through the use of specific gestures, which signal the unavailability of a word and make accountable and explain the way the speaker is engaging in the production of possible lexical outcomes. As we have seen, for the recipients, these gestures have a clear and relevant meaning, which enables them to recognize that a word search is in progress (Goodwin & Goodwin 1986). Even if the speaker tries to search for a word without asking for help, the fact that this is a face-to-face meeting leads the recipient to join in the resolution of the lexical problem. The recipient thus assists in the word search event and provides a solution, which allows everyone to move on towards the accomplishment of activity goals.

On the evidence of the above figures in which the speaker initiates the search for a word, we can make the following points:

- He tries to solve the interactional problem on his own. This is to be seen in the production of a variety of verbal and nonverbal resources such as self-questions or stereotypical gestures, for example, gaze withdrawal or thinking face, which both indicate that the speaker is seriously engaged in a word search (for more details see Goodwin & Goodwin, 1986).
- He faces himself to the co-participants. In this case, nonverbal resources such as the orientation of her/his body and her/his gaze allow to recognize how the search for a linguistic solution occurs in a collective way. By these actions, the participant who is in trouble calls upon the linguistic skills of specific participants in the interaction. This way, he gives his co-participants “roles” such as “expert”, “inexpert” or “native speaker” in the linguistic activity.

In the examples examined above, when the interactional difficulty appears, the participants do not interrupt their turn, but persist with it, showing a strong commitment to the continuation of the communicative activity. Engagement in the conversational process exhibits not only the fulfillment of the roles of each member, but also how they construct social actions such as reporting professional results in a meeting. The interactions in the work meeting display individual investment, as well as a collective effort to develop effective communication in ELF. In both cases, the actions are consequential to the result of the interaction. Sometimes the treatment of interactional difficulty becomes an opportunity to improve communication skills,

for instance to expand vocabulary in a second language or to find out, through the interaction itself, the adequacy of problematic utterances or words.

But not all word search activities lead to the clear lexical solution that would normally be expected. The following figures will allow us to investigate a different type of interactional problem. Here, the speaker in trouble thematizes the difficulty by pursuing the conversation or closing the talk in progress after finding a second interactional trouble.

Searching for words to solve an interactional thematized difficulty:

Figure 5



Caption: +: Frédéric (FRE); #: Claire (CLA); \$: Martine (MAR); Anne (ANN); Johnny (JON); Tommy (TOM); Participant not identified (?)

1 **FRE** we we work with (eu::h; the::) (0.8) with
2 (eu:::h; the:::) some companies/ (0.8) a:nd
3 but (0.6) +°ah non c'est mince c'est trop compliqué°=
 oh no it's shoot it's too complicated
 +bending to the right side, head resting
 on hand -->
4 =((collective laughter))
5 **CLA** no:n+
 no
 fre --->+
6 **FRE** NON MAIS NON [it's it's] it's too complicated(e; ing)
 no but no
7 **CLA** [#sorry#]
 #turns quickly towards TOM & JON#
8 **FRE** +fo:r for you (0.5) a::h I+=
 +points towards TOM & JON+
9 **MAR** =((laughs)) (0.4) \$for [you/ ex]plain for them\$
 \$looks quickly at FRE & after
 at TOM & JON\$
10 **FRE** [NO:N m-]
 no b-
11 **MAR** [xxx]
12 [((collective laughter))]
13 **CLA** [no the xxx xxx-tion]
14 [((collective laughter)) ((collective laughter))]
15 **ANN** <prestataire ((imitating an English accent))>=
 provider
16 ? =OH NON alors là=

oh no wow
 17 **FRE** =**non c'est pas ça m- +but+ (0.3) s-** if sometimes yeah ah
 no it's not that s-
 +claps quickly on the table+
 18 **sometimes so:me school/ maybe have:\ (.) fifty::**

Figure 5 starts with successive self-repairs produced by Frédéric. During Frédéric’s turn, we observe some hesitations showing his difficulty in finishing his speaking slot. It is shown by sound stretches and pauses (represented by the twofold transcription *eu:::h; the:::*). On Line 3, Frédéric verbalizes his difficulty and gives rise to collective laughter. In a multimodal way, the difficulty in finding the missing English words is clearly shown by the use of stereotypical gestures: Frédéric bends over the table and holds his head in his right hand (line 3).

The statement formulated in French by Frédéric (line 3) thematizes in some way the kind of interactional difficulty he is experiencing. For Frédéric, what makes it a burden to continue his presentation in English is not insufficient linguistic skills in English but the complexity of the subject under discussion. Switching to French and thematizing the difficulty provoke the reactions of his co-participants, whose response is laughter. The collective laughter (line 4) shows the attitude of the co-participants towards Frédéric’s difficulty and works as a call to order (Goffman 1974). In an implicit way the collective laughter indicates that they expect a return to formality in the work situation. This reaction drives Frédéric to repair his switching and previous thematization “ah non c’est mince c’est trop compliqué”²⁶. The twofold negation “NON MAIS NON”²⁷ in French has the effect of changing the interpretation of his thematized difficulty. When Frédéric switches back to English to explain the complexity of the subject, Claire looks rapidly at Tommy and Johnny (English speakers) and apologizes for this momentary suspension of Frédéric’s English presentation (line 7). Claire’s gaze orientation toward Tommy and Johnny makes intelligible the English speaker category. In this way the French speakers recognize the need for the use of the English language to ensure mutual understanding particularly for the English team to whom the explanations are addressed. The continuation in English (line 6) seems to be explicable in terms of complexity of content rather than linguistic incompetence. This can be explained by the way Frédéric orients himself towards two main participants (See multimodal transcription line 8). Frédéric’s pointing to the English speakers signals a new category of participant “you” (line 8). By using verbal and nonverbal means, Frédéric separates the meeting into two groups: the English speakers (you) and the French speakers. During Martine’s turn (line 9) two categories of participants “you” and “them” are clearly marked out. Martine highlights Frédéric’s difficulty (*you*) and the possible difficulty encountered by the non-French-speaking participants (*them*). On line 17, Frédéric shows his disapproval of the interpretations made by co-participants. Indeed, his position, expressed in French, clearly stating his disaffiliation is followed by the conjunction “but” with which Frédéric introduces the formulation of a new statement in English (lines 17–18). This sequence illustrates a difficult situation in the discursive production for Frédéric and shows how the interactants orient themselves to certain categorical items to achieve the social order of professional activity.

A different case of interactional trouble “resolution”:

²⁶ oh no it’s shoot it’s too complicated

²⁷ no but no

Figure 6



Image 1

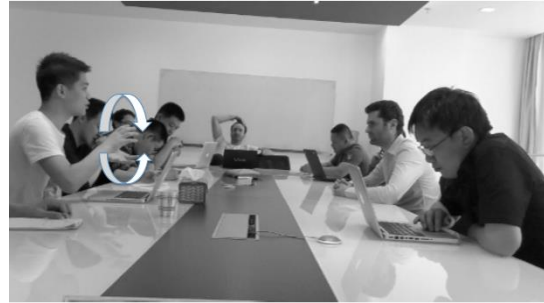


Image 2



Image 3

Caption: #: Phong (PHO); Emmanuel (EMM); David (DAV)

```

1   PHO   a::h modify som::::e call back&
2   EMM   °°°okay°°°
3   PHO   &we remove about so- xxx and the we::: we: modify
4   PHO   #som::e (2.0)# #a::h return# results/ a:h we return results
      im   #....im. 1--># #---im. 2-->#
5       #and the:::: f- and# <that is all ((laughing))>
      #....im.3,,,,,,,,-->#
6       (1.0)
7   PHO   [(laughter)
8   EMM   [°°(discreet laughter) okay°°
9   PHO   okay\ that's all\
10  DAV   okay\

```

Let us examine what happens in this example. At the beginning of the figure, we can see that during Phong's turn some perturbations such as sound stretches (a::h, som::::e) slow down the talk production. But the speaker does not really show involvement in the search for a word until his gestures and thinking face clearly indicate the initiation of a word search (l. 4, See image 1). After the pause, in line 4, he changes his gesture: rather than moving in a way signifying "return", his hands make an alternating movement to suggest the meaning of the missing word (See image 2). The sought-for word is produced during this gesture. The repetition of the word is followed by a continuer and a sound stretch on "the:::::" creating a new

disturbance in the talk (line 5). The attempt to find the new sought-for word may be also seen in the false start on “f-” accompanied of a stereotypical gesture (See image 3) which shows that he still is engaged in an unsuccessful word-search. But this new word search is immediately given up and almost closed by the “that’s all” utterance (line 5). Neither the speaker nor the recipient seems to recognize the end of Phong’s turn. He is still engaged in closing it by laughter that shows the awkward character of the situation, and by repetitions of decreasing volume finally making more explicit the end of the sequence-in-progress (lines 5–9).

In the two cases we have different treatments of interactional difficulty. In figure 5 the speaker tries to give up the talk in progress when the interactional problem appears. In this case he uses particular verbal resources to show his inability to proceed with the production of his English turn. The French utterance “ah non c’est mince c’est trop compliqué”, produced in a lowered voice, and the gesture made by the speaker show an interruption of talk in progress rather the beginning of a word search. The special character of the linguistic difficulty is collectively noticed. The recipients, by laughter and various comments, display their involvement in the activity and its importance. They contribute collectively to find a speedy solution to the interactional problem, and thus to accomplish the main goal of the interaction.

However, in figure 6, neither the speaker nor the recipient engages in the resolution of the interactional problem. In figure 5 we saw the recipients’ attempt to help the speaker toward the resolution of the interactional problem. In figure 6, we did not find any effort to produce a satisfactory result for the second word search (lines 5). After an unsuccessful attempt at word search (and the::: f- and), the speaker interrupts in mid-course the turn-constructural unit, showing at the same time, through laughter, his difficulty in continuing the talk.

The two examples demonstrate a very different modality of co-participation in the resolution of interactional problems. Despite displaying a verbal recognition of the interactional difficulty, the recipients do not immediately repair the problem that has arisen. Instead, they wait for a solution to be produced by the speaker. This action shows a preference for giving speakers the opportunity to solve their own interactional difficulties and to lead the activity towards the achievement of its goals. These last figures provide some evidence on how speakers treat the unavailability of a word or an utterance. In both cases, this unavailability is displayed in the same way as in the earlier examples, but very differently in terms of word search resolution. Instead of asking for the recipients’ contribution to find the sought-for word(s), the speaker, by thematizing the difficulty or by interrupting the unit of talk points out the complexity of talk.

4. Discussion

The production of verbal and visual phenomena has consequences for the organization of the activity and for its duration. The treatment of interactional difficulty leads to a prolongation of turn taking and a deceleration of the interaction, without this being interpreted as an obstacle to the achievement of the goals of the activity, except when the speaker makes explicit his difficulty in producing a specific unit of talk²⁸. Thus we can have three different treatments of interactional difficulty. When a difficulty arises:

- The speaker interrupts his turn by resorting to other verbal resources. Code-switching can be used to explain the interactional trouble. This may offer an opportunity to solve the

²⁸ In these cases we cannot demonstrate that the goals of activity have been accomplished.

trouble collectively. Another possibility is closure utterances, which demonstrate that the speaker is not able to produce a completed unit of talk in the foreign language being used.

- The recipients show their desire to facilitate the achievement of the speaker's turn. This organization of the interaction causes an extension of the turn taken by the speaker trying to solve her/his interactional difficulty.
- The recipients immediately focus on the resolution of the interactional difficulty. They thus ensure the continuation of the work activity and the achievement of the goals of the interaction.

The way the participant goes about searching for words makes it possible to study the production of specific inferences linked to the participants' activity. The achieving of mutual comprehension is therefore relevant and consequential to the interaction, and produces conditions in which the continuation of the activity will be developed. Through these interactional practices, the participants come to a mutual understanding of their actions. We therefore think that this is related to a preference for interaction designed to solve locally what could be problematic for the success of the activity (Levinson 2006).

If we analyze the word search process by taking into account its multimodal dimension we can better define the interactive circumstances within which this phenomenon occurs. When the interactional difficulty arises, the gestures used by the participants have a double effect in the interaction. In our corpora, we noted that the gestures often seem to stand in for what the participant who is experiencing a difficulty cannot verbalize. We also noted in our corpus how the participants do not interpret gestures as an action that can entirely replace the word being sought. This is quite a significant discovery. Despite the way in which some stereotypical gestures facilitate the understanding of problematic words, this corpus shows that the participants engage not only in the interpreting of these gestures, but also in the production of specific and sometimes complex utterances. This means that in these organizational settings a word search cannot be conducted only by gestures providing information about what the participant is trying to say. The word search activity also provides significant and useful utterances that make it possible to continue pursuing professional goals.

This corpus often demonstrates that participants are often oriented toward how and by what means they can accomplish the communicative activity they are engaged in. An example of such activity is the presentation, to a particular audience, of problematic points or expected results.

We have studied how the participants focus their attention on the achievement of the goal of the activity in progress. The treatment of the difficulties shows the specificity of the activity in which it is occurring. Indeed, the problematic organization of the units of talk would be marked in other types of ordinary, formal or non-formal institutional conversations, but this particular focus (individual or collective) on interactional problems, as we just examined in our corpus, constitutes an argument in favor of the achievement of the activity for all practical purposes.

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Appendix:

Key of the transcription symbols (ICOR – Interactions CORpus, 2007)

Verbal transcription conventions

- [] mark the beginning and the end of overlap between two locutors
- = marks a quick move between two turns (latching)
- & marks the continuation of the turn by the same speaker
- (0.6) marks the length of the pause, with an accuracy of tenths of seconds
- ::: mark syllabic lengthening
- nou- the hyphen indicates sound ‘cut-off’
- i ` marks an unstandardized elision
- / and \ mark the ups and downs of intonation
- ° ° encloses talk which is produced quietly
- underline marks words or syllables which are given special emphasis
- (eu::h ; the::) alternative hearings
- (veux) parenthesis indicates transcriber doubt

Multimodal transcription conventions

- * * delimit the gestures and the description of actions
- *----> mark the continuation of the gesture or the action after the end of the transcript line
- *-->> mark the continuation of the gesture or the action after the end of the extract
- >* mark the continuation of the gesture or the action until the next symbol is reached
- >>---- mark the beginning of the gesture or the action before the beginning of the extract
- mark the preparation of the gesture
- mark the outcome and the maintenance of the apex of the gesture
- ,,,,,,,,,, mark the retraction of the gesture