A MODEL FOR A MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF ASIDES IN CONFERENCE PLENARY LECTURES

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RESUMEN

El objetivo de este trabajo es presentar el análisis de las digresiones en las conferencias plenarias desde una perspectiva multimodal (Querol-Julián, 2010; Fortanet- Gómez & Ruiz-Madrid, 2014; Querol-Julián & Fortanet-Gómez, forthcoming). Para llevar a cabo esta investigación hemos seleccionado una conferencia plenaria en inglés impartida por el profesor David Crystal en la 7th Annual International IATEFL Conference & Exhibition en 2013 en Liverpool disponible también en linea.

Palabras clave: Análisis multimodal del discurso, conferencia plenaria, digresiones.

ABSTRACT

The objective of the present study is to analyze asides in plenary lectures taking a multimodal discourse analysis approach (Querol-Julián, 2010; Fortanet- Gómez & Ruiz-Madrid, 2014; Querol-Julián & Fortanet-Gómez, forthcoming). In order to fulfill the objective of the research, we selected one plenary lecture in English at a conference in linguistics delivered by Prof. David Crystal at the 47th Annual International IATEFL Conference & Exhibition in 2013 in Liverpool and is also available online [ii].

Keywords: Multimodal Discourse Analysis, plenary conference, digressions, asides.

1. INTRODUCTION

Much of the research carried out up to now on academic spoken discourse has been based on classroom lectures or conference paper presentations (Flowerdew, 1994; Fortanet & Räisänen, 2006; Strodt-Lopez, 1991). Plenary lectures share with all the other conference genres many of the characteristics that define them, such as a) dynamism, b) situatedness, c) form and content, and d) community ownership, as described by Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) for written genres, and applied by Shalom (2002) to conference genres. The objective of the present study is to provide a model for analyzing asides in plenary lectures taking a multimodal discourse analysis approach (Querol-Julián, 2010; Fortanet-Gómez & Ruiz-Madrid, 2014), which will start from a linguistic analysis and will move on to the paralinguistic and kinesics resources that accompany and complement language. For this analysis, we will try to adapt previous studies by Strodt-Lopez (1991) and Pons and Estellés (2009). In order to fulfill the objective of the research, we selected one plenary lecture in English at a conference in linguistics delivered by Prof. David Crystal at the 47th Annual International IATEFL Conference & Exhibition in 2013 in Liverpool and is also available online [i].

2. ASIDES

Some research suggests that university lecturers often try to make their lectures more comprehensible by using asides. According to Strodt-Lopez (1991: 121), "Analytically, an aside is an episode of discourse with a distinct topic framework which occurs between discourse episodes having the same topic framework." Asides are connected semantically, pragmatically and formally to the surrounding and global discourse by means of key words. Strodt-Lopez (1991) analyzed the functions of asides, especially their interactive function, relating the topic to everyday frames and takes into account the role of paralanguage for her analysis. Some researchers have used other terms when referring to the same communicative resource. Pons and Estellés (2009: 922) refer to 'digression,' when "the theme of the adjacent

utterances [. . .] is shifted," a definition that is very close to that of asides. In this paper, we will consider both terms, 'aside' and 'digression,' as synonyms. Based on Pons and Estellés' (2009) we proposed the following taxonomy:

1. Context-based digressions:

    1a. University/city (space) context

    1b. Lecture context (e.g., reference to slides, handouts, etc.)

    1c. Relation between topics in lecture and 'real life' for speaker or audience

2. Utterance-based digressions: Clarifications

3. Addressing the audience directly

3. METHOD

In order to fulfill the objective of the research, we selected one plenary lecture given at a conference in linguistics. This lecture was delivered by Professor David Crystal at the 47th Annual International IATEFL Conference & Exhibition in 2013[1] in Liverpool and is also available online. The audience was formed by members from over 100 countries, mainly university lecturers and researchers on English as a foreign language. The title of the lecture was "The world in which we live in: Beatles, blends and blogs," and its duration was 59 minutes and 53 seconds.

In this text we identified asides following the parameters established by Strodt-Lopez (1991): a) paralinguistic elements (high/low pitch and pauses), and b) disjunction or digression beginning and end markers. Then, we classified the asides, adapting Pons and Estellés (2009) taxonomy and analyzed them following a

multimodal approach in which language, visual communication and gestures were jointly analyzed, while also considering how these three dimensions interact. As a multimodal approach requires an extremely high level of detail, we have selected one aside from this lecture where both verbal and nonverbal resources are used in order to carry out this particular component of our analysis.

3. A MODEL FOR A MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS OF ASIDES

Following previous studies that have dealt with multimodal discourse analysis (Querol-Julián, 2010; Fortanet-Gómez & Ruiz-Madrid, 2014), we distinguished:

1. Four types of kinesics: gestures (Kendon, 2004; McNeill, 1992), head movement (Kendon, 2002; McClave, 2000), *facial* expression (Kendon, 1981) and gaze (Argyle et al., 1981).
2. Four types of gestures (Mc Neill, 1992): iconic when there is a formal relationship with the semantic content of speech; metaphoric when the relationship is pictorial but the gestures present abstract ideas; beats when the same gesture is used regardless of the content showing the word or phrase as significant; and deictic when the gesture points out something concrete or abstract;
3. The functions that kinesics accomplish in the discourse (Kendon, 2004; McNeill, 1992): referential function when the kinesic feature represents any aspect of the content of the utterance; cohesive when kinesics link part of the discourse; interactive when kinesics are used to maintain interaction rather than convey meaning; and pragmatic when kinesics add actual meaning to the communicative value of the utterance;
4. How they all interact with the speech (Kendon, 2004; McNeill, 1992; Schegloff, 1987): showing semantic or pragmatic synchrony, adding meaning and going beyond the utterance.

As for paralanguage, we identified three types: two voice qualities and one voice differentiator (Poyatos, 2002), as well as the functions they accomplish in the discourse. In this particular case, the analysis of paralinguistic elements was narrowed to the role intonation plays in the discourse following Brazil's (1997) approach to Discourse Intonation (DI). In this sense, Cauldwell (2002) summarizes the interpretation of the choices as follows: a low key tone adds meaning that could be paraphrased as 'this discourse unit has an equitable relationship with what has gone before,' and high key tone adds 'this discourse unit is not related to what has preceded,' or 'this tone is discourse-initial.' Low termination tone also adds meaning such as 'this is discourse-final,' and high termination tone adds 'this is something I want you to reflect and give judgment on.' We agree with Querol-Julián (2010), who suggests that although DI seems to disregard the attitudinal aspects of intonation, it is possible to interpret some attitudinal function, since the key system enables the speaker to show feelings or anticipate feelings in their hearers, as is the case in the present study.

The aside taken as a model belongs to Crystal's conference. It was taken from the very beginning of his plenary, where the speaker thanks the organization of the conference for their invitation. In this context-based aside (subcategory 1c) the speaker resorts to a personal narrative in which linguistic, paralinguistic and kinesics resources co-occur to achieve a direct and intensive interaction with the audience. It seems that he wants to break the ice and create a friendly atmosphere for the whole speech.

Table 1 below summarizes the three-level analysis of this aside including 1) the structure of the aside and its relation to the structure of the lecture, 2) the linguistic analysis and 3) the multimodal analysis (paralinguistic elements and kinesics). We have divided this aside into four different moves.

Table 1: Three-level analysis of Aside 1

Aside 1: Context-based, the speaker refers to his own life	
	Relation to the structure of the lecture: Thank you section
Well, thank you for **that.** [Laughter]	Move 1) Linking the aside with previous discourse. Linguistic analysis: - discourse marker ("well") as a starter of aside. - demonstrative pronoun ("that") with an anaphoric function, making reference to the presenter's previous discourse. Multimodal analysis: - paralinguistic elements: high key (i.e., discourse-initial function) and laughs. - kinesics: the speaker steps backwards from the lectern.
Oh, dear. Never **trust** Wikipedia, of course. **I mean** the things you read there. **I learn** something new about myself every time **I look** at Wikipedia. [Laughter] **You** never know what somebody is going to say.	Move 2) Introduction of the aside: the speaker refers to the chair's mention of him in Wikipedia to give cohesion to the lecture and to interact with the audience. Linguistic analysis: - discourse marker, "oh, dear," informal expression used as digression marker to signal beginning of move. - imperative ("never trust"). - 1st t person singular (e.g., "I mean" - 2nd person ("you") to interact directly with the audience. Multimodal analysis:

	- paralinguistic elements: rising and falling intonation. - kinesics: head movements to emphasize significant discourse.
I mean for a while, a few years ago, just for a day or two, **a)** they **knighted me.** For a while I was Sir David Crystal according to Wikipedia and it only lasted a short time, but it was nice while it lasted. **b)** I've had **different numbers of children on Wikipedia** [Laughter], **c)** varying **numbers of wives**	Move 3) Extension of the aside: narrative on different topics: a) Sir David Crystal; b) number of children; c) number of wives. Linguistic analysis: - 1st person singular (e.g., "I mean") and simple past and time expressions (e.g., "a few years ago"). Multimodal analysis: - paralinguistic elements: rising and falling intonation, slow speech rhythm. - kinesics: head movements + intensive gaze to emphasize significant discourse.
you never know what's going to turn up	Move 4) End of the aside: pat-ending expression. Linguistic analysis: - 2nd person ("you") as an undetermined person, though also used as direct reference to the audience. Multimodal analysis: - paralinguistic elements: rising and falling intonation. - kinesics: head movements to emphasize significant discourse.
So, well good morning	Move 5) Resumption of main topic. Linguistic analysis: - discourse marker (e.g., "so") to note the end of the aside, use of the expression "well, good

	morning" to link to the chairwoman's discourse (she said good morning at the very beginning). Multimodal analysis: - paralinguistic elements: rising intonation. - kinesics: arm and hand movements to emphasize significant discourse; use of pauses.

As shown in Table 1, in this example the speaker begins with a narrative passage to initiate his discourse. For more insight into the pragmatic value of this aside, we should look closer at the co-occurrence of the linguistic, paralinguistic and kinesic features that Crystal uses to convey the final message. In this sense, it is interesting to highlight how intonation and head movements help Crystal to emphasize specific words or utterances in Move 3. In this move, Crystal extends the aside by talking about different topics, among which is the anecdote about having become Sir for some days according to Wikipedia. He uses the first person singular and simple past tense ("knighted," "was," "lasted"), which are common in narratives. The intonation he uses is neutral when saying "they knighted me," but he wants to emphasize this anecdote and therefore he adopts a more ironic and humoristic approach. In order to do so, he uses linguistic features to rephrase the same idea ("I was Sir David Crystal") and paralinguistic features, since he makes intentional pauses in between each word, thus establishing a slow rhythm as when inviting people to listen carefully to what he is saying. However, in this particular example, the kinesic features seem to play a fundamental role, since Crystal makes repetitive head movements (up-down) when pronouncing every word. These beat gestures have a parsing function that adds an implicit punctuation to discourse. Moreover, they are accompanied by an intensive gaze at the audience. One can deduce from Crystal's intonation, gestures and gaze that his intention is to interact with the audience by creating a shared

understanding of his ironic approach to this anecdote. He accomplishes this by means of an intense and significant interaction, which combines a slow speech rhythm, repetitive gestures and an intensive gaze.

4. FINAL REMARKS

In this paper, we have presented a model for the multimodal analysis of asides in plenary lectures from a multimodal perspective, which includes a detailed analysis of linguistic, paralinguistic and kinesic resources that afford a comprehensive understanding of discourse. Though this can be considered a preliminary study whose results need to be corroborated with additional sources of data, we think there is enough evidence to state that discourse analysis cannot be complete unless there is a joint study of verbal and nonverbal behaviors. Regarding the in-depth study of the aside selected, our joint analysis of verbal and nonverbal elements following the three-level analysis adapted from Carter-Thomas and Rowley-Jolivet (2003) confirms the validity of this analytical framework. It has allowed us to apply a multimodal approach to better understand the role of asides and their final communicative aim in the genre of plenary lectures. Plenary speakers are invited and are usually allotted more time for their lectures and therefore may feel freer to include digressions, anecdotes and humor, thus using more organizing clues than is usual in paper presentations. However, we agree with Webber (2005: 173) when she refers to this specific trait of plenary lectures as "very complex material since the speaker may be one of the few experts in the field and only a handful of experts in the audience may be able to follow the speaker's argument adequately." It is at this point when a multimodal approach proves to be necessary and effective for a comprehensive understanding of the whole message as shown in the analysis of Aside 1 in which kinesics and paralinguistic elements play a fundamental role in understanding Crystal's communicative goal.

Though the results in this paper can only be considered preliminary because of the limitations of the dataset, some of them are in line with those obtained by previous researchers such as Hood and Forey (2005), for example, the use of humor as well as verbal and nonverbal resources when thanking the organization for the invitation

or referring to the conference venue. On a practical level, the findings of this study can be very useful in the context of training courses for new researchers, providing support for the need to pay careful attention to both verbal and nonverbal features for a complete understanding of conference lectures.

Notes

[1] Available at http://iatefl.britishcouncil.org/2013/sessions/2013–04–09/plenary session-david-crystal (17/10/2014).

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