Latching as a turn-holding device and its function in retrospective turn continuation: Data from Mandarin conversation

Wei Zhang

City University of Hong Kong

weizhang@cityu.edu.hk

Abstract

Latching is a term used in Conversation Analysis referring to the absence of 'natural beat of silence' between two turn constructional units. It is generally interpreted as a turn-holding device. In this presentation, we report a case study on the use of latching for retrospectively-oriented turn continuation, where further talk is produced to address some aspects in previous talk of the same speaker. While previous literature has identified 'pursuing recipient response' as an interactional function for further talk beyond completion (thus effecting turn continuation), our focus here is on further talk produced through latching as a kind of 'pre-emptive' means to address potential interactional difficulties. The following two examples illustrate this point. Both involves self-repair on the construction of a question. In (1) apparently the lack of immediate response from the recipient has led to the speaker to repair the reference term ('his students' vs. 'his other students'). In (2) on completion of the question the speaker immediately continues with a repair to specify that the term 'work' refers to 'research'. As this repair is produced through latching it contrasts with the one in (1) in that it is not addressing any actual difficulty on the recipient's part, but it may be seen as a means to prevent potential difficulty of a similar kind.

(1) 1 J: [然後] 他 的 學生　　 有沒有　　 做　 呢?
             [ranhou] ta de xuesheng   you-mei-you   zuo ne?
             then   he DE studeht   have-not-have do   PT
             'then did his students do it?'

     2   (0.37)

     3 Y: 他- (0.3) [一-]
             ta   yi
             he   one
             'he- (0.3) [one-]'

     4 J: [其]他 的 學生
                     qita   de xuesheng
                     other   DE   student
                     'other students'

     5   (0.1)

     6 Y: 也 做
             ye zuo
             also do
             '(they) also do (it)'

(2) 1   J: e 你們 (.) 平時間　做　　甚麼　　工作　　啊 =
            nimen　pishijian　zuo　shenme　gongzuo　a
            you　　normally　do　　what　　work　　PT

     2   就是: e:::i:　　(0.55) 做　　你　的 re:search (.) [方面的
            jiushi　　　　　　zuo　ni　de　　　　　　fangmiande
            that.is.to.say　do　you　DE　　　　　aspect
            '*what work do you normally do = that is to say work in your research* '

     3   Y: [就- e 就 我們
                                                 jiu　jiu　women
                                                 just　just　our

     4   老闆　不讓:　(0.1) 不讓　　我們　　做　他　的 RA 做　　的　事情
            laoban　bu-rang　　bu-rang　women　zuo　ta　de　　zuo　de　shiqing
            boss　　NEG-let　　NEG-let　we　　do　he　DE　　do　DE　matter
            '*Our boss would not (0.1) would not let us do his RA's work*'

It is found that speakers may produce specification, explanation, elaboration, etc. through further talk produced in latching. Such talk may either orients towards the recipient (e.g. to prevent a potential interactional problem) or towards the speaker him/herself (e.g. self-deprecation). In discussion we will also look at cases where talk produced through latching may not be so clear in the retrospective/prospective orientation.