

## **Turn-taking in conversation: overlaps and interruptions in intercultural talk.**

### **1. Introduction**

The motivating factor for this study was personal experience of communicating in intercultural settings, and the differences that seemed to emerge in turn-taking behaviour or interaction patterns (pauses, overlaps, speaker changes, simultaneous talk, prosody and intonation patterns, etc.). The present study could represent a first stage in exploring convey cultural similarities and differences in conversational behaviour, especially on a turn-taking level.

The underlying hypothesis is that turn-taking behaviour and interaction patterns play a key role in the process through which the participants interpret each other's meanings and intentions. The hypothesis includes a view according to which the participants in an intercultural situation of communication, trying to understand the intentions of their co-locutors from their own cultural perspective, can frequently commit misinterpretations that lead to misunderstandings. These misinterpretations are assumed to stem partly from socially acquired "rules" of interaction that are culturally biased. It will be proposed that discovering the cultural differences of conversational behaviour could increase the awareness of the processes involved in face-to-face intercultural communication.

Following this line of inquiry, a case study has been conducted comparing the turn-taking behaviour between Americans and French engaged in French conversations (Wieland 1991). Wieland conducted recordings of ordinary dinner table conversations, and later interviewed the participants in order to elicit insights into their interpretations of the interaction.

This article presents the results of a similar kind of a study, however, without access to participants' opinions, and at this stage, without access to the comparative aspects, due to the nature of the data used in the study.

## 2. Methodology

The aim of the study was to gain insights into how conversations in French work, especially on the level of turn-taking, in a selected corpus of everyday conversations among three participants, using a corpus of spoken French recorded in France by Sihvonen-Hautecoeur in 1988 and kept at the Institute of Romance and Classical Languages at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland.

From the corpus, three recordings of ordinary dinner-table conversations with three participants were selected for analysis (codes JKL 8A, JKL 8B, and JKL 9A). Triadic conversations were preferred to dyadic due to the different patterns of turn-taking they convey. The participants in these conversations were two females, one French and one Finnish, and one French male, all about 30 years of age.

As one of the locutors was a non-native but nevertheless fluent speaker of French (the Finnish female participant), it has to be pointed out that this element may have influenced the French interaction. However, as the participants seemed to be fairly well acquainted and conversing in a relaxed setting, the difference is likely not to have hindered the interaction. Furthermore, it needs to be drawn into attention that due to the limitations of the corpus, comparative aspects between the French and the Finnish communication styles did not fall within the scope of the study, since this would have required additional data in separate native-language groups.

The study draws upon several approaches to analysing interaction. A key element is ethnomethodological Conversation Analysis (henceforth, CA), focusing on the making of social realities and on meaning-making through communication. Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) pioneered the study of ordinary conversations in order to discover the detailed “rules” of conversational behaviour, turn-taking, overlapping of turns, pausing between the turns, etc. This line of research has been further and most recently discussed by Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998) and Ten Have (1999). Some of CA’s specific aspects, which were of use in the present study, include frameworks developed for the analyses on overlaps and interruptions (Drummond 1989, Lerner 1989).

In relation to functional analysis of language and interaction, previous studies on feedback and discourse markers provided valuable background for the analysis and categorisation of the data. De Gaulmyn (1987) in her study on French

discourse markers and Pennington and Doi (1993) in their paper on English foreign language speakers' use of discourse markers put forward categories based on how discourse markers are used rather than categorising the markers based on their form.

The present study was also influenced by a case study on cross-cultural conversation (Wieland 1991), comparing the interaction of French and American interlocutors conversing in French. Furthermore, the study was partly inspired by a model taking into consideration the aspect of the role of language use in situations of intercultural communication, as proposed for example by Müller-Jacquier (1998).

A necessary comparison to the CA approach to overlaps is presented with research on interruption and overlapping from the point of view of anthropological interaction studies, as proposed for example by Bennett (1981) and Carroll (1988). This avenue of investigation focuses on the participants' interpretations on meaning-making and on the interaction as an important source of reliability for analyses.

### **3. Conversational analysis: empirical approaches**

Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) introduced the detailed analysis of ordinary conversations. Coming from a sociological background, and with an ethnomethodological underpinning, they studied conversational behaviour from audio recordings of mundane conversations. They discovered ways in which a naturally occurring conversation was actually highly organised as a social activity. These findings were formulated into 'rules' of turn-taking that seemed to govern conversational behaviour, to the surprise of many a sociologist and a linguist who in the 1960's considered spoken language and interaction too unorganised and erratically spontaneous to be studied systematically.

Drummond (1989) presents a variety of approaches that started from coding of all overlaps as interruptions and were elaborated into empirically detailed definitions of counting the amount of overlapping syllables and taking into account whether these overlaps occurred near to or far from a *Transition Relevant Place* (TRP). Drummond's own emphasis is on the importance of examining the context of any utterance before classifying it as an interruption. He consequently questions attempts to code and count interruptions empirically altogether. (1989: 151, 163.)

Drummond (1989) further presents West and Zimmerman's (1983) definition as one among the first to separate neatly facilitation and simultaneous talk from interruptions, thus avoiding counting all overlaps as interruptions. Interruption, according to West and Zimmerman, disrupts a current speaker – although disruption as such can also be regarded as interaction (1983:105). Their empirical definition of interruptions as violations of speaker's turn at talk is further summarised into 'incursions initiated more than two syllables away from the initial or terminal boundary of unit-type'. (1983:103,104)

However, it is not always feasible to follow this definition in the practical analysis of interruptions. Indeed, it would seem that using the method of counting the syllables would undermine the attempts to separate facilitation from interruptive talk. Furthermore, one of the flaws, according to Drummond (1989), of West and Zimmerman's (1983) model is that they do not take into consideration the resolution of the overlap. Drummond claims that the disruptive potential of a turn can and should be evaluated based on the way the overlap was resolved in the interaction. (1989: 151, 158-159.)

Lerner (1989) observes that there are interruptions which can be justified in the ongoing interaction based on the sequential context of turns that lead to interruptive turns. He calls these justified interruptions *Delayed Completions*. A *delayed Completion* is defined as a device for resolving overlap. A locutor producing it might have been 'interrupted' by a current speaker before reaching the end of a (prior) turn. This gives the locutor the status of an interruptee, and thus the interruptee gains the "right" to complete his or her previous turn by interrupting the current speaker. Thus the utterance produced 'attains the status of *Delayed Completion*' in the context in which it is produced. (Lerner 1989:168-169.)

#### **4. Phenomenological and anthropological approaches**

Other approaches to interaction do not share, or refuse to share, the empirical scrutiny of CA. They could be called phenomenological and anthropological approaches due to the shift of emphasis which they present from detailed transcriptions and strictly empirical classifications to how turn-taking, overlaps and interruptions are used and interpreted by the participants during/ in the course of the interaction.

On one side of the spectrum there is the definition of interruption offered by De Gaulmyn (1987) and quoted Wieland (1991). It is, in the light of the preceding discussion, rather vague: 'The interlocutor's taking a turn or attempting to take a turn without waiting for the speaker to finish, thus causing the partial overlap of two turns.' (Wieland 1991:103). From a CA perspective, this definition does not take into account *Transition Relevant Place*.

Wieland considers an aspect that empirical approaches do not: the participants' interpretations of the phenomena of interruption and overlaps, as well as the participants' perceptions of their co-participants' intentions in producing them. Both Wieland and De Gaulmyn point out the aspects of role and function of the overlap for the participants as a central issue (De Gaulmyn 1987: 220; Wieland 1991: 106-109), although De Gaulmyn does not elicit the participants' opinions on her analysis.

Wieland's (1991) case study comparing the turn-taking behaviour between Americans and French engaged in French conversations emphasises the fact that even long-term learners of a foreign language in the target-language country still experience difficulties in modifying their interaction behaviour when it comes to the socially acquired "rules" of conversational behaviour which alter from one culture to another. Wieland (1991) conducted recordings of ordinary dinner-table conversations, and later interviewed the participants in order to obtain insights into their interpretations of the interaction. One of her conclusions (1991: 103,105,111) states that overlapping seems to be the 'rule' in French, contrary to a basic Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) 'rule' of minimisation of overlap.

On the other side of the spectrum, Bennett (1981) claims that using such structure-based approaches, the analyst can end up coding an overlap as an interruption even though the participants themselves would not consider the turn interruptive (1981:174). Bennett further questions the quest for turn-constructional units as

pre-existing models that participants in conversation use, and instead encourages adopting a phenomenological view that emphasises the overall setting and the relationships of the interactants.

Bennett stresses the importance of the momentary roles of the setting and the relationships in ‘working out of the shared experience of the discourse world for and by the participants.’ (1981: 184) He argues that the analyst should take into account the ‘unfolding of understandings and interpretations’ on the level of aims, motives, feelings, etc. (*ibid.*) While he further affirms the importance of gaining access to participants’ interpretations of the interaction in which they were involved, he does not, unlike linguists who take an empirical approach, put forward a practical *modus operandi*.

The definition of an interruption adopted for this study is that it is an observable situation in the sequence of interaction in which the current speaker has started his or her turn as a second person speaking, through an audible overlap or a pause (i.e. an *Interjacent Onset*, interruption without audible overlap, Lerner 1989:170), thus interrupting the previous speaker, without it having been a TRP, a phatic discourse marker or what Pennington and Doi (1993) call a DMD (*Discourse Management Device*), a sequence of interaction with simultaneous onsets, a simultaneous turn, or a ‘justified’ interruption (*Delayed Completion*, Lerner 1989).

## 5. Defining overlaps

I now present the categories that were elaborated before and during the analysis, in the order of their frequency in the data.

- 1) **Overlaps related to TRPs** (*Transition Relevant Places*) A TRP and its projected closeness in an ongoing turn convey to the co-locutors that the current speaker is about to end his or her turn, and that the co-locutors can begin theirs even with a slight overlap of turns.
- 2) **Discourse Management Devices** (DMDs) ‘DMDs are paralinguistic and pragmatic devices which are outside the grammatical structure of utterances but which provide continuity, informational structuring, and socio-pragmatic coherence in spoken discourse’ (Pennington and Doi 1993: 68). DMDs are not produced in general to indicate a desire for turn transition but to show

interest and participation. In other literature, same class of phenomena have been labelled ‘back channel’ or ‘feedback’.

- 3) Their role is to create and enforce the relationship between the participants and to facilitate the interaction. In order to maintain the turn, vowel draws and short repetitions are produced, but sometimes they can also take on the role of invitation for others to take the turn, to complete the current speaker’s unachieved turn. Wieland (1991:113) claims that the French very often complete others’ incomplete turns when there seems to be a problem within the fluency of the ongoing turn.
- 4) **Simultaneous onsets** – occurrences of two or more participants trying to take their turn at the same time, after the previous speaker has finished or is about to finish his or her current turn. Frequently only one of the locutors will be continuing the turn and accomplishing it, as the others drop out.
- 5) **Laughter and shared laughter** are produced mostly to establish or reinforce a relationship or an alignment between the participants, as well as to convey a less serious attitude towards the previous or the following turns (cf. Ellis, 1997).
- 6) **Simultaneous turns** occur when participants start their turns simultaneously and no one relinquishes the floor to the other. Wieland (1991: 103,105) claims that it is a frequent phenomenon in French, although, according to her study, it contravenes the American style of communication. Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1996:72) states that the tolerance of overlaps and interruptions is high in the French communication style.

She compares the French opinions on interruptions to the German ones, and concludes that what might seem lively and a sign of active participation to the former, the latter could interpret as aggressive. Wieland (1991: 107, 109, 111, 112) points out that on the other hand, the French can interpret the absence of overlaps as a sign of impoliteness.

Carroll also puts forward the same point. In French, she claims (1988:36-37), interruptions are not usually considered impolite, but rather they have the role of punctuation marks. They stand for ‘seizing the pause, brief as it may be, to react’ (*ibid.*).

- 7) **Delayed Completions** (Lerner 1989) or ‘justified’ interruptions. The locutor

producing one might have been ‘interrupted’ before he or she reached the end of a prior turn, which gives the locutor the ‘right’ to complete his or her previous turn by interrupting the current speaker.

- 8) **Interruptions** are an observable situation in the sequence of interaction in which the current speaker has started his or her turn as a second person speaking, through an audible overlap or a pause (i.e. an *Interjacent Onset*), thus interrupting the previous speaker, without it having been a TRP, a phatic discourse marker (or a *DMD*), a sequence of interaction with simultaneous onsets, a simultaneous turn, or a ‘justified’ interruption (*Delayed Completion*).
- 9) **Third party mediation** is a specific case in the data where two of the three participants start arguing and the third participant successfully attempts to alleviate the conflict through a disruptive action that changes the topic altogether.

## 6. Results

The total number of turns in this corpus is 1016, of which 422 (41.5%) are overlapping with one or more other turns. After the qualitative analysis, only four cases (0.9%) were classified as interruptions. The coding of the overlaps was not always self-evident. However, the ultimate basis for it was the way in which each turn was taken and interpreted by the co-participants in each sequence of interaction.

These interpretations by the participants were observable in the data, within the sequential context of the turns of speech. Indeed, one of the main findings concerning interrupting is that it is the co-participants who in their turns of speech make it known if the prior turn or turns are to be perceived as interruptive or not. It is suggested that further studies consider the importance of gaining access to participants’ opinions on selected samples of data, in order to improve reliability. Overall frequencies of the different categories of overlapping are shown in Table 1.



**Table 1. Overall percentage frequencies of the various categories of Overlap**

Category	%
Related to TRPS	34.4
DMDS	26.3
Simultaneous Onsets	21.8
Laughter and Shared Laughter	8.8
Simultaneous turns	6.2
Delayed completions	1.2
Interruptions	0.9

### 7.1 Overlaps related to TRPS

*Transition Relevant Places* (TRPs) are a natural place for the occurrence of short overlaps, DMDS (feedback or back channel devices), or simultaneous onsets of turns. What I refer to as overlaps related to *TRPs* are the short overlaps that are produced when the current speaker projects a *TRP*, or rather, when one or more interlocutors perceive a projected *TRP* in the ongoing turn and initiate their own turn(s) with a brief overlap of speech. In examples (1) the arrows 3 and 4 indicate the overlaps that are produced by L2 and L1 due to an apparent *TRP* at arrow 1. This *TRP* is in the form of a grammatically finished clause by L3.

- (1)  
 L2: [mm]  
 L3: [oui] bon tu es tu es incapable de m'expliquer [soit-disant] les avantages  
 L1: [oh oh (rire)]  
 1-->L3: de votre système [ x x]  
 2-->L2: [ je dis pas qu'il est x x x]  
 3-->L1: [ dans notre système on te] propose de lécher le plat par exemple  
 - bon ça va - alors
- (JKL 9A 1.247-253)

In example (2), the pause of two seconds after L1's turn, indicated in the brackets, prompts L2, at arrow 1, to start her turn although it seems afterwards that L1 had not finished her turn by then. At arrow 2, L1 intervenes to join in the construction of the meaning and of the turn in progress. In the end, L2 comes in again through an overlap, most likely due to the repetitions L1 was doing prior to L2's final paraphrasing of the meaning, indicated by arrow 3. Even though this example is given here in regard to *Transition Relevant Places*, the same extract can be seen as a prime example of the process of joint construction of turns.

- (2)  
 L1: ça ça m'énerve x x x bien (2s) et [ça]  
 1-->L2: [mais] on n'arrive pas à se il y a [des choses où]  
 2-->L1: [il y a des] trucs où on peut  
 pas si tu veux on nous a trop inculqué en nous on [peut pas x x x]

3-->L2:  
distances

[oui oui on arrive plus] à prendre ses  
(JKL 9A 1.542-547)

## 7.2 Discourse Management Devices (DMDs)

DMDs are in general produced to show, first of all, an agreement about the distribution of the interactive roles. An interactant can take on a listenership “contract” and manifest it by uttering short feedback in relevant “places” or during relevant moments, as the interactant in the speakership is talking. Secondly, the listening party will produce the *DMDs* to show that the speaker is being listened to and understood. In the extract (3) L3 is taking on the listenership role by uttering three short feedback devices, and in the end, by helping L1 in her “troubles” which L1 is conveying by prolonging the vowel sound, thus displaying hesitation on how to finish her turn, at arrow 2. At that point, L3 intervenes and offers a possible way to complete L1’s meaning, which L1 subsequently accepts.

(3)  
L1: et puis je sais pas comment te dire [- ]tu es crevée un peu tu tu vois [ce] que je veux dire  
hein tu  
1-->L3: [justement] [mm]  
2-->L1: as envie de te reposer quoi [-] tu as pas envie de: [euh :]  
3-->L3: [mm] [ de] ressortir tout de suite  
L1: oui x x x  
(JKL 8B 1.5-11)

Another example of the same type of joint construction and intervention by the listener is apparent in sample (4) below. L3 displays hesitation by a vowel drawl and L2 proposes a word to fill in the pursued meaning. In the data, vowel drawls such as this one often proved out to be signals of troubles within the turn, functioning as invitations for the other interactants/participants to step in. However, the word offered by L2 was not the word L3 was looking for, and L3 goes on to repeat his own choice of word with a further explanation. L1 finds herself agreeing to this explanation and conveys the agreeing in her short *DMD* at arrow 2, as well as in the completion she (L1) provides for L3’s turn after another vowel drawl by L3.

(4)  
L3: il avait trouvé ça très drôle parce qu’il trouvait que ça représentait bien la : [les familles]  
1-->L2: [la réalité]  
L3: [- ]les familles bourgeoises d’un côté : [et]

2-->L1: [oui c'est ça] [oui] et et la famille prolo de l'autre voilà  
(JKL 8B 1.503-508)

### 7.3 Simultaneous onsets

Simultaneous onsets, again, take place at *Transition Relevant Places*. The turn that is perceived to be available is taken by two or more participants. In example (5), after the natural pause caused by an action of someone pouring more to drink, L2 and L3 start speaking at the same time. In situations like this, the interactants most often display obedience to the 'rule' observed by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974), according to which only one person speaks at a time. In practice it means that one of the interactants drops out, as does L2 in mid-word ('abso-').

(5)  
L3: dans mon système il y a toujours quelque chose dans le plat le plat ne se termine jamais  
L2: et je trouve ça idiot  
( ( bruit de liquide s'écoulant dans un verre ) )  
L1: oui merci  
I-->L2: [ moi je trouve qu'il faut abso-]  
I-->L3: [ et c'est bien pour ça] que tu vas essayer de finir le plat mais là il y en a vraiment trop  
à mon avis (JKL 9A 1.256-261)

A similar type of giving in can be observed in extract (6) where, after some troubles displayed by turn-internal false starts and repetitions, as well as by a vowel drawl, L1 intervenes, perhaps taking the moment as a projected *TRP*. However, as L3 still continues his turn, L1 quickly relinquishes the turn back to him, again, in mid-word.

(6)  
L3: oui mais enfin ça n'a pas ça n'a on sait pas si c'est arrivé: ou bon enfin je sais pas  
c'est pas: [ c'est pas] une histoire réaliste: enfin disons moi je l'ai pas: senti comme  
histoire  
I-->L1: [non c'est pas l'import-]  
L3: réaliste qui se serait passée ou qui aurait pu se passer  
(JKL 8B 1.156-160)

### 7.4 Laughter and shared laughter

Laughter can have, as was discussed above, several functions in interaction. It can bring the interactants in a closer alignment with each other if they are joining in as equal participants in the laughing sequence. Furthermore, one interactant can start laughing alone, and others may join in, thus displaying understanding and creating closeness. The extract (7) is in effect only the ending of a longer sequence of negotiation of opinions on a given issue. During this negotiation, the interactants L1 and L3 were continually faced by situations where they were disagreeing with each other. At the end, L1 gives in, saying that she does agree with L3, but adds immediately that there is a condition to the agreement. That is when L2 and L3

start laughing, and L3 breaks off by offering some more wine to drink. The laughter produced here would indicate that the disagreement was not of a serious nature.

(7)

- L1: non mais alors bon disons que je te je t'accorde ce que tu m'as dit je suis d'accord  
avec toi [- mais x x x à une condition]  
L2: [(rire)]  
L3: [(rire)mais - (rire) mais - il y a le mais ] est-ce que tu veux un peu de vin rouge  
(JKL 8B 1.521-525)

### 7.5 Simultaneous turns

Contrary to the “rule” that was observed by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) on how the interactants seemed to prefer not to be talking at the same time, and that in case such situations occur, the suitable reaction seemed to give the floor to just one person while the others drop out into what one might call a listenership contract, the corpus used for this study indicated that simultaneous turns were not in fact shunned by the interactants. Although less frequent (6.2%) when compared to simultaneous onsets (21.8%) in which the floor is relinquished to one interactant alone, the coding of simultaneous turns as a separate category from interruptive ones proved out to be highly relevant for the conclusion and the synthesis of the present study.

Two possible reasons suggest themselves as to why these relative frequencies differ from those noted by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson. Firstly, the corpora are not of the same type. Most of Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson’s data corpus consisted of two-party telephone conversations. Secondly, some researchers have suggested that there are cultural differences in American and French communication styles.

In example (8), L3 initiates a simultaneous turn construction by his proposal of there existing an order for eating. To this, L1 responds in a similar simultaneous way, by producing her answer while L3 is still speaking. A situation that could easily have evolved into L1 giving up her turn, which would have made L3’s intervention interpretable as an interruption. Instead, L1 holds on to her turn, and keeps on talking together with L3.

(8)

- L1: il y a un plat [x x x] pour pour les petits mais [chacun prend en même non non non] chacun  
L3: [mm] [ oui ou bien il y a un ordre un truc comme ça]  
L1: prend en même temps

(JKL 9A 1.338-342)

In extract (9), after a lengthy sequence of discussion about a movie that the interactants had seen, L3 produces a turn in which he says he thought the film was not in the end all that good. This prompts L1 to say she was under the impression that L3 was defending the movie, which in turn gives rise to a bundle of simultaneously initiated turns – all of the three participants talk at the same time, at arrows number 1. Furthermore, it seems that they all hold on to their respective turns, thus creating an instance of simultaneous turns.

- (9)  
 L3: oui oui je me souviens vaguement mais je - non /ben, mais/ - j'ai trouvé aussi que c'était plutôt raté comme film hein  
 L1: ah bon ah bon - non parce que je trouve que tu le défends quand même quoi  
 1-->L3: [x non c'est - je x non x x non - non]  
 1-->L2: [c'est une question de principe x x x]  
 1-->L1: [x il fait que le défendre il dit c'est raté mais il fait que]  
 L3: je suis pas d'accord sur [les: - ] sur les: sur: la façon dont tu le critiques tu comprends  
 2-->L1: [sur les critiques x]
- (JKL 8B 1.404-412)

### 7.6 *Delayed Completions* or “justified” interruptions

*Delayed Completions* (DCs) signify instances of turn-changes in which an interactant, by reverting back to his or her previous turn, indicates that the turn was not finished yet, thus evoking a right to interrupt whoever started to speak before the turn in question was completed. A *Delayed Completion* can occur either through an audible overlap of speech, or as an *Interjacent Onset* (Lerner 1989), in which the interactant wishing to revert to the previous turn will do it during a pause in the current speaker's turn.

In the extract (10), at the arrow number 1, L2 produces an interruption by cutting off L3 in a grammatical mid-sentence. L3 quickly returns to his turn by repeating the grammatical structure during which he was interrupted, and completes his turn. At arrows numbered 2, both L1 and L2 seize a *Transition Relevant Place* and engage in simultaneous turns.

- (10)  
 L3: [bon] ton ton système est peut-être meilleur d'un point de vue de la sincérité en ce sens qu'il-euh n'impose pas d'hypocrisie aux gens [-] mais son rôle est faux c'est qu'il en: qu'il est justement  
 L2: [mm]  
 L3: il limite la souplesse d'interprétation au lieu d'avoir un système  
 1-->L2: non parce qu'il permet encore  
 L3: au lieu d'avoir un système avec-euh différentes possibilités tu te retrouves avec un système à  
 deux possibilités ou [x x x]  
 2-->L1: [tu en sais rien tu en sais rien on connaît pas les x x x]

2-->L2: [non non non pas du tout pas forcément] tu peux très  
[bien aussi continuer]

L3: [j'aimerais bien -] qu'on m'explique comment on fait alors

(JKL 9A 1.227-234)

### 7.7 Interruptions

Contrary to the working hypothesis formulated before the data analysis, interruptions were among the least frequent types of overlaps in the data set. According to the definition of interruption used in this study, only 0,9% of all the overlaps were coded as interruptions. One of the main criteria characterising interruptions, as portrayed by example (11), was the displayed non-comprehension due to an intervention by someone other than the original addressee/ recipient.

In example (11), L1 is addressing L2 by her name in the question. However, as L2 gets her answer started, L3 intervenes and makes it impossible for L1 to hear what L2 is saying. This is evident from L1's request for repetition of L2's answer ("hein?"), but again L3 initiates in a simultaneous onset with L2, although only L2 has been addressed.

(11)  
L1: pourquoi tu t'es pas servie au passage ((NAME)) d'abord  
L2: ah ben parce que [ça c'est le x x]  
1-->L3: [ça aurait été plus simple quand même]  
L1: hein ?  
2-->L3: [ça]  
L2: [ça - parce que] c'est les invités d'abord  
L1: aaah

(JKL 9A 1. 429-435)

In extract (12), L3 and L2 seem to engage in a slight struggle to gain the floor. This is manifested in the several turns that L3 attempts to start while L2 is still grammatically in the middle of her turn unit-type. Despite these attempts L2 does not give in until after the third one which L3 produces with noticeable stress on what he is saying, thus cutting off L2's unfinished turn ("misé sur").

(12)  
L3: c'est quand-même incroyable il faut tout leur apprendre  
L2: je crois tu vois que c'est s: [c'est ce qui a c'est ce qui a plu à]  
1-->L3: [il faut comprendre que la politesse]  
L2: Marc en c'est que [-] il a l'impression que vraiment il peut [-] être le professeur [misé sur]  
L1: [ah oui]  
2-->L3: [c'est un] [ce qui m'a  
plu]  
c'est d'avoir rencontré un truc pareil hein  
L3: [- une méconnaissance complète de toutes] les règles de: de la politesse ah non ça tu es restée

L1: [rire]

L2: [et c'est x x x x]

L3: exactement la même hein

(JKL 9A 1.57-70)

### 7.8 Third-party mediation

(13)

((...))

L2: ben tu refuses c'est à dire que tu prends les normes de politesse - parmi les normes de politesse uniquement ce - ce qui te convient tu fais un choix très net et tu estimes que [les autres

1-->L1:

[ah là là je crois

L2: devraient pas devraient faire] le même choix

L1: qu'on /a affaire, va faire/]

L3: oui [ben je je prends cette norme de politesse] parce que je ne résiste pas au plaisir de te

2-->L1: [là je crois qu'on /a affaire \_ / va faire/ une x x]

L3: l'expliquer mais je ne suis pas sûr enfin euh effectivement que je l'applique[-] parce que bon

L2:

[oui]

L3: effectivement hein ça me plaît pas forcément de l'appliquer

(JKL 9A 1.362-373)

As to the distribution of turns by each participant and the overlaps produced by each participant, it can be briefly stated that there were no major differences among the participants. The turns of speech in the corpus were almost equally distributed among the three participants, whereas L1 (French Female) produced more overlaps (Table 2) than the other interactants.

**Table 2 Relative frequency of Turns and Overlaps per speaker**

Speaker	Turns	Overlaps
<b>L1 French female</b>	38%	42%
<b>L2 Finnish Female</b>	29%	29%
<b>L3 French Male</b>	33%	29%

When the overlap categories of each participant are compared, some small differences can be observed. One worth mentioning is the difference in the amount of *DMDs* produced by L2 (the Finnish female), around 10% fewer than the same category of L1 and L3 (Table 3).

**Table 3 Distribution of types of overlap per interactant**

Type	L1	L2	L3
<b>Transition Relevant Place</b>	33.5	34.4	35.5
<b>Discourse Management Device</b>	30.2	18.9	28.1
<b>Simultaneous Onsets</b>	17.3	27	23.1
<b>Laughter</b>	11.2	12.3	1.7
<b>Simultaneous Turns</b>	6	6.6	6.6
<b>Delayed Completions</b>	1.1	-	2.5
<b>Interruptions</b>	-	0.8	-
<b>Mediation</b>	1.1	-	-

Other differences to be noted are in the categories of Laughter and Shared Laughter, as well as *Delayed Completions* and Interruptions. Of L3's turns only 1,7% are laughter, whereas L1 and L2 both laugh almost equal amounts, slightly over 11% each. This is explained by the fact that L2 and L1 (the female participants) often appeared to show a kind of female solidarity in opposition to L3 (the male participant). On the other hand it is L3 who produces the majority of *Delayed Completions* and Interruptions.

## 8. Conclusion

Contrary to the initial hypothesis interruptions turned out to be one of the least frequent forms of overlapping talk in the corpus studied (0,9%). The analysis revealed that the majority of overlaps in the corpus were produced by the participants to maintain a natural flow of interaction (*TRPs*), or to facilitate the interaction (*DMDs*), or to participate simultaneously (simultaneous starts, simultaneous turns, shared laughter).



No doubt that the definition of an interruption can be further refined by taking into account how the participants of that interaction use the prior and the following turns; how they treat previous turns and how they make their interpretations known through their own following turns. According to CA, all such information is observable in the data itself, within the sequences of interaction. Nonetheless, such observations could be carried out more accurately if tested against participants' own interpretations of the interaction. Moreover, there is enough evidence to suggest that different language groups have different communication styles, e.g. the "rules" of turn-taking behaviour, overlapping and pauses between cultures that are likely to cause misunderstandings in situations of intercultural face-to-face communication.

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