

## EXPLORATORY INVESTIGATION

# Disagreement Sequences in A Naturally Occurring Conversation And in A Textbook Dialog

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In this paper, I compare disagreement sequences found in a naturally occurring conversation and an English textbook, *Crown English*. The ability to perform disagreement appropriately is an important part of a learner's communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). This analysis thus aims to inform language learners and teachers about how disagreement may be done in conversations and what may be missing in a textbook's dialog.

The data from the naturally occurring conversation comes from the recording of a

first encounter between an American and a Canadian. The participants gave consent for their conversations to be recorded and analyzed.

In the conversation excerpt below, the two participants were talking about the location of a haunted house. They seemed to disagree on whether it was at the Dole Cannery, which is in town and has a movie theater, or the Dole Plantation, which is not in town (and indeed has a haunted house).

### Conversation Excerpt: Haunted House

- 1 C: Oh that maze at the Dole Factory  
2 A: Yea:h (.) exactly.  
3 C: have you ever gone on that maze?  
4 A: u:h I did once, when I first got <here> it  
5 was just so fun I love that kind of stuff?  
6 =I wanna go there for the haunted  
7 (0.6)  
8 → C: is the one at the Dole- (0.3) Dole Factory:?  
9 oh the Dole <Cannery>.  
10 A: ye[a:h not at th]  
11 C: [here in to]wn.  
12 A: >yeah yeah yeah<  
13 C: ri:ght  
14 A: u[:h]  
15 C: [I've] got tickets to go to: tks a place  
16 called eight oh fi:ve? Ala Moana?  
17 (.)  
18 C: I thought it was Dole Cannery but it's not.  
19 it's another hau- haunted house feature.  
20 [(0.5) even]t.  
21 A: [o:h no yeah]  
22 no I know I think the no the <Dole Cannery>  
23 that's like the theater i:[n ye]a:h?  
24 C: [yeah]  
25 that's n[ot?  
26 A: [th]at's not where I think it is.  
27 >I think< [it's actuall]y t]he  
28 C: [<it's no:t?>]



29 A: plantation they have a haunted (.) they  
30 haunted  
31 C: oh >is it out at the< plantati[on]  
32 A: [uh] hun.  
33 (0.6)  
34 A: tha the -that's a haunted plantation=  
35 C: =oh tut >cause anyway< there is something  
36 on eight oh fi:ve  
37 (.)  
38 A: °Ala M[oana]°?  
39 C: [Ala] Moana they've haunted a house  
40 (1.0)  
41 C: bought tickets you know how they have those  
42 L[iving Social]'s  
43 A: [I love those] I love yeah >yeah [yeah]<  
44 C: [yea:]h yeah  
45 so bought it from Living Socials but I wish  
46 I'd bought Dole one 'cause it apparently it's  
47 supposed to be really fun  
48 (.)  
49 A: °yeah°=  
50 C: =but >for some reason I thought it was at  
51 the< (.) Dole Cannery hhm u: ha. guess no:t.  
52 A: oh I -maybe I'm wr[ong]  
53 C: [ha]?  
54 A: >maybe I have to check into that<  
55 C: °yea:h°  
56 (0.3)  
57 C: °to find out°  
58 A: >but I didn't go< I -I heard about it and  
59 °I didn't go in previous years (.) so  
60 [uh° ( )]  
61 C: [waitut i]f you got a costume for <Halloween>

### Initial Agreement Sequence As Context of Disagreement Sequence

As the conversation goes on, the participants seemed to show no disagreement with each other about the location of the haunted house. In line 8, C asks if the haunted maze is at the Dole Factory, and in line 9 she self-repairs (Wong & Waring, 2010) and asks if it is at the Dole Cannery. In line 10 A shows agreement to A's self-repair. In line 11, C continues the self-repair and in line 12, A shows agreement to it. Then, C produces a sequence closing third (Schegloff, 2007) to close up this sequence. Indeed, C then talks about another topic (the difference between the Dole Cannery and another place, 805 Ala Moana) starting in line 15.

Although the participants start out with an agreement about the location of the

haunted house, it turns out that they do not agree with each other on this point.

### Disagreement Sequence

In lines 22 and 23, however, A shows, in an indirect way, her disagreement to C's understanding that the Dole Cannery has a haunted house. C first says, "I know" and immediately switches to "I think," which is a softer expression. In line 25, C uses a question "that's n[ot]?" to seek confirmation, showing disbelief at the same time. In line 26, A gives the confirmation. This is done through a softened expression with the use of a hedge "I think." She uses this hedge again in line 27 at the beginning of her turn to soften what is going to be said next. Further, in this same turn, A uses "actually" to indicate implicitly that what she is about to say will contrast with what C may assume. In line 28, C again

repeats the same question in line 25 to show her disbelief.

After A gives the information about where the haunted house is (at the plantation), C shows new understanding with a change-of-state token (Heritage, 1984) and uptakes the new information positively (line 31). A then acknowledges C's uptake (line 32) and recycles the new information (line 34). In line 35, C says "oh" and continues to treat what A has shared as new information to her. The participants have, at this point, reached agreement.

### Post-Disagreement Sequence

After agreement has been reached, the participants performed further amending actions, quite similar to how participants in a multiparty conflict at the workplace may proceed after their conflict has been resolved (Nguyen, 2011). In lines 50-51, C brings up Dole Cannery again. This time C again uses a mitigation technique to disagree, saying "for some reason," "I thought it was," and "guess

not." This turn shows that C continues to orient to the information given by A as new to her. In line 52, A also mitigates her position and says that she might be the one who is wrong. In lines 54, 58 and 59, A goes on to show how she is not sure. Thus, both parties produced several turns to soften their positions, and by the same token, acknowledging the possibility that the other side may be right.

At the end of line 59, A produces a brief pause followed by "so." This is an unfinished TCU, which it is pragmatically complete. It thus serves to close down the whole sequence. At this point, A and C have reached an agreement, that is, they are both not sure about where the haunted house is.

This data set shows how disagreement is often managed with delays and mitigation by both parties (see also Nguyen, 2011). Next, I turn to a textbook dialog to examine how disagreement is presented to learners of English.

Textbook Dialog: CROWN English Series II, p. 190;  
Activity Workshop 1: Disagreeing with Someone

((Kumi and Sam are friends))

- 1 Kumi: Guess what, Sam? I've got a new pet.
- 2 Sam : A new pet? I bet it's a dog. I love dogs.
- 3 Kumi: It's not a dog. It's a cat. I don't like dogs.
- 4 Sam : What do you mean you don't like dogs? Everybody
- 5 likes dogs. Dogs are our best friends.
- 6 Kumi: Sorry, Sam, I can't accept that. Dogs are noisy
- 7 and dangerous. They bark and bite.
- 8 Sam : Yes... but cats are worse. They scratch.
- 9 Kumi: Maybe, but dogs are even worse. You have to take
- 10 them out for exercise every day.
- 11 Sam : That's true.
- 12 Kumi: See? That's another reason not to like dogs.
- 13 Sam : I love to take my dog for a walk!
- 14 Kumi: Sam, I don't think we can ever agree.
- 15 Sam : Yes, we can. We agree that we want a pet that's
- 16 easy to care for.
- 17 Sam and Kumi: So? Robopets!

Kumi's utterance in line 1 is a news announcement (Wong & Waring, 2010). Line 2 is a news-mark (Wong & Waring, 2011) from Sam ("A new pet?"). Without a response from

Kumi, Sam then goes on to guess that the pet is a dog, and adds that he loves dogs. In line 3, Kumi directly disagrees with him by saying, "I don't like dogs." There is no delay or

mitigation of disagreement as seen in the conversation above.

In line 4, in order to disagree with Kumi's previous statement, Sam uses a question form, which is a technique that is also observed in the conversation above. However, this is a different kind of question. In the naturally occurring conversation above, a question (that's not?) is used to show disbelief and seek confirmation from the other person. Here the question is used to challenge the other person.

Kumi's "Sorry" in line 6 can be a way of mitigation, but what follows next ("I can't accept that.") is still a strong disagreement, quite different from the conversation above. Because it is a dispreferred turn, Kumi provides more accounts in lines 6 and 7. However, it still lacks pause or hesitation markers. Sam's "Yes...but" in line 8 is a disagreement preface. With the pause, the turn seems quite natural. However, what comes next is still a direct disagreement ("cats are worse"). In the recorded conversation above, A often used an expression "I don't

know" to soften her utterance. In line 9, Kumi uses "Maybe, but," which is another disagreement preface. Yet, again, what comes after this is rather strong (dogs are even worse).

In lines 12-13, there is another disagreement where no mitigation devices are used. In line 14, Kumi gives up on Sam. The only agreement in this dialog is in lines 15-17; however, the agreement is rather abrupt and appears out of no where, that is, there is no negotiation that leads up to it.

It may be said that Kumi and Sam are very close friends and they are teasing each other throughout the conversation. However, if this is the only dialog or one of a few dialogs from which students can learn how to disagree with someone, it is problematic. Chances are they will think it is okay to be direct and assertive when disagreeing in English, even though naturally occurring data suggest that several mitigation techniques are often employed to show indirect disagreement.

## Reference

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