The Implications of Convergence, Divergence and Maintenance in Football Conferences: A Sociopragmatic Study

Assistant Lecturer Haider Mohammed Hameed

General Directorate of Education/ Babil

Haider90.muhammed3@gmail.com

Abstract

Sociopragmatics is a subfield of general pragmatics that is concerned with the ways social factors influence the pragmatic meanings of utterances. The present study aims to sociopragmatically investigate Carlo Ancelotti's employment of the strategies of convergence, maintenance and divergence in football conferences. Adequately, it aims to reveal the influence of social distance on the speech acts that are used to achieve the accommodation strategies of convergence, maintenance and divergence by Carlo Ancelotti when answering the reporter's questions at the football conference before playing against FC Liverpool in the Champions League in 2023. The qualitative method is adopted in this study to analyse the data which operates in accordance with Giles' (2016) classifications of accommodation strategies and Searle's (1969) classifications of speech acts. The study concludes that Carlo Ancelotti adopts the convergence strategy to show togetherness and a positive attitude and minimise the social distance between him and the reporter while he adopts the divergence strategy to show disaggrement and a negative attitude and to maxmise the social distance between him and the reporter. The maintenance strategy is employed to show that Carlo Ancelotti wants to stick to his style and hide information that is related to his team and have a neutral attitude and keep the social distance between him and the reporter as it is.

Keywords: Accommodation, convergence, divergence, maintenance, social distance, sociopragmatics and speech acts.

تطبيق استراتيجيات التقارب و الحفاظ و الابتعاد في مؤتمرات كرة القدم: دراسة تداولية اجتماعية

المدرس المساعد: حيدر محمد حميد

المديرية العامة للتربية/ بابل

التداولية الاجتماعية هي فرع من التداولية العامة المختصة بطرق تاثير العوامل الاجتماعية على المعنى التداولي للكلام. تهدف الدراسة الحالية للتحقق بصورة تداولية اجتماعية في تضمين كارلو انشيلوتي لاستراتيجيات التقارب و الحفاظ و الابتعاد في مؤتمرات كرة القدم. بصورة دقيقة، تهدف الدراسة الحالية لكشف تاثير المكانة الاجتماعية على افعال الكلام التي استخدمت لتحقيق التقارب و الحفاظ و الابتعاد كاستراتيجيات للتكيف من قبل كارلو انشيلوتي عند الاجابة على اسئلة الصحفي في مؤتمر كرة القدم قبل اللعب ضد نادي ليفربول الرياضي في دوري ابطال اوربا في ٢٠٢٣. تبنت الدراسة الحالية الطريقة النوعية لتحليل البيانات و التي تعمل حسب تصنيف جايلز (٢٠١٦) لاستراتيجيات التكيف و تصنيف سيرل (١٩٦٩) لافعال الكلام.استنتجت الدراسة الحالية بان كارلو انشيلوتي يتبنى استراتيجية التقارب لاظهار التضامن و الانطباع الايجابي و تقليل المسافة الاجتماعية بينه وبين الصحفي بينما يستخدم استراتيجية الابتعاد لبيان عدم الموافقة و الانطباع السلبي و توسيع المسافة الاجتماعية بينه وبين الصحفي. استخدمت استراتيجية الحفاظ لبيان ان كارلو انشيلوتي يريد الحفاظ على اسلوب كلامه و اخفاء المعلومات التي تخص فريقه و الحصول على الانطباع الحيادي و المحافظة على المسافة الاجتماعية بينه و بين الصحفي كما هي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التكيف، التقارب، الابتعاد، الحفاظ، المسافة الاجتماعية، التداولية الاجتماعية و افعال الكلام.

1. Introduction

Paralinguistics and sociopragmatics are the two subdisciplines that are proposed by Leech (1983) under the umbrella term of 'general pragmatics'. It is highlighted that these subdisciplines work differently. That is, conducting a pargmalinguistic study requires examining the linguistic devices that are exploited to achieve pragmatic meaning in a certain context. Conversely, conducting a sociopragmatic study requires examining the influence of social factors such as 'age', 'social distance', 'social norms' and others on the pragmatic meaning. Thus, these fields are termed as

'language-specific' and 'culture-specific' respectively (Marmaridou, 2000). To arrive at the sociopragmatic interpretation, interlocutors ought to be sociopragmatically competent in order to be aware of the importance of social factors to the pragmatic meaning of an utterance (Harlow, 1990). Otherwise, sociopragmatic failure will be present. More adequately, when interlocutors pragmatically fail to consider the 'social conditions' of an utterance, sociopragmatic failure takes place (Thomas, 1983).

Interlocutors employ various accommodation strategies when they participate in an interaction. The typical ones that are seen on the spectrum of accommodation are convergence, maintenance and divergence. While the former is activated when interlocutors modify their speech to accommodate that of their peers, the other strategies are activated when interlocutors stick to or diverge from the speech style of their peers, respectively (Giles, 2016).

The current study aims at investigating the accommodation strategies of convergence, maintenance and divergence that are employed by Carlo Ancelotti, Real Madrid football coach, when answering the reporter's question at the football conference before their match against FC Liverpool. Since this aspect of language is not thoroughly studied, this study, thus, attempts to fill this gap of knowledge from a sociopragmatic angle.

 Accordingly, the present study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. Finding out the reasons behind employing the accommodation strategies of convergence, maintenance and divergence by Carlo Ancelotti.
2. Highlighting the speech acts that are used to achieve the accommodation strategies of convergence, maintenance and divergence by Carlo Ancelotti.
3. Revealling the influence of social distance on the accommodation strategies of convergence, maintenance and divergence by Carlo Ancelotti.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Sociopragmatics

The term "general pragmatics" is used by Leech (1983) to refer to the "general" conditions rather than the "local" conditions that are covered in the study of communicative language usage. He argues that there are two subfields within general pragmatics: 'sociopragmatics' (i.e., denotes "the sociological interface of pragmatics", and 'pragmalinguistics' (i.e., denotes the more linguistic end of the field (pp. 10–11).

Following Leech, Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009, p. 95) add that Pragmalinguistics addresses the language tools that are often employed to communicate a certain pragmatic message in a particular setting. However, sociopragmatics is concerned with how language should be used in social contexts.

As far as the sociopragmatic meaning is concerned, Solar and Martinez-Flor (2008, p. 3) assert that this type of meaning emphasises the fundamental social perceptions that people utilize to comprehend and carry out communication activities.

In a neat description, Dascal and Françozo (1989, p. 13) the study of sociopragmatics is concerned with determining how external pragmatic elements like "indirectness" and "SAs" impact the language signals that are created and received.

More precisely, Marmaridou (2000; quoted in Bublitz and Norick (2011) it is the "pragmatic meaning with the participants' social distance, social rules, norms, behaviours and discourse practices" are what the field of sociopragmatics links (p. 77). Thus, the sociopragmatic analysis deals with 'culture-specific' rather than 'language-specific' of a community.

The way through which speakers convey their identities through transmitted pragmatic meaning is seen as important to the sociopragmatic discipline. It is necessary to make our vocabulary and abstractions—such as sex, gender, race, class, and others—factual in order to govern our ways of living, haircuts, and clothing choices. Accordingly, prosody, tone of voice, word choice, and other aspects are included in the sociopragmatic components (Locastro, 2012, p. 159).

Seeing how the uses of language that express pragmatic tactics in a context are impacted by socio-cultural aspects to sum up the basic issues of sociopragmatics. In addition to explaining their distinction, sociopragmatics plays a role in explaining the pragmatic phenomena (such as SAs) that are realized in social-cultural contexts.

2.1.1 The Social Variables of Social Distance

The initiation of the variable of social distance is attributed to Park (1924) who explicates social distance as "an attempt to reduce to something like measurable terms the grade and degrees of understanding and intimacy which characterise personal and social relations generally" (p. 339).

For Bogardus (1933), social distance includes various aspects such as 'racial', 'religious', and 'occupational'. Besides, Bogardus (1933), asserts that "the degree of sympathetic understanding that exists between two persons or between a person and a group" is what is meant by social distance (p. 268).

Social distance, as Brown and Levinson (1978) underscore, is described as a "symmetric dimension of similarity/difference based on an assessment of the frequency of interaction and the kinds of materials or non-material goods [including face] exchanged between S[peaker] and H[earer]" (p. 76).

More importantly, Allan and Burridge (2009, p. 263), claim that factors such as 'gender', 'age', 'socio-cultural backgrounds' and the like have an influence on the social distance that speakers maintain.

In a neat description, Ishihara and Cohen (2010, pp. 11-12) stress that social distance is a scale used to assess convergence (i.e. closeness or intimacy) or divergence (i.e. non-intimacy) that speakers try to maintain or reveal during communications.

2.1.2 Austin's (1962) and Searle's (1969) classifications of Speech Acts

The Speech Act Theory is a key area of study in pragmatics research. The creation of this theory is credited to Austin (1962) and then developed by his supporter Searle (1969), which has a significant impact on pragmatics in particular and linguistics in general. Austin emphasises this in his book that is entitled *How To Do Things With*

Words. Therefore, verbal activities that bring about a change in the current situation are what speech acts refer to (Mey, 2001, p. 92).

A taxonomy is proposed by Austin (1962) in order to categorize illocutionary activities in relation to "English performative verbs". His taxonomy is divided into five categories:

1. Verdictive: they are denoted by giving a verdict, e.g., 'appraise'.
2. Exercitive: they are employed to exercise control, e.g., 'warn'.
3. Commissive: they reveal the speaker's commitment to or announcement of a forthcoming action., e.g., 'promise'.
4. Behabitive: they convey the speaker's opinions or sentiments about things that have happened or the opinions of others., e.g., 'greet'.
5. Expositive: they show the way through which interlocutors interpret 'argument', e.g., 'argue'. (p. 150-152)

Additionally, Searle (1979) propose other classifications which are based on Austin's (1962) classifications.

1. Representatives: relate to verbal acts that convey the speaker's conviction about the veracity of certain facts and claims, i.e., suggest, claim.
2. Commissives: they are demonstrated by the speaker's promises to perform certain future activities, i.e., promise, refuse, etc.
3. Directives: are actions that the speaker does to persuade the listener to take a certain action, i.e., command, invite, etc.
4. Expressives: refer to 'the psychological state towards the hearer', i.e., congratulate, compliment, etc.
5. Declaratives: are used to proclaim or declare anything by dominant individuals, such as when presidents deliver judgments or courts sentence offenders, etc. (p. 15).

2.2 Sociopragmatic Competence

Apart from linguistic and lexical proficiency, sociopragmatic competence, as Harlow (1990 p. 328) highlights, refers to the speaker's capacity to choose the

appropriate words based on the "situational or social variables" of a particular communication exchange.

According to Ekwelibe (2015), the ability to choose and use language in a way that respects social agreements in communication is known as sociopragmatic competence. It becomes evident that having a sufficient understanding of both the 'language and its culture' is necessary in order to use it (p. 90).

The employment of suitable language resources to suit the communication situation is a prerequisite for being labelled as sociopragmatically competent, for Delahaie (2015, p. 5). For instance, fluency in both the target language and the target culture is necessary in order to employ a SA for a request made in a foreign language.

In short, the function of competence serves as a useful indicator of how speakers should apply the underlying principles in various sociocultural circumstances.

2.3 Sociopragmatic Failure

The notion of sociopragmatic failure was initially described by Thomas (1983) as "the social conditions placed on language in use." (p. 99). Therefore, a sociopragmatic failure occurs when a communicative behaviour is realized differently across cultural boundaries. This indicates that a speaker commits a sociopragmatic error when he misjudges what a certain culture considers suitable language use. Thus, it would be an easy task for a teacher of a foreign language to correct the matters that are related to the incorrect paralinguistic uses of that language rather than the sociopragmatic ones of the same language in question (p. 103).

To support Thomas' (1983) view, Rose and Kasper (2001) mention that disparities in the cultural backgrounds of the interlocutors lead to sociopragmatic failure (p. 125).

As for the clarification of the pragmatic failure phenomenon, Montgommery and Tinsley-Kim's (2001) present the following scenario between Sara, an English native speaker, and Laura, a Korean non-native speaker:

1) *Laura: what nice things you have!*
Sara: Thank you. It took me a long time to pack!
Laura: But your clothes are so tiny. You are too thin! How much do you weigh?
Sara: Uh, well… I'm not sure.
Laura: Not sure! You're about 52 or 54 kilos, aren't you?
Sara: Uhm well….
Laura: My scale is right in the bathroom there. Let's weigh you now.
Sara: Uhm thank you, really, that's Ok. ….

(Montgommery and Tinsley-Kim's, 2001, p. 75)

The scenario of talking about weight stuff is an example of the sociopragmatic failure. It is clarified that Sara attempts to skip Laura's insistence concerning Sara's exact weight. Therefore, different cultures requires adequate linguistic behaviour that goes in line with their norms and requirements. Speakers, thus, have to modify their speech in a way to accommodate the social norms and behaviours of their addressees otherwise sociopragmatic failure takes place.

2.5 Accommodation Theory

The process through which interlocutors adapt or modify their speech to sound more like that of their participants is known as speech accommodation. Other terms are also used for this process such as 'communication accommodation' and 'linguistic accommodation'. Giles (1973), who noted that interactants change their speech patterns from formal to casual at the conclusion of an interview, is credited with providing the theoretical groundwork for speech accommodation (Atalay, 2016, p. 4).

 According to Thankerar et al. (1982):

Speech Accommodation Theory was devised to explain some of the motivations underlying certain shifts in people's speech styles during social encounters, and some of the social consequences arising from them. More specifically, it originated in order to elucidate the cognitive and affective processes underlying speech convergence and divergence. (p. 217)

In addition to explaining the 'psychological' and 'social' mechanisms that influence interactants to adopt 'convergent' or 'divergent' communicative action, Giles' (1973) theory is evidently put out to show the manner in which speakers modify their speech styles during encounters.

Moreover, Babel (2009, p. 21) notifies that the speech accommodation theory expands its range to include other communicative perspectives. Thus, Giles and his fellowships modify their theory to communication accommodation theory in 1987. As such, the communication accommodation theory encompasses the verbal and non-verbal actions.

Speech accommodation, for Hamers and Blanc (2000, p. 242), is the suitably adapted style that participants use in encounters. It may be used in 'monolingual' or 'bilingual' situations and at all language levels (i.e. structural, lexical, etc…). The finest illustration is when parents adjust their speaking patterns to suit their "immature" child.

Some speaker feel unsatisfied when they stick to one style while speaking. As a result, they shift to various styles that either converge or diverge from that of their peers. Accordingly, this behaviour is referred to as speech accommodation theory (Yule, 2006, p. 210).

Giles (2016, pp. 36-37) states that there are three strategies of accommodation that interlocutors usually adopt when they communicate; namely, *convergence, divergence* and *maintenance*.

1. *Convergence*:
   the strategy of convergence takes place when interlocutors accommodate their communicative actions in line with that of their peers in certain interaction (Shepard et al., 2001). In this regard, Giles et al. (1991, p.7) notifies that when speech styles are modified to be mutually understood at the various linguistic and non-linguistic levels such as 'phonological variants', 'smiling', 'speech rate' and so forth. In doing so, speaker aims to reduce the social distance between them, as Yule (2006, p. 210) proposes. For illustration, consider the following scenarios:

(2) *C'mon Tony, gizzalook, gizzalook.*

(3) *Excuse me: could I have a look at your photos too, Mrs. Hall?*

(Yule, 2006, p. 210)

Examples (2) and (3) manifest how the same speaker, Tony, exploits the convergence strategy to achieve his aim, that is, asking Mrs. Hall to have a look at her photo. When speaking to his friend, he converges his speech (informal) to accommodate his friend, since the social distance between them is the same, as presented in example (2). In contrast, his speech (formal) converges Mrs. Hall's since the social distance between them is different.

2. *Divergence*

Unlike the strategy of convergence, the strategy of divergence is activated when speakers call for communicative actions that deviate from that of their addressees. In doing so, speakers aim at enhancing the social distance between them (Yule, 2006). The interlocutors' affirmation of each other's differences is known as divergence, according to (Gallois et al., 2005, p. 123).

For Atalay (2016, p. 6), the greater the disparity in a speaker's speech pattern, the greater the social distancing effect, and as a result, the divergence technique of accommodation is employed. Furthermore, interlocutors use this tactic for a variety of purposes, including avoiding conflict, maintaining diversity, or harbouring animosity toward other group members. A 'royal person', for example, wouldn't change their speaking pattern in informal conversations.

3. *Maintenance*

The third accommodation strategy that is activated when speakers stick to their speaking pattern regardless of what their peers are saying. In contrast to the strategy of "convergence", the strategies of "divergence" and "maintenance" are negatively perceived since they stem from a propensity to exhibit one's own identity or insensitivity to the language behaviours that others exhibit (Giles and Oagy 2007, p. 295).

3. Methodology

The data of the current study includes three extracts that are presented by Carlo Ancelotti, the current football coach of the Real Madrid football club. These extracts are taken from the speech that was given at the conference before their game with Liverpool football club in a written format. The topics that are discussed in the selected data are related to the matters of players, injuries, the club, and the like.

Selecting three extracts that show the way Carlo Ancelotti uses the accommodation strategies of convergence, maintenance and divergence; analysing these extracts to show how Carlo Ancelotti exploits Searle's (1969) classifications of speech acts; showing the role of social distance between Carlo Ancelotti and the reporter when using these strategies; arriving at certain conclusions are the procedures conducted in this study.

The qualitative method is adopted in the current study. This method is accomplished by analysing Carlo Ancelotti's employment of the accommodation strategies of convergence, maintenance and divergence in his responses to the reporter's questions that are related to their next match with FC Liverpool. Besides, Searle's (1969) classifications of speech acts are also examined to show how they are used to achieve the accommodation strategies in question.

4. Data Analysis

Extract (1)

Reporter: What message will you be trying to get across to your players bearing in mind the result from the first leg?

Carlo Ancelotti: "The message is quite simple, it's very clear. It's not about calculating how many goals might be needed. We have to play to the best of our abilities and try to put in a similar performance to the one we put in during the first leg. We'll be trying to enter the game from kick-off, playing with intensity and desire to win the game". (web 1.).

Extract (1) manifests that Carlo Ancelotti, FC Real Madrid coach, exploits **the strategy of maintenance** when he replies to the reporter's question. In doing so, Carlo Ancelotti presents the kind of reply that neither converge nor diverge from the style of the reporter's question. Instead, Carlo Ancelotti maintains to his style. Carlo Ancelotti's reply reveals that he cares about even the smallest details that are related to his team. Therefore, he presents a neat answers to the reporter's question. To achieve this strategy of accommodation, Carlo Ancelotti uses **the representative, declarative and commissive speech acts**. The linguistic expressions **"The message is quite simple, it's very clear. It's not about calculating how many goals might be needed."** are used to exemplify the representative speech act since he explains his message to the reporter. Besides, the linguistic expressions "We have to play to the best of our abilities and try to put in a similar performance to the one we put in during the first leg." are used to illustrate the declarative speech act since Carlo Ancelotti declares his plan towards the next match. Finally, the commissive speech act is achieved via using the linguistic expressions "We'll be trying to enter the game from kick-off, playing with intensity and desire to win the game" so as to promise the fans that the team will do his best to win the match from the beginning. The scale of the social distance is at the middle since Carlo Ancelotti employs the maintenance strategy. In simple words, Carlo Ancelotti wants to maintain the social distance between him and the reporter at the middle. That is, Carlo Ancelotti avoids emphasising or de-emphasising the social distance between him and the reporter but rather at the middle.

Extract (2)

Reporter: In a game like this, what is more important, youth and energy in the centre of the park or experience?

Carlo Ancelotti: "That's a trick question! (smiles) And I will reply with a trick answer. Tomorrow, experience and energy will be important to us". (web 1.)

Extract (2) clarifies that Carlo Ancelotti's reply launches the accommodation **strategy of convergence**. The linguistic and non-linguistic behaviours "That's a

trick question! (smiles) And I will reply with a trick answer. Tomorrow, experience and energy will be important to us" lead to the initiation of this strategy through which Carlo Ancelotti aims at converging his reply to accommodate the style of the reporter's question. Besides, the convergence strategy is also achieved via using the non-linguistic behaviour when Carlo Ancelotti smiles. **The declarative speech act** is used to achieve the accommodation strategy of convergence via using the linguistic expressions in this extract. The reason behind doing so is to declare the players who will play for the next match against Liverpool football club. To minimise the social distance between him and the reporter requires him to adopt the accommodation strategy of convergence. The influence of the variable of social distance is seen due to the employment of the linguistic expressions that activate the convergence strategy in extract (2).

Extract (3)

Reporter: Deschamps' recent comments about Benzema and the Qatar World Cup, Do you support your player...

Carlo Ancelotti : "No, no, no... that's a personal issue, not for me. You're talking to me about two of my players, because Deschamps was also one of my players. I respect him a lot as a player, as a person and as a coach in this... In Italy, we say it's not right to poke a colleague, so I won't do that. Will Karim be affected by it? I don't think so because whatever has happened between them, it's never mentioned. He doesn't talk about it and I don't think it's something that bothers him". (web 1.)

Answering the reporter's question requires Carlo Ancelotti to exploit the accommodation **strategy of divergence**, as seen in extract (3). This strategy is activated when Carlo Ancelotti negatively replies to the reporter's question. That is, Carlo Ancelotti's reply deviates from the requirements of the reporter's question. As such, the divergence style results from adopting the type of speech that diverges from that of his/her peers. Using this strategy initiates **the commissive speech act** by refusing to answer the reporter's question. More precisely, Carlo Ancelotti's reply does not operate in accordance with the requirements of the reporter's question. The linguistic expressions "***No, no, no... that's a personal issue, not for me…***" and

"…we say it's not right to poke a colleague, so I won't do that. Will Karim be affected by it? I don't think so because whatever has happened between them, it's never mentioned. He doesn't talk about it and I don't think it's something that bothers him." Accordingly, the social distance between Carlo Ancelotti and the reporter is de-emphasised since all the linguistic expressions carry a negative implementation to the reporter's question. More specifically, the influence of the social variable of social distance is evident, with regard to the linguistic expressions that activate the accommodation strategy of divergence.

5. Conclusions

It is concluded that:

1. The accommodation strategy of maintenance is activated by Carlo Ancelotti when he tries to be aware of revealing even the smallest details about his team, plans and the like to the media. When doing so, he sticks to his speech style rather than being divergent or convergent. Besides, multiple speech acts are employed to achieve this strategy. Neutral language is seen on the spectrum of this strategy. That is, Carlo Ancelotti employs the type of linguistic expressions that are neither positive nor negative when using the maintenance strategy. In doing so, the social distance between Carlo Ancelotti and the reporter remains the same. That is, Carlo Ancelotti's use of the maintenance strategy reveals that he wants to keep the social distance neither emphasised nor de-emphasised, but rather neutral.

2. As for the accommodation strategy of convergence, it is manifested that Carlo Ancelotti adopts this strategy when he attempts to be in line with the requirements of the reporter's question. The type of linguistic expressions that activate this strategy carry a positive implication, and thus, give Carlo Ancelotti the space to explain his opinion. The strategy of convergence can be activated via using non-linguistic behaviours such as smiles. The declarative speech act is used by Carlo Ancelotti to achieve the convergence strategy. Hence, the accommodation strategy of convergence has a positive implication when employed in interactions. Accordingly, Carlo Ancelotti aims at

minimising the social distance between him and the reporter when using the convergence strategy.

3. The accommodation strategy of divergence is launched when Carlo Ancelotti wants to accommodate his response in a way that deviates from the requirements of the reporter's questions. The linguistic expressions that are used to activate this strategy carry a negative implication. Achieving this strategy requires Carlo Ancelotti to use the commissive speech act. Thus, the social distance between Carlo Ancelotti and the reporter is maximised due to the employment of the divergence strategy.

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