

Preface

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**Building Coherence and Cohesion: Task-oriented dialogue
in English and Spanish**

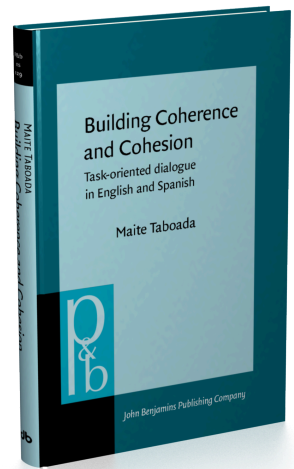
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Preface

The goal of this book is to examine some of the resources that speakers employ when building conversations. These resources contribute to overall coherence and cohesion, constructed interactively as speakers build on each other's contributions. The book furthers the study of coherence at all levels, from surface structure to internal organization. Typical dialogues are considered to be coherent by those participating, and often by those observing as well. However, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly what makes a dialogue or a conversation coherent, and how that coherence is achieved dynamically. Similarly, cohesion, as an internal property of togetherness in a text, is usually considered to be present in conversation. Coherence and cohesion together give us texts and conversations that we recognize as such.

In this book, I present a study of coherence and cohesion. The study is cross linguistic, based on a corpus of task-oriented conversations between dyads of two speakers each. The corpus contains conversations between two native speakers of English on the one hand, and two native speakers of Spanish on the other. The interlocutors have conflicting agendas that cover a two to four week period; their task is to agree on an appointment within that time. The conversations are viewed as collaborative efforts, yielding texts built interactively by the speakers. My analysis is concerned with the discourse characteristics that make the dialogues hold together as texts.

The framework of the study is the analysis of speech genres (Bakhtin 1986). These conversations are interpreted as instances of a genre, as a "staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture" (Martin 1984:25). The conversations can be divided into three main stages: Opening, Task Performance and Closing. Each of these stages contains different linguistic and discourse characteristics: thematic progression, rhetorical structure analysis and cohesion. These three are unified under the textual metafunction of language in the Hallidayan tradition (Halliday & Hasan 1976). The structural component of this metafunction is the thematic structure of the clause. The non-structural component is cohesion. A primary element of cohesion is conjunction, analyzed here according to Mann and Thompson's (1988)

Rhetorical Structure Theory. The study investigates how two speakers create a text interactively, and sheds light onto the nature of text, textual metafunction and texture in a spoken genre.

A second focus of this work is to find out whether, and how, the conversational process is different in English and in Spanish. Analyses were performed on both languages, following the same methods. The comparison allows us to examine how the task affects the dialogue organization for two different languages.

The main contributions of the book are as follows: (1) corpus-based characterization of a dialogic genre; (2) compilation of a body of analysis tools for generic analysis; (3) application of English-based analyses to Spanish and comparisons between English and Spanish text-building strategies; and (4) a study of the characteristics of each stage in the dialogues, for both languages.

This book is the result of a number of years of research, which started with my Ph.D. research at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, in Spain. Parts of the book have appeared elsewhere: the English analysis of Chapters 4 and 5 in *Functions of Language* (Taboada & Lavid 2003); the contrastive analysis in Chapter 5 in *Discourse across Languages and Cultures*, edited by Carol Moder and Aida Martinovic-Zic (Taboada 2004); and parts of Chapter 6 in the *Proceedings of the 26th LACUS Forum* (Taboada 2000). Those materials are reproduced with permission of John Benjamins and the Linguistic Association of Canada and the United States.

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Maite Taboada
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