

TOPIC- AND MODE-SENSITIVE INTERACTION STRATEGIES: FUNCTIONS OF ELLIPSIS IN ORAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

In this article, we discuss ellipsis as an interactive strategy by analysing the author's textchat corpus and the VOICE corpus of English as a Lingua Franca. It is found that there were fewer repetitions in the textchat data, and this is explained as a consequence of the textchat mode. Textchat contributions are preserved as long as the chat is active or has been saved, and therefore users can scroll through and review the discussion, compared to the more fleeting nature of oral conversation. As a result, repetition is less necessary. The frequency of other functions identified could be attributed to the topic of discourse. Discussions involve much ellipsis used to develop discourse, although some were self-presentations with repetition used to confirm details. Back-channel support and comments were often low because speakers instead used forms like *yeah* as supportive utterances.

Key words: ellipsis, interaction, oral discourse, textchat, discourse topic, mode of communication

1. Introduction

This article reports research into the interaction functions of ellipsis in English, and demonstrates that one particular strategy is used at a high frequency because of the mode of communication, while the others are used because of the topic of discourse. White (2013a, 2013b) has discussed interaction strategies encoded through ellipsis in two types of oral discourse, which we will be comparing here. White (2013a) presents data from his own corpus of text chatlogs involving learners of English in an academic setting, and White (2013b) does the same using data from the VOICE corpus of English as a Lingua Franca (VOICE, 2011), focusing on data from an education setting. Here, we will compare these two types of oral discourse with respect to the frequency at which the interaction strategies are used and the contexts they are used in.

Our discussion begins with some background on interaction, especially within computer-mediated communication. Next, the results discussed in White (2013a, 2013b) are presented. Then, the two corpora analysed are presented in the Method section. The whole of the author's corpus of textchat seminars is compared to a specific part of the VOICE data, seminar discussions in educational contexts. This ensures the compatibility of results in that they are both within educational contexts. This point will be made clearer

below. Finally, the contexts in which the different interaction strategies are used are compared, concluding that one specific strategy, repetition, is explained by the mode of communication and the others by the discourse topic. We start with the background on ellipsis and interaction.

2. Interaction in computer-mediated communication

Much work has been carried out on interaction in literature on second language acquisition and language learning, and particularly computer-mediated language learning, over recent years. Chun (1994) discusses the following speech acts that mark the competence to interact, based on work by Kramsch (1983): opening and closing conversations; constructing and expanding on topics; taking turns; capturing attention; steering or avoiding topics; elaborating on ideas; requesting confirmation or clarification; apologizing; giving feedback; and creating, expressing, interpreting and negotiating meaning. Thus, we see many acts related to the organisation and development of discourse.

Darhower (2002) mentions greetings/leave-taking, as well as intersubjectivity, humor, sarcasm/insults and the use of the L1 as markers of interaction. For Darhower, intersubjectivity means sharing or negotiating an understanding on a strand of interaction. Thus, marking understanding and developing a discussion on a particular topic constitute examples of intersubjectivity, which covers many of the functions of Chun's and Kramsch's above like expanding on topics, steering topics, elaborating on ideas and the final one on creating meaning, etc. The use of humour and sarcasm/insults are positive or negative ways of interacting with others, and affect inter-group relations. Fernández-García and Martínez Arbeláiz (2003) also mention the use of an L1, particularly for echoing or asking for an explanation of a term.

Peterson (2009) presents evidence of Japanese learners of English engaging in collaborative interaction in textchats. The strategies they used were: requests for assistance, provision of assistance, continuers, off-task discussion, self-correction and other-initiated correction (Peterson, 2009, p. 305). Assistance has a positive effect on interaction, and therefore the asking for and receiving of assistance is important. Continuers refer to back-channel support which encourages others to continue their interaction (Cogo & Dewey, 2012, p. 139-142 also discuss back channel support in non-native speaker discourse). Off-task discussions create a social framework for the group, and reduce any anxiety at being required to interact in a foreign language. Finally, corrections are also positive strategies for learning, although other-initiated corrections can be face-threatening. As Peterson notes, such interactive strategies create a sense of social cohesion and help establish discourse communities – Cogo and Dewey (2012, p. 139) also argue that interaction has a rapport-building function. Thus, we see the socio-affective side of discourse being very much a theme of this work.

Repetition is a strategy mentioned by a number of authors in the literature. For example, Cogo (2009, p. 260) and Mauranen (2012, chapter 7) both discuss the role of repetition as a communicative strategy for non-native speakers in ELF contexts. Cogo argues that repetition demonstrates alignment and solidarity with a fellow speaker,

and Mauranen suggest that it is a good strategy for those interacting with ELF speakers, as repetitions help with the processing of discourse and mark sections of discourse clearly.

To summarise, there are two main types of strategy proposed for interaction in computer-mediated communication. Firstly, there are those related to development and negotiation in discourse, including the changing of topics and steering of discourse plus repetition. The second set of types relate to social relations among participants, where supportive comments are in focus.

Now we turn to the author's work on the function of ellipsis specifically.

3. Data and methodology

As stated in the introduction, the analysis in the rest of the article involves data from two corpora: the author's own corpus of text chatlogs and the VOICE corpus, the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE, 2011), a one million-word corpus of spoken English as a Lingua Franca. The author's own corpus of data consisted of text chatlogs involving learners of English, so the educational seminars from the VOICE corpus provides a natural spoken counterpart.

3.1 Author's corpus

Taking the author's corpus first, it consists of text chatlogs produced by non-native English-speaking students (28 in total) on an MA programme in English Linguistics run by a Swedish university. The author carried out a survey with this group on their Internet and linguistic awareness, and it was found that their ages ranged from 25 to 55 (although most were between 25 and 30), and they had studied English for between seven and 22 years. To be admitted onto the programme, they needed a documented IELTS (International English Language Testing System) average score of 7.0 with no lower than 6.5 in each component (reading, writing, listening, speaking). These students are mostly novice Internet users.

The data were taken from an introduction to core linguistics topics and sociolinguistics run in Autumn 2007. There were nine sessions: a general introduction, language and the media, language and politics, language and gender, phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics/pragmatics. Students divided themselves into four groups, and for four topics (media, politics, gender and morphology) these groups arranged a pre-seminar without the teachers being present where they discussed the material, which consisted of reading on the relevant topics and data analysis. In the pre-seminars, they were told to discuss the issues raised, and identify anything they wanted the teacher to discuss more during the seminars. All these discussions took place through Skype's textchat service. The chatlogs from the pre-seminars were sent to the teachers, which helped guide the seminars which also took place through Skype textchat in two groups. The other topics had seminars only. This gave a total of 30 transcripts that were analysed, with a total of 93 923 words. Unfortunately, the logs from the introduction session and final session on semantics and pragmatics were not saved, and therefore were not available to the author for analysis.

Students were informed at the start of the course about the research conducted by their teachers, and were asked to give their consent for material they produced from the courses on the programme to be used in research. Only those students who gave their permission were included in this study. All students have been made anonymous in the presentation of the data, and are referred to as, e.g. Student 15, including where they are used as address forms in individual contributions.

3.2 VOICE corpus

Moving onto the VOICE corpus, it is divided into data from the following areas: education, leisure, professional business, professional organization, and professional research and science. There are a variety of what are referred to as *speech event* types within these areas, such as conversations, interviews and workshop discussions. We have concentrated on the speech events within the educational area, again to be closest in type to the author's own corpus.

The instances of ellipsis and their functions have been identified, and these will be presented and compared across speech event type in the following sections. Texts are given a code for the general area and speech event plus a number for the text. Thus, a seminar discussion in education will have a code starting EDsed. The markup conventions used in the corpus are described in a file available at the following link: http://www.univie.ac.at/voice/documents/VOICE_mark-up_conventions_v2-1.pdf.

Now we move onto the interactive strategies that appear in the two corpora.

4 Interactive functions of ellipsis

White (2013a, 2013b) analysed the functions of ellipsis in the two corpora described above, respectively. As discussed in White (2013a, 2013b), out of the strategies noted above, one from Darhower (2002) was discounted, namely Off-task Discussion (they are found, just not in elliptical form). The Use of L1 strategy has also been discounted, as we are specifically looking for data in English, and the speakers all have L1s other than English.

There were instances of the Greeting/Leave-taking and Apology strategies mentioned by Darhower (2002) and Chun (1994), respectively. However, these have been removed from the results, as we have chosen to focus as much as possible on language that has been generated directly by users rather than applied as a formula.

Thus, we are concentrating on the following functions: Intersubjectivity, Continuers and Correction. We also recognise Repetition as a function, following the work by Cogo (2009) and Mauranen (2012) mentioned in the background. Repetition is not included under Intersubjectivity, in that the discourse is not being developed; rather something is being confirmed. There are cases of translation into English plus Requests for Assistance, and these have been analysed as examples of Intersubjectivity, as understanding is being promoted. Then, we are adding one function of our own: that of Comments. We take Comments to be different from Continuers, in that Comments do not play the role of back channel support.

We have chosen not to recognise as ellipsis examples where a speaker restarts a phrase started in an earlier contribution. We also do not include interjections like *yes/no*, which, although they do affirm or deny an understanding on a discourse topic, do not involve any of the original utterance. We stick to those where some of the original is preserved.

We will now look at the functions in turn, taking examples from both corpora to illustrate, starting with examples of Intersubjectivity.

4.1 Intersubjectivity

When presenting the data, we give examples from both corpora together if that particular type of strategy appears in them both. Unless otherwise stated, the data are taken from pre-seminars on Language and Politics for the author's own corpus, and, for VOICE, from the seminar EDsed31, for illustration – they are representative of the corpora as a whole.

Recall that Intersubjectivity involves the negotiation and development of understanding on a discourse topic. The first cases are of students providing extra information on the topic at hand, where the elliptical part is marked in bold:

(1) Extract 1

Student 1 says: Euphemism means saying st nicely but dysphemism means making st worse than they are
 Student 7 says: you mean positive and negative?
 Student 4 says: **EX: " pass away" instead of " die"**
 Student 4 says: **" rest room" instead of " toilet"**
 [Author's corpus]

(2) Extract 2

354S12: (i) have more or less the same <@> impressions </@>
 355S1: @ <5> @@ </5> (.
 356S12: <5><@> as [S11] </@></5>
 357S1: seems to be
 358S12: first of all
 359S1: @@ =
 360S12: = **drunk** (.
 [VOICE corpus]

The discourse is clearly being developed by these elliptical contributions. Student 4 is giving some examples of euphemisms in Extract 1. It is not necessary for Student 4 to give full sentential contributions, as it is clear from the context what her contributions refer to. In Extract 2, we find a discussion of stereotypes about Austrians, and a particular student's list is being read out loud with stereotypical qualities being introduced elliptically. In all cases, these contributions add to the discussion and are therefore analysed as Intersubjective.

The next examples are of elliptical questions:

(3) Extract 3

Student 5 says: can u give some example
 [...three contributions missing...]
 Student 2 says: **For which one ?** Pronoun first i think
 [Author's corpus]

(4) Extract 4

374S12: <reading_aloud> unfriendly </reading_aloud>
 375S1: mhm =
 376S12: = especially young people <6> e:r </6> have met er during the courses
 some (1)
 377SX-f: <6> hm </6>
 378S12: very unfriendly people unfriendly hh people especially erm males
 379S1: okay
 380S12: <smacks lips> i don't know why. (1) and er =
 381S1: = unfriendly **in what respect?**
 [VOICE corpus]

In Extract 3, Student 2 is wondering which rhetorical device they are going to give examples of, and she is referring back to Student 5's question in the first line of the extract. This develops discourse by asking for details to be confirmed. The same is true of the example from VOICE in Extract 4, questioning how Austrians are unfriendly.

Then, we have answers to questions:

(5) Extract 5

Student 25: and what he's doing is for the good
 Student 12: both of them I think
 Student 11: I agree
 Student 12: he?
 Student 12: who is he?
 Student 25: **Blair**
 Student 11: **Blair**
 [Author's corpus]

(6) Extract 6

148S1: okay (.) and so this is your first (.) first <1> time </1> in austria. (.)
 and which part of romania are you from
 149S13: <1><soft> yeah </soft></1>
 150S13: **south**
 [VOICE corpus]

In Extract 5, Student 25 has stated that what Tony Blair is doing (in the War in Iraq) is for the good of people. Student 12 does not understand who Student 25 is referring to, and Students 25 and 11 answer by just giving the relevant information, *Blair*. Answering questions certainly entails developing the discourse, and so this is an uncontroversial example of Intersubjectivity. The next example in Extract 6 is from a seminar where the students introduce themselves, and Speaker 1 asks where in Romania one student is from, and she responds with an elliptical answer.

Finally, only from the VOICE corpus do we find examples of translation into English:

- (7) Extract 7
 274S10: okay. (.) i'm the next (2) {S10 goes to the blackboard (3)} erm (1) i (.) also think that austrian people are friendly (1) and (1) er sorry but i i: didn't know the: (.) english word f:or (.) <L1ger> gemuetlich {unhurried} </L1ger>
 275S2: <soft> @ </soft> (1)
 276S1: <L1ger> geMUEtlich {unhurried} </L1ger> is very important for austrians @ <1> @@ </1>
 277SS: <1> @@ </1> @@ (.)
 278S2: **cosy**
 [VOICE corpus]

In Extract 7, Speaker 10 asks for the translation of *gemuetlich*, and Speaker 2 gives the incorrect *cosy*. Despite the mistranslation, this is clearly intended to promote an understanding in discourse, therefore we analyse it as Intersubjective.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, these examples are representative of what appears in the rest of both corpora.

4.2 Continuers

Next, we will discuss Continuers:

- (8) Extract 8
 Student 10 says: He means all Americans will share difficulties and have duty to overcome
 Student 9 says: **Exactly**
 Student 10 says: yes
 Student 10 says: **I agree** that's very good one
 [Author's corpus]
- (9) Extract 9
 95S9: (and i'm) twenty-six and i've been to austria many times before (1) and erm (1) i came to austria because i (.) <soft> er </soft> i've (.) very g- (.) good experiences and i've met (.) many nice (.) people (.) in austria before (.) and er (.) one (.) big reason is because i like the mountains a lot. (.) and i just wanted to be closer (.) to <3> the alps. @@ </3>
 96SS: <3> @@@ </3> @@ (.)
 97S1: <@> **good reason** </@> @@@@ hh
 [VOICE corpus]

There are two Continuers in Extract 8, *exactly* and *I agree*. Both serve to encourage Student 10 in her analysis of a political speech. *Good reason* appears in Extract 9. Again, these are all clear examples of Continuers, as they are functioning as back channel support. Such socially cohesive strategies are very important for promoting group unity, and therefore we might expect them to be very popular strategies (the actual situation will be made clear when we look at the frequencies in section 5).

4.3 Correction

Now, we move onto Correction, focusing on other-initiated correction, to use Peterson's (2009) terminology:

(10) Extract 10

Student 2 says: In a whirlwind of change and hope and peril : Parallelism I think
 [...two contributions missing...]
 Student 4 says: **noT PARRALLELISM**
 Student 1 says: both in one sen, Student 2
 Student 7 says: **No parralle**
 [Author's corpus]

(11) Extract 11

1051S11: <LNger> und er er {and} </LNger> and we: we have (told) about the:
 concept of er erm friendship =
 1052S1: = mhm
 1053S11: and e:r we've done a sort of er (1)
 1054S18: <soft> **comparison** </soft>
 1055S11: **contrast** yeah
 1056S18: **comparison**
 1057S7: <1> mhm </1> **comparison**
 [VOICE corpus]

Student 2's analysis in Extract 10 of a phrase from a speech as an example of parallelism is corrected by Students 4 and 7. In Extract 11, Speakers 7 and 18 correct Speaker 11's use of *contrast*, and prefer the term *comparison*.

In the other example of Correction, we will take up here only appearing in the author's corpus, Student 2 corrects her own typing mistake:

(12) Extract 12

Student 2 says: THAT MEAN YOU BRAEK THE RULE
 Student 2 says: **Break** I am sorry
 [Author's corpus]

This type of example was rare in comparison to correction initiated by others.

4.4 Repetition

In this next section, examples of Repetition are discussed. Consider first the following:

(13) Extract 13

Student 7 says: " The term PC originate with left wind-politician, it has now been
 largely "hijacked" by those on the right.
 Student 3 says: yes, I see
 Student 5 says: as Student 7 write
 Student 3 says: in page 40 Student 7?
 [...two contributions missing...]

Student 7 says: **Yes in 40**
 [Author's corpus]

(14) Extract 14

148S1: okay (.) and so this is your first (.) first <1> time </1> in austria. (.)
 and which part of romania are you from
 149S13: <1><soft> yeah </soft></1>
 150S13: south
 151S1: <soft> **the south.** (.) okay. (.) thanks [S13] . (3) shall we (1) <2>
 continue (here) ?</2></soft>

[VOICE corpus]

In Extract 13, Student 7 has given a quote from the course textbook, and Student 3 asks whether it came from page 40. Student 7 confirms this by repeating part of Student 3's question, *in 40*. Since new information is not being given, this is given a different function from Intersubjectivity. The latter need to involve new information or otherwise develop discourse, while Repetition simply repeats old information. In Extract 14, repeated and extended from Extract 6, Speaker 1 asks Speaker 13 which part of Romania she comes from, and she answers the south, and Speaker 1 repeats this for confirmation.

There are examples of repetition and development for clarification like the following:

(15) Extract 15

28S1: <1> it will </1><2> all be very natural </2>
 29S7: <2> you keep sitting </2><3> in it </3>
 30S5: <3> @@ </3>
 31SS: @@@@@ (.)
 32S1: <4> @@ </4>
 33S5: <4> **natural communication** </4>

[VOICE corpus]

Speaker 1 says that the presentations the others are going to do will be in a natural setting, and Speaker 5 repeats and develops this item into *natural communication*.

4.5 Comments

Finally, we move on to the category of Comments:

(16) Extract 16

Student 5 says: they use parallesim when they want to draw attention to a particular part
 of thei message in page 51
 Student 1 says: I just felt that way it was
 Student 2 says: **vague langue**
 [Author's corpus]

(17) Extract 17

6S5: = i put it on the floor is that (.) okay <4> just just don't step on that.</4>
 7S1: <4> yeah (.) just put it in the middle.</4>
 8S1: <9> you can <un> xx </un></9> @@ (1)

9SS: <9> @@@ </9>
 10S4: <soft> just put it (.) next to mine or something = </soft>
 11S5: <soft> = okay. **fine**.</soft> (1)
 [VOICE corpus]

In Extract 16, Student 2 is commenting on politicians' language and use of rhetorical devices, saying that it is an example of vague language. This is clearly an example of interaction, but can be considered a separate category as there is no back channel support function here. It is not really Intersubjective, as such comments are not directly developing the topic at hand. Rather, they move the topic in a different direction. The same appear in the VOICE example in Extract 17 with a comment on previous contributions, *fine*.

Having gone through the range of sorts of functions appearing in the two corpora, we now turn to a comparison between them, looking at the frequencies at which the different functions appear, and identifying possible explanations for any differences.

5. Comparison of the data

The frequency at which the functions occur in the two corpora is summarised in the following table (the percentages have been calculated based on the number of ellipsis contexts for that corpus specifically; *Inter* refers to Intersubjectivity, *Rep* to Repetition, *Comm* to Comment, *Cont* to Continuer, and *Corr* to Correction):

Corpora	Inter.	Rep.	Comm.	Cont.	Corr.
VOICE seminars	137 (39.48%)	96 (27.67%)	60 (17.29%)	43 (12.39%)	11 (3.17%)
Author's corpus	2136 (57.25%)	472 (12.65%)	615 (16.48%)	423 (11.34%)	85 (2.28%)

Table 1. Frequency of functions in the two corpora

Intersubjectivity is the most popular function, although the frequency is lower for the VOICE seminars. It can be expected that developments and negotiation of discourse are highly frequent in an academic discourse setting, since the goal of seminars is to discuss and ask questions about different aspects of language. This is a reflection of the institutional nature of academic discourse (Heritage, 2005). Repetition has the next highest frequency, with a drop for the author's corpus. Comments and Continuers come next, and the frequencies are almost the same; and finally, there are very few examples of corrections. We will look now in detail at the frequencies for each corpus to try to determine the reasons for these differences, starting with the author's own corpus.

5.1 Author's corpus

In the author's corpus, we saw that it has the highest frequency of Intersubjectivity, but the lowest level of Repetition – the other functions being at similar levels to the VOICE data. We propose that the reason for the lower frequency of Repetition is that the data is

textchat. Given that the chatlog can be scrolled through by users at any time to check what has been written before, previous contributions are always present as long as the log is active, or has been saved. Thus, there is no actual need to repeat what has been written before.

The frequency at which the functions occur in the different sessions of the author's course is summarised in the following table. The percentages show the frequency for each session (we do not take up differences between pre-seminars and seminars, but leave that to future work):

Session	Inter.	Rep.	Comm.	Cont.	Corr.
Media	377 (57.38%)	69 (10.50%)	139 (21.16%)	63 (9.59%)	9 (1.37%)
Politics	314 (59.47%)	30 (5.68%)	111 (21.02%)	59 (11.17%)	14 (2.65%)
Gender	388 (61.39%)	25 (3.96%)	117 (18.51%)	82 (12.97%)	20 (3.16%)
Phonetics	132 (66.67%)	18 (9.09%)	24 (12.12%)	17 (8.59%)	7 (3.54%)
Phonol.	152 (64.14%)	32 (13.50%)	23 (9.70%)	24 (10.13%)	6 (2.53%)
Morph.	710 (53.91%)	294 (22.32%)	145 (11.01%)	144 (10.93%)	24 (1.82%)
Syntax	63 (38.89%)	4 (2.47%)	56 (34.57%)	34 (20.99%)	5 (3.09%)
Totals	2136 (57.25%)	472 (12.65%)	615 (16.48%)	423 (11.34%)	85 (2.28%)

Table 2. Frequencies of functions per session for the author's corpus

It needs to be said at the start that the reason for the numbers of instances of ellipsis being so high during the Media, Politics, Gender and Morphology sessions is that there were pre-seminars for those sessions. This meant that there were higher numbers for all functions, apart from one instance of more Repetitions in Phonology.

The numbers of Intersubjectivity were very similar. The Syntax session stood out, with under 40%, and the Phonetics, Phonology and Gender sessions had over 60%. The Phonetics and Phonology sessions involve a lot a discussion of terminology, and so there are many question-and-answer pairs and requests for clarification. Consider the following from a Phonology seminar:

(18) Extract 18

Teacher 1 says: actually, the only REAL way to identify minimal pairs is to look at phonetic transcription

Student 1 says: you mean : bin -pin, Teacher 1?

[...five contributions missing...]

Student 3 says: **mean and green?**

[Author's corpus, Phonology seminar]

The teacher is asking for examples of minimal pairs, and Student 3 gives the elliptical answer highlighted in bold, asking for confirmation. Gender is a very popular topic for discussion, along with Politics, and so there are many discussion threads being developed. Syntax is the odd session out here. There is much analysis in the session, but the topic does not lend itself to discussion in the same way as the others – plus the students were familiar with Syntax from their previous studies, and so maybe did not feel the need for discussion in the same way.

Repetition is still frequent, despite what was mentioned above about it not being necessary because of the chatlog, since students were told on the course to express their opinions about some issue or answer a question, even if someone else had made the same point. This is seen in one of the heaviest topics for analysis, Morphology, which provides over half of the cases of Repetition (294 instances out of 472). There was very little Repetition in the Politics and Gender sessions, probably because students were giving their own opinions on politics and gender, and not asking for confirmation.

Given the affective side of language, it is also not surprising that Continuers in particular, but also Comments, are popular functions. The frequencies of Continuers are higher in the beginning of the course, which is expected if their role is to develop a community. This, then, is reduced in the remainder of the sessions. The numbers are highest in Morphology, where students support one another's analyses. Consider the following, from the author's corpus from a seminar on Morphology:

(19) Extract 19

- Teacher 2 says: so, what about question 2 from the handout? what allomorphs are there of PLURAL and PAST morphemes?
- Student 25 says: **s, es**
- Student 1 says: regular ; irregular and zero morphs
- Student 24 says: **s, es ,ed**
- Student 25 says: **ed**
- Student 20 says: is it **-s** and **-ed**
- Student 7 says: plural **e ,es**
- Student 10 says: **ed , -s**
- Student 7 says: past **ed**
- [Author's corpus, Morphology seminar]

There are many examples of this type in analysis sessions, where the speakers repeat one another to confirm the answers to study questions.

In Syntax, there is a jump in frequency of Repetition, also due to the large amount of analysis just like in Morphology. The numbers are not very much higher than in the other sessions, especially Phonetics and Phonology, but the percentage can be assumed to be due to the lower level of discussion, which artificially raised the frequency of Continuers and Comments.

Corrections are the least popular function, which is understandable given how quickly communication takes place in textchat. Thus, there is pressure for users to interact at conversation-like speed. Of course, it is well-known from the literature that editing is an important feature of textchat, and gives users the opportunity to assess their language use (Sauro & Smith, 2010). Thus, it might be that there is some editing going on, but without tracking software this cannot be confirmed.

We now move on to the VOICE seminar discussions.

5.2 VOICE corpus seminar discussions

Finally, we consider seminar discussion data:

Text #	Inter.	Rep.	Comm.	Cont.	Corr.
31	67 (47.86%)	47 (33.57%)	16 (11.43%)	6 (4.29%)	4 (2.86%)
251	15 (30%)	13 (26%)	11 (22%)	11 (22%)	0
301	11 (29.73%)	11 (29.73%)	14 (37.84%)	1 (2.70%)	0
362	16 (45.71%)	11 (31.43%)	5 (14.29%)	2 (5.71%)	1 (2.86%)
363	17 (32.69%)	13 (25%)	8 (15.38%)	10 (19.23%)	4 (7.69%)
364	11 (33.33%)	1 (3.03%)	6 (18.18%)	13 (39.39%)	2 (6.06%)
Totals	137 (39.48%)	96 (27.67%)	60 (17.29%)	43 (12.39%)	11 (3.17%)

Table 3. Frequencies of functions per session for VOICE seminar discussions

Just as with the previous data, Intersubjectivity is most common, with Repetition and Continuers coming behind.

EDsed31 contains a discussion of Austrian stereotypes. It is the longest discussion at 1725 lines, so the numbers are highest. Many stereotypes are presented, hence the high frequency of Intersubjectivity, but there are few Comments or Continuers. *Yeah* is mostly used as a comment:

(20) Extract 20

17S6: <5> so you </5> can sit in the middle.

18S7: <@> yeah </@>

[VOICE, seminar discussion EDsed31]

Repetition is used to confirm what speakers have said:

(21) Extract 21

114S1: and so this is your first (.) <7> longer stay in aust</7>ria? =

115S11: <7> hh erm yah </7>

116S11: = my first erm long and short. @ <8> my first time in austria. @ </8>

[VOICE, seminar discussion EDsed31]

EDsed251 contains a discussion of academic mobility. There are longer utterances, and so less Intersubjectivity. There is much agreement expressed as Comments and Continuers:

(22) Extract 22

- 57S1: <5> thank you </5> for coming <6><soft> and for </soft> (.) <@>
CHOOSING US </@> for your </6>
58S2: <5><soft> er er </soft></5>
59S2: <6> well thank you very much for for for giving me the </6>
60SS: @@@@ <7> @@@@ </7>
61S2: <7> opportunity </7> thank you very much (.) <8> @ </8>
62S1: <8> **cer**</8>tainly yah (.) thank you
63S2: <soft> **thank you** </soft> (1)
[VOICE, seminar discussion EDsed251]

EDsed301 is a discussion of agriculture in the European Union. Again, there are longer utterances and little Intersubjectivity. This time there are more Comments:

(23) Extract 23

- 12S3: but after the enlargement there are even more countries (.) erm that dePEND strongly on agriculture (.) a:nd erm to compete with the other <spel> e u </spel> countries <spel> e u </spel> member countries e:rm the <spel> e u </spel> has to subsidize these countries. (.) and so: the budget therefore (.) erm: we don't have <@> enough money </@> (1) and that's the reason why they (.) first of all they get (.) they don't get as much as all the other <spel> e u </spel> members got when they first joined the <spel> e u.</spel> (.)
13S2: **right.** so: bu- <soft> er </soft> the: the old structure seems unsustainable
[VOICE, seminar discussion EDsed301]

In EDsed362, there is a discussion of how to combat terrorism. There is much Intersubjectivity but little feedback in the form of Continuers, with *yeah* taking their place:

(24) Extract 24

- 17S1: questions? (7) <soft> no question </soft> (2) everybody agree (.)
18SX-m: **yeah** =
19S4: = er (.) ju- just one question (.)
20SS: <soft> @@@@ </soft> (.)
21S4: er who's gonna educate <un> x </un> er (.) those guys in er (.) poor countries. (.) <5> specialists from </5> western world? o:r =
22S3: <5> (important for us) </5>
23S3: = **YEAH** =
[VOICE, seminar discussion EDsed362]

In the final two seminars, EDsed363 and EDsed364, there are discussions about the artist, Gustav Klimt. In both cases, there are very high levels of Continuers and little Repetition:

(25) Extract 25

- 33S3: <5> his (.) his </5>
34S3: like profile i guess of his art couldn't be (.) er explained by erm (.) not conventional paintings or drawings but rather (.) like projects that he

- submits himself to (.) some sort of torture (.) to (.) bring out a political statement. (1)
- 35S1: political o<6>.r </6>
- 36S3: <6> or soci<6>etal or (.)
- 37S1: y<7>es.</7>
- 38S3: <7> SOME </7> sort of statement <8> to bring </8> out
- 39S1: <8> **good** </8>
- [VOICE, seminar discussion EDsed363]
- (26) Extract 26
- 30S1: <@> good </@><6> @@@@ </6> @@@@ @@@ hh {parallel whispering starts} i think that was well explained {parallel whispering ends} in the brush stroke thing (.)
- 31S5: <6> it's so nice </6>
- 32S1: see you see a tree BUT in fact there IS no tree <7> it's </7> not even the FORM of a tree it's just BRUSH strokes
- 33SX-f: <7><un> x </un></7>
- 34S5: mhm
- 35S1: and that was that was (1) **well done** huh (.) **good** what else? (1)
- [VOICE, seminar discussion EDsed364]

The discussion gives rise to supportive comments on the contributions.

5.3 Summary of Analysis

Just to summarise this analysis, we have seen strong differences between the two corpora. In the author's corpus, we proposed that there was more Repetition since the discussions took place through textchat. Otherwise, the differences were proposed to be due to the type of discourse. Analysis often involved much Repetition and supportive Comments and Continuers. It must be said that an important difference between the corpora is that the author's material does show the development in students' language use synchronically the course. This is not the case for VOICE, where the same individuals are not followed. Thus, we get a somewhat different picture of language use from these corpora.

5. Conclusions

Our study has demonstrated that the frequency of different functions of ellipsis can be explained by two factors. In textchat, Repetition is not so frequent because the "conversation" is always present as long as the chatlog exists. Otherwise, functions can be explained as a result of the discourse topic. Discussions on topics involve much presentation of information, and questions and answers to clarify. Repetition also serves to confirm information. Continuers and Comments acts as supports for contributions and help develop and maintain group identity. Thus, we see a wide variety of functions in ellipsis contexts.

As already noted above, the author's corpus allowed us to see synchronic developments in students' language use within the time span of the course, which it was not possible to see in VOICE. This is a weakness of the choice of corpora, and could be remedied with a different choice of material for future research. Naturally, the other main development to this work would be to analyse in more detail the functions, especially Intersubjectivity and Repetition. This will be the subject of later work, though.

To wrap things up, we hope that this work has demonstrated the variety of interactive functions in discourse, and how these are affected by mode and type of discourse.

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