

Triadic Exchange Pattern in Multiparty Communication: A Case Study of Conversational Narrative among Friends

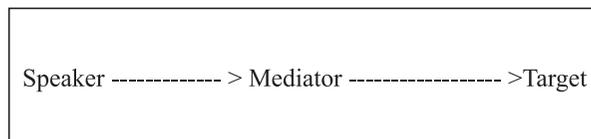
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Introduction

Multiparty interaction brings about numerous ways to arrange its participant framework, and such diversity creates many interactional strategies used toward social goals. Kang (1998) has delineated one of such strategic patterns uniquely available for multiparty participation, which she calls “triadic exchange.” A triadic exchange is recognized when a speaker addresses a mediating addressee (“Mediator”) to communicate a message to another co-present addressee(s), or “Target.” See Figure 1 for illustration.

Figure 1. (Adopted from Kang 1998: 140)

Diagram for a triadic exchange



In Kang’s data, a meeting among several Korean-American youth group members, this particular exchange style was used to carry out face-threatening acts (e.g., accusing/blaming someone) not as an individual but as a group. The triadic exchange allowed the side-participants (Clark & Carlson, 1982) of the interaction a chance to display their alignment and/or rebuttal in the created in-between space, through which the whole group negotiates and re-establishes their social relationships.

Triadic interactions are used across a wide range of interlocutory relationships to elicit a vast range of stance, act (Ochs, 1996) and activity displays (Ochs, 1996; Field, 2001). Triadic exchange patterns are indeed an integral resource for the participants to organize their social world. In this study, a gathering of close female friends over dinner was examined. The data are video-recorded, and the analysis pays careful attention to the physical arrangement, gestures, manner of speaking, and linguistic

content of the interaction to show the moment-by-moment process in which the participants collaboratively construct the triadic pattern.

The analysis shows that a triadic exchange pattern was embedded in telling of second stories. The dinner discourse data are approximately comprised of 8 hours, three occasions. At each setting four to five Japanese females participated in the dinner gathering. In this study I will be discussing one segment from the corpus.

Triadic Speech Exchange Pattern

“Triadic” interactional patterns were first introduced in Kang (1998). Kang (1998) has delineated one of such strategic patterns uniquely available for multiparty participation, which she calls “triadic exchange.” A triadic exchange is recognized when a speaker addresses a mediating addressee (“Mediator”) to communicate a message to another co-present addressee(s), or “Target.”

Let us see an illustration taken from the segment discussed in her study:

Exerpt 1. (Adopted from Kang, 1998: 143)

Participants (Korean-American teens at a youth meeting) :
Ralph, Dave, Jill, Andy, Hank, Mark, Agnes

35. Hank: ((pointing at Mark)) Don't work with him on anything
36. like tapes or something <@ because like @>,
 ((gaze at Dave, Ralph, and Jill))
37. you'll give a suggestion and he'll be like,
38. yeah but,
39. and then he'll put his own suggestion down. ((gaze goes
40. to Mark by the end of utterance, then back to others))
41. ALL: @@@@
42. Jill: Oh. ((sympathetically))
43. Mark: come on.
44. Hank: ((pointing to Mark)) He's the most anal person
45. I've ever met in my life.

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which the whole group negotiates and re-establishes their social relationships.

A triadic speech pattern can take various shapes other than what has been just described in Kang’s study. In a multi-party setting, there are cases when the current speaker may not directly address his recipient. Yet, they turn to another participant, hence creating an “eavesdropping” role for the actual recipient. Figure 2 illustrates the system. The pattern occurs when A addresses (i.e., speaks to) B, but for some socio-cultural or interpersonal reasons B does not directly reply back to A. Instead, B engages in a “side-play” (in Goffman’s sense, 1981) with C on the addressed matter, having A listen to their exchange. The triadic nature figures in that the progress of interaction eventually “comes back” via an indirect roundabout route to A-B. As the final phase of the pattern, A would follow up on what she/he just “overheard” from B-C exchange.

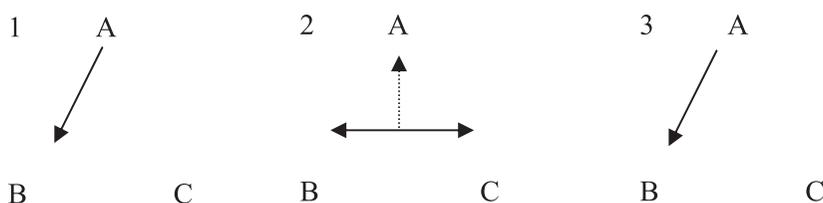


Figure 2. A Prototypical Triadic Speech Pattern

In some cases, it is rather easier to tell that the speakers purposely design an utterance to be overheard by someone. Morgan (1996)’s “pointed indirectness” in African American women’s discourse is one of such examples. A speaker ostensibly says something to someone (“mock receiver”) that is intended for and to be heard by someone else and is so recognized. The linguistic features found in the discourse of such “indirect” talk invoke the participants to treat the message as triadic.

This collaborative participation work by all those present has been already an important theme for Goffman (1981). In the definition above, I already assume some of Goffman’s distinctions such as “ratified participants” from “by-standers.” In Goffman’s framework, within the group of ratified participants, there can be “addressed recipients” or “unaddressed recipients.” “By-standers” is further divided into either “eavesdroppers” or “overhearers.”

These classifications are useful, but they raise a number of difficulties when we want to apply them straightforwardly to the triadic pattern under discussion. In a

recent article, Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2004) notes that one problem here is the notion of participation itself. Ratified participants are, according to Goffman, officially a part of the conversation, as witnessed by the way the members of the group are physically positioned (though proximity, posture, eye contact, etc). Kerbrat-Orecchioni points out, however, that there are many cases that challenge this definition. As Drew (1992) observes, Goffman considers jurors in courtrooms “overhearers,” despite their central role and the fact that they are the focus of address. Goffman classifies them only as overhearers because they are forbidden to speak. Complete ratification, in Goffman’s sense, means that participants have the right both to produce and to receive. If we adopt more detailed degrees of ratification, however, we could certainly avoid labeling some crucial players as non-ratified participants in cases such as trials or television talk shows.

Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2004) suggests that it is more accurate to see all participants as ratified, but, depending on the sequence, some may be more ratified than others. There may be various signals that indicate degree of ratification, used both by ratifiers and those seeking ratification. These vary depending on the interactional situations. Goffman was mostly focusing on the verbal ratification, however, ratification may be kinetic, or simply of a function of attentiveness, involvement, or the lack thereof. Language, however, will be one of the most efficient and most often used means of signaling. Through the negotiation of ratification, in many contexts the participants will become socialized. Just as there are degrees of ratification among participants, there are degrees of non-ratified participant status. As I have already mentioned, Goffman provides two sub-classes within the category of by-standers, namely, overhearers and eavesdroppers. An example of an overhearer would be factory workers doing repair work in an office where a meeting is being held, or a staff member in charge of handling technical problems during a conference (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2004). Sometimes speakers are entirely unaware of hearers, as happens when a record of an event falls into someone’s hands after the event has taken place (an example of this would be an analyst who examines it later), or when speakers are simply unaware of a listener’s presence.

Kerbrat-Orecchioni’s broadening of ratification perhaps accounts for non-linguistic ratification process as well as that of linguistic process. The triadic pattern I discuss in this paper certainly welcomes this interpretation; the third party’s presence, although temporarily, shifts its ratification degree within the pattern. The other claim I want to put forward here is that because of this fluid nature of the pattern, we will find

it emerging in numerous social activities when they satisfy the following minimum constitutive configuration. First, there must be a multi-party setting. Secondly, each participant of the interaction must consider each other's entitlement to initiate a turn when possible. Thirdly, each participant must treat the utterances produced by the other speakers "relevant" to himself/herself, regardless of kinetic ratification from the speaker as an addressee of the talk. In short, the triadic pattern cannot be enacted without the collaborative construction and joint attention by all the participants.

If the triadic speech pattern is enacted ubiquitously, what is so resourceful about it that brings us some social achievement in communication? This is the question probed in this paper, dealing with various communicative occasions in Japanese. I do not claim any culturally specific uniqueness over the fact that the occasion uses Japanese language as a medium. Rather, I would like to emphasize that the pattern can be found in all events that may appear very different in the social purpose.

A Case Study: Stories in Rounds in Close Friends' Dinner Conversation

There were total of four native speakers of Japanese, all females (see Figure 3 for the seating arrangement).



Figure 3. Seating of Four Participants

The occasion emerged because it was one of the participants' birthday that day, so that the dinner was to celebrate the birthday together. The emergence of narratives during this dinner talk is the focus of the current analysis. Narratives, or what I refer to in this paper as stories, occur frequently in a dinner setting. In this paper, a story is defined as a discourse unit (or using Edelsky (1981)'s term, *floor*) in which the speaker (teller) displays some kind of 'first hand' involvement in the events they describe (Sacks, 1992; Silverman, 1998). The stories emerged in the dinner talk data consist of various kinds of rememberings (Edwards, 1997; Norrick, 2000). Some are based on personal experience, and others based on their empathetic involvement in

the happenings to the character other than themselves.

In the data examined in this study, the first story was invoked by the youngest speaker of the five, R, upon listening to the two others' talking about how their mutual female friend looks very young for her age. Let us see Excerpt 2, which captures the essence of R's story from the whole transcript.

Excerpt 2. R's First Story (Digest)

1. R: ° (de)mo ° doogan tte urayamashikatta desu yo (2)
But I was always jealous of those with a baby face
2. S: nan[de?
Why?
3. R: datte wakai uchi kara sa:: (1)
Because even while you were still young you know,
4. K: un
yeah
5. R: .hh ano ichiban shokku datta dekgoto wa:: (.) nank- -
KAI mono ni ik (.) itta n desu ne: ,
Uhm the most shocking thing for me was when I (.) went shopping,
6. S: haihai
Yes yes
7. R: ano toki ikutsu datta n daroo (2) 19 ka (.)
That time how old was I (2) 19 years old (.)
8. S: u:n
yeah
9. R: hatachi gurai n [toki]
When I was about 20 years old
10. S: [n:::] (1) tandaisee no toki ne?=
Hm:: (1) when you're at the college? =
11. R: =otsutome desu ka? toka iwarete:: (.)
=(Someone asked me)are you working?
12. S: un
yeah
13. R: e! (.) chigaimasu toka itte (1) e, ja moo gokekkon
sareteru [n [desu ka? toka (chigau*)]
Oh! (.) no, I said (1) oh, then (they said)you're already married? (No)*
14. K: [ha[hahahaha ((laughter))
15. S: [hahha ara:::] .hh ((laughter))
Oh my:::
juudai no shoojo [ni wa mada]
for a teenage girl, that is (impossible) yet
16. R: [ja ikutsu ni]mieta n desu ka tte ki(h)it(h)ara (.)

27, 8 ka to omoimashita tte iw(h)arete::=
"Then how old did I look?" I asked, then (they answered)
"27-28 we thought" ::=

During R's story, you can see that S was the main recipient of the telling. The video data indicate that eye gazing was maintained for the most of the time between R and S. In line 4 R looked at K, T and S in order in a very brief manner, but she settles her gaze towards S throughout. Figure 4 illustrates this.



Figure 4. R's eye gaze toward S.

In line 1, R states "I was jealous of those who had a baby face." and in line 2 by S and 3 K these two seek for a repair (or further elaboration) from R for what was said in line 1. In line 3 R starts "Because even while you were still young," attempting here to meet S's "why" question. However, R stops this utterance in the middle and in line 5 she says "um the most shocking thing for me was when I went to shopping," initiating her story. The story ends right around line 16, when K comes in saying "No such things are not rare I'd had [such experience] too."

In response to R's story, K takes over the turn to provide her story. Sacks (1992) in his original lectures talks about how storytellings in conversation can take rounds. "Second stories" like K's narrative are very common manifest of participation by those who were cast as listeners of the first speaker. By shaping their second stories such that display their understanding of the first story, the second (or third or later) speakers can negotiate and contribute to build intersubjectivity among speakers. Let us see the essence of K's second story captured from the transcript.

Excerpt 3. K's Second Story (Digest)

17. K: =iya sonna no wa nee (.) mare (.) mare ja nai wa yo
No that kind of thing is not unusual at all

18. watashi mo aru wa (1) keiken ga.
I have (1)experience too.
19. R: sugoi shokku datta n desu kedo
But I was really shocked.
20. K: atashi:: 18:: ka (.) a 17 da yo (1) amerika lnen kaette
I was 18 or 17 years old (1) after a year in America
21. kite (.) sono: (.) natsu:? ka nanka ni:
came back (.) that (.) summer? or something like that
22. suupaamaaketto ni itte kaimono shitete::
I was shopping at a supermarket
23. S: [un
yeah
24. R: [un
Yeah
25. K: .hh n de:: (.5) nanka nooto ka nanka
26. o kaitakute:: .hh (.5) a tch- depaato da kore (.)
.hh and then:: (.5) notebooks or something
I wanted to buy them .hh (.5) oh it's department store(.)
27. 3gai ka 4kai toka soo iu toko >datta kara<
Because it was on the 3rd or 4th floor
[...]
36. K: hutsuu no bunboogu! (.) >aru ja nai< koo
Normal stationaries! You know, like
37. kerokerokeropp[i ga >tsuiteru no toka<]
the ones with Kerokerokeroppi and other stuff
38. S: [o::hoo]
Oh:: hoo
39. R: [n::::]
yeah
40. K: ga na- NAI yatsu. (1) o (.5)
The ones without those. (1)I was (.5)
41. erandetaRA (1) koko ni 2 3 sai no ko ga ita no
selecting those (1) then there was a 2-3 year old child
42. S: .hh un
.hh yeah
43. K: n de:: nanka ((swallow food)) mono o sanrio no mono
44. toka soo iuu mono o wa: ((creaky)) tte
45. (koo) asondeta [no
Then uhm (the child)was playing with the sanrio things
46. S: [n:
hmm:
47. K: soshitara dokka no obasan ga kite ° tattattatta °

- Then an old lady from somewhere came ((sound of heels))*
48. (1.5) chotto! (.5) jubun no kodomo no
49. mendoo gurai mitara doo ya no yo! ((speaking with
a dialect style))
*(and said) "Hey! (.5) aren't you supposed to be taking
care of your own child?"*
50. S: ara:: ((high tone)) hahahaha
oh my::

Triadic Exchange Pattern with the Second Story

From here, the teller role is now shifted to K in which she now tells a story in which she was mistaken for a mother with a small child (or someone who is old enough to be so) at the age of 17.

In the emergence of the second story by K, we observe a triadic exchange pattern in use. K, despite of placing herself as the follow-up speaker to the first story, has selected someone else besides R as her main listener of the story. The content of the second story, as examined in detail here, is clearly implicating the connection to the first story, and she clearly displays in the beginning and the end that the second story was meant to address the first storyteller.

The physical location of their seating (that R and K were sitting aligned with each other and S was sitting across the table from R) plays an important determiner for how the following interaction unfolds. Because of the seating location for S, as we see in the figures, she is the one who verbalizes listener responses which observe story receiptship I had indicated earlier. S sends out continuers when they are needed, comments in temporal interstices given by the teller yet coheres to the story content explored so far by the teller.

One would predict that R, the first storyteller will become the ratified recipient for several reasons; one being that R just indicated her availability in receiving K's eye gaze, and two being that R was the first storyteller, and the second story in process by K was clearly marked to be closely related in topic with the first. However, when we further examine the transcript, S again plays the collaborative participant in constructing a conversational narrative with K. Several further pieces of evidence can also be observed that S is granted such a role. In line 41 and 43-44, K describes the location where a small child was standing. In response to this, in line 42 S sends out a response displaying her understanding. This negotiation sequence for the child's position was only participated by S and the teller, K. Figure 5 illustrates S and K

have a mutual eye gaze throughout the second storytelling.



Figure 5. K and S's storytelling collaborative work.

During K's storytelling, R, the first storyteller was not a primary recipient, yet we cannot neglect that fact that K's story was invoked to comply with R's story to send the message that K even had a worse experience. Excerpt 3 is the segment under discussion.

Excerpt 3.

56. S: ↑ hmm

hmm

57. K: dakara ne (.5) ochikomanai hoo ga ii wa yo=
So you know (.5) you should not get bogged down=

58. Y: =ochikomimashita yo
I did get bogged down.

59. S: huuhuhu [huhuh ((laughter))

60. K: [hahahaha ((laughter))

In line 57 K again addresses R saying “you should not get bogged down.” alluding to R's assessment utterance that she was shocked because of the incident told in the first story. In line 58 R finally comes back in to engage in interaction with K. Adopting Goffman's notion of complexity in participant framework and nature of participation here, we can say that R was the *socially addressed* participant of the story. S was ratified as a story recipient as a discourse role (D. Zimmerman, 1998), yet she was not the one the message of the story was addressed to.



Figure 6. K (2nd storyteller) makes an eyegaze again with R (1st storyteller).

What we see here is the triadic pattern in rather a large unit of talk. Not just turn-by-turn occasion; rather, a triadic exchange pattern can emerge with narratives. Figure 7 below recaps what we have observed in the data.

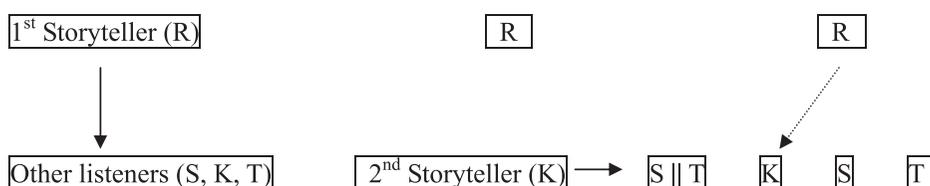


Figure 7. A Triadic Speech Pattern found in Stories in Rounds.

Conclusion

The analysis in this study demonstrates that in the dinner get-together context, a triadic exchange pattern was found in the stories-in-rounds situation. When one of the audience of the first story initiated telling of a “second story” (Sacks, 1992: 764), a triadic exchange pattern was established by the teller’s choosing someone besides the first storyteller as her main listener. The teller’s formulation of the story, use of speech styles, and eye gaze indicate her selection, as well as the main listener’s display of her ratification in her responses. The pattern invoked upgrades of the ratification level for the other quieter, side-participants (Clark & Carlson, 1982) at the table, resulting in a transformation of the participant framework (Goffman, 1981).

In the end, it is worth coming back to the issue of cultural uniqueness and the use of triadic speech pattern. A similar pattern has been identified in previous literature on Japanese communication. For instance, Kawasaki (1992) has made an analogy

to a “boomerang” style of Japanese interaction, referring to the actual message gets delivered indirectly to the target, then a response from the target returns back to the original speaker. Kawasaki’s account for the use of “boomerang” style by the Japanese speakers was directly associated to the infamous “harmony” preference over conflict in Japanese culture, and it left no room for variable uses that can be occur with the same interactional style. The case examined in this study has no reference to the participants’ preset purpose to be harmonious. Kawasaki’s examination of casual interaction among friends at different ages may indeed utilize the pattern that suits their social purpose, which may have been the reduction of imposition towards the others. However, the generalization of the function of the triadic speech pattern as such and its direct connection to a cultural description of the Japanese appear weakly argued. It seems more comprehensive to argue that this style of speech, or any other interactional rhetorics by the same token, is a resource available for any conversation participants. What gets done by these resources, however, may vary dynamically from one context to another. These three cases demonstrate a remark that although the same interactional practice on the surface was implemented, the social goals of these settings accomplished by it are diverse, given the different contexts. It also emphasizes and reconfirms that triadic speech pattern is a resource for speakers, not a rule.

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