# SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES

# Non-native and Native Speakers' Casual Conversations: A Comparative Study of Involvement and Humour

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## ABSTRACT

Research on spoken language has mainly focused on spoken discourses in settings such as classroom and workplace. Another important use of speech, casual conversation, has received much less attention. Casual conversation is a functional and semantic activity. It is a site for the establishment and development of social identity and interpersonal relationships; a way of conveying who we are and of interacting with others in different contexts. This paper reports a comparative study on two casual conversations, which naturally occurred in two different settings; between international students from different language backgrounds and between native speakers of English. The texts were constructed in everyday social settings and reflected the role of language in the construction of social identities and interpersonal relations. The two settings displayed different uses of language to construct solidarity, intimacy and affiliation. The study used a functional and semiotic theoretical framework for analysing casual conversation, in order to describe and explain two aspects of casual talk; namely involvement and humour. Using a bottom-up approach, the conversations were analysed to look at the use of naming, technicality, swearing and slang for the purpose of involvement. Humour in each conversation was analysed through language devices that triggered laughter from participants. Situational and

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cultural influences on meaning-making were explored and compared in the analysis of involvement and humour in the two different settings.

## INTRODUCTION

Casual conversation often refers to naturally occurring talks motivated simply for the sake of talking itself (Eggins & Slade, 1997). It is critical in the social construction of reality through which "shared meanings, mutual understandings, and the coordination of human conduct are achieved" (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990). The extensiveness of this type of spoken discourse in daily life has made it an exciting domain of study for researchers from different disciplines. Anthropologists are interested in casual talks as they see it as "an omnipresent communicative practice through which sociocultural norms and values are articulated and passed on from experts to novices" (He, 2000). Yet detailed descriptions regarding conversation structures as well as the structuring of language use in the construction of these talks have mainly come from sociologists and linguists. While sociologists take casual conversation to be the primordial site for the accomplishment of sociality, linguists are fascinated about how language is structured and used as a semiotic resource that enables us to *do* conversation, to be social beings and do social life Eggins and Slade (1997). Considered as a semantic activity, casual conversation is a rich linguistic site for

analysis to explore how language is used in different ways for the construction of the conversation, and how patterns of interaction reveal the shared values, social identities and interpersonal relations among interactants.

This paper provides a comparative study on two casual conversations which were naturally occurred in two different settings: one between international students from different language and cultural backgrounds, and another between native speakers of English who share the same language and cultural background. Intercultural conversation, compared to conversation between native speakers, often depends "more heavily on the shared responsibility and collaboration of the culturally divergent speakers in converging their communicative behaviour to that of the interlocutor in order to negotiate common, shared grounds" (Cheng, 2003). As casual conversation is doing to construct and maintain culture, interactants' beliefs, values and perceptions of meaning will be conveyed through communication process (Krippendorff, 1993). In this study, our aim was to explore how different users of English use the language in their casual talks to construct solidarity, intimacy and affiliation. Situational and cultural influences on meaning making were also explored and compared in the analysis of the two casual conversations.

The study used Eggins and Slade's (1997) functional and semiotic theoretical framework for analysing casual conversation. As casual conversation is

mostly motivated by interpersonal needs in order to establish and maintain personal identities and social relationships, this study described and explained two interpersonal aspects of casual talks at the semantic level, namely *involvement* and *humour*. For the purpose of understanding involvement created by interactants, the conversations were analysed in terms of the lexical selection of naming, technicality, swearing and slang. Humour in each conversation was analysed through language devices that trigger laughter from participants.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Casual Conversation

Interacting with other people is part of our lives as socialized individuals. In this process of exchanging meanings, our interactions are not only functionally motivated to accomplish certain tasks, but also inspired by our interpersonal needs to establish and maintain contact with one another. Very often, in everyday encounter situations we engage in a variety of chats, either voluntarily or accidentally, with friends, family members or workmates. In this kind of talks, we often feel most relaxed, spontaneous and most ourselves. These informal encounters are usually labelled *casual conversation*.

As defined by Thornbury and Slade (2006), casual conversation is primarily spoken, planned and produced spontaneously in real time. It often refers to interactions which display informality and have no clear pragmatic motivations Eggins and Slade (1997). It differs from other pragmatic-oriented interactions (i.e. buying a bus ticket, or making an appointment with a family doctor) in that these pragmatically oriented interactions are motivated by clear purposes and tend to be ended after achieving the goals. Casual talks, on the other hand, can be fairly long without reaching a specific informative level (Ventola, 1979). Another point making casual conversation distinctive to other spoken discourses is that it is not necessarily always fully developed. Its subject-matters, or topics of talks, are normally non-technical, trivial, and can be often overlapped and changeable. The topics of these casual encounters are also highly context-dependent and culture-bound. Another typical nature of these casual talks concerns the social role of the participants, which is typically non-hierarchic even though participants involved can be friends or strangers.

From linguistic point of view, casual conversation is a semantic activity, a meaning-making process. According to Halliday (1978), it is "the spontaneous interchange of meaning in ordinary, everyday interaction". In spite of its sometimes aimless appearance and apparently unstructured content, casual conversation plays a critical role in the social construction of reality. As we gossip, we are not only transmitting our messages, but also enacting our social identities, establishing and sustaining interpersonal relationship. Therefore, Eggins and Slade (1997) argued that the motivation of casual conversation was interpersonal that revealed the positioning of participants in relation

to each other. Casual conversation is a rich linguistic site to not only see how language is used in different ways as a meaning-making resource to enable us to construct the conversation, but also to explore how patterns of interaction reveal social identities, interpersonal relations and cultural backgrounds among conversationalists. Although casual conversation occurs in a relaxed social setting in which interactants feel most themselves and comfortable, it would be interesting to observe how people from different cultural and language backgrounds make linguistic choices to express their positioning during the negotiation of solidarity and differences.

In spite of its centrality in daily lives, casual conversation has generally received less analytical attention compared to written discourse. Despite a large number of written corpora, which comprised of millions or billions of words, there have been a much smaller number of spoken corpora made up of a few hundred thousand words (Raso & Mello, 2014). However, corpus linguistics has made a significant contribution to the study of informal spoken texts with much of the evidence for the description of its nature drawn from findings of corpus linguistics. One of the pioneering work on this domain was in McCarthy & Carter (1995)'s study of spoken grammar of informal and conversational language drawn from the Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse which was one of the first corpora to target only spoken language. Miller and Weinert (1998) explored the syntactic structures across languages from three sets of corpora compiled of spontaneous conversation produced by speakers of Scottish English, German and Russian. The corpora of C-Oral Brazil, Nordic Dialect Corpus and Brazilian and American Sign Language Corpora are the multiplicity of spoken corpus which were used in Raso & Mello (2014)'s for the study of information structure, syntactic variation and sign language acquisition. Significant studies on casual conversation also include Eggins (1990), Thornbury and Slade (2006), Ventola (1979), addressing features of casual talks such as lexical and grammatical features, discourse and genres. Other research has been into other aspects, such as listener back-channel expressions in Japanese and American English conversations (Maynard, 1986), non-verbal elements in Japanese casual conversation (Maynard, 1987), morphological errors in casual talks (Bond, 1999), and role structure and dimensions of social identifies among interactants (Banda, 2005). These studies analyse casual conversation from a number of perspectives and aspects, making significant contributions towards understanding the nature of casual conversation.

## Systemic Functional Linguistics: a functional-semantic interpretation of casual conversation

In this paper Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) was adopted as the approach to analysing casual conversation. SFL provides a functional-semantic approach to language description which views language as a social semiotic system, a resource for individuals to make meanings by exercising linguistic

choices in close relation to contexts of language use. SFL's development is largely contributed to the work of MAK Halliday from the 1960s, with major contributions from Hasan (1979, 1980, 1984, 1992) Halliday and Matthiessen (2008, 2014), Martin (1984, 1992), Martin and Rose (2007), and Martin and White (2005), to name just a few.

This functional model of language is relevant to casual conversation analysis in several respects. With an emphasis on functions of language, SFL argues that all human languages are internally organised to serve three major functions simultaneously: to represent our experiences (ideational metafunction), to enact our social relationships (interpersonal metafunction), and to organise our representation and enactment into coherent texts (textual metafunction). Therefore, from SFL perspective, language is a resource for making three strands of meanings at the same time corresponding to the functions it serves. In casual conversation, ideational meaning is expressed through the negotiation of a shared ideational world, which can be analysed by looking at the topics of talk, and topic transition and closure. Simultaneously, the interpersonal strand of meaning runs through the conversation, which reveals the roles and relationships among interactants. Textual meaning helps to organise the ideational and interpersonal actualities into a piece of speech, which can be explored by looking at different types of cohesion used to tie chunks of talk together.

As all three strands of meanings

being enacted, casual conversation can be analysed and interpreted by different analytical techniques to uncover each strand of meaning. However, this paper placed the main focus on interpersonal meaning because it was argued that casual conversation is driven by interpersonal, rather than ideational and textual meanings. With the absence of pragmatic purposes and outcomes, it can be seen that the primary task of casual conversations concerns the negotiation of social identities and relationships. Furthermore, the topics of talk can be anything (e.g. the weather, health, holiday plans or current news), and can be constantly transitioned, which suggests that casual conversation is not motivated by ideational meanings. Rather, these topics serve as "a means of establishing and maintaining social relationship" (Ventola, 1979).

Another fundamental premise of SFL significant to casual conversation analysis is the interconnectedness between the language use and the social contexts. The immediate social context, called context of situation, constrains the linguistic choices that individuals can choose to make appropriate meanings (Christie & Unsworth, 2000). Each context of situation is characterised by a particular register of language, which is a combination of three variables: field, tenor and mode. Field refers to the topic or what is going on in an interaction (i.e. about childcare, or the weather). Tenor is about the interactants and their role relationships (i.e. mothers to children, friends to friends, or specialists to general audience), while

mode refers to the role of language plays in an interaction (i.e. interactive face-to-face or written). Field is realised through ideational metafunction, tenor through interpersonal metafunction, and mode through textual metafunction. However, the way language is structured for use is not only influenced by the context of situation, but also by the context of culture which involves a full range of situational contexts that the culture embodies. According to Martin and Rose (2007), each interaction is an instance of the speaker's culture, and the text can be used to interpret aspects of the culture it manifests. Therefore, both of these contexts have "a significant and predictable impacts on language use" (Eggins, 2004).

Given the key focus on interpersonal semantics, tenor and patterns of interpersonal meaning running through casual conversation were analysed to see how linguistic choices contribute to the realisation and construction of role relations between participants. Two main areas of interpersonal semantics were explored, concerning involvement and humour.

**Involvement**

Involvement refers to how interpersonal worlds are shared by conversationalists. It comprises a range of semantic systems that participants can use for the realization, construction and maintenance of intimacy and affiliation. These interpersonal alignments are largely expressed at the semantic level through lexical selections. The choice of one word other than another reveals the speakers' identities and their

cultural backgrounds. According to Eggins and Slade (1997), in casual conversation involvement includes the use of lexical items which can be categorised into naming, technicality, swearing, slang or anti-language.

Naming involves the use of vocatives to get attention or to control the turn-taking system by targeting the next preferred speaker. Vocatives are an important resource to analyse multiparty conversations which speakers can use to control, manipulate, divide or align the other interactants. Vocatives include titles, surnames, first names in full or modified form, nicknames or other terms of address. Names of other people who are mentioned in the talk are also in this category. Technicality concerns technical and common-sense lexis which are used and understood by most interactants without special background in the particular field. Generally, technicality is closely related to the topics of the conversation. Swearing in casual conversation includes swear words and expletives, which give some indication of casualness or formality of the talk. The frequency of swearing is very much dependent on status and preference of interactants. Eggins and Slade (1997) suggested that there was some association between swearing and group membership, which could reveal the positioning of the speaker in the group. Involvement can be also expressed by the use of slang or anti-language. Anti-language involves the creation of an extensive vocabulary which gives new meanings to things.

For the case of international students

from different language and cultural background, despite their effortless participation in casual conversation with their peers, their involvement in talks also reveals their emergence into the new community of practice. Through their engagement in a number of casual talks, these students move from peripheral to full participation in their community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). It is noted that the linguistic choices when involving in casual conversation that those students make from their repertoire are greatly influenced by their language and cultural backgrounds.

## Humour

Humour and lightheartedness are consistently used in casual conversation to achieve serious social work as a semantic resource related to Appraisal, one of which is developed to include Involvement (Eggins & Slade, 1997). There is a variety of research on humour from different perspectives. Rogerson-Revell (2007) studied humour in business meetings and found shifts in style of humour from formality to greater informality. Similarly interesting, Bell (2005) explored how humour was negotiated and constructed by non-native speakers of English, indicating a correlation between level of language proficiency and the ability to use language resources to be humorous. Some other studies of humour have focused on laughter since it is the most explicit cue of identifying humour; however, not all humour is indicated by laughter (Eggins & Slade, 1997).

Teasing, telling funning stories, dirty jokes, exaggerating or minimizing things are typical devices of presenting humour in casual conversation. Eggins and Slade (1997) outlined four claims about humour in casual conversation: 1) Humour is used in casual conversation to make it possible for interactants to do social work, while being able to distance themselves from it; 2) Humour not only provides distance, but it also disguises the serious work that is being achieved through talk. In addition, participants of casual conversation are positioned and socialized through laughter; 3) Humour, like other linguistics resources, constructs meanings through differences; and 4) Humour connects the interpersonal contexts of private life with the social contexts of public life.

## METHODOLOGY

### Data

The data used in this investigation is drawn from two sets of casual conversations occurred in two different settings. The first data is a casual conversation participated by a group of international students from different cultural backgrounds: three Chinese and one Indonesian with age ranging from 28 and 34 years old. These participants are mutual friends who are familiar to each other. Two participants, however, met for the first time on that day. It was set on a casual outing during lunchtime at a restaurant. Due to different language background, English was used in the conversation to cater for the language gap among participants. The second data is a conversation among a group of Australian native speakers which

occurred in a pub. The participants in this conversation are between 28 and 29 years old, consisting of two couples: the first couple have been together for four years and the other have been together since high school. The participants were recruited on a voluntary basis with informal consent. All the participants agreed with the audio recording process and the use of the conversation for the study while their identities remained anonymous.

**Analytical procedure**

Both conversations were audio recorded. The recordings were then fully transcribed following Eggins and Slade's transcription conventions. Eggins and Slade's (1997) transcription is made to conform the spontaneity and informality in the conversation, but still understandable for common readers. The transcription was then analysed using colour coding for the recognition of: turn and speaker number, naming, technicality, swearing, slang/anti-language, and humour as in Table 1.

Subsequently, the turns that contained the relevant analytical points were categorised into naming, technicality, swearing, slang/anti-language, and humour were categorised. The sample of each analytical points were presented at the discussion section.

In relation to the aims and objective of the paper, the data analysis in the study is focused on how language in casual conversation constructs solidarity among familiar participants as a part of interpersonal semantics. More specifically, the study looks at how solidarity is enacted through involvement and humour. Involvement is a system which 'offers interactants ways to realise, construct and vary the level of intimacy of an interaction'. Another aspect to analyse from the data is the realisation of humour through the devices such as teasing, telling jokes or funny stories, and other resources that provide resources of 'otherness' and 'in-ness'.

Table 1

*Colour coding analysis of the lexical items to indicate involvement and humour*

| Convention | Coding and Colour Coding | Use |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Turn | Number | To indicate the turn of the speakers |
| Speaker number | Initials | To indicate the speaker's name |
| Naming | Green | To indicate vocatives spoken by the speakers |
| Technicality | Blue | To indicate the technical terms used by the speakers |
| Swearing | Red | To indicate swear words used by the speakers |
| Slang/anti-language | Yellow | To indicate slang used by the speakers |
| Humour | Underline | To indicate words, moves or exchanges that trigger laughter |

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study has found that evidences of involvement and humour are realised differently in the two casual conversations under study. This section presents in more details the realisation of Involvement and Humour expressed by the interlocutors in the conversations.

### Casual Conversation in International Setting

The conversation in the first setting is a good example of the initial stage in relationship construction. From the total of four participants in this casual conversation, one person is a new inclusion to the group, while the rest have known each other for less than a year. The conversation occurred while waiting for being served at a restaurant. The talk reflects how language is used to build relationship among the interactants.

The particular selection of the recording was the 8-minute exchange in the conversation. Within this length, the conversation reflected a comprehensive content and showed a constant transition of topics. Three prominent topics were found: housing, relationship/marriage, and age. Typical to any first-time encounters in any conversations, it was started with asking names and where they lived. Then, the topic moved on to the types of housing where the participants lived. When the recording started, the participants were discussing J's plan to move to a new place. The coverage of the topic was reflected in the use of technicality such as: *units, apartments, rental fee, house, furniture, bills*, *bed*, and *wardrobe*.

In the subsequent part, the conversation developed into more personal topic such as relationship. Two participants in the conversation are married, one has a boyfriend and one is single. The topic became an interest as B, who was single, was in disbelief to know that J was married. She was keen on knowing why such young-looking girl was actually married. She brought about her disbelief explicitly:

B   : You are too young to be married.

J, Y, Z:  Laugh

J    : No. I'm not that young. I have been married for almost five years.

B   : I don't believe you.

The talk became more interesting as Z expressed her similar disbelief knowing the length of J's marriage.

Z   : 5 years?

J    : When I …Yea, almost five years.

From this point, the topic changed into the discussion of age. An ample amount of time was spent on talking about age. This was realised in exchanges such as:

B   : No…I think you are…you are married? You must be younger than me. How old are you?

J    : No.

Z   : She's younger than you, she's not married, and…she doesn't have a baby.

All : [Laugh]

Y   : Oh, thank you. And I'm only 23 years old.

B   : Yea, you are.

All : [Laugh]

Y   : I'm 34.

B   :You look like thirty something. 30, maybe 30.

All :[Laugh]

Y   : You make my day! Thank you.

All : [Laugh]

B   : I look 18, right?

Y   : Yes.

J   : 16! You look 16! You're not adult.

B   : Oh, thank you.

This topic was interrupted by a joke. But after the joke was told, they were back at discussing J's age again before she finally told her actual age.

J   : I'm 30, seriously…

B   : No, twenty ... uhm ...twenty three ... but no sorry

J   : I told you, I'm 30, I'm 30, I'm 30, okay!

Y, B, Z : [Laugh]

Y   : ID card, make her believe

Y   : I don't bring my ID card, next time I will bring my ID card

B   : Really? Thirty?

It can be noticed that naming was rarely used for the purpose of naming. Rather, paralinguistic features, i.e. gesture and gaze, might be used to indicate turn taking. Instances can be found all over the script, for example at the first topic about J's plan to move out. All other participants are looking at her, raising questions or suggestions hoping to get response from her. In the next topic when B was surprised that J was married, B raised her intonation to express her disbelief.  One clear example was found at almost the end of the script, although no naming was used, it is clear that J was responding to Y's question with a prompt answer.

Y   : Your fan, your fan, your fan!

J   : Which one? Stupid one?

Z, B, Y : [Laugh]

J   : Crazy boy

Y   : She's got a lot of fan

J   : [Laugh]

All : [Laugh]

B   : I'm gonna be nice to you

Generally, each participant in the conversation took their turn by personal initiative. Turn taking was indicated by other paralinguistic features, i.e. gaze, to indicate the next speaker. Due to the limitation of the audio recording, this feature was not evident. However, the promptness of the responses revealed that every participant knew when the question was addressed to them and hence responded accordingly. The only naming that can be seen in the talk was an interjection. Y said J's name in surprise as she commented on herself negatively.

Z   : She's doing her PhD, how old do you think she is? She's doing her PhD.

B   : Uhm but if she just finished the

Z   : Master's degree

B   : Uhm undergraduate and do PhD exactly

J   : I'm not that smart

Y, B, Z     : [Laugh]

J   : I'm not that smart

All : [Laugh]

Y   : J! [Laugh]

Regarding to swearing, it has been noticed in the study that international students do not use swear words in their casual conversations. This may occur for several reasons. First of all, the participants in the study are paying respect to each other. They are familiar to each other but

they have not been friends for too long. Not using swear words is a cautious act to avoid misunderstanding. Also, they are colleagues in an academic institution. It is important to maintain their good relationship by being careful of the words they use in conversation. Secondly, English is an additional language for these students. Limited vocabulary repertoire of swear words and limited understanding of the semantic levels of a number of swear words in English might hinder them from using swear lexis in the talk. Finally and more importantly, swearing is cultural. Some swear words are highly emotional and involve cultural beliefs. Swear words are usually originated from derogatory associated with negative values in particular culture.

The only derogatory is observed in the data is a label given to a subject at the end of the talk. The lexis chosen as the labels are *stupid one, crazy one*, and *crazy boy* (previous excerpt) spoken by a participant showing her attitude about a subject. These lexis choices are not purely categorised as swear words as they are quite acceptable and non-offensive. In some sense, however, these can be included in derogatory. The participant used them to invite empathy from the other participants on the way she felt about the subject being talked about.

If there is any lexis close to derogatory but used to refer to something else, it is at the beginning of the talk. This form is recognizable as a form of anti-language.

Y : So when you got in the house, you bought your own bed?

J : No. They purchased them for me.

Y : Oh

[B and Z looked at J]

J : My roommates.

B, Z: [Laugh]

J : Two sloths.

Y : Very kind of them.

J : They are rich.

It can be seen from the excerpt that the term *sloths* is not used to talk about the animal. The term was coined by J to refer to her roommates. She explained that the term came from another friend who thought that the roommates' characteristics were like sloths. Sloths are well known of their characteristics as slow animals. The use of the term *sloths* can be distinguished from naming as the use of the words are to refer to people who have quality like the animals.

As the topic changes, laughter highlights the conversation. Laughter in the conversation is triggered by the shared humour among the participants. In a conversation among people who have shared commonalities, laughter can be triggered even by the smallest, corniest and most trivial cause. The notable humour in the conversation is the response from J towards her disbelief in the fact that she is married. The fact that J, Z and Y knew the fact while B didn't made the exchanges hilarious. The explicit humour is found when B retold a joke. She translated the joke from Chinese.

Z : … Chinese mothers don't buy Chinese milk. However, they buy Australian products, Australian formulas.

...

B : Uhm, there is a joke, you know,

when China said that two-child policy instead of the one-child policy.

J    : Yes, yes.

B   : There is a joke saying us treating milk cows…be… I don't know how to say that: "da zhan", how do you say?

Z   : "Da zhan"? Shaking.

All : [Laugh]

## Casual Conversation in Australian Setting

The participants in the second conversation setting have known each other for longer time. The two-minute recorded conversation was a part of the longer conversation. The lexis choices throughout the conversation reflect a lot about their involvement, not only in the current conversation, but as a member of small community of friendship.

Two considerations can be made to understand the lexis choices reflecting technicality in this setting: (1) the length of relationship among participants and (2) the length of the recorded data. The conversation was a two-minute cut from the hours spent in the pub. The data is not enough to see how the conversation opens and maintained. This conversation, however, shows the richness of the conversation, the degree of the relationship among the participants and the degree of involvement in the conversation. Instead of talking about some superficial things, i.e. where the member live, the participants planned another event to spend together i.e. bread party. This is indicated by the use of technical lexis such as *knead , plait, Pretzels, loaf, rise and grow, pound, brioche, Jew bread, Ukrainian/Easter bread, Potato bread, dense,* and *yummy*

Much similar to the first conversation, naming was not much used. Towards the ending of the conversation, naming is used as summary of who do what for the party plan:

N   : E—is making a Ukrainian bread, T—'s making brioche, I'm making Jew bread.

In the context of the conversation, normally face-to-face recognition is allowed as the participants are in the same venue. This summary is spoken by N while referring to another participant, R, probably by means of gaze rather than the use of naming or any other vocatives. In this way, the unspoken name of R may be alternated by gaze, indicating the invitation for R to respond to the statement i.e. asking what he planned to make for the party.

Another naming was also found to refer to one participant to make some jokes:

N  : It's a bachelorette pad now.

E  : Yep. It's bread day at the bachelorette pad

[Laughter]

N  : T—can be a bachelorette.

The fuse between naming and humour in this conversation is highly contextual. The inclusion of T in *T can be a bachelorette* is clearly a joke as T is a male participant in the conversation. The laughter that occurred during the emergence of these lines indicates that it is not an offensive matter for T or the rest members of the group. Instead, this is a matter that induce laughter for the group of close friends such as this one.

Towards the end of the talk, another naming was found to talk about a past event that included particular participant:

N    : Do you know what R—said to me one time?

R    : What?

N    : He only hangs… This was before we started going out. He only hangs out with me so he can, like, get the fruity cocktails and not look gay.

[All laugh]

These turns are another example of naming that fuse into humour. The fact that R was one of the conversation participants who were present at the venue can be excluded by the use of naming. While saying *Do you know what* R *said to me one time,* N's gaze was probably turned away from R. Instead, she may look at E and T to refer the questions to. The laughter was triggered with the recount that N said to the other interactants that R approached N to *get the fruity cocktails and not look gay.*

A few swear word uses are found in the conversation, for example in the following lines:

R: Potato bread again.

N: Potato bread?

[laughter]

R: I like potato bread.

N: That was so **fricken'** dense!

Although the lexis *fricken* is not a strong swear word, the use in this context is to augment the meaning associated with *potato bread* in negative evaluation. Another example of swear word in the following lines is softened by the speaker's tone. The swear word was a response to a long string of joke in the previous line teasing R on her ability of making potato bread.

R    : No… I'll go to work. You have your bread party. Get **fucked**.

E    : [gasp] …It's alright.

As it was a friendly situation, the use of the swear word was not derogatory by any means. Instead, it shows the participants' closeness with the fact that even the swear word was not offensive to them. One last example of an anti-language is the use of the lexis 'Jew'. The use of this lexis or anything related to it, is potentially sensitive due to its relation to notorious religion/culture. In this setting, the lexis is used as a suggestion from T to N. T hesitated before N confirmed by saying 'Jew bread' confidently. With this, N indicates that mentioning 'Jew' is acceptable.

T    : And you can make… you can make Jew bread.

N    : Jew bread.

## CONCLUSION

From both conversation settings, we can learn a few things. Turn taking in the conversation is not well-organised such as guided interviews. Naming is a crucial device to construct familiarity between interactants. While it is important to hint the turn taking in conversation, it is not always necessary. Casual conversation in a live setting, as opposed to online chat or telephone conversation, is conducted face-to-face. Therefore, naming is not always necessary due to the fact that the interlocutors see each other in real situation. Naming and other terms of addresses may be replaced by gaze and other gestures such as hand or chin movements.

Eggins and Slade (1997) suggested that swearing was an element of language to indicate involvement. While this is true for the conversation for the native speakers, the study indicates the opposite for the intercultural context. Even so, in the native speakers' talk, swear words are not used in derogatory terms. Rather, they are used to trigger humour. On the other hand, in the situation where a group of international students met for the first time, swear words are avoided as swear words used in the initial stage of friendship could give a bad impression. This will in turn risk being excluded from the circle of friendship. In real life, people do not always use 'four-letter words' in their casual conversation. Particular topics, such as emotional ones, may elicit swear words. Otherwise, they will be used sparingly as a part of jokes.

A group of participants in its early stage of community development is in the stage of constructing fundamental base of a relationship. Knowing each other, including personal information is necessary. When each member knows a general background of the other members, they would feel comfortable to open and build up stronger relations. Also, at this stage, humour is a good indication that a community of practice will be sustained or developed or not. Once the strong relationship is developed, sensitive issues will be less a problem within the community. Understanding towards each other will become base to respect each member of the community despite the differences. At some tolerable point, this can even be a subject of humour in the conversation.

Involvement and humour are two aspects of casual conversation that are expressed through the selection of the lexical resources used by the participants. While naming, technicality, swearing and slang in casual conversations are easily recognizable due to their distinguished characteristics, elements of humour are highly contextual. Humour can be realised by various expression, including naming, technicality, swearing and slang. This can be seen as the capability of language to fuse their functions in the context of casual conversation. Casual conversations, however varied by topics, interactants' relationship and setting of locations, are mostly conducted to achieve the purpose of building and sustaining relationships.

The paper has attempted to describe the affordance of language to perform the function of building a bond among interlocutors in casual conversation through involvement and humour. The limitation of the discussion, however, lies in the exclusion of some important aspects of a spoken language use such as intonations and paralinguistic elements. The limitation occurs due to the data collection method that was carried through audio recording. A better method in collecting data will be using video recording. In such method, analysis can be undertaken more thoroughly by taking into account aspects such as facial expressions, gestures, and the situation surrounding the conversation.

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