Service telephone call openings: a comparative study on five European languages

Gabriele Pallotti

University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Italy

Cecilia Varcasia

Free University of Bolzano, Italy

Abstract

The paper presents the results of a comparative study on how speakers of different languages (English, French, German, Italian and Spanish) manage the opening of service phone calls. Previous research has focussed on cross-cultural variability in telephone conversations, but this is the first attempt to systematically compare several European languages at the same time. The communicative strategies speakers use in each language are analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively, allowing a systematic comparison across cultures and languages and the observation of intra-cultural variability. Comparative analysis is based on five fundamental moves that may be performed in a telephone call opening: summons-answer, identification, greetings, how-are-you's, getting-down-to-business. Implications are drawn for cross-cultural research on interaction and for training staff working in multi-lingual and multi-cultural settings.

Keywords: telephone calls, conversation analysis, cross-cultural pragmatics, English, French, German, Italian, Spanish.

Introduction

Telephone call openings have been the object of a considerable amount of cross-cultural and intercultural pragmatic research. The first systematic investigation in this area dates back to Schegloff's (1968) analysis of telephone calls openings in the United States. This and much of subsequent research was carried out within the Conversation Analysis (CA) paradigm, which implies careful observation of the details of interactions in order to uncover how social order is created and reproduced in everyday life. The fundamental analytic units are moves and sequences, whereby conversation is seen as a social activity in which interactants produce actions and counter-actions in a highly coordinated manner.

Schegloff (1968, 1979, 1986) identified four core sequences in his corpus of North American telephone call openings:

a) summons - answer, i.e. the telephone ring followed by a voice token by the recipient indicating that the communication channel is open;

b) identification - recognition, i.e. parties identify themselves and/or recognize each other;

c) greetings, which can be produced by one party or both;

d) initial inquiries ('how-are-you?'), which may constitute themselves the main object of the conversation or may be preliminaries leading to the 'reason for call' (Schegloff 1986).

These four core sequences have been used as a basic 'template' (Hopper 1992) for describing telephone call openings in a number of studies. Other researchers have proposed further developments of this initial model. For example, Bercelli & Pallotti (2002, see also Bowles & Pallotti 2004) add a fifth move which they call 'getting down to business', to indicate those actions - typically performed by the caller, but at

times elicited and co-constructed by the receiver as well - in which the reason for call is stated and oriented to (see also Schegloff's 1986:116 similar but not identical notion of 'anchor position'). These works, as well as the present contribution, analyze landline telephone calls only. More recent research has focused on mobile phone conversations' openings, which have some distinctive features of their own (Arminen 2005, Hutchby, & Barnett 2005, Arminen, & Leinonen 2006).

Schegloff's seminal papers were based on a corpus of telephone calls collected in the US. Among his findings was that callers, when they are acquaintances, prefer not to provide explicit self-identification, but would rather play the game of mutual recognition based on the small voice samples produced in the first turns. Several subsequent studies, however, have shown that this generalisation does not apply to other contexts, cultures and languages. To begin with, the preference for other-recognition only holds for private homes in the US, whereas in service telephone encounters among strangers, for example, receivers customarily provide some form of personal and/or institutional identity (Schegloff 1986:122). Secondly, in some countries like Finland (Halmari 1993, Arminen 2006), Germany (Werlen 1984, Varcasia 2003), Sweden (Lindström 1994), and the Netherlands (Houtkoop-Steenstra 1991), the preference is for both callers and receivers to self-identify, even when they are at home and speaking with acquaintances. Finally, the opening may be more or less routinised. For instance, as Sifianou (1989) has shown, Greek openings tend to be more varied, and every person develops an individual style. Several other differences have been noted cross-culturally, regarding e.g. if, when and how people identify themselves, the length and shape of greeting sequences, the presence of other moves like apologies for disturbing, the more or less direct interactional style of participants, the number of turns composing the opening and so on (for reviews see e.g. Luke, & Pavlidou 2002, Leonardi 2003).

Telephone call openings thus represent an ideal object of study for cross-cultural pragmatics research. Since these social encounters are very specific and strongly constrained by technology, the range of actions that can be performed in them is limited so that one can thus observe how different cultures and languages vary in their realisation of the same interactional routine.

Data and methodology

The present study is the first attempt to provide a systematic comparison among five European languages on the way service telephone calls are opened. Data come from a number of calls made to a variety of businesses and institutions, including bookstores, travel agencies, hairdressers, language schools, libraries, student dorms, university departments. Languages investigated are Italian (N=159 calls), Spanish (N=63), French (N=59), British English (N=56) and German (N=53)(1). The parties involved signed a written consent before the study began, so that receivers agreed on being recorded but would not know exactly which calls would have been made for the research project. Most of the calls were recorded between 2000 and 2003.(2>

Data were recorded on audio cassettes or digital media and transcribed in CA format (Ten Have 1999; see appendix for conventions used).

The corpus size is relatively small but comparable to those used in previous research, which rarely went beyond a few scores of calls per language. This obviously raises issues of generalizability, and one should be very cautious about making general claims regarding millions of people based on a few scores of examples. Corpus size also prevents one from drawing finer distinctions among sub-categories. For example, Bowles & Pallotti (2004) have shown that there are a few differences between calls to bookstores and to other types of business in English and Italian, which may point to a more general claim that different activities exhibit systematic features in phone calls' openings. However, in order to substantiate this claim, one would need robust corpora for each activity type and for each language, which would increase the size of the database considerably. Another area of possible differences may be related to geographical variations – it could be that speakers from different regions tend to open calls in specific ways. Again, this type of investigation, while certainly worth pursuing, would require region-specific corpora, which could be the subject of further studies on intra-linguistic variation. Some preliminary remarks on possible regional differences between Emilian and Sardinian calls in our larger Italian corpus were made by Bercelli (2003), who noted some subtle differences, for example, in the more common use of terms of address by Sardinians. In keeping with previous research, in this study we

aggregated calls at the national level – and thereby at the linguistic level - and found some consistent trends for each language. More research on intra-linguistic variation is certainly needed, and we are currently working at making our corpus available on the Internet with automatized search options that will allow calls to be sorted by various parameters, such as geographical area, business size, caller's gender and age (available soon on <linguistica.uniss.it>).

A first qualitative stage of analysis led to the identification of recurrent patterns in the data and the recognition of the most evident cross-cultural differences. In a subsequent phase, systematic comparison across languages was carried out by a quantitative analysis based on the core sequences framework presented above, with a few modifications leading to the following scheme, comprising five possible moves:(3)

> a) ***Channel openers***. These are forms whose aim is uniquely to signal that the communication channel has been opened, i.e. to provide a minimal answer to the summons represented by the telephone ring. They include Italian *pronto*, French *allô* and Spanish *dígame*, but also a generic 'yes'.

> b) ***Identification.*** Callers and receivers may identify themselves in various ways, e.g. by providing their personal names or that of the institution they work for.

> c) ***Greetings***, such as *hello* or *good morning*.

> d) ***Availability***. This move, which is found almost exclusively in the British corpus, consists in the receiver stating their availability to the caller's requests, as in *how can I help you?*

> e) ***Getting down to business***, i.e. formulating the reason for call and moving from the opening to the call's central part.

In what follows, these categories will be used for a systematic cross-linguistic comparison, both at the level of individual moves and their realisation in different languages, and at the level of how such moves are combined in receivers' and callers' turns in the opening.

The use of quantification is uncommon in research inspired by the CA approach. However, as Schegloff (1993) notes, there is no intrinsic incompatibility between CA and quantification, which should be used cautiously, after a careful qualitative investigation has been carried out. One area Schegloff believes profitable for quantitative analysis is the comparison among different languages and communicative contexts (1993:116). Schegloff, like many other CA researchers, advocates the use of more informal, verbal types of quantification, i.e. words such as *frequently, occasionally, massively*. Much previous research comparing telephone calls in different languages has been stated in such terms, and the following citations exemplify how results were expressed in this type of studies.

> Greek answerers hardly ever provide overt self-identification when answering their telephone at home either by means of name or telephone number. Similarly, Greek callers overwhelmingly refrain from identifying themselves overtly. (Sifianou 2002:50)

> The receiver's first turn in the majority of [Persian] calls is *alo*. … the majority of second turns in Persian telephone conversations address the identification/recognition issue. (Taleghani-Nikazm 2002:90)

There have been exceptions to this trend, and studies like Houtkoop-Steenstra (1991), Lindström (1994), Hopper & Chen (1996), Bangerter, Clark & Katz (2004), Arminen (2005, 2006), Bowles (2006) present results in both qualitative and quantitative terms. In this report, the exposition will proceed stating frequencies and percentages together with a conspicuous variety of examples, which contribute to illustrate the general points through the details of individual interactions. It should be made clear that, with this methodology, and type and amount of data, quantitative measures should be taken as indicative of trends and relative ratios, rather than exact values from a sample carefully designed to represent the whole population. This is why, in order to strike a balance between reporting accurate figures and avoiding the misplaced precision fallacy, we have chosen to round off figures to the first decimal in the table and to the integer in the text body. Furthermore, in order to increase reliability and replicability, the

corpora which form the basis of our analysis are available on the Internet at the following address: www.gabrielepallotti.it.

The exposition is divided into two main parts, one devoted to the receiver's first turn, the other to the caller's - henceforth R and C in the transcriptions. For each part, individual moves are analyzed first, describing their frequency and how they are performed in different languages. An analysis follows of how these moves are combined, pointing to the most common turn formats for each language. In the conclusions, implications are drawn on how these findings may be used in the professions to improve intercultural communication practices.

The receiver's first turn - individual moves

After the caller's summons, i.e. the phone ringing, the person at the other end of the line picks up the phone and starts speaking. These are the very first words in the call and a crucial interactional site, where several moves can be performed and social identities and roles begin to be defined. As Schegloff notes "The opening is a place where the type of conversation being opened can be proffered, displayed, accepted, rejected, modified – in short, incipiently constituted by the parts of it " (1979:25).

Minimally, one may simply display that the communication channel is open and that the conversation can proceed. However, it is often the case that other moves are produced in the receiver's first turn, including greetings, self-identification, offers of availability and/or invitations to the caller to express the reason for the call. This lumping of moves in the first turn is functional to the pragmatic, business-oriented nature of a telephone service encounter. The receiver orients to the routinised character of the event, sorting out all the matters that need to be dealt with in the opening and rapidly proceeding to the core of the telephone call, the 'business-at-hand'.

Although the same set of moves can be recognized in all the languages examined, there are cross-cultural differences in the frequencies of individual moves and in how they are sequentially combined within the turn. Table 1 in the Appendix provides a summary of the most common turn formats found in the corpus. (4)

Channel openers

All the languages included in this study have simple, minimal tokens that can be uttered to perform the basic action of showing that the communication channel is open, i.e. the two speakers have established contact and they can proceed talking. There are however important differences in the way such tokens are used.

First of all, the pragmatic meaning of these forms is not exactly the same. French *allô* and Italian *pronto* are specialized discourse markers that can be used only in the context of a telephone call and only with the function of checking for an open channel, in the beginning or later on. In Italian, French and Spanish 'yes' can also be used as a minimal first turn response, which may be followed by another channel opener, as in *sì pronto*, *allô oui* or *sí dígame*. However, only in French does one find the opposite order, i.e. *allô oui*.

English *hello* performs all these functions too, but it can also be used in other ways, most notably as a greeting, both in face to face interactions and on the phone. The same holds for German *hallo*, which is much rarer in service encounters and appears only once in our corpus. Spanish *dígame/díga*, on the other hand, besides being conventionally used as a phatic signal at the beginning of a telephone call, also conveys the more specific and literal meaning of '(please) tell me', that is, an invitation to speak. *Hola* and *alò,* which are common in Latin American varieties of Spanish, never occur as channel openers in our corpus recorded in Spain.

Hence, channel openers in different languages have different semantic and pragmatic meanings, producing certain restrictions on their position within the turn and implications for sequential

development, as will be seen below. Secondly, there is substantial cross-linguistic variation in frequency of token usage, especially when they are the only expression uttered in the receiver's first turn. While in French, Italian and Spanish it is quite common to answer a service telephone call with a bare channel opener (27%, 30% and 36% of the cases respectively), this pattern is found only once in the German corpus and is completely absent from the English calls. Answering the phone with a simple *hello* or *hi* is not at all infrequent in English, but is strictly confined to the domestic space of personal interactions (Schegloff 1986). This distinction seems to be more blurred in other languages, which may mean either that the two forms are viable alternatives for opening a service encounter on the phone, or that, at least for some offices and businesses, the distinction between behaviour in domestic and public domains is less clear-cut.

Identification

Receivers often identify themselves upon answering the phone at the workplace. This occurs in all the languages studied, with varying proportions - 95% of the times in English, 89% in German, 71% in French, 67% in Italian, 62% in Spanish. Not providing one's identity at home can be a way of playing the game of mutual recognition from small voice samples, which exhibits, confirms and reinforces the intimate relationship among callers (Schegloff 1986). The opposite effect is produced when a stranger calls a public telephone number - here the caller may be legitimately uncertain of having contacted the right address, and the receiver's self-identification in the first turn pre-empts further questions. As a matter of fact, if such self-identification is missing, it is often the case that callers immediately initiate a repair sequence in which they ask confirmation about the receiver's identity, as in the following example.

Ex. 1

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: sì pronto?
C: e: buonasera,il centro soggiorni stu[di?
R: [sì: buonasera.
```

"R: yes hello?
C: er: good evening, ((is it)) the centro soggiorni stu[di?
R: [ye:s good evening."

(PCI 4)

Providing one's identity in the very first turn is thus a way of optimizing the opening, as the caller, being reassured that s/he has reached the right number, can proceed directly to the reason for call.

There are several ways in which self-identification can be performed. The simplest and most frequent is by stating the place name, as in the following examples.

Ex. 2

```
((telephone rings))
AA: bundespost
BB: guten tag bogener ich hätte gern eine auskunft
```

"R: post office
C: good morning bogener i'd like to have a piece of information"

(Werlen 1984)

Ex. 3

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: >tre elle musica<
C: .hh eh::buonasera vorrei:: sapere, se avete un::
una pelle .hh per rullante eh:: bianca.
```

"R: >tre elle musica< ((name of the shop))
C: .hh e::r good evening i'd like to know, if you have a::
a head .hh for a snare drum er:: white ((a white snaredrum head))."

(GDI 7)

Occasionally, and only in some languages (French, Italian, Spanish, German), receivers may self-identify by stating not the proper name of their business or institution, but rather the more general category they belong to, like 'library', 'butcher's', 'post office'.

Ex. 4

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: pronto biblioteca?
C: e: pronto buonasera (.) senta avrei necessità di
un'informazione (.) vorrei sapere quali sono i giorni
in cui siete aperti,
```

"R: hello library
C: e: hello good evening (.) listen i'd need to have a
piece of information (.) i'd like to know which days
you are open,"

(CVI 4)

Another common self-identification format is providing one's name, which is relatively common in English (23%) and German (20%), less so in other languages.

Ex. 5

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: .hh guten tag hier ist dr reisebüro mein name ist
kristine?
C: ja guten tag hier ist müller äh ich rufe gerade an
u:nd um zu wissen […]
```

"R: .hh good morning this is the travel agency my name is
kristine
C: yes good morning this is müller erm i call you now
a:nd to know"

(ATD 16)

Ex. 6

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: good afternoon thank you for calling lunnpoly nikki speaking
C: oh hello good aft-can you hear me?
R: yeah
```

(PCGB 03)

As can be seen in these examples and in Table 1, with the exception of four German calls the receiver's proper name is always uttered in association with a more institutional identification, be it the place name or its category.

Greetings

Another frequently occurring move in the receiver's first turn are greetings. Although they appear in all the languages investigated, their lexicalization and meaning differ in various ways. For example, while in English the greeting must be appropriate to a specific time of the day (*good morning, good afternoon, good evening*) languages like French and Spanish have a single expression (*bonjour, buenos días*) for the whole period from early in the morning to around 5 p.m.. While *good morning* in English is valid until noon, and is then followed by *good afternoon*, German *guten morgen* can only be said until around 10 a.m., after which *guten tag* becomes the appropriate formula until sunset. Furthermore, while some languages, like German and English, include a generic and relatively informal greeting such as *hallo* or *hello*, which can also be heard as a phatic channel opener, Italian and Spanish equivalents such as *salve* and *hola* never occur in the receiver's first turn in our corpus.

Languages also vary in how frequent greetings are in the receivers' first turns, from 79% of the cases in German, 73% in French, to 55% in English, , 40% in Italian and a mere 19% in Spanish.

Some qualifications to these data are in order.

Firstly, the figure reported for English includes only greetings such as *good morning* and *good afternoon*. The addition of turns containing *hello* raises the proportion of turns with greetings to 76%(5). Secondly, the low figure for Spanish can be accounted for by a particular conversational pattern found in this language, whereby the caller's first turns often consists of simply uttering a greeting, which is then reciprocated by the receiver, as in the following example. In other words, Spanish receivers can greet either in their first (19%) or in their second turn (48%), and sometimes even in both (6%), which brings the overall proportion of calls with greetings by the receiver to 73% (Colamussi & Pallotti 2003).

Ex. 7

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: sí dígame?
C: hola buenos días
R: buenos días
C: mire que estoy buscando para comprar la película
american beauty [y he preguntado a otro videoclub y:
R: [sí
C: dice que no
```

"R: yes hello
C: hello good morning
R: good morning
C: look i am looking forward to buy the movie
american beauty [and i asked to another videoclub and
R: [yes
C: they say no((they don't have it))"

(ACS 12)

Availability

Another move that can be found in receivers' first turns are offers of availability such as *(how) can I help you?* English is by far the language in which this move is most often produced, being present in 41% of receivers' first turns. Examples like the following were uttered in a variety of offices and businesses, of various sizes and in different areas of the United Kingdom.

Ex. 8

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: hello melany can i help you?
C: yes hello good afternoon i'd like to know if you do interflora.
```

(PCGB 04)

Ex. 9

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: good afternoon travelrunners independent can i help you?
C: okay good afternoon (.) uh: i was wondering if i could book a trip
to: eurodisney through you:.
```

(PCGB 11)

Expressions like *(how) can I help you?* seem to be not just stereotyped routines, frozen politeness formulas, but rather a way of actually expressing the receiver's orientation towards the caller's needs. This can be seen quite clearly in the following example, where the bookshop assistant uses the rather uncommon and creative *can I do something* before falling back on the more usual *how can I help*.

Ex. 10

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: folders bookshop can i do something how can i help,
C: hi can you give me ( ) of your opening hour please
```

(BSGB 23)

This type of interactional move is also found in other languages, but with much smaller frequencies and confined to larger firms. This might be the result of training programs based on materials originally conceived for the English-speaking world, yielding such awkward and unnatural prefabricated sequences as in the following Spanish example:

Ex. 11

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: super líneas santander buenos días la atiende
ricardo dígame en que puedo ayudarle
C: sí me puede poner con banca supernet?
```

"R: super líneas santander good morning
ricardo speaking please tell me how I can help you
C: yes could you connect me with the supernet bank?"

(ACS 42)

The receivers' first turn composition

Having examined the moves that can be produced in the receivers' first turn, we will now focus on how these moves are combined and linearly ordered. For each language, special attention will be given to the most common patterns and to those that seem to be peculiar to it.

French

As is clear from Table 1, French receivers use very few formats for producing their first turns. The most common by far is place identity + greetings, which alone accounts for nearly two thirds of the openings. Another 27% of the calls is answered with simple channel openers, for the most part single tokens of *allô* or *oui*, and occasionally a combination of both as in *allô oui* and *oui allô*. Three calls were initiated with the place identity, followed by the receiver's identity and greeting, a pattern that wasn't found in other

languages except German. These three formats account for 95% of the calls, with the following being a characteristic French opening:

Ex. 12

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: librairie du roi bonjour?
C: bonjour madame je m'excuse de vous déranger
R: =ou[i
C: [je voudrais savoir si vous avez des livres de
cuisine?
```

"R: king's bookshop goodmorning
C: good morning madam i apologise for disturbing you
R: =ye[s
C: [i'd like to know if you have books for
cooking?"

(LBFRs 18)

Italian

The two most common formats in Italian are the same as in French, namely place identity + greetings (28% of the cases) or a simple channel opener (30%). However, Italian receivers tend to employ a wider array of answers in their first turn. Among these, the simple identification of the place being reached is relatively common (15%), which may also be accompanied by a channel opener such as *pronto*.

Ex. 13

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: pronto camera di commercio?
C: buongiorno e:: la signora rossi?
R: sì
```

"R: hello chamber of commerce
C: good morning e:rm ((is it)) mrs rossi?
R: yes"

(CVI 24)(6)

English is the only other language in our corpus in which this phenomenon is represented, in openings like *hello meridian school*. However, *hello* here can be seen both as a channel opener and a greeting, so that the sequence channel opener (proper) + place identity seems to be peculiar to Italian.

Spanish

Spanish is the language in which service telephone calls are more frequently opened with a simple phatic signal, like *sí, díga* or *dígame*, a choice that appears in over 36% of the calls in our corpus. Callers seem to be used to it and they don't treat these cases as particularly problematic. In fact, while French and Italian callers confronted with a bare *allô* or *pronto* tend to ask for confirmation of the receiver's identity one time out of two, Spanish callers carry on producing their turns more than 90% of the times without any special repair work.

Another common opening move is simply stating the place name, as in *banco de españa* or *farmacia*. This seems to be coherent with a general attitude to conciseness in Spanish openings, a language in

which one finds exchanges like the following, containing only the minimally necessary moves, without greetings, identification or pre-requests.

Ex. 14

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: dígame?
C: .hhh hola (0.2) a: para reservar mesa?
```

"R: hello?
C: hello (0.2) uh to reserve a table?"

(ACS 25)

Another turn format which is relatively common in Spanish (11%) and peculiar to this language is place identity + dígame, as in the following example.

Ex. 15

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: >floristeria balme< dígame?
(.)
C: hola buenos días
R: >buenos dí[as<
C: [mira (.) una pregunta yo llamo desde
barcelona y me interesaría encargar un ramo de
flores=
```

"R: >florist balme< hello ((tell me))?
(.)
C: hello good morning
R: >good mor[ning<
C: [look (.) a question i call from
barcelona and i'd be interested in ordering a flowers' bouquet="

(ACS 35)

Here one can see how *dígame* is a different channel opener from French *allô* or Italian *pronto*, or even Spanish *sí*. In fact, the literal meaning of *dígame* is 'tell me', a meaning that is still transparent to speakers despite the 'ritualization' (Haiman 1994) of the form as a conventional way to answer the phone. This is why *dígame* always occurs at the end of the turn when this contains other moves, such as channel openers proper (like *sí*) or the receiver's identification. In other words, one finds openings like *peluquerìa dígame?* or *sí dígame?*, but the reverse would just be impossible, as *dígame peluquerìa* and *dígame sí* literally mean 'tell me hairdresser' and 'tell me yes'. The following example shows how *dígame*, besides being a channel opener, is also used and heard as an invitation to speak. The receiver in her first turn answers with a greeting and her personal identity; after reciprocation of the greeting by the caller, the receiver encourages her to speak with a *dígame*.

Ex. 16

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: ( ) buenas tardes atiende silvia
C: .hh hola buenas tardes
R: dígame
C: guías de:: la ciudad
(0.2)
R: sí
C: tienen?
```

```
(0.4)
R: claro::
```

"R: ( ) good evening silvia serving ((you))
C: hello good evening
R: tell me
C: city maps
(0.2)
R: yes
C: do you stock?
(0.4)
R: certainly"

(ACS 24)

German

A variety of opening formats is found in the German corpus, none of which appears to be particularly prevalent over the others. A common feature however is the receiver's self-identification, which occurs in 91% of the cases. This preference for self-identification has been described for other North-European languages like Dutch (Houtkoop-Steenstra 1991) and Swedish (Lindström 1994) and can also be observed in the callers' first turns, as will be shown below.

Among the most common formats one finds simple place identity (25%), possibly followed by greetings (25%). Receivers are also quite ready to provide their personal identity (20% of the calls), more frequently associated to that of their workplace, but in a few cases as the only form of self-identification. Providing one's name is also a standard opening in private telephone calls (Werlen 1984), and when it is done in a service encounter it is delivered in a fast, automatic way, often without any accompanying lexical material like *am Apparat* or *am Telefon* (the equivalent of '[xyz] speaking'), as in the following examples, where the receivers' names (*Dittman* and *Katy Grimm*) are given immediately after the place identification.

Ex. 17

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: praxis doktor schwarz dittman schönen guten tag?
C: altmann guten tag. ehm ich rufe an ((continues))
```

"R: surgery doctor schwarz dittman good morning?
C: altmann good morning. erm i call you ((continues))"

(CVD 9)

Ex. 18

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: mittagtisch thiel katy grimm?
C: ja >schönen guten tag mein name ist astrid huber
(.) ich habe eine frage<
```

"R: canteen thiel katy grimm?
C: yes >good morning my name is astrid huber
(.) I have a query"

(ATD 05)

English

In English too there seems to be no frequently recurrent pattern in the way telephone calls are opened. A large variety of formats is found, none of which accounts for more than 16% of the cases. This figure refers to an opening that occurs in all languages, the association of place identity and greetings. However, while in the other languages greetings tend to follow identification, the reverse order is normally found in English.

Ex. 19

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: good morning the grove veterinary surgery?
C: .hh good morning. e: i was wondering if you sell the: collars for
dogs for fleas
```

(SNGB 16)

As we said, another common move in the English corpus is the offer of availability, which is found even in relatively small businesses, such as a fishing shop (*boat rod and parrot can I help you?*) or a florist (*hello melany can I help you?*). In one case, a car accessories shop, the offer of availability was the only move in the first turn:

Ex. 20

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: >how can i help<.
C: .hh oh hello ahm: i wonder if you can help me. .hh ahm: […]
```

(GDGB 14)

A move that occurs only in the English corpus is thanking the caller, as in the following example.

Ex. 21

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: >thank you for calling (brian stanley) speaking, how can i help.
C: ah-.hh i'm VAGUELY thinking of putting my house on the market in
the next few months
```

(GDGB 12)

The caller's first turn - individual moves

After having examined how receivers answer the phone, in the next sections we will focus on callers' first turns, beginning with an analysis of individual moves followed by the description of the most common turn formats in different languages, summarized in Table 2 in the Appendix.

Channel openers

Speakers of languages having specialized channel openers for the phone, such as Italian *pronto* or French *allô*, also use such forms when they act as callers. For example, 51% of the French callers' first turns begin with *allô* or *oui* and 15% of such turns are initiated with *pronto* in Italian. With respect to Italian, French callers may choose which of the two forms to use to respond to the summons, and they seem to prefer *oui* as second part, used in two thirds of these calls.

Ex. 22

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: la soirée bonjour ?
C: oui >bonjour madame< voilà j'ai eu votre numéro
pa:r par un ami .hh et je voulais savoir si vou:s
louez des salles enfin louez une salle pou:r
plusieurs personnes.
```

"R: la soirée good morning ?
C: yes >good morning madam< I got your number
from from a friend .hh and I wanted to know if you
rent halls well rent halls for several people."

(LBFRs 08)

English and Spanish have words that can be used both as channel openers and greetings, namely *hello/hi* and *hola*. Their basic function is that of an informal greeting, which was subsequently extended to the role of phatic signal in phone conversations. These forms may be used on their own or in combination with another greeting formula, which is usually a more formal and explicit greeting, as in *hello good morning* or *hola buenos días*.

When the second greeting form is also produced, it reinforces the greeting made in the first form, so that its main role is that of channel opener. In English *hello* is used together with another greeting form only in 3% of the calls, whereas it is found on its own in the majority of the caller's first turns (86%). The following examples, 23 and 24, show the prototypical use of this move in the two languages.

Ex. 23

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: hello boat rod and parrot?
C: nth .hh oh hello i'm just making an inquiry i wonder if you can
tell me .hh if you sell live bait every day or is it any p(a)t- or
some particular days (at) the week.
```

(GDGB 08)

Ex. 24

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: >hotel avenida< buenos días
C: hola buenos días mira que quería ir con mi pareja
este fin de semana (.) e: bueno pasar el fin de
semana [y me gustaría que me dijera el precio
R: [mh
```

"R: >hotel avenida< good morning
C: hello good morning look i'd like to go with my girlfriend
next week-end (.) well ((to)) spend the
week-end [and I would like you to tell me the price
R: [mh"

(ACS 11)

In Spanish the use of *hola* together with another form of greeting is much wider than in English, accounting for over 75% of the calls. Whereas in English the channel opener is the same phatic signal for receiver and caller, ie. *hello*, in Spanish the caller's response to *dìgame*, acting both as channel opener and preliminary greeting form, is *hola*.

In German, instead, the callers open their turns either with greetings or identification, as their interlocutors do, because there is nothing that works specifically as channel opener in the institutional context. *Hallo*, which is the equivalent signal for opening the channel, is restricted to the informal context.

Greetings

Greetings are a very frequent move in callers' first turns. French and German callers greet 98% of the times, Spanish 95%, Italians 94.5% and the English 89%. The less frequent use of greetings by English callers might depend on the fact that, as pointed out in the previous sections, English receivers display their availability to satisfy the interlocutor's request in a number of cases, and this may lead to speed up the opening phase towards the reason for calling. In fact, in all cases where callers directly get into the business of the conversation, skipping the reciprocation of the greetings (9% of the English corpus), the receiver's turn contained an explicit offer of availability, as in the following example.

Ex. 25

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: good afternoon mac↑well('s).can i help you?
C: yeah. i'm just making an enquiry do you have hm(.) i don't know if
it's a biography or an autobiography for victoria beckham? .hh do you
have it in stock?
```

(GDGB 10)

In all instances of this type the caller replies to the offer of availability with an acknowledgement token, *yeah*, directly followed by the request.

Identification

When it comes to identification, considerable differences emerge among languages, as can be seen in Table 3 in the Appendix. For example, while English callers never self-identify, in Germany self-identification is almost categorical and its lack may not only be of relevant absence, but also sanctionable (Schegloff 1968) if receiver has identified her/himself. The principle that comes into play is that even if they do not know each other, speakers need to introduce themselves before starting to talk about anything.

German callers' identification is such a routinised move that it may be produced without any 'frame' (Schegloff 1968:353), but just by uttering the name of the person speaking, as in the following call.

Ex. 26

```
C: ((Telephone rings))
R: blumen reuer guten tag?
C: guten tag julia schnibben (.) ehm ich wollte
fragen? ob sie mir-ehm etwas über die pflege von
bonsaibäumen sagen können
```

"R: flowers reuer good morning?
C: good morning julia schnibben (.) ehm i wanted
to ask? (you) if you- could tell me ehm something about
the care of bonsaitrees"

(CVD 4)

German callers identify in 87% of the cases, a pattern that has been described for other northern European countries, such as Sweden (Lindström 1994) and the Netherlands (Houtkoop-Steenstra 1991), both in private and service calls.

Callers identify in their first turns 19% of the times in Italian, 12% in Spanish and 3% in French. This seems to happen only when it is relevant for the request that is going to be made, so that self-identification should be seen as part of the preliminary work to the request, like in ex. 27.

Ex. 27

```
C: ((telephone rings)) ((waiting music)) (5)
R: centro viaggi buongiorno sono valeria?
C: e:: buongiorno sono cristina migliorati,
(.)
R: sì
C: senta io volevo comunicare il mio:: codice
millemiglia
R: sì (.) la prenotazione per che data è?
```

"R: travel centre good morning this is Valeria?
C: e:: good morning this is cristina migliorati
(.)
R: yes
C: listen I wanted to communicate my thousand
miles code
R: yes (.) what date is the booking?"

(CVI 18)

In this specific instance the caller gives her identity because she is calling to communicate her miles card number. Although her identification will be explicitly requested by the receiver later in the call, the caller also provides it spontaneously in her first turn. It should also be reported that the caller had already been to the travel agency and had promised to call back for providing the code number. Hence, caller's self-identification may also be seen as prompting recognition from the interlocutor. This interpretation is strengthened by the micro-pause following identification, which seems to project a possible recognition turn, which however doesn't occur.

Apart from these more specific cases, it seems that English, French, Italian and Spanish callers don't find lack of self-identification particularly 'accountable' (Garfinkel 1967), as opposed to what happens in Germany and other Northern European countries. In these contexts an asymmetry is produced whereby the receiver's identification is preferred and required, while that of the caller can normally be omitted. In other words, callers are automatically and implicitly recognised by their interlocutors as (possible) customers and this seems to be taken as sufficient for the conversation to proceed.

The caller's first turn composition

As in the previous section, we will now look at how single moves are combined in callers' first turns, pointing to commonalities and differences among languages. Table 2 summarizes the most common patterns.

French

75% of French calls are initiated by the caller's greeting and getting down to business, which may be preceded by a channel opener like *oui* or *allô*. Ex. 22 in the previous section is an example of this latter category, while ex. 28 below shows the most frequent pattern of greetings followed by the request.

Ex. 28

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: prêt à partir jeanne bonjour
C: bonjour je voudrais avoir une information s'il
vous plaît? (0.2) je voudrais savoir si vous faites
des prix réduits? (.) pour les jeunes. (.) qui
voyagent en avion?
```

"R: prêt a partir jeanne good morning
C: good morning i'd like to have a piece of information
please (0.2) i'd like to know if you have
reduced prices (.) for young people. (.) who
travel on airplanes?"

(LBFRs 21)

In both instances we have quite long request turns. Speakers deal with the accomplishment of the opening moves at the very beginning of their turns and pass on to the reason for calling quickly.

Use of the channel opener at turn beginning is quite frequent in French. One also finds, for example, turns composed of just the channel opener and greetings (8%), or channel opener and greetings followed by a request of confirmation of the receiver's identity (8%). Altogether, in 51% of the French calls the caller begins his or her turn with *oui* and/or *allô*.

Italian

Although Italian callers exhibit a wider variety in their first turns, the most common pattern (46%) is the same as in French, i.e. greetings directly followed by the reason for the call, as in this example.

Ex. 29

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: >alma buonasera?<
C: e: buonasera mh vorrei un'informazione signora
senta io< ho fatto da poco una permanente (.) ora
però vorrei fare il colore >è possibile<?
(1.2)
R: sì
```

"R: alma good evening
C: e: good evening mh i'd like apiece of information madame
listen i recently had a perm (.) but now
i would like to colour ((my hair)) >is it possible<?
R: yes"

(ATI 02)

Of the five groups studied, Italians are, after Germans, those who most often provide their identity, which they do 18% of the times. As noticed for the Receiver's identification, callers that self-identify in their first turn do it either by providing their name, or by stating their belonging to a social category, such as clients, mothers, students, etc. Italian callers in our corpus identify themselves with a category almost

half of the times they provide an identification. Below follows an example of turns with greetings followed by identification, the second most used format (10%).

Ex. 30

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: sì buongiorno?
C: e-buongiorno io sono una studente di lingue di
bologna [>dell'università =
R: [sì
C: =di bologna< ehm: vorrei sapere
se voi fate nei corsi di inglese anche avete
agevolazioni o sconti per studenti universitari o
no:n
R: no no non ne abbiamo
```

"R: yes good morning
C: e- good morning i'm a languages student in
Bologna [>of the University =
R: [yes
C: = of Bologna< erm: I'd like to know
if you make in the english courses also ((if)) you have
reductions or discounts for unversity students or
no:t
R: no no we don't have any ((discounts))"

(ACI 13)

In this example the caller self-identifies by providing the category she belongs to, student of the faculty of Modern Languages of the University of Bologna, and this kind of identification is prior and embedded to the discount request.

Spanish

The most frequent turn format by far in Spanish, and quite peculiar to this language, is the caller's simply greeting, with no additional moves. Most of the times a double form of greeting is produced, as *hola buenos días*, a sequence found in 51% of the calls. Another 6% consists of a form of greetings not prefaced by *hola*. After this turn consisting of greetings only, the receiver greets back, and the caller then proceeds with other moves - reason for call, but also negotiation of the receiver's identity - in their second turn. This opening ritual is very frequent in Spanish and seems to be peculiar to this language (Colamussi & Pallotti 2003).

Ex. 31

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: ( ) dígame?
C: hola buenos días
R: buenos días
C: <es> es un servicio de fotocopias?
R: sí
C: a hola buenos días (0.2) mire (0.2) quería saber
e:::m para preparar un dossier para la universidad?
```

"R: ( ) hello?
C: hello good morning
R: good morning
C: <is> is ((it)) a photocopy shop?

R: yes
C: a hello good morning (0.2) look (0.2) i'd like to know
e::rm to prepare a dossier for the university?"

(ACS 45)

In this example the caller greets twice in her first turn, then she asks the receiver to confirm his identity in the second, and formulates her request in the third turn only.

Finally, another 25% of the calls is represented by turns in which the moves are compressed in the first one with the use of *hola* plus another greeting form plus the request, such as in ex. 24 previously analysed.

German

As we have already said, German callers very frequently identify themselves. This usually occurs after the greetings and before the reason for call (64%), but one also finds identification preceding the greetings and getting down to business (11%) and even a few examples of turns composed of just greetings and identification (6%). Example 32 can be taken as a quite typical way of call opening in German.

Ex. 32

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: °guten tag°
C: >guten tag mein name ist schmidt und ich wollte fragen was sie für
öffnungszeiten haben<?
```

"R: °good morning°
C: >good morning my name is schmidt and i wanted to ask you
what times of opening you have<"

(CVD 18)

English

English callers seem to be quite uniform in their behaviour, contrary to what happens when they act as receivers. In fact, the most common turn format by far is a greeting directly followed the reason for call (82%). Otherwise, in another 9% of cases, greetings may be omitted and the caller begins by simply stating their request. This however occurs only after a receiver's offer of availability, which in a certain way urges the caller to rush to the request, as in the following example.

Ex. 33

```
C: ((telephone rings))
R: good afternoon (morris fowell hair) speaking >how can i help you< ?
C: .hh i'm interested in some high lights. how much do they cost?
```

(GDGB 02)

In other words, upon hearing *how can I help you*?, callers have two competing motivations in producing their first turn. They might reciprocate the greeting, which was however produced quite a while before in the receiver's first turn, but they also have to provide a second pair part to the request to formulate how they wish to be helped, which is the most recent move in the interaction. It is thus not surprising that this

latter format may somehow push them to skip greetings in order to answer as soon as possible the receiver's question.

Conclusions and implications

Several practical implications can be drawn from these results. The first is that, although telephone call openings appear at first sight to be a relatively simple and invariable routine, there is actually great variation in the way they are realized across languages, institutions and individuals. Paraphrasing Schegloff (1986), the 'routine is an achievement', and every time we are confronted with the apparently simple and straightforward task of opening a phone call, we must find an appropriate way, which cannot be determined a priori, as the outcome is always co-constructed with the other interlocutor and is sensitive to various contextual variables. These constraints are weaker on the receiver's side, as his or her first turn is not dependent on previous talk, which explains the lesser variety found in these turns. However, even such cases may exhibit a degree or variation, depending e.g. on how close one is to the phone, on the activities one may be engaged with when the phone is ringing, on the calls that were made in the preceding seconds or minutes, and so on (Schegloff 1986:118ff). The caller's task is more complex, as his or her turn is contingent upon previous talk by the receiver and must be tailored to the variety of requests to be made.

Even among speakers of the same language there is thus a high variability in the way telephone calls begin. Given this inherent variability, does it make sense to compare different languages and cultures, as if Germans, French, Italians all behaved in the same way? The present study has shown that there are no single ways in which speakers of a language open a telephone call. However, quantitative analysis shows that certain patterns are more frequent in one language than in others and such differences can be considerable. Some moves and turn formats which are quite ordinary in one language are virtually absent from another, and even when the same moves are produced, they may appear in different orders with different sequential implications.

Some of these differences meet the eye of the researcher and the layperson alike quite easily. Such is the case, for example, of the strong tendency for German callers to self-identify, vis á vis the lack of such a practice in English and French, or the frequency with which Italians, French and Spaniards answer the phone with a simple 'hallo', a format that is virtually absent from German and English service calls. Other differences are less evident, and only a careful analysis can make them apparent. Among them, the tendency for Spanish speakers, and to a certain extent for the French, to produce greetings in separate turns - i.e. the caller's first and the receiver's second - without inserting them in turns containing other moves; or the fact that in some language like French there seem to be only two or three main ways to answer the phone on the workplace, whereas much greater variation is found in German and English.

Other areas of non obvious differences concern the linear order in which various moves occur within turns. For example, channel openers like French *allô* and Italian *pronto* always occur at the beginning of the turn, while Spanish *dígame* only at the end. In English there is a strong tendency for greetings to occur at the beginning of the receiver's first turn, a format that is much rarer in German and virtually absent from Spanish, Italian and French, where greetings are produced at the end of the turn or in any case *after* uttering the place and/or receiver's identity.

Such findings may influence intercultural communication training programs in several ways. First, one should acknowledge the fact that there is no pan-European standard way of answering the phone. Even a relatively widespread pattern - identifying the place and greeting - is realised in the reverse order in at least one language, English. From this follows the dubious validity of training programs based on literal translations of materials originally written in other languages. An opening like *good afternoon travelrunners independent can I help you?*, which is quite natural in the UK and uttered even in small businesses, becomes almost ludicrous when it takes the Spanish form *super líneas santander buenos días la atiende ricardo dígame en que puedo ayudarle*, which strongly contrasts with the usual patterns for that language, characterized by very short turns in the opening phase.

Staff working in multilingual settings should thus be made aware of the peculiarities of the pragmatic routines in each of the languages spoken, including their own native language. This would make them realize what is unmarked, appropriate behaviour and what might be seen as more or less sanctionable deviations from such standards, both on the receiver's and the caller's end. Opening a telephone call is just one small communicative ritual in professional daily life, albeit a frequent and important one. There are hundreds, thousands, of similar rituals which display such cross-cultural variation, and it would be virtually impossible to provide in-depth training for each one of them. However, taking one exemplar case like telephone calls and unravelling all of its complexity might be a way to sensitize workers to the fine details of cross-cultural variation in communicative rituals.(7)

Appendix

Tables

Table 1. Receiver's first turn formats in different languages (percentages).

	Receiver's first turn	French (N= 59)	Italian (N= 159)	Spanish (N= 63)	German (N= 44)	English (N= 56)
1	Channel openers: fr. *allô/oui*, it. *pronto*, sp. *sí/díga/dígame*, eng. *Hello*	27.2	30.5	36.5	2.3	0.0
2	Channel opener + place identity	0.0	11.5	0.0	0.0	14.3
3	Place identity	0.0	14.6	23.8	25.0	7.1
4	Greetings	0.0	0.0	1.6	9.1	0.0
5a	Place identity + greetings	62.7	28.0	9.5	25.0	3.6
5b	Greetings + place identity	0.0	1.2	1.6	4.5	16.2
6a	Greetings + place identity + availability	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	12.5
6b	Place identity + greetings + availability	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.1
7a	Place identity + greetings + R identity	0.0	9.0	6.3	0.0	1.8
7b	Place identity + R identity + greetings	5.0	0.0	0.0	9.1	0.0
7c	Greetings + place identity + R identity	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.8	5.4
8	Place identity + sp. *dígame*	0.0	0.0	11.1	0.0	0.0
9	Place identity + R identity	0.0	0.0	1.6	4.5	1.8
10	Other formats and/or doubtful	5.1	5.2	8.0	13.7	30.2

Table 2. Caller's first turn formats in different languages (percentages).

	Caller's first turn	French (N = 59)	Italian (N=159)	Spanish (N = 63)	German (N = 53)	English (N = 56)
1	Channel opener: fr. *allô*, it. *Pronto*	3.4	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
2	Channel opener + greet + getting down to business	30.5	7.5	0.0	0.0	0.0

2a	*Hola/hello* + greet + getting down to business	0.0	0.0	25.4	0.0	3.6
3	Channel opener + greet + confirmation of R id	8.5	2.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
4	Channel opener + confirmation of R id	0.0	2.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
5	Channel opener + greet	8.5	1.9	0.0	0.0	0.0
6	Greetings	1.7	5.0	6.3	1.9	3.6
6a	*Hola* + greetings	0.0	0.0	50.8	0.0	0.0
7	Greet + getting down to business	44.1	46.5	6.3	9.4	82.1
8	Greet + id C + getting down to business	0.0	7.5	0.0	64.2	0.0
9	Greet + confirmation of R id	3.4	9.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
10	Greet + id C	0.0	10.1	0.0	5.7	0.0
11	Id C + greet + (id place C) + getting down to business	0.0	0.0	0.0	11.3	0.0
12	Id-conf R	0.0	1.9	6.3	1.9	0.0
13	Getting down to business	0.0	0.6	1.6	0.0	8.9
14	Other moves	0.0	3.8	3.2	5.7	1.8

Table 3. Caller's self-identification in the first turn (percentages).

The caller	French (N=59)	Italian (N=159)	Spanish (N=63)	German (N=53)	English (N=56)
Self-identifies	3.4	25.5	12.6	86.8	0.0
Doesn't auto-identify	96.6	72.5	87.4	13.2	96.4
?	0.0	2.0	0.0	0.0	3.6

Transcription conventions

.   marks a falling pitch or intonation

,   indicates a continuing intonation with slight upward or downward contour

?   indicates a rising vocal pitch or intonation

lo::ng   indicates stretched sounds

-       indicates a cut off with glottal stop in the speaker talk

=   indicates contiguous utterances, or continuation of the same utterance to the next line

CAPITAL   raised voice; to avoid ambiguities, proper names, the first person pronoun 'I' etc. are all written in lower-case.

<word>   decreased speed of delivery

>word<   increased speed of delivery

<u>word</u>   emphasis

(word)   parentheses indicate transcriber's doubt about hearing of passage

[square brackets indicate overlapping utterances

.hh/hh   audible inbreath/outbreath

(.)   period within parentheses indicates micropause

(1.2)   number within parentheses indicates pause of length in approximate secs

((word))   non verbal behaviours and transcriber's comments

References

Agar, Michael. (1996). *The professional stranger: An informal introduction to ethnography* (2nd ed.). New York: Academic Press.

Arminen, Ilkka (2005). Sequential order and sequence structure – the case of incommensurable studies on mobile phone calls. *Discourse Studies,* 7, 649-662.

Arminen, Ilkka & Leinonen, Minna (2006). Mobile phone call openings: tailoring answers to personalized summonses. *Discourse Studies*, 8, 339-368.

Bangerter, Adrian; Clark, Herbert, H. & Katz, Anna, R. (2004). Navigating joint projects in telephone conversations. *Discourse Processes*, 37(1), 1-23.

Bercelli, Fabrizio. (2003). Le aperture delle telefonate di servizio italiane. Eva-Maria Thune & Simona Leonardi (eds.), *Telefonare in diverse lingue*. Milan: F. Angeli. 59-90.

Bercelli, Fabrizio & Pallotti, Gabriele. (2002). Conversazioni telefoniche. Carla Bazzanella (ed.), *Sul dialogo. Contesti e forme di interazione verbale*. Milan: Guerini. 177-192.

Bowles, Hugo (2006). Bridging the gap between conversation analysis and ESP – an applied study of the opening sequences of NS and NNS service telephone calls. *English for Specific Purposes*, 25, 332-357.

Bowles, Hugo & Gabriele Pallotti. (2004). Conversation analysis of opening sequences of telephone calls to bookstores in English and Italian. *Textus*, 17(1), 63-88.

Colamussi, Anna & Pallotti, Gabriele. (2003). Le aperture di telefonate in italiano e spagnolo. Eva-Maria Thüne & Simona Leonardi (eds.), *Telefonare in diverse lingue*. Milan: F. Angeli. 91-111.

Duranti, Alessandro. (1997). *Linguistic anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Garfinkel, Harold. (1967). *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Haiman, John. (1994). Ritualization and the development of language. In W. Pagliuca (ed) *Perspectives on grammaticalization*. Amsterdam: Benjamins. 3-28.

Halmari, Helena. (1993). Intercultural business telephone conversations: a case of Finns vs. Anglo-Americans. *Applied Linguistics*, 14, 408-430.

Hopper, Robert. (1992). *Telephone conversation*. Bloomington: Indiana UP.

Hopper, Robert & Chen, Chia-Hui. (1996). Languages, Cultures, Relationships: Telephone Openings in Taiwan. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 29(4), 291-313.

Houtkoop-Steenstra, Hanneke. (1991). Opening sequences in telephone Conversations. Deidre Boden & Don Zimmerman (eds.), *Talk and social structure*. Oxford: Polity. 232-250.

Hutchby, Ian & Barnett, Simone (2005). Aspects of the sequential organization of mobile phone conversation. *Discourse Studies* 7, 147-171.

Jäger, Karl-Heinz (1979). Beratungen und Dienstleistungsdialoge. In K. H. Jäger (ed.), *Texte gesprochener deutscher Standardsprache IV*. München: Max Hueber. 7-16.

Leonardi, Simona. (2003). Introduction. Eva-Maria Thune & Simona Leonardi (eds.), *Telefonare in diverse lingue*. Milan: F. Angeli. 37-53.

Lindström, Anna. (1994). Identification and recognition in Swedish telephone conversation openings. *Language in Society* 23(2), 231-252.

Luke, Kang Kwong & Pavlidou, Theodossia-Soula. (2002). *Telephone Calls*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Moerman, Michael. (1988). *Talking culture*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Schegloff, Emmanuel. (1968). Sequencing in Conversational Openings. *American Anthropologist*, 70(6), 1075-1095.

_____ (1979). Identification and recognition in Telephone Conversation Openings. George Psathas (ed.), *Everyday language*. New York: Irvington Publishers Inc. 23-78.

_____ (1986). The routine as achievement. *Human studies*, 9, 111-151.

_____ (1993). Reflections on quantification in the study of conversation. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 26, 99-128.

_____ (2004). Answering the phone. In G. H. Lerner (ed.), *Conversation analysis. Studies from the first generation*. Amsterdam: Benjamins. 63-107

Sifianou, Maria. (1989). "On the telephone again!" Differences in telephone behaviour: England versus Greece. *Language in Society*, 18, 527-544.

_____ (2002). On the telephone again! Telephone conversation openings in Greek. Kang Kwong Luke & Theodossia-Soula Pavlidou (eds.), *Telephone calls*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 49-85.

Taleghani-Nikazm, Carmen. (2002). Telephone conversation openings in Persian. Kang Kwong Luke & Theodossia-Soula Pavlidou (eds.), *Telephone calls*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 87-109.

Ten Have, Paul. (1999). *Doing Conversation Analysis*. London: Sage.

Varcasia, Cecilia. (2003). Chiamate di servizio in Italia e Germania: aperture a confronto. Eva-Maria Thüne & Simona Leonardi (eds.), *Telefonare in diverse lingue*. Milan: F. Angeli. 112-132.

_____ (2007). English, German and Italian responses in telephone service encounters. In Hugo Bowles & Paul Seedhouse (eds.), *Conversation analysis and language for specific purposes*. Bern: Peter Lang. 217-44.

Werlen, Iwar. (1984). *Ritual und Sprache. Vom Verhältnis von Sprechen und Handeln in Ritualen*. Tübingen: Narr.

Zorzi, Daniela. (1990). *Parlare insieme*. Bologna: CLUEB.

Endnotes

[1] All callers were native speakers of the languages investigated. To the best of our knowledge, all receivers were native speakers too; at least none of them had a clearly non-native pronunciation.

[2] We wish to thank Lorena Bissiri, Anna Colamussi, Paola Contu, Gloria Deriu, Silvia Nieddu, Anna Tilocca, Manuela Riu for sharing their corpora in the present research project.

[3] The scheme appears to be reliable: besides having been replicated in a number of previous studies, it was easily understood by us and our co-workers. Very few doubts arose as to how a particular move should have been classified, and consensus was reached for all of them. A few categories are inherently ambiguous, like the double function of English *hallo* as channel opener and greeting, or that of Spanish *dígame* as channel opener or prompt for formulating a request. However, this is due to structural reasons rather than to the unreliability of raters' judgments. Such special cases are discussed in the text.

[4] For technical accidents, in nine German phone calls the receiver's first turn was not recorded, partially or entirely. Quantitative analysis of the receivers' first turns will be carried out only on the remaining 44 complete calls. To increase sample size, the German corpus consists of 35 calls recorded for this study plus 9 calls taken from articles by Jäger (1979) and Werlen (1984).

[5] Schegloff (2004) provides a thorough discussion on whether *hello* at the beginning of a phone call is to be considered a greeting or an answer to a summons. His conclusion is that it can be heard as either or both, the interpretation largely depending on what participants do in subsequent talk.

[6] This is one of the very few cases in our corpus in which caller and receiver seem to know each other. However, as becomes clear in subsequent turns, the caller only knew he had to contact Mrs. Rossi, although he had never talked to her before. More generally, callers and receivers in our corpus did not know each other and only in exceptional cases had they been in professional contact before.

[7] An anonymous reviewer asked whether our results might be 'related to something deeper and more general in the structural aspects of those cultures'. As conversation analysts, we tend to be very cautious about making broad generalizations at the level of 'culture' or ' society'. However, in different research paradigms the observation of small details in everyday practices can indeed be used as grounds for more general observations on a culture's *ethos*. Some ethnographers, for example, have used CA methods to analyze the micro-level of interactional organization, which was then related to wider-ranging sets of practices, attitudes, and beliefs relevant for 'macro' constructs such as person, responsibility, and social distance (Moerman 1988, Duranti 1997: 264-79). .Everyday routines such as opening a phone call may contain 'rich points' (Agar 1996) which open broader perspectives on a culture's basic structuring. For example, the finding that there is a strong tendency for Germans and speakers of other Nordic countries to self-identify when they make or answer a call may point to broader conceptualizations of what is appropriate behaviour in the public domain and the types of information that can be easily made accessible to others. Similarly, the British a ssistants' frequent statements about their readiness to help and their consistent self-identification seem to display a strong concern for customer satisfaction, which stands in contrast to the more i nformal Spanish and Italian openings, where callers are often addressed with a simple *hallo*. This attitude is also consistent with other types of behaviour: for instance, British shop assistants are frequently ready to provide suggestions and alternative solutions when they cannot satisfy a customer's request, whereas Italians tend to just say *no*, letting the customer initiate the repair work. This was found by Varcasia (2007) in our telephone corpus, but also by Zorzi (1990) in face-to-face bookshop encounters, showing that there are indeed recurrent cultural patterns that cut across contexts, media and time. This type of investigation is certainly worth pursuing, but goes beyond the scope of this paper. We can only hope that our results may be useful for further investigations relating the micro and the macro levels of social organization.

About the Authors

Gabriele Pallotti is associate professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia. His research interests include second language acquisition, cross-cultural and intercultural pragmatics, conversation analysis, with special attention to methodological and epistemological issues.

Cecilia Varcasia is Researcher at the Centre for Language Studies of the Free University of Bolzano (Italy). Her research interests are conversation analysis, inter- and cross-cultural pragmatics and second

language acquisition.

Authors'adresses

Mail address for correspondence:

Gabriele Pallotti, Università di Modena e Reggio Emilia, Facoltà di Scienze della Formazione, Via Allegri 9, 42100 Reggio Emilia (Italy).

name.surname@unimore.it
name.surname@unibz.it

* Although both authors worked together at the research project and analyzed the data, Gabriele Pallotti wrote the /Introduction/ and /The receiver's first turn (individual moves and turn composition)/; Cecilia Varcasia wrote /The caller's first turn (individual moves and turn composition)/ and /Conclusions and Implications/