Cooperative Patterns in the Egyptian Colloquial Arabic

Siti Aminah, Amir Ma’ruf
Universitas Gadjah Mada
Email: aminah_arb@ugm.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This article described the cooperative patterns formed in the Egyptian speech community using Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA). The data were taken by using participatory observation method through the recording and note-taking techniques. By employing Grice’s theory of cooperative principles and maxims, this study suggested that speech events in Egyptian society had a variety of cooperative patterns. The varied patterns could be seen in the negotiation processes to reach an agreement. Therefore, the negotiations required a lot of energy and time.

Keywords: ECA, speech, cooperative pattern

INTRODUCTION

Speakers and listeners involved in conversation are generally cooperating with each other (Yule, 1996:63). As suggested by Wijana (1996:46), there is some sort of cooperative principle to do by both speaker and listener so that the communication process runs well. Therefore, cooperative principles in a conversation should be understood by each interlocutor, no exception for people who speak Arabic as a second language (Sobh, 2013:150).

In communication, the speaker articulates certain utterances with the intention to communicate something to his/her interlocutor and hopes he or she understands what are going to be communicated. Therefore, the speaker is always trying to make their utterances always relevant to the context, clear, understandable, succinct, concise and to the point, so that they do not spend their interlocutors’ time much (Wijana, 1996:45).

The Egyptians communicate by using Modern Arabic which consists of Modern Standard Arabic (fusha) and Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (amiyah). This is consistent with Prochazka (2006) and Greis (2000) who stated that Arabic has two varieties, i.e. fusha and amiyah. Modern Standard Arabic (fusha) is used in writing and in most formal speech, including in academic lecturers (Bakalla, 1984:81). Meanwhile, the amiyah variety, also known as Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA), is used by the Egyptians in daily conversation and non-formal situations. Like the process of communication in general, in a conversation, the speaker and the hearer mutually realize that there are rules that guide their actions, use of language, and interpretation of the partner’s utterances and deeds (Wijana, 1996:45). Consequently, both speaker and hearer create cooperative patterns during their communication. Therefore, this study examined the cooperative patterns that were formed by speakers and hearers in their conversations using ECA.

Jaradat (2011:243) investigated the pragmatic function of intonational variations in a Jordanian dialect spoken in Irbid. The study discussed the intonational variations in different utterances with directive and commissive illocutionary forces. The illocutionary forces examined in this study were: orders, requests, warning, threatening and promising. By using the autosegmental-metrical approach which was proposed by Pierrehumbert (1980), the study showed that intonation changes
the interpretation of an utterance by virtue of its structure into another interpretation which the speaker actually intends to convey. Also, intonation is needed to determine the illocutionary function of an utterance when there is no any other illocutionary marker. In a same speech community, Sobh (2013:150) investigated apology as a way to express politeness. His study focused on the expressions of apology used by Jordan university students. The findings showed that the apology strategies used were apology and regret, explanation, offer of repair, equal – equal, low high and responsibility.

Qanbar (2012:999) in his study which investigated the compliment behavior in the Yemeni speech community suggested that a compliment in Yemeni society is formulaic and commonly contains adjectives. Women are more dominant in using compliment in their communication.

A study of Egyptian Arabic was done by Morsi (2010:51) who examined the speech act of thanking within native speakers of Egyptian Arabic who lived in the city of New York. The research locations were places where they usually interact with, such as shops, clinics, and homes. The study concluded that the functions of the thanking expressions in Egyptian Arabic include appreciation of benefit, opening and close a conversation, and leave-taking.

Several studies that have been conducted regarding the Arabic language have not shown cooperative patterns that are formed from speech events happened in the Arab society. Therefore, the cooperative patterns in the Egyptian speech events characterized this study.

Clauses, sentences, and paragraphs of Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (Amiyah) which were used as a means of communication by the Egyptians, especially those living in Cairo and Ismaili, were used as research data. The data were collected through interviews (participatory observation) using recording and note-taking techniques. To determine the cooperative patterns formed by the speaker and hearer, this study employed the theory of pragmatics, a branch of Linguistics that studies the language in social contexts, and how the contexts contribute to comprehend meanings (Verhaar, 2001:14). Meanwhile, Leech (1993:8) defines pragmatics as the study of how utterances have meanings in situations.

By employing Grice’s theory of cooperative principles (1975:45-47), the collected data were analyzed by taking into account cooperative patterns that exist between speaker and hearer. The results of the data analysis were presented in the form of ordinary words using the scientific language variety.

**COOPERATIVE PATTERNS**

A conversation leads to the equalization of elements on the formerly different cooperative transaction (Grice, 1975: 309). The equalization is done by way of: (1) equating short-term goal, even though the end goal is different or even contradictory, (2) uniting participation contribution so that the speaker and the hearer need each other, and (3) trying to make the speaker and the hearer have a common understanding that the transaction occurs with a certain compatible pattern.

Grice (1975: 45-47) outlines the cooperative principles in four maxims, i.e. the maxim of quantity, the maxim of quality, the maxim of relation, and the maxim of manner. According to Grice, the maxim of quantity requires the speaker to make an adequate contribution or as much as is required by the hearer. The maxim of quality compels each interlocutor to say something true and based on adequate evidence. The maxim of relation demands a cooperation between the speaker and the hearer in which each interlocutor should give a relevant contribution to the conversation topic. The maxim of manner requires each interlocutor to speak in direct way by avoiding ambiguity and exaggerated conversation.

The Egyptian conversations using Amiyah Arabic create certain patterns. Based on Grice’s (1975) maxims, cooperative patterns among the Egyptians are as follows.

**The Maxim of Quantity**

The maxim of quantity requires the speaker to give a sufficient contribution in a conversation. The response should be in line with what is expected and not exceeds what is required. The example below is taken from two Egyptians’ conversation:
In the conversation (1), the speaker, who is a hotel receptionist, asks the hearer, who is a hotel guest, about the type of room that he is going to rent. The guest gives an answer to the question, no more and no less by answering “fardi” (single). The cooperative pattern which is formed in this conversation is consistent with the maxim proposed by Grice (1975). A different cooperative pattern is illustrated in the following conversation:

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The Maxim of Quality

The maxim of quality requires the speaker to not say something he or she believe to be false or have no strong and sufficient evidence. The following conversation can be seen as an example of the maxim of quality as proposed Grice (1975: 45-47).

The conversation (2) is made by a ticket agent and a customer. When the ticket agent asks about the date, the customer answers “Tārik>h ēh?” (What date?)

The conversation (3) occurs between a doctor (a) and a patient (b). The patient sees the doctor, complaining of his fever. When the doctor asks about his complaints “bitisytikī minhā ger kedah?”, the patient (b) responds appropriately by giving a clear answer according to the fact that his body aches and he has a fever by saying “huwa
Similarly, when the doctor asks about the type of the fever "Al-ḥarārah biyirūḥ wi tīgī wallā mustamirah ‘ala tāl?”, the patient gives an answer according to what he is suffering from at that moment by saying "al-ḥarārah biyirūḥ wi tīgī". A different cooperative pattern is illustrated in the following conversation.

In the conversation (4), a person buys food in a restaurant to eat at the restaurant. Once finishing eating, he just remembers that he will also order food to take home. Therefore, he goes to the desk to order food to take home. The waiter says okay but the buyer has to wait awhile “Musy ‘inah has dih hastani syuwayyah”. Then the waiter adds, “Ințī ulti abla ma kunti ta’ ‘adī kuntu khalasthum” (in a very short time, before you re-sit, the food will be readily wrapped). In fact, the ordered food is available a few minutes later. The following conversation (5) has a different cooperative pattern from the conversations (3) and (4).

This conversation happens between a person who is going to ride a boat on the Nile and a boatman. When the passenger (the speaker) asks about the cost, the boatman says that he eliminates the cost by saying “wallāhi ‘alasyān khutrak bibalāsy”. Nevertheless, after the passenger says “tisykur” (thank you), the boatman then says the cost of the boat ride on the Nile is 30 pounds by saying “In syā allāh ‘alasyān khutrak talatīn gineh”. After the boatman mentions the cost, the passenger pays for it. In this conversation, the hearer at first says something that does not correspond to reality – the boat ride on the Nile is not free. In fact, every passenger who rides a boat on the Nile will be certainly charged. However, after that the boatman revises that the cost for a boat ride is 30 pounds.

The Maxim of Relation

In order to create a good cooperation between speaker and hearer, each should be able to make a relevant contribution to the conversation topic. The example is illustrated in the following conversation:
The conversation occurs between a doctor and a patient. When the doctor asks the patient whether he is working in an air conditioned room “huwa ārīfah a’id fi takyīf au kedah?” the patient gives an irrelevant answer by saying “‘āyizah illīhuwa murabba’ ‘ayizāhā musy laff”. The patient says that there are some people who are also disturbed by the extremely changing weather, meaning that his pain is not because he is working in an air conditioned room, but because he is disturbed by the extreme weather “‘āyizah illīhuwa murabba’ ‘ayizāhā musy laff”. The seller (speaker) actually expects her buyer to mention a size by saying “ṣugayyar” or “kibīr”, but she replies “rectangular” (‘āyizah illī huwa murabba’). The same cooperative pattern is demonstrated in the conversation (8) below.

The conversation occurs between a doctor and a patient. When the doctor asks the patient whether he is working in an air conditioned room “huwa ārīfah a’id fi takyīf au kedah?” the patient gives an irrelevant answer by saying “‘āyizah illīhuwa murabba’ ‘ayizāhā musy laff”. The patient says that there are some people who are also disturbed by the extremely changing weather, meaning that his pain is not because he is working in an air conditioned room, but because he is disturbed by the extreme weather “‘āyizah illīhuwa murabba’ ‘ayizāhā musy laff”. The same cooperative pattern is demonstrated in the conversation (8) below.

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īh”. The Al-Azhar student gives an unsuitable response to the question by saying the university is located in Nasser City “Gāmi’ at-il-azhar fī madīnat naṣr”. In term of Grice’s (1975) maxim of relation, the interlocutor (student) provides an irrelevant response to speaker’s question. The response is said to be relevant when he responds by mentioning a type of transportation to get to Al-Azhar University.

The Maxim of Manner

The maxim of manner requires each interlocutor to speak briefly and orderly by avoiding ambiguity and exaggerated obscure conversation. The following conversation (9) happens between a father and a government official.

A : Muddah ad-dirāsah bitākhuţ fī ēh?  
B : Huwa ḥadratak hadakhalhum kulliyāt ēh?  
A : ‘How long will the study last?’  
B : ‘What faculty will your son be attending?’

A father who is going to send his son to a university abroad goes to a government office to take care of the necessary documents. When the father asks about the period of study “Muddah ad-dirāsah bitākhuţ fī ēh?” the government official responds by making a question “Huwa ḥadratak hadakhalhum kulliyāt ēh?”, thus causing the conversation ambiguous. This happens because the interlocutor intends to give an appropriate answer to the speaker’s question, given that the study period for each faculty is different. A different cooperative pattern is illustrated in the following conversation (10):

A : Tayb ḥadratak insyaAllah hatti’milhā lī bikām  
B : bimīt gineh il-fard  
A : ‘So, how much I have to pay?’  
B : ‘One hundred pounds for one person’  
A : ‘One hundred pounds?’  
B : ‘Yes’  
A : ‘That’s too much. For what? It’s pointless then.’

The conversation (10) happens between a travel agent and a customer. When the customer asks about the cost of a travel package to Alexandria “insyaAllah hatti’milhā lī bikām”, the travel agent answers “bimīt gineh il-fard” (one hundred pounds for one person). To ensure that he hears the correct answer, the customer repeats the travel agent’s answer “Mīt gineh?” (one hundred pounds?), and the travel agent replies “Aiwh” (yes). The speaker who has received a clear answer objects to the offered price by saying “musy hayanfa’sy kedah” (that’s too much). For the interlocutor, this causes an obscurity of meaning.

COOPERATIVE PATTERNS IN SOME SITUATIONS

In some expressions, there are some cooperative patterns produced by the speakers and the hearers. The cooperative patterns produced in certain situations are diverse. Here are some examples of cooperative patterns that are produced by speakers and hearers in some situations.

Compliment

A compliment is defined as a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the speaker addressed, some for ‘good’ (possession,
characteristic, skill etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer (Holmes, 1988:458). Conversation in Egyptian Arabic commonly uses compliments, which one of its intention is for mujamalah. The conversation below contains a compliment.

(11)

| A | (أ) | أهلا و سهلا . العمر كام |
|   | (ب) | العمر سبعين سنة |
|   | (أ) | ما شاء الله... يهديك الصحة و العافية |

The conversation (11) is the end of a conversation between a doctor and his patient. After examining and prescribing his patient, who is older than him, the doctor thanks his patient for visiting him “māṣī... syukran”. However, the patient gives an irrelevant contribution and causes an obscurity by responding “Al ‘afwu ‘al ēḥ?”. The patient actually expresses his politeness because he thinks that the one who is supposed to thank is him (not the doctor)since he has been examined by the doctor.
Apology

Al-Abdi (1981:4-5) defines apology as the utterances and deeds a person tries to offer to lift punishment or blame due on him/her for a malicious deed he has committed. In Arabic communication, apology is expressed in some situations. The conversation below illustrates an apology in Arabic communication.

\(14\)

\(\begin{align*}
A & : \text{Kedah mitīn \text{ x} wa \text{ x} isyri\text{ n} \text{ w} al-gawant bi 'asryrah \text{ w} al-hāgāt al-bābyah bi 'asryrah yib'a talāti\text{ n}---yib'a kulluh mitīn kham\text{ sīn} \text{ w}\text{ a} kham\text{sīn} \\
B & : \text{Tayb mumkin kham\text{sīn} \text{ w}\text{ a} kham\text{sīn} }
\end{align*}\)

The above conversation occurs between a clothes seller and a buyer. To get a final price, the seller and the buyer make a negotiation. The seller insists on the price she sets (255 pounds) "yib'a kulluh mitīn kham\text{sīn} \text{ w}\text{ a} kham\text{sīn}", but the buyer wants a lower price (250 pounds) “mumkin kham\text{sīn} \text{ w}\text{ a} kham\text{sīn}”. Each speaker and hearer contributes adequately in the conversation. However, because the buyer has not got the price he wants, then the buyer says "ma'lisy say 'sorry' with the intention to make the seller accept her proposed price. In term of cooperative pattern, the partner (buyer) does not give a relevant contribution to the speaker’s utterance (offering). Obviously, the partner has a specific purpose of saying ‘sorry’. In Arab society, an apology is often spoken by women to obtain a compensation (Muzhir, tt:74). This is also done by the buyer to get a rebate. Making an apology to the hearer means the speaker lowers her/his status below the hearer. However, this speaker’s lower status will cause the hearer to follow his/her want so that the negotiation could reach an agreement.

Negotiation

In a negotiation process, the speaker and the hearer forms a cooperative pattern which produces an agreement between the two. In Egyptian society, negotiation often takes a long process. In the negotiation process, the speaker and the hearer frequently perform perlocutionary
acts, which Austin (1962:101) defines as “what we bring about or achieve by saying something, such as convincing, persuading, deterring, and even, say, surprising or misleading”. A perlocutionary act is associated with specific effects expected by the speaker’s utterances (Baskoro, 2014: 82). The conversation below demonstrates a process of negotiation between a taxi driver and his passenger in determining a taxi fare.

\[
\text{A: Aiwa hina hatzil hina kem?} \\
\text{B: Khamsin gineh} \\
\text{A: Dâ kibir, arba’în gineh bas.} \\
\text{B: Wallâh inti dayya’na wa’t adi êh, khilhim khamah wa arba’în} \\
\text{A: Lâ humâ arba’în gineh bas} \\
\text{B: Mâsyi} \\
\]

\[
\text{A: I get out here. How much is that?} \\
\text{B: ’Fifty out here.’} \\
\text{A: ’That’s too much. Forty pounds.’} \\
\text{B: ’By Allah, you see, we’ve spent a long time. Come on, pay only 45 pounds.’} \\
\text{A: ’No, I’ll pay you forty pounds.’} \\
\text{B: ’Okay.’} \\
\]

A passenger takes a taxi to go to the city of Doki. After arriving, she asks about the fare. The taxi driver says 50 pounds “khamsîn gineh”. The passenger bargains it down to 40 pounds “dâ kibir, arba’în gineh bas”. The negotiation process continues when the taxi driver does not agree with the reduction because of the crowded and long journey. For that reason, he asks for 45 pounds “dayya’na wa’t adi êh, khilhim khamah wa arba’în”. Thinking that it is too expensive, the passenger insists on 40 pounds “lâ humâ arba’în gineh bas”. Realizing that his reason does not affect the passenger, the taxi driver then accepts the proposed cost reduction.

**Interrupting**

One of the Arabs habits in conversation is interrupting. This gives rise to an impression that the hearer cannot wait to respond to the speaker’s utterance. The conversation (6) between a doctor and a patient above describes such a situation. At first, the doctor asks if his patient works in an air-conditioned room. Then the patient says that the weather changes so often, making some people disturbed. Before the patient finishes his utterance, the doctor interrupts him. In this situation, it is assumed that the doctor thinks that the patient does not give a proper contribution to his question. The doctor actually expects ‘yes or no’ answer. Because of not getting a proper response, the doctors re-explains by giving an example that the patient sleeps in a very cold room because he forgets to turn off the air conditioner before leaving the room.

Another example of interrupting is as follows:

\[
\text{B: } \text{Wallâh inti dayya’na wa’t adi êh, khilhim khamah wa arba’în} \\
\text{A: Lâ humâ arba’în gineh bas} \\
\text{B: Mâsyi} \\
\]

\[
\text{A: ’I get out here. How much is that?’} \\
\text{B: ’Fifty out here.’} \\
\text{A: ’That’s too much. Forty pounds.’} \\
\text{B: ’By Allah, you see, we’ve spent a long time. Come on, pay only 45 pounds.’} \\
\text{A: ’No, I’ll pay you forty pounds.’} \\
\text{B: ’Okay.’} \\
\]

A passenger asks which country he is going to send them to. The doctor answers “Hulaandâ biti’ dî minahah lit-talabah ax-sânâniyyah anta bitidfa’ en-nus wen-nus at-tani’ alal-balad illiy inta ráyikhâ...nazhi‘ah awi’...wâhid mursiyd wa yib’âlium wa kedah wi biyib’û al-walâd fi amân”.

\[
\text{A: ’To which country you are going to send them?’} \\
\]
The conversation occurs between a man and a government official. The man asks about a country where the official usually sends students abroad “Iy balad mumkin tib’as-hum?”. The officials says that he is going to present some countries that usually become a destination for study. But before the official finishes explaining, the man interrupts him, so that the official stops talking “wallāhi iḥnā udāmnā...”. The man does so since he thinks he has to clarify his question with the intention to receive a sufficient contribution (answer), which is information about the safest country for study “illī aktar amān ya’nī?".

CONCLUSION

The speech events that occur among Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (Amiyah) speakers create a variety of cooperative patterns. In these varied cooperative patterns, the speakers give not only relevant contributions to the speakers’ utterances, but also irrelevant contributions. By employing Grice’s view of the conversation maxims, this study suggests that speech events in Egyptian society has various cooperative patterns.

The varied cooperative patterns can be shown in the negotiations to reach an agreement. In a speech that is intended to reach an agreement, the speaker and the hearer mutually to make an excessive and less relevant contribution. In Arab society, an apology is often made by women to get a compensation, so that negotiation reaches an agreement.

The habit of interrupting the other is intended to make the hearer provide a sufficient contribution to the speaker’s speech. This happens when the speaker thinks that he or she does not receive a relevant and adequate contribution from the hearer. These two things are very dominant in Egyptian society’s communication. Consequently, a negotiation requires a lot of energy and time to reach an agreement.

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