Opening up closings - the Ecuadorian way

Journal Article

Opening up closings—the Ecuadorian way

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Abstract

In the conversation analytic tradition, this paper examines the procedures Ecuadorian Spanish (ES) speakers employ to close telephone conversations.

Conversation analysts (cf. Schegloff, 1972; Schegloff and Sacks, 1974 [1973]; Schegloff, 1979) examined telephone talk in American English and found that conversations are opened and brought to a close by the joint work of the participants. Concerning closings, they observed, for example, that participants employ certain procedures to signal their desire to bring the conversation to an end and others to actually close the interaction. They also suggested that the conversational procedures they describe are of a universal character (cf. Schegloff and Sacks, 1974 [1973]).

The examination of telephone closings in the present study reveals that similar procedures are employed in Ecuadorian Spanish. Nevertheless, it also highlights some of the features that appear to be characteristic of Ecuadorian Spanish only, that is, that seem to be culture-bound, and thus contests Schegloff and Sacks' universality claims.

This study also points to one of the main drawbacks of conversation analysts' work which is that they restrict themselves to the description of structural aspects of talk (i.e., the machinery of conversation), and fail to consider, for example, participants' use of indirectness and other face-saving devices in the closing of conversational interactions, their selection of linguistic form in relation to characteristics of the participants and their relationship, and the ritual function certain closing utterances perform. In fact, the main thrust of this paper is devoted to the examination and illustration of these neglected aspects of talk, with examples from Ecuadorian Spanish telephone conversations. The need for a culturally contexted conversation analysis, along the lines proposed by Moerman (1988) is supported here.

Keywords: *telephone talk; conversation analysis; interactional sociolinguistics; pragmatics; Spanish; Ecuadorian Spanish.*

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Background and aims

Conversation analysts were the first scholars to methodically examine the structural procedures participants employ to open (cf. Schegloff, 1972 [1968]; Schegloff, 1979) and close (Schegloff and Sacks, 1974 [1973]) telephone conversations, as part of their analysis of what they referred to as the 'overall organization of conversation' (i.e., how conversations are organized section by section). This level of analysis stemmed from their initial observation that conversations are '... segmented events which are marked off in some fashion with beginnings, middles and ends' (Benson and Hughes, 1983: 162); this observation led them to examine beginning and closing sections across a number of telephone conversations in search of recurrent patterns.

Conversation analysts also examined the organization of turn-taking in conversation (cf. Sacks et al., 1974), that is, how the exchange of turns is organized. They made two basic observations (among others)—that usually one party speaks at a time in a single conversation and that speaker change recurs. To account for these phenomena, they proposed the existence of an internal machinery in conversation, the turn-taking machinery, which regulates speaker change, that is, how next speaker is selected, and turn transition, such as how the end of a turn is marked. When it came to explaining closings, the existence of this machinery posed a problem to conversation analysts in that '... an indefinitely extendable string of turns to talk ... [could] ... be generated' (Schegloff and Sacks, 1974 [1973]: 237). In other words, the problem they were faced with was explaining how participants organized talk so that 'one speaker's completion' did not 'occasion another speaker's talk' (Schegloff and Sacks, 1974 [1973]: 237) or how the machinery could be stopped.

After detailed analyses of telephone closings, they proposed that participants use several procedures to 'lift' or 'suspend' the transition relevance place, that is, the place where a new turn can be inserted, to allow the bringing of the close. They discussed two basic types of procedure—those participants employ to initiate the closing, which they refer to as closing (and pre-closing) devices, and those they employ to actually close a conversation, which are encapsulated in the notion of the terminal exchange. The use of these two procedures and their subtypes is considered here in relation to Ecuadorian Spanish telephone conversation data.

A key notion conversation analysts also employed in the description of closing and other procedures is that of adjacency pairs (cf. Schegloff and Sacks, 1974 [1973]). This notion, which is at the centre of what they refer to as the sequential organization of conversation, is used for pairs of utterances sequentially placed, where the production of the first pair

part '... sequentially implicates the production of the second part of the pair' (Benson and Hughes, 1983: 173). The application of this notion, which can be seen, for example, in participants' exchange of farewell utterances to end telephone conversations is considered here, too.

The focus of attention of conversation analysts dealing with telephone talk, particularly in the early years of the discipline, was the examination of the machinery of conversation, as revealed in the analysis of transcripts of recorded authentic conversations. They limited themselves to descriptions of what appeared in the data and avoided resorting to considerations of matters outside the data. Benson and Hughes (1983: 156) express the conversation analysts' view regarding considerations of context in the analysis of talk when they say that the features they describe can be found across data, irrespective of any contextual features, that is,

> ... operating transituationally, independent of such things as the interactant's age, sex, social class, time, date and place, and so on ...

This approach can, in fact, be better understood when one considers the origin of conversation analysis. It started as a reaction to the methods employed within conventional sociology, where talk was interpreted and abstracted into a priori categories rather than studied as an object of its own (cf. Benson and Hughes, 1983). Hence, their emphasis on description rather than explanation.

Some scholars working in the same tradition, however, have departed from the original conversation analytic approach and moved to include consideration of some aspects of context in the analysis of telephone closings. One of them is Davidson (1978), who examined utterances such as *okay* and *alright* occurring in the closing section of conversations. She found that these utterances can perform different functions in relation to the type of call they occur in and the role relationship between participants. On the other hand, Clark and French (1981) looked at 'goodbye' sequences and suggested that the production of farewell utterances of this type was determined by the degree of acquaintance between participants. As such, they emphasized the leave-taking function of these utterances, as opposed to the purely structural function conversation analysts appeared to attribute to them.

Outside the tradition, conversation analysts' focus on structural aspects of talk has only received criticism from different scholars (cf., Thomas, 1988; Graddol and Swann, 1989). Thomas (1988: 1), for example, remarks that

> ... many of the features of the exchange system which conversational analysis presents as purely *structural configurations* can be seen as *motivated* and to have interpersonal significance.

In this paper, I echo this criticism and attempt to go beyond a purely structural description of closing procedures into considerations of contextual aspects that appear to determine the occurrence of particular procedures and particular linguistic realizations for such procedures. I argue that restricting oneself to the description of structural aspects of talk (i.e., the internal machinery of conversation) can only give a partial account of how closings are effected. A more adequate picture can only be gained if attention is given to considerations of characteristics of the participants (e.g., the type of relationship and the degree of social distance obtaining between them, and their age) which determine the selection of certain procedures and particular linguistic realizations, and which are a reflection of the social conventions in operation; the type of activity the participants are engaged in, which also has an effect on procedures and forms; the participants' preference for the use of certain politeness strategies (e.g., indirectness); and the motivations behind their preferences.

For this purpose, I draw from aspects of the fields of interactional sociolinguistics and pragmatics, mostly those relating to the explanation of talk in relation to participants' roles, matters of symmetry/asymmetry in an interaction, and the type and place of interaction (cf. Goffman, 1968 [1951]; Brown and Fraser, 1979). I also propose that considerations of face and politeness (cf. Goffman, 1967; Brown and Levinson, 1978, 1987) can shed some light upon the prevalence of certain closing procedures and participants' choice of particular linguistic realizations.

In addition, I stress the interactional function closing utterances perform, which appears to be disregarded by conversation analysts. Goffman (1971, 1976), Firth (1972), Laver (1975), and Lüger (1983), among other scholars, have emphasized interactional (as opposed to structural) aspects of closing (and opening) utterances in face-to-face interactions. These scholars regard greetings, farewells, and other expressions that occur in openings and closings as expressions that perform a ritual function, through which participants ratify their acquaintance and appreciation of each other, that is, these expressions are not regarded merely as entry or exit mechanisms. Goffman (1971), in fact, refers to greetings and farewells as 'supportive interchanges' and 'access rituals' since, according to him '... greetings mark a transition to a condition of increased access [between participants] and farewells to a state of decreased access' (Goffman, 1971: 79). He also considers variation in the type of ritual used in relation to the degree of acquaintance of the participants, the frequency with which the participants meet and other factors:

> If the leave-takers are merely going back into the same felt probability of contact from which they came, and if this probability is high, then a phrase such as 'See you' or 'So long' may well be employed .... (Goffman, 1971: 82)

... a long-absent neighbor will ordinarily be owed less of a show than a long-absent brother. (Goffman, 1971: 83)

... the more lengthy and absolute the predicted separation, the more expensive the ritual. (Goffman, 1971: 88)

According to Firth (1972: 1), 'greeting is the recognition of an encounter as socially acceptable ...' and parting, '... the recognition that the encounter has been acceptable.'

Laver (1975) and Lüger (1983), on the other hand, refer to greeting and farewells as phatic expressions which occur at critical points in the interaction. According to Laver (1975), these expressions serve two main functions in the closing section of conversations—they help to mitigate '... the potential sense of rejection that a participant might feel when his fellow participant initiates the closing phase' (1975: 229), which is necessary to reach a consensus regarding the termination of the encounter, and to consolidate the relationship.

Like Goffman and Firth, Laver and Lüger also highlight the social-marking function greetings and farewells accomplish:

... the type of linguistic token chosen by a speaker may reflect his view of the social structuring of the interaction .... (Laver, 1975: 222)

... [phatic formulae] provide the necessary information for defining the situation and signalizing the level of the relationship. (Lüger, 1983: 701)

These scholars, particularly Goffman and Firth, also stress the existence of cultural variability in the use of greeting and parting rituals. Firth (1972: 17) remarks that 'behavioural codes in many societies specify who may address whom ... and the actual words of greeting [and parting].' He also says that greeting and parting behavior is 'highly conventionalized', and that the conventions are '... apt to be culture-specific, not universals' (Firth, 1972: 29). Likewise, Goffman (1976: 267) says that '... ritual concerns are patently dependent on cultural definition and can be expected to vary quite markedly from society to society'.

In contrast, conversation analysts (cf. Schegloff and Sacks, 1974 [1973]: 235) avoid characterizing their findings as corresponding to any particular ethnic group or language, and as such appear to suggest that the procedures they describe for closings in American English (which include the use of farewell expressions) are of a universal character. Their claims, however, have been contested by a number of scholars. Eades (1985), for instance, examined how information is exchanged in southeastern Queensland Aboriginal society. She found that question-answer sequences (i.e., instances of adjacency pairs) operating in Australian English to elicit and produce personal information are absent in this

Aboriginal society. Participants in this society normally volunteer information, but when a question occurs, they do not feel the obligation to answer. Eades thus proved that the notion of adjacency pairs was culture-bound.

Moerman (1988), on the other hand, examined conversational procedures employed in Thai in contrast with those used in American English and found that Thai conversation was 'the same, but also different ...' (Moerman, 1988: 3). This, he attributed to the widely recognized fact that 'all talk is thoroughly and multifariously embedded in the historical, cultural, social ... context of its occurrence' (1988: 8). Thus his proposal for a 'culturally-contexted' conversation analysis which recognizes '... that societies differ in their ways of speaking both from one another and internally ...' (1988: 11).

Godard's (1977) study of telephone openings in French and American English, carried out within the ethnography of speaking tradition (cf. Gumperz and Hymes, 1972), pointed to the existence of different sociocultural norms in the use of the phone in the two languages and cultures. And Sifianou's (1989) more recent work also points to cultural differences when she suggests that differences in telephone beginnings between British English and Greek reflect the existence of different politeness systems in operation.

One of my initial motivations for the present study was precisely to find out whether Ecuadorian Spanish speakers employed similar telephone conversational mechanisms to those conversation analysts have described for American English, and, therefore, whether their universality claims were valid. The results from my study echo Moerman's (1988: 3) remarks on Thai conversation with regards to American English—that Ecuadorian Spanish telephone talk (in relation to closings in this case) is 'the same, but also different'.

In the next section, I attempt to show what the similarities and differences are. I also highlight the aspects of analysis that I argue have not been accounted for in the examination of closings within the conversation analytic tradition. I start with the use of indirectness and other face-saving devices Ecuadorian Spanish conversationalists employ to propose and effect closings; their selection of procedures and linguistic forms in relation to considerations of the type of relationship and the degree of social distance obtaining between the participants, their age, the type of conversation participants are engaged in, and the location of the interaction. In addition, I consider the multifunctionality of utterances and the degree of explicitness in their linguistic realization in relation to the degree of social distance obtaining between participants. Finally, I consider Ecuadorian Spanish speakers' use of conversational mechanisms

that display 'connectedness' (to use Goffman's [1971: 63] term), such as repetitions and restatements of certain utterances, the expression of welfare wishes, and promises to talk again.

The corpus of data upon which this paper is based consists of 73 telephone conversations recorded in the conversation analytic tradition in a household in Quito, Ecuador. Participants in these conversations include six members of the household, aged between 25 and 80, and a range of friends, acquaintances and relatives with whom they interact on the phone. It also includes a number of service-encounter type interactions.[1] Some reference to data obtained through participant observation of face-to-face interactions is occasionally made, too.

Analysis

The use of indirectness as a face-saving device

Within the category of pre-closing devices, Schegloff and Sacks (1974 [1973]) discuss what they refer to as 'warrants'. They observe that certain utterances, such as *okay*, *well* and *so*, when produced alone, are employed as warrants for closing in American English, allowing for the possibility of the closing to start and proceed if the other participant agrees.

In the Ecuadorian Spanish data, warrants appear to be realized by similar utterances such as *ya*, *bueno*, or *no*, meaning 'okay'; *así (es) que* or *entonces* 'so'; *muy bien* 'excellent'; and combinations such as *ya okay*[2] 'okay okay'; *ya entonces*, or *bueno entonces* 'okay then'. Some instances of these utterances can be found in the following conversation:[3]

(1)

06 C *te llamaba para avisarte que Washington está por llegar*
'I was calling you to tell you that Washington is about to get there'

07 A *ya*
'okay'

08 C *así que: en minutos está llegando no*↑
'so: he'll be arriving in a few minutes time okay'

09 A *sí ya*
'yes okay'

However, something conversation analysts have overlooked is that the closing function of these utterances is usually performed indirectly, that is, that there is no direct indication that the speaker wants to finish the interaction; in fact, many of these utterances on the surface constitute

expressions of agreement (also see Placencia, 1996). The question would thus be, why people resort to indirect forms to bring about closings. Explanations for such choices can be found in relation to considerations of face and politeness (cf. Goffman, 1967; Brown and Levinson, 1978, 1987).

Within Goffman's notion of face and face work, and Brown and Levinson's theory of face, which developed from the former, one of the central ideas is that many acts in social interaction can put people's face at risk. To prevent this from happening, people carry out face-saving actions or use politeness strategies. One of these face-threatening acts can be said to be that of closing or ending an interaction given that if it does not proceed smoothly, the end of the relationship might be brought about as well. Participants, therefore, need to be tactful in the way they express their desire to end the interaction, thus their use of indirect forms; they also need to seek mutual agreement to close since, otherwise they might feel rejected or offended. Expressions of agreement such as the ones referred to here serve this purpose. In addition, these expressions might be said to have the effect of offering some reassurance as to the continuation of the relationship by emphasizing group membership through agreement (cf. Brown and Levinson, 1978, 1987).

In some cases (as in example [2]), agreement appears to be, nevertheless, more explicitly sought through the inclusion of the agreement-seeking utterance *¿no?* produced in conjunction with farewell utterances, as though permission was needed to conclude the interaction.

(2)
46 A *ya chao chao*
'okay bye bye'
47 C *chao chao no*↑
'bye bye okay'↑

Other face-saving devices

Another pre-closing procedure Schegloff and Sacks (1974 [1973]) discuss is what they refer to as 'announcements', that is, utterances that more clearly state the speaker's desire to terminate the interaction. They consider two basic types—those that appeal to the addressee's interests and those that are explicitly based on the speaker's interests. The former include reference to what the addressee mentioned at the beginning of the interaction. The example they give is the utterance 'Well, I'll let you get back to your books', which makes reference to the reply given to 'What are you doing?' produced at the start of the interaction (Schegloff

and Sacks, 1974 [1973]: 250). In this example, the speaker's desire to terminate the interaction is presented as motivated by his/her concern for the other participant's previous engagement. One instance of this procedure can be found in example (3), where A (mother) seems to appeal to C's (son) interests to initiate the closing:

(3)
15 A *ya te suelto entonces ...*
'I'll let you go then ...'

By using the verb *soltar* 'to let go', A seems to imply that she had been keeping C against his will and will now free him for his benefit. This can be regarded as a way of 'attending to the hearer's interests', to use Brown and Levinson's (1987: 102) words, which, according to them, would constitute a positive politeness strategy ultimately aimed at claiming common ground.

On the other hand, the speaker's interest can also be stated as a reason for finishing the interaction, as in example (4) from a conversation between two friends:

(4)
15 A *bueno Luchita le dejo que voy a me voy al mercado ...*
'well Luchita I have to go the thing is that I'm going to the market ...'

Nevertheless, personal reasons of this type in Ecuadorian Spanish are usually accompanied by appropriate explanations which often have to do with a third person. In this conversation, for instance, A explains why she has to go in relation to her husband (i.e., Albertito) being available to give her a lift to the market then and not later:

(4) [continued]
15–16 *... tengo que aprovechar esta horita antes de que Albertito/se vaya ...*
A '... I really have to take advantage of this hour before Albertito goes to work ...'

As Brown and Levinson (1987: 131) would put it, the speaker in this example 'disassociates' herself from the 'infringement' that the initiation of the closing causes by putting the blame on someone else.

Schegloff and Sacks (1974 [1973]) also consider announcement devices that are employed by one of the participants only (i.e., by the caller or the answerer) and which do not appeal to either participant's interest. Within this category would fall some explicit devices employed in Ecuadorian Spanish, such as the utterance *eso no más era* 'it was just that', which is produced after the statement of the reason for the call.

Utterances of this type unequivocally express that the speaker does not have anything else to say and, therefore, indicate that he/she would like to end the conversation. An instance of this procedure can be found in this conversation between a woman (C) and her aunt (A).

(5)
18 C *ya entonces eso no más era*
'okay then it was just that'
19 A *ya muchas gracias ...*
'okay thank you very much ...'

The utterance *eso no más era* tells the answerer the conversation can come to an end at that point, and saves the caller or both participants from unnecessary further talk or embarrassing silence, as once this utterance is produced, the closing of the interaction becomes the expected course of action. It can also be interpreted as meaning 'I don't want to trouble you with anything further', and as such, it can be regarded as a way of acknowledging the imposition the caller is placing upon the answerer with the telephone call (i.e., as an instance of the use of one of Brown and Levinson's [1987] negative politeness strategies).

Utterances of a similar kind are sometimes attached to the statement of the reason for the call (rather than at the end) and also signal that the speaker will not have anything further to say once the main reason has been stated, as in example (6):

(6)
10 C *quería nada más saludarle por su aniversario*
'I just wanted to greet you for your anniversary'

In this particular example, the utterance *nada más* appears to constitute a minimizing expression (i.e., 'I won't be long'), through which the speaker (son) expresses deference to his addressee (father), in the context of parent–child relationships being asymmetrical in Ecuadorian Spanish within the generations under scrutiny in the present study. It might, however, serve other purposes for the caller, too, such as enhancing the event (the answerer's anniversary) by announcing that the call was made for that and no other reason and, at the same time, restricting the length of the conversation. The production of a similar utterance after four turns in the quoted conversation can be taken, nevertheless, as an indication of the caller's wish not to prolong the interaction.

Selection of linguistic forms in relation to the type of relationship and the degree of social distance obtaining between the participants

Another remark that can be made about warrants and other closing utterances in Ecuadorian Spanish is that there is often a range of utter-

ances available to participants—from intimate to neutral forms, and from neutral to formal and even deferential—and that the selection of utterance is dependent upon the type of relationship and the degree of social distance obtaining between the participants. The utterance *o-ka* 'okay', for example, appears to be only employed in cases where there is a great deal of intimacy; *ya*, on the other hand, seems to be a more neutral expression that can be used across the spectrum. *Muy bien* 'excellent' or *está bien* 'fine' seem to constitute formal expressions that convey some deference. Example (7) from a conversation between a landlord (A) and a tenant (C), displays the use of *ya* by the former and the more formal utterance *muy bien* by the latter. This asymmetrical use of agreement expressions could point to the existence of asymmetry in service-encounter type interactions where the service provider (i.e., the landlord in this case) is in a position of power, requiring the expression of deference by the service seeker through the use of more formal forms.

(7)
34 C *nos encontramos ahí en el edificio*
'shall we meet there in the building'
35 A *en el edificio en la habitación por ahí*
'in the building in the suite in that area'
36 C *muy bien ingeniero*
'excellent Engineer'
37 A *ya*
'okay'

Intimate expressions of agreement, on the other hand, can take the form of *(ya) bestial* or *ya chévere*,[PO] both meaning 'great'.[4]

The choice of a type of explanation to accompany an announcement also appears to be related to the degree of intimacy obtaining between the participants. In example (4), A would have had to use a different type of excuse had she been talking to someone from whom she had more social distance; on such occasions, the usual excuse in Ecuadorian Spanish, particularly among older adults, is to say *tengo un compromiso* 'I've got an engagement',[PO] without explaining what it is about.

The relationship between linguistic form and degree of social distance obtaining between participants can also be observed in utterances that realize what Schegloff and Sacks (1974 [1973]) refer to as the 'terminal exchange'. According to them, telephone conversations are brought to a close by the production of pairs of utterances such as *thank you—that's*

all right, and farewell sequences such as *bye—bye*, which mark the termination of the conversation, as in the following examples

(8)
09 A *gracias*
'thank you'
10 C *de qué*
'don't mention it'

(9)
21 A *hasta luego*
'goodbye'
22 C *hasta luego*
'goodbye'

Thank you utterances, as in example (8), are usually made up of an expression of gratitude by one participant and a rejection or acknowledgement of thanks by the other. There are a number of linguistic forms, however, that can be employed both to say thank you and to reject or acknowledge thanks depending on the kind of interaction and relationship participants are engaged in, the degree of distance obtaining between them, the object of gratitude, as well as the participants' age (see the next section but one). The following are some of the formulae participants in the present study used to say thank you:

(muchas/muchísimas/mil) gracias
'(many/many many/a thousand) thanks'

le agradezco muchísimo/te agradezco un mundo
'I thank you very very much/a world'

muchísimas gracias por esa atención
'thank you for the thought'

aprecio mucho tu atención
'I appreciate your thought very much'

muy amable
'very kind of you'

And these are some of the replies given:

no tiene de qué
'you don't have anything (to thank me for)'

de qué (abbreviation of the above utterance)

ya sabe estamos para servirle
'you know we are here to serve you'

ya
'okay'

a la orden
'at your command'

igualmente
'likewise'

It appears, nevertheless, that more elaborate thanks and replies are usually used among people who are neither intimates nor strangers, that is, those who are in the middle and which Wolfson (1988) refers to as the 'bulge' group. *Te agradezco un mundo*, for instance, is used in a conversation between two cousins who are not very intimate, and *gracias* between two sisters in the younger group, or two strangers; the absence of a reply is also common among intimates and strangers. Age, however, appears to interact with social distance, resulting in the use of utterances that convey more or less formality and deference. Participants in the older group, for instance, appear to use more formal and deferential forms even with intimates, as in the production of the utterance *aprecio mucho tu atención* by a father thanking his son.

Concerning replies, the place of the interaction also determines the occurrence of certain utterances. *A la orden*, for example, is generally heard in service-encounter type interactions over the phone, but also in face-to-face ones.[PO]

Farewell expressions may be preceded by greetings to the family (also discussed later). These greetings range from familiar to neutral and formal, as in examples (10), (11), and (12), respectively.

(10)
16 A *saludarás a Cristina*
'you will say hello to Cristina'
(11)
18 A *salude a todos*
'say hello to everyone'
(12)
14 C *le ruego saludar a todos en casa hasta luego*
'I urge you to say hello to everyone at home good bye'

Type of conversation in which participants are engaged

The type of interaction in which participants are taking part appears to determine the selection of certain closing procedures, too.

In Ecuadorian Spanish announcements that the speaker does not have anything further to say can also take the form of somewhat philosophical summing-up or concluding expressions in what I refer to as *phatic* conversations, that is those conversations mainly oriented towards the maintenance of social relations, as opposed to the negotiation of a transaction in *instrumental* conversations.[5] Two instances of this can be found in the following examples.

(13)
23 A *claro/ésa es la cosa/*
'of course/that's the thing/'
24 C */su trabajo pues/su marido y su trabajo así que así es*
'/her work then/her husband and her work so that's the way it is'
25 A *claro*
'of course'
26 C *así es Isabelita*
'that's the way it is Isabelita'

(14)
12 C *yo tampoco tengo muchas esperanzas*
'I'm not very optimistic either'
13 A *sí así es Luchita*
'yes that's the way it is Luchita'
14 C *desgraciadamente ...*
'unfortunately'
15 A *esa es la vida bueno Luchita le dejo que me voy ...*
'that's life well Luchita I have to go the thing is that I'm going ...'

Apart from expressing some kind of agreement and giving some reassurance to the other participant as to the unfolding of events in a particular way being what is expected (e.g., 'that's the way things are'/'that's life'), utterances of this type can also be regarded as indirect ways of indicating that the speaker has nothing further to say.

Explicit announcements of the speaker not having anything else to say, on the other hand, occur in conversations with a more instrumental element, as in example (5), where C called A to inform her of a particular event.

Reinvocations of the reason for the call (i.e., another closing procedure described by Schegloff and Sacks), which also signal that there is nothing further to add by repeating what was said earlier in the conversation, appear to occur in instrumental conversations, too. In example (15), for

instance, C had called A to ask her for a telephone number. Towards the end of the interaction C repeats the number, as if double-checking it, whereas in fact it had already been checked when it was first given.

(15)
30 C *bueno (.) la Gladys está bien*
'well (.) is Gladys all right'
31 A *sí*
'yes'
32 C *ya mija 231 572 gracias*
'okay my daughter 231 572 thank you'
33 A *ya*
'okay'

Age of participants; Frequency of contact between participants

Schegloff and Sacks (1974 [1973]) focus on the devices participants employ to initiate the closing of a conversation and the utterances employed to actually terminate it. In Ecuadorian Spanish, it is also important to look at what goes on between these two points since some conversations have quite a lengthy closing, which reflects the relationship between the participants and the state of their relationship (e.g., whether they are in frequent contact or not), but also their age.

In interactions where the participants are not acquainted with each other, the closing is initiated with the utterance of the reason for the call, and is completed as soon as the reason for the call has been stated, as in this example:

(16)
08 C *que me dé diciéndole que ... no*↑
'could you tell him that ... okay'↑
09 A *ya ya muy/bien yo/le aviso (.) de qué*
'okay okay/excellent/I'll tell him (.) don't mention it'
10 C */gracias/*
'/thank you/'

This can also be the case in interactions between people who are intimates, and who are in frequent contact, as in example (17). Once the reason for the call has been stated then the closing might begin without much preamble and without causing any embarrassment or ill feelings. In other words, lengthier closings also appear to occur among Wolfson's 'bulge' group.

(17)

04 C *como vas hazme un favor /bien/ grande*
'how are you doing do me a very big favor'

.
.
.

08 C *ve (.) dile: a Eulalia o a Juan que ...*
'look (.) tell Eulalia or Juan that ...'
09 A *ya okay*
'okay okay'
10 C *gracias*
'thank you'
11 A *ya okay ya (.) chao*
'okay okay okay (.) bye'

Age, however, is one factor that appears to interact with social distance. Rather rushed endings as in examples (17) and (18) are common among younger participants but less so among older ones.[6] The latter appear to have to take the time to go through all the relevant niceties before closing, even if they see each other frequently, as in example (19) from a conversation between two neighbors. The closing in this conversation is started in turn 14 with the repetition of the reason for the call and the reinstatement of thanks by the answerer (turns 15 to 17), followed by a welfare wish and its correspondent acceptance (turns 18 and 19), a promise to meet and its correspondent acceptance (turns 20 and 21), the expression of pleasure at the encounter (turns 21 and 22), the exchange of farewell utterances (turns 24 and 25) and greetings to the other participant's family (turn 25), and its corresponding reply (turn 26).

(18)

51 A *ya bruja nos vemos no*↑
'okay Witch we'll see each other okay'↑
52 C *ya (.) nos vemos chao*
'okay we'll see each other bye'
53 A *ya okay*
'okay okay'

(19)

14 C *vaya vaya yo quise eh ser de las primeras en llamarle /Marianita y/ desearle un feliz día*
'well well I wanted to be one of the first to ring you /Marianita and/ wish you a nice day'

15 A '/*gracias*/ *gracias Inesita*
'/thank you/thank you Inesita'
16 C *Albertito*
17 A *gracias muy amable pues le agradezco por su atención*
'thank you very kind of you thank you for your thought'
18 C *que pase muy bien no*↑
'I hope that you'll be all right okay'↑
19 A *gracias*
'thank you'
20 C *un ratito nos hemos de ver*
'we shall get together at some point'
21 A *gracias Inesita gusto de saludarle no*↑
'thank you Inesita it was a pleasure to greet you okay'↑
22 C *para mí*
'my pleasure'
23 A *que pase buenita*
'I hope that you'll be all right'
24 C *hasta luego*
'good bye'
25 A *hasta luego salude a todos*
'goodbye say hello to everyone'
26 C *gracias*
'thank you'

These in-between phenomena appear to correspond to what Knapp (1978: 107) refers to as the 'dramatization of relationship features' which he says occurs in face-to-face interactions when people have been parted for a period of time, or perhaps, one could say, when participants anticipate a long separation. In Ecuadorian Spanish however, these phenomena also appear to be related to the age of the participants; as suggested earlier, older participants (as in example [19]) produce lengthier closings, almost irrespective of the frequency with which they interact. This appears to be particularly the case in interactions that involve emotive acts such as thanking and apologizing (see later discussion).

Place where the call is made

Another closing mechanism Schegloff and Sacks (1974 [1973]) consider is what they refer to as 'pre-closing offerings'. Before the conversation develops, the caller might offer the answerer the possibility of stopping the conversation by asking him/her whether he/she is busy, as in

example (20), where C does so and A indicates that the conversation can continue:

(20)
05 C *qué estás ocupada*
'what are you busy'
06 A *no*
07 C *ah*
'oh'

The occurrence of this utterance in this particular conversation, which takes place among close friends, appears to be tied to the place where the call is made—A's office; this means A is likely to be busy. In other cases, however, questions of this type might occur in asymmetrical relations where the less powerful participant needs to somehow ask permission for the interaction to take place.[PO]

Brief and sometimes abrupt closings might occur when people call from a public phone and find themselves running out of money or small change. Likewise, polite exchanges at the end of the conversation may be reduced or even skipped in long distance calls due to the costs involved.

The multifunctionality of utterances and degrees of explicitness in their surface linguistic realization

Farewell expressions (Schegloff and Sack's 'terminal exchange') are sometimes exchanged, as in example (19), turns 24 and 25, but sometimes they seem to occur on their own, as in this conversation:

(21)
09 C *... muy amable gracias*
'... very kind of you thank you'
10 A *de qué hasta luego*
'don't mention it goodbye'

However, what seems to be the case is that some of these utterances perform more than one function. The 'thank you' utterance in turn 09 of example (21), for instance, appears to serve as an expression of gratitude as well as a farewell utterance. As such, the utterance *hasta luego* in turn 10 could be said to address the leave-taking force suggested for *gracias.* In other words, the first or second part of the 'terminal exchange' might not always be explicit in Ecuadorian Spanish, as conver-

sation analysts (Schegloff and Sacks, 1974 [1973]) appear to claim for American English.

The occurrence of more or less explicit forms would appear to be related to the key factor Clark and French (1981) consider determines the production of goodbye sequences—the degree of acquaintance between participants, as well as the degree of distance obtaining between them. If participants are very distant or very intimate (i.e., outside Wolfson's bulge group), then such explicitness does not appear to be necessary. An instance of the latter case can be seen in example (17), which takes place between two sisters (see turns 10 and 11).

In example (22), on the other hand, from a service-encounter type of interaction, asymmetry in the interaction seems to determine the lack of production of a farewell utterance on the part of the more powerful participant (i.e., the service provider), or of a reply to the thank you utterance. Or it can be said that *ya* in turn 17 serves as both an expression of agreement, an indication the speaker does not have anything further to say, and as a farewell utterance.

(22)
15 A *sí llámeme no más ...*
'yes just call me'
16 C *ya okay*
'okay okay'
17 A *ya*
'okay'
18 C *gracias hasta luego*
'thank you goodbye'

Repetitions and reinstatement of utterances

Another feature that becomes noticeable in the examination of closings in Ecuadorian Spanish is the duplication and reinstatement of warrants and other closing utterances. In example (23), the utterance *ya* (and variations of it) is repeated a number of times.

(23)
29 C *entonces eh: te espero en la casa*
'so uh: I'll be waiting for you at home'
30 A *muy bien*
'very well'
31 C *ya okay*
'okay okay'

32 A *o ka*
'o ka'
.
.
.
42 C *ya ya okay ...*
'okay okay okay ...'
43 A *ya*
'okay'
44 C *ya ya le voy a llamar ahora*
'okay okay I'll call her now'
45 A *ya*
'okay'
46 C *okay Pato*
'okay Pato'
47 A *o ka*
'o-kay'
48 C *entonces nos vemos en la casa*
'so we'll see each other at home'

It is as though, through such repetition, the expression of agreement between the two participants was reinforced.

Repetitions and reinstatements can also be found in farewell utterances (Schegloff and Sack's 'terminal exchange'), as in the following instances:

(24)
22 C ... *hasta luego /que esté bien/*
'... goodbye/I hope you'll be all right'
23 A */hasta luego/también hasta luego*
'/goodbye/you too good bye'
24 C *hasta luego*
'goodbye'

(25)
46 A *ya chao chao*
'okay bye bye'
47 C *chao chao no↑*
'bye bye okay'

The reinstatement of the formal form *hasta luego*, which appears to occur in interactions where people are acquainted with each other and between whom there is some social distance, can be interpreted as an indication of the difficulty ending an interaction poses and the compensation participants attempt to give each other by being overly polite. In contrast, in interactions where participants are not acquainted with each

other, there is often no explicit exchange of farewell utterances, as suggested earlier.

With respect to the informal form *chao*, the occurrence of a single farewell utterance in example (25) would probably sound too abrupt, and thus rude. On the other hand, its duplication seems to convey the feeling that the speaker cares. This feeling might also be achieved, however, by the attachment of a diminutive to the farewell expression instead, as in *chaito*[PO] or *hasta lueguito*.

In conversations where participants are acquainted, but between whom there is some social distance (i.e., Wolfson's bulge group), the closing section might be prolonged. This is particularly the case if the participants have not interacted together for some time and also if the reason for the call involves emotive acts such as thanking or apologizing. In the latter case, expressions of thanks or apologies are stated numerous times by one participant and usually rejected an equal number of times by the other. This can be seen in example (26), where the initial closing signal (turn 23) lies quite distant from the actual termination of the conversation. As suggested earlier, however, the occurrence of shorter or lengthier endings seems to be also tied to the age of participants.

(26)

23 C *así que le agradezco harto*
'so thank you very much'

24 A *no tiene de qué Luchita*
'don't mention it Luchita'

25 C *llamé para eso Marianita (.) para agradecerle harto*
'I called for this reason Marianita (.) to thank you very much'

.
.
.

45 C */gracias Marianita/que pase usted bien*
'/thank you Marianita/I hope that you will be all right'

46 A *gracias (.) igualmente hasta/luego/*
'thank you (.) likewise good/bye/'

47 C */gracias/ mija*
'/thank you/dear'

Through repetition, the force of the utterance, that of expressing gratitude in this case, appears to be strengthened.

Tannen (1989) discusses various types of repetition and the functions they may accomplish in conversation. A global function she considers, which seems to apply to the Ecuadorian Spanish examples, is that of repetition 'creating personal involvement' (Tannen, 1989: 52). She,

however, suggests that '... the degree and type of repetition differ with cultural style' (1989: 78). The duplication of utterances (e.g., *ya ya okay*) in Ecuadorian Spanish might, in fact, have its roots in the Quechua language spoken in the Andean region, as Toscano (1953) has suggested in relation to other forms. According to him, forms are duplicated to emphasize the meaning conveyed, and this procedure, he claims, derives from Quechua (Toscano 1953: 103).

Other signs of connectedness

In addition to thank you and farewell utterances, other terminal exchange utterances employed in Ecuadorian Spanish are welfare wishes, as in the following example:

(27)
17 A *que pases /bien chao/*
'I hope that you'll be all right'
18 C */chao que/ estés bien*
'/bye I hope/that you'll be all right'

These wishes are sometimes softened through the attachment of a diminutive, as in *que pase buenita*, so as to display even more concern.

Welfare wishes are often accompanied by expressions of pleasure of the interaction, as in example (19) (turns 21 and 22) or the following conversation:

(28)
35 A *que pase bien gusto de saludarle*
'I hope that you'll be all right it was a pleasure speaking to you'
36 C *ya mucho gusto*
'okay much pleasure'

According to Laver (1975: 230), expressions of this type have a consolidating function in face-to-face interactions, that is, they serve to consolidate the relationship between the interactants.

Promises to meet or talk again are sometimes also uttered together with or preceding a farewell utterance, as in examples (29) and (30).

(29)
22 C *nos vemos chao*
'we'll see each other bye'

(30)
47 A *ya hemos de hablar*
'we shall talk some time'

Availability for future encounters can also be displayed deferentially, as in the following example from a conversation between two women in the older group, who are only slightly acquainted with each other:

(31)
31 A *alguna vez por ahí me he de ir a molestarle*
'I might come and trouble you some time'
32 C *ya señora me tiene a las órdenes*
'okay Mrs you have me at your command'

These utterances appear to offer reassurance as to the continuation of the relationship. Goffman (1971) refers to utterances of this type in face-to-face interactions as 'supportive exchanges' which pave the way for future encounters. Albert and Kessler (1976), on the other hand, refer to such utterances as 'continuity' statements, that is, statements that signal that the relationship will continue after the particular encounter in which the participants are engaged ends, since as they say, '... to end an encounter it is necessary to affirm a non-ending' (Albert and Kessler, 1976: 165). In other words, these and other scholars stress the interactional function of many of the utterances employed in closings.

Summary and conclusions

In this article I have examined the procedures speakers of Ecuadorian Spanish employ to close telephone conversations in contrast to those described by Schegloff and Sacks (1974 [1973]) for American English, and I have illustrated a number of similarities and differences between the two languages (and cultures).

Many of the procedures employed in Ecuadorian Spanish were found to be similar to those used in American English, but their linguistic realizations frequently exhibited differences. For instance, in both languages, participants make use of warrants to announce the speaker's desire to finish the interaction, but in Ecuadorian Spanish warrants appear to be often duplicated and restated. Another difference has to do with the type of linguistic realizations available to speakers. In Ecuadorian Spanish, there is usually a range of forms from intimate or neutral to formal or deferential. In the case of warrants, for example, there are neutral and more formal forms (see also Placencia, 1996).

Concerning announcements, again, similar procedures appear to be employed in both languages—those that appeal to the addressee's interest and those that address the speaker's interest. One difference, however, may lie in the type of justifications that accompany the latter. In Ecuadorian Spanish, for example, general justifications (e.g., *tengo un compromiso* 'I've got an engagement') are acceptable in some contexts, but detailed ones, which indicate that the person's reason for wanting to finish the encounter is beyond his/her wish somehow, appear to be required in others. Concerning the latter, according to Laver (1975: 230), the 'appeal to a compulsion external to the speaker' seems to be of widespread use in English-speaking cultures.

With respect to other types of announcements, the use of explicit devices (e.g., *eso no más era* 'it was just that') seems to be characteristic of Ecuadorian Spanish alone; this also appears to be the case with the use of 'philosophical' summing-up or concluding expressions (e.g., *así es la vida* 'that's life'), which perhaps can be taken as a reflection of the deterministic view of life held by some speakers of Ecuadorian Spanish, which may in turn be said to originate in their religious upbringing.

As in American English, pre-closing offers also occur in Ecuadorian Spanish, allowing conversationalists the possibility of proceeding or ending the conversation at that point.

In relation to closing devices, making arrangements is a common procedure in Ecuadorian Spanish, too, and so is the reinvocation of material mentioned earlier.

Turning to conversational analysts' 'terminal exchange', the use of thank you and farewell sequences is also found in Ecuadorian Spanish. Nevertheless, less explicit farewell sequences, where only one part of the pair can be seen on the surface are often found in Ecuadorian Spanish. Another difference is that farewell utterances are also often duplicated and restated in Ecuadorian Spanish. Farewell utterances in Ecuadorian Spanish were found to occur with promises to meet or talk again too, or with the agreement-seeking utterance *no* 'okay?' produced with rising intonation.

With respect to thank you utterances, and their corresponding replies, the range available for speakers of Ecuadorian Spanish seems to be larger and also includes neutral and deferential forms. Another matter of difference might be who thanks whom and for what. For example, in British English, in contrast to Ecuadorian Spanish (cf. Placencia, 1991), it is the answerer in service-encounter type interactions who often says thank you first, and who thus speeds up the closing process. Yet another difference might lie in the acceptance or rejection of thanks (i.e., whether thanks are usually accepted or rejected), or in the circumstances in which the absence of a reply altogether is acceptable.

In addition to thank you and farewell sequences, conversations in Ecuadorian Spanish also appear to be closed with exchanges of welfare wishes, which, when produced on their own, also seem to perform the function of farewell utterances.

The analysis of Ecuadorian Spanish data also showed that there could be some rather lengthy stretches of talk between the pre-closing offer and the production of the terminal exchange, which could include numerous restatements of the reason for the call in the case of thanks and apologies, for example, as well as expressions of appreciation of the encounter, and greetings for the other participant's family. This would appear to be a characteristic of Ecuadorian Spanish only.

Nevertheless, the occurrence of variation in the length of parting utterances in face-to-face interactions in American English has been acknowledged by some scholars outside conversation analysis. Kipers (1983) (cited in Wolfson, 1988: 34), for example, found that the number of turns in the closing section of face-to-face encounters was highest among casual friends and acquaintances (as opposed to the number of turns occurring between intimates or strangers), and that 'individual utterances were notably longer too ...'. According to Wolfson (1988), the occurrence of these phenomena is related to the degree of certainty/uncertainty participants have about their relationship. It is as though participants who are more uncertain about each other (e.g., casual friends and acquaintances) need to do more elaborate work to carry out what Goffman (1967) or Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) would refer to as face-threatening acts, an instance of which is the ending of an interaction. This rule seems to apply to interactions in Ecuadorian Spanish, too. Age, however, also appears to determine the occurrence of more or less elaborate forms in Ecuadorian Spanish.

In this study, I have also attempted to go beyond a mere description of closing procedures into an explanation of their occurrence in relation to a number of features of context, such as the degree of social distance obtaining between participants, their age, the location of the interaction, the type of interaction, and the frequency with which participants interact. I have provided numerous examples to illustrate the role these factors play in participants' selection of procedure and linguistic realization for different procedures, which show that not only there is a lot to gain from considering context in the analysis of closings (and other aspects of talk), but that it can be futile not to do so, since as Moerman (1988: 8) and many other scholars have stressed, talk is embedded in the context of its occurrence. Therefore, any discussion of conversational mechanisms in a vacuum can be regarded to be rather unproductive.

I have also emphasized the interactional function closing utterances perform in relation to participants' needs for appreciation and assurance

as to the continuation of their relationship and I have discussed some of the strategies participants employ to deal with the threat to the relationship that the closing of an interaction poses (e.g., the use of indirectness, the expression of agreement, the expression of enjoyment of the encounter that is about to end, promises to talk again, greetings to the other participant's family and welfare wishes). That is, I have attempted to show that some of the devices conversation analysts present as purely mechanistic actually perform a very important interactional function, and, therefore, I have attempted to show that it is not only the practical problems of how to end talk that participants deal with in closings (i.e., how to stop the conversational machinery), but also how to end social encounters without ending relationships.

However, as the present study is based on the examination of the linguistic behavior of one particular social network within the Spanish-speaking society in Ecuador, further research would be needed to find out whether the claims made here can be generalized to other groups of the society. Analyses of a wider range of telephone closings in Ecuadorian Spanish and within a larger number of social networks would thus be needed.

Quantitative research with a focus on particular variables (e.g., the age of participants, the type of relationship between them) to corroborate some of the findings of the present study would also be useful, as the approach to data collection employed (i.e., a qualitative approach which gave access to immensely rich data) did not allow for strict variable control. It would also be interesting to examine telephone talk in relation to other sociolinguistic variables such as sex and class which were not taken into account here, as this study, in the conversation analytic tradition, was not designed to take into account all these variables.

Studies of closings in other varieties of Spanish would also serve to highlight aspects of telephone talk which are culture-specific or more general. Finally, studies of closings in other languages would also be needed to further determine the features of telephone talk that are of a universal character, and to find out whether other closing procedures are in use, and which (other) contextual factors come into play in participants' selection of procedure and linguistic form.

Appendix: Transcription conventions

Numbers:

Each numbered line represents a turn in the interaction. The number on the left corresponds to the actual number of the turn in the conversation from which the utterance was extracted.

Transcription of data:

An orthographic transcription is given, but the traditional punctuation symbols are avoided (cf. Schegloff and Sacks 1974 [1973]).

Letters:

C stands for caller, i.e., the person who makes the call.

A stands for answerer, i.e., the person who answers the call.

Other symbols:

↑ marks rising intonation
(falling intonation is regarded here as the unmarked form and thus no symbol is employed to mark it)

... indicates that there is more talk preceding or following the turn

. indicates that there are more turns preceding or following a given turn

// indicates overlapping text

(.) marks a pause

Notes

1. See Placencia (1991) for more details of the data and the data collection methodology employed.
2. *Okay* is a word that has been incorporated into conversational Ecuadorian Spanish in recent years, presumably due to the influence of the US and of American English. It appears to be widely used by people in the younger generation group (see note 6) in informal contexts; as such it is synonymous with *ya* or *bueno*. In a playful way, some people just utter the initials 'O' and 'K' in Spanish rather than the entire word.
3. See the transcription conventions listed in the appendix. A roughly equivalent translation, which is nevertheless not always idiomatic, is given within single quotation marks to show the reader the procedures employed in Ecuadorian Spanish.
4. PO indicates the example derives from data collected through participant observation.
5. The notion of 'phatic', which is used here in contrast with 'instrumental' is taken from Malinowski's 1972 [1923] notion of phatic communication. These are not, however, completely clear-cut categories, as transactions may have a phatic element (e.g., making arrangements to meet or calling to thank someone).
6. The younger generation group in the study on which this article is based corresponds to participants between 25 and 40 years of age. The older group of participants includes two generation groups—those between 41 and 60, and those between 61 and 80.

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