SMALL TALK IN THE WORKPLACE
A CORPUS–BASED STUDY

This book investigates small talk among coworkers, revealing how it is intertwined with their daily routines and task–oriented exchanges. The study, based on the Small Talk at Work (STW) sub–corpus is culled from the AAC and Non–AAC Workplace Corpus (ANAWC, Pickering & Bruce, 2009). Through a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis, it explores constituting elements and discursive strategies individuals employ when talking at work. It also identifies preferred topics of conversation, along with interaction patterns, greeting routines, and their functions. Moreover, the work examines the influence of gender, humor, and disability on these daily interactions. In particular, the observation of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) device users' access and use of small talk provides a first understanding of the strategies through which AAC device users build and consolidate their membership in their workplace.

LAURA DI FERRANTE

She is an Assistant Professor of English Language and Linguistics at the University of Milan. Editor in chief of *E–JournALL, EuroAmerican Journal of Applied Linguistics and Languages*, her education background and work experience have been carried out both in Italy and the United States and she actively collaborates with research teams in both countries. Her main research interests focus on workplace and media discourse.

LAURA DI FERRANTE

SMALL TALK IN THE WORKPLACE

LAURA **DI FERRANTE**

SMALL TALK IN THE WORKPLACE
A CORPUS–BASED STUDY

preface by
LUCY **PICKERING**

ENGS
16

aracne

aracne

ENGLISHES

TESTI E CONTESTI DELLE LINGUE INGLESI

16

ENGLISHES

TESTI E CONTESTI DELLE LINGUE INGLESI

Tra le lingue occidentali, l'inglese è quello che si è maggiormente evoluto, se non trasformato, fino a divenire la lingua della globalizzazione. Oggi, quindi, non si può più parlare di "English" bensì di "Englishes", ognuno dei quali si inserisce in un ben delineato contesto geografico e storico-politico dal quale ricava e afferma nuove e originali strutture grammaticali e lessicografiche. È il caso dell'anglo-americano, dell'anglo-canadese e dell'anglo-australiano, ormai realtà consolidate e codificate, così come è il caso dell'anglo-caraibico, dell'anglo-indiano e dell'anglo-africano (nelle sue diverse accezioni) che sono tuttora realtà "in progress" e, proprio in virtù di ciò, le più interessanti e innovative.

La Collana intende, pertanto, ospitare studi filologici e linguistici, testi grammaticali e lessicografici che possano coadiuvare l'insegnamento dell'inglese moderno e aiutare la comprensione e l'insegnamento delle letterature che di questi "Englishes" sono espressione.

This book was published with the contribution of the University of Milan.

LAURA **DI FERRANTE**

SMALL TALK
IN THE WORKPLACE
A CORPUS–BASED STUDY

Preface by

LUCY **PICKERING**

aracne

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

to do research. Their commitment to fostering an environment that encourages intellectual exploration and their forward thinking have been instrumental in the realization of this work. In particular, special thanks are due to Dr. Kim Grego for her guidance, encouragement, and vision.

Finally, I am forever grateful to my family, Paola, Ermanno, Carlo, and Luca, to whom this book is dedicated, for their love, and for everything else (ad hoc software were programmed, proofreading was provided, as well as coffee, time, participation, encouragement, unconditional support).

Naturally, all remaining flaws are totally my responsibility.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

When Carrie Bruce (Georgia Institute of Technology) and I conceptualized the Augmentative and Alternative Communication and Non-Augmentative and Alternative Communication Workplace Corpus (ANAWC; Pickering & Bruce, 2009), we were not certain how far and into what areas the research based on the corpus might extend. The work undertaken by Di Ferrante has shown us the breadth of the possibilities.

Di Ferrante has extracted the Small Talk at Work corpus (STW) from ANAWC, i.e., a sub-corpus of small talk in the workplace and quite possibly the first of its kind. As this is foundational work, much of this volume is rightfully dedicated to methodological issues which will serve future efforts in this direction well. A second noteworthy aspect of the book is an in-depth discussion of the very concept of small talk which is, in fact, a remarkably elusive concept. Finally, Di Ferrante presents her "mixer" model of small talk (essentially, a multi-dimensional array of continua) which is itself a significant innovation in the field.

Di Ferrante's study is transdisciplinary and therefore transmethodological, not only combining usefully qualitative and quantitative approaches, but ranging broadly over theoretical stances. For example, Di Ferrante considers and uses both the communities of practice approach and the speech and discourse community approaches (p. 35) resulting in a textured approach that allows the data to shine through. Elsewhere, quantitative methods are strengthened by close attention to detail, and a recognition that qualitative analysis is crucial to determine what needs to be counted quantitatively: "the frequent

laugh of one of the participants, for example, was revealed listening to the recordings to be, in fact, a nervous laughter" (p. 69).

One of the most interesting findings of Di Ferrante's study is that "most of the small talk interactions happen during the workday and that opening and closing small talk exchanges are less frequent than on-the-run talk." (p. 109). This goes against many of the findings in the literature, but is readily explained by the fact that most small talk literature does not focus on corpus data from the same interactants working together for a whole day. After all, in a workday, we greet each other once, but we talk for eight hours!

Other findings are new for the study of conversation and humor research. For example, "as interactions have a higher number of participants, there is a tendency for the presence of humor to also increase." (p. 154). Another finding, that humor is more prevalent in all-female and mixed groups (or to put it differently, men-only group joke less) confirms previous studies (e.g., Pollio & Swanson, 1995) but is significant because of the numerical data and the high level of significance of the difference shown in these data.

With regard to AAC users, as expected, there was less interaction when compared to non-AAC users: "the AAC speakers talk less than their non-AAC counterparts, and when they do, they use fewer words" (p. 170) but more significantly, they "exhibit limited engagement in the recorded interactions". This points clearly to the fact that much work remains to be done on AAC devices, which despite improvements, still fall short of providing full support to their users in this context.

In conclusion, this is a strong contribution to a field in much need of research. Di Ferrante should be complimented for her solid work and for some groundbreaking findings and proposals. As is often the case, innovative work opens more questions than it answers. This is undoubtedly the case with this volume, and we look forward to further work on the subject from both Di Ferrante and others.

<div align="right">

LUCY PICKERING
Texas A&M University-Commerce

</div>

References

PICKERING, L., DI FERRANTE, L., BRUCE, C., FRIGINAL, E., PEARSON, P., BOUCHARD, J. (2019). An introduction to the AAC and Non-AAC Workplace Corpus. *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics, 24,* 229-244

POLLIO, H.R., & SWANSON, C. (1995). A behavioral and phenomenological analysis of audience reactions to comic performance. *HUMOR: International Journal of Humor Research, 8*(1), 5-28.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Talking at work

This book is about non-task-related spoken *interactions* occurring in the workplace. Also, it is about *people* doing small talk while at work. And it is about the *role* of small talk in the work context.

Within any workplace, specific cultures, practices, and also tacit, shared norms regulate what can and cannot be said, which kind of jokes are acceptable and which are not, which topics are appropriate and which should instead be avoided. Some norms are common to many workplaces across the world, norms like greetings among coworkers when they first meet or run across each other, or farewells, at the end of the workday. Some other norms are very much related to the specific country where the workplace is located: For example, a study (Salin *et al.*, 2019) on workplace bullying in 13 different countries, found that both cultural and contextual factors influence the very conceptualization and perception of bullying behaviors in the workplace. Similarly, norms, policies, and practices may vary across workplaces, even in the same geographical area; it should suffice to think of how dress codes are very specific in some contexts — ranging from *formal*, *business casual*, and *casual* — to non-existent elsewhere; moreover, there are professions where uniforms of some sort are mandatory and also identify a specific role or job type, like the military, or the hospital, or the airport.

In this respect, two anecdotes should help convey this idea. A few years ago, I coordinated a three-week intensive program of Italian language and culture for a group of American military in Rome, Italy. After a couple of days, the group leader approached me apologizing for

one of the other students wearing bermuda shorts to class and informed me that he had formally reprimanded his colleague and warned him to wear more appropriate clothes in the future. When I tried to explain that I had not noticed the outfit of the other student and that anyway it was customary for students in Italy to wear bermuda shorts in Rome's hot weather (it was a very warm April), he said that they were students of that intensive program in their military capacity, and because of this, it was not acceptable for them to represent their institution in bermuda shorts. The second anecdote refers to my very first day in Texas as a doctoral student. It was the first week of August and it was extremely hot, even at night. In the morning of another sunny day in Texas, I walked to the campus as I wanted to start familiarizing myself with my new workplace. Since the semester had not started yet, I met very few people during my walk. As I entered the building of my Department, I saw someone working in an office with an open door. I timidly knocked on the door and introduced myself. The woman in the room welcomed me with a southern, warm, happy greeting, and introduced herself as one of my soon-to-be Professors. She was wearing a pink, sleeveless t-shirt and high-waisted denim shorts. While I had not paid attention to my student's bermuda shorts, I did notice the professor's women's shorts. In my previous job at an Italian university, this attire was uncommon among professors, and my previous experiences clearly informed my perceptions and attitudes. However, it is worth mentioning that after a few months in Texas, I became accustomed to a much broader spectrum of clothing choices.

These two anecdotes should make it clear that many variables inform workplace norms and such variables include status (in my example, student vs. professor), country (and therefore culture), but also temporary and contextual conditions (e.g.: the weather), the type of institution (e.g. the military vs. the university), each individual's experience of the world, and so many more.

Workplace practices also depend on the organizational structure of the workplaces, i.e., whether or not they are primarily hierarchical. The variety of policies and procedures informs the interactions among coworkers, along continua that range from formal to familiar, from

mostly work-related interactions to mostly everyday talk, from all-day-long spoken conversations to sporadic ones, from conversations involving only coworkers to exchanges also involving customers or third parties.

Workplace talk is hence influenced by a fair amount of circumstances; coworkers engage every day in a multitude of types of discourse and topics, which depend on the aforementioned variables, but also on the specific characteristics of the speakers. In this context, small talk in the workplace is a specific type of discourse, inherently different from small talk engaged in non-workplace situations (see, for example, small talk at parties: Schneider, 1988; and at the coffee place and other types of informal settings: Ventola, 1979). The distinctive characteristics of small talk in the workplace mainly depend on its speakers, because their relationships are strictly connected to them being coworkers: their linguistic and social behaviors are influenced and shaped by the workplace culture, its rhythms, and practices; in other words, their rapport is not authentically (and solely) social as that of, say, two strangers at a bus stop: in fact it is determined by the working environment, broadly conceived as the office setting, interpersonal dynamics, power roles, etc. From sociolinguistic, socio-rhetorical, and ethnographic perspectives, the community of coworkers is very composite and their discourses are influenced by such a plethora of variables that hardly does one of the concepts of community of practice, discourse community, and speech community entirely cover the complexity of characteristics of a workplace community.[1]

In this book, an investigation of small talk in workplace settings is presented to illustrate how coworkers engage in non-task related discourse, how it "infiltrates" their workdays, what discursive strategies are developed, which topics are preferred, and how gender and disability inform coworkers' discursive routines.

The spoken interactions analyzed here are from the Small Talk at Work (STW) corpus, which is culled from the Augmentative and Alternative Communication and Non-Augmentative and Alternative

---

[1] For discussion on the concept of workplace community, see Ho-Beng *et al.,* 2006; Marra, 2012; Shamir, 1981.

Communication (AAC and Non-AAC) Workplace Corpus (ANAWC, Pickering and Bruce, 2009; Pickering *et al.,* 2019), an over one-million-word collection of spoken interactions from six different U.S. workplaces. For individuals who have difficulties in expressing themselves through natural speech, augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) presents a solution to facilitate their engagement with others. AAC encompasses diverse modalities, including sign language, spelling boards, and electronic tools, allowing individuals to fulfill both verbal and written communication requirements in a workplace setting. Portable speech-generating devices allow users to compose messages through the selection of pictures, letters, words, or sentences. These devices can be operated through various means such as touch, eye gaze, or switch input.

The ANAWC corpus is particularly novel and interesting as not only does it provide a wide range of workplace typology—and hence a multitude of diversified interactional situations and dynamics—but it also comprises both AAC and non-AAC speakers, who were entrusted to record their workday interactions with over 160 interlocutors.

1.2. The size of small talk

Typing *small talk* in quotation marks in the search engines of some of the major online book retailers and digital databases will result in a moderately large quantity of titles on how to become successful in relationships by learning the art of small talk. The ability to engage in small talk and keep it going is sold as the key to professional success, personal effectiveness, relationship mastery, and social comfort. But what is *small* about small talk? There seems to be consensus on the uncomplicated character of small talk: everyone can engage in it and it does not require any particular knowledge or expertise. The degree of complexity, hence, partly accounts for the smallness of small talk. In addition, the seemingly trivial nature of small talk is emphasized as a basic characteristic of the successful social being: The author of one of those books maintains that her goal was to learn small talk strategies in

order "to figure out how to keep a conversation going for more than five minutes" (Fine, 2005, p. xii); this suggests that length is not the reason why this kind of talk is small.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Arnold Bennet was one of the first to use the expression *small talk*. In his *Tales of Five Towns*, he wrote: "'Will Harry be late at the works to-night again?' she asked in her colder, small-talk manner, which committed her to nothing" (Bennet, 1905, p. 22). In this citation, small talk is used as a modifier for "manner", and it seems to convey a sense of casual, unplanned talking. Along these lines, small talk seems to be connected to distance toward both the interlocutor and in regard to the topic at hand; the idea of distance is in fact embossed in the notion of *weather* as the stereotypical topic for small talk. However, interpersonal and referential distance is not a plausible defining characteristic for small talk as it occurs very often among intimates or acquaintances; therefore its smallness is not a matter of little intimacy either.

When approaching the study of gossip, Bergmann (1993) claimed that "what is familiar is not yet understood" (p. 7). In the same way, *small talk* is a commonly used phrase to refer to a pervasive mode of interaction, and yet its anatomy, contents, and mechanisms are still vague: it is often used as an umbrella term to refer to interactions in which people talk about anything with anybody, in various situations. Schneider (1989) noticed that small talk is "the art of talking about nothing" (p. 437): its undemanding nature makes it versatile and apt to be used in many situations and among different interlocutors to avoid silence, but also conflict. The ductility of small talk may have led to the equivalence between small and unimportant, meaningless talk. According to the 2023 data of the US Employment Situation Summary of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average time spent at work by employees is 43.7 hours per week (United States, Bureau of Statistics, 2023). In other words, many people spend a very large portion of their adult lives at work, interacting with other people who are coworkers or clients and a very large number of these interactions are simply not work-related. In the last thirty years or so, research has been focusing on small talk in specific workplaces and among specific interlocutors

with different social and hierarchical roles. A conspicuous number of studies has for example investigated service and medical encounters (Coupland *et al.,* 1994; Friginal, 2009; Staples, 2016, Van De Mieroop, 2016 and many more) because they are very relevant in terms of successful communication (Friginal, 2022) and of patient-centered care (Staples, 2015), but also because small talk interactions might be problematic in that they might collide negatively with the on-task talk (Benwell & McCreaddie, 2016).

Small talk seems not only to be relevant to fill the silence, which might be uncomfortable. It is in fact demonstrated that social talk allows people to establish control over "emerging discourse" and "future actions" (see Ainsworth-Vaughn, 2003, p. 454 and ff.). In other words, small talk may provide power in interaction and contribute to social relationships. Thus, framing it and becoming familiar with its mechanisms and contents could prove very beneficial to communication and social interaction.

1.3. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this book is to detail the anatomy of small talk as it is used in a sample of U.S. workplaces. The aim here is to obtain a map of the structure and functions of small talk interactions and their impact on the work experience of different populations of workers.

Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the variables that define small talk, in terms of their frequency and internal hierarchy? The objective for this question is to determine a mostly quantitative, structural definition and a comprehensive description of small talk's elements (number of the participants, topics revolved around, position with respect to work interactions, number of turns, etc.).
2. Are there recurrent discursive patterns in small talk exchanges? The objective is to focus on qualitative aspects of the interactions to identify typical routines both in terms of content (preferred topics,

presence of humor, etc.) and in terms of modes (storytelling, gossip, etc.).

3. What are the differences between Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) and non-AAC users in their participation in small talk? This last question derives from the hypothesis that AAC users develop different strategies from non-AAC users in their involvement (or avoidance of involvement) in small talk interactions.

Currently, to my knowledge, none of the published studies on small talk in the workplace includes the devising of a methodological protocol for a quantitative analysis of small talk features. This gap makes the results on this type of interaction difficult to compare across research projects. Consequently, looking at the anatomy of small talk from a quantitative perspective is one of the main objectives of this work.

The need for a methodological protocol in which small talk interaction functions as the minimal unit of analysis is addressed by my first research question. The analytical dimensions elicited in previous research—such as the kind of topics, the point of the work day or of a work routine at which these talks are undertaken, and their functions relative to social and business dynamics—were developed to be exhaustive and mutually exclusive variables; other variables identified either through the pilot study (Pearson *et al.*, 2011; Di Ferrante, 2012) or through the following close observation of the interactions were also organized in the form of categories and their values were classified. Once the small talk interactions were extracted from the ANAWC—AAC and Non AAC Workplace Corpus (Pickering and Bruce, 2009) — and gathered together to form a small talk corpus, they were analyzed according to the variables identified.

Linguistic behaviors adopted by coworkers in order to create and preserve amicable and pleasant relationships in the workplace are addressed by my second research question. The main objective was to observe, through a qualitative discourse analysis, the modalities through which the participants handle small talk, if there is any

discursive strategy they use as a pattern to do small talk, or any linguistic features that are preferred in coworkers' small talk exchanges. This analysis was intended to be run in parallel with the quantitative analysis, so that it could be informed and supported by the results obtained from the frequency and correlation analyses. I analyzed workplace discourses in which work duties are such that the interactions with strangers were rare and the bulk of interactions happened among people who, in some cases, had worked together for years developing intimacy and discursive routines. More intimate relationships influence the exchanges among people; therefore, I anticipated that coworkers develop strategies and modalities for engaging in small talk that are significantly different from those observed in various contexts such as parties or coffee shops, especially when interacting with strangers. This assumption is grounded in the belief that the workplace explicit and implicit norms and practices influence interpersonal relationships and impact the construction and maintenance of shared and conventionalized linguistic and nonverbal behaviors. This dynamic differs from other contexts where professional roles are either absent or in the background, and where there are fewer constraints in term of information to conceal or avoid sharing.

Studies such as Wang (2006)—who investigated power by analyzing questions in casual conversations—suggested that the allocations of the turns are strictly connected to topic control and to asymmetric relations between the speakers. Thus, I anticipated that specific markers would have been chosen by the speakers to switch from small talk to work talk and that AAC device users would have likely controlled this particular interaction boundary less frequently than non-AAC device users; moreover, where the participants to the exchanges were men and women, the men would have more likely controlled the passage from a talk to the other. I also hypothesized finding back-to-work talk discourse markers that would have specifically determined topic switching.

The concept of face needs, as described by Brown and Levinson (1978), has been applied to small talk in several studies: Schneider (1988), for example, investigated politeness and friendliness strategies,

and Holmes and Marra (2004) looked at face needs as ways of creating team (following the terminology Joyce Fetcher (1999) uses in her work on *Relational Practices at Work*). Through the qualitative analysis, the possibility of customary communicative strategies used to express solidarity and team building was investigated.

The third and final research question refers to AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) device users. From a general perspective, augmentative and alternative communication consists of any method of communication used to supplement and/or to substitute speech. More specifically, with the label *AAC users*, I refer to those people who use AAC devices—such as picture and symbol communication boards or speech generating devices to communicate more effectively. While AAC is helpful in overcoming some of the obstacles created by speech impediments, it has been shown that compared to natural speech, AAC continues to have many limitations such as a slow rate of language production (Higginbotham *et al.,* 2007; Higginbotham & Wilkins, 1999), minor engagement Holmes *et al.,* 2001 in the interaction (Basil, 1992), and the "out of context" (Robillard, 1994, p. 391) problem which consists of the AAC users participating in an interaction when the topic has already been switched. These limitations make the AAC users disadvantaged in the workplace, particularly as far as social interactions are concerned. AAC device users, just as non-AAC users, are fully aware of the importance and functions of small talk, but the devices that produce speech for them are not augmented enough to allow them to interact effectively. I proposed that unlike workers who demonstrate language impairment due to intellectual disability, workers whose complex communication needs are connected to physical impairment can be assisted by technology that will allow them to appropriately access the sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence that they possess. In order to inform the research of new technologies apt to improve the devices that allow people with long-term or temporary language impairments to effectively participate in communicative exchanges, one of the intents of this work was to investigate the barriers in the access to and use of

small talk by AAC device users through the analysis of their role in small talk exchanges.

For this analysis, I used the ANAWC from which I extracted only the small talk interactions in order to create a sub-corpus, on which this study was based. The recordings of ANAWC involve both AAC users with physical disabilities and non-AAC users. To my knowledge, there was no previous publication on AAC users in the workplace looking at small talk; in addition, a quantitative and qualitative analysis like the one proposed so far adds significance to the well-known value of this type of research as pointed out by Holmes in this passage: "it is clearly crucial for workplace success that all workers acquire the sociolinguistic skills which will enable them to establish good relations with coworkers. […] The value of effective socio-pragmatic skills in the workplace cannot be over-estimated" (2005, p. 367).

1.4. Overview and outline of the study

In Chapter 2, the evolution of small talk as an object of study is presented. In particular, the focus is on those studies that investigate small talk in workplace contexts. The architecture of the chapter is designed around specific foci on which different scholars have based their investigations. These foci include but are not limited to topics, functions, distributions, position in the interaction, and production by speakers with intellectual disabilities. In the 20th century small talk as an object of study has had a scattered tradition, but has been examined across multiple disciplines, including ethnography, anthropology, social psychology, and linguistics. The chapter intends to hold together such a variety of perspectives to provide the reader with a picture of the work on small talk as comprehensive as possible.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to the design of the methodology adopted and devised for the present work and with discussions about and data-driven decision-making and the challenges related to working with a spoken corpus. The entire investigation is based on a small talk sub-corpus (STW, Small Talk at Work sub-corpus) compiled from the

ANAWC (AAC and Non-AAC Workplace Corpus, Pickering & Bruce, 2009), which is a 1-million-word collection of spontaneous spoken interactions among coworkers in North American workplaces. The specificity of this corpus is that it includes speakers with speech impairments who rely on a number of strategies – including AAC devices – to communicate in the workplace. Along with established corpus-based methods of analysis, a specific methodological protocol was devised to annotate this particular corpus, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The protocol is presented in this chapter in a way that makes it replicable in other studies. This chapter also includes the description of the methodological protocol built *ad hoc* for this research; the description includes information regarding the identification of the variables and their values and observations related to the inherently iterative quality of a process that needs multiple testing and adjustments to be set up in a definite manner.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to quantitative and qualitative analyses. In this section, frequencies are analyzed and discussed. The results of the quantitative analysis are used to inform the qualitative discourse analysis of specific interactions analyzed in detail. The close observation of specific exchanges accounts for the study of pragmalinguistic and context-bound discourse mechanisms. Where possible, the findings are compared with the results obtained in previous studies and in particular, are related to the findings emerged from the Wellington Language in the Workplace Project (Holmes, 2000a, 200b; 2003; 2005; Holmes & Fillary, 2000; Holmes *et al.,* 2000; Holmes & Marra, 2004; Holmes & Stubbe, 2003; Marra, 2002; 2012; Stubbe, 2000, 2001; Stubbe *et al.,* 2003).

Chapter 5 extensively examines greetings, which are a significant component of small talk interactions in the corpus. The initial section critically reviews existing multidisciplinary research on greetings, aiming to establish a systematic description of their nature, structure, and functions. Emphasis is placed on distinguishing between passing and extended greetings. The latter part of the chapter focuses on the analysis of the interactions. In quantitative terms, the most common words and n-grams in greeting interactions are extracted and discussed.

Additionally, four specific types of greetings, which are prevalent in the corpus, are analyzed and their characteristics elicited by examining relevant interactions.

Chapter 6 focuses on the presence of humor within interactions, scrutinizing the corpus to assess the frequency and placement of humorous exchanges among coworkers. Furthermore, the quantity of humorous instances is examined in relation to the distribution of speakers by gender. Notably, intriguing findings emerge regarding the variability in the quantity of humor based on the specific types of interactants involved.

In Chapter 7, the analysis focuses on workers who have complex communication needs and talk through voice output communication devices, namely Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) or by vocalizing. The analysis of how they interact (or not) with other coworkers in small talk interactions in the workplace, on the one hand sheds light both on the challenges that people with disabilities face in building interpersonal relationships at work. On the other hand, it elicits communicative strategies utilized by AAC speakers to be part of the work community. The results aim at contributing to the development of technology that improves verbal and non-verbal communication for AAC users.

The work ends with Chapter 8, an overall discussion on the findings and some conclusions based on the results of the analyses. Some reflections on the significance of this study, its limitations and its future developments are also presented.

SMALL TALK STUDIES

The aim of this chapter is to delineate and critically map the development of small talk research, specifically focusing on its use within workplace contexts from a linguistic perspective. After a brief description of the diachronic progression of studies related to small talk, the subsequent sections are organized thematically and explore definition issues and the characterizing elements of small talk by examining how these were analyzed in the main studies on the subject.

2.1. A diachronic overview of the research on small talk

At the beginning of the 1920s, the renowned Polish-British ethnographer, Bronislav Malinowski identified *phatic communion* as a study subject. Forty years later, the linguist Roman Jakobson (1960) identified *phatic* as one of the six functions of language in his well-known communication model. However, more time had to pass before the intuitions of the ethnographer and that of the Russian linguist inspired more in-depth studies on this type of everyday talk.

Toward the end of the Seventies, three important articles drew attention again to the topic of small talk: Judith Beinstein's (1975), John Laver's (1975), and Ejia Ventola's (1979). In Beinstein's paper, the construction *small talk* is used in an academic context for the first time. The scholar reflected on the possibility of considering public conversations as indicators of the social cohesiveness of a community. In particular, she defined small talk along two dimensions: the topics of interpersonal exchanges and the nature of the relationship; she denoted small talk as those "superficial exchanges about the weather,

news, and health" (Beinstein, 1975, pp. 147-148) that do not require the presence of "mutual trust and/or attraction" in contrast to "deeper conversation[s]" (p. 148) in which disagreement or conflict can arise. Laver looked at the phenomenon from a different perspective: He focused on the boundaries of spoken exchanges and showed that the function of the "communicative behavior that accompanies and includes phatic communion is the detailed management of interpersonal relationships during the psychologically crucial margins of interaction" (Laver, 1975, p. 217). Ventola's analysis revolved around *casual conversation*, defined as "verbal interaction in casual encounters" (1979, p. 268), those "everyday encounter situations where two or more participants meet without a specific purpose" (p. 267).

These early studies on small talk were followed by more research by individual scholars, who addressed the subject from different perspectives and contributed to establishing it as a study subject. At the end of the Twentieth century, three dissertation-level works on small talk were carried out by Traynowicz (1981), Schneider (1988), and Risako Ide (1998).

For several years, Ventola's work had been the last study on relational talk. In the 1980s and 1990s, only few studies were conducted on this subject: Fawcett's in 1984 and in 1992, the journal *Language in Society* featured a study by Coupland, Coupland, and Robinson who joined the debate on small talk both by assembling and discussing the major works published until then and by conducting a study with a negotiation perspective in which older people were asked the scripted question *How are you?* at the beginning of medical visits. The remaining works in those years are doctoral dissertations. In 1988, Klaus Schneider's dissertation was published. In the study, he was able to determine a prototypical model for conversation sequences and he also demonstrated how small talk fulfills some pragmatic functions both in public and in private settings. In 1991, Laurel Lynn Traynowicz wrote a dissertation that revolved around small talk; the focus was on communicative variables and linguistic features — such as the use of "we" — as indicators of different communicative behaviors between intimates and strangers in small talk interactions. Finally, in

1998, Risako Ide analyzed small talk in service encounters through an ethnographic study for her dissertation at the University of Texas at Austin. In the study, small talk is distinguished from transactional talk, and she analyzed small talk formulas, participants, topics, distribution, functions, and the humor involved in the conversations. This research embraces many aspects of small talk interaction and the author's ultimate remark is that of having "provided a new perspective on the notion of speech community that is emerging within complex, urban societies […]" (Ide, 1998, pp. 239-240). In the same year, a preliminary article based on the work of the Wellington Project group was published. The paper was authored by Janet Holmes, who, from that moment on, led a large amount of mainstream research on workplace discourse and small talk. Her 1998 paper was titled, *Oiling the wheels at work:* This has been a fortunate metaphor, which has been re-used in many studies on small talk in the workplace to underline the role of small talk as facilitator in both social and transactional relationships among the participants in exchanges in workplace contexts.

In the 2000s, small talk completely established its position as an important subject to understand personal relationships, to analyze linguistic community dynamics, particularly in the context of workplace discourse. The interest of scholars in small talk exchanges among coworkers and between workers and customers in different situations (doctor-patient, cashier-customer, etc.) characterized a new branch of linguistic study on small talk as a "big deal" (Holmes, 2005, p. 344) for its sociolinguistic, sociocultural, and pragmatic importance (Coupland, 2000a); not to mention its multifunctionality within social relationships and interactions (Holmes, 2000a). The workplace is almost always the site of asymmetric power relationships between people and, as pointed out by Coupland (2000a) "[small talk] is an intrinsic part of the talk at work complex" (p. 6). Two of the most comprehensive works in English on small talk are the collection of studies in the book *Small Talk* edited by Coupland in 2000, and the series of studies of spoken interaction in New Zealand workplaces by a team of researchers at Victoria University of Wellington (Holmes, 2000a; 2000b; 2003; Holmes & Fillary, 2000; Holmes & Marra, 2004;

Stubbe *et al.*, 2003). Moreover, the Wellington Language in the Workplace Project (WLP) is one of the very few projects exploring a corpus widely, considering multiple aspects of small talk in the workplace.[1] The WLP team collected the recordings of approximately 2,000 interactions in 16 different workplaces (government departments, factories, a plant nursery, a recycling business, private commercial organizations, and semi-public organizations; see Holmes, 2000c) between the years 1996 and 2000; this corpus represents today the source of data for many studies on small talk in the workplace (Holmes, 2000a; 2000b; 2000c; 2003; 2005; Holmes & Fillary, 2000; Holmes & Marra, 2004; Holmes & Stubbe, 2003; Stubbe, 1998). The methodology for the collection of the corpus consisted in entrusting the recordings of both business and social interactions to the participants themselves: The recording equipment was worn by some participants and positioned on the desk by some others (for extensive descriptions of the methodology see Stubbe, 1998; Holmes, 2000c).

An additional branch of the studies on small talk is represented by Koester's work (2004; 2006; 2010) on workplace discourse; the part of her research dedicated to small talk is based on the ABOT (American and British Office Talk) corpus that is a sub-corpus consisting of "generic stretches of talk" (Koester, 2010, p. 24): 66 conversations and 34,000 words. Koester has centered her analysis mainly on "informal, unplanned workplace interactions between coworkers in office settings" (Koester, 2010, p. 13). In addition, Handford, who compiled and examined the CANBEC – The Cambridge and Nottingham Business English Corpus (almost one million words of business discourse), does not investigate specifically small talk but refers several times to it while describing and discussing specific phases before, after, and even during business meetings (Handford, 2010). Moreover, he compares the language of business meetings, as emerged from the CANBEC, to "everyday language" (Handford, 2010, p. 95) from the SOCINT (Socializing and Intimate) sub-corpus of CANCODE

---

[1] Schneider (1988) used a corpus of small talk interactions, but it was not recorded in a workplace; the situational contexts were: encounters with acquaintances, party, pub, café, hotel, and theater lobby.

(Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse English) and in particular, he contrasts "negative" (p. 103) and "positive" (p. 105) keywords across the two corpora.

2.2. Toward a definition of small talk

Any reflection and analysis on small talk usually starts with *The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages* by Bronislaw Malinowski. This 1923 essay represents the first time in which someone labeled small talk as that particular type of interaction; as Laver put it, "[Malinowski] crystallized a conceptual area that had been previously amorphous" (Laver, 1975, p. 215). *Phatic communion* is the phrase that the eminent ethnographer used to designate this new object of study and establish its theoretical boundaries: "A type of speech in which the ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words" (Malinowski, 1930, p. 315). This kind of talk was described and its functions explained in a few pages where Malinowski conveyed the sentiment and the atmosphere of a talk in which almost all the people are involved in their everyday interactions:

> The case of language used in free, aimless, social intercourse requires special consideration. When a number of people sit together at a village fire after all the daily tasks are over, or when they chat, resting from work, or when they accompany some mere manual work by gossip quite unconnected with what they are doing –it is clear that here we have to do with another mode of using language, with another type of speech function. Language here is not dependent upon what happens at the moment, it seems to be even deprived of any context of situation. The meaning of any utterance cannot be connected with the speaker's or hearer's behavior, with the purpose of what they are doing. (Malinowski, 1930, p. 313)

Malinowski was describing a talk that is centered on contents independent from practical tasks and related either to restful moments of the day or to moments in which the task at end is manual and allows

people to talk in the meanwhile. He also put forth some of the reasons why this kind of speech is used: "The breaking of silence, the communion of words is the first act to establish links of fellowship, which is consummated only by the breaking of bread and the communion of food" (Malinowski, 1930, p. 314). By ascribing to phatic communion this function of filling the silence, he presented the first moves people do toward a "full" (Coupland, 2003, p. 1) interaction. Drawing on this interactional function, Malinowsky pointed out that this kind of talk is composed of "purposeless expressions of preference or aversion, accounts of irrelevant happenings, comments on what is perfectly obvious" (Malinowski, 1930, p. 314). In other words, it is what today is commonly and erroneously (Schneider, 1987) referred to as talking about "nothing" (Bergmann, 1993, p. vii) or "talking for the sake of talking itself" (Eggins & Slade, 2001, p. 6). Underneath this shell of seeming emptiness of this kind of conversation, further research demonstrated that small talk fulfills very important social, interactional, and communicative functions (Coupland *et al.,* 1992; Coupland, 2000b, 2003; Holmes, 2003; Laver, 1975; Ventola, 1979).

Small talk has often been differentiated from "instrumental discourse" (Schneider, 1988, p. 1), defined as "a form of institutional talk which is not relevant, at least not directly, to the task at hand" (Kuiper & Flindall, 2000, p. 186). Several scholars discriminated among small talk and "task (instrumental) talk" (Ragan, 2000, p. 269), "business- or task-oriented talk" (McCarthy, 2000b p. 84), "transactional" talk. It was also contrasted to "interactional" (Brown & Yule, 1983 p. 1; Koester, 2004, p. 1407) as well as to "institutional" (Drew, 2002, p. 482), and set in opposition to "'real', 'full', 'serious', 'useful', or 'powerful' talk" (Coupland, 2003, p. 2).

The identification of the types of talk that are deemed as *not* being small talk serves to underline some of the problems researchers face when attempting a definition of this subject of study. The inconsistency of some of the features of small talk's anatomy makes even more complex its definability: The contexts of use are heterogeneous; there is a great variety and variability of formulas,

participants, topics, functions, position within the wider interactions; there are fluctuations of the levels of intimacy among the speakers, their number, power and gender dynamics, let alone the differences between "small talk which occurs at work [which] is not exactly 'the same' as small talk outside work" (Koester, 2010, p. 15) and "across national varieties of English" (Schneider, 2008, p. 132).

The role of small talk in workplace contexts challenges the idea of small talk as marginal both in terms of its position in the interactions and in terms of its importance in the workplace routines. Researchers stressed that underneath the shell of the seeming emptiness, small talk fulfills very important social, interactional, and communicative functions (Coupland, 2000b; 2003; Coupland *et al.,* 1992; Holmes, 2003; Laver, 1975; Ventola, 1979). In her introduction to Coupland (2000b), entitled and entirely dedicated to small talk, Justine Coupland reviewed phatic communion stressing the accent on its "peripheral" (2000b, p. 1) nature. Coupland's main point is that small talk is not of "small" importance from a sociolinguistic and sociocultural point of view, in addition, it is also relevant from a pragmatic, social, and even "human" perspective: "'simple, desultory conversation' has a significance that is anything but marginal. […] It defines the basic parameters and possibilities of social exchange […]" (Coupland, 2000b, p. 4). Similarly, Holmes challenged the concept of small talk as merely non-task oriented or purposeless: she noticed that other than its proper social functions, it can be also referential because,

> talk is inherently multifunctional […] Adopting this perspective, 'small talk' cannot be dismissed as a peripheral, marginal or minor discourse mode. Small talk is one means by which we negotiate interpersonal relationships, a crucial function of talk with significant implication for on-going and future interactions. (Holmes, 2000a, pp. 33-34)

This multifunctional nature of small talk and its strict relation with work talk in workplace contexts make it necessary for any analysis of workplace discourse to acknowledge that "small talk […] cannot be segregated from the 'mainstream' concerns of talk at work. It is an intrinsic part of the talk at work complex" (Coupland, 2000, p. 6). In

this sense, the coworkers that engage in talk may be considered as a particular type of community (Ho-Beng *et al.,* 2006; Marra, 2012; Shamir, 1981). However, on the typology of this community, scholars have different perspectives.

For her analysis on workplace discourse, Koester (2010) adopted together the two well-known concepts of *Community of Practice* and *Discourse Community.* Koester found the former "richer and more complex" (p. 9) than the latter. However, she observed a lack of clarity in the formulation by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998). According to them, mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire are essential components of a community of practice. The confusion lies in understanding the role of linguistic and non-linguistic elements in the community's practice. This lack of clarity makes the concept of a discourse community more suitable for operationalization and use in discourse analysis purposes. For these reasons, Koester chose the concept of *discourse community* to look at how the community members use workplace genres. At the same time, Koester recognized that the concept of *community of practice* covers more extensively the social function, as Wenger (1998) does not merely refer to common goals (like in the case of the discourse community), but to mutual (and deep) social relationships. These observations led Koester (2010) to rely on the concept of *community of practice* to investigate relational talk— which roughly corresponds to what in this study I refer to as a small talk, with the only difference that Koester also includes "non-obligatory task-related talk with a relational focus" (2010, p. 97)— and humor in workplace contexts.

Similarly, Marra (2012) applied a *community of practice* framework to the study of disagreement strategies in a workplace where newcomers, skilled immigrants interact with long-lasting members of the workplace community. Specifically, Marra explored the access of the out-group members in the in-group through their comprehension and use of the common norms and the practices, also linguistic, mutually shared by the members of the workplace community. In particular, she examined "learning to disagree in a way which is considered appropriate [as a contribution] to the inbound trajectory

from peripheral to core membership of the community" (Marra, 2012, pp. 1580–1581). Marra found that the attempts of the migrants to disagree were disregarded or reinterpreted by the original members of the workplace community which led to a difficulty for the newcomers to learn the pragmalinguistic norms of the community and therefore to become its members.

2.2.1. *Small talk in the workplace community*

Workplace discourse scholars like Koester (2010), Marra (2012), and Mullany (2006a) applied the frameworks of *community of practice* and/or *discourse community* to the analysis of interactions among coworkers. Swales (1990) distinguished the concept of discourse community (as he delineated it) from that of speech community; through Swales's distinction, it is shown here how workplace discourse necessarily comprises the construct of speech community as well as that of discourse community. In particular, Swales identified three main differences between the two notions of community.

In the first place, Swales stated that the discourse community is not confined in a certain space as its members communicate mainly in writing and frequently from distant places. Conversely, the members of a speech community share a more or less large space, for example the city of New York (Labov, 1966), or Italy (Berruto, 2003), and speech has a priority over writing. Looking at this first distinction, we can see that the workers of a traditional workplace would fit the definition of speech community as far as the commonality of the space—or locality—is concerned, and, as for the means of communication, they would be placed across the two notions as both in presence speech and on-distance writing are practiced in most workplaces.

The second distinction of Swales refers to the linguistic behavior, which in the speech community is culled from the need of socialization and group solidarity, whereas in the discourse community is mainly functional to the pursuing of established objectives. Also in this case, a workplace community would have an ambiguous positioning as it is true that on one hand the members have work to get done and this is

a primary objective in terms of good-standing careers. However, on the other hand, it must not be underestimated that most employees work in an office for many years, and sometimes for life-long periods, and their relationships with the workmates are often as long as their careers. Sometimes, such relationships extend even outside the workplaces, and, in any case, it is common sense to build a good social relationship with a coworker (independently or beyond the needs of the tasks at hand) as much as it is a good idea to build good relationships among neighbors, classmates, or sport teammates. In such a context and also looking at how in the STW corpus small talk worked within the workplace, it would be difficult to maintain that the workplace is 'merely' a discourse community in which as Swales (1990) put it "the primary determinants of linguistic behavior are functional" (p. 471) to pursuing work objectives.

The third reason that Swales provided to distinguish between discourse and speech community stands in the centripetal character of the speech community which tends to absorb its members in the "fabric of the society" (p. 471) and the centrifugal force of the discourse community which instead tends to separate its members into groups of interest. These aspects applied to a workplace are dependent on the typology of the work: in the same workplace, as it is the case of the present study, an administrative manager, a manual worker who mainly fixes mechanic objects (wheelchairs, hospital beds, etc.), two men who mainly load and unload furniture from the track, a volunteer who organizes used clothes and similar things, and a couple of cashiers, all work together. All these people share the same space and are separated by different specialties, but still continuously communicate with each other to coordinate the work or simply to socialize. Moreover, Swales includes within this third reason, the criteria of the membership: adoption, birth, or accident are the ways through which people become members of a speech community, while persuasion, training, or relevant qualification are the criteria through which people are recruited in a discourse community. Even looking at this membership criteria and translating them to the workplace, one community is hardly preferable to the other: it will be easy to think of people who are

qualified for a job, but finally obtain it more by accident and for a series of fortunate circumstances than through persuasion, training, or because they were the most qualified for that specific vacancy.

In sum, the discourses and practices of a workplace go through aspects of the three communities of practice, discourse, and speech and do not perfectly coincide with any of them, but comprise all of them.

2.3. Tokens and topic selection

Talking about the weather is a common expression to refer to mundane and non-compelling conversation. The topic of an interaction is hence elemental to establish the nature of the talk at hand. In this sense, topics have been one the main investigated elements in the research on small talk.

In Laver's formulation, apart from formulaic greetings, the tokens refer either "to factors narrowly specific to the time and place of the utterance or, more widely, to factors in the context of situation in which the utterance occurs which are personal to the speaker or the listener" (Laver, 1975, p. 222). Laver includes in the narrow sense the neutral tokens, which affect both the participants in the context of the situation: weather, comments on the party between guests, on a view between fellow tourists, or on the cleanliness of a train between fellow passengers. In the broader sense, Laver distinguishes between *self*-oriented and *other*-oriented tokens. The former category is constituted by comments related to the personal situation or state of mind of the speaker–themselves; examples would be: "'Hot work, this'; 'My legs weren't made for these hills' (to a fellow country walker)" (Laver, 1975, p. 223). The other-oriented tokens are generally concerned with general questions and observations on the interlocutors' life and condition: "How's life (/business/things/the family/the wife/ etc.?);" or "how do you like the sunshine, then?" (Laver, 1975, p. 223).

The distinction between topics in phatic communion constituted an issue also in the work of Ventola (1979) and Schneider (1987; 2008). Ventola examined casual conversation as a symmetric type of discourse where the participants have non-hierarchical roles. She

introduced the concept of approach (Ap): "Through Approaches we establish comfortable relationships with others. Ap may be realized by topics which we can call safe topics, social niceties, breaking the ice, chats, small talk, etc. It is a means of getting conversation going" (Ventola, 1979, p. 273). She distinguished between two types of approach: *direct* and *indirect*. The former focused on the speakers themselves: their lives, their health, tastes, family, profession, etc.; the indirect approach concerns instead the immediate situation: the weather, current news. In this sense, we can identify an overlap between Ventola's direct approach and Laver's self-oriented and other-oriented tokens on one hand, and on the other hand, Ventola's indirect approach and Laver's neutral tokens. Interestingly, Ventola listed small talk as a kind of topic of casual conversation that is "non-technical and often very trivial" (p. 268): this is the way Ventola referred to topics used in her study as she noticed that they vary and overlap with one another.

Drawing from Laver's model of tokens and personal vs. impersonal oriented utterances, and Ventola's (1978) direct vs. indirect approach (discussed above), Schneider (2008) proposed a three-circle model where the "inner circle" is dedicated to personal topics; the "intermediate circle" to general remarks about uncontroversial topics on the immediate situation (weather/party); the "outer circle" contains all the other references. Schneider's study revealed how each of the three circles used different small talk linguistic features and strategies at multiple levels (*formal, actional, topic, interactional*, and *organizational*); his study on small talk continued with his research group at the University of Bonn.

2.4. Function, distribution, and position of small talk

The functions and positions of small talk have been investigated since the earliest studies as they are crucial to the understanding of the nature of small talk. These elements were examined in relation to situations, places, time of the day and the workday, and in relation to other types

of talk. Malinowski's perspective on the functions of phatic communion were very broad: "words in phatic communion […] fulfill a social function," since they vaguely relate speaker and receiver, "each utterance is an act serving the direct aim of binding hearer to speaker by a tie of some social sentiment or other" (Malinowski, 1930, p. 315). In Malinowski's view, the relationship between the interactants is a core function of small talk.

On the contrary, Laver (1975) seems to have a more situated approach, reflecting on position and functions as intertwined elements and he focused on opening, medial, and closing phases of conversation. He identified three main functions fulfilled by phatic communication:

1. Propitiatory function: it had first been identified by Malinowski and consists of avoiding and preventing the silence, "defusing the potential hostility of silence in situations where speech is conventionally anticipated" (Laver, 1975, p. 220).
2. Exploratory function: it serves to investigate the state of mind of the interlocutor "in order to be able to define and construct an appropriate role for themselves in the rest of the interaction" (Laver, 1975, p. 219) where the role is not already clear from the context. Laver noticed that this function is aimed at reaching what Goffman, (1959) called "working consensus" of the interaction which is a tentative agreement as to whose claims and definitions would be honored according to the different situation. This function was explored also by Schneider in 1987 and renamed *wavelength check.*
3. Initiatory function: it works for the "participants to cooperate in getting the interaction comfortably under way, using emotionally uncontroversial communicative material, and demonstrating by signals of cordiality and tentative social solidarity their mutual acceptance of the possibility of an interaction taking place" (Laver, 1975, p. 221).

These functions identified by Laver are clearly very centered on the interpersonal relationship and seem to be almost concerned with the psychological state of mind of the interactants. Moreover, the way

Laver formulated them, they all seem to be paving the way for the ultimate goal of the interaction, which seems to be separated from the phatic communion. Although separated, Laver's formulation interprets the functions of small talk as affecting the communicative behavior in a broad sense, making them necessary to what comes after: "The single most important detailed conclusion is that phatic communion is a complex part of a ritual, highly skilled mosaic of communicative behavior whose function is to facilitate the management of interpersonal relationships" (Laver, 1975, p. 236).

In sum, Laver studied how people interact and his aim was to decode those communicative mechanisms that smooth and simplify not only the exchanges themselves but in a wider sense the social connections among people. In particular, Laver borrowed the concepts of *index* in the sense of a sign that elicits speakers' personal features as they are communicated through phatic communication. The author maintains that "all the tokens have deictic reference" (Laver, 1975, p. 222). He distinguishes between two senses of deictic reference, a narrower one referring to the actual situation and a broader one.

As far as the functions are concerned, Holmes (2000a) drew on those identified by Laver (propitiatory, exploratory, and initiatory) and pointed out that small talk is mainly used as a transitional device (marks discourse boundaries) or time filler, that also serves to "establish, maintain or renew social relationships" (Holmes, 2000a, p. 49). Small talk is in sum a means of "doing collegiality in the workplace" (p. 51). Holmes also reflected on power dynamics in the workplace context as they are constructed and expressed through small talk; discussing the interaction in which the manager signals the switch to work talk, Holmes notes: "as the superior she has the right to signal the end of the small talk phase of the interaction" (Holmes, 2000a, p. 33), highlighting how the superiors define the situation along with the absence/presence of small talk and /or determining how much small talk is appropriate in every conversation. Within the dynamics of 'doing power' Holmes also records some "resistance to a superior's repression of social talk" (2000, p. 54) when the superior tries to cut the small talk off and the assistant keeps on talking.

While Laver focused on the position of small talk in respect to the rest of the main interaction, other scholars examined it in relation to the workday and the different situations people face at work. For example, a focal study by Holmes (2000a) on *Doing collegiality and keeping control at work* was based on the analysis of 330 interactions (comprising 152 women and 99 men) in four government departments for a total of 121 hours of material. Holmes analyzed small talk distribution and identified the most suitable moments for small talk to be started: a) the first encounter of the day; b) the beginning and end of the meetings*:* "small talk provides a transition assisting people 'to come back to earth' […] after a session of hard work" (p. 43); c) the moment in which the personnel involved in an interaction changes; d) the moment in which people wait for someone or for something to happen.

A further perspective on the position of small talk was related to the different contexts and situations in which random people might find themselves talking with strangers and acquaintances. This is the case of Ventola's work, which consisted of four spoken interactions totaling 50 minutes and recorded "surreptitiously" (p. 268) in casual encounters with people at parties, train stations, coffee shops, and similar situations.

As far as the distribution is concerned, Holmes and Fillary (2000) recognized the first encounter of the day as an "obligatory" site for small talk between coworkers; the boundaries of an interaction and those of the workday were also noticed to be suitable small-talk moments. The book *Power and Politeness in the Workplace* by Holmes and Stubbe (2003) hosts a chapter on small talk, which is mainly centered on the functions and distribution of small talk. Holmes and Stubbe showed that small talk mainly occurs when and where the workers are not supposed to be focusing on work activities. They also added, though, that if, on one hand, places that are not work-places and times that are not working times are the most suitable situations for doing collegiality, on the other hand, they are not the only ones to be used as small talk opportunities. Holmes and Stubbe provided examples of small talk distributed over all the situations listed in Holmes and Fillary (2000) grouping them in two main categories: small talk as boundary marker and small talk inside work talk. In the first case, the boundaries are both

those of an interaction and those of the working day: "in this position it serves to soften the transition to work by attending to the addressee's positive face needs" (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003, p. 90). In the second case, they underlined how the boundaries are rather blurred but the switch between work talk and small talk is still clearly distinguishable, and its function is mainly that of "time-filler and source of tension relief, or informality, during more task-oriented workplace activities." (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003, p. 96). Di Ferrante (2021) explored the use of discourse markers used to specifically signal the switch from small talk to work talk and viceversa. She found that the shifts toward work talk are marked more frequently than transitions from a small talk topic to another. Furthermore, variations in discourse marker selection were observed based on the type of shift.

2.5. Small talk in the workplace

The 2000s mark the end of the discontinuous and non-systematic development of the studies on small talk. Various scholars, from different parts of the world, began examining small talk with a specific focus on its significance in the workplace, and identified the elements and the characteristics of a talk considered increasingly less marginal to workplace discourse.

As a matter of fact, a great part of the debate in the field concerns the characteristics of small talk and work talk, their boundaries, and their relationships. The general tendency has been that of conceiving of small talk as strictly dependent on workplace practices and, for this reason, deserving attention for its sociopragmatic implications in the work routines, as Coupland underlined in this passage:

> The blurring of traditional life worlds—e.g. 'the world of work' vs. 'the world of leisure' becoming less distinct in the information society, but also in the redefinition of some forms of 'leisure' as 'work'—adds salience. In these ways too, small talk merits sociolinguistic attention. Small talk may be expected to feature in the new communicative domains, particularly those of the ever-growing service industries,

which have come to recognise the need for 'relational sensitivity' in the way they market and conduct their activities […] This gives us another strong argument for developing richly contextualised accounts of small talk, as part of a critical orientation to language in social life. (Coupland, 2000, p. 11)

Consistently with this, Holmes's analysis of interactions recorded in government departments (2000a), demonstrated that social and discourse context are crucial to identify small talk, and her analysis showed that the boundaries between small talk, business talk, and other types of talk are not well defined. Holmes believed that it is not possible to identify small talk by merely looking for some features rather than others: "relevance is a matter of degree rather than a feature which is simply absent or present" (Holmes, 2000a, p. 38). For this reason, she placed small talk on a continuum that has been largely accepted by most scholars (see for example, McCarthy, 2000; Mullany, 2006; Schneider, 2008; Tsang, 2008) with core business talk and phatic communion/small talk at the two opposite ends. The two types of talk were defined on four dimensions: *topic, information load, situatedness, orientedness.* Holmes (2000a) illustrated core business talk as characterized by topics that are relevant to core business, full load of information, bound to the context, and goal-oriented. Conversely, small talk is characterized by independence "of any specific workplace context" (Holmes, 2000a, p. 37); according to the author, it has no topic, is minimally informative, and has no relevance for the business of the workplace.

The great majority of scholars who investigated small talk in the workplace agree, although in different measures, on this general perspective where small talk and work talk are presented as on a continuum and not sharply detached. However, on specific traits such as topic and situatedness, research findings differ. In her work on relational sequences, Koester (2004) demonstrated that, in most interactions, relational talk[2] cannot be distinguished from transactional

---

[2] It must be noticed, however, that within relational talk Koester (2004; 2010) discriminated between small talk and office gossip, stating that the former concerns those

talk; in fact the researcher finds instances of small talk at different stages of both non-transactional and transactional discourse: "even our most instrumental, transactional encounters are pervasively organized around multiple interactional goals that go well beyond the transmission and reception of factual information" (Coupland *et al.*, 1992, p. 211).

Discussing Holmes's continuum, Maynard and Hudak (2008), in their final reflections on the study in caregiver-patient contexts, proposed to substitute the continuum itself with two other figures: one that would represent small talk and work talk as parallel and a second that would represent them as sequential. In the former, small talk "can actively disattend to instrumentally oriented and especially embodied practices that are necessary to the work of the setting. […] Such parallelism is small talk in simultaneity with work practices." (pp. 684-685). The second figure they propose:

> would suggest that small talk can actively disattend to instrumentally oriented practices, including those done through talk, in a sequential manner, when there are underway such actions as complaining or recommending that are relevant to the work of the setting, but from which the recipients of such actions wish to withdraw. This is small talk in sequential relationship with work practices. (Maynard & Hudak, 2008, p. 685)

It seems clear, though, that Holmes (2000), with her continuum, proposed how to position singular small talk and work talk interactions, whereas Maynard and Hudak looked at how multiple interactions of both types were related to each other. In other words, the two models seem to refer to different objects of workplace discourse and therefore they do not exclude each other.

The importance of small talk interaction has been explored across many different workplace settings. Cheepen (2000), for example, investigated relational talk in call centers' telephone talks. She compared both calls between the client and the call center workers and

---

exchanges that are not related to office topics while the latter refers to "off-task talk about work" (Koester, 2010, p. 25).

between the clients and "automated systems" that in some situations have been substituted for the workers but are still programmed to compensate in some ways the absence of a human as an interlocutor. Cheepen demonstrated that the lack of "naturalness" (p. 309) in the talk with the automated system accounts for clients' dissatisfaction toward the service; while small talk is appreciated in human-to-human telephone interactions, it is perceived as "at best an irrelevance and at worst an impediment to full usability" (p. 309) in the case of human to machine interaction. More than half of the studies published in the book edited by Coupland (2000) pertains to the occurrence of small talk in the workplace, observed from several diverse perspectives and approaches that intertwine with one another: Kuiper and Flindall (2000) investigated discourse at supermarket checkout encounters to identify the individual linguistic behaviors of the operators. In a context different from New Zealand, we can read Michael McCarthy's study (2000) based on a spoken corpus (the CANCODE, Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English) of exchanges in two different types of encounter services: the hairdresser (in England) and the driving lesson (in Ireland). Not only did he find some differences in the amount of small talk in the two situations, but he was also able to show a connection between specific conditions of space and time and the engagement in small talk exchanges. Tracy and Naughton's (2000) study was aimed at analyzing small talk in institutional settings through different "academic lenses" (pp. 62-83) using four different meta-talk concepts: a) *phatic communion* vs. *communication*; b) *task* vs. *socioemotional behaviors* c) *content/relational and message/metamessage*, and d) *talk as identity-work.* The authors conceive talk itself as the "place in which people establish and challenge who they are as individuals and as groups." (Tracy & Naughton, 2000, p. 80). An additional work in Coupland's (2000) book is the one by Ragan (2000) who demonstrated that in many circumstances, in women's health care environments, small talk is fundamental for the accomplishment of the physicians' medical objectives and outcomes. Ragan explored women-only interactions (female patients and female caregivers) and showed that the relationship and task-related components are not detachable

and that the former is present even if small talk is not engaged. Ragan also argued that small talk is "a component of the relationship dimension that psychologically characterizes the entirety of the discourse and which, therefore, could be argued as being the more important, more serious, more believable and more authentic part of the message" (p. 283).

Also other works, in the United States, explored small talk in workplace contexts. Mirivel and Tracy (2005) studied the interactions occurring in a nine-month long period in a meeting room before work meetings of a nutrition corporation started. The interactions were videotaped and Mirivel and Tracy identified four kinds of premeeting talk: *small talk, work talk, meeting preparatory talk*, and *shop talk*.[3] They discuss boundaries and relationships between these talks adding to the general reflection on the variable of "visible behaviors" (p. 29) that they were able to analyze thanks to the videotape and that revealed the contribution of what people eat, drink, and do to what they say. Differently from Ragan (2000) and Mirivel and Tracy (2005) who, in different ways, see work talk and relational talk as intertwined, Maynard and Hudak (2008), whose research focused on doctor and patient interactions, see the two types of talk as separated and positioned either as parallel or as sequential. As a matter of fact, they demonstrated how small talk is used as a strategy to "disattend" (p. 662) to the job at hand, in terms of "push[ing] instrumental tasks […] to the background of that talk." (Maynard & Hudak, 2008, p. 662).

Like in the United States, in Europe research on small talk in the workplace has been conducted in the years following Coupland's (2000a) collection. In the United Kingdom, Mullany (2006a) looked at small talk as a politeness strategy used by women to create solidarity and collegiality. She conducted two ethnographic studies in a retail company and in a manufacturing company where she both interviewed workers and audio recorded business meetings. In a community of

---

[3] Mirivel and Tracy define *shop talk* as talk related to work, but that cannot be considered as work talk: "discussion about people, events, and issues that link to the workplace. It is not talk that is explicitly doing institutional work (work talk), nor is it addressing issues related to readying the group for the meeting (preparatory meeting talk); rather, it is talk about work" (2005, p. 16).

practice framework, Mullany also found small talk as an indicator of women's in-group identity as opposed to men's. Five years later, in Finland, Raevaara (2011) has her article published on a study started between 1999 and 2000 in which 763 encounters at R-kiosk (convenience stores) were videotaped and Raevaara investigated the 182 accounts of dispreference or small talk occurred between clerks and clients. A cross cultural analysis on small talk in England, Ireland, and the U.S. was conducted by Schneider (2008) who used a mixed method, both qualitative and quantitative and the technique of free discourse completion task (DPT/FDCT); he analyzed a total of 90 dialogues, 30 each from England, Ireland, and U.S.A. where the central levels of analysis are turns and moves. Even if Schneider's study does not pertain to workplace contexts, it is particularly interesting for its contribution to the analysis of topic selection in small talk conversations.

2.6. Small talk and language impairment

Although underdeveloped, a further area of application of small talk research has regarded people with communication impairments. These individuals, whose speaking ability is hindered, often resort to diverse strategies for communication. In cases where motor functions are compromised, they may generate speech that deviates from the norm.

Continued challenges for individuals with language impairment include consistent gaps in interaction and slower communication turns, creating an imbalance in conversational reciprocity. Lower initiation rates and fewer conversational turns negatively impact an interlocutor's attitude toward device users (Hoag *et al.,* 2004; Wisenburn & Higginbotham, 2008). The frustration of AAC device users arises when non-AAC users struggle to anticipate the completion of their utterances, leading to misunderstandings of intended topic shifts, word selection, or the endpoint of the utterance (Bloch, 2011). Consequently, workers using AAC are less likely to have their

communication needs met by their devices, impeding their full participation in the workplace.

To address these challenges, researchers have conducted corpus collection and analysis to gain insights into workplace communication dynamics. Corpora such as the Wellington LWP, ABOT, CANBEC, and the AAC & Non-AAC Workplace Corpus (ANAWC) by Pickering & Bruce (2009), which is partly analyzed in this work, provide valuable data for quantitative and qualitative analysis. Holmes and Fillary (2000) looked at interactions in workplaces where some people with intellectual disabilities were present. The starting point of this study was, on one side, the assumption that social interaction is a fundamental competence in a working environment; on the other side, the authors pointed out the lack of sociolinguistic competence by intellectually disabled workers as a cause of their difficulties to be integrated with the fellow workers. This analysis consisted of 84 interactions involving young male workers with intellectual disabilities. The authors traced extracts of small talk within the interactions and were able to identify some typical situations where "workers with intellectual disabilities" (Holmes & Fillary, 2000, p. 273) used to fail the exchange. They categorized these "situations" as topics, distributions, and functions. They also identified as relevant social factors the gender and status. They found that workers with intellectual disabilities usually 1) fail in keeping the conversation short; 2) fail in prolonging the small talk when it is needed; 3) use inappropriate topics; 4) are not able to understand jokes or humorous exchanges; 4) fail in answering the greetings at the first encounter of the day; 5) tend to claim a specific commitment where a non-specific symbolic suggestion is given; 6) generally lack sociolinguistic competence. Similar results were obtained by Holmes (2003) who observed that workers with intellectual disabilities tend to omit small talk: they just do not answer the questions; they also fail the timing by giving short, monosyllabic answers when they are expected to extend the small talk into social talk; Holmes also noticed that they do not seem to understand the social function of small talk. Holmes concludes that the analysis of sociopragmatic skills involved in workplace conversations is valuable to

prepare materials to teach workers with intellectual disabilities strategies to socialize in their workplace.

Although research on AAC speakers is progressing and many technological developments of the AAC devices have been possible thanks to studies that focused on speech, pragmatics, and interactional aspects of AAC communication. Often scholars have worked on case studies, ethnographic reports of behavioral norms, and analyses of conversation dynamics. However, due to a series of limitations, including methodological constraints, there is a gap in the research on the characteristics of discourse used by AAC users in job-related situations and how AAC-based discourse differs from non-AAC discourse in comparable work environments. Pickering *et al.* (2014) found that AAC users in workplace settings develop a set of strategies to communicate at work; many of these strategies are developed in order to not use the device or use it more effectively. The interaction strategies identified include repetition, spelling, relying on listener's guesses, simplified talk, and complementing the machine with vocalizations. As a matter of fact, individuals who are dependent on AAC frequently use vocalizations to fulfill various conversational objectives tailored to their abilities and the contextual dynamics of the interaction (Bouchard *et al.*, 2021; Clarke & Kirton, 2003). Studies reveal that those with language impairments employ vocalizations to engage in real-time interactions promptly, and these vocalizations are frequently favored over AAC devices for specific purposes, including capturing interlocutors' attention, providing swift feedback (e.g., yes/no responses), engaging in back-channeling, exchanging greetings, or making requests for accessible objects (Nunes & Hanline, 2007).

The volume of research is even more limited in regard to AAC users' discursive practices in small talk interactions in workplaces settings. Nonetheless the few studies on this subject provide important information to the understanding of AAC users' discursive practices in non-task-oriented interactions in the workplace. For example, Simpson *et al.* (2000) found that AAC users often refrain from using 'initiators' (e.g., salutations, markers indicating topic introduction and maintenance, topic shifts) in interactions. Additionally, it has been

shown that most AAC users tend to avoid or control small talk and narratives unrelated to work. Bloch further noted that when non-AAC users attempt to anticipate the completion of AAC users' ongoing utterances, they often struggle to understand the intended topic shift, word selection, or the conclusion of the utterance.

However, integrating natural language systems into AAC devices remains a crucial area of research, focusing on incorporating real-life information, personal details, and relationship information to reduce language generation demands.

2.7. Chapter summary

This chapter is dedicated to outlining and examining the wealth of studies on small talk. Starting with Malinowski's work, at the beginning of the Twentieth century, the chapter traces the core steps that contributed to establishing small talk as a study subject. Moreover, through linguistic lenses, the chapter critically explores definitory issues, distinctive features, functions, and core matters of small talk research within workplace settings. The thematic organization allows to map research on specific aspects of small studies and contrast the empirical findings for a comprehensive understanding of the role and impact of small talk in the workplace. The final section of the chapter focuses on the literature on small talk and language-impaired people, which is particularly relevant for this work which is based on a corpus of naturally occurring spoken interactions including Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) users and non-AAC users.

CHAPTER 3

WORKING WITH THE SMALL TALK AT WORK SUB-CORPUS

3.1. Background

A large number of studies on small talk in workplace contexts focused on interactions among coworkers or between workers and customers. Koester (2010) distinguished among two main types of corpus-based analysis of workplace discourse:

1. those such as The Language Project in the Workplace at Wellington (Holmes, 2000c; Stubbe, 1998) and the study on the language of corporate meetings by Bargiela-Chiappini & Harris (1997b) that have not been searched using corpus linguistic computer software;
2. those that have been analyzed through quantitative methods, such as the one by Nelson (2000a) based on the Business English Corpus (BCE), the study on business meetings based on the Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Business Meetings (CANBEC) compiled by Handford (2010), and the studies on the Hong Kong Corpus of Spoken English (HKCSE) (see for example Cheng, 2004; Warren 2004). McCarthy and Handford (2004), who worked on the CANBEC corpus combining both quantitative and qualitative data, similarly to Koester observed that corpus linguistic techniques of analysis have not been fully exploited "to seek out understandings of the nature of SBE [spoken business English]" (p. 169).

The majority of corpus-based studies on workplace discourse are predominantly centered on business talk; it appears that small talk is often marginal or not examined at all in these studies. Three corpus-based projects identified small talk as crucial in their research: 1) the

Wellington Language in the Workplace Project (LWP) in New Zealand, which has a whole area of investigation dedicated to the analysis of small-talk spoken interactions in the workplace; 2) one of the four sub-corpora of the HKCSE that consists "of naturally occurring conversations recorded in homes, restaurants, cafés, cars, etc." (Warren, 2004, p. 115) and 3) the ABOT corpus where Koester (2006; 2010) looked at small talk exchanges. However, so far, a corpus or sub-corpus consisting only of small talk in the workplace had not been compiled or extracted from a larger workplace-based corpus. It is likely that the lack of corpora exclusively dedicated to small talk posed a barrier to the systematic and quantitative analysis of small talk interactions in the workplace. In most cases, researchers observed small talk interactions within broader workplace corpora, prompting them to extract samples of small talk that contained the features under study and analyze them.

A small talk-only corpus can shed light on the patterns and features of small talk and can offer quantitative data to interpret and contrast with future studies. In the conclusion of her 2006 article, Mullany wrote: "small talk is an integral part of workplace interaction, and should be recognized as such" (p. 74). Consistently with this statement, it was a specific objective of the present work not only to recognize the crucial importance of small talk for the interpersonal relationships among coworkers and for the success of business practices and discourses at large, but also that to systematically identify instances of small talk within workplace discourse.

In other words, the primary propelling force of this work was that of filling the gap of a small talk in the workplace corpus enabling a comprehensive exploration of a form of communication which is acknowledged as an integral part of workplace discourse.

3.2. Theoretical framework

In this work, following Meyer (2002) and McEnery and Wilson (2005), I refer to *corpus* as a collection of texts that can be written and/or spoken. It is possible to look at corpora as huge containers of

natural language data that can be observed, compared, contrasted, and counted as they represent a portion of a language. Williams (1996) points out that,

> the function of a corpus is the accumulation of as large a mass of data that allows the linguist to obtain full details of the range of a linguistic feature and its patterns of behavior, related to the language as a whole, in objectively measured terms. (Williams, 1996, p. 6)

Written corpora have been the norm for many years, mainly because of the absence of the necessary technology for the collection of spoken corpora. Römer (2005) noted that even in the present times written corpora are predominant compared to spoken ones, mainly because they are "a less difficult, less time-consuming, and less expensive undertaking than that of a speech corpus." (p. 40)

Spoken corpora development has increased since technology offers much more sophisticated devices to gather reliable data (see Friginal, 2019); spoken discourse corpora are increasing in number, and more and more scholars are becoming interested in using them as sources of data for their investigations (McEnery & Wilson, 2001; Wynne & AHDS, 2005).

Recording technologies that allow the high-quality recording of the spoken discourse of speakers in their natural environment engaged in their spontaneous conversations are a recent achievement, and the huge amount of time needed for the transcriptions of the data is one of the main reasons why written discourse corpora are still significantly more numerous than the spoken ones. Written and spoken corpora have in common the characteristic of being both written down; however, spoken corpora consist of transcripts of spoken material, and this makes the huge difference between the two kinds of corpora.

In order to fully understand the implications related to working with a spoken corpus, it is important to consider that, for example, the transcription of speech includes dealing with overlaps of multiple participants, hesitations, repetitions, and a great number of intonation features such as pauses, tone unit boundaries, and pitch contours (Knowles *et al.,* 1996). It has been pointed out (Chafe *et al.,* 1991) that

spoken corpora's transcriptions take an incredible amount of time (an average of six hours per minute, and even more for a "cleaned" transcription). Transcriptions need conventions and, on the basis of the purposes of the projects, they can be very complex, including non-verbal markers and intonational and phonological annotations. Moreover, a corpus transcription is always developmental as researchers can add further analytical data such as non-verbal elements including laughs, gestures, and proximity information.

The diverse nature of written and spoken corpora not only results in distinct methods of collecting and classifying data, but the use of one or the other is a choice strictly related to the purposes of the research.

3.3. Description of the corpus

The data that inform the analysis in this book are derived from the sub-corpus Small Talk at Work (henceforth STW). Since there was no previously existing small talk in the workplace corpus, the STW was built by culling it from a larger workplace discourse corpus, the ANAWC – AAC and Non-AAC Workplace Corpus (Pickering & Bruce, 2009; Pickering *et al.*, 2019), which comprises more than two hundred hours (221) of recorded interactions. The ANAWC is centered on eight focal participants and their interactions with over 160 interlocutors in seven different workplaces in the U.S., totaling over one million words.

The participants are four AAC users (three men and a woman) and four non-AAC users (two men and two women) in parallel professional contexts. Data collection methods were derived from the *Wellington Language in the Workplace Project* (henceforth WLP) conducted at Victoria University in New Zealand (Holmes, 2000c; Stubbe, 1998; 2001). One of the main issues related to spoken corpora is the reliability of the data as far as the researcher purports to collect spontaneous interactions. As Gumperz (1972) noticed, due to the technological restraints, most of the experiments were either conducted in a laboratory or the linguist was an ethnographer who had an active role

in the process of data retrieval inevitably producing what in the literature is well-known as the observer's paradox: "the aim of linguistic research in the community must be to find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed; yet we can only obtain these data by systematic observation." (Labov, 1972, p. 209). The problem is well presented in this passage:

> The linguist's request to a speaker to produce particular forms of languages may be interpreted by speakers as a request to behave in a certain way […] or to emphasize otherwise some aspect of his social personality, the social implications of linguistic forms thus elicited may seriously affect the validity of the linguist's analysis, for in effect, the question has filtered out significant aspects of the potential corpus of data. (Gumperz, 1972, p. 24)

The size of modern audio-recorders and the high-quality of the audio (in addition to the format and the easy accessibility of the final audio files, easily readable by any computer) allow researchers to complete their research without being present in the data collection setting. For example, both for the WLP and for the ANAWC, the subjects conducted their own recording whilst carrying the recorders with them throughout the workday. In both cases, the participants had complete control over the recording process.

In the ANAWC, data were gathered in six different workplaces in the United States, over five consecutive days (i.e., one week of work) to ensure a wide range of routines and novel topics. Each focal participant (AAC and non-AAC) received $100 for each of the five days of data collection, with a total honorarium of $500. The participants wore a voice activated recorder and a badge explaining to their interlocutors that their conversations were being recorded, and that the equipment could be turned off should it be preferable (see Figure below).
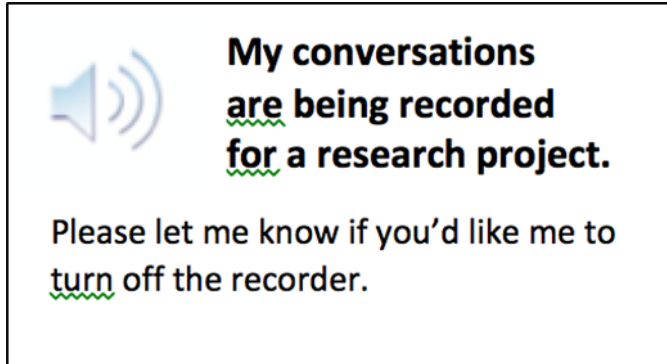
Figure 3.1. Badge worn by focal participants.

Research consent was signed by each participant. Data were transcribed following an enhanced orthographic transcription scheme (Crowdy, 1994; BNC). Details regarding the eight focal participants are provided in Table 3.1. The table is organized by paired ACC and non-AAC participants in each parallel workplace.

Table 3.1. Focal participants and recording information on ANAWC.

PERSON	AAC	GENDER	JOB	TYPE OF DEVICE	ESTIMATE AMOUNT OF USE	NUMBER OF WORDS	RECORDING TIME
Len	AAC	M	Admin Assistant	Dynawrite	20%	78,797	28:56:10
Alex	non-AAC	M	Admin Assistant			175,272	29:30:41
Ron	AAC	M	Parks & Recreation Department Manager	Pathfinder II	80%	9233	11:26:33
Tony	non-AAC	M	Parks & Recreation Department Manager			162,761	44:32:35
Saul	AAC	M	Director of Information Technology	Dynavox V-max	99%	186,853	24:09:56
Katie	non-AAC	F	Information Technology Specialist			101, 643	34:34:15
Sarah	AAC	F	Grant Administrator	EzKeys	20%	106,995	12:10:25
Paula	non-AAC	F	Grant Administrator			247,888	35:43:00

3.3.1. *The STW, Small Talk at Work sub-corpus*

The ANAWC (Pickering & Bruce, 2009) is rather variegated for several reasons: it contains very different types[1] of workplace discourse: meeting interactions, actual group work, phone calls, service encounters, people who talk aloud to themselves while writing a work report, etc. Furthermore, hundreds of people participated in the interactions at different stages of the workday and in different places: sometimes they were at their desk or in the meeting room, other times they talked in the elevator or in the restroom, or on a balcony; some of them worked in a crowded gym; others spent most of their time by themselves in their own personal offices. Besides, sometimes it happened that someone brought his daughter or her grandchild to work and interactions with 5-year-old children were recorded as well.

This description serves to offer a sense of what the researcher is likely to face when dealing with spontaneous conversations recorded when nor them, nor other researchers were present. In other words, if on the one hand the absence of the researcher allows to avoid the observer paradox, on the other hand, recordings do not consist just of work or of those interactions that one would imagine suitable to a workplace.

As mentioned above, the STW is small talk sub-corpus, separated from the ANAWC, which makes possible an approach that allows looking at linguistic features and sociolinguistic phenomena through frequency analysis of exhaustive and mutually exclusive variables classified and compared with each other and with other features and phenomena observed at different times, in different studies.

The Small Talk at Work sub-corpus (STW) comprises interactions recorded by two of the four AAC speakers, Sarah and Ron, and two of the non-AAC speakers, Paula and Tony. Sarah and Paula on the one hand, and Ron and Tony on the other hand, have respectively parallel jobs. The choice of these four participants, out of the original eight, has been determined by a number of

---

[1] For a classification of workplace genres, see Koester, 2010.

considerations. Firstly, it was necessary that the AAC and the non-AAC device users had parallel jobs so that they had similar chances of interpersonal contacts and similar duties.[2] Secondly, it was preferable that the two persons with parallel jobs belonged to the same gender as it has been shown that males and females with the same occupations approached them with different styles (Hamilton, 2011; Nadler & Stockdale; 2012; Rosener, 1990).

In Table 3.2., a breakdown of the total number of interactions and of words of the STW per focal participant is presented.

Table 3.2. STW sub-corpus: focal participants, interactions, and words.

FOCAL PARTICIPANTS	NUMBER OF INTERACTIONS	NUMBER OF WORDS
Sarah-AAC	93	14,247
Paula	143	17,635
Ron-AAC	47	3,211
Tony	140	13,662
Total	423	48,755

The total number of interactions constituting the corpus is 423; the total number of words is 48,755. As far as Sarah's, Ron's, and Tony's recordings are concerned, all of them have been completely scrutinized and every small talk interaction has been methodically extracted and included in the STW. Instead, only the first third of Paula's recordings were examined, so that the number of interactions recorded by Paula was homogeneous to those recorded by Tony. However, it must be underlined that some of the conversations do not involve the focal participant that had the recorder on them. It happens, for example, that AAC users do not participate in conversations that they are recording.

---

[2] Some jobs require one to spend a consistent amount of time on the phone, others in front of the computer. Some jobs are mainly manual and others require the worker to walk to different places, but not all of these differences can be controlled and still exist also among workers who have the same job, particularly if the speech impairment of the AAC device users is connected to physical disabilities that necessitate special accommodations.

On the basis of the literature on small talk in the workplace (see Chapter 2) and on some of the necessities and the constraints related to the present work, some basic criteria have been defined for the selection of small talk interactions and hence the compilation of the STW sub-corpus. Such criteria are listed below:

1. The task-oriented interactions are excluded as they are not considered small talk;
2. Interactions that clearly concern work (meeting schedules, duties, appointments, etc.) are excluded;
3. Phone calls are not considered as the interlocutor is not audible;
4. Greetings are considered small talk interactions;
5. Gossip (Bergmann, 1993) and "office gossip" (Koester, 2004, p. 1407) are considered small talk;
6. When the participants in a small talk interaction operate a sharp switch from a topic to another, the interaction is separated into two different interactions, each dedicated to a topic. The continuity between the two interactions is signaled in the coding database with "tied to previous". Conversely, when the switch is smooth or different topics are handled simultaneously, the interaction is considered as one.
7. If the small talk interaction is interrupted by work-talk, depending on the length of the work talk or other contextual issues, the small talk has been considered either as one whole interaction or as two separate ones.

The contribution of the focal participants to the recordings was voluntary. The focal participants had the option to turn the device off, if needed.

3.4. Designing a protocol for small talk analysis

For this kind of research, it is fundamental to use real language data as it is the only way to observe spoken language as it is actually used by the speakers in natural contexts. Except for a few studies that

looked at small talk at parties or other informal situations such as Schneider's (1988) and Cheng and Warren's (1999b), there is a gap as far as quantitative analysis of small talk interactions is concerned.

Following McEnery and Wilson (2005), *quantitative analysis* here refers to the process through which "we classify features, count them and even construct more complex statistical models in an attempt to explain what is observed" (p. 76). The STW sub-corpus' characteristics are such that it cannot be considered representative (Biber, 1990; 1993) of larger-scale small talk interactions in workplace contexts and the results cannot be extended to larger populations of the same type. However, in terms of frequency and correlation analysis, the results do account for tendencies and the likelihood of patterns and characteristics, with a high degree of certainty compared to the bulk of the research on small talk in the workplace, which offered rich and detailed descriptions, yet such analysis were only qualitative.

After assembling the STW sub-corpus, the following methodological step for the present research was that of building from scratch a protocol for the quantitative analysis of the corpus. A coding system for the corpus was devised: the variables were mostly derived from the literature. The coding was piloted on 360 interactions (135 of which involved AAC users) from the ANAWC by five researchers (Pearson *et al.*, 2011; Di Ferrante, 2012) who coded the interactions independently. The outcomes of each of the five coding were then compared and discussed. The pilot study served to test the coding, to verify the suitability of the variables for a statistical analysis, and to fix the problems related with the descriptors. The pilot analysis also served to test that the operational definition of small talk was compatible with the coding and that it would be functional to effectively discriminate between small talk and non-small talk interactions.

In Table 3.3., the final set of variables and of the values ensued from the pilot study are listed. The table represents the classification used in this work to code and analyze small talk interactions.

Table 3.3. Small talk in the workplace: set of the variables and their values.

VARIABLES		VALUES	
1.	Number of participants	[open cell]	
2.	Gender of participants[3]	1. only men 2. only women 3. mixed	
3.	AAC User Involved	1. yes 2. no	
4.	Topic	1. weather 2. health 3. family and friends 4. free time 5. economy/politics 6. appearance 7. professional life 8. sport 9. people known by at least one of the participants 10. technology /mass media 11. (extended) greeting routine 12. other (specify) 13. food/ drinks/ restaurants 14. recording /research 15. TV shows/movies	
4a.	Topic (specify)	[open cell]	
4b.	Type of greeting	1. passing 2. introducing 3. extended 4. farewell	
5.	Function	1. chit-chat for its own sake 2. gossip /indirect complaints 3. preparatory 4. transitional 5. teasing/joking 6. seeking or sharing information 7. recognition and acknowledgment	
6.	Position in the wider interaction	1. opening interaction 2. closing interaction 3. other (specify) / unknown	

[3] While the gender of the focal participants is known, it is not possible to be sure of the gender of the 160 people the focal participants interacted with. The classification was then based on their names and the pronouns used by the other participants to refer to them.

7.	**Distribution in the work day**	1.	first encounter of the day
		2.	end of work day
		3.	other (specify) / unknown
8.	**New person in the interaction**	1.	Yes
		2.	No
9.	**Situation**	1.	small talk before starting to work/ before a task
		2.	waiting for something/someone; going somewhere;
		3.	small talk during a work activity
		4.	small talk during breaks
		5.	small talk after work
		6.	unknown
10.	**Intimacy**	1.	they know each other
		2.	they are complete strangers
11.	**Turns (number of)**	[open cell]	
12.	**Utterer of initiation**	0.	unknown/ none
		1.	woman AAC
		2.	man AAC
		3.	woman Non AAC
		4.	man Non AAC
13.	**Discourse markers for small talk initiation**	[open cell]	
14.	**Utterer of the back to work talk**	0.	unknown/ none
		1.	woman AAC
		2.	man AAC
		3.	woman Non AAC
		4.	man Non AAC
15.	**Back-to-work-talk discourse markers**	[open cell]	
16.	**Utterer of transition strategies**	0.	unknown/ none
		1.	woman AAC
		2.	man AAC
		3.	woman Non AAC
		4.	man Non AAC
17.	**Transition strategies' discourse markers**	[open cell]	
18.	**Utterer of separation**	0.	unknown/ none
		1.	woman AAC
		2.	man AAC
		3.	woman Non AAC
		4.	man Non AAC
		5.	not marked
19.	**Separation's discourse markers**	[open cell]	

20.	**Humor**	0.	Yes
		1.	No
21.	**Tied to previous**	1.	Yes
		2.	No
		3.	embedded
22.	**Note**	[open cell]	

As shown in the first column of Table 3.3., the final number of variables is 21. Most of these were assigned values within a given range. The second column shows the values, and the third column shows their descriptors. Seven of the variables are "open cell", indicating that it was not possible to pre-establish a range of applicable values. In the following sections, this protocol of analysis is further clarified.

3.4.1. *Data analysis procedure*

The procedure for the data entry and analysis is detailed as accurately as possible to facilitate the understanding of the whole process and also to allow replicability. The data were manually entered in the database according to the variables and their values. Example 3.1. represents one of the small talk interactions in the STW sub-corpus and it is followed by an exemplification of how it was coded in the database:

Example 3.1.
STW, interaction 54

1   Lauren: Diane hi
2   Diane: hey how are you doing?
3   Lauren: I'm so glad to see you [laughs]
4   Sarah-AAC: [voc]

The three Tables 3.4., 3.5., and 3.6. below represent the line of the database[4] for the interaction 54 in Example 3.1. Each line of the

---

[4] For legibility reasons, rows and columns in the tables were transposed compared to the database.

database is dedicated to each of the 423 interactions, whose values on the variables were manually entered.

Column zero, labelled *file and page,* served to record the number of the audio file (which is the same as the transcription file), the number of the page on the transcription file where the interaction is present, and the number of the first line of the interaction. The minute of the file audio at which the interactions started is also noted, to make it easier to retrieve it.

Table 3.4. STW database, extract A: variables 1-7.

VARIABLE NUMBER	VARIABLE NAME	CODING
	INTERACTION	54
0	FILE AND PAGE	Sarah 4, p. 5 L 1690 [16:23]
1	PARTICIPANTS	3
2	GENDER	only women
3	AAC USER INVOLVED	yes
4	TOPIC	greeting routine
4a	TOPIC (SPECIFY)	N/A
4b	TYPE OF GREETINGS	passing
5	FUNCTION	recognition and/or acknowledgement

Table 3.5. STW database, extract B: variables 6-13.

VARIABLE NUMBER	VARIABLE NAME	CODING
6	POSITION IN INTERACTION	Other/unknown
7	DISTRIBUTION IN THE WORKDAY	First encounter of the day
8	NEW PERSON IN THE INTERACTION	yes
9	SITUATION	during a work activity
10	INTIMACY	they know each other
11	TURNS	4
12	INITIATION	Woman non-AAC
13	INITIATION DISCOURSE MARKER	NONE

Table 3.6. STW database, extract B: variables 14-21.

VARIABLE NUMBER	VARIABLE NAME	CODING
14	BACK TO WORK	Woman non-AAC
15	BACK TO WORK DISCOURSE MARKER	NOT PRESENT
16	TRANSITION	NOT PRESENT
17	TRANSITION DISCOURSE MARKER	NOT PRESENT
18	SEPARATION	NOT PRESENT
19	SEPARATION DISCOURSE MARKER	NOT PRESENT
20	PRESENCE OF HUMOR	NOT PRESENT
21	TIED TO PREVIOUS	embedded

The manual entry of the data served to record those elements that are not manageable through a corpus linguistic approach. For example, the manual entry allows recording the discourse markers placed at the boundaries of the interactions or the gender of the participants which cannot be done by a corpus software since, unless the programmer specifically instructs the software, it is not able to distinguish discourse markers at the boundaries of the interactions or elsewhere. This is particularly true if we consider that the boundaries of the interaction are often a convention or an arbitrary decision. Clearly, software can count the discourse markers in a corpus, but not those at the

boundaries of the interaction, unless we have good heuristics to identify the starting points of the opening and of the closing for each and every interaction in the corpus, or unless the opening and closing are manually tagged in the corpus.

Once the manual entry of the data was completed, several phases of database cleaning were necessary. The first screenings served to eliminate typos (such as symbols typed by mistake, multiple numbers per each cell, etc.). Moreover, a thorough double check of all 423 interactions was conducted to ensure the accuracy of the coding. An additional step consisted in addressing the data on those variables whose values were not predicted. This is for example the case of the variable 4a (see Table 3.3.), where the pre-selected topics (variable 4) would not suffice to describe or would not cover the content of the given interaction. For these, the option "other (specify)" under the variable *topic* was selected, When the occurrence of these 'other' values reached or exceeded 2%, they were classified as a separate variable value, which was added and applied. Finally, the last step of database cleaning consisted of the anonymization of the names of the participants, which is better detailed in the next section.

3.4.2. *Notes on anonymization*

Each focal participant and each of their interlocutors were assigned a consistent pseudonym across all the interactions. This mapping was maintained through a separate, confidential table where names, pseudonyms, gender, and audio file were recorded. This approach was adopted to allow future comparisons with the rest of the recordings in the ANAWC corpus. The chosen pseudonym needed to be checked against the actual interactions, to ensure that the pseudonym was consistent with the content of the exchanges. In some cases, the name changing was a challenging procedure as some small talk revolved around the confusion about those name's assonance and the presence of two new workers with similar names. Consider the interaction in Example 3.2.

Example 3.2.
STW, interaction 209

1   Paula: now do you go by Maria or Mary
2   Mary: Mary
3   Paula: okay that's what
4   Mary: it's actually short for Marilyn
5   Paula: that's what I thought 'cause I was telling everybody about you and
6   then we have a Mariah
7   Cloe: oh from Georgia State
8   Paula: coming this afternoon so yes
9   Mary: okay
10   Paula: and so I was trying to clarify
11   Mary: okay [unclear]
12   Paula: that with everybody uhm Charles wanted me to give you a copy of
13   this

This interaction is very appropriate to show how pseudonyms cannot be assigned randomly, as it would compromise the whole sense of the interaction. Looking at lines 1 and 6 of interaction 209 in Example 3.2, we see that for the anonymization three female names were needed that were similar and could go by the same diminutive. This represents also a very good example of how quantitative and qualitative analysis really ran together in this work. Each interaction was examined closely in order to avoid ambiguities and discrepancies of any kind. Moreover, even with the criteria presented in Section 3.3.1 for the identification of the small talk interaction, the personal perspective of the researcher does have a role in the final decision for an interaction to be considered small talk or not. As it was clarified in Chapter 2, and is further shown in Chapter 4, small talk and work talk are sometimes so strictly connected and melted together that it is particularly hard to decide whether to include or not certain exchanges in the STW sub-corpus.

3.5. Building a methodological protocol for small talk: stages of the analysis

The interactions analyzed here are non-task related; they are face-to-face only (no phone or computer mediated exchanges are included) and they occur in workplace settings, but they are not institutional (as defined in Drew & Heritage, 1992); in other words, those investigated here are not specialized interactions occurring in order to complete a task (e.g.: a courtroom cross-examination, a cashier-client encounter; a doctor-patient interaction during a medical visit, a psychologist-patient interaction, a presentation at work, etc.).

For the analysis presented here, it was necessary to listen to the recordings several times, not only to identify small talk interactions and their boundaries, but also because becoming immersed in the speakers' daily discourses offers a better sense of the general situation, the context, and the relationships between the coworkers. It also helped to distinguish between work talk and small talk and to identify the participants in an interaction when more than one exchange was happening at the same time. Moreover, listening to the recordings warranted the possibility of acquiring interpretive clues to the interactions, such as relationship dynamics among the participants, recurring jokes, and expressions. It was also possible to gain insights into the office settings, which was otherwise unattainable, due to the absence of video recordings. For example, by listening to the recordings, it was often possible to understand how the desks were organized (whether in large rooms or individual desk offices), how various employees occupied the office space, and to understand the differences in the types of jobs. This included distinguishing, for example, between those primarily stationed at their desks and those engaged in more dynamic roles around the workplace. All of these pieces of information were often useful for a more complete understanding of the interactions. Although I analyzed only small talk exchanges, monitoring also the work talk exchanges was crucial to understanding and analyzing most of the interactions. One last reason why it was important to listening to the recording is that the transcripts sometimes were misleading and could lead to wrong interpretations:

the frequent laugh of one of the participants, for example, was revealed listening to the recordings to be, in fact, a nervous laughter. The recognition of the nervous laughter and its distinction from the same participant's amused laugh was only possible because of repeated and careful listening to the audio files.

As mentioned before, in this work, the minimal unit of analysis was the interaction of small talk. As shown in Table 3.2, the Small Talk at Work sub-corpus (STW) is a 48,755-word collection of samples of small talk in the workplace. It is constituted by 423 interactions in which 160 speakers interact. As the interactions are spontaneous linguistic events, they are inherently different from one another in length, number of participants, and number of turns.

Some of the variables have been selected based on other studies in the field and adapted in a way suitable to a quantitative data set coding. Additional variables and/or values have been identified in the pilot study as useful for the purposes of this study. In some other cases, changes occurred during and even after the data entry process: for example, in some cases, the interactions did not fit any of the values of a certain variable, or, in some other circumstances, the high occurrence of a certain type of interaction would determine the *ad hoc* creation of a new label. A typical example would be the case of strangers being introduced to each other as a specific type of greeting (see Section 5.4). In the next subsection, the variables used for the analysis in this work and their values are described and discussed.

The bulk of the variables identified in this work are those indicated in the literature as crucial for the definition of small talk. The primary methodological goal was that of determining the portions of conversation that fit the definition of small talk. For this purpose, a first coding sheet was created, encompassing the following variables: 1) number of the participants; 2) AAC user involved; 3) orientation; 4) topic; 5) function; 6) distribution; 7) intimacy; 8) power; 9) number of turns. Except for *orientation* and *power*[5], these categories were

---

[5] Metatextual information in the corpus was not sufficient to determine the hierarchical relationships among the workmates and this made it impossible to consider the variable power. Also gender as an indicator of power dynamics would have not been efficient because workers'

retained in the current protocol, but some of their values were modified.

3.5.1. *Selected variables and their significance – topics*

As pointed out by McEnery and Wilson (2005), the qualitative analysis is often precursor for quantitative studies since a certain phenomenon can be detected through a qualitative study, and the existence of patterns related to it or the possibility of generalization can be then verified by the quantitative analysis on the same phenomenon. In this subsection, the final methodological protocol with the selected variables, as listed in Table 3.3., is presented.

The variable *number of participants* served to quantify the number of individuals involved in each interaction, while *AAC user involved* is a dichotomous variable to record the presence or absence in the interactions of a person who uses augmentative and alternative devices to communicate. In the variable *gender of the participants*, the gender of the participants in each interaction was recorded and the value were *only women*, *only men*, and *both men and women*. Since demographic information was only available for the focal participants, gender was attributed to the other speakers based on their first names and on the pronouns that other speakers used to refer to them[6] (Table 3.7.).

---

status, their roles in the workplace, and other elements — such as age — would have functioned as uncontrollable intervening variables.

[6] While here gender was attributed based on names and pronouns, it is crucial to acknowledge that this method may not always accurately reflect the participants' self-identified gender. People's names and the pronouns used to refer to them might not align with their actual gender identity. However, despite this limitation, employing such an approach proves valuable for identifying broader patterns and tendencies within discursive practices and dynamics, offering insights into societal norms and language use even if it doesn't capture individual preferences with absolute precision.

Table 3.7. Variables 1-3: labels and values.

NUMBER OF THE VARIABLE	NAME OF THE VARIABLES	VALUES
1	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	[open cell]
2	GENDER OF THE PARTICIPANTS	**1.** only men **2.** only women **3.** mixed
3	AAC USER INVOLVED	**1.** YES **2.** NO

With regard to topic selection, the initial analysis of the corpus suggested that in addition to the topics derived from the literature (weather; health; family; free time; economy; appearance; professional life; sport; people known by the participants), a number of other topics occurs quite a few times. The ones identified in the pilot study are *food and drinks*, *technology/mass media*, *greeting routines*, and *TV shows and movies*.

Recording is very specific to this corpus. It refers to the actual recording of the interactions that allowed the data collection for the ANAWC, the general corpus from which the STW was derived. This topic was included due to its frequent occurrence in the interactions, where the recording served as a pretext for leisure talk and humorous exchanges. In the analysis, only those interactions where *recording* was used as a small talk topic were selected. Interactions where, for instance, the emphasis was on explaining the technical characteristics of the recorder, or the goals of the research, or other task-oriented discussions were excluded because they would not qualify as small talk interactions. Even after the exchange of opinions and analysis between five different researchers in the pilot study, the *topic* category remains highly problematic. This is due to the nature of interactions, where the overlap of the values with each other is quite common. For example, small talk about *health* may encompass discussions about *family and friends.* However, these two distinct topics, which are not exclusive, are listed as two different values of the same variable. Moreover, the greeting routine, especially when extended, may contain comments on any of the other topics. Notwithstanding these challenges, information regarding the frequency of specific topics was highly relevant to the mapping of small talk interactions. For this reason, it was determined

to maintain *topic* as a structured variable. The value *other — specify* was introduced to accommodate instances where more than one topic was addressed in the same interaction or where topics overlapped. In such cases, the list of the other topics was recorded in a separate column of the dataset.

Finally, during the coding process, it was necessary to introduce a new value for the variable topic. Upon examining the STW corpus, numerous interactions were identified where the speakers shared personal experiences about their past and/or particular events in their lives. It was then determined that the variable *personal stories* would be added to the list. Table 3.8. below shows the final configuration of the topic variable.

Table 3.8. Variable 4: label and values.

VARIABLE	VALUES
4 TOPIC	**1.** weather **2.** health **3.** family and friends **4.** free time **5.** economy/politics **6.** appearance **7.** professional life **8.** sport **9.** acquaintance of at least one of the participants **10.** technology/mass media **11.** greeting routine **12.** personal stories **13.** food/drinks/restaurants **14.** recording/research **15.** TV shows/movies 16. other

The table provides information on Variable 4, categorized as Topic, and it encompasses a range of specific values for analysis. The values assigned represent different topics addressed by coworkers in the interactions and identified within the dataset. The variable consists of 16 values, each corresponding to a distinct topic, with one labeled as *Other*, designated for topics that were not anticipated in the review of the literature and in the pilot study.

3.5.2. *Functions*

The topics chosen by the participants to engage in small talk contribute to what, according to Holmes, is "the most fundamental function of small talk: to construct, maintain, and reinforce positive social relationships or solidarity between coworkers" (2003, pp. 66-67).

While this is with no doubt the central role of small talk in workplace interactions, in this work an attempt has been made at assembling those functions that had been identified in the literature, from Malinowski on, as peculiar to small talk exchanges. Those functions were used to classify interactions and each of them is considered as encompassed by the general relational function, as explained in Holmes' definition. In Table 3.9. all the values of the variable function are presented.

Table 3.9. Variable 5: labels and values.

	VARIABLE	VALUES
5	FUNCTION	**1.** chit-chat for its own sake **2.** gossip/indirect complaints **3.** preparatory **4.** transitional **5.** teasing/joking **6.** seeking/sharing information **7.** recognition and acknowledgment

The final setup of the *Function* variable includes 7 different values. The first one, *chit-chat for its own sake* applies to those interactions that seem to serve no specific instrumental purpose. Instead, the only goal appears to maintain social bonds and a friendly atmosphere. Clearly the analysis here is based on the discursive and pragmatic elements, which often do not reveal hidden motives or secret intentions of the speaker. In other words, this value was used to code exchanges where coworkers seemed to engage in conversation without a particular agenda.

The second function, *gossip/indirect complaints* is found in the literature and addressed from different perspectives. For example, Koester (2006) distinguishes between *office gossip* and *small talk,* explaining that "the distinction […] is based not on the structure of the talk, but solely on the topic: office gossip is not task-oriented, but involves talk about some aspects of the workplace, whereas small talk addresses topics outside the workplace" (2006, p. 56). In the STW corpus, it was found that while relational talk about the workplace happens often, it is not necessarily gossip. In the present work, *gossip/indirect complaints* was applied to those interactions where there is exchange of information about coworkers who are not present in the conversation, including information that is private and not public knowledge, unconfirmed workplace events (e.g.: firing, promotions,

changes in leadership, projects), coworkers' dynamics (for example, disagreements, arguments, alliances, etc.).

The preparatory function of small talk is found in the literature particularly when relational talk precedes on-task talk. For example, Mirivel and Tracy (2005) analyzed the conversations happening before staff meetings. They refer to *preparatory talk as* "talk that attends to the upcoming meeting". They operationalize it as different from small talk as in their perspective it is purposely built around the necessary topics to start the meeting (see also Yoerger *et al.,* 2015). Drawing on this concept of preparation toward the main work goal, it was determined to attribute a *preparatory* function to all those small talk interactions that appear to be aimed at preparing the ground for the transition to work talk. This is achieved by preserving politeness routines and allowing space to the relational aspects of the rapport with the coworkers.

As for the *transitional function,* it is at the opposite end of work talk when compared to the preparatory function. It was introduced for those particular cases in which small talk serves not to end the conversation abruptly once the talk on work-related issues has been completed (Holmes, 2000a). This category is particularly useful to classify those interactions where small talk is used as a transitory talk between work talk and leave–taking or some other significant transition point.

Additionally, the *teasing and joking* function was also introduced. This function serves to classify those exchanges that have a primary facetious utility. One of the light-hearted ways people build rapport by jokingly commenting on other people's interests and activities.

The pilot study also highlighted that coworkers often share or ask for non-work-related information during small talk. This helps to establish common ground between coworkers and to facilitate mutual understanding. For this reason, *seeking and/or sharing information* was introduced as a value for the variable *function*. Recently, this function was also identified by Wei and Mao (2023) in doctor-patient small talk interactions.

The last value on the Function variable was determined by the analysis of the literature on greeting routines. As a matter of fact, when the exchange between people is limited to the greeting alone, it can have

various functions: Youssouf, Grimshaw, and Bird (1976) listed: "(1) show respect, (2) show solidarity, (3) obtain and validate presence recognition, (4) introduce displays […] (5) threateningly underline recognition […] (6) identify the interlocutor to other parties […] or (7) reduce uncertainty or threat" (p. 812). In this study, it is not possible to consider those functions separately because basic information for the identification of the functions (hierarchies, people actually present, etc.) is absent for most interactions. Therefore, I indicated *recognition and acknowledgement* as functions of the passing greetings.

3.5.3. *Situatedness*

In this work, the distribution has been distinguished in four different variables: *position in the wider interaction*, *distribution in the workday*, *new person in the interaction*, and *situation*; their values have been distributed as shown in Table 3.10.

Table 3.10. Variables 6-10 and 20: labels and values.

	VARIABLE	VALUES
6	POSITION	**1.** opening interaction **2.** closing interaction **3.** other /unknown
7	DISTRIBUTION	**1.** first encounter of the day **2.** end of work day **3.** other - unknown
8	NEW PERSON IN THE INTERACTION	**1.** YES **2.** NO
9.	SITUATION	**1.** small talk before starting to work/before a task **2.** waiting for something/someone; going somewhere **3.** small talk during a work activity **4.** small talk during breaks small talk after work **5.** unknown
10	INTIMACY	**1.** they know each other **2.** they are complete strangers
20	PRESENCE OF HUMOR	**1.** YES **2.** NO

Some interactions, and the greetings in particular, are clearly related to the time of the workday in which they occur. In this sense, most of the studies on small talk considered *distribution* as a relevant element in the analysis of small talk, and it has been used as an umbrella term

for different moments of the work day, of the interaction itself, and of the people participating in the interactions: "first encounter of the day" (Holmes, 2003, p. 62); "at the beginnings and ends of meetings" (Holmes, 2003, p. 72); "end of interactions" (Holmes, 2000a, p. 43); opening interaction; closing interaction; end of the work day; new person in the interaction; waiting for something or someone. The limit of these categories is that when they are used for quantitative purposes, they overlap with each other.

Conversely, opening and closing interactions are discourse analysis categories, and their identification is operationalized here for Variable 6 based on the text of the conversation itself and on its co-text. The values in Variable 7 are instead based either on the temporal dimension of the workday, or on contingent situations related to the dynamics in the workplace. Also, other distributions have emerged in the phase of discussions of the categories in the pilot study: many small talk exchanges happen during work activities (mainly manual ones) or during coffee or lunch breaks.

New person in the interaction records whether new speakers join the interaction while it has started already, and it is aimed at providing additional information about the interaction dynamics.

The ninth variable, *Situation*, is aimed at keeping trace of the diverse contexts of workplace interactions. It identifies five key situations, which were found in the corpus. The consideration of the *Situation* variable is aimed at enriching the understanding of workplace communication dynamics, offering insights into the varied contexts in which small talk plays a role.

Intimacy is a dichotomous variable that refers to the distinction between whether or not the interactants have a pre-existing knowledge of each other. In the specific context of this study, the presence of intimacy between individuals can significantly influence communication dynamics. When interactants know each other well, for example, they might handle small talk in a way that is not necessarily shallow, communication may be more informal, and there might be a shared understanding of certain cues, or inside jokes. All of this clearly impacts on the discursive practices among coworkers. On

the other hand, in interactions where there is limited or no pre-existing relationship, communication may tend to be more formal and to avoid depth.

Variable 20, *Humor,* is a dichotomous variable meant to register the presence or absence of humor within an exchange. The assessment on the humorousness of an interaction is made on the basis of the triangulation method[7] (Attardo, 2012; 2020).

3.5.4. *Structure and transition variables*

Variables 11 to 19 concern the number of turns included in each interaction (11) and the boundaries of the interactions in terms of utterers and discourse markers. Table 3.11. shows a breakdown of these variables and their values.

Table 3.11. Variables 11-19 and 21: labels and values.

	VARIABLE	VALUES
11	Turns	[open cell]
12	Utterer of initiation	**1.** unknown/ none **2.** woman AAC **3.** man AAC **4.** woman Non-AAC **5.** man Non-AAC
13	Initiation DMs	[open cell]
14	Utterer of back to work talk	**1.** unknown/ none **2.** woman AAC **3.** man AAC **4.** woman Non-AAC **5.** man Non-AAC
15	Back-to-work-talk DMs	[open cell]
16	Utterer of transition	**1.** unknown/none **2.** woman AAC **3.** man AAC **4.** woman Non-AAC **5.** man Non-AAC
17	Transition DMs	[open cell]
18	Utterer of separation	**1.** unknown/none **2.** woman AAC **3.** man AAC **4.** woman Non-AAC **5.** man Non-AAC **6.** non
19	Separation DMs	[open cell]
21	Tied to previous	**1.** YES **2.** NO **3.** embedded

---

[7] See Chapter 6.

Together with intimacy, information about the initiators of interactions has also been identified as an indicator of the relationships among coworkers. *Utterer of initiation* and *utterer of closing* are variables that serve to record those who make the first move to start or end the small talk interaction distinguished by gender and the use of an AAC device. The variable is meant to assess if the frequencies of the subjects responsible for initiating or closing the exchange show a significant relation with gender and/or AAC use. The very same procedure is applied to the three different small talk ending boundaries: 1) *utterer of back to work talk*, 2) *utterer of transition strategies* and 3) *utterer of separation*. These three types of "closing" boundaries are defined as follows:

1. *back to work talk*: the speakers switch from small talk to work talk;
2. *transition strategies*: there is a change in the topic of small talk, in the focus of the topic, or in the participants in the exchange;
3. *separation*: either end of the workday or each participant goes back to work.

Specifically, it was also recorded the gender and the use of AAC devices of the participants who utter the first sentence right after the last sentence of the small talk interaction. Clearly, the three categories exclude one another. There are only two cases in which all the three of them are absent: a) when the recording ends, or b) when the exchange is interrupted by something or someone. Notice that when two interactions are tied to each other, the transition discourse markers in the first one will coincide with the initiation discourse marker in the second one. As for Variables 13, 15, 17, and 19, the boundaries between small talk interactions and those between these and task-oriented talk have been examined to determine the presence and the frequency of discourse markers[8]. It was decided to introduce these variables to investigate whether there is a relation between the use of certain discourse markers and the nature of the shift, as well as to

---

[8] For the report and discussion on the results of the data on discourse markers, se Di Ferrante (2012).

explore the pragmatic considerations that come into play during participation in workplace exchanges. The value on these variables are not a pre-established range, therefore the *open cell* serves to register any discourse marker occurring in any of the four cases. Variable 20 records the tie of the interaction with the one that precedes: they are two completely different interactions (no= not tied); they belong to the same flow of discourse but they have been divided because there is a switch of topic or a brief interruption (by someone or something that happens) that makes the participants lose the thread of the conversation, which make it necessary some move (e.g. the use of markers such as *where were we?* or various types of connectives). The transition strategy is the only one that may appear at the beginning of a new segment of small talk tied to the previous one.

3.5.5. *Variable omission rationale*

In the pilot analysis (Pearson *et al.,* 2011*)*, Laver's (1975) concept of *token,* Ventola's (1979) *approach*, and Schneider's (1988; 2008) scheme of *topic selection* were used. However, each of these categories presented difficulties for the coding. At first, the study included Laver's token as a variable and *neutral*, *self-oriented* and *other-oriented* as its values (see Section 2.3.); this variable was meant to provide information about the orientation of the interaction. However, applying this variable to exchanges longer than one utterance proved to be problematic; this may due to Laver's original conception of *phatic communion:* Laver considered it as positioned at the boundaries of the interactions, therefore it ended up not being suitable for the setup of the present work, where entire, sometimes lengthy interactions (rather than just their boundaries) are considered instances of small talk. The following exchange in Example 3.3. might help clarify this particular point:

Example 3.3.
STW, interaction 10

1   Jade: can I come sit next to you?
2   Sarah-AAC: [VOC- yeah]
3   Jade: boss lady

4   Sarah-AAC: [VOC-yeah]
5   Jade: alright
6   Margaret: what you call her?
7   Jade: boss lady
8   Margaret: I thought you said floss lady
9   Sarah-AAC: [laughing]
10   Margaret: I was like [+] did I miss something
11   Sarah-AAC: [laughing]
12   Jade: she's got the cleanest teeth [laughter]
13   Sarah-AAC: [laughing]
14   Margaret: so pretty [0:03]

In interaction 10, Jade, Sarah, and Margaret are in the same room. Jade tells something to Sarah and Margaret mishears what has been said. In this short exchange, the orientation of the small talk interaction changes continuously: as Jade calls Sarah "boss lady" (line 3), this instance should be classified as *other oriented* because the speaker does not refer to herself (*self-oriented*), nor to an external event (*neutral*). However, in line 6, Margaret is clearly addressing her question to Jade; this way, the *other* of the *other oriented* category would switch from Sarah to Jade, and of course these moves would not be visible in the data sheet where *other oriented* would remain unchanged. Furthermore, in line 10, Margaret is decidedly *self-oriented*. Even if we established a common criterion along the line of 'the first utterance has precedence in determining the orientation', the resulting classification would be inaccurate because it would conceal a more dynamic development of the exchange. Because of the difficulty of applying Laver's tokens to entire exchanges where the orientation might change continuously, it was eliminated from the variables.

The possibility of coding Ventola's (1979) *direct* and *indirect approaches* (focus on the speaker vs. focus on the situation, see Section 2.3) was also explored. However, a specific problem arose when these values were coded: the two approaches refer to two dimensions that are not necessarily discrete: the (immediate) situation vs. personal events or feelings; and it was often the case that these two dimensions would coincide. This particular issue is demonstrated with interaction 13 in

Example 3.4., where four coworkers are making a toast to celebrate a work accomplishment.

Example 3.4.
STW, interaction 13

1   Jade: [0:03] And this is here to [+] celebrate the fact that we actually got the
2   letter from the state that we're approved [+] and we can go ahead [+] well
3   we're in the process of
4   going ahead and starting
5   Brianna: yay
6   Jade: all of this [+] congratulations
7   Brianna: yay
8   Jade: thank you for all your hard [overlap] work
9   Landon: cheers
10   Brianna: cheers
11   Sarah-AAC: [VOC]
12   [everybody laughing]
13   Sarah-AAC: [VOC]
14   Jade: after how many years? [laughter]
15   Brianna: three [+] isn't it about three?
16   Jade: [0:04] now the work begins [laughter]
17   Sarah-AAC: [VOC]
18   Landon: yeah
19   Jade: [+] ooh this isn't bad
20   Brianna: umh-uh
21   Jade: it's pretty good
22   Brianna: [0:03] she saw a sparkle

In Example 3.4., a portion of small talk is presented, which would hardly align with one (and not also the other) of Ventola's (1979) approaches: the deictic that Jade uses at the beginning of the utterance, "here" (line 1), clearly points to the immediate situation, which is also a personal event that involves personal feelings of the participants (they are attending a small office party where they are toasting and celebrating job accomplishments). In order to appropriately code this interaction based on the direct and indirect approaches, one might certainly choose the one of the two alternatives, based on which one is considered more appropriate. However, it makes little sense to choose

as a variable one that contains dimensions that are not mutually exclusive and which do not provide meaningful information.

In Schneider's (2008) concentric-circle model of topic selection, the smaller circles — reference to *self* and *others* (inner circle) and to *immediate situation* (intermediate circle) — clearly have a large area of overlap with Ventola's (1979) approaches. Moreover, *immediate situation* and *interactants and their identities* (Schneider, 2008) are dimensions belonging to completely different semantic categories that can coexist in the very same segment of conversation and are therefore non-exclusive by nature; hence they could not be taken into account as dichotomous values of the same variable. For these reasons, eventually, Schneider's model could not be included in the protocol.

As far as the functions are concerned, the three macro-functions identified by Laver, *propitiatory, exploratory,* and *initiatory* (1975; discussed in this work in Chapter 2) seemed to not fully satisfy the necessities of the categorization. In the first phase of the pilot study for the validation of the categories, through the tentative data entry by different researchers, and following discussion on the practicality and appropriateness of the variables and their values, it was observed that those variables were not sufficient to cover some of the functions of small talk interactions. In the first place, we had to eliminate the *initiatory* and the *propitiatory* functions as their definitions are not detailed enough to delineate a closed, exclusive category. Moreover, their nature pertains in part to the "intentions" of the speakers and the interpretation of these intentions represents a huge responsibility for the researchers as it is much more dependent on their experience and personal considerations or opinions than to their expertise and knowledge.

3.6. Chapter summary

The focus of this chapter is the Small Talk at Work corpus (STW). The primary objective of this section was to provide a detailed description of the methodological choices made to gather and classify data — both quantitative and qualitative, encompassing linguistic and

formal aspects — of small talk interactions in the workplace. Following considerations on the characteristics, challenges, and experiences associated with working with workplace spoken corpora, the STW is detailed in terms of the methodology used for corpus collection and its final consistency. The various passages for the definition of the variables — from the pilot study to the final classification of the variables — are outlined and motivated, based both on the pilot study and the relevant literature. The chapter then focuses on the detailed description of the analysis protocol purposefully designed for this work, along with the variables and their values. The description includes methodological considerations, comparisons with previous studies, and the motivations that determined the methodological choices.

THE NATURE AND FUNCTIONS OF SMALL TALK AT WORK

The design of the analysis protocol was aimed at obtaining data that would account for the nature and functions of small talk interactions in the workplace both in terms of presence and frequency of the constituting elements and in terms of their contribution to the discursive workplace dynamics. Through a systematic analysis of the data collected, some discursive and structural patterns are unveiled, contributing to the understanding of how different factors influence small talk. This quantitative exploration builds upon the methodological groundwork laid out in Chapter 3, offering insights into the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of small talk variables and their implications in professional settings.

4.1. Constituting elements

As noticed elsewhere (Coupland, 2000; Holmes, 2000a; Holmes & Stubbe, 2003; Koester, 2010) sometimes it is hard to distinguish between business talk and small talk. This issue has been particularly prominent at the moment of selecting the small talk interactions to constitute the STW sub-corpus and discriminating between them and the task-oriented interactions. This is particularly relevant not just for methodological concerns but also because it constitutes a defining characteristic of small talk in the workplace. As a matter of fact, this was noticed in several studies on workplace discourse, to the point that, drawing on Ragan (2000), Koester (2006) stated that "we need to develop much finer distinctions than the traditional instrumental/phatic dichotomy" (p. 52). The ways small talk and work

talk are intertwined are many. In Interaction 420 below, for example, four people, Ross, Shawn, Derek, and Tony, are talking. Ross and Tony work in the same workplace, while Shawn and Derek are from a sports league and are visiting to discuss with Tony and Ross. In the workplace, Ross works as a volunteer for a youth basketball program for disabled children. Derek and Shawn are there to learn about the program. In the first part of their interaction, the discussion has been very work-centered, revolving around the logistics, planning, and integration of a special needs flag football program within the existing youth football league. The four participants discuss the benefits for the special needs kids and seek guidance on practical aspects from Tom.

Example 4.1.
STW, interaction 420

1   Ross: all I do is tell me to get off the couch [+] quit watching tv [+] go out
2   and shoot basketball and they tell me he can [+] he can hit 7 out of 10 from
3   the 3 point line
4   Shawn: hmm [laughter]
5   Ross: uh I [+] I don't have any reason to not believe them [+] perhaps not
6   in game situation [overlap] but just shooting around now [+] you know
7   some of these kids I saw one that [+] that has a vocabulary of two things
8   not [+] and he can't speak [0:02] this means chicken and this means be
9   quiet and don't do the chicken sign for be quiet because I'll tell you what
10   you can't stop them till you give him chicken
11   Shawn: right [laughter]
12   Ross: but I took this kid on a basketball field
13   Derek: right
14   Ross: and I gave him a basket ball and he missed the first one and he hit
15   about 19 in a row
16   Shawn: wow
17   Tony: mmm-hm
18   Ross: and he just dialed that mind in [+] what is in there [+] he was able to
19   dial it in [+] I mean [phew] [phew] and I just keep feeding him the ball
20   [phew] I was in awe
21   Derek: now last year [phone rings] uh when you all did it [+] how often did
22   you participate during the week [+] was it.

In this interaction, through specific examples, Ross shares his experience working with special needs kids. In particular, Ross talks

about a child with a limited vocabulary but impressive basketball skills. He describes taking the child to a basketball court, where the child initially missed a basket but then made 19 consecutive successful shots. Ross expresses amazement at how the child was able to focus and excel in the activity.

Although this interaction is not task-oriented, the fact that Ross talks about something happened while working, brings a work-related element into the discussion. Ross's sharing of experiences seems aimed at enriching the conversation by providing a nuanced perspective on the needs and abilities of special needs kids, contributing to a more informed discussion about the proposed flag football program. However, the specific anecdote about the kids and their abilities is filled with personal feelings and emotions — Ross says "I was in awe" (line 20). This clearly makes this interaction not very typical for work talk. Ross is sharing a personal experience related to his workplace, blurring the lines between personal and professional conversation. This aspect highlights the fact that work talk and small talk cannot be sharply distinguished. And the interaction that was just analyzed, puts forth the fact that many people do their job with passion and dedication, becoming personally and emotionally involved with the work, which is not just business anymore. In other words, as people's personal and work lives often overlap and blend, also their discursive practices often tend to overlap and intertwine.

4.2. The structure of the STW sub-corpus

As mentioned before, the final structure of the STW sub-corpus consists of 423 total interactions (recorded by two AAC device users, Sarah and Ron and by two non-AAC device users, Paula and Tony; the four focal participants interact with 160 total interlocutors. The number of interactions recorded by each participant is represented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. Number of small talk interactions.

RECORDED BY	AAC USER	NUMBER OF SMALL TALK INTERACTIONS
Sarah	AAC	93
Paula	non-AAC	143
Ron	AAC	47
Tony	non-AAC	140

The difference in the number of small talk interactions among the focal users partly depends on the time of the recordings, which is shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2. ANAWC corpus: total recording time per focal participant.

PARTICIPANTS	TOTAL ORIGINAL RECORDING TIME — ANAWC CORPUS
Sara-AAC	12hrs 10 mins 25 ss
Paula non-AAC	35hrs 43 mins
Ron-AAC	11hrs 26 mins 33ss
Tony non-AAC	20hrs 28 mins 16 ss

The differences in the recording time are due to various factors: each of the participants could turn the recorder off whenever they wanted; each of them handled the job in their own ways. Paula, for example, used to walk around often, going to the thrift store or to the magazines and talked with a large amount of people during her workday. Ron instead, tended to spend his days in his office, by himself. The STW sub-corpus consists of all the small talk interactions present in Sarah's, Ron's, and Tony's recordings. However, only part of Paula's have been selected as Paula had the longest recording time and the number of small talk interactions almost doubled those extracted from Tony's recordings. It is interesting to notice that the AAC users' recording time is approximately half compared to the non-AAC. This is not only due to the type of jobs they do, but also to the difficulties related with their participation in the interactions. This aspect is better explored in Chapter 7.

Table 4.3 shows the gender[1] of the interactants in the STW corpus. It must be noted that the total of six AAC device users comprises Sarah and Ron who were recording and other AAC device users that are present in some interactions.

Table 4.3. Gender and status of the participants.

GENDER	AAC USER	NUMBER OF SMALL TALK INTERACTIONS
Woman	non-AAC	69
	AAC	2
Man	non-AAC	85
	AAC	4

The numbers in Table 4.3. represent the frequencies of the participants distribution in the corpus by gender and type of speaker (AAC or non-AAC device users). The frequencies include the focal participants. The corpus included a total of 89 men and 71 women.

The following step consisted in observing how these participants were distributed in the interactions. Table 4.4. shows the gender distribution per interaction: in each interaction the presence of *only men*, *only women*, or *both men and women* was coded.

Table 4.4. Gender distribution per interaction.

PARTICIPANTS	INTERACTIONS
Both men and women	231
Men	105
Women	87

The great majority of interactions, 231, involved both men and women and those where only men talk are 18 more with respect to those where only women talk.

---

[1] Gender categorization for the non-focal speakers relied on the analysis of their first names and the pronouns employed by others to address them.

In this description of how the corpus is composed, it was decided to observe the number of participants per interaction.

Table 4.5. Number of participants in interaction.

	INTERACTIONS	
PARTICIPANTS	**FREQUENCY**	**PERCENTAGE**
2	238	56.26%
3	118	27.90%
4	43	10.17%
5	18	4.26%
6	4	0.95%
7	1	0.24%
8	1	0.24%

Table 4.5. shows that interactions between two speakers are the most frequent, representing over half of the small talk interactions in the corpus. More than one fourth of the interactions is among three participants and slightly over 10% among four participants. Interactions become increasingly rare as the participant count surpasses four.

4.3. Topics

The interactions in the STW corpus were examined to identify the topics discussed by the coworkers. As mentioned before, a predetermined list of possible topics was created based on the findings in the literature and the pilot study; other topics were either recorded under the label "other" or an ad hoc label was created when the topic was present in 2% of interactions or more. The outcome is presented in Figure 4.1.
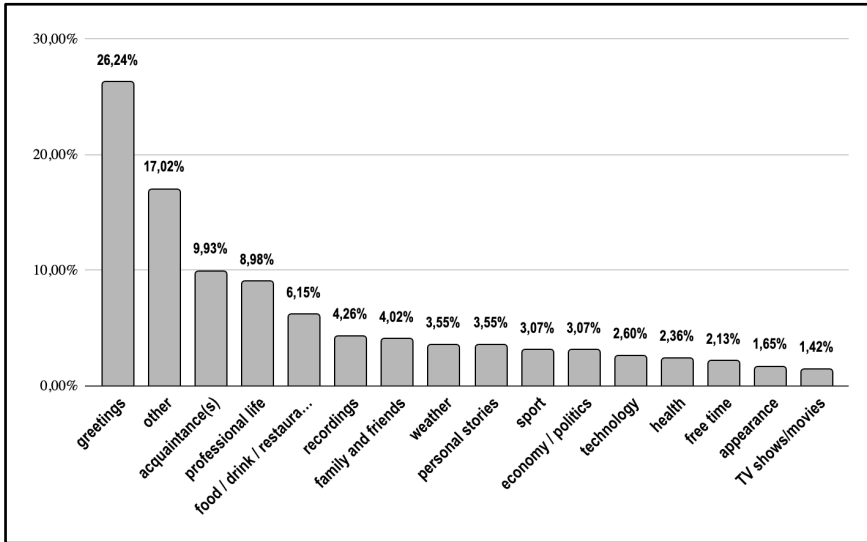
Figure 4.1. Topics in the small talk interactions.

Figure 4.1. shows the frequency distribution of the topics in the small talk interactions. Overall, these percentages collectively indicate the diverse nature of workplace small talk, revealing a balance between formalities, professional engagement, and more casual topics.

Just by observing the labels, it is noticeable that the exchanges span across a wide range of themes, which can be grouped into three macro categories: work, life, and external matters. Those in the first macro category are related to the workplace and to people, routines and events related to it—examples being *greetings, acquaintances, professional life, recordings*. This macro category stands out as the largest one, emphasizing how workplace life heavily influences and characterizes coworkers' discursive practices. The second macro category encompasses the private sphere of the speakers—including discussions about *personal life, family and friends, personal stories.* These conversations involve speakers sharing aspects of themselves with their colleagues; these aspects extend beyond the shared environment of the workplace. These are perhaps interactions more fundamentally social because they are less compartmentalized and job-related. Finally, the third macro category consists of topics that are external to the speakers:

such as *weather, sports, economy, politics, technology,* etc. These subjects are not necessarily intertwined with the speakers' professional and personal experiences. Instead, they can be used as a neutral territory, where coworkers can relate to each other without personal involvement.

In the following sections, some of the most relevant topics are discussed more in depth. Unsurprisingly, greetings are the most frequent topic because it is less deliberate in that greetings are also regulated by social norms, routines, and politeness rules, which make them an almost mandatory exchange. Clearly, some greetings are brief and formal, some others consist of more extended and elaborated interactions. Because of their relevance in the corpus, they are analyzed extensively in Chapter 5, which is completely dedicated to greetings. This intentional focus on greetings underlines their pivotal role in characterizing workplace social interactions, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive exploration to better understand their implications within the broader context of coworkers' relationships.

4.3.1. *Professional life*

The workplace is something that the speakers in this corpus have in common; it is an entire universe of shared knowledge, events, and people with their stories. Therefore, the workplace, its culture, and even its physical organization are themselves intervening variables for the analysis of small talk anatomy.

Recordings is the small talk topic in 4.3% of the interactions and it refers to those exchanges where the participants talk about the recordings for the ANAWC corpus collection. They were not part of the predefined list of topics, but since they represented more than 2% of the interactions, a dedicated label was introduced. The recordings for the corpus collection represent an event in which all the participants are involved as they need to decide whether or not they want their interactions recorded. As a matter of fact, these recordings are often an excuse for the participants to engage in small talk. It is likely that anything that does not belong to the workers' daily tasks might be used as a small talk topic. In some cases, the speakers also discuss the

opportunity of keeping the recorder on or switching it off, as shown in interaction 138.

Example 4.2.
STW, interaction 138

1   Paula: ew I could eat all of that cake chocolate dutch apple oh gosh I'm so
2   hungry I could eat a horse. Can I sit in your spot? Thank you
3   Alex: now hers is on
4   Paula: yep speak into the microphone loudly and clearly [laughs] oh I
5   meant to put some water
6   in there oh well do you still got yours on [overlap] I'm turning mine off
7   for lunch
8   Alex: I turned mine off for lunch
9   Paula: that's what I'm going to do too [overlap] I'm just going
10   Dr. Ben: I gather that this intended to accumulate a vocabulary set for
11   what amounts to business English or interesting

This interaction takes place at lunch break. Alex warns that Paula's recorder is activated and she jokes instructing Alex to speak into the microphone loudly and clearly. Paula seems to be aware of the potential embarrassment that could be derived from recording interactions that are highly informal, private, and confidential. The decision to turn the recording off during lunch indicates the potential omission of informal conversations that commonly occur during breaks. In the context of this research, there is a likelihood that the quantitative balance between small talk and task-oriented discussions is skewed due to the participants deliberately underreporting or downplaying instances of small talk. Conversations involving gossip, complaints, personal opinions unrelated to job tasks, and potentially conflicting elements are aspects that individuals may be inclined to keep private or confidential within the workplace. This discretion may stem from a desire to maintain workplace harmony and positive relationships among coworkers as well as a reluctance to divulge specific personal or office-related events from becoming widely known to those reviewing the recorded interactions. In some other occasions as explored in Chapter 6, they recall that the recorder was turned on only after engaging in

discussions that they would have concealed. And often they react to this realization with laughter.

Small talk is also concerned with interactions that serve to negotiate hierarchy and its boundaries, even if job positions are clearly determined. As stated by Holmes and Stubbe in their book on *Power and Politeness in the Workplace,* "While such relationships often appear 'given', a social constructionist approach emphasises the extent to which participants are constantly constructing their social roles as they interact with others" (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015, p. 9). Interaction 273 in Example 4.3. is a clear instance of such dynamic.

Example 4.3.
STW, interaction 273

1	Jade: [0:06] you need my help you told me I could leave right
2	Sarah-AAC: yeah
3	Jade: [laughter]
4	Sarah-AAC: [VOC]
5	Jade: I'm just
6	Carl: can I leave
7	Sarah-AAC: no
8	Jade: [laughter]
9	Brianna: nice try though
10	Carl: [laughter] I [+] I can at least try

Note: The gray-highlighted portion of text is classified as work talk.

Sarah holds the highest position in the hierarchy of the office, therefore Jade asks her whether she can leave the office. Sarah agrees. At that point Carl jokingly asks whether he can leave as well. Because it is a playful exchange, Sarah assertively says "no" without any hedging. Following this, Brianna joins the playful interaction, addressing Carl and complimenting him for his attempt. While this is a light-hearted situation, in which the participants are amicable, a negotiation of power takes place. The initial statement establishes Sarah as the highest in the hierarchy, suggesting a clear chain of authority, which is acknowledged by Jade. Carl acknowledges the authority as well, but makes an attempt to obtain favoritism. Sarah participates in the joke, but firmly reasserts her role while Brianna affirms her role as Carl's peer commending his

effort at trying to obtain permission to leave the office early. This interaction is a clear example of how coworkers construct their social roles as well as the extent of their power by talking with each other. In other words, the interaction is strictly related to the workplace (i.e.: it is not workplace-independent), Carl is technically asking for permission from Sarah, recognizing and underlining her role in the workplace as the person in charge, the manager. In sum, even in the relational and humorous mood of the interaction, the boundaries of the workplace surrounding the participant and the hierarchical boundaries between them are well perceived, and the discourse flows accordingly to those very boundaries.

4.3.2. *Personal life*

In Example 4.4., an interaction coded with *personal stories* on the variable *topic* is presented. In the relational process that facilitates the construction of relational ties, coworkers share stories, about their family and friends, and their lives outside of the workplace. Sometimes the stories they share are very personal, touching on private issues and problems related to family or health. These narratives often nurture a sense of trust and empathy. In fact, the level of intimacy is such that, on occasion, in response to a personal story, the interlocutors would reciprocate by sharing their own experiences. (see the I-feel-you strategy: Di Ferrante, 2016, pp. 91-94).

Example 4.4.
STW, interaction 139

1   Jay: See what I went to Texas for? [0:05] this is just weird I I know you
2   might think I'm weird now but I went to Texas and bought one of those
3   Sean: [+] an iron lung [0:02] wow [+] for going? [+] Woah
4   Jay: it's gonna go in Warm Springs [+] in the museum down there
5   Sean: amazing
6   Scott: oh that's cool
7   Jay: well that's gonna be my con- the the opportunity presented itself [+]
8   and uh
9   Sean: amazing

10   Jay: I probably spent [+] five times more going to get it than I actually paid
11   for it but
12   Sean: just the trip to go get it
13   Jay: well you know road trip
14   Sean: yeah yeah
15   Jay: let's go to Texas
16   Sean: I know yeah that's no short trip
17   Jay: I thought you were gonna make a [unclear] out of me.
18   Sean: no, [+] well actually
19   Jay: yeah you got it you got it, hey a lot of people don't.

The interaction starts with Jay announcing the reason for his recent trip to Texas. Despite acknowledging the potential peculiarity of his actions, he reveals that he purchased an iron lung, destined to be featured in a local museum. Sean and Scott, react positively to the revelation, showing amazement and support: "whoah" (line 3), "amazing" (line 5) "oh that's cool" (line 6) with Sean repeatedly emphasizing his appreciation. Jay, while sharing the exciting news, admits that the overall cost of the trip to acquire the item far exceeded the actual purchase price (line 10) and says that he thought they might ridicule him for the unusual purchase (line 17). Sean reassures him in a lighthearted way: "no, [+] well actually" (line 18) denying any intent to mock and suggesting an underlying understanding. Overall, the interaction is filled with sharing personal stories and thoughts: not only Jay informs about the purchase, but also shares concerns and personal insecurities with his coworkers: "I thought you were gonna make a [unclear] out of me" (line 17) and "yeah you got it you got it, hey a lot of people don't." (line 19). Moreover, the coworkers show understanding and support.

The event narrated by Jay and the emotional information attached to it contribute to two outcomes. On the one hand, Jay is adding elements to the representation of himself: he talks about something that is not related to work, showing willingness to show his interlocutors traits of his private life and self, which at work they do not have chances to witness. He also shares feelings and aspects of his personality. On the other hand, all the speakers together co-construct their relationship by supporting each other, expressing understanding and solidarity.

From a methodological perspective, this interaction is a good example to show the difficulty of creating rigid categories for the topic description. The speakers are talking at the same time about an iron lung, a road trip to Texas, and Jay's concerns about being the target of negative judgment. In cases like this, it was difficult to identify the actual focus of the exchange.

4.3.3. *External topics: focus on weather and politics*

In the third episode of the first season of the *Handmaid's Tale,* a TV series based on the homonymous 1985 novel by writer Margaret Atwood, the protagonist, handmaid Offred (her name is really June), is questioned by the authorities. In the dystopian world as it is narrated, there are no newspapers or magazines, no coffee places or restaurants and handmaids are deprived of fundamental rights: they cannot read, or object; they cannot decide what to wear, where to live, who to love. One of the tasks, which is required of them, is to go grocery shopping for their hosting family. The walk—to and from the grocery shop—must be done in pairs. Offred had been paired with handmaid Ofglen, who has just been replaced by a new Ofglen. Authorities want to gather information about the previous Ofglen, thus a man, with the help of handmaids' trainer, Aunt Lydia and her electric shocker, questions Offred. Offred is very scared, as she knows she can be killed for anything, which makes her aware and very careful about what to say, and not to say, when she replies to the questions. The scene starts with Ofglen standing and praying not to feel pain and not to die. She's standing in the living room and Aunt Lydia abruptly hits her with the electric shocker. Here is the transcript of their exchange:

> Inquirer: Offred, if you do your best to answer these questions, this'll all be really painless. Alright?
> Offred: Yes, Sir.
> Inquirer: Good. That's what we all want. Ofglen is your shopping partner, correct?
> Offred: Yes, Sir.

Inquirer: And you walked with the previous handmaid assigned to that house?
Offred: Yes.
Inquirer: You walked together every day?
Offred: Yes.
Inquirer: And what sorts of things would you and Ofglen talk about?
Offred: **We talked about our shopping. We talked about the weather.**
Inquirer: You always walked directly to town and then directly home?
Offred: Yes. Sometimes we would stop at the wall to pray.
Inquirer: Did you ever take the long way home, walk by the river?
Offred: It's pretty by the river.
Inquirer: Yeah. It's nice. It's peaceful. Private. What did you talk about when you walked by the river?
Offred: **Shopping. And the weather.**
Inquirer: **Shopping and the weather.** Nothing else?
Offred: Nothing I can remember.

[*emphasis added*]

Grocery shopping is something the handmaids are supposed to do together, so they are allowed to talk about it. The other topic they are allowed to talk about is the weather.

As a matter of fact, in contemporary society, weather is commonly perceived as a safe topic to talk about. It is believed to be a topic that does not lead to conflict or critical thinking, so that even in an imagined world characterized by a truly controlling dictatorship, where there is no place for people's expression of individual thoughts, it is still safe to talk about the weather.

In the literature, weather has often been looked at as "a paradigmatic case of phatic communion" (Coupland & Ylänne-McEwen, 2000, p. 63). In contradiction with the stereotype, the data in this work show that the weather is not among the most frequently chosen topics (see

Figure 4.1.). Coupland and Ylänne-McEwen (2000) focused on the stereotypical topic for small talk exchanges: the weather, which the authors demonstrated to accomplish several functions: from being a marker of conversation boundaries (signaling the closing exchange) to being a bridge toward more intimate talk. As a matter of fact, Coupland and Ylänne-McEwen argued against the overlap between non-transactional and peripheral talk, maintaining that their data showed how "weather talk has a clear structuring potential" (p. 179) within the interactions since they indicated that the speakers talked about the weather to signal their intention to close the interaction; the authors also showed that weather talk serves to reestablish the importance of the situation outside that communicative event. "To say that weather talk 'fills' spaces where transactional talk has been suspended is therefore to underestimate its role in the management of the encounter more generally" (Coupland & Ylänne-McEwen, 2000, p. 179). They also noticed that talk about weather is particularly suitable "in states of transition between activities" (p. 165) for its characteristic of being non-controversial, accessible to, and shared by all the participants.

Besides being safe, weather is a common-knowledge topic, about which everybody is likely to be able to observe. It has also been suggested that people living in places with continuous change of weather and atmospheric temperature will talk about the weather more often than those where the climate is rather constant. Coupland and Ylänne-McEwen (2000) maintain that the unpredictability of the weather in Britain "ensures that there will very often be a change-of-state to comment upon" (2000, p. 165) and the authors underline that it is the change of weather or the unconformity of the weather to our expectations based on the period of the year that stimulate discourses over it.

In addition, other reasons can explain the minor role of the weather in small talk in the workplace. Acquaintances of at least one of the participants, professional life, food and drinks, and restaurant are the topics more frequently touched on. Contrary to many previous studies on small talk in the workplace, where the interactions were recorded mainly among strangers who interacted for a relatively short amount of time (service encounters, doctor/patient, etc.) most of the interactions

in this corpus take place among coworkers: they are people who spend many hours a day together, sometimes for years. This can be one of the reasons why safe topics, like the weather, often used to prevent embarrassing silence, are less needed in these workplaces where people know each other well. People who know each other probably have many subjects to talk about and this is very apparent by looking at the high percentage of topics pertaining to professional life, personal life, and acquaintances on the chart.

Example 4.5.
STW, interaction 60

1   Brianna: just that not the employee stuff just those and then that'll go in here
2   too [0:04] put that under your organization [0:04] somebody said there's a
3   risk of like [+] uhm bad weather today what's the bad we- weather is it
4   tornadoes or [+] like hail [overlap] or?
5   Jade: I don't know when I saw the thing it looked like it had all flown over to
6   me
7   Landon: [laughs]
8   Jade: cuz they were saying s- [overlap] no it doesn't
9   Landon: doesn't sound like it now [laughs]
10   Brianna: I know
11   Jade: well maybe maybe I only saw Tennessee and I didn't look at what was
12   in Arkansas [laughter]
13   Landon: [laughter]
14   Brianna: going across the bridge though there was uhm [+] and those are just
15   going behind [overlap] organizer not organizer organization [sigh] I have to
16   try to get this thing out of here
17   Sarah-AAC: [voc]
18   Sarah-AAC: [+] [laughs]
19   Brianna: [0:04] I'm going across the bridge there was
20   Trey: here let me try
21   Lauren: yeah go ahead
22   Sarah-AAC: good luck
23   Brianna: yeah well I don't have anything but the monster film so
24   Sarah-AAC: [+] [laughter]
25   Jade: [+] alright now we want policies and procedures in here

Note: the gray-highlighted d portions of text are classified as work talk.

Interaction 60 in Example 4.5. present exchanges where work talk and small talk are intertwined. The small talk is concerned with the weather and the coworkers talk about it while performing work tasks (the gray-highlighted sentences). The talk about the weather does not seem to mark transitions to other topics or leavetaking as the work talk will keep going for a long time after that. From the audio sounds and the work-related exchanges, it seems that the coworkers are performing manual activities, organizing folders and documents: "then that'll go in here too" (lines 1-2) "those are just going behind" (lines 14-15). This kind of activity allows people to chat. In this particular case, the weather talk seems to be stimulated by the fact that there is a risk of severe weather, which clearly impacts on the lives of everyone. The mention of a "monster film" (line 23) by Brianna could be a colloquial way of referring to her plans for the night after work. It appears to imply that she will be at home, watching movies, suggesting that she does not have commitments that would keep her out in the bad weather.

In sum, it seems that the choice of this topic in this case is not based on concerns about it being safe, rather on the possibility it might worsen and affect everybody. It also appears to be dealt lightly in a familiar atmosphere, which does not seem formal.

In this regard, it is interesting to observe interaction 53. It is centered on politics, an inherently unsafe topic, which elicits different and contrasting pinions among the coworkers.

Example 4.6.
STW, interaction 53

1   Trey: yeah uh I [+] I suppose English first was what like English as the
2   official language?
3   Sarah-AAC: [voc]
4   Lauren: well actually it was
5   Jade: well was it that they couldn't [overlap] give anybody anything in
6   another language
7   Landon: English only
8   Sarah-AAC: [voc] [overlap] [voc]
9   Jade: that was what they were trying to pass
10   Sarah-AAC: [voc] [overlap] [voc]

11   Lauren: unless it was unless it was an emergency situation but then [+] they
12   were trying to it was this one guy and
13   Brianna: uhm
14   Lauren: he was uhm [overlap] he's not gonna fight it anymore he said if
15   other people are going to it's up to them but it cost the city thou- hundreds
16   of thousands of dollars to run this and it was just a waste [overlap] of
17   money
18   Trey: to run?
19   Lauren: to run this this uhm vote an extra vote
20   Trey: right
21   Lauren: to see if people wanted to have [unclear] [overlap] I mean
22   California [overlap] you got to a voting booth and there's English Spanish
23   Cambodian uhm Cantonese uhm [overlap] Mandarin [unclear] you know
24   10 or 12 different languages Ethiopian cuz they're so many different kinds
25   of people there [+] it's wonderful I mean it exposes people to cool things
26   Trey: yeah uh I agree people ought to [+] learn English
27   Lauren: pardon?
28   Trey: I I I do think that people ought to learn English and ought to learn
29   to deal in English cuz
30   Brianna: **I think** if they're coming into the country just like if I went into
31   France I would expect to have to know French [+] I don't think that you
32   have to [+] well I don't know cuz it's citizenship and like if you're gonna be
33   a citizen
34   Trey: well [overlap] yeah
35   Jade: well there is a difference between
36   Brianna: that's our national language
37   Trey: yeah [overlap] they should **but it's a difference between** saying this
38   is our national language and saying that people aren't welcomed
39   Jade**: yeah but** if you're in France and you're gonna buy property wouldn't
40   you appreciate if they gave it to you in English even if you knew how to
41   read Spanish?
42   Brianna: yeah
43   Jade: I mean even if you knew how to read French
44   Brianna: yeah I think we ought to be accommodating like that **but I think**
45   that for citizenship requirements and that kinda stuff they ought to learn to
46   speak English [overlap] I been the
47   Landon: for citizenship requirements they do
48   Brianna: yeah [overlap] and that's one of the things one of the arguments
49   with the language thing is the you know can we change our national
50   language to be all these others and I'm like [+] no
51   Trey: uh no
52   Brianna: I don't think I don't think [overlap] we should
53   Trey: at the same you know uh

54   Brianna: **I think** we ought to be accommodating like we [+] most of the
55   time are you know **but**
56   Trey: uhm [+] you know uh Trey Philzack well when when Philzack was
57   Governor of Iowa [+] uh this legislature passed a law saying that English
58   was the official language of the state and he signed it uh and he said since
59   then that he that's the legislation that he most regrets and [overlap] it is I I
60   would say it's not that it's a bad idea
61   Lauren: wow
62   Lauren: uh-huh
63   Trey: **but** uh [+] it had the effect of making immigrants feel unwelcome
64   Lauren: mmm-hm
65   Trey: and uh that's [+] not what they wanted to say I mean a Iowa's a state
66   with an aging population and you know the immigrants were the people
67   you know coming into the state with new families and [overlap] you know
68   being working age
69   Lauren: mmm-hm
70   Trey: so uh
71   Trey: all in all it was net plus uh
72   Landon: well the thing of it is you know that's exactly it's to be
73   unwelcoming was the entire intent of that
74   Brianna: that's the thing [overlap] you can consider the intent
75   Trey: that that that is I suppose it is the intent yeah
76   Landon: yeah it really is and [laughter] you know it's not surprising that
77   people feel that way feel unwelcome [overlap] when they're
78   Landon: when they pass that kind of a political slogan
79   Trey: a lot of [overlap] aliens and I'm in favor of immigration **I think** you
80   ought to know who you have in this country
81   Lauren: uh-huh
82   Trey: in a large extent [overlap] you know

In the lengthy interaction in Example 4.6., the participants talk about *English Only* initiatives. The conversation touches on citizenship requirements, language diversity, and the impact of declaring English as the official language. There is a mention of a past law in Iowa and its unintended consequence of making immigrants feel unwelcome, leading to a broader discussion on immigration. The topic is clearly unsafe as it pertains to politics, immigration policies with the opposition between *we* vs. *they* (Van Djik, 1994; 2004), and a well-known debate about English not being by law the official language of the United States. In the exchange, several disagreements

are present, but they are softened (Rees-Miller, 1995) through several linguistic strategies. In lines 28, 29, and 37, for example, Trey is trying to distinguish between the issue of immigrants learning English and the issue of welcoming them in the country; before introducing his objection with the adversative conjunction "but", he shows support to Brianna by saying "yeah they should" (line 37), the positive comment softens the following expression of disagreement. Brianna uses the same strategy in line 44 when she agrees that "we ought to be accommodating" before disagreeing: "but I think that". Also, in this interaction, *I think* is often used as a mitigating device (Fraser, 1987) to express a potentially conflictual opinion. It is also interesting to look at Lauren's role in the exchange: in lines 21-25 she expresses her positive attitude toward the multilingual situation in California; however Trey — probably misunderstanding her words — claims that he agrees that immigrants should learn English and the other colleagues seem to more or less agree with Trey's position. From that moment on, Lauren does not express her opinion anymore and all she does is give feedback with fillers. In sum, it seems that the unsafe topic is approached smoothly through positive comments, mitigating devices,[2] and avoidance to reinforce one's own opinion where most of the group has a different one. Even if the participants are discussing "unsafe" topics, this interaction still appears "safe" as the coworkers seem serene and are not characterized by anger or belligerent behaviors.

It is possible to conclude then, that the "safety" of these interactions might lie in the ways the speakers approach the topic and relate to one another and not in the topic itself, which, like in this case, can be very controversial and the coworkers do not seem to avoid expressing their opinion, even when in contrast with their interlocutors'.

---

[2] In her research on disagreement in the classroom, Rees-Miller (1995) lists positive comments and mitigating devices among the strategies used to soften the disagreement.

4.3.4. *"Other" topics*

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the category labeled "other" gathers topics that did not fall within the predefined list of potential topics, derived from existing literature and the pilot study. Because the frequency of the interactions of these topics was below 2%, they did not constitute a separate label. The label "other" includes two main types of topics: 1) random events, such as a fire in a nearby building, Valentine's day, a robbery in the news or 2) overlapping topics within a single interaction that could not be distinctly distinguished.

Example 4.7.
STW, interaction 273

```
 1    Barbara: you're welcome [+] uh-oh did I lose my 10 dollar bill? I lost my 10
 2    dollar bill [0:06] dangnabbit
 3    Mindy: [0:04] well it's a thing [overlap] [unclear]
 4    Barbara: I had a 10 dollar bill and I lost it
 5    Ron-AAC: [voc]
 6    Barbara: [0:04] you see a 10 dollar bill floating around it's mine
 7    Nelly: oh no
 8    Ron-AAC: [0:03] [voc] [0:40] look in the truck [0:24] [background
 9    conversation] [0:11] look in the truck
10    Barbara: uh?
11    Ron-AAC: look in the truck
12    Barbara: good thinking you're right
13    Mindy: whose truck?
14    Barbara: our truck [+] cuz it was in the Sale pocket it's probably sitting at
15    Home Depot because it was in the Sale pocket as the keys
16    Ron-AAC: [voc]
17    Barbara: oh look at that
18    Mindy: [laughter]
19    Barbara: I checked [overlap] that pocket three times
20    Ron-AAC: [voc]
21    Barbara: I did
22    Ron-AAC: [voc] [0:08] [voc] [0:07]
```

The grey-highlighted text in line 1 identifies a portion of work talk. The interaction is introduced by the interjection "uh-oh", which conveys the realization of an issue or mistake, leading to subsequent

worry. Indeed, Barbara uses it to express concern over the apparent loss of her $10 bill, "did I lose my 10 dollar bill? (line 1) and involves Mindy, Ron and Nelly in the matter, by letting them know: "I lost my 10 dollar bill". Barbara further emphasizes her frustration with an exclamation: "dangnabbit" (line 2). As the group searches and offers suggestions, there's a moment of realization when Barbara finally finds the bill in her own pocket, "oh look at that" (line 19) leading to laughter from Mindy. Barbara explains that she had checked the pocket multiple times, highlighting the relief and humor in finding the misplaced money.

This interaction is one of the instances that were classified as "other" as it would not fall in any of the predefined labels for topic. Many of the interactions that have been coded under "other" revolve around events that are new and peculiar to a specific workday. These interactions are still essential for understanding the workplace dynamics. The conversation showcases a blend of casual banter and collaborative problem-solving among the participants. Barbara feels that the context is familiar enough for her to freely share her worry with her coworkers multiple times (lines 1, 4, and 6) and everyone acknowledges her concern and gives support. In particular, Ron vocalizes throughout the interaction, offering suggestions and succeeding in maintaining engagement in the conversation. While some aspects of AAC interactional dynamics will be expanded more in Chapter 7, AAC speakers are focal participants in this corpus, therefore their communicative practices impact and characterize the whole corpus. It is interesting to notice here that because of his speech impairment, Ron's words are often not immediately understood, moreover, it takes him some effort to vocalize. For these reasons, he uses linguistic strategies which are a sort of shortcuts, which help him to reduce the effort and the time required to express himself. In this case, he uses an imperative verb, "look in the truck" (lines 8 and 10) in place of a less demanding expression, such as, for example, "have you checked the truck"? The introduction of politeness and hedging require the use of additional linguistic material, which would be time-consuming and require additional

effort to Ron. The dynamic between Ron and the other coworkers seems well-developed and nobody seems to be concerned by his way of communicating. In fact, they all seem to make an effort to listen and support each other.

4.4. Position, distribution, and situation of small talk interactions

The next step, after the analysis of the topic, was that of investigating the modalities, the places, and situations in which small talk occurs. A first basic observation regarded the position and distribution of small talk interactions. In terms of position, the interactions were examined to establish in how many exchanges small talk was used as conversational opening or closing. In terms of distribution, they were analyzed to identify whether they coincided with the first encounter of the day or with the end of the workday. When the small talk would not fall under these categories, it was coded as "other/unknown".

Table 4.6. Position of small talk in the interactions.

POSITION	SMALL TALK INTERACTIONS
Opening	18,68%
Closing	9,22%
Other/unknown	72,1%

Table 4.7. Distribution of small talk in the workday.

DISTRIBUTION	SMALL TALK INTERACTIONS
First encounter of the day	17,49%
End of the workday	5,91%
Other/unknown	76,6%

Unsurprisingly, as shown in Tables 4.6 and 4.7, the position in the interaction and the distribution presented quite homogeneous values

with each other, with the highest frequency observed on *other/unknown* — both over 70%. Additionally, the frequencies of *Opening* and *First encounter of the day* are closely aligned at 18,68% and 17,49% respectively. The lower values are on *Closing* (9,22%) and *End of the workday* (5,91%). It was indeed reasonable to think that most of the openings would have coincided with the beginning of the workday and most of the closings with the end of the workday. However, it is necessary to point out that the position in the interaction and the distribution largely depend on the setup of the workplace: colleagues who share the same space for the entire day will probably have more exchanges in the middle of the work day compared to those types of work settings where people either meet a large number of different people every day (doctors who deal with patients, cashiers who take care of customers, etc.) or where the workers have very dynamic jobs and walk from office to office (for example those who deliver mail).

The analysis of the data recorded on the variable *Situation*, shown in Table 4.8. and Figure 4.2. provide a more detailed understanding of the circumstances that are more or less likely for coworkers to engage in small talk.

Table 4.8. Situations of small talk interactions.

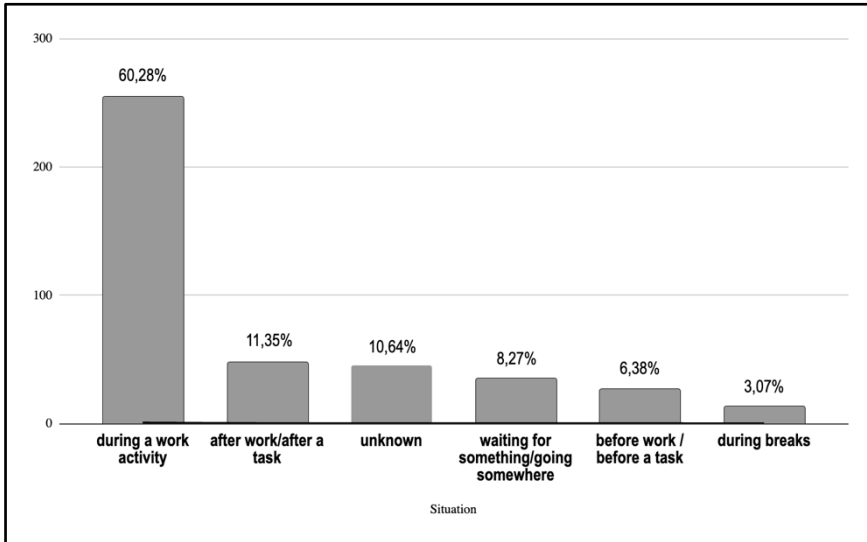| SITUATION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
During breaks	13	3,07%
Before work / before a task	27	6,38%
Waiting for something / going somewhere	35	8,27%
Unknown	45	10,64%
After work / after a task	48	11,35%
During a work activity	255	60,28%

Figure 4.2. Situation of workplace interactions.

The data show that most of the small talk interactions happen during the workday and that opening and closing small talk exchanges are less frequent than on-the-run talk. This result is surprising if we consider that in the literature, the boundaries of the interactions have been regarded as the paradigmatic places for small talk to occur: "small talk is typically, but not exclusively, found at the boundaries of interactions, as well as the boundaries of the working day" (Holmes, 2000a, p. 43). One of the reasons why small talk has been considered as typically occurring at the boundaries (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003) can probably be found in the fact that some early studies focused on particular forms of small talk such as phatic communion (Laver, 1975) or politeness routines (Ferguson, 1976) which, by their very nature, are positioned at the beginning or at the end of exchanges. As we have seen in the section about the topic selection, in this study, the greeting routines — which are usually situated both at the boundaries of the interaction and of the workday — constitute the most frequent type of topic, but at the same time the remaining topics account for as much as 73,8% when summed up. In this sense, greetings still play a big role

in the characterization of small talk, but not big enough to list the boundaries of the interactions as the typical place for small talk.

In 60.28% of the cases, small talk occurs while people are working. People do small talk while doing manual work or sitting at their desks, while fixing a wheelchair or organizing the merchandise of the thrift store. This result is particularly remarkable as one would expect that most small talk happens before work or meetings, during breaks or before and after tasks (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003; Mirivel & Tracy, 2005). As Coupland put it, "the expectations, or the social norms, surrounding a dinner party, for example, include that the interactants will come together to foreground the relational rather than ideational talk-work" (2003, p. 3); in the same way, we would expect the bulk of small talk at points of the workday different from those when a work activity is being performed.

In the interaction 42, there are three women working together (one of them is Sarah, the AAC device user, who is recording the interaction, but does not participate in it) and they engage in small talk during their work activity.

Example 4.8.
STW, interaction 42

1	Brianna: alright [+] let me show you what we're doing as others come in
2	[+] where's my
3	big ol' honking pen?
4	Jade: [+] I don't know she had a command pen
5	Brianna: [+] I love my [overlap] big pen [+] there it is
6	Jade: [laughter]
7	Jade: she's got a pen that just says she's in charge [laughter]
8	Brianna: I love this thing [+] I originally got it cuz I thought it would be
9	easier for my
10	toddlers to use to write [overlap] I ended up liking them [laughter] but I
11	haven't been able
12	to find them again they were on clearance at Kroger for a buck [+]
13	[overlap] I should
14	have bought all of 'em
15	Jade: [laughter]

Brianna is talking about work when she interrupts herself and looks for her "big ol' honking pen"; the attribution of the pen prompts a brief small talk exchange between Jade and Brianna; we know that Sarah is paying attention to the interaction because in line 6, Jade refers to Brianna in the third person pronoun. The excerpt is a typical example of small talk during work activities where humor is involved (Jade, lines 3 and 6) and references to personal life: "it would be easier for my toddlers" (lines 7-8). These elements show that there is a certain familiarity among the coworkers and the small talk exchange as a whole probably contributes to keeping a serene atmosphere in the workplace and in nurturing the familiarity among coworkers. In terms of implicit negotiation and co-construction of roles, it is also interesting to notice that Jade teases Brianna about having a "command" pen, playfully introducing a category connected with power dynamics. This is particularly meaningful because Jade makes this comment while addressing the actual boss, Sarah, further emphasizing the reference to power. Jade also reinforces her comment by saying, "she's got a pen that just says she's in charge [laughter]" (line 6). Sarah does not comment and Brianna ends up providing a reason for having such a big pen. In doing so, she also introduces some personal elements, such as her having toddlers and spending little money on that pen.

On a second note, it must be stressed that the result on the value *during breaks* might not be perfectly accurate as while we have data on coffee breaks or small parties at the office, sometimes the participants turned off their recorders during lunch time as it was shown in Example 4.2. — interaction 138, where Paula joins her workmates for lunch and among the others there is Alex, one of the focal participants in the ANAWC corpus (Pickering & Bruce, 2009).

Both Alex and Paula agree on having the recorders turned off for lunch. We can deduce therefore that we are losing a fair amount of small talk, as lunch breaks are suitable situations for talking of non-task-related topics among workmates.

In studies like this one, where the researcher did not participate as an observer, the numeric relation between small talk and work talk may be biased by the fact that sometimes the subjects tend to 'hide' small

talk interactions more than the work talk ones. Gossips, complaints, personal ideas, and beliefs in matters not directly connected with job tasks are often conflictual aspects of the workplace life, non-safe for relationships between coworkers. Moreover, the speakers probably do not want specific events of their own or office lives to be known by whoever will listen to the recordings. This also happens because coworkers are often very close to one another and as it has been demonstrated through several data, they share thoughts well beyond the pleasantries of the workplace. This fact is very evident by the data in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9. Intimacy.

INTIMACY AMONG PARTICIPANTS	PERCENTAGE OF INTERACTIONS
They are strangers	8,77%
They know each other	91,23%

Observing Table 4.9., it is apparent that most of the interactions in the STW sub-corpus occur among people who know each other. This fact deeply influences the kind of small talk they engage in: spending months and sometimes years working together likely makes the interactants more and more familiar with each other, which has a clear impact on every aspect of their communication and hence small talk as well.

4.5. Functions of small talk

Time informs small talk practices in many ways. A person who engages in small talk with some stranger at the bus stop or in an elevator does it knowing that that exchange will last a limited amount of time, and that it is unlikely that there will be follow-up conversations. In the workplace, the time of the conversation might be limited by the specific situation — a pre-meeting talk, quick encounter at the coffee machine, etc. — but coworkers know that there will be more conversations in the

future. Thus, small talk interactions in the workplace are often engaged with while knowing that a certain coworker may be an interlocutor for years to come or might have been an interlocutor for a very long time. This circumstance clearly informs the mode and the content of the interactions. However, time is not the only factor that informs the interactions. Typically, in any formalized context, and perhaps more so in the workplace, there is a large amount of factors that might be considered when engaging in conversations with a coworker because small talk is not just a way to fill the silence, but it is a way to build and maintain relationships and therefore, ultimately, also an informal tool to share information.

The analysis of the *function* variable has been particularly complex. In the data it is very common that one interaction appears to have multiple functions that intertwine with each other. Example 4.9. represents one of these cases. In the interaction, Paula introduces Mitch to Mariah, so the exchange includes greetings, comments about recordings and a coworker, Arleen, who left and a discussion about hair color.

Example 4.9.
STW, interaction 236

1   Mitch: hello
2   Paula: this is Mitch Macioce
3   Mariah: hello
4   Paula: she just wanted to hear your voice and see your face so she'll know who
5   she's listening to
6   Mitch: I uh she she's recording me I'm sure
7   Mariah: yep
8   Mitch: how ya doing
9   Paula: do and you didn't meet Arleen I bet she's gone though isn't
10   Mariah: yeah she just left
11   Mitch: I love red hair I love my my wife has strawberry you know what that is
12   strawberry blonde?
13   Mariah: mmm-hmm I that's what my sister
14   Mitch: tint
15   Mariah: has she's got strawberry
16   Mitch: tint of red you know
17   Mariah: mmm-hmm

18   Mitch: and my uh new well not yeah but my youngest son's fiancé has nice
19   bright red hair she she's only pint size she's only about so tall
20   Mariah: oh pint size
21   Mitch: my son is about my height so yeah lot of red hair always loved red hair
22   so

In this exchange, we can identify the following functions: a) recognition and acknowledgment expressed by Maria with "hello" (line 3) and Mitch with *"how ya doing"* (line 8); also, the exchange about hair tint (lines 11-22) could be interpreted as b) "preparatory": Mike is probably trying to get a sense of Mariah's personality (is she sociable?); there is also a c) sharing-information function accomplished when talking about Arleen (lines 9-10). These different functions cannot be detached from one another and considered as different chunks of small talk. In cases like this, there are at least two choices: either setting the coding tool in a way that multiple values could be chosen for one entry on a single variable (in this case the three different options for the variable *function* on this single interaction), or reporting as function the predominant one. In the present work, in these types of situations, the second option was preferred for the reason that the predominant function sheds particular light on the overall exchange: therefore other co-occurring functions also tend to contribute to that preeminent function: in the case of the exchange in Example 4.10 is "greeting routine – introducing." It is clear that if, beside the seven functions identified, one would also consider their combinations, the variable would end up with a number of values virtually endless, which would prevent the possibility of any synthesis.

In the introduction to his seminal work on the *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,* Erving Goffman observes how acquiring information on the interlocutor "helps to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what he will expect of them and what they may expect of him. Informed in these ways, the others will know how best to act in order to call forth a desired response from him" (Goffman, 1956, p. 1). Goffman paved the way for a still current reflection on how people select the information they share, in order to provide the interlocutors with a made-up re-presentation of the self, where a new social identity

is created. The basic concept of this theory represents the current framework of a large number of marketing studies on consumer behavior and social media interactions as they connect to impression management (see, for example, Fox *et al.,* 2018; Krämer & Winter, 2008).
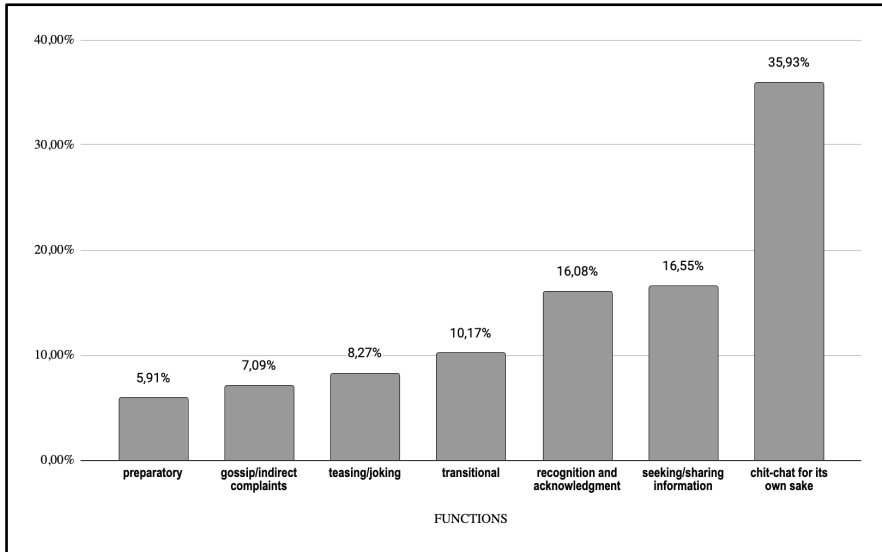
Figure 4.3. Functions of small talk interactions.

Figure 4.3 shows that the most frequent function of small talk is *chit chat for its own sake*. In 35.93% of the interactions, people in the workplace tend to engage in non-task related talk for no other apparent reason than talking with each other. As it was explained above, all the functions illustrated in Figure 4.3 are micro-functions in respect to the more general scope of building, keeping, and strengthening social relationships among coworkers.

Interactions 190 and 402 below were coded with the function *chit chat for its own sake*. They are quite different, in terms of length and in terms of content, but both appear to be aimed at nurturing the relationship.

In interaction 190, Wade and Paula discuss downloading pictures from when Paula and Aron were in the mountains onto Wade's phone.

Wade mentions that having their pictures will make it show when she calls. Then Wade shows her other pictures of other coworkers matched with their contacts.

Example 4.10.
STW, interaction 190

1	Wade: it was hey Paula
2	Paula: uh huh
3	Wade: have pictures of when you an uhm Aron were in the mountain
4	Paula: yeah
5	Wade: I'm gonna download that onto my phone tonight
6	Paula: uh-huh
7	Wade: and that way if you ever call me it's gonna pop
8	Paula: it'll pop
9	Wade: up with your picture
10	Paula: oh my gosh
11	Wade: I got Mitch
12	Paula: how scary
13	Wade: I got Jack
14	Paula: that's scary oh yeah
15	Wade: yeah well Jay's I got re-do
16	Paula: uh huh

In Example 4.10, Wade starts a friendly exchange with Paola and shows her that he has been adding pictures of many coworkers on his phone. This is a pretext to look at the picture and joke at how Mitch and Jack look scary, probably because the pictures do not compliment them. Finally they both agree that Jay's picture needs to be retaken.

This interaction is a nice example of how small talk embraces many spheres of the coworkers' lives. Their conversations, at times, revolve around sharing fragments of the workday in an amicable manner. The function of this kind of interaction is therefore primarily social as they reinforce existing relations and contribute to create a sense of community.

The following interaction, in Example 4.11, only lasts three turns, between Tony and Jasmine.

Example 4.11.
STW, interaction 402

1　　Tony: [0:02] that's a nice coat
2　　Jasmine: thanks
3　　Tony: uh-huh

Tony compliments Jasmine on her coat. She thanks him, and he responds with the typical exclamation sound — uh-huh — aimed at giving positive feedback. Compliments are known to be a way to show appreciation and to nurture a positive attitude (Holmes, 1986) in the workplace. By thanking Tony, Jasmine is accepting his compliment. Consistently with Pomeranz (2021) this can be considered as a typical "preferred chain action" where A compliments B and B agrees with the assertion. It should be noted, though, that Jasmine's response is not "semantically fitted to the specifics of that compliment" (Pomerantz, 2021, p. 66) and she does not reciprocate with any compliments for Tony nor does she provide any clues indicating a desire to expand the exchange. At that point, Tony limits his closing to a meaningful sound of agreement. Based on how familiar coworkers are with each other, compliments may or may not be positively received and/or perceived as appropriate, particularly in workplace settings (Kahalon *et al.,* 2022). One element worth noticing is that this particular compliment in Example 4.11. is referred to clothing. On the one hand, expressing attention to the interlocutor's appearance might be perceived as caring and polite, but on the other hand, it is not a work-related comment nor is it a compliment based on work performance; there is, hence, a risk for Tom's comment to be considered too personal and not appropriate to the work setting. Keeping the exchange short might be a strategy to limit or obliterate a potential sense of inappropriateness.

Looking at the chart in Figure 4.3., it is particularly interesting to notice that the second most frequent function is *seeking / sharing information,* the one that initially was not included in the coding as many scholars do not consider the exchange of information as a component of small talk. Malinowski himself, in describing phatic

communion, specifies that informing — and even expressing thoughts — is not included in his definition: "inquiries about health, comments on weather, affirmations of some supremely obvious status of things — all such are exchanged, *not in order to inform*, not in this case to connect people in action, certainly not in order to express any thought" (my emphasis, 1930, p. 313).

Exchange of information happens at many levels and the type and amount of shared information varies across interactions. In interaction 239, for example, the identified function is *seeking / sharing information* and the information is as limited as it can be.

Example 4.11.
STW, interaction 239

1	Fay: you back [+] how did it go?
2	Manuel: went well
3	Fay: good
4	Manuel: thank you
5	Fay: sure

In Example 4.11, Fay asks Manuel how something went. When Manuel replies that everything went well, Fay is satisfied with the answer: she does not ask for further details. In addition, the fact that Manuel then thanks her for asking is a further remark that Fay asks for information about Manuel's affair to show interest in his life and therefore, ultimately, to nurture their relationship. In other words, exchanging information, even little ones, is one of the strategies used in small talk interaction, and it complies with the macro-function of small talk as a fully relational type of communication.

The *seeking / sharing information* function seems to be used as a way to show interest in the interlocutor's life and also to demonstrate affection and caring attitudes. One example of this is shown in the interaction in Example 4.12. between Stanley, who is in the office, and Ron, who is entering:

Example 4.12.
STW, interaction 238

1	Stanley: [0:02] here comes the man [+] did you get some pizza?
2	Ron-AAC: [voc]
3	Stanley: there's pizza in there
4	Ron-AAC: [voc]
5	Stanley: oh come on Ron
6	Ron-AAC: [voc]
7	Stanley: you're a growing young man [+] you need that

By asking Ron if he had (already) had some pizza (line 1) and pointing him to where he could find it (line 3), Stanley is being nice to Ron, showing him affection without explicitly expressing it. Counihan (2005), maintains that "in many cultures, the exchange of food is a most profound way of making social connection" (p. 3). Moreover, the author rightly refers to the famous work of Marcel Mauss (1967), *Essai sur le don [The Gift]* where Mauss identifies three main obligations of the gift: giving, receiving, and repaying. According to Mauss, social relationships are created through the exchange; through the obligation of the reciprocation there will be continuous exchanges, not only material ones, but also spiritual that create a bound among individuals. In this light, not only the can the interaction in Example 4.12., be seen as an instance of strategies used to create bonds, but many other interactions where food, drinks, and flowers are donated, can be seen as strategies to create a sense of community among coworkers.

Observing the interaction, it is also important to notice that Ron-AAC avoids the use of the AAC device to interact with Stanley. From the context and from Stanley's turns, it can be easily entailed that, in line 2, Ron is stating that he did not get any pizza and in line 4 he expresses, through vocalization, his unwillingness to have some—which is possibly what he reaffirms in line 6. Clearly, when the content to convey is not too complex as in this interaction, using the device becomes a non-practical effort for an AAC device user. From the example, it is apparent that the exchange is felicitous in terms of relevance as the two participants seem to understand each other. The AAC users probably use non-verbal elements to accompany their vocalizations and their colleagues likely get more and

more familiar with the strategies their AAC-colleagues develop in order not to rely on the device each and every time.

One example of *transitional* function of small talk is the interaction in Example 4.13.

Example 4.13.
STW, interaction 107[3]

1	Carol: get it checked out. Do we need to get her any of the size rings out of
2	the?
3	Paula: I told her to see Cynthia she's [overlap] got some
4	Carol: oh okay cool
5	Paula: yeah
6	Carol: cool [+] you're so special
7	Paula: oh [smiles] [+] you are [overlap] you are
8	Carol: between the two of us there's like one brain
9	Paula: [laughs]

From line 1 to 4, the speakers are finishing a work talk conversation; while lines 5 to 8 represent their final exchanges, transitioning from work talk into small talk and then into leavetaking. It should be noted that this is also a typical instance of what in the literature is defined as the structural function of small talk. In fact small talk here is used to end the task at hand.

4.6. An identikit of small talk interactions

Small talk is a speech event, and its length, content, and form depend on who the participants are, what the workplace culture is, and how much time the participants have to spend not talking about specific tasks at hand; they depend on whether the job has been done or not, whether the speakers are sitting at their desks or if they meet each other while walking in an aisle of the office, and so on and so forth. These and many other reasons make it hard for small talk to fit into closed

---

[3] Note that the gray-highlighted segment is clearly work talk; hence, it is not considered part of the small talk interaction. It is shown in the example to account for the context in which the chunk of small talk is collocated.

categories with specific values. Nonetheless, this has been exactly the effort of the analysis in this chapter where the small talk interactions have not been culled from a wider corpus on the basis of the personal (and therefore subjective) opinion of the researcher or with the intent of looking for specific qualities, elements, or features to examine. Naturally-occurring spoken interactions were selected on the basis of an operational definition and systematically extracted from a workplace corpus; they have been coded, and hence counted and compared through an *ad hoc* quantitative analysis method for empirical investigation.

The resulting frequency analysis allows to generate a sort of 'identikit' of the most representative interactions of small talk in the workplace in the corpus. It may be looked at as a prototype that makes it possible to contrast small talk interactions with other corpora (or other prototypes) based on their closeness or distance to this instantiation that is deemed to be the best representative of the category. In other words, the initial operational definition made it possible to identify instances of small talk, and these instances, analyzed and compared, offer us additional and pondered information about the overall anatomy of small talk, compared to what the single instances could tell us separately.

In order to have a clearer idea of how the most representative interactions relate to all the others, we can follow Rosch's (1978) theory of prototypes. Rosch opposes two ways to obtain categories that are separate from each other and clear-cut; one way (categorical) is that of establishing necessary and sufficient criteria on which basis determining the membership of a determined object to such a category. The second way (prototype), according to Rosch, is accomplished,

> by conceiving of each category in terms of its clear cases rather than its boundaries […]. In the normal course of life, two neighbors know on whose property they are standing without exact demarcation of the boundary line. Categories can be viewed in terms of their clear cases if the perceiver places emphasis on the correlational structure of perceived attributes such that the categories are represented by their most structured portions. (Rosch, 1978, p. 11)

When applied to small talk, Rosch's *clear cases* are those interactions whose characteristics are the most present and recurring in a small talk corpus: "the more prototypical of a category a member is rated, the more attributes it has in common with other members of the category and the fewer attributes in common with members of the contrasting categories." (1978, p. 12)

The prototypical interaction of small talk will be constituted by the mean of the frequencies on each variable and, where this is not possible, (as for the topic, for example) by the highest frequency number.

Having an idea of what an interaction of small talk in the workplace looks like serves to eventually observe any small talk interaction and see how it is close to or distant from the prototype and what the elements of similarity or difference are.

On the basis of the merely quantitative results obtained, the prototypical interaction of small talk in the workplace has the following characteristics:

1. It is constituted by two or three participants (average: 2,67);
2. Its participants are both men and women (54,6% of the interactions; 24,8% only men; 20,5% only women);
3. Its participants know each other (91,23%; they are strangers in 8,77% of the interactions);
4. Its most frequent practice consists of greetings (26,2%) which in 33,94% of the cases extend in longer talk; the participants also preferably talk about people they know (9,9%), matters related to professional life (9%), and about food and restaurants (6,1%);
5. Its primary function is chit chat for its own sake (35,93% of the interactions; seeking and sharing information: 16,78%; recognition and acknowledgement: 16,8%; transitional 10,17%; teasing/joking: 8,27%; gossip/indirect complaint: 7,095; preparatory 5,67%);
6. Occurs during work activities (60,28%; after work or a task: 11,35%; waiting for something or going somewhere: 8,27%; before work or a task: 6,38%; during breaks: 3,07%);
7. It lasts 11 or 12 turns (average: 11,43);

8. It is initiated slightly more often by women (53%) than by men (47%) and when a discourse marker is used it will preferably be *so* (3,8%), *oh* (2,61%), *yeah* (2,61%), *okay* (2,38%), *well* (2,38%), or *hey* (1,9%)[4];

9. Almost half of the time it will conclude to go back to talking about work (45%; transition: 29%; separation: 21%; interruption 4%; end of the recording: 1%), and when a discourse marker is used to operate this switch, it will likely be so (11,41%), well (5,43%), okay (5,43%), uh/uhm (4,89%), or yeah (3,26%);

10. Humor will be present in two interactions out of 10 and more likely when there are three participants rather than two, and both male and female participants (see Chapter 6).
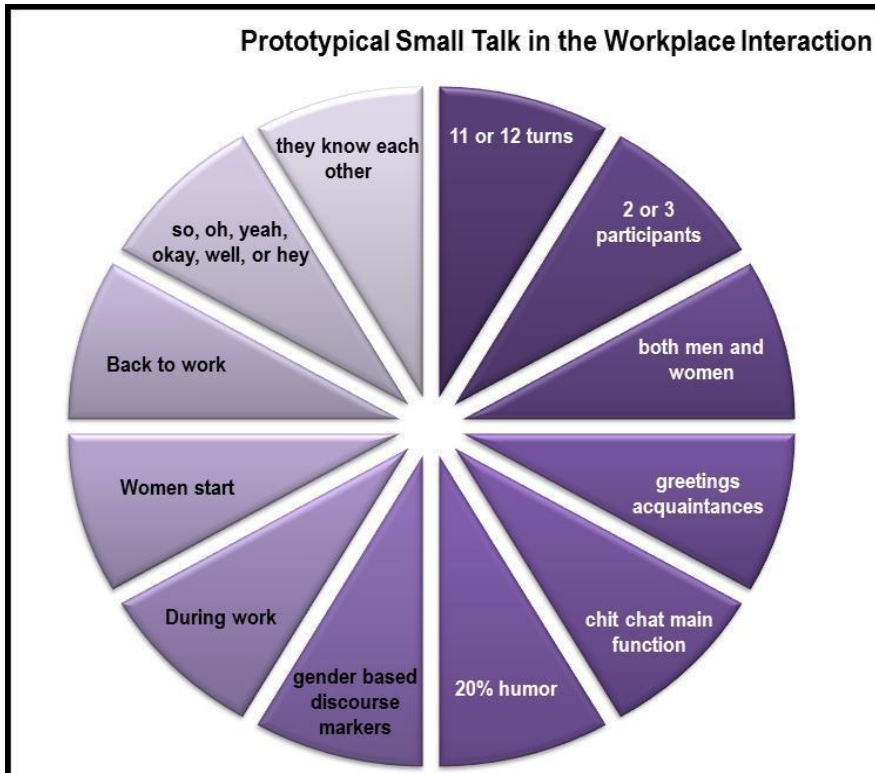

Figure 4.4. The identikit of small talk interactions.

---

[4] The results on discourse markers were discussed in detail in Di Ferrante (2021).

Figure 4.4. is a visual representation of the prototypical small talk interaction; the prototype and the data from which it is culled constitute an original contribution to the study on small talk in the workplace.

In sum, not only this work offers a protocol for the analysis of small talk, but it also offers an analysis of small talk interactions based on that protocol and a prototype of small talk against which many interactions from many different corpora can be compared.

8. When the participants in a small talk interaction operate a sharp switch from a topic to another, the interaction is separated into two different interactions, each dedicated to a topic. The continuity between the two interactions is signaled in the coding database with "tied to previous". Conversely, when the switch is smooth or different topics are handled simultaneously, the interaction is considered as one.

4.7. Chapter summary

The focus of this chapter is the analysis of the variables. Frequencies are analyzed and discussed and based on the results, specific interactions are examined in detail. The findings are compared with the results obtained in previous studies. In particular, structural and constituting elements of the interactions in the STW corpus are presented, along with the most frequent topics and a particular focus on those concerned with professional life, personal life, and topics that are not inherently non-controversial. The analysis also elicits the most frequent position and distribution of small talk interactions and their functions. The chapter ends with an attempt at outlining an identikit of small talk interactions in workplace contexts.

CHAPTER 5

GREETINGS

5.1. Introduction

This chapter is rooted within the socio-ethnographic framework of greetings as social rituals, whose origin can be traced back to the beginning of the 20th century with Malinowski's observation of interpersonal relationships and his identification of the concept of *phatic communion,* which "has the literal meaning of 'communion achieved through speech'" (Laver, 2011, p. 217). Greetings[1] have been the focus of attention of many scholars interested in the ways people relate to one another. Work in this field has been carried out from many disciplinary perspectives, which together offer a quite detailed picture of greetings as a universal social ritual.

Goffman (1971) approached greetings as a form of access to social interaction as they represent a sort of bridge between two different statuses. The matter is then why people greet each other or avoid doing so. How they do that, moving what muscles, using which words, communicating what feelings, using certain gestures. All of this has been investigated by the relevant disciplines that have also studied greetings in terms of position in the discourse structure and in terms of time. The way people greet each other is often culturally marked[2], which is why a very thorough list of possible ways in which people engage in this activity would probably hardly encompass the

---

[1] Here the focus is on verbal greetings which take place in face-to-face interactions, but it should be noted that non-verbal greetings are also a codified and used in human interactions and they are used independently or together with verbal greetings (see for example, Laver, 1967; Eisenstein-Ebsworth *et al.,* 1996).

[2] See, for example, Duranti's (1997) findings in Samoan speech communities, where there is no basic, unmarked greeting formula.

pragmalinguistic varieties and variants produced in everyday exchanges.

I remember very well the first time I, as an international student, called an American University office on the phone. At that time, I had recently moved to Texas from Italy and I called one of the campus offices to ask for information about some documents I needed to fill out. I will stress that I had never had any contact with that office and its employees before. I hear the voice of a woman who says the name of her office, immediately followed by her name; when she stops, I greet her (*good morning*), I tell her my first and last name and before I could proceed to explain the reason of my call, she said "hello, Laura, how are you today?". I felt confused. On the basis of my life experience, mainly in Italy, I would only expect such a question from someone who actually knew me and I was also used to interacting with unacquainted office employees based on a dimension of social distance that would result in our reciprocal—quite formal—discursive practice. This is why I was surprised by the voice on the phone calling me by my first name only, and asking about me; I did not know how to reply. I later learned that an answer such as, "I am good [sic], how are you?" with a cheerful intonation was an appropriate reply, and the next step would really be determined by the interlocutor's personality and, in Goffman's phrasing, by the "mutual orientation and openness for talk" (1971, p. 77): it would then either progress to a little more small talk, or it would transition into the intended reason of the contact after the first four turns of interaction. My confusion clearly derived from my lack of familiarity with that specific Texan workplace[3] (and perhaps most Texan workplaces): it took me a while to learn that campus office employees were very gracious and welcoming and it was customary –

---

[3] It is possible that this type of behavior is typical of Texas or Southern U.S. countries. In a study based on the CANCODE (The Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English) and on a corpus from an Irish radio program, McCarthy and O' Keeffe note that "greetings. phatics exchanges, and 'How are yous' (HAYs) are part of the canonical sequence of telephone openings between people who are familiar with each other, and they are typically absent in calls between strangers" (2003, p. 170). Since the corpora used by these authors were gathered in the UK, the difference might be attributed to questions of cultural pragmatics.

and expected – to engage in some greetings and jovial talk before switching to work talk.

As we will see in this chapter, the way people greet each other, particularly when they are coworkers who are well-acquainted, can be very different, to the point where it would hardly be possible to build a taxonomy that comprised them all. However, it is possible to group different types of greetings within macro-categories based on length of contact and on quality of the greeting.

The objective of this chapter is twofold: Firstly, it aims at critically pulling together reflections and findings of previous studies on greetings, which, although surprisingly limited in quantity, have been looked at from multiple disciplinary perspectives and their communicative functions have often been interpreted very differently. Secondly, the chapter aims at presenting the findings related to the types and functions of greetings in the Small Talk at Work (STW) corpus, which offer insights on face-to-face interactional dynamics and on specific workplace uses.

5.2. The nature of greetings

In 1972, the Department of Psychology of the University of Chicago hosted the IX International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences. According to its call for papers, articles were accepted in five different languages: "All papers will be reproduced in English. Papers submitted in French, German, Portuguese and Spanish will be accepted and reproduced in the original language as well as in English." (IX International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, 1972, p. 501). The topics listed on the call for papers were as different as *Paleoanthropology: The Pleistocene* or *Reproductive and Early Childhood Behavior, Language and Thought.* Group flights for the conference attendees were organized from multiple airports around the world: London, New Delhi, Lima, Prague, Sydney, Caracas, Athens, Tokyo, Mexico City, Nairobi, Rio de Janeiro, Lagos. This is just one example of the incredibly rich interdisciplinary and cultural context in which studies on greetings

developed. Some of the papers presented at this multilingual conference with speakers from all over the world were collected in a volume titled *Organization of Behavior in Face-to-Face Interaction* (Kendon *et al.,* 1975). Two years earlier, Kendon, the editor of the book, had written an article titled *A description of some human greetings* (Kendon & Ferber, 1973), while the 1975 edited book included British Indian phonetician John Laver's seminal study on phatic communion.

Thus it is no surprise that in 1997, when classifying the theoretical disciplinary roots of greetings, anthropologist Alessandro Duranti mentioned ethology, sociology, ethnography, and linguistics (conversational analysis and speech act theory). Duranti observed how each of these disciplines looked at greetings from different perspectives, their biological basis, social functions, sequential organization, illocutionary force. It is important to notice that although greetings can be (and have been) observed in isolation and through multiple approaches, nevertheless, all the scholars who focused on them have also framed their works by taking into account other disciplines' findings. This is also due to the fact that, as noticed by Sobrero (1995), greetings are based on the integrated use of three different codes: verbal, kinesic, and proxemic, which are privileged topics of different fields of research. Moreover, as the ritual of greeting is present in almost all cultures (see Levinson, 1983), greetings have been observed in very diverse contexts with often divergent findings: greetings vary according to the culture in which they are produced and on the basis of people's individual background. For example, Liu (2016) notes that compared to English, Chinese greetings are less dependent on formulaic language and more situated: "They can therefore be more 'personal' than the set phrases or formulae that are used in English. It is argued that the use of terms for Chinese greeting depends more on acknowledgement of the setting of a verbal exchange than that in western languages." (Liu, 2016, p. 2343) Through a survey with a sample of Chinese speakers and one of English-speaking people, Liu was also found that there are differences in the conception of politeness which refers to opposite core values in the two cultures (individualism vs. collectivism) and is reflected in the content of the greetings. Other differences were also

found for other variables, such as frequency and distribution of greetings. Additionally, research has shown that greetings can fulfill numerous functions, beyond acknowledging the presence of another person or establishing relations. For example, Schleicher (1997) pointed out that Yoruba people in West Africa also convey cultural information when greeting; one of the reported examples of greeting is "father/mother will come back" (Schleicher, 1997, p. 340) which reflects Yoruba beliefs in afterlife and reincarnation.

On the basis of previous research, Duranti identified six criteria to determine greetings; these criteria refer to the linguistic form of greetings and these are: 1. near-boundary occurrence; 2. establishment of a shared perceptual field; 3. adjacency-pair format; 4. relative predictability of form and content; 5. implicit establishment of a spatio-temporal unit of interaction; and 6. identification of the interlocutor as a distinct being worth recognizing. While these criteria overlap in some cases and would need a number of specifications for them to be operationalized, nonetheless they are interesting as they establish some important coordinates that contribute to the definition of greetings: their position in interaction, format, situated nature, linguistic form, space and time concerns, presence of a relation.

5.3. Greetings' place in interaction: Types of greeting

In his well-known and pioneering work on *Relations in Public*, Erving Goffman (1971) described greetings as fundamental interpersonal rites. The following year, Firth (1972) also specified that greetings fall under the umbrella of ritual behaviors[4] as they follow "patterned routines" (Firth, 1972, p. 30). While approaching this ritual, Goffman did not systematically classify different types of greetings, rather, the sociologist narratively described (proto)typical situations in which greetings occur. For example, he maintained that two strangers might nod at each other

---

[4] Here ritual is referred to "in the broader sense of formal procedures of a communicative but arbitrary kind, having the effect of controlling or regularizing a social situation" (Firth, 1972, p. 3)

in a rural town and sometimes also in an urban environment in specific conditions, like a narrow passageway. The situations he described elicit different types of greetings depending on a variety of circumstances: people may be acquainted or not, see each other often or seldom, be conditioned by specific social or contextual rules and norms, etc.

In particular, the distinction he made between types of greetings among acquaintances is particularly interesting. Goffman discriminated between *passing greetings*, which are strictly (and solely) connected to social recognition and *extended greetings*, namely those greetings that extend into a wider interaction (see also Youssouf, Grimshaw, and Bird, 1976). A more fine-grained classification is provided by Eisensten-Ebsworth *et al.* (1996) who distinguish between seven types of greetings; the first four are based on the exchange of information: *greetings on the run, speedy greetings, the chat*, and *the long greeting* where the first and the last seem to match Goffman's dichotomous categories, while *speedy greetings* appear to be a medial typology where information is exchanged (" How have you been? – Not bad. 'N you? – Oh, can't complain. Busy." Eisenstein-Ebsworth *et al.*, 1996, p. 93) and farewells are present. *The chat* also is in the medial position where additional pieces of information might be shared before parting. Furthermore, Liu (2016) distinguished between six types of greetings: *all-time, real-time, formal, weather, inquiry, others.* The limit of these classifications is that they are not characterized by exhaustive, operational definitions that would allow for their identification and a clear-cut distinction between them in actual interactions. For example, in Eisenstein-Ebsworth *et al.* (1996) classification, it is not clear how much information exchange would account for *the chat* vs. for *the long greeting.* The classification is even more complex as they add the categories of *intimate greetings, all-business greetings,* and *introductory greetings* which are not based on information exchange, but on the degree of intimacy between the participants.

5.3.1. *Passing and extended greetings*

Within the realm of classifications of greetings, the distinctions between passing and extended greeting appear to underlie most of the

variations. Passing greetings are defined as the exchanges that might happen "when two acquaintances pass close by each other on their separate daily rounds in consequence of what is seen as the routine intersecting of their activities" (Goffman, 1971, p. 75). They are characterized by brevity and often are mainly focused on acknowledging others: In Goffman's idea, they are functional to maintain "access rituals" (p. 79). It should be pointed out that Goffman underlines how greetings are strictly related to access; specifically, he maintains that greeting someone signals heightened access. However, since passing greetings, by definition, do not expand into a conversation, the access they signal is only potential. Goffman notices how they are mostly not followed by farewells and contact among speakers is very little, sometimes minimal, where either reciprocity is omitted (– "What's up?" – "All good, thanks" – question is not asked back to the interlocutor) or answering is absent.

When distinguishing between passing greetings and extended greetings, Goffman focuses on two moments: the current contact and the past relationship contact between the individuals who are greeting each other. It should be clarified that, when making this distinction, Goffman considered people who are somehow acquainted with one another:

> [the passing greeting] looks in only one direction: back from the contact to the relationship of the individuals who have momentarily come into each other's ken. The greeting associated with encounter, however, looks in two directions: back to the relationship of the participants but also forward to the temporary period of increased access that has come into being just now. (Goffman, 1971, pp. 76-77)

In other words, Goffman suggests that since passing greetings do not develop into longer interactions, then they should be seen as unidirectional, somehow both restrained to the greeting moment and "looking back" to the relationship between the greeters. More specifically, in an attempt to further clarify Goffman's perspective, it could be seen as if there were two focal moments to passing greetings: (A) all the times that contributed to building the relationship and (B)

the moment of the greeting. Thus, in Goffman's view, passing greetings orient the speakers in a relationship span that goes from B to A, while in the case of extended greetings it also goes from B to B+, where B+ is the moment of the greeting, (B), which extends into a longer stretch of talk, (+). Now, the fact that Goffman himself refers to them as "maintenance rituals" (1972, p. 76) seems to imply that, in the intentions of the acquaintances, there is the possibility of future contact and then the greeting works as a marker of a relationship that is being kept alive. This might entail that greetings exchanged for mere politeness[5] are not encompassed here

In Goffman's perspective then, passing greetings do not appear to be considered as an actual encounter, rather, they seem to be markers of recognition and (only potential) access. Slightly differently, Schiffrin (1977) maintained that passing greetings are focused activities, even in situations where they co-occur with other interactions. Imagine for example in a workplace, someone talking with a coworker and a third coworker passes by with greetings being exchanged: these greetings would be subordinate to the more dominant activity, namely the talk between the first two coworkers; nonetheless, in Shiffrin's perspective, the talk and the greeting would be co-occurring encounters. She concludes that "all opening sequences can be considered encounters" (Schiffrin, 1977, p. 688). It is very relevant to note that in Goffman's block quotation above, he opposes passing greetings to "greeting associated with encounter" (Goffman, 1971, pp. 76-77). In this sense, Goffman's and Schiffrin's perspective on greetings partly diverge as the former sees a greeting as something separate, different from an encounter — although they can be associated with one another — while Schiffrin sees greetings as encounters themselves. In this regard, it seems relevant to point out that Duranti's (1997) conceptualization of greeting contrasts the idea that the prominent function of greetings is the one of merely acknowledging the presence of the interlocutor: the scholar observes that this conception would entail that the propositional content of greetings would be ignored, that is, what is

---

[5] In the Italian language they are conveniently codified with the noun phrase *saluto di circostanza* (conventional greeting).

actually said while greeting "may be seen as socially insignificant" (p. 66). Duranti insisted that the linguistic form of greetings should also be looked at as a real "concern participants manifest toward gaining access to new information about their interlocutors" (p. 70). Moreover, in a cross-cultural pragmatics study on two salutations (*hi* for English and *ciao* for Italian), Farese (2015) pointed out that greetings carry different meanings across languages, but it also suggests that the choice of a given greetings over another is also compatible with the intention of conveying certain meanings (e.g., I want to tell you something nice). Thus, possibly, even a brief, passing greeting represents a way to nourish a relationship and not just a tool to keep a channel of communication open or show good manners. Similarly, Eisenstein-Ebsworth *et al.* (1996), who compared greetings in native and non-native speakers of American English, found that "greetings often convey feelings which are reflected either in the words themselves or the tone of voice (e.g., 'Oh, it's nice to see you' or 'Hi, how are you?' [warm tone])" (p. 92).

Consistently, in both Schiffrin's and Duranti's view, in the specific context of workplace exchanges, passing greetings appear to be means to exchange important information and are charged with additional pragmatic considerations. People who pass by in the workplace, might not be looking "forward to the temporary period of increased access" (Goffman, 1971, p. 77) as there is no extension in the interaction, but them being coworkers implies their being aware that the greeting itself is a necessary interactional ritual to ensure the maintenance of good-standing relationships. In other words, the greeting also serves as a means for the coworkers to inform each other that they are aware of their relationship being in place and that there is will and interest in maintaining it. Duranti observes that this happens despite the routinized nature of greetings and predictability of their linguistic form, which on the one hand does not necessarily determine greetings' predictability and on the other hand, is still compatible with the participants actually meaning/intending what they are saying. It should also be added that the prosodic features of greetings might also help interpreting the propositional content (see Gumpertz, 1975;

Eisenstein-Ebsworth *et al.,* 1996) and therefore, in a way, the extent of the interlocutor's interest in the relationship, which represents an additional and very important piece of information that could help understand workplace dynamics. Furthermore, Laver (1975) observed that just by speaking, people reveal personal characteristics of themselves (from origin to mood), which can be inferred by the listeners on the basis of phonetic features of the speaker's talk as well as from linguistic choices:

> so that, just the fact of speaking and of allowing the other participant to hear the sound of one's voice, regardless of the actual linguistic content of the utterance, provides the listener with some of the information he needs to reach some initial conclusions about the psychosocial structuring of the interaction. (Laver, 1975, p. 221)

Passing greetings, when exchanged among coworkers, look both back and forth to the relationship and present and/or future access possibilities. This is also demonstrated by Eisenstein-Ebsworth *et al.* (1996) who identified *greetings on the run*, which are described as those exchanged in situations where "two people see each other and exchange brief phatic statements or questions which do not necessarily require responses" (p. 93) and provided the example of two students who walk past each other in the university hallway and quickly greet:

> female student: Hi, how ya doin'?
> male student: Hi! Gotta run. I'm late for class
> female student: Okay!
> (Eisenstein-Ebsworth *et al.,* 1996, p. 93)

The authors noticed that this type of greetings often includes excuses or apologies for the shortness of communication and sometimes reassurance that "no slight is intended or that more lengthy contact is hoped for in the future. Expressions like, 'I'll call you', see you', or 'talk to you soon' are examples of this kind of reassurance." (Eisenstein-Ebsworth *et al.,* 1996, p. 93). This particular finding regarding reassurance and looking forward to future contact supports

the argument discussed so far that also passing greetings are functional to maintaining and reinforcing the existing relationship.

Differently from passing greetings, extended greetings are not limited to signal the potential access among interlocutors through ritualized communicative exchanges: extended greetings are in fact access in place, or access in the making. They delve into extensive interactions and vary in length and content, although they involve longer interactions compared to passing greetings. In the 1970s, John Laver conducted some of the first exploratory studies on phatic communion, with the intent of understanding the complex interactional paths undertaken by people to create "ties of union" (Laver, 2011, p. 216). In particular, he was interested in the opening and closing phases of the interactions and had dozens of students informally observing people's exchanges. Laver's studies and reflections are particularly relevant here because greetings typically happen at the beginning and end of interactions, which are the phases on which Laver focuses most.

Laver identified eight stages of any encounter, which consist of verbal and non-verbal communication and include gaze, gestures, facial expressions, proximity, etc. The seventh stage, which is core to his analysis, "is the exchange of stereotyped linguistic symbols used as tokens in the transactions of phatic communion" (2011, p. 220) which come right before the last stage, namely "the indication by the participants that they would like to initiate the main business of the interaction." (2011, p. 220). Laver's seventh stage concerns extended greetings as it focuses on greetings that extend in further interaction.

In some works (McCarthy, 2000; Koester, 2006; 2010), greetings were considered as separate categories from other forms of relational talk, including small talk, and have been often addressed as "phatic exchanges" (McCarthy, 2000, p. 104). However, in this work, *passing greetings* are considered as forming part of small talk interactions on the basis of a series of considerations. While on the one hand, consistently with Goffman, *passing greetings* and *extended greetings* are here dealt with as structurally different, on the other hand, just like the extended ones, passing greetings contribute to nurture social relationships, complying, thus, with the central function of small talk. Passing greetings keep a

channel open between two people. All of us have experienced or witnessed those situations in which two people who know each other and maybe have even been close for a while, at some point, for whatever reason, lose interest in one another and as the time passes, they also stop greeting each other. Here it is maintained that avoiding greeting someone who used to be an acquaintance marks the shutting of the channel of communication and, therefore, the end or suspension of a relationship. Often passing greetings do not evolve into an extended one for a number of reasons (lack of time or because people are busy at the moment of the encounter, etc.), but the fact that the two people greet each other every time they happen to be in the same place at the same time does mark their intention not to close their communication channel and, therefore, keep their relationship going. In the following sections, a closer look is taken to the actual greetings in the corpus, to identify types, linguistic forms, and functions they encompass in the workplace context.

5.4. Greetings in the ANAWC corpus

As the ANAWC corpus includes natural and spontaneous interactions among coworkers during typical workdays, greeting interactions are present in the corpus among a wide range of people, at different times of the day. Greetings are exchanged when a person first arrives at the office in the morning, or when two or more coworkers pass by each other walking from one office to another, or when they see each other in the office coffee corner, or when the workday has finished and one or more people leave the office. This variety of situations allowed for the recording of several types of workplace greetings.

   Out of 423 interactions, in the AAC and Non-AAC Workplace corpus, 111 consist of greetings. In other words, in this corpus, over one fourth of relational talk in the workplace consists of or comprises greetings. This high occurrence is expected due to the ritualized nature of greetings and their being inherent components of universal relationship and politeness practices. Nonetheless, it should be remarked and not taken for granted how these rituals are present in almost every social encounter, from the most to the least intimate, and

in the Small Talk at Work corpus (STW), they turn out to be by far the most frequent type of relational exchange among coworkers. In this light, the limited attention that has been paid to greetings as an object of study does not really do justice to this act of speech.

The interactions consisting of greetings were extracted from the STW corpus to form a greetings-only sub-corpus of 6,940 words. The sub-corpus of greetings was then uploaded to Sketch engine to find out what are the most frequently occurring words.

Table 5.1. Frequency list of greeting interactions.

RANK	ITEM	FREQUENCY
1	you	251
2	i	192
3	paula	180
4	to	98
5	good	81
6	it	68
7	tony	67
8	okay	67
9	the	66
10	and	63
11	how	63
12	yeah	63
13	so	50
14	that	50
15	is	50
16	a	48
17	see	47
18	mary	47
19	oh	47
20	hey	46

The frequency list strongly represents the relational nature of greetings: "You" and "I" are the most frequently occurring words: this extensive use of pronouns is expected as greetings often involve addressing someone directly and talking about oneself. Consistently with this, first names occur very frequently: Paula (180), Tony (67) and Mary (47); it is important to stress that these occurrences are only related to those interactions consisting of greetings. Surprisingly, salutations like, "hi" or "hello" are not among the first 20 words in the list, only "hey" appears in the 20th position with 46 occurrences. Given this outcome and the fact that greetings are a privileged occasion for the use of routine formulas and formulaic expressions (see Coulmas, 1979), the greeting interactions of the STW corpus were explored for the most frequently occurring three- and four-word n-grams. They are presented in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2. Three- and four-word n-grams in the greeting interactions.

RANK	N-GRAM	FREQUENCY
1	how are you	30
2	to meet you	16
3	nice to meet you	13
4	nice to meet	13
5	good to see	11
6	how you doing	11
7	I don't	9
8	to see you	8
9	good to see you	7
10	good how are	7

Table 5.2. shows that the most frequent n-grams are very much focused on the interlocutor and two patterns are present: 1) asking about the interlocutor's wellbeing: *how are you, how you doing*; 2) expressing positive attitudes towards the encounter: *nice to meet you, good to see you*. These expressions are very formulaic and strictly connected to the situation where people meet and greet each other.

It should be pointed out that the label *greetings* constitutes a large umbrella under which different types of greetings are comprised. Here, four main categories were identified. *Extended greetings* are defined as those greetings that extend for several turns by touching on topics other than the actual greeting itself. *Passing greetings* consist of those situations where people meet for a very short amount of time, for example, passing by or running into each other in an aisle or passing in front of an office with an open door and exchanging a short number of turns, sometimes just two. *Farewell greetings* vary in length and are different from the previous categories because they happen when one or more interactants are leaving. Finally, *Introducing greetings* is one of those types of greetings that really depend on the type of workplace and workers being analyzed: in service encounter situations, it would never occur—or it would be rather rare—that greetings are accompanied by introductions of other people. Table 5.3 below represents a breakdown of these types of greetings.

Table 5.3. Classification of greetings.

TYPES OF GREETINGS	PRESENCE
Passing greetings	32.11%
Extended greetings	33.94%
Farewell greetings	22.02%
Introducing greetings	11.93%

Passing greetings are very frequent, but they are very limited in number of turns and do not contribute to the development of a more extensive conversation. *Extended greetings* are those that ease the encounter towards a longer interaction and they are the most frequent in the STW corpus. *Farewell greetings* constitute only 22% of the total number of greetings in the corpus, but it should be taken into account that usually, before leaving, people only greet those who are around them at the time of the leavetaking and do not go around the office greeting everyone, whereas, during the whole day at work, multiple people may be encountered and greeted. Finally, unsurprisingly,

introducing is the least frequent type: in the workplaces where the present study was carried out, workers mostly know each other, so introductions do not happen very often. Although these categories might encompass various sub-varieties of greetings, they serve as an effective means to distinguish and describe them.

Passing greetings perfectly fit the busy routines at work. In the STW corpus, it is very frequent that employees walk around the office to complete different tasks and in doing so, they meet other coworkers and they greet each other in passing. Most coworkers see each other every day and brief exchanges fulfill basic needs related to keeping good-standing relationships as well as needs related to time and work schedule management.

Example 5.1 is a typical passing greeting in the STW corpus. Ray and Landon pass by each other and exchange a salutation in just three turns:

Example 5.1., *passing greetings*
STW, interaction 67

1   Ray: how you doing?
2   Landon: I'm doing good. How 'bout you?
3   Ray: doing alright

The interaction in the example can be included in the category of passing greetings. There is no farewell, but there are both reciprocity - Landon asks back about Ray's health—and answering—they both briefly inform each other about their well-being. Even in just three turns though, a great deal is accomplished in terms of interpersonal communication. The two coworkers manage to ask and inform each other about their wellbeing. In this case, they both reassure each other about their being well while at the same time showing interest in each other. In this way, they both reinforce their relationship and ensure its continuance, at least for the time being. It is interesting to notice that neither of them thanks the other nor do they further comment on the positive news of their wellbeing. Thus, just three turns are enough for these two speakers to fulfill three functions: exchange information, reinforce the relationship, and ensure its continuance. The interaction

remains unaffected by the absence of explicit politeness markers, as the frequency and familiarity of their daily encounters foster a natural friendliness that renders the explicit expression of gratitude unnecessary.

As far as extended greetings are concerned, in the STW sub-corpus they appear to have an important role in building and keeping relationships. Extending the greetings often translates into exchanging information about personal events which nurtures the reciprocal knowledge of the participants; it also constitutes a way to show interest in each other. One instance of extended greetings is presented in Example 5.2.

Example 5.2., *extended greetings*
STW, interaction 93

1	Serena: [on phone]: hello Sarah
2	Sarah-AAC: [voc]
3	Serena: how are you?
4	Sarah-AAC: [voc] how are you?
5	Serena: I'm all right [+] ready for Spring
6	Sarah-AAC: I know
7	Serena: had a haircut the other day and it's a little shorter than usual
8	and I told somebody it was just because I was trying to make spring come
9	a little faster
10	Sarah-AAC: [laughter]

Interaction 93 represents a typical example that was codified as extended greetings. It involves one of the focal participants, Sarah, who is the one recording, and her coworker, Serena. Sarah has a language impairment and although having a device through which she speaks, especially in official meetings and for well-defined purposes, she also relies on unaided communication (see Müller & Soto, 2022): which means methods in which speakers decide not to use external tools to convey their messages. Instead, they rely on their capacity to utilize their bodies, such as eye contact, hand gestures, facial expressions, and vocalizations (see Dahlgren Sandberg & Liliedahl, 2008; Di Ferrante & Bouchard, 2020). Because greetings are very formulaic and people can also rely on contextual clues to understand each other, this is a

typical situation where vocalizations are used consistently and effectively[6].

The greeting in the example, does not end with line 5 when salutations have been exchanged as well as ritual questions about each other's wellbeing. At that point, Serena decides to add some details to the information about herself and she states that she is "ready for Spring". Doing so, Serena shows a positive disposition to the exchange, which is reciprocated by Sarah, who responds and agrees. Serena then extends the interaction by narrating a short, personal episode about cutting her hair wishing that the warmer season would approach more quickly. In this way, Serena succeeds in sharing something personal by connecting it to seasonal talk, which is typical of small talk and quick exchanges. However, by telling Sarah about her haircut and connecting it to a funny story, she contributes to building a positive work environment, as confirmed by Sarah's laughing in response to Serena's story. It should also be noticed that this extended greeting contributes to fostering the reciprocal knowledge of the participants, for example Sarah learns that Serena can be cordial, that the current length of her hair is shorter than usual and that she likes Spring. Serena, on the other hand, learned that Sarah is polite and positively responds to a funny story.

Farewells usually happen at the end of the workday or when a meeting finishes. The length of the exchange varies greatly and it can be as short as two-turn long or it can include multiple turns. Example 5.3 below is an instance of the first case.

Example 5.3., *farewell*
STW, interaction 142

1   Jay: see you later Paula
2   Paula: alright thanks Jay

In this interaction, the exchange does not extend beyond basic politeness and the expression of some degree of familiarity, which is

---

[6] The massage is conveyed and understood in a timely manner because the AAC speaker does not need to spend time operating the device.

conveyed by the fact that both the speakers decide to say the name of their interlocutors, making the farewell more personal. Jay is leaving the office, while Paula is not. He greets her with a routine expression, "see you later", which not only has the function of salutation, but it also conveys the intention or the expectation of meeting each other again soon, which is appropriate for two coworkers working in the same workplace for an extended period of time. In the STW corpus, farewells usually contain formulaic expressions which might consist of or imply a) salutation (*bye, goodbye*) b) plans for future occasions of encounter (*see you*), c) wishes for the rest of the day or the week (*have a good weekend, have a good day*), d) comments on the encounter that has just happened (*nice seeing you, thanks for coming*). Interaction 77 in Example 5.4 is an instance containing some of these elements.

Example 5.4., *farewell*
STW, interaction 77

1	Michelle: thank you both for participating
2	Sarah-AAC: [voc]
3	Darren: you did good
4	Margaret: alright
5	
6	Sarah-AAC: [voc]
7	Darren: have a good day we'll see you later
8	Margaret: okay [overlap] bye
9	Michelle: alright bye
10	Darren: alright bye

Interaction 77 involves four speakers who have finished a meeting and are greeting each other before separating. The exchange contains three of the four types of formulaic expressions observed in farewell: *salutations* (lines 8-10): in all three turns it is used "bye" preceded by a discourse marker (okay, alright) which signals the transition to the final turn of the interaction. In lines 1 and 3 Michelle and Darren *make comments about the meeting* that has just taken place: Michelle thanks Sarah and Darren ("thank you for participating"), Darren compliments Michelle who has led the meeting ("you did good"). Finally, Darren

(line 7) expresses wishes for the future ("have a good day we'll see you later").

As mentioned above, *introducing* is the least frequent type of greeting in the corpus and this depends on the type of workplace: people are only introduced in case of job interviews, new hiring or people from other offices and organizations joining the focal group for training or other purposes. These situations are not overly frequent in the STW corpus. The interaction 225 presented below shows Paula introducing Mary to her coworkers. Mary is a student and she is at Pam's workplace as a volunteer. She has just started, so she needs orientation regarding the organizational structure, the roles of employees and volunteers, and the tasks she is going to undertake.

Example 5.5. *introduction*
STW, interaction 225

1   Paula: oh Dan Dan did you this is Mary from
2   Mary: Hi
3   Paula: Welley
4   Dan: how you doing?
5   Paula: she's gonna be a physical therapist
6   Dan: oh okay
7   Paula: and this is Lonnie
8   Lonnie: how you doing? You doing okay today?
9   Mary: Mary Lonnie
10   Lonnie: yes ma'am yes ma'am
11   Mary: nice to meet you thank you
12   Paula: yep they just got back off the truck
13   Mary: oh
14   Paula: picking up donations
15   Mary: well go eat, go eat

The introduction of Mary to Dan and Lonnie, includes some formulaic expressions, such as "how you doing", which is used both by Dan (line 4) and Lonnie (line 9); Paula also gives Mary some contextual information about the fact that Dan and Lonnie "just got back off the truck" because they were "picking up donations". It is interesting to

notice that, although this interaction is social in nature and not specifically oriented to work, it is still part of the job: Paula is introducing Mary to the other coworkers as part of her job; similarly, in order to do her job effectively, Mary needs to be acquainted with the people who work there. Moreover, Dan and Lonnie, need to be aware of those who belong to that workplace as workers. In other words, social exchanges are part of the job and being pleasant is not required, but most workers are nice to others because this contributes to a positive environment at work. When Mary says (line 17) "well go eat, go eat" to someone she has just met, she's showing solidarity and understanding for other people's necessities, which is a positive social attitude and a valued soft skill in the workplace.

5.5. Chapter summary

This chapter focuses on greetings, which is the most recurring type of interaction in the Small Talk at Work corpus. In the first part of the chapter, the multidisciplinary, yet limited, research on greetings is analyzed critically in the attempt to outline a systematic description of the nature, structure, and functions of this fundamental social ritual. A specific focus is dedicated to their nature and the distinction between passing and extended greetings. The second part of the chapter focuses first on the identification and interpretation of the most frequent words and n-grams in the greeting interactions and second, to the analysis of four specific types of greetings that were found in the corpus: passing, extended, farewell, and introductions. The findings suggest that there are routinary expressions which are typical of greetings in the workplace. Moreover, it is shown how greetings, which are usually classified as small talk instances, still play an important role in the workers' daily routine and are, in many cases, actually a relevant part of the job.

SMALL TALK, HUMOR, AND THE GENDER VARIABLE

6.1. Humor at work

As mentioned before, workplaces are often comprised of communities of people who spend a large amount of time together and engage in all kinds of discourses, whose topics and modes depend on a number of reasons: from how well workers know each other, to how often they engage in talks which are not related to work.

In everyday interactions, humor is used as a discursive strategy to achieve a wide range of interpersonal goals, including conveying solidarity, mitigate conflict, and/or negotiate consensus (for example, Holmes & Marra, 2004; Norrick, 1994; Norrick & Spitz, 2008; 2010; Schnurr & Chan, 2011).

The role of humor in workplace contexts has been explored from multiple perspectives by scholars from all over the world and a large part of the contributions on this branch of humor studies originated by Holmes and her affiliates at Victoria University of Wellington within The Language in the Workplace Project. The project is based on a corpus of approximately 2000 interactions in 30 different workplace settings. Those studies are based on the analysis of actual, spontaneous interactions in New Zealand workplaces and particular attention was paid to the ways humor is used as a means to manage relational dynamics among coworkers. The foci of the studies ranged from power and hierarchies (Holmes 2000; Holmes and Marra 2002; Holmes and Stubbe 2003), to the approach to difficult situations (Holmes, 2007), from the discursive strategies used to facilitate maintenance of good relationships, to those aimed at creating solidarity and group belonging. Moreover, humor has also been observed as a relational

strategy to mitigate tension in conflict talk in the workplace (Du, 2022) and also in those exchanges where gender is part of the equation (see Holmes, 2006; Holmes, 2009). There seems to be, however, a lack of studies that would give account of how much humor is used in the workplace and whether its use is influenced by the gender variable. The objective of this chapter is to examine the Small Talk at Work corpus to observe how much humor is carried out in the workplace while doing small talk and whether the quantity of humor vary across gender.

6.2. Identifying humorous interactions

One aspect that has not been fully explored is the extent to which humor is used in workplaces. While many studies have addressed the way humor interactions are co-constructed also depending on the genre of the speakers and some studies have explored the functions humor fulfills in workplace relationships, in this work, the focus is on how the very presence of humor in interaction is somehow informed by the gender of the participants in the interaction. The understanding of humor as connected to gender has advanced greatly since the 1970s when seminal works described the place of women in language (see Lakoff, 1975).

Through a frequency analysis, my intent was to see how many small talk exchanges involved humor and if and how gender is an intervening variable in interactions where humor is present. Exchanges comprised both men and women, only men, and only women; the qualitative analysis also explored if the use of humor in small talk exchanges in U.S. workplaces supported any function in connection with solidarity. Following Attardo (2012; 2020), humor instances have been identified, in this work, through the triangulation method which considers four elements for the analysis: a) semantic and pragmatic analysis of the text; b) intention of the speaker; c) response of the hearer; d) markers of humor.

The semantic and pragmatic analysis represents the first step for the identification of the humor and the tools and modality of analysis are culled from the *General Theory of Verbal Humor* (Attardo, 1994), which

suggests that in order to analyze a humorous text, six knowledge resources (Attardo, 2001) need to be considered:

— the script opposition (Raskin, 1985)
— the logical mechanism (the logic that determines the opposition of scripts)
— the situation (participants and object included)
— the target
— the narrative strategy
— the language

Once an instance of humor is identified through the semantic and pragmatic analysis, it is important to verify it with the other elements: *the intention of the speaker,* which can be detected through signals like: "I am kidding" or "It's a joke"; *the response of the heare, which* can be expressed in multiple ways (e.g.: adding humor, echoing the word of the previous speaker) and *the use of humor markers* (e.g.: laugh, smile).

In a corpus of spoken discourse, markers of humor are particularly challenging to identify because it happens often that transcribed laughter can be unrelated to humor (it is the case, for example, of nervous laughter) or related to the humor going on in parallel conversations (for an extensive discussion on the links — and lack thereof — between laughter and humor see Attardo, 1994, pp. 10-13; Attardo 2020, and Gironzetti, 2017, pp. 406-408). This is one of the reasons why, in this work, all the audio files were listened to multiple times; the listening was also particularly useful for the semantic and pragmatic analysis as some elements, such as the tone of voice or the use of pauses, which are very important hints for comprehension of the situation and of the dynamics among the speakers.

On the basis of the Triangulation Method (first presented in Attardo, 2012), a number of factors may be taken into account for the identification of humor: a) the humorous intent of the speaker –when it is possible to trace it through metalinguistic cues; b) the recognition of such intent by the interlocutor who signals it through humor markers such as laughter, smiling, prosody, etc., and c) the presence of

script oppositions and incongruity, identified through pragmatic and/or semantic analysis (Attardo, 1994; 2001; 2018; Raskin, 1985)

The presence (or absence) of humor in interaction is strictly related to several variables, which are strictly connected with the specific workplace life. Holmes and colleagues (2001) summarized many of these variables with reference to business meetings:

> The activity type involved, the size of the group, the length of the meeting, the contribution of the chair to the humor, the objectives of the meeting, the 'seriousness' of the topic, the personalities of the contributors, characteristics of the workplace 'culture', the particular point reached in the meeting (e.g., tension relief after difficult phase), and […] the gender of participants. (pp. 92-93)

Some of these factors do not apply to small talk interactions, as interpersonal dynamics and communicative needs vary greatly across contexts. Specifically, business meetings constitute a well-defined workplace genre (Angouri & Marra, 2010; Handford, 2006), characterized differently from small talk (Koester, 2010). However, Holmes and colleagues (2001) provide a general idea of the multitude of variables associated with the occurrence of humor among coworkers. It must be considered that there are also structural variables that should be considered: the most important clearly is the methodology used for the identification of humor.[1] For example, in this work, the Triangulation Method was adopted, but not all the scholars operated the same choice[2] even if they analyze some of the elements considered in the Triangulation Method. For the identification of humor, Holmes, Marra, and Burns (2001) adopted an approach that has some

---

[1] See, for example, Hay's (2000) critique to Cox and colleagues' 1990 study pointing out that the methodological tool used, the questionnaire, was not apt to answer the researchers' questions; in fact it was investigating aspects very different from those indicated by the authors of the study.

[2] Rogerson-Revell (2007), for example, identifies as humorous only instances where humor is "externally marked by participant response" (p. 12) which means that the author does not consider the intent of the speaker and the General Theory of Verbal Humor (Attardo, 2004). Conversely, Hay (2000) considered humor "anything the speaker intends to be funny" (p. 715), and specifies that she was interested in "intentional humor, including humor that remained unsupported by the audience" (p. 715).

aspects in common with the triangulation: they define as humorous those utterances

> which are identified by the analyst, on the basis of paralinguistic, prosodic, and discoursal clues, as intended by the speaker(s) to be amusing and perceived to be amusing by at least some participants. (p. 88)

In other words, they did not make explicit reference either to humor markers or opposition of scripts. Therefore, this type of procedure might have left out interactions that would be included by using the Triangulation. The three scholars also identified a further variable connected to the presence of humor: they suggested that both the quality and quantity of humor depend on the distinctive culture developed in different workplaces. In the same vein, Adams (2012), in her study on humor in computer-mediated communication, associated the frequency of humor to the situational and contextual setting. Moreover Lynch (2009), in his ethnographic study on humor in restaurants' kitchens, pointed out five different functions of the use of humor in the workplace and one of those was "humor as safety valve resistance" (p. 456), which was defined as:

> the humor that the chefs use to distance themselves from the constraining effects that production demands and hotel hierarchy can have on their labor and professional identity. At the same time this resistance (blowing off steam) does not directly change the restrictive nature that these constraints have in the kitchen. (Lynch, 2009, p. 456)

In this perspective, Lynch demonstrated that the type of workplace, its rhythms, and constrictions heavily influence the use and the modalities of production of humor during work.

An additional variable to consider for the interpretation of the data is represented by the portions of texts taken into account: the interactions that constitute the corpus of the present study are relatively short — an average of 11.44 turns per exchange. Studies like Rogerson-Revell (2007) that focused on humor in business meetings of an airline corporation, detected humor in every meeting analyzed, but the length

of those meetings varied from 35 minutes to 1 hour and 35 minutes which is a time frame not comparable with that of the STW interactions that usually consisted of few minutes, or even seconds. Also the studies of Holmes, Marra, and Burns (2001) and Holmes and Marra (2002) focused on business meetings, but this time these meetings varied from five minutes to more than one hour, which entails that in order to make their data homogeneous, they calculated the number of instances of humor in 100 minutes of recording and found that there was an average of 34 instances — a minimum of 13 and a maximum of 121 instances for a hundred minutes (Holmes *et al.,* 2001, p. 92).

6.3. Humor in the Small Talk at Work corpus

As mentioned before, interactions were coded one by one for all the variables, including the presence of humor. Table 6.1. shows that humor is present in 19% of the total interactions of the corpus.

Table 6.1. The presence of humor.

PRESENCE OF HUMOR	PERCENTAGE
yes	19%
no	81%

The next step of the analysis consisted in the exploration of the presence of humor with other variables such as the number of participants, the topics, and the gender of the participants. First, the relationship between the number of participants in each interaction and the presence of humor was examined. The particularity of the STW sub-corpus is that differently from most corpora, it is organized in distinct, small talk-only interactions, which allows a precise observation of certain phenomena related to definite types of participants. Table 6.2. shows the distribution of humor based on the number of participants.

Table **6.2**. Humor and distribution of participants in interaction.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE INTERACTION	PRESENCE OF HUMOR		
	no	yes	Total
2	221	17	238
3	85	33	118
4	24	19	43
5	11	7	18
6	2	2	4
7	1	0	1
8	0	1	1

As it is shown in the table, the majority of the interactions consist of two or three participants, very few interactions in the corpus involve more than five people. For the purposes of this research, it was interesting to explore whether the number of participants in the interaction has an impact on the presence of humor. Table 6.3. shows the number of participants in relation to the presence of humor.

Table **6.3.** Impact of humor presence on number of participants in interaction: Descriptive statistic.

PRESENCE OF HUMOR	PARTICIPANTS			
	N	MEAN	STD. DEVIATION	STD. ERROR MEAN
no	344	2,52	,843	,045
yes	79	3,34	1,120	,126

The descriptive statistics shows a difference in means (2.52 vs. 3.34) when humor is present indicating that, on average, interactions where humor is present tend to involve a higher number of participants compared to those without humor. This finding could have implications for understanding the social dynamics or engagement levels in interactions where humor is introduced. Moreover, the variability, as indicated by the standard deviation, is higher in the "Humor Present" group (1.120) compared to the "No Humor" group

(0.843). This suggests a wider range of participant numbers in interactions with humor.

The potential association between the presence of humor and a higher average number of participants in each interaction was further tested through an Independent-Samples Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) Test as shown in Table 6.4.

Table 6.4. Independent-Samples Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test summaty.

Total N		423
Most extreme differences	Absolute	,427
	Positive	,427
	Negative	,000
Test Statistic		3,425
Asymptotic Sig.(2-sided test)		,000

Based on the results of the K-S test, the null hypothesis that the two samples come from the same distribution is rejected. The p-value (p = <0,01) suggests that there are systematic differences between the distribution of number of participants and presence of humor and that these are statistically significant. This means that as interactions have a higher number of participants, there is a tendency for the presence of humor to also increase.

6.3.1. *Humor and gender*

The analysis shows a positive correlation that reveals that the presence of humor is related to the number of participants in the interactions: the more subjects that are present within an exchange, the more likely verbal humor will be used. Given this result, it seemed interesting to investigate whether, as well as the number of the participants, their gender had a role in the choice of introducing humorous instances in the interactions. In Table 6.5., the presence of humor is represented in relation to three types of gender distribution, namely interactions where participants are a) both men and women, b) only men, and c)

only women. The data have been normalized on the basis of this tripartite distribution of gender and according to the data presented in Table 6.5.

Table 6.5. Presence of humor by gender in interaction.

PARTICIPANTS	HUMOR
both men and women	24.6%
only men	3.8%
only women	20.6%

As shown in Table 6.5, interactions that include both men and women are more frequently humorous (24.6%). Very interestingly, in the exchanges among women only, humor is present 20.6% of the times, a frequency much higher than that of the interactions where only men are interacting. In other words, humor in small talk interactions appears to be linked to the gender of the speakers.

These results are consistent with evidence from previous studies in New Zealand workplaces (Holmes *et al.,* 2001; Holmes, 2007) and groups of friends (Hay, 2000) that "challenges the widely held stereotype that women lack sense of humour, and the equally widespread popular misconception that women produce less humor than men in the workplace" (Holmes *et al.,* 2001, p. 104), even in multiethnic contexts: "women in single-gender groups self-direct humor significantly more than men in single-gender groups" (Ervin-Tripp & Lampert, 1992). Holmes, Marra, and Burns (2001) found that in women-only meetings more humor[3] was produced than in the men-only ones. Similarly, Hay (2000) found that in spontaneous conversations among friends, women use humor to form and maintain solidarity more often than men.

---

[3] The methodology of this study is not comparable with the present work as the New Zealand scholars purposely chose for their analysis 22 meetings where humor occurred.

6.3.2. *Humor and small talk topics*

The next step of the analysis was to examine the distribution of presence of humor based on the small talk topics emerged in the corpus. Table 6.6. shows the 423 interactions, distributed by topic and presence of humor.

Table 6.6. Crosstabulation: topics and presence of humor.

TOPICS	PRESENCE OF HUMOR		TOTAL
	no	yes	
weather	14	1	15
health	9	1	10
family and friends	15	2	17
free time	7	2	9
politics/economy	11	2	13
appearance	7	0	7
professional life	24	14	38
sport	12	1	13
acquaintance(s) of at least one of	33	9	42
technology/mass media	10	1	11
(extended) greeting	103	8	111
other	62	10	72
food / drinks/ restaurants	16	10	26
recording/ANAWC research	4	14	18
TV shows and movies	2	4	6
personal stories	15	0	15
Total	344	79	423

Table 6.6. indicates that certain topics are more likely to be associated with humorous exchanges. Specifically, professional life and recordings show a higher frequency of humor presence.

The participants in these interactions are workers who share time in the workplace; work is the primary matter that they have in common; it seems safe to state that this datum on humor in small talk is deeply related to the workplace and its workers; in fact, we can assume that in

non-workplace contexts, professional life is probably a less frequent small talk topic. Also, when we observe the incidence of humor compared to the total of the interactions having professional life as a topic, we see that the humorous interactions are more than one third (14 for a total of 38). Jointly with other data on conflict and solidarity and on power dynamics, the humor about professional life can be considered an indicator of the workplace 'mood' and culture.

The second particularly interesting result is the high frequency of humor in relation to the recording. One of the major concerns/limitations connected to the methodology used to record the ANAWC corpus is that of seeing the recorders on the neck of the focal participants and the tags on their clothes stating that the recorder is on. This could represent an intervening variable that might compromise the spontaneity of the interactions. The presence of humor in almost 80% of the interactions (14 out of 18 total) that have recording /ANAWC research as a topic offers a new perspective on the concerns about the methodology used for the collection of the ANAWC corpus. The analysis of Example 6.1. further clarifies the relation between humor and recording /ANAWC research.

Example 6.1.
STW, interaction 64

1	Ray: ah you know is this on the recorder do we have the recorder going?
2	Sallie: [laughter]
3	Tanya: oh shoot I'm sorry [overlap] I forgot we were recording
4	Sallie: [laughter]
5	Ray: yeah I mean y-that can be used in a criminal trial
6	Sallie: [laughter]
7	Tanya: erase that and start over
8	Sallie: [laughter]
9	Sarah-AAC: [laughter]
10	Ray: no it's not a dunk if it's what got her saying P P
11	Sarah-AAC: [laughter]
12	Sallie: [laughter]
13	Ray: we'll play it at the board meeting Monday
14	Tanya: just for your own information she is recording it's it's uh uh
15	Sarah-AAC: [voc]

16   Tanya: a study an equipment study so [+] to see how she uses vulgar
17   language on her computer [overlap] at her everyday job
18   Sarah-AAC: [voc]
19   Ray: oh is that why she's been using that thing more than usual?
20   Rafael: [0:04] [clears throat]
21   Sarah-AAC: [voc]
22   Ray: you should answer that loud enough so that you [overlap] can record
23   it
24   Rafael: so where are we?

Statements like the one in line 3, "I forgot we were recording", are quite frequent in the corpus. Participants forget about the presence of the recorder, and most of the times, when they realize it, engage in humorous exchanges on those things that have been said and that they value as private or controversial and not to be said while the recorder is on. The participants joke about non-appropriate discourse recorded on tape, but then do not really mean for those tapes to be deleted as many remained recorded and are now transcribe interactions of the ANAWC. Also, when Tanya, in line 7, says "erase that and start over", both Sallie and Sarah laugh as they take it as a joke, and Sarah, who is the one recording, does not turn the device off. In line 16, Tanya keeps joking about the recording, defining it as "a study an equipment study so [+] to see how she [Sarah] uses vulgar language on her computer [overlap] at her everyday job;" this way, not only is Tanya joking about the recording, but also teasing Sarah who is the AAC user who records their exchanges and in a previous interaction had used very colloquial expressions. Sarah laughs and Ray creates another jointly constructed joke in line 19. The recorder seems to serve as a trigger for humor. It appears to be something the participants aren't genuinely concerned about. At times, they even forget about its presence, reinforcing the notion that the recorded exchanges are indeed spontaneous. Whenever the interactants remember that they have been recorded, they react to this as to something funny that presumably does not greatly compromise the spontaneity of their interactions (otherwise they would have deleted the interactions). Example 6.2. is an additional example of jokes about the recording:

Example 6.2.
STW, interaction 2

1	Ray: oh see I forgot we are being recorded today too
2	Tanya: [+] and [overlap] he has to be nice [+] we're being retested
3	Sallie: [reading to herself] appropriate fire drills will be conducted annually
4	to ascertain that all staff [overlap][overlap][unclear][overlap] staff [overlap]
5	safe evacuations are adapted
6	Diane: [+] oh
7	Ray: yes
8	Tanya: big brother is here
9	Ray: [+] big time [+] actually I'm big sister
10	Sallie: [+] for
11	Tanya: [laughter]
12	Ray: [+] uhm excuse me [overlap]
13	Sallie: [+] themselves
14	Ray: would you rather verbalize that [overlap] instead of using your
15	[overlap] fingers to demonstrate that [overlap] uhm [+] that statement
16	Diane: [laughter]
17	Sarah-AAC: [laughter]
18	Ray: [laughs] [0:04] you're cheating yourself basically you know that right?
19	Sarah-AAC: [voc]
20	Ray: [laughter]

This time, it is Ray (line 1) who forgot about it. Tanya jokes about the recorder calling it "big brother" (line 8) and Ray immediately plays along in line 9: "big time actually I'm big sister". Example 6.2. also offers a hint at what strategies the participants use to avoid being recorded and in alternative to turning off the device: when Sallie says "for themselves" (lines 10 and 13), we understand, from Ray's comment — "would you rather verbalize that instead of using your fingers to demonstrate that that uhm statement" (line 14) — that she is using gestures and other non-verbal communication strategies to get the message across for her colleagues, but not for whoever listens to the recording (apparently, Ray's comment and their not deleting the tape invalidates in part her effort). These examples serve to show that the recorders are not really perceived as threatening and the fact that non-appropriate exchanges stay undeleted, further demonstrates it.

In the STW corpus, there are also several occurrences of jointly constructed humor (Davis, 1984; Holmes, 2007). It must be noted that humor is present in very different ways in the exchanges: some are entirely humorous, some contain two or more different instances of humor, while some others contain small portions, or even just a couple of turns of humorous exchange.[4] Example 6.3. below constitutes one of the interactions in which humor occurs in the whole exchange. The portions highlighted in grey, as usual consist of work talk and therefore are not considered part of the small talk interaction, but at the same time offer important information on the context, the background, and the interaction dynamics.

Example 6.3.
STW, interaction 79

1   Claire: [on phone] Sue Ellen [+] hi [overlap] I'll call you back
2   Jonie: I know [unclear] [laughter]
3   Claire: [on phone] alright bye bye
4   Jonie: or we did in the seventies [overlap] or eighties
5   Layla: I get attached I just know that
6   Jonie: [laughter] Sue Ellen and JR
7   [group laughter]
8   Jonie: who shot JR?
9   [group laughter]
10 Jonie: was it Sue Ellen?
11 Layla: [laughs] yea… yeah that's all we say to my sister in Texas
12 Jonie: oh my gosh [overlap] oh how funny
13 [group laughter]
14 Jonie: did she shoot JR?
15 [group laughter]
16 Claire: oh my gosh [laughter]
17 Layla: I'll never tell
18 Jonie: yeah [laughter]
19 Sarah AAC: [voc]
20 Jonie: [sings a melody] well there you go
21 [group laughter]
22 Jonie: I know all the words to that one [laughter]

---

[4] Future developments of this kind of research might include the coding of the lengths of humor exchanges in number of turns and the different functions of humor in each interaction.

23   Hans: yeah I didn't know there were words
24   [group laughter]
25   Sarah AAC: [voc]
26   Jonie: there are [overlap] da da dee or if Adam's there it would be dee dee
27   dee dee dee
28   [group laughter]
29   Sarah AAC: [voc]
30   Hans: oh
31   Jonie: fond of that letter [+] okay Harry Diamond mister chairman

Claire is on the phone talking to someone named Sue Ellen: this name immediately suggests to Claire's colleagues, Jonie and Layla, the connection with the famous TV show titled *Dallas*, produced by CBS and broadcasted from 1978 to 1991, in which two of the protagonists were called Sue Ellen and J.R. The group laughs and Jonie (line 8) refers to the soap opera by recalling what became a leitmotiv in the 80s when J.R. was shot and his shooter was not revealed for several episodes:[5] 'Who shot J.R?. The group laughs just by hearing those names spelled out. However, as pointed out by Attardo (2012), when the audience laughs, we cannot be sure if the hearers "a) recognize[6] but do not understand the joke [or] b) recognize and understand the joke" (p. 428). With lines 11 and 12, we not only know that there is recognition and understanding, but also appreciation and participation (Hay, 2001):[7] Layla makes a comment on her sister being in Texas (the state where the story unfolds) which denotes that she knows about the

---

[5] According to Proulx and Shepatin (2012) the soap opera *Dallas* created a new concept of cliffhanger in television. The authors notice that *Dallas* also "triggered a pop culture firestorm as people around the world obsessively began to wonder who shot J.R. [...] T-shirts and other memorabilia asking, "Who shot J.R?" were mass-produced. The July 14, 1980 issue of *People* magazine reported that J.R. bumper stickers outnumbered those of the Carter and Reagan presidential campaigns that were simultaneously taking place. [...] At last, during the fourth episode of *Dallas'* third season [...] an estimated 83 million Americans tuned in to the 'Who Done It?' episode" (Proulx & Shepatin, 2012, ch. 6).

[6] Attardo adopts Hay's (2001) terminology, where the recognition consists of the hearer's recognition of the humorous intention of the speaker while the understanding is a further step in which the hearer recognizes the intention and understands the humor of the text (the appreciation of the humor is a further step).

[7] In Hay's (2001) terms, appreciation consists of the enjoyment of the humor, while participation consists of the involvement of the hearer in creating further humor.

connection between Sue Ellen, J.R., and the state of Texas (recognition of Claire's intention to be humorous and understanding of her joke): Layla's laughter constitutes her enjoyment of the joke and the reference to Texas represents Layla's way of "playing along with the gag" (Hay, 2001, p. 66). In line 12, Jonie says "oh how funny" explicitly appreciating Layla's humor; furthermore, Jonie reinforces the gag by making another joke: "did she shoot JR?" (line 14). At this point, everybody laughs; Claire expresses a verbal appreciation of the joke ("oh my gosh", line 16) and Layla keeps playing along stating that she will never tell whether it was actually her sister who shot J.R. At this point everybody laughs again, and Jonie sings the melody of the soap. It is apparent that the humor mechanism is based on the combination of opposite scripts (Attardo, 1994; Raskin, 1985) between a reality and unreality level, real life people (Layla's sister) and fictional characters, etc. The humor represented in the small talk exchange is the type that Davies (1984) defines as "jointly constructed" (p. 361) and Holmes and Marra (2002) call "supportive" (p. 1687), emphasizing its role in the workplace as the kind of humor that "agrees with, adds to, elaborates or strengthens the propositions or arguments of previous contribution(s)" (p. 1687). Most of the humorous interactions in the corpus show solidarity among the coworkers: in the last example, the talk about Dallas has clearly the function to create/maintain a bond among the participants; however, in the last part, the reference to Adam (line 26), who probably is a coworker, sounds like a criticism of his use of the letter *d*; the reference is very context-bound so its meaning is not completely understandable, but we can get the sense of Jonie's derision of her colleague.

Rodrigues and Collinson (1995) focused on the oppositional function of humor that can be opposed to the solidarity function observed also in several other studies (Du, 2022; Holmes 2000a; Holmes & Stubbe, 2003; Koester, 2010). The function explored by Rodrigues and Collinson concerns the expression of dissent and dissatisfaction of workers through humor. As Rogerson-Revell (2007) noticed, humor can be a "'double-edged sword' being used to both positive and negative effect: facilitating, on the one hand, collaboration

and inclusion and, on the other, collusion and exclusion" (p. 4) in particular, the author argued that "in many types of interactions, including meetings, participants not only collaborate but also collude and even compete with each other in order to get things done" (p. 21). In the present work such cases of conflictual function of humor were found in very small amounts; still they were present and mainly in male-only interactions. Few cases of conflictual humor were also found. Only one case of humor used to mitigate conflict (Du, 2022; Norrick & Spits, 2008) was found in the STW sub-corpus, and it seems particularly representative of this specific strategy, as shown in interaction 86:

Example 6.4.
STW, interaction 86

1   Shauna: good morning
2   Margaret: good morning
3   Samuel: well hello there
4   Shauna: thought you told me 10:30?
5   Margaret: oh [+] I I did
6   Samuel: [+] she lied to you
7   Margaret: okay
8   Samuel: [laughter]
9   Shauna: apparently so

In this small talk exchange, the new person in the interaction, Shauna, asks a question to Margaret to be sure that she did not misunderstand the time of the meeting and that she arrived on time (line 4). The question obviously refers to transactional talk, but it is also deeply embedded in the small talk exchange, between the ritual of the greetings for the first encounter of the day and a humorous joke (line 6) that Samuel uses to try to prevent the possibility of conflict. As a matter of fact, when Shauna enters, she sees her colleagues talking together, so she wonders if the meeting has started without her. A possible interpretation of this exchange is that, with her question, Shauna probably wants to underline, in front of everybody, that she is not late because that is the time she was told to arrive and that it had

been Margaret the one who told her. Samuel, with a humorous line, "she lied to you" (line 6), acknowledges that he understood and avoids any discord. Samuel's strategy is actually subtle as he makes explicit what Shauna is probably covertly implying with her question "thought you told me 10:30?", namely the suspicion that Margaret might have deliberately lied about the time of the meeting. The assumption of Shauna's suspect is reinforced by her choice to point at Margaret: Shauna chooses to use the personal form "thought **you** told me 10:30?" as opposed to other choices less conflictual and more impersonal such as:

a. thought the meeting was at 10:30? Or
b. weren't we supposed to meet at 10:30? Or
c. wasn't this supposed to be at 10:30?

The three examples above are all appropriate and less conflictual as they do not point to a specific person. Samuel probably perceives Shauna's suspicion, makes it explicit (line 6) and laughs about it (line 8). By doing so, Samuel expresses the idea that the suspicion of lies is something to laugh about. In other words, Samuel prevents the conflict or an embarrassing situation using three elements that play in his favor:

1. He is extraneous to the misunderstanding among Shauna and Margaret: he can therefore be seen as a neutral participant;
2. He makes explicit a suspicion that is the cause of a potential conflict, laying the cards on the table.
3. He laughs about it expressing this way his evaluation of the non-seriousness of the issue.

There is also a possibility that a further element to support Samuel's neutrality is his being of a different gender from Shauna and Margaret. Shauna does not enjoy Samuel's joke, and does not react to it by laughing or through any other marker of appreciation of the joke: she stays on a conflictual level, where there is an actual possibility that Margaret lied, which Shauna marks with her comment, "apparently so"

(line 9). The exchange ends here, they go back to work, and the actual conflict is avoided probably thanks to Samuel's intervention.

On a side note, it is interesting to see that these elements (the greeting, the references to the time of the meeting, the humor, and the underlying strategies) are all part of the same interaction where work talk and small talk are not separate, nor do they seem to be on a continuum (see Holmes, 2000a); they rather seem to be combined. Interestingly, this is not the only case of small talk intertwined with work talk; hence the decision of how to consider these interactions is trusted to the researcher's experience. Interaction 105 in Example 6.5. below, is a further example of the multi-functional character of some small talk.

Example 6.5.
STW, interaction 105

1   Dr. Ben: why are you guarding the doors?
2   Paula: well I'm [overlap] I'm
3   Vince: Paula asked me to
4   Dr. Ben: well that's as good an answer as any
5   Paula: I'm just warming up because it's a nice warm place

Dr. Ben comes out of the doors and he jokes with no ritual greeting or anything similar. This short interaction not only has the function of joking, but it also works as a passing greeting, with the function of acknowledgment and recognition.

6.4. Chapter summary

Humor in small talk interactions carried out in the workplace is examined in this chapter considering both some quantitative aspects and some qualitative ones. The quantitative presence of humor is analyzed in all the small talk interactions and it is correlated with the number and gender of participants in the interactions. Results show that the number of speakers positively correlates with humor and that humor is more frequent when both male and female speakers interact

together. It was also found that interactions involving only women are more humorous compared to those involving men only. Moreover, the presence of humor is analyzed in relation to the topics discussed and it was found that topics regarding professional life and recording tend to generate more humor. The discursive analysis of these interactions also provided data for reflections concerned with the methodological procedures of spoken data collection and on the ways coworkers co-construct humorous interactions.

CHAPTER 7

SMALL TALK AND AAC USERS

7.1. Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

This chapter is dedicated to Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) device users and the ways they engage in small talk interactions with their coworkers. In a general sense, AAC refers to almost any kind of communication—from facial expressions to portable speech synthesis technology—different from oral, unaided speech. People with complex communication needs who rely on AAC devices face a number of different barriers at many levels (environmental, related to policies, attitudes, etc.) and in particular in terms of efficiency and effectiveness of communication compared to unaided, oral speech (Beukelman & Miranda, 1992; Glennen, 1997b).

Workers facing Complex Communication Needs (CCN) number over 4 million in the United States, with a significant portion relying on AAC devices or strategies (Beukelman & Miranda, 2012). AAC users often rely on a mix of integrated strategies, based on their difficulties and needs (ASHA, 1991). The spectrum of communication tools available ranges from unaided to aided, with options including no-tech, low-tech, and high-tech typologies (Beukelman & Miranda, 2013; Cook & Polgar, 2014; Elsahar *et al.,* 2019; Glennen, 1997; Jette, 2017). Low-tech options operate without electronic components (such as picture boards) whereas high-tech options usually refer to speech-generating devices, also known as Voice Output Communication Aids (VOCAs), which utilize computer technology. Speech-generating devices, for example, enable users to construct messages by choosing from pictures, letters, words, or sentences. Some of these devices are portable, with enhanced functionalities and are supposed to improve

167

the quantity and the quality of interactions and in general to foster increased engagement for users in different settings, including the workplace. These are usually based on pre-stored messages (Glennen, 1997a; Hoag *et al.,* 2004), which are based on the idea that individuals often use formulaic language, characterized by recurring patterns in speech. These recurrent elements can be pre-stored for future retrieval, facilitating efficient communication (Todman *et al.,* 2008).

However, despite considerable progress in AAC technologies, the users still face important challenges in accessing language tailored to specific contexts, in creating an output that satisfies their needs, and in participating in the interactions effectively and in a timely manner. These challenges are especially problematic in workplace contexts. For these reasons, there is a need for research to focus on technology, which aims at enabling individuals to generate novel, spontaneous messages during interactions, aligning communication with context and interlocutors (Yorkston *et al.,* 1990).

Several researchers highlighted the area of interpersonal and social relations as one of the most critical for people with communication impairments. O'Keefe and colleagues (2007) conducted a focus group study in which AAC device users were asked to identify what they thought the priority of the research on AAC should have been. One of their major needs resulted in the "development of intervention programs that lead to the acquisition of new life skills. They [AAC device users] seek abilities that allow them to do everyday things in life such as [...] make and keep new friends" (p. 95). Moreover, Blackstone (2007) underlines the difficulty for people with "complex communication needs" (p. 199) of having wider social networks. This evidence underlines the need of research that would look at social and relational aspects of communication as they are handled by AAC users in order to identify gaps and devise strategies for the improvement of the technologies. Higginbotham and colleagues (2007) maintained that it is the researchers' and practitioners' responsibility to enhance the comprehension of real-time, social dimensions of communication for individuals with complex communication needs. In the authors' idea, it is crucial that researchers work with AAC software developers to

eliminate existing device-related access barriers that constitute an obstacle — and sometimes an impossible one — to social participation.

Research into AAC systems is aimed at empowering effective communication and interaction based on individual needs. Hill (2006) rightly emphasizes that maximizing the potential of AAC assistive technology necessitates the careful selection of a solution that aligns with an individual's skills, needs, and expectations, considering the specific language, input, and output features of the system.

The classification of communication modes distinguishes between unaided and aided strategies (Millikin, 1997). Unaided communication encompasses body language, such as gaze, gestures, and vocalizations, while aided communication, whether technology-driven or not, involves the use of external tools or devices (Glennen, 1997a; Jette, 2017). Moreover, technological AAC systems are further categorized into visual output options (e.g., text, pictures, symbols) and Voice Output Communication Aids (VOCA), which include speech-generating devices (SGDs) and mobile AAC technology encompassing various applications and dedicated devices providing digitized and/or synthesized speech output (Jette, 2017)[1].

7.2. Small talk interactions of AAC and non-AAC users

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the first clear element about AAC device users in the present work is that they recorded fewer interactions (both small talk and work talk) than non-AAC device users. They also produced fewer words, comparatively, than non-AAC device users (Friginal *et al.,* 2013).

In Table 7.1., verbal interaction data of the four focal participants of the STW corpus are presented. The focal participants are equally distributed among AAC and non-AAC users, males and females.

---

[1] Although dated, Glennen (1997a) presents a detailed diachronic description of the evolution and development of the AAC systems. The author accurately explains terminology, access methods and equipment. However, Glennen points out that "professionals who work with nonspeaking persons need to constantly update their knowledge as new AAC devices, software, and peripherals are developed" (p. 95).

Table 7.1. Verbal interactions of small talk: AAC and non-AAC users.

FOCAL PARTICIPANT	WORDS[2]	TURNS	WORDS PER TURN	TURNS PER INTERACTION	INTERACTIONS
Ron-AAC	294	86	3,41	1,8	47
Tony	5724	556	10,29	3,9	140
Sarah-AAC	493	186	2,65	2	93
Paula	7491	932	8,03	6,5	143

Table 7.1. shows data related to verbal interactions of each participant. Comparing the data of the AAC participants with those of the non-AAC, at least three important aspects emerge. First, non-AAC participants (Tony and Paula) generally have a much higher average number of words per turn compared to AAC participants (Ron and Sarah). Non-AAC participants, especially Paula, have a higher average number of turns per interaction compared to AAC participants. Non-AAC participants have a higher number of interactions, indicating potentially more frequent or extended communication sessions compared to AAC participants. These differences suggest variations in communication styles and patterns between AAC and non-AAC users, with non-AAC users generally exhibiting higher levels of verbal communication in terms of words per turn and turns per interaction. In other words, the AAC speakers talk less than their non-AAC counterparts, and when they do, they use less words.

A reflection should then be dedicated to the unobservable aspects of these interactions, the turns that were never started and the words that were never told. Notably, Sarah and Ron exhibit limited engagement in the recorded interactions; although physically present, they remain silent. While it is acknowledged that individuals may, at times, abstain from verbal participation because they have nothing to say or do not

---

[2] Note that when the vocalizations were not audible or understandable to the transcribers, they were transcribed as "VOC" and counted as one word. This methodological approach was adopted with the recognition that, in typical scenarios, vocalizations commonly align with one-word expressions, such as greetings ("hello") or responses to binary questions ("yes" or "no"). Consequently, the data pertaining to word counts, inclusive of transcribed vocalizations, maintains a level of precision deemed adequate for comparative analyses with individuals not utilizing Augmentative and Alternative Communication (non-AAC) systems.

wish to engage in a given exchange, a clear disproportion emerges when comparing the frequency of their speech to that of their non-AAC counterparts.

This issue is particularly problematic, especially in this particular corpus, because the words that are left unexpressed correspond to missed relational exchanges and missed opportunities of socializing and sharing, which are fundamental aspects of life, within and outside of the workplace. The interaction 12 in Example 7.1. below might help to demonstrate this issue. The coworkers in the interaction are working and while they do, someone takes some leftover juice and cupcakes from a previous celebration.

Example 7.1.
STW, interaction 12

1	Margaret: back into work? alright [0:02] [unclear] instead [0:07] If I was a
2	drinking person [+] I would've been drunk these past two months
3	[laughter]
4	Jade: It it's it's it's ah [+] non alcoholic [laughter]
5	Margaret: I know
6	Trey: we all drink grape juice
7	Margaret: yeah it's the sparkling grape juice
8	Jade: but it's got a good fizz
9	Trey: it does [+] it's [overlap] got a great fizz
10	Margaret: there's a brand that makes like a strawberry flavor and an apple
11	flavor
12	Jade: there's ah [+] we got one of grap- one I got two grapes I got white
13	grape and [+] red grape [+] so if you want red grape it's still in the
14	refrigerator
15	Margaret: [0:03] cupcake?
16	Jade: see if Landon wants a cupcake over there
17	Landon: yeah [+] [unclear] which is where we used to live
18	Jade: oh really
19	Landon: yeah that is where [unclear] is from
20	Margaret: ah [+] you wanna cupcake?
21	Sarah-AAC: [VOC-yeah]
22	Margaret: [0:05] would you like a glass of sparkling grape juice with this
23	[0:03] wh-what [overlap] what color do you want?
24	Margaret: yeah I kinda counted on there be more than just the [unclear]
25	Sarah-AAC: [VOC]

26   Jade: **chocolate** [+] I knew you would I knew that [unclear] you want a
27   strawberry one too?
28   Landon: pardon
29   Margaret: I said the office is us- actually more bare tonight than it usually
30   is usually there is a few meetings going on

The interaction shows the speakers talking and offering drinks and sweets and making comments about the grape juice. Sarah only participates in line 21 and 25, when she is asked direct questions. In the first case, she vocalizes "yeah", in line 21, the content of the vocalization was not clear to the transcribers, but it was intelligible to Jade who repeated out loud Sarah's response, "chocolate" (line 26). This kind of exchange, where speakers talk back and forth pretty quickly and Sarah stays silent is frequent in the corpus. While the use of vocalizations and gestures allows Sarah and the other AAC speakers to interact promptly and timely, avoiding delays (Higginbotham *et al.,* 2016; Higginbotham & Wilkins, 1999) the effort that is necessary for them to vocalize and be understood by their coworkers prevents them from producing longer sentences and expressing their thoughts in detail, to the extent that sometimes they avoid speaking at all. In Example 7.2., it is possible to observe such an instance where a small talk interaction is immediately followed by a work talk one and Sarah does not participate in the small talk.

Example 7.2.
STW, interaction 15

1   Margaret: and there is some more drink in the [+] freezer too [+] if you
2   want some
3   Rachel: hmm you what actually I threw it in the refrigerator so it wouldn't
4   freeze
5   Margaret: refrigerator yeah
6   Rachel: but yeah if you want some of the [0:03] juice feel free
7   Margaret: [0:05] ah he has to make him eat the real food first
8   Rachel: uhm yeah that's probably a good idea
9   Sarah-AAC: I call it quorum *
10   Margaret: you call it for us [laughter] sounds good to me
Note: the grey-highlighted portion of text indicates work talk.

In this interaction, Sarah does not participate in the small talk exchange, but she is the utterer of the back to work talk: through the device she says "I call it quorum" (line 9) bringing everybody back to the document they were writing together before engaging in the small talk. Sarah switches to work talk quite abruptly, without using hedging or markers of sort, which is consistent with the observed strategy of omitting linguistic material that is not perceived essential to understand the message: in this way, Sarah avoids the additional effort for her to communicate to the device additional pieces of information and reduces the time needed for her message to be conveyed.

7.3. Vocalizations

Vocalizations are defined as follows: "whether intelligible or unintelligible, vocalizations are speech-like sounds emitted by an AAC speaker with the intention of communicating and conveying meaning" (Di Ferrante & Bouchard, 2020, p. 26). Vocalizations serve as a crucial communication tool for individuals with complex communication needs, even those relying on AAC devices (Di Ferrante & Bouchard, 2020; Dominowska, 2002; Müller & Soto, 2002; Bouchard, 2016; Pullin, *et al.,* 2017). Research indicates that individuals with language impairments often use vocalizations for real-time interactions, preferring them over AAC devices for certain contextual purposes like catching attention, providing quick feedback, back-channeling, greeting, or requesting objects (Bouchard *et al.,* 2021; Odom & Upthegrove, 1997) and integrated with gestures and facial expressions, vocalizations can convey very specific meaning (Millikin, 1997).

In the STW corpus, it often occurs that the AAC device users vocalize and the team of researchers who transcribed and cleaned the corpus, sometimes was not able to decode the content of the vocalizations by listening to the recordings. However, the same vocalizations were fully intelligible to the coworkers. In this respect, interaction 277 is a clear example.

Example 7.3.
STW, interaction 277

1	Max: yes I will [0:02] are you still being recorded?
2	Ron-AAC: [voc]
3	Max: huh?
4	Ron-AAC: [voc]
5	Max: get to work Shelton!
6	Ron-AAC: [voc]
7	Max: [laughter]

It happens often, in the STW corpus, that Max, who is the supervisor, asks Ron-AAC whether he is recording; if Ron's answer is affirmative, then Max playfully yells at Ron calling him by his last name and urging him to return to work, "get to work, Shelton" (line 5). This implies a humorous insinuation that Ron might not be diligently working, creating an impression for those who will later listen to the recording. At the end of the exchange, Max finally laughs. Clearly if Ron were not recording the joke would not work

This is a recurring pattern between them, illustrating Max's chosen interaction style with Ron. Interestingly, Ron does not use his AAC device to interact with Max, instead he vocalizes. Ron's vocalization does not seem to represent an obstacle to the communication flow as the exchange occurs effectively. Similarly to what was observed in Example 4.3., also here the relationship between the interactants is asymmetric as Max is higher in hierarchy than Ron. Probably because of his status, Max feels that he can use aggressive humor with Ron. Aggressive humor (Vinson, 2006) is particularly problematic in the workplace as it is unethical and it has been found to impact negatively on the employees with less power: "the use of humor by supervisors, particularly aggressive humor, may increase levels of strain and provoke problematic addictive behaviors among subordinates" (Huo, 2012, p. 878). Furthermore, also in this case (similarly to interaction in Example 4.3.) the content of the teasing is related with the power of one of the interactants over the other. As a matter of fact, Max is Ron's boss, so he is allowed to tell Ron to go back to work. In the STW corpus, there are numerous instances in which Max tells Ron the same sentence,

therefore, while it being a recurring joke, it also remarks Max's higher status compared to Ron, reinforcing the unbalanced power dynamic.

7.4. Timing

The ultimate objective of AAC systems revolves around achieving effective communication, which is underpinned by two fundamental factors: speed and appropriateness. AAC users must communicate at an adequate pace while accurately conveying their intended messages.

One of the main issues identified for AAC device users' effective communication is related to timing: the devices take more time than natural speech to produce utterances, and this delay creates a whole series of problems in the interaction (Wisenburn & Higginbotham, 2008). The slow communication rate of device users may stem from a lack of pre-stored messages relevant to workplace contexts, leading to inefficiencies in spontaneous novel utterance generation (SNUG). Thus, the user's selection speed, influenced by visual, auditory, and/or motor skills, often represents an obstacle to small talk and other conversational elements (Simpson *et al.,* 2000).

For these reasons, an essential focus of AAC research centers on users' real-time interactions and communication within workplace environments. AAC systems often grapple with the challenge of simultaneously meeting users' needs regarding communication speed and message appropriateness, particularly in professional settings (Fager *et al.,* 2019). This issue is significant not only in terms of employment access for individuals with language impairments but also in understanding meaning negotiation and interactional dynamics (McNaughton *et al.,* 2002).

Time constraints, imprecise message output, and the absence of narrative and implicit features distinguish AAC users' interactional and discursive performance from that of non-AAC users. The interaction in Example 7.4. is a typical example of how timing impacts on the way AAC speakers communicate and on the accuracy of the message they produce.

Example 7.4.
STW, interaction 18

1   Sarah-AAC: [0:13] I do not want my husband to fall and
2   Rachel: in the freezer [laughter] that's why she'd rather end upright [+] so
3   if he ends up in the freezer [overlap] we know she put him in there
4   Sarah-AAC: [laughs]
5   Landon: that's right [laughter]
6   Rachel: that he didn't fall in [laughter]

    The interaction presented in Example 7.4. is tied to a previous one where the focus is an episode of the TV show *Desperate Housewives,* in which a man dies and his wife freezes him in order to delay people finding out of his death. The wife does this with the intention of gaining time to alter the husband's will and become the primary beneficiary of his inheritance. After the exchange on the TV show, the participants switch to work talk. At that point, as shown in Example 7.4, Sarah-AAC makes a joke connected to the episode (line 1). In this regard, it is interesting to focus on two aspects: in the first place, the timing for Sarah is significantly delayed: by the time she conceives the joke and operates the device for it to be spelled out, her colleagues have already moved on to something else. Secondly, it is apparent that Sarah's sentence is not complete, "I do not want my husband to fall and" (line 1) — a nd this probably depends on the considerable effort it takes to her to communicate through the device and on her assumption that her coworkers will be able to deduce the unsaid content. Indeed, Rachel (line 2) understands the sense and completes Sarah's content and humorous intent and laughs. Furthermore, in order to show appreciation for the joke, Rachel also co-constructs on it (Davies, 1984; Holmes & Marra, 2002) suggesting that Sarah prefers her husband to "end upright." The freezer joke is extended with a playful comment about knowing that it would be Sarah who put him in the freezer should he end up there.
    Despite the obstacle to the flow of communication represented by the timing, some strategies take place to increase the efficiency of the discourse exchange: Sarah does not communicate her whole sentence through the device, in fact her sentence ends with "and", which signals

that her thought is not fully expressed. In this way, Sarah saves time to the benefit of communication efficiency, relying on the ability of her colleague to make an implicature (in Gricean terms) on the intended meaning of her comment, which Rachel successfully does. In sum, the deletion of sentence elements and reliance on the interlocutors' understanding are two recurring strategies in the corpus to prevent delays.

7.5. Communication partners and echoing

It has been underlined that communication partners (family, strangers, coworkers etc.) have a crucial role in the successful flow of AAC device users' communication: "Individuals with complex communication needs communicate differently with different kinds of partners, i.e., the topics, strategies, and modes will vary" (Blackstone *et al.*, 2007, p. 197). Moreover, AAC users rely on the interlocutors' ability to predict or complete meaning delivery (Ferm *et al.,* 2005; Higginbotham *et al.,* 2016).

This suggests that research should not only look at the improvement of the technology, but also at the training of people, non-AAC device users, who spend many hours a day with AAC device users, as is clearly the case of coworkers.

In the STW sub-corpus small talk interactions, the AAC users often communicate through vocalizations rather than through their own devices, and the comprehension of their message is often entrusted in their coworkers' ability to interpret visual cues or to get accustomed to their ways of conveying messages.

While Sarah often uses the AAC device when working, heavily relying on prestored content, in small talk interactions she seems to prefer vocalizing rather than using her device. As a result, her sentences are very short and often she only interacts by agreeing or greeting. Her coworkers are familiar with her communication style and often echo the sentence that Sarah has just vocalized.

Example 7.5. *Echoing AAC speakers' output*
STW, interaction 34

1	Brianna: [0:08] [sigh] [+] there's my computer cord [+] that's all wrapped
2	up in makeup that I didn't put on [overlap] cuz I don't care
3	Sarah-AAC: [laughter]
4	Sarah-AAC: [voc – we don't care]
5	Brianna: huh?
6	Sarah-AAC: [voc - we don't care]
7	Brianna: **we don't care** [overlap] yeah I don't care today either [+] I've
8	been trying to be a little more self-conscious about it because it makes me
9	feel a little more alive [+] but [+] I don't care today [+] probably going to
10	get all rained on anyway I was surprised it wasn't pouring
11	Sarah-AAC: [voc - yeah I know]
12	Brianna: it was pouring when I left this morning [laughter] I was like oh
13	please don't get my printer all wet [laugh]
14	Sarah-AAC: [laughter] [voc]

Brianna repeats Sarah's vocalized statement and this appears to be a pattern in the interactions with the AAC speakers. Their interlocutors tend to echo verbatim the AAC's statement, seemingly to ensure accurate comprehension or to reinforce clarity in their own understanding. It seems a process very similar to the oral corrective feedback observed with non-native speakers in interactions (see Langit-Dursin, 2016; Lyster *et al.,* 2013). If the individuals mispronounce words, their interlocutors provide correction by repeating the words with adjusted pronunciation or intonation. Clearly the interaction between an AAC user and a non-AAC user is not a second language context, but the two situations are comparable in that the language production of one of the interactants is not typical. The repetition operated by the interlocutor has hence the twofold function of confirming the understanding of the conveyed content and partially also the function of correcting it, restating it in a way that is clearer. In respect to the function of confirming, this is also observed in the context of epistemic constructions in spoken interactions. With the label "epistemic list constructions" Pietrandrea (2018) analyzes those constructions consisting of two or more units where "the first occurrence uttered by C represents the scope of the construction, the

second occurrence, uttered by A, represents the marker that A uses to check the truth of the scope." (p. 179). In other words, the repetition of the interlocutor's statement serves to ensure the understanding of the spoken content. This pattern was also observed in interaction 12 (Example 7.1.) and several others in the corpus.

Here it is not possible to make generalizations, for one main reason: the number of AAC device users in the STW corpus is small and what is detected in these interactions should be tested and verified in future studies with larger numbers of subjects. In particular, there is no certainty that the phenomena observed in these exchanges are related to personality characteristics of the speakers or to their having complex communication needs. Moreover, Ron and Sarah have different ways to handle the interactions, but we cannot be sure if this depends on the fact that Sarah is more extroverted than Ron, if it depends on the fact that they belong to two different genders, or if it is a consequence of Sarah being the supervisor in her own department, or if it is due to the fact that Sarah's desk is close to her colleagues' and Ron's work space is more isolated.[3]

7.6. Chapter summary

This chapter specifically focuses on small talk interactions including both Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) users and non-AAC users. The analysis elicited some of the major issues AAC speakers encounter when participating (or trying to participate) in relational exchanges. Moreover, through the analysis of specific interactions, some strategies adopted by AAC speakers are uncovered. These strategies are developed to overcome barriers and obstacles to the flow of communication. In particular, it is demonstrated how AAC speakers interact less (they have less conversational turns), and produce less words than non-AAC speakers. Furthermore, it is shown how AAC users integrate vocalizations in their interactions and produce

---

[3] The characteristics of the workspace was entailed by listening to the recordings; however, there is no certainty derived from direct observation about how the desks were located.

incomplete sentences to prevent communicative delays. It is also analyzed that they rely on their coworkers' ability to understand what they say: the coworkers function as speaking partners co-constructing meaning with their AAC interlocutors and using completion and expanding strategies as well as echoing to clarify and confirm understanding.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS

According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics' American Time Use Survey ATUS (2023), which is based on the 2022 survey data, on average, people spend 43,7% of their time working or doing work-related activities. This means that those who work in an office or in similar kinds of workplace spend half of their days, physically, at work. Clearly, several different types of workplaces exist, but typically, a workplace is constituted by several offices, either individual or shared by two or more people with desks, computers, and telephones; a meeting room and some sort of lounge, where there is a vending machine or maybe a couple of tables and a coffee place. These are the places where work is done; these are the places that workers share, every day, often for years. The workplace is not only a place of work, it is also a relational and social space where the workers not only become a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), but also a discourse community (Swales, 1990; for a discussion on the distinction between community of practice and discourse community as they apply to workplace discourse analysis see Koester, 2010, pp. 7-9) and, as discussed in Chapter 2, a speech community (Berruto, 2003; Scherre, 2005), and sometimes the relationships between coworkers develop far beyond that.

Workers' days unfold in front of their computers, on the phone at their desks, briefing in meeting spaces, and even standing in front of coffeemakers waiting for the coffee to be ready or the cup to be full. In all these situations, it is not only *work* that gets done or talked about. Work talk intertwines with other talk, smaller than work talk in quantity, smaller in prominence compared to the tasks at hand, smaller in relation to the general work issues. This 'smaller' talk constituted the subject of the present work.

8.1. Synthesis of the study

The study presented here unfolded in three main phases:

1. Development and elaboration of an operational definition and of a methodological tool for the analysis of small talk in the workplace.
2. Collection of a small talk in the workplace corpus.
3. Data entry and analysis.

Firstly, the formulation of an operational definition and a protocol of analysis were necessary for the construction of a small talk corpus that had both internal and external consistency. Mainly on the basis of the literature in the field, an operational definition was created for which any non-task and non-work-related portion of text was considered small talk and the small talk interaction was chosen as the minimum unit of measure.

Since no methodological protocol was previously available, nor had any variable been identified and classified for a quantitative study, an analytical protocol was designed and constructed for the quantitative analysis of those interactions. These preliminary tools (the definition and the protocol) were experimented in a pilot analysis (Pearson *et al.,* 2011; Di Ferrante, 2012) in which the researchers encountered several problems, both related to the tool and to the definition of small talk.

The analytical protocol was then refined based on the outcome of the pilot study, the definition was improved and some of the problems highlighted by the pilot study were solved. Some new variables that seemed interesting to be explored were also introduced. The theoretical and experimental findings of the research in the field were considered together with the need of designing a procedure that allowed the categorization of small talk features and characteristics. The main goal was that of generating coding criteria that allowed frequency analysis and reduplication of the study; therefore, the categories for the analysis of small talk in the workplace had to be exhaustive (i.e., capable to comprise any value encountered) and mutually exclusive (each event—the small talk interaction—could not have more than one value in each category).

The analytical protocol was designed, developed, and adjusted in order to code small talk interactions in workplace contexts and in part also to cope with some of the peculiarities/specificities of the corpus at hand. The very detailed and groundbreaking research on small talk so far had the fundamental lack of a small talk-only corpus. The consequence of such a gap was that all the generalizations on small talk features were based on the detailed qualitative analysis of a limited number of excerpts. Furthermore, the characteristics of these excerpts and the primary research interests of the scholars often determined the focus of the study. The analysis presented here has the quality/advantage of having focused on large-scale variables and the values of these variables have been listed in a way that they could be entered in a database and counted; moreover, where the lists were not apt to contain all the types of values, open cells and generic categories ("other") have been set up.

The second step consisted of using the new tool and applying it to an actual corpus of small talk interactions. The Small Talk at Work sub-corpus (STW), was built by culling it from a larger corpus, the AAC and non-AAC Workplace Corpus (ANAWC; Pickering & Bruce, 2009). The STW sub-corpus is to my knowledge the first corpus of small talk in the workplace and consists of 423 small talk interactions recorded by four focal participants interacting with 156 other speakers. Two of the focal participants are affected by speech impairments and communicate through Augmentative and Alternative communication (AAC) devices. The STW sub-corpus was coded on the basis of the 21 variables that constitute the definitive analytical protocol used in this research.

In the third phase, the small talk interactions were coded on the basis of the analytical protocol. The data recorded were analyzed and the results discussed.

8.2. Closing remarks

The linguistic landscape of small talk that derived from the analysis appears very complex. While, on the one hand, the analysis revealed various peaks of frequency on some values (e.g.: small talk during work

activities, intimacy among coworkers), on the other hand, the interactions are distinguished from each other on many different values: they vary for number of participants and conversational turns, presence of humor, utterers of initiations, functions, topics, distribution in the work day, etc. Holmes (2000a) positioned small talk and work talk along a continuum that on one side had "core business talk" with several characteristics: *relevant to the organization core business, focused, context-bound, on task, high-information content.* On the other end of the continuum there was "phatic communion (small talk)" with opposite characteristics: *workplace context independent, irrelevant, atopical,* and *little referential content or information load.* Based on the results of the present work, Holmes's representation of the continuum might be considered problematic for two main reasons.

First, the results in this work showed that the characteristics of *small talk* would not slide together on the continuum, rather they would assume different positions on the basis of the interactions. When Hymes (1968) analyzed Jacobson's (1960) six functions of language, among which is the phatic, he pointed out that "the defining characteristic of some speech events may be a balance, harmonious or conflicting, between more than one function" (p. 120). Similarly, in the present context, small talk and work talk were analyzed as speech events and observing the results of the quantitative analysis of small talk's variables, it can be seen that: they are distributed, or *balanced*, in different ways within each interaction and the topics dealt with are not necessarily safe; small talk is not inescapably positioned at the opening or closing of an interaction; the information load can be quite *heavy* in some exchanges and not all the small talk interactions are "workplace-independent" (Holmes, 2000a, p. 38). Holmes herself had perceived this aspect, as in discussing the continuum, she pinpointed:

> Similarly, the information content of an interaction is not a matter of all-or-none. Measurement is crucially context-sensitive; so, for example, the current background knowledge of participants about relevant topics and issues is just one variable which will determine how informative an interaction is. And the extent to which a verbal exchange is tied to a particular context is also clearly variable. So an

exchange may involve 'work talk', but not be strictly on-topic for the particular interaction in which it occurs. (Holmes, 2000a, p. 38)

Holmes's discussion on the gradualness of the variables should highlight the ineffectiveness of the continuum to represent so many different variations. For these reasons, I propose a different tool for the conceptualization of the gradual progression of interactions toward *small talk* or *work talk*. Similarly to the sliders of a music mixer, which can be arranged at different levels to give different sound effects, in the same way, *context*, *information load*, *focus*, *connections with the workplace* and many other elements of workplace discourse (all the 21 variables considered in this work, for that matter) can have different weights within each interaction and determine fully small talk-related interactions or fully task-related ones, or else interactions in which the work talk and the small talk overlap and melt in an area where the type of talk is not noticeably distinguishable — an area where workplace discourse is comprised of small talk and work talk at the same time.
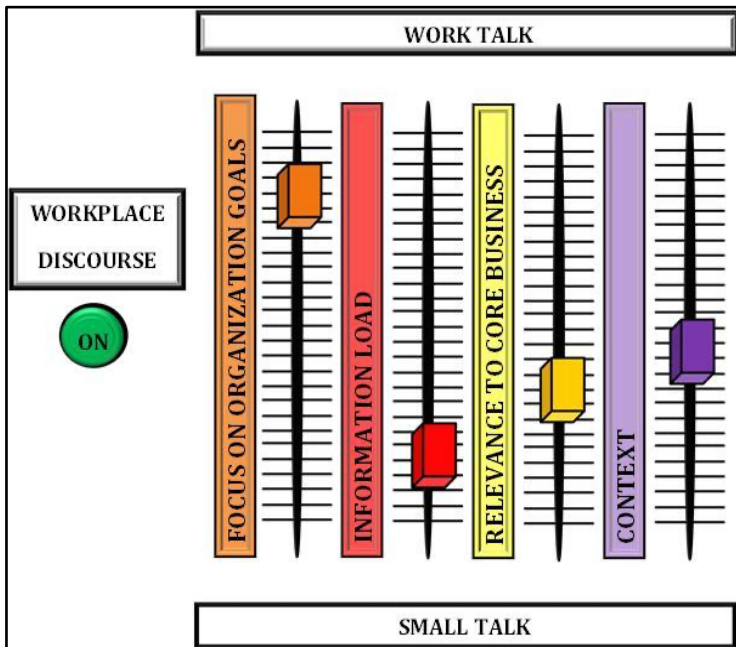
Figure 8.1. Workplace discourse mixer.

The area where small talk and work talk overlap elicits the second problem in Holmes's representation: since a continuum is a linear representation, it is too weak a tool to represent a phenomenon that has more than one dimension. Positioning small talk at the extreme end of her continuum, Holmes defined small talk as a "talk which is independent of any specific workplace context, which is 'atopical' and irrelevant in terms of workplace business, and which has relatively little referential content or information load." x As evidence for this, she showed an example of passing greetings where any reference to the workplace is absent. In contrast to this, in the present work several small talk interactions are considerably more complex than a passing greeting from the point of view of references to the workplace and in terms of clear distinctions between small talk and core business talk.

The workplace discourse mixer is a proposal for a further development of Holmes's continuum; in the figure it has the same labels that Holmes used for her representation, but it must be clear that those labels constitute a simplification of all the variables (at least the 21 examined in this study) that together determine the 'sound' of *small talk* and *work talk*.

This type of analysis was, to my knowledge, completely new in the study of small talk in the workplace and offered a bird-eye view on this phenomenon. It showed the relationships between the characteristics attributed to small talk and trends of their distribution in terms of significance in the definition of the general phenomenon. For example, this analysis on the one hand, confirmed certain findings from previous studies, such as the weather as a topic, or the presence of small talk at the boundaries of the workday. On the other hand, it also offered new results and shed light on aspects not observed before, such as the importance of sharing information as a small talk function or the introduction of topics that are *not* safe.

One of the reasons why the present analysis offers new perspectives depends on the fact that the corpus was methodically collected. In other words, given the ANAWC, the larger workplace corpus, each and every interaction was examined to evaluate whether it was small talk, work talk, or any other type of talk. This procedure made it possible to also

select those small talk interactions that are slightly ambiguous or that did not coincide with the prototypical idea of a small talk interaction.

Such results were possible because the systematic extraction and coding were applied to a large number of interactions. This procedure also offered insights for the qualitative analysis, since several aspects, such as the *I-feel-you* and the *my-relative* strategies (Di Ferrante, 2016) or the classification of greetings were formulated thanks to the recurrence in the interactions of the correspondent phenomena. This type of recurrence was observable because the small talk interactions were all gathered to form a corpus and analyzed one by one.

In sum, the contribution of the present work is multiple: firstly, for the first time a corpus of small talk in the workplace was assembled; secondly, a methodological protocol for the systematic quantitative analysis was devised with variables and values that allowed the classification and frequency of certain features of small talk and made it possible to look at the impact and the weight that these features have on the definition and description of small talk as a speech event. Moreover, both the quantitative and the qualitative analyses described a type of talk that while being complex and multifaceted, presents specific characteristics and patterns that configure small talk as a (socio)linguistic variety of workplace discourse.

Furthermore, it is important to highlight that the methodical and systematic observation of many variables at the same time and of various and diversified types of small talk interactions was a very effective means to add knowledge to the field of small talk studies, not only in terms of individual results on specific variables, but also in terms of a comprehensive snapshot of a type of talk that presents itself as an interactional variety of the language. The *Workplace Discourse Mixer* is a step forward in small talk studies as it stresses the passage from a linear conception of the phenomenon, to a multidimensional structure of variation that determines the variety of workplace discourse (work talk, small talk, etc.), including the following dimensions: demographic (e.g., the gender of the participants), social (e.g., their profession; the topics talked about), structural (e.g., the number of turns or the position in the workday), contextual (situation — coffee break, work meeting etc.

formal or informal, etc.) communicative (the participants communicate face to face, on the phone, or via mail; with or without AAC devices, etc.). Each of these dimensions clearly contributes to shaping the variety of talk that the participants build by talking with one another. This type of framework, represented by the Workplace Discourse Mixer, can inform future frameworks of research in the study of small talk.

Hopefully, the protocol of analysis devised here will be expanded, modified, and refined; but the protocol itself and the results it allowed to obtain finally represent a starting model for replicable and comparable future research. It is hoped that the present analysis contributes to account for a larger spectrum of different small talk interactions at work, from very typical ones to borderline.

8.3. Limitations

An important limitation of the dataset is the lack of video recordings. A huge number of non-verbal elements that would constitute important information about both the setting and the participants are missing. On the other hand, it must be considered that the data collection techniques used here were based on those of the Wellington's Project (Holmes, 2000c; Stubbe, 2001) in which video recordings were also not employed. Also, both the IRB (Institutional Review Board) and the workplaces did not approve the use of video recordings as they were considered too intrusive. Moreover, there are also practical reasons that make the presence of video recordings disturbing. For example, an observation that included the video might be intrusive: if the focal participants wore a camera, their own faces would not be visible; if on the contrary, the cameras were positioned somewhere in the workplace, it would be difficult for the participants to turn them on and off when needed and new people walking in the office might not notice them and might be filmed without consenting to it.

A further limitation is constituted by the fact that the two pairs of primary speakers, namely two AAC and two non-AAC device users, might raise *representativeness* issues; however, the aim of this research was

that of drawing an anatomy of small talk interactions, while it did not intend to be representative of the small talk practiced in every workplace in the country; it rather offers a benchmark against which further studies can be compared and contrasted.

A further concern, in terms of limitations of the study is the lack of information related to the hierarchical relationships between the participants: this would have helped in interpreting certain data—it is the case, for example, of the use of humor and of the discourse markers in initiating or closing a small talk interaction. Other limitations, are related to the protocol of analysis: in a future duplicating research it should be considered whether to deal with *greetings* as a topic or if they should be dealt with as a 'genre' of small talk; this kind of reflection is necessary for at least two reasons: first, the instances of greetings are larger in quantity than any other kind of topic since they are embedded in the workplace routine; second, greetings are very likely to contain other topics: the extended greetings, which are those that extend to our topics, in my data, are more than passing greetings (cf. Table 5.3.).

The opportunity to measure the length in time of the interactions and the prosodic and intonational elements that would certainly offer additional understandings to the theory of small talk might be considered. For example, it would be interesting to see if there is any relation between pause length and the attempt to switch from small talk to work talk, or if the length in time of the interactions is connected with the position in the workday. These types of considerations might offer insights in the perspective of small talk as a discursive strategy itself—is small talk enjoyed by coworkers or is it a mere politeness strategy (Mullany, 2006b)? Is it perceived as a digression from work talk? (Holmes & Marra, 2004) or as a way to disattend it? (Maynard & Hudak, 2008).

8.4. Suggestions for future studies

As it was pointed out, small talk in the workplace does not necessarily coincide with small talk in other contexts. It would be very interesting

to see how small talk in different contexts (on the beach, at the bar, in a coffee shop, or at a gala) is similar or different from that described here. Different situations— as well as different demographics of the participants and their relationships with each other— clearly introduce other variables that can provide new and different insights to the field.

Also, both from a sociolinguistics and a cross-cultural perspective, remarkable results can be obtained from the analysis of small talk in the workplaces of other countries or from the comparison of different typologies of workplaces: is the small talk engaged in the kitchen of a restaurant different from the one of a University English Department? Compiling studies in these different contexts could lead to the formulation of the absolute prototypical small talk interaction, and could reveal the elements that modify our social relations in different contexts.

Not only can discourse analysis studies extend from the present kind of research, but also pedagogical reflections on sociolinguistics, intercultural linguistics, and second language teaching and learning. Small talk in the workplace reflects the workplace speech community; as such, its features are an important and relevant object of study in those academic courses of sociolinguistics, business English, and intercultural linguistics where the observation of language and culture within social interaction is emphasized. Certainly a significant indicator of the progressive incorporation of small talk among the important objects of sociolinguistic research is demonstrated by the fact that Coupland and Jaworoski (2009) included in their collection for *The Sociolinguistic Reader* a study by Holmes on *Humor, Power, and Gender in the Workplace*, a paper by Coupland on the *Functions of Small Talk and Gossip,* and a work by Jaworoski on *Greetings in Tourist-Host Encounters*.

It is well-known how important naturally occurring, spontaneous speech is in a second language classroom; in order to become proficient in the target language, learners need to be exposed to a great quantity of spontaneous interactions, folkloristic expressions, colloquialisms, etc. A corpus of small talk can certainly represent a gold mine for

teachers who want to offer their students authentic examples of everyday exchanges.

The second language learner has also to face big challenges in terms of pragmatics (what is appropriate to say, what consequences a specific linguistic behavior can lead to, how to decode subtly intended meaning, etc.), use of humor (what kind of humor is appropriate in the target culture and how it must be phrased in the target language to actually sound humorous, etc.), contents of conversations (what topic are appropriate and what should be avoided, to what extent a specific topic is appropriate, etc.). In this sense, research on small talk can offer a wealth of pedagogical material: it would be possible to build specific materials for those who study English to work in the United States, telling them, for example, that acquaintances and food are very common topics and different examples of interactions may show the learners how to approach those topics and what to say about them. Also, the interactions can clearly be used to show particular uses of the language. Consider, for example, the interaction from the STW corpus:

Example 8.1.
STW, interaction 14

1   Margaret: we really don't have a whole lot to cover tonight
2   Sarah-AAC: [VOC- no]
3   Jade: we got cupcakes [+] and strawberries to cover
4   Margaret: [laugh] that's important [laughter]
5   Jade: alright so who do we have to call in [+] some people

The teacher may show the interaction to display the two different semantic uses and syntactic functions of *to cover;* the way a joke can be made; the use of discourse markers to signal the switch of topic: *alright so*; and the expression *a whole lot* certainly not frequent in most L2 textbooks. On the basis of what I showed in this work, small talk has a fundamental role as the cartilage of social relations and community building. Doing small talk represents the contemporary way of maintaining one of the most ancient social cements.

REFERENCES

ABERCROMBIE, D. (2001). Phatic communion. In R. Mesthrie, & R. E. Asher, (Eds.). *Concise encyclopedia of sociolinguistics*. Elsevier.

ADAMS, A. (2012). Humor markers in computer-mediated communication. Texas A&M University - Commerce. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, 94. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/1225896247?accountid=70.

AINSWORTH-VAUGHN, N. (2003). The discourse of medical encounters. In D, Schiffrin, D. Tannen, and H. E. Hamilton *The handbook of discourse analysis* (pp. 453-469) Blackwell Publishers.

ANAWC, AAC AND NON-AAC WORKPLACE CORPUS. (2009). Compiled by Lucy Pickering & Carrie Bruce.

ANGOURI, J., & MARRA, M. (2010). Corporate meetings as genre: a study of the role of the chair in corporate meeting talk. *Text & talk, 30*(6), 615-636. https://doi.org/10.1515/text.2010.030.

ATTARDO, S. (1994). *Linguistic theories of humor.* Mouton de Gruyter.

ATTARDO, S. (2001). *Humorous texts: A semantic and pragmatic analysis*. Mouton de Gruyter.

ATTARDO, S. (2012). Smiling, laughter, and humor. In P. Santangelo (Ed.). *Laughing in Chinese*. (pp. 421-436). Aracne.

ATTARDO, S. (2018). Humor and laughter. In D. Tannen, H. E. Hamilton, D. Schiffrin, *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (pp. 168-188). John Wiley & Sons.

ATTARDO, S. (2020). The linguistics of humor: An introduction. Oxford University Press.

ATWOOD, M. (1985). *The handmaid's tale.* McClelland & Stewart.

AUSTIN, John Langshaw (1962). *How to do things with words.* Harvard University Press.

AVOLIO, B. J., Howell, J. M., & Sosik, J. J. (1999). A funny thing happened on the way to the bottom line: Humor as a moderator of leadership style effects. *Academy of Management Journal, 42*(2), 219–227. https://doi.org/10.2307/257094.

BARGIELA-CHIAPPINI, F. & HARRIS, S. (Eds.). (1997a). *The Languages of business: An international perspective.* Edinburgh University Press.

BARGIELA-CHIAPPINI, F. & HARRIS, S. (Eds.). (1997b). *Managing language: The discourse of corporate meetings.* John Benjamins.

BASIL, C. (1992). Social interaction and learned helplessness in severely disabled children. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 8,* 188 – 199. https://doi.org/10.1080/07434619212331276183.

BAUMAN, R. (1986). *Story, performance, and event.* Cambridge University Press.

BEINSTEIN, J. (1975). Small talk as social gesture. *Journal of Communication 25,* 147-154. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1975.tb00649.x.

BENNET, A. (1905). *Tales of five towns.* Chatto & Windus.

BENWELL B. & MCCREADDIE M. (2016) Keeping "small talk" small in health-care encounters: negotiating the boundaries between on- and off-task talk. Research on Language and Social Interaction, 49 (3), pp. 258-271. https://doi.org/10.1080/08351813.2016.1196548.

BERGMANN, J. R. (1993). *Discreet indiscretions: The social organization of gossip.* Aldine de Gruyter.

BERRUTO, G. (2003). *Fondamenti di sociolinguistica.* Laterza.

BEUKELMAN, D.R., & MIRENDA, P. (1992). *Augmentative and alternative communication: management of severe communication disorders in children and adults.* Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

BEUKELMAN, D.R., & MIRENDA, P. (2005). *Augmentative and alternative communication: Supporting children and adults with complex communication needs.* Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

BIBER, D. (1990). Methodological issues regarding corpus-based analysis of linguistic variation. *Literary and Linguistic computing, 5*(4), 257-269. https://doi.org/10.1093/llc/5.4.257.

BIBER, D. (1993). Representativeness in corpus design. *Literary and Linguistic computing, 8*(4), 243-257. https://doi.org/10.1093/llc/8.4.243.

BIBER, D. (1995). *Dimensions of register variation: A cross-linguistic comparison*. Cambridge University Press.

BIBER, D., Conrad, S., & Reppen, R. (1998). *Corpus linguistics: Investigating language structure and use.* Cambridge University Press.

BIBER, D., Reppen, R., & Friginal, E. (2010). Research in corpus linguistics. In R. B. Kaplan (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of applied linguistics* (2nd ed.) (548-576). Oxford University Press.

BICKMORE, T. (1999). A computational model of small talk. *MAS 962 Discourse and Dialogue for Interactive Systems.* Retrieved from http://web.media.mit.edu/~bickmore/Mas962b/.

BLOCH, S. (2011). Anticipatory other-completion of augmentative and alternative communication talk: a conversation analysis study. *Disability & Rehabilitation, 33*(3), 229-242. https://doi.org/10.3109/09638288.2010.491574

BLUM-KULKA, SHOSHANA, & OLSHTAIN, ELITE (1984). Requests and apologies: A cross-cultural study of speech act realization patterns (CCSARP). *Applied Linguistics, 5*, 196-213. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/5.3.196.

BONSIGNORI, V., BRUTI, S., & MASI, S. (2011). Formulae across languages: English greetings, leavetakings and good wishes in dubbed Italian. In A, Şerban, A. Matamala & J. Lavaur (Eds.), *Audiovisual translation in close-up: Practical and theoretical approaches* (pp. 23-44). Peter Lang.

BOUCHARD, J., DI FERRANTE, L., EL KHATIB, N., PICKERING, L. (2021). AAC users' discourse in the workplace. In E. Friginal and J. Hardy (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of corpus approaches to discourse analysis* (pp. 22-38). Routledge.

BROWN, G. & YULE, G. (1983). *Discourse Analysis.* Cambridge University Press.

BROWN, P., & LEVINSON, S. (1978). Universals in language usage: Politeness phenomena. In E. N. Goody (Ed.), *Questions and politeness*, (pp. 56-324). Cambridge University Press.

CALCULATOR, S., & DOLLAGHAN, C. (1982). The use of communication boards in a residential setting: an evaluation. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Disorders, 47,* 281 – 287. https://doi.org/10.1044/jshd.4703.281.

CHAFE, W. L., DU BOIS, J., W., & THOMPSON, S. A. (1991). Towards a new corpus of spoken American English. In K. Aijmer & B. Altenberg (Eds.), *English Corpus Linguistics,* (pp. 64 82). Longman.

CHEEPEN, C. (1988). *The predictability of informal conversation.* Pinter.

CHEEPEN, C. (2000). Small talk in service dialogues: the conversational aspects of transactional telephone talk. In J. Coupland (Ed.), *Small Talk,* (pp. 288-312). Longman.

CHENG, W. (2004). // → did you TOOK //(rise) from the miniBAR //: What is the practical relevance of a corpus-driven language study to practitioners in Hong Kong's hotel industry?. In U. Connor & A. Upton (Eds.), *Discourse in the Professions* (141-166). John Benjamins.

CLARKE, M., & KIRTON, A. (2003). Patterns of interaction between children with physical disabilities using augmentative and alternative communication systems and their peers. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy, 19*(2), 135-151. https://doi.org/10.1191/0265659003ct248oa.

COATES, J. (1994). Discourse, gender, and subjectivity: the talk of teenage girls. In M. Bucholtz, A. C. Liang, L. A. Sutton, and C. Hines (Eds.), Cultural performances (pp. 116–132). Berkeley Women and Language Group.

Cook, A. M., & Polgar, J. M. (2014). Assistive technologies-e-book: principles and practice. Elsevier Health Sciences.

COULMAS, F. (1979) On the sociolinguistic relevance of routine formulae. *Journal of Pragmatics 3,* 239-266. https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(79)90033-X.

COULMAS, Florian (1979). On the sociolinguistic relevance of routine formulae. *Journal of Pragmatics, 3*(3-4), 239-266. https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(79)90033-X.

COUNIHAN, C. M. (2005). Introduction—Food and gender: identity and power. In C. Counihan & S. L. Kaplan, (2005). *Food and gender: Identity and power.* Harwood Academic Publishers.

COUPLAND, J. (2000a) (Ed.). *Small Talk.* Pearson Education Limited.

COUPLAND, J. (2000b). Introduction: sociolinguistic perspective on small talk. In J. Coupland (Ed.) *Small Talk* (pp. 1-25). Pearson Education Limited.

COUPLAND, J. (2003). Small talk: social functions. *Research on Language and Social Interaction 36*(1), 1-6. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327973RLSI 3601_1.

COUPLAND, J. (2009). Social functions of small talk and gossip. In N. Coupland & A. Jaworski, (Eds.) *The sociolinguistic reader* (pp. 646-661). Palgrave Macmillian.

COUPLAND, J. & YLÄNNE-MCEWEN, V. (2000). Talk about the weather: small talk, leisure talk and the travel industry. In J. Coupland (Ed.), *Small Talk* (pp. 163-182) Pearson Education Limited.

COUPLAND, J., COUPLAND, N., & ROBINSON, J. (1992). "How are you?": Negotiating phatic communion. *Language and Society, 21,* 207–230. Retrieved at https://www.jstor.org/stable/4168343.

COUPLAND, J., ROBINSON, J. D., AND COUPLAND, N. (1994). Frame negotiation in doctor–elderly patient consultations. *Discourse and Society,* 5(1):89–124. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404500015268.

COUPLAND, N. & JAWORSKI, A. (2009). *The sociolinguistic reader.* Palgrave Macmillian.

COX, J. A., L. Raymond R., & Van Auken, P. M. (1990). Male-female differences in communicating job-related humor: An exploratory study. *Humor, 3*(3), 287-295. https://doi.org/10.1515/humr.1990.3.3.287.

COX, J. A., L. RAYMOND R., & VAN AUKEN, P. M. (1990). Male-female differences in communicating job-related humor: An exploratory study. *Humor 3*(3), 287-295. https://doi.org/10.1515/humr.1990.3.3.287.

CROWDY, S. (1995). The BNC spoken corpus. In G. Leech, G. Myers, and J. Thomas, (Eds.) *Spoken English on computer: transcription, mark-up and application* (pp. 224-235). Longman.

DAHLGREN SANDBERG, A., & LILIEDAHL, M. (2008). Patterns in early interaction between young preschool children with severe speech and physical impairments and their parents. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 24(1), 9–30. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265659007084566.

DAVIES, C. E. (1984). Joint joking: Improvisational humorous episodes in conversation. In: Claudia Brugman, M., Dahlstrom, A., Emanatian, M., Moonwomon, B., and O'Connor (Eds.), *Proceedings of the tenth annual meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society,* 360—371. University of California.

DERKS, D., FISCHER, A.H., AND BOS, A. (2008). The role of emotion in computer-mediated communication: A review. *Computers in Human Behavior, 24*(3), 766-785. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2007.04.004.

DI FERRANTE, L. (2012) Small talk in the workplace: A discourse analysis of AAC and non-AAC users using corpus linguistics. Unpublished pilot study, Texas A&M University – Commerce, USA.

DI FERRANTE, L. (2016). "I love red hair. My wife has strawberry": Discursive strategies and social identity in the workplace. In Lucy Pickering, Eric Friginal, and Shelley Staples (Eds.) *Talking at Work* (pp. 79-98). Palgrave Macmillian.

DI FERRANTE, L. (2021). Transitioning between small talk and work talk through discourse markers: Evidence from a workplace spoken corpus. *Brno Studies in English, 47*(2), 7-30. http://doi.org/10.5817/BSE2021-2-2.

DI FERRANTE, L., & BOUCHARD, J. (2020) The nature and function of vocalizations in atypical communication. *Current Developmental Disorders Reports 7*(1), 23-27. http://doi.org/10.1007/s40474-020-00186-x.

DREW, P. (2002). Out of context: an intersection between domestic life and the workplace, as contexts for (business) talk. *Language & Communication 22,* 477–494. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0271-5309(02)00021-6.

DREW, P., & HERITAGE, J. (1992). *Talk at work: Interaction in institutional settings*. Cambridge University Press.

DU, P. (2022). Shared laughter as relational strategy at intercultural conflictual workplace interactions. *Journal of Pragmatics, 188*, 39-55. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2021.11.016.

DURANTI, A. (1997). Universal and culture-specific properties of greetings. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology, 7*(1), 63-97. Retrieved at stable.

EDDINGTON, D. (2002). Why quantitative? *Linguistics, 40*(2), 209-216.

EGGINS, S., & Slade, D. (2001). *Analysing casual conversation*. Continuum.

EISENSTEIN-EBSWORTH, MIRIAM, BODMAN, JEAN, & CARPENTER, MARY (1996). Cross-cultural realization of greetings in American English. In S. Gass & J. Neu (Eds.), *Speech acts across cultures. Challenges to communication in a second language* (pp. 89-107). Mouton de Gruyter.

Elsahar, Y., Hu, S. Bouazza-Marouf,K., Kerr, D., and Mansor, A. (2019). Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) advances: A review of configurations for individuals with a speech disability. *Sensors 19*(8), 1911. https://doi.org/10.3390/s19081911.

ENDRASS, B., NAKANO, Y., LIPI, A. A., REHM, M., & ANDRÉ, E. (2010). Culture related topic selection in small talk conversation across Germany and Japan. In Allbeck, Jan. (2010). *Intelligent virtual agents: 10th international conference*; proceedings. Springer.

ERVIN-TRIPP, S. M. & M. D. LAMPERT (1992). Gender differences in the construction of humorous talk. In Hall, K., Buchholtz, E. & Moonwoman, B. (Eds.), *Locating power: Proceedings of the Second Berkeley Women and Language Conference* (108-117). Berkeley Women and Language Group, Linguistics Department, University of California Berkeley.

Fager, S. K., Fried-Oken, M., Jakobs, T., & Beukelman, D. R. (2019). New and emerging access technologies for adults with complex communication needs and severe motor impairments: State of the science. *AAC: Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 35*(1), 13–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/07434618.2018.1556730.

FAIRCLOUGH, N. (1995). Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language. Longman.

FARESE, G. M. (2015). Hi vs. Ciao: NSM as a tool for cross-linguistic pragmatics. *Journal of Pragmatics, 85*, 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2015.05.020.

FARRIER, L., YORKSTON, K., MARRINER, N., & BEUKELMAN, D. (1985). Conversational control in nonimpaired speakers using an augmentative

communication system. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 1,* 65 – 73. https://doi.org/10.1080/07434618512331273551.

FERGUSON, C.A. (1976). The structure and use of politeness formulas. *Language in Society, 1*(5), pp. 137-151. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404500006989.

FILLARY, R. (1998). Disability: Research methodology issues. In J. Holmes (Ed.) *Te Reo 41: Special Issue: Proceedings of the Sixth Language and Society Conference,* June 1998, 203-207.

FILLARY, R. & PERNICE, R. (2005). Workplace culture analysis where people with intellectual disabilities work: A case study approach. *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability, 30*(3), 176-180. https://doi.org/10.1080/13668250500204091.

FINE, D. (2005). *The fine art of small talk.* Hyperion.

FIRTH, R. (1972). Verbal and bodily rituals of greeting and parting. In J. S. La Fontaine (Ed.) *The interpretation of ritual* (pp. 1-38).

FLETCHER, J. K. (1999). *Disappearing acts: Gender, power, and relational practice at work.* MIT Press.

FOX, A.K., BACILE, T.J., NAKHATA, C. AND WEIBLE, A. (2018), "Selfie-marketing: exploring narcissism and self-concept in visual user-generated content on social media", *Journal of Consumer Marketing, 35*(1), 11-21. https://doi.org/10.1108/JCM-03-2016-1752.

FRASER, B. (1987). Pragmatic Formatives. In J. Verschueren & M. Bertuccelli-Papi, *The pragmatic perspective: Selected papers from the 1985* International Pragmatics Conference. John Benjamins.

FRIGINAL, E. (2009). The language of outsourced call centers: A corpus-based study of crosscultural interaction. John Benjamins. https://doi.org/10.1075/scl.34.

FRIGINAL, E., (2019) Compiling, annotating, and analyzing spoken corpora. Pronunciation in Second Language Learning and Teaching Proceedings 11(1).

FRIGINAL, E. (2022). I'm sorry, my what? Understanding caller clarification sequences in outsourced call center interactions. *Sociolinguistic Studies, 16*(1), 65–85. https://doi.org/10.1558/sols.42324.

FRIGINAL, E., PEARSON P., DI FERRANTE L., PICKERING, L. & BRUCE, C. (2013). Linguistic characteristics of AAC discourse in the workplace. *Discourse Studies, 15*(3), 1-20. https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461445613480586.

GENOVESE, E., Vallarino, M., & Farneti, D. (2010). AAC in communication disorders. *Audiological Medicine, 8*(4), 199-201. https://dx.doi.org/10.3109/1651386X.2010.530024.

GIRONZETTI, E. (2017). Prosodic and multimodal markers of humor. In Salvatore Attardo (Ed.). *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Humor* (pp. 400-413). Routledge.

GLENNEN, S. L. (1997a). Augmentative and alternative communication systems. In S. L. Glennen, & D. C. DeCoste (Eds.), *Handbook of augmentative and alternative communication* (pp. 59-96). Singular.

GLENNEN, S. L. (1997b). Augmentative and alternative communication assessment strategies. In S. L. Glennen, & D. C. DeCoste (Eds.), *Handbook of augmentative and alternative communication* (pp. 149-192). Singular.

GOFFMAN, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Doubleday.

GOFFMAN, E. (1971). *Relations in public: Microstudies of the public order*. Basic Books.

GUMPERZ, J. J. (1972). Introduction. In J. Gumperz & D. Hymes (Eds.) *Directions in sociolinguistics: The ethnography of communication* (pp. 1-25). Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

GUMPERZ, J. J., & Herasimchuk, E. (1975). The conversational analysis of social meaning: A study of classroom interaction. In Mary Sanches and Ben G. Blount. *Sociocultural dimensions of language use* (pp. 81-115). Academic Press.

GUMPERZ, J. J., & Hymes, D. H. (Eds.) (1972). *Directions in sociolinguistics: The ethnography of communication*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

HAMILTON, J. L. (2011). 'Caring/sharing': gender and horizontal co-ordination in the workplace. *Gender, Work & Organization, 18*(1), e23-e48. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0432.2009.00468.x.

HANDFORD, M. (2007). *The genre of business meeting: a corpus-based study*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Nottingham (Unpublished).

HANDFORD, M. (2010). *The language of business meetings*. Cambridge University Press.

HAY, J. (2000). Functions of humor in the conversations of men and women. *Journal of Pragmatics 32*, 709-742. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(99)00069-7.

HAY, J. (2001). The pragmatics of humor support. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research, 14*(1), 55-82. https://doi.org/10.1515/humr. 14.1.55.

HIGGINBOTHAM, D. J., & WILKINS, D. (1999). Slipping through the timestream: Social issues of time and timing in augmented interactions. In D. Koversky, J. Duchan, & M. Maxwell (Eds.), *Constructing (in)competence* (pp. 49 – 82). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

HIGGINBOTHAM, D. J., KIM, K., & SCALLY, C. (2007). The effect of the communication output method on augmented interaction. *Augmentative & Alternative Communication, 23*, 140 – 153. https://doi.org/10.1080/07434610601045344.

HIGGINBOTHAM, D., SHANE, H., RUSSELL, S., & CAVES, K. (2007). Access to AAC: present, past, and future. *AAC: Augmentative & Alternative Communication, 23*(3), 243-257. https://doi.org/10.1080/07434610701 571058.

HIGGINBOTHAM, D.J., FULCHER, K., & SEALE, J. (2016). Time and timing in interactions involving individuals with ALS, their unimpaired partners and their speech generating devices. In M. M. Smith & J. Murray (Eds.) *The silent partner? Language, interaction and aided communication*. J & R Press.

HO-BENG, C., MAW-DER, F., & RUOLIAN, F. (2006). Workplaces as communities: The role of social networks in who seeks, gives, and accepts information on justice issues. *Journal of Community Psychology, 34*(3), 363-377. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.20104.

HOLMES, J. (1986). Compliments and compliment responses in New Zealand English. Anthropological Linguistics, 28(4), 485–508. http://www.jstor.org/stable/30028355.

HOLMES, J. (1998). Small talk, business talk – Oiling the wheels of business. *People & performance, 28-31*.

HOLMES, J. (2000a). Doing collegiality and keeping control at work: Small talk in government departments. In J. Coupland (Ed.) *Small Talk* (32-61). Longman.

HOLMES, J. (2000b). Talking English from 9 to 5: Challenges for ESL learners at work. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics 10*(1), 125-140. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1473-4192.2000.tb00143.x.

HOLMES, J. (2000c) Victoria university's Language in the Workplace Project: an overview, Language in the Workplace *Occasional Papers,* 1, 1-16.

HOLMES, J. (2003). Small talk at work: Potential problems for workers with an intellectual disability. *Research on Language and Social Interaction 36*(1), 65-84. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327973RLSI3601_4.

HOLMES, J. (2005). When small talk is a big deal: Sociolinguistic challenges in the workplace. In M. H. Long (Ed.), *Second language needs analysis* (pp. 344-371). Cambridge University Press.

HOLMES, J. (2006). Sharing a laugh: Pragmatic aspects of humour and gender in the workplace. *Journal of Pragmatics 38(*1). 26–50. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2005.06.007.

HOLMES, J. (2007). Humour and the construction of Maori leadership at work. *Leadership*, *3*, 5–27.

HOLMES, J. (2009). Humor, power, and gender in the workplace. In N. Coupland & A. Jaworski, (Eds.) *The sociolinguistic reader* (pp. 631-645). Palgrave Macmillian.

HOLMES, J., & FILLARY, R. (2000). Handling small talk at work: Challenges for workers with intellectual disabilities. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, 47*(3), 273-291.

HOLMES, J., & MARRA, M. (2002). Having a laugh at work: how humour contributes to workplace culture. *Journal of Pragmatics 34,* 1683–1710.

HOLMES, J., & MARRA, M. (2004). Relational practice in the workplace: Women's talk or gendered discourse? *Language in Society, 33,* 377-398.

HOLMES, J., & STUBBE, M. (2003). *Power and politeness in the workplace. A sociolinguistic analysis of talk at work.* Pearson Education.

HOLMES, J., FILLARY, R., MCLEOD, M. & STUBBE, M. (2000). Developing skills for successful social interaction in the workplace. *New Zealand Journal of Disability Studies 7,* 70-86.

HOLMES, J., MARRA, M., & BURNS, L. (2001). Women's humor in the workplace. A quantitative analysis. *Australian Journal of Communication, 28,* 83-108.

HULTGREN, A. K. (2011). 'Building rapport' with customers across the world: The global diffusion of a call center speech style. *Journal of Sociolinguistics 15*(1), 36–64. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9841.2010.00466.x.

HUO, Y., LAM, W., & CHEN, Z. (2012). Am I the only one this supervisor is laughing at? Effects of aggressive humor on employee strain and addictive behaviors. Personnel Psychology, 65(4), 859-885. https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12004C.

HYMES, D. (1968). The ethnography of speaking. In J. A. Fishman (Ed.), *Readings in the sociology of language.* (pp. 99-138). Mouton.

IDE, R. (1998). "Small talk" in service encounters: The creation of self and communal space through talk in America. (Doctoral dissertation). The University of Texas at Austin, 1998).

IRVINE, J. T. (1974). Strategies of status manipulation in the Wolof greetings. In R. Bauman & J. Sherzer (Eds.), *Explorations in the ethnography of speaking* (pp. 167-191). Cambridge University Press.

IXTH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND ETHNOLOGICAL SCIENCES. (1972). *Current anthropology, 13*(3/4), 498–501.

JAKOBSON, R. (1960). Closing statement: linguistics and poetics. In Sebeok, Thomas A. (Ed.), Style in Language (pp. 350-377). MIT Press.

JAWORSKI, A. (2009). Greetings in tourist-host encounters. In N. Coupland & A. Jaworski, (Eds.) *The sociolinguistic reader* (pp. 662-679). Palgrave Macmillan.

JAWORSKI, A., & COUPLAND, J. (2005). Othering in gossip: "you go out you have a laugh and you can pull yeah okay but like…" *Language in Society, 34,* 667-679. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404505050256.

Jette, A. M. (2017) the promise of assistive technology to enhance work participation, *Physical Therapy, 97*(7), 691–692, https://doi.org/10.1093/ptj/pzx054.

JOHNSTONE, B. (1993). Community and contest: Midwestern men and women creating their worlds in conversational storytelling, In D. Tannen (Ed.) *Gender and conversational interaction* (pp. 62-80). Oxford University Press.

KAHALON, R., BECKER, J. C., & SHNABEL, N. (2022). Appearance comments presented as compliments at work: How are they perceived by targets and observers in and outside of workplace settings?. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 52*(8), 751-762. https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12732.

KENDON, A., & Ferber, A. (1973). A description of some human greetings. In R. P. Michael & J. H. Cook (Eds.) *Comparative ecology and behaviour of primates*. Academic Press.

KING, J., SPOENEMAN, T., STUART, S., & BEUKELMAN, D. R. (1995). Small talk in adult conversations: Implications for AAC vocabulary selection. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 11*(4), 260-264. https://doi.org/10.1080/07434619512331277399.

KNOWLES, G., WICHMANN, A., & ALDERSON, P. (1996). *Working with speech: Perspectives on research into the Lancaster/IBM spoken English corpus.* Longman.

KOESTER, A. (2004). Relational sequences in workplace genres. *Journal of Pragmatics, 36,* 1405–1428. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2004.01.003.

KOESTER, A. (2006). *Investigating workplace discourse*. Routledge.

KOESTER, A. (2010). *Workplace discourse*. Continuum.

KRÄMER, N. C., & WINTER, S. (2008). Impression management 2.0: The relationship of self-esteem, extraversion, self-efficacy, and self-presentation within social networking sites. *Journal of Media Psychology: Theories, Methods, and Applications, 20*(3), 106–116. https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-1105.20.3.106.

KUIPER, K. & FLINDALL, M. (2000). Social rituals, formulaic speech and small talk at the supermarket checkout. In J. Coupland (Ed.), *Small talk* (pp. 183-207). Pearson Education Limited.

LABOV, W. (1966). *The social stratification of English in New York City.* Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

LABOV, W. (1972). *Sociolinguistic Patterns.* Blackwell.

LANGIT-DURSIN, R. (2016). Incidental corrective feedback by classroom teachers and uptake by bilingual elementary students in teacher-learner interactions. *Indonesian JELT 11*(1), 47-67.

LAVE, J., & WENGER, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation.* Cambridge University Press.

LAVER, J. (1975). Communicative Function of Phatic Communion. In A. Kendon, R.M. Harris & M.R. Key (Eds.), *Organization of behavior in face-to-face interaction* (pp. 215-238). Mouton.

LAVER, J. (1975). Communicative Function of Phatic Communion. In A. Kendon, R.M. Harris & M.R. Key (Eds.), *Organization of behavior in face-to-face interaction* (pp. 215-238). Mouton.

LAVER, J. (1981). Linguistic routines and politeness in greeting and parting. In F. Coulmas (Ed.), *Conversational routine* (pp. 289-318). Mouton.

LAVER, J. (2011). Communicative functions of phatic communion. In Adam Kendon, Richard M. Harris, & Mary R. Key, (Eds.). Organization of behavior in face-to-face interaction (pp. 215-238). De Gruyter Mouton.

LENK, U. (1998). Discourse markers and global coherence in conversation. *Journal of pragmatics, 30*(2), 245-257. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(98)00027-7.

LINDENFELD, J. (1990). *Speech and sociability at French urban marketplaces.* John Benjamins Pub. Co.

LITOSSELITI, L. (2010). *Research methods in linguistics.* Continuum.

LIU, L. (2016). Different cultures and social patterns matter in English and Chinese greetings. *Literacy Information and Computer Education Journal (LICEJ), 7*(3), 2342-2346.

LYNCH, O.H. (2009). Kitchen antics: the importance of humor and maintaining professionalism at work, *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 37*(4), 444-464. https://doi.org/10.1080/00909880903233143.

LYSTER, R., SAITO, K., & SATO, M. (2013). Oral corrective feedback in second language classrooms. *Language Teaching, 46(*1), 1-40. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444812000365.

MALINOWSKI, B. (1930). The problem of meaning in primitive languages. In C. K. Ogden & I. A. Richards (Eds.), *The meaning of meaning* (pp. 296–336). Harcourt Brace. (First published 1923).

MARRA, M. (2002). Laughing on the Inside: Humour and Internal Politics in the Workplace. *Language in the Workplace Occasional Papers 4.*

MARRA, M. (2012). Disagreeing without being disagreeable: Negotiating workplace communities as an outsider. *Journal of Pragmatics, 44*(12), 1580-1590. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327973RLSI3601_3.

MAUSS, M. (1967). *The gift: Forms and functions of exchange in archaic societies*. Norton.

MAYNARD, D.W., & HUDAK, P.L. (2008). Small talk, high stakes: Interactional disattentiveness in the context of prosocial doctor-patient interaction. *Language in Society, 37*(5), 661-688. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404508080986.

MCCABE, A., & PETERSON, C. (Eds.). (1991). *Developing narrative structure*. Lawrence Erlbaum.

MCCARTHY, M. (2000). Mutually captive audiences: small talk and the genre of close-contact service encounters. In J. Coupland (Ed.), *Small Talk,* (pp. 84-109). Pearson Education Limited.

MCCARTHY, M. (2003). Talking back: "small" interactional response tokens in everyday conversation, *Research on Language & Social Interaction, 36*(1), 33-63. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327973RLSI3601_3.

MCCARTHY, M., & HANDFORD, M. (2004). "Invisible to us": A preliminary corpus-based study of spoken business English. In U. Connor & T. A. Upton (Eds.), Discourse in the professions. Perspectives from corpus linguistics (pp. 167-201). John Benjamins.

MCCARTHY, M.J., & O'KEEFFE, A. (2003). "What's in a name?": Vocatives in casual conversation and radio phone-in calls. In Pepi Leistyna & Charles F. Meyer (Eds.) *Corpus analysis: language structure and language use* (pp. 153-186). Rodopi.

MCENERY, T., & WILSON, A. (2005). *Corpus linguistics: An introduction.* Edinburgh University Press.

MEIERKORD, C. (2000). Interpreting successful lingua franca interaction. An analysis of non-native-/non-native small talk conversations in English. *Linguistik online 5, 1/00.* Retrieved 10 May 2011.

MEYER, C. F. (2002). *English corpus linguistics: an introduction.* Cambridge University Press.

MILLIKIN, C. C. (1997). Symbol systems and vocabulary selection strategies. In S. L. Glennen, & D. C. DeCoste (Eds.), *Handbook of augmentative and alternative communication* (pp. 97-148). Singular.

MIRIVEL, J. C., & Tracy, K. (2005). Premeeting talk: an organizationally crucial form of talk. *Research on Language & Social Interaction, 38*(1), 1-34. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327973rlsi3801_1.

MULLANY, L. (2006a). Girls on tour: politeness, small talk and gender identity in managerial business meetings. *Journal of Politeness Research 2,* 55-77. https://doi.org/10.1515/PR.2006.004.

MULLANY, L. (2006b). Gender, politeness and institutional power roles: Humour as a tactic to gain compliance in workplace business meetings. *Multilingua 23,* 13-37. https://doi.org/10.1515/mult.2004.002.

MÜLLER, E., & SOTO, G. (2002). Conversation patterns of three adults using aided speech: variations across partners. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 18*(2), 77-90. https://doi.org/10.1080/074346102123 31281181.

NADLER, J. T., & STOCKDALE, M. S. (2012). Workplace gender bias: not just between strangers. *North American Journal of Psychology, 14*(2), 281-291.

NELSON, M. (2000a). A corpus-based study of business english and business english teaching materials. Unpublished PhD Thesis. Manchester: University of Manchester. Available at http://users.utu.fi/micnel/business_english_lexis_site.htm (Accessed 26 September 2012).

NORRICK, N., & SPITZ, A. (2008). Humor as a resource for mitigating conflict in interaction. *Journal of Pragmatics, 40,* 1661-1686. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2007.12.001.

NORRICK, N. R. (1993). *Conversational Jokes.* Indiana University Press.

NORRICK, N. R. (1994). Involvement and joking in conversation. *Journal of Pragmatics, 22*(3-4), 409-430. https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(94)90117-1.

NORRICK, N., & SPITZ, A. (2010). The interplay of humor and conflict in conversation and scripted humorous performance. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research, 23*(1), 83-111. https://doi.org/10.1515/humr.2010.004.

NUNES, D., & HANLINE, M. F. (2007). Enhancing the alternative and augmentative communication use of a child with autism through a parent implemented naturalistic intervention. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, 54*(2), 177-197. https://doi.org/10.1080/10349120701330495.

O'KEEFE, B., KOZAK, N., & SCHULLER, R. (2007). Research priorities in augmentative and alternative communication as identified by people who use AAC and their facilitators. AAC: *Augmentative & Alternative Communication, 23*(1), 89-96. https://doi.org/10.1080/07434610601116517.

ODOM, A., & UPTHEGROVE, M. (1997) Moving toward employment using AAC: case study, Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 13:4, 258-262, https://doi.org/10.1080/07434619712331278078.

OSTERMANN, C.A. (2003). Communities of practice at work: gender, facework and the power of habitus at an all-female police station and a feminist crisis intervention center in Brazil. *Discourse & Society, 14*(4), 473-505.

PEARSON, PICKERING, L., BOUCHARD, J., LOMOTEY, & DI FERRANTE, L. (2011). "Small talk at work: comparison of AAC and Non-AAC User Corpora" AACL 2011 – Paper presented at the Conference of American Association for Corpus Linguistics Conference. Georgia State University, Atlanta GA. October 7-9.

PICKERING, L. & BRUCE, C. (2009). *AAC and Non-AAC Workplace Corpus (ANAWC)* [collection of electronic texts]. Atlanta, GA: Georgia State University.

PICKERING, L., BOUCHARD, J., & BRUCE, C. (2014). An investigation of the interactional experience of AAC users in the workplace. Conference

Presentation. International Society of Language Studies, June, Puerto Rico.

PICKERING, L., DI FERRANTE, L., BRUCE, C., FRIGINAL, E., PEARSON, P., BOUCHARD, J. (2019). An introduction to the AAC and Non-AAC workplace corpus. *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics*, *24*(2), 229-244. https://doi.org/10.1075/ijcl.17088.pic.

PIETRANDREA, P. (2018). Epistemic constructions at work. A corpus study on spoken Italian dialogues. *Journal of Pragmatics, 128,* 171-191. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2017.10.006.

POMERANTZ, A. (2021). *Asking and telling in conversation.* Oxford University Press, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-623550-0.50010-0.

PONS BORDERÍA, S., & ARGUEDAS M.E. (2009). Expressing digression linguistically: Do digressive markers exist? *Journal of Pragmatics, 41,* 921-936. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2008.08.011.

PROULX, M., & SHEPATIN, S. (2012). Social TV: how marketers can reach and engage audiences by connecting television to the web, Social Media, and Mobile. John Wiley & Sons.

PSATHAS, G. (1979). Everyday language: Studies in ethnomethodology. Irvington Publishers.

PULLIN, G., TREVIRANUS, J., PATEL, R., & HIGGINBOTHAM, J. (2017). Designing interaction, voice, and inclusion in AAC research. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 33*(3), 139–148. https://doi.org/10.1080/07434618.2017.1342690.

PULLIN, P. (2010). Small talk, rapport, and international communicative competence. *Journal of Business Communication*, *47*(4), 455-476.

RAEVAARA, L. (2011). Accounts at convenience stores: Doing dispreference and small talk. *Journal of Pragmatics, 43,* 556-571. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2010.01.020.

RAGAN, S. (2000). Sociable talk in women's health care contexts: two forms of non-medical talk. In J. Coupland (Ed.), *Small Talk* (pp. 269-287). Longman.

RASKIN, V. (1985). *Semantic mechanisms of humor*. D. Reidel Pub. Co.

REES-MILLER. J. (1995). Linguistic features of disagreement in face-to-face encounters in university settings. (Doctoral dissertation, SUNY at Stony Brook, 1995).

ROBILLARD, A. (1994). Communication problems in the intensive care unit. *Qualitative Sociology, 17*(4), 383–395. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02393337.

RODRIGUES, S., & COLLINSON, D. (1995). 'Having Fun'?: Humour as Resistance in Brazil. *Organization Studies (*OS), 16(5), 739-768. https://doi.org/10.1177/017084069501600501.

ROGERSON-REVELL, P. (2007). Humour in business: A double-edged sword. A study of humour and style shifting in intercultural business meetings. *Journal of Pragmatics, 39*(1), 4-28. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2006.09.005.

RÖMER, U. (2005). *Progressives, patterns, pedagogy: A corpus-driven approach to English progressive forms, functions, contexts and didactics.* Benjamins.

ROSCH, E. (1978). "Principles of categorization". In E. Rosch and B. Lloyd (Eds.), *Cognition and categorization* (pp. 27-48). Lawrence Erlbaum.

ROSCH, E. (1975). Universals and cultural specifics in human categorization. In R. Brislin, S. Bochner, & W.Lonner (Eds.), *Cross-cultural perspectives on learning* (177-206), John Wiley & Sons.

ROSENER, J. B. (1990). Ways women lead. *Harvard Business Review 68*(6), 119–125.

Salin, D. (2015). Risk factors of workplace bullying for men and women: The role of the psychosocial and physical work environment. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology, 56*(1), 69-77.

SCHEGLOFF, E. A. (1987). Analyzing single episodes of interaction: an exercise in conversation analysis. Special Issue: Language and Social Interaction 101-114. *Social Psychology Quarterly 50*(2), https://doi.org/10.2307/2786745.

SCHERRE, M. (2006). Speech community. In *Encyclopedia of Language & Linguistics.* (pp. 716-722). Elsevier.

SCHIFFRIN, D. (1977). Opening encounters. *American Sociological Review, 42*(5), 679–691. https://doi.org/10.2307/2094858.

SCHLEICHER, A. F. (1997). Using greetings to teach cultural understanding. *The Modern Language Journal, 81*(3), 334–343. https://doi.org/10.2307/329309.

SCHNEIDER, K. P. (1987). Topic selection in phatic communication. *Multilingua 6-3,* 247-256. https://doi.org/10.1515/mult.1987.6.3.247.

SCHNEIDER, K. P. (1988). *Small talk: Analyzing phatic discourse*. Hitzeroth.

SCHNEIDER, K. P. (1989). *'The art of talking about nothing': Zur Beschreibung phatischer Dialoge.* In: E.Weigand & F. Hundsnurscher (Eds.) *Dialoganalyse II: Referate der 2. Arbeitstagung Bochum* 1988 (437-449). Niemeye.

SCHNEIDER, K. P. (2008). Small talk in England, Ireland, and the USA. In K. P. Schneider & A. Barron *Variational pragmatics: A focus on regional varieties in pluricentric languages* (99-139). John Benjamins.

SCHNURR, S., & CHAN, A. (2011). When laughter is not enough. Responding to teasing and self-denigrating humor at work. *Journal of Pragmatics, 43,* 20-35. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2010.09.001.

SCOTT, M. (1999). *Wordsmith Tools.* Version 3 *(*corpus analytical software suite). Oxford University Press.

SEARLE, J. (1969). *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge University Press.

SEARLE, John (1975). A taxonomy of illocutionary acts. *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science, 7,* 344-369.

SHAMIR, B. (1981). The workplace as a community: the case of British hotels. *Industrial Relations Journal, 12*(6), 45-56. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2338.1981.tb00387.x.

SIMPSON, K., BEUKELMAN, D., & SHARPE, T. (2000). An elementary student with severe expressive communication impairment in a general education classroom: Sequential analysis of interactions. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 16,* 107 – 121. https://doi.org/10.1080/07434610012331278944.

SOBRERO, A. (1995). Sul sistema dei saluti in Salento. In Maria Teresa Romanello & Immacolata Tempesta (Eds.), *Dialetti e lingue nazionali. Atti del XXVII congresso della Società di* Linguistica Italiana (Lecce, 28-30 ottobre 1993) (pp. 455-468). Bulzoni.

STAPLES, S. (2015). *The discourse of nurse-patient interactions: Contrasting the communicative styles of U.S. and international nurses.* John Benjamins Publishing Company.

STAPLES, S. (2016). Identifying linguistic features of medical interactions: A register analysis. In *Talking at Work* (pp. 179-208). Palgrave Macmillan.

STUBBE, M. (1998). Researching language in the workplace: a participatory model. *Proceedings of the Australian Linguistics Society Conference.* Brisbane University of Queensland, July 1998.

STUBBE, M. (2000). Talk that works: evaluating communication in a factory production team. *New Zealand English Journal, 14*, 55-65.

STUBBE, M. (2001). From office to production line: Collecting data for the Wellington in the Workplace Project. *Occasional Papers, 2*, 1-26.

STUBBE, M., LANE, C., HILDER, J., VINE, E., VINE, B., MARRA, M., … WEATHERALL, A. (2003). Multiple discourse analyses of a workplace interaction. *Discourse studies, 5*(3), 351. https://doi.org/10.1177/146144 56030053004.

SWALES, J. M. (1990). Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings. Cambridge University Press.

TANNEN, D. (1990). *You just don't understand: Women and men in conversation.* Morrow.

TANNEN, D. (Ed.). (1982). *Analyzing discourse: Text and talk.* Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics. Georgetown University Press.

TRACY, K. & NAUGHTON, J. (2000). Institutional identity-work: a better lens. In J. Coupland (Ed.), *Small Talk,* (pp. 62-83). Pearson Education Limited.

TRAYNOWICZ, L. L. (1981). Communication and relationship: The small talk of intimates and of strangers. (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

TSANG, S. C. (2008). Is small talk in the workplace really "trivial"? *LCOM Papers 2,* 69–83.

UNITED STATES. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS (2023). American Time Use Survey (ATUS): American time use survey — 2022 results. https://www.bls.gov/tus/.

Van De Mieroop, D. (2016). Small talk in interpreted interactions in a medical setting. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, *16*(2), 292-312.

VAN DIJK, T. A. (1994). *Il discorso razzista. La riproduzione del pregiudizio nei discorsi*. Rubbettino.

VAN DIJK, T. A. (2004). *Ideologie. Discorso e costruzione sociale del pregiudizio*. Carocci.

VENTOLA, E. (1979). The structure of casual conversation in English. *Journal of Pragmatics. 3,* 267-298. https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(79)90034-1.

VINE, B. (2009). Directives at work: exploring the contextual complexity of workplace directives, *Journal of Pragmatics 41*(7): 1395-1405. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2009.03.001.

VINSON G.A. (2006). Aggressive humor and workplace leadership: Investigating the types and outcomes of workplace leaders' aggressive humor (Doctoral dissertation). University of Minnesota.

WALSH, I. (2007). Small talk is big talk in clinical discourse. Appreciating the value of conversation in SLP clinical interactions. *Top Lang Disorders. 27,* 24-36.

WANG, J. (2006). Questions and the exercise of power. *Discourse and Society, 17*(4), 529-548. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926506063127.

WARREN, M. (2004). //(falling tone) so what have YOU been WORking on REcently//: Compiling Specialized Corpus of Spoken Business English. In U. Connor and T.A. Upton (Eds.) *Discourse in the professions* (pp. 115-140). John Benjamins.

WEI, S., & MAO, Y. (2023). Small talk is a big deal: A discursive analysis of online off-topic doctor-patient interaction in Traditional Chinese Medicine. *Social Science & Medicine*, 317, 115632. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2022.115632.

WENGER, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge University Press.

WILLIAMS, B. (1996). The status of corpora as linguistic data. In G. Knowles, A. Wichmann, & P. Alderson (Eds.), *Working with speech: Perspectives on research into the Lancaster/IBM Spoken English Corpus.* Longman.

WISENBURN, B., & HIGGINBOTHAM, D.J. (2008). An AAC application using speaking partner speech recognition to automatically produce contextually relevant utterances: Objective results. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 24*(2), 100-109. https://doi.org/10.1080/07434610701740448.

WYNNE, M., & AHDS LITERATURE, LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS (ORGANIZATION). (2005). *Developing linguistic corpora: A guide to good practice.* Oxbow Books on behalf of the Arts and Humanities Data Service.

YOERGER, M. A., FRANCIS, K., & ALLEN, J. A. (2015). So much more than chit-chat. In Allen, J. A., Lehmann-Willenbrock, N., Rogelberg, S.G., *The Cambridge handbook of meeting science* (pp. 153-173). Cambridge University Press.

YOUSSOUF, I. A., GRIMSHAW, A. D., & BIRD, C. S. (1976). Greetings in the desert. *American Ethnologist, 3*(4), 797-824. Retrieved at https://www.jstor.org/stable/643351.

ENGLISHES

TESTI E CONTESTI DELLE LINGUE INGLESI

1. Jodi L. Sandford
   Red Clover

2. Elisa Perego
   Eye tracking in audiovisual translation

3. Ahmad Khuddro
   Arabic/English syntax in translation

4. Roberta Mastrofini
   Classi di verbi inglesi tra pesantezza *e* leggerezza

5. Diane Ponterotto
   Studies in Conceptual Metaphor Theory

6. Janet Bowker
   Internal organizational discourse in English. Telling corporate stories

7. Virginia Formisano
   From waste–to–energy. Per una terminologia dei rifiuti

8. Margherita Rasulo
   Highlights of ESP in the Arts and Humanities. An approach to the study of language discourse and translation

9. Stefano Mochi
   Minimalism and the Acquisition of Functional Categories in Italian EFL Classes

10. Marianna Lya Zummo
Health Quering in the Digital Era. The Language of Health 2.0

11. Assunta Caruso
Talking peace. A metaphor analysis of political speeches

12. Anna Franca Plastina (edited by)
Challenging Language Barriers in the Public Service. An Interdisciplinary Perspective

13. Eleonora Gallitelli
Il ruolo delle traduzioni in Italia dall'Unità alla globalizzazione. Analisi diacronica e focus su tre autori di lingua inglese Dickens, Faulkner e Rushdie

14. Franco Tondi
German loanwords in English

15. Sara Castagnoli
Learner translation corpora. Exploring regularities and variation in student translation

16. Laura Di Ferrante
Small talk in the workplace. A corpus–based study