



**UNIVERSIDAD DE JAÉN**  
Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación

Trabajo Fin de Grado

**Free Conversation in  
English: a Practical and  
Methodological  
Approach to Free  
Interaction**

**Alumno/a:** Marta Cubero Villar

**Tutor/a:** Prof. D. Jesús Manuel Nieto García  
**Dpto.:** Filología Inglesa

**Enero, 2021**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. ABSTRACT AND <i>RESUMEN</i> .....	1
2. INTRODUCTION.....	2
3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: FREE CONVERSATION.....	3
3.1. What is a free conversation?.....	3
3.2. Norms.....	8
4. DIDACTIC FRAMEWORK.....	18
4.1. Understanding between different speakers in English.....	18
4.2. Interaction strategies.....	22
4.2.1. Turn-taking.....	22
4.2.2. Cooperating.....	26
4.2.3. Asking for clarification.....	27
4.3. Common expressions.....	29
5. CONCLUSIONS.....	32
6. REFERENCES.....	33

### ANNEX I

## **FIGURES**

Figure 1. A visual representation of what free conversation is.....	6
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## **TABLES**

Table 1. Expressions commonly used at transition points in turns.....	26
Table 2. Paraphrasing strategies.....	30
Table 3. Clarification strategies.....	32
Table 4. Some useful expressions for conversation.....	33
Table 5. Other common expressions in free conversation.....	34

## **IMAGES**

Image 1. Covering the Mouth with the Hand: Surprise, Crying, Pensiveness.....	28
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## 1. ABSTRACT AND *RESUMEN*

**Abstract:** Conversation plays a fundamental role in our daily life. Therefore, the purpose of this project is to know in depth what free conversation is and its relationship with the organization of turn-taking established by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson. As an example of their fourteen principles to carry out a conversation, a big part of this work will focus on the analysis of a conversation taken from the American TV series *Friends*. In addition, a didactic approach will show that understanding between different speakers can be possible through some interaction techniques. Finally, those interaction techniques will be illustrated in different ways.

**Key words:** Free conversation, rules, turn-taking, native and non-native speakers, interaction strategies.

**Resumen:** La conversación juega un papel fundamental en nuestra vida diaria. Por lo tanto, el propósito de este proyecto es conocer en profundidad qué es la conversación libre y su relación con la organización del turno de palabra establecido por Sacks, Schegloff, y Jefferson. Como ejemplo de sus catorce principios para llevar a cabo una conversación, gran parte de este trabajo se centrará en el análisis de una conversación tomada de la serie de televisión americana *Friends*. Además, a través de una propuesta didáctica se mostrará la posible comprensión entre distintos hablantes mediante algunas técnicas de interacción. Finalmente, estas técnicas de interacción serán ilustradas de diferentes formas.

**Palabras clave:** Conversación libre, reglas, turno de palabra, hablantes nativos y no nativos, estrategias de interacción.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, English is seen as a relevant language for worldwide communication since it is internationally known. Consequently, non-native speakers are interested in speaking English because it is a very useful skill in order to know how to communicate when it comes to traveling abroad. As a result, communication skills are considered a highly esteemed gift for people who establish a fluent conversation. For this reason, this project focuses on spoken interaction, and therefore, it is important to learn what must be done to succeed at good dialogues.

Hence, the purpose of this end-of-degree thesis is to study in depth what exactly free conversation is, and how to set a conversation between different speakers: English native speakers, English non-native speakers, those who speak English as a second language, and people who have English as a foreign language. For that, it is necessary to know how a free conversation is set by two or more native speakers; while a conversation in which there are some non-native speakers may not be exactly a free conversation, because it will be difficult to achieve exactly the type of interaction that is found in a mother tongue. Consequently, another objective of this project is to analyze and exemplify in some depth a seminal article by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, “A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn-Taking for Conversation”, as a crucial approach. These authors were among the few people who stopped to analyze initially how conversation is organized, and their model has been fundamental to begin a sound study in this fundamental area of research. Also, it is important to learn how understanding between different speakers happens, taking into account the corresponding techniques.

This work is divided in two parts. Firstly, I will develop a theoretical framework that has as its basis Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson’s article that explains the different rules and principles that can be found during a conversation; these principles are also seen in a clip of the American TV series *Friends*, which has been chosen mainly because the conversation established is between native speakers. Secondly, the other part is a didactic framework aiming at looking for a better understanding between different interlocutors, that is to say, foreign people who are interested in setting a conversation with other foreign people or with English natives. For that, this second part will be about learning how to deal with a conversation by using common expressions

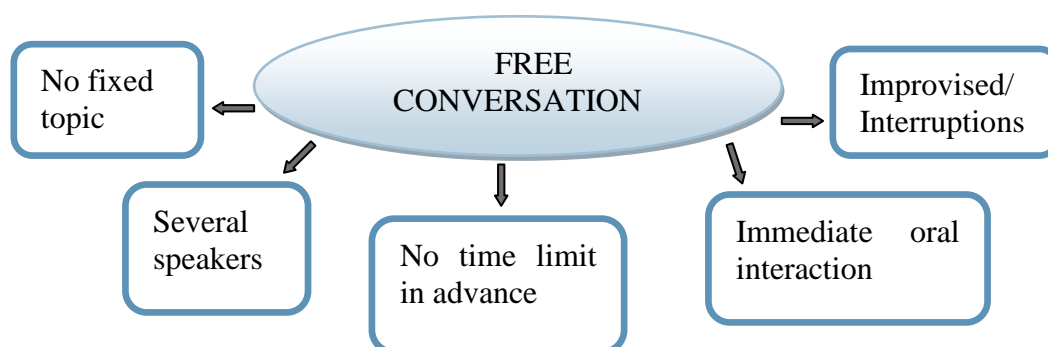
and strategies, such as turn-taking, cooperation, and asking for clarification. This part will be based on very diverse sources, although the most useful one will be the *Companion* to the *CEFR*, because it is a very relevant document for learners of English.

### 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: FREE CONVERSATION

This section will be a descriptive part which will explain what free conversation is, and what the rules in a conversation between English native speakers in relation to the organization are. Also, norms for carrying out a conversation are included in this section.

#### 3.1. WHAT IS FREE CONVERSATION?

Free conversation is produced spontaneously related to everyday situations with a vocabulary on no fixed topic, such as school or work, friends, health, house or home, marriage and divorce, family, and even free time, which is one of the commonest topics in this type of interaction. Free conversation is that immediate interaction between several speakers which may include interruptions and even improvisation without a limit of time considering it is an everyday common event and nobody marks the topic or the time. We can see this in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** A visual representation of what free conversation is

As we can see in figure 1, a free conversation has no fixed topic due to the variation that there can be, since we are talking about an informal and spontaneous spoken interaction. There are frequently more than two speakers, and therefore, there is no fixed limit in the number of interlocutors. Also, there is no time limit in advance because this is free, and the speakers can talk until they agree to finish. Furthermore, it is an immediate oral interaction because the interlocutors show an immediate ability to respond through improvisations, which are linked to interruptions, taking turns and using different strategies for keeping them, but always bearing in mind the corresponding norms.

It is necessary now to explain that in conversation turn-taking is considered as a fundamental factor to establish communication between two or more interlocutors, since this makes it possible for them to take turns. As a result, we should highlight that Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson referred to turn-taking as a simplest systematics for free conversation: “The turn-taking system for conversation can be described in terms of two components and a set of rules” (1974: 702). The two components mentioned are the turn-constructive component and the turn-allocation components. Regarding the turn-constructive component, Sacks et al. explained that “[there] are various unit types with which a speaker may set out to construct a turn” (1974: 702); these include sentences, phrases, clauses and any other lexical –or sometimes even non-lexical– construction. Therefore, there is no necessity to introduce a long sentence, and there is no rule in terms of length of sentences; as Sacks et al. suggest, conversations can be structured by means of singled-clause turns (1974: 702). We can see this in the following two examples which have been taken from Sacks et al. (1974: 702):

- (1) **Desk:** What is your last name? [Lorraine.  
**Caller:** [Dinnis.  
**Desk:** What?  
**Caller:** Dinnis.
- (2) **Anna:** Was last night the first time you met Missiz Kelly?  
(1.0)  
**Bea:** Met whom?  
**Anna:** Missiz Kelly.  
**Bea:** Yes.

On the one hand, in example (1), a single word is used to construct a turn, communication here is successful even if the caller uses just one word in his or her two

turns. On the other hand, in the second example, we can see the use of single phrases such as “Yes”, that is to say, there is no complex structure as such, just the right response. Consequently, Sacks et al. justified that each speaker has the right of taking a turn for one unit (1974: 703); as a result, interlocutors can take turns in any of the previous ways, such as by phrases, sentences, single-word turns, and so on.

Moreover, according to Sacks et al., a person can select another speaker to participate in the conversation, and even the interlocutor can self-select in starting to talk (1974: 703), for this they will use what they define as turn-allocational techniques. Now, we are going to see some examples of these turn-allocational components, also taken from Sacks et al. (1974: 703):

- (3)     **Sara:** Ben you want some ( )?  
          **Ben:** Well all right I'll have a,  
          ((pause))  
          **Sara:** Bill you want some?  
          **Bill:** No,
- (4)     **Sy:** See Death 'v a Salesman las' night?  
          **Jim:** No.  
          ((pause))  
          **Sy:** Never see(h)n it?  
          **Jim:** No.  
          **Sy:** Ever seen it?  
          **Jay:** Yes

In example (3), Ben's and Bill's turns are allocated by Sara, however, Sara also selects her own turn, and therefore, there is also self-selection (Sacks et al., 1974: 703). Then, in example (4) we can see that Sy selects Jim and Jay as next speakers; in contrast, turns that are allocated by self-selection are Sy's turns (Sacks et al., 1974: 703).

In addition to turn-constructural and turn-allocational components, according to Sacks et al., there is a set of rules managing turn construction that provides for the allocation of the following turn, and it also coordinates transfer in order to avoid too many gaps (1974: 704). As for their first rule, Sacks et al. (1974) explained that “[for] any turn, at the initial transition relevance place of an initial turn-constructural unit” (704):



- i. (rule a) If the turn is constructed in order to have a speaker who selects the next one, the party selected has to take a turn; as a result, the transfer takes place at this time (Sacks et al., 1974: 704).
- ii. (rule b) If the turn is constructed in a way that there is no necessity of a speaker allocating the turn, there would be self-selection by the next speakers, although this is not institutionally managed; therefore, the first participant to speak has the right to take a turn (Sacks et al., 1974: 704).
- iii. (rule c) If the turn is constructed in a way that does not involve a speaker selecting a next one, the current speaker may –although he or she does not need to– continue, unless another one uses self-selection (Sacks et al., 1974: 704).

Regarding their second rule, also, as Sacks et al. said:

If, at the initial transition-relevance place of an initial turn-constructive unit, neither 1a nor 1b has operated, and, following the provision of 1c, current speaker has continued, then the rule-set a-c re-applies at the next transition-relevance place, and recursively at each next transition-relevance place, until transfer is effected (1974: 704).

This means that if there is not be a transfer at the beginning, then, there will be a repetition in order to look for an effective transfer. Then, Sacks et al. established an ordering of rules, which consists of constraining the options provided (1974: 704). Consequently, although rule *a* is the first one, it does not have to be imposed as the first one, it does not have to be imposed by the presence in terms of the set of rules (Sacks et al., 1974: 704-705). Also, Sacks et al. analyzed that *b* applies if *a* is not used; therefore, if we want *a* to be applied, there has to be an initial transition-relevance place in the unit (1974: 705). Furthermore, although *b* may not be used it is limited, and in a similar way, if *c* is applied, rule 2 will be used (Sacks et al., 1974: 705). As has been explained before, there would be a repetition of the group of rules from *a* to *c*, Sacks et al. also affirmed that option *b* is constrained by the presence of option *c* (1974: 705). As we have appreciated, rules with higher priority are constrained by the lower one, and higher rules also constrain the lower ones, including these rules in the set of rules (Sacks et al., 1974: 705). In general, the ordering of rules is used in order to avoid the possible overlaps and gaps in most turns when a conversation is established.

Apart from the set of rules, a conversation needs to have an organization, and therefore, as Tsui points out, one speaker who makes an utterance is expecting another speaker's response (1994: 11). This conversational organization is made clear by Schegloff and Sacks in their writings, who established the term "adjacency pair", which explains that a question needs an answer, a greeting another one, and an offer has to be accepted or rejected (Tsui, 1994: 12-15), as we can see in example (5).

- (5)     **John:** Hi!  
          **Mary:** Hi!  
          **Mary:** Hi Karen!  
          **John:** What's up, Karen?  
          **Karen:** Hi!

As we can see, this represents an example of "a greeting sequence" in which there are expectations in order to receive the greeting from Karen, since greetings need to be returned by other greetings. Finally, as a classic example we must mention that the following is "question-answer", completed with a follow-up from the first speaker:

- (6)     **Katy:** D'you know where is the park?  
          **Mike:** It's so far from here.  
          **Katy:** Oh no!

In this case, Katy is asking for information, Mike answers the question considering it is an answer to a question, and Katy follows up Mike. The way in which Katy starts the conversation reflects a free interaction is going to be established due to the context and the informal way of communicating. As Tsui points out:

When a conversation is started, there is an expectation of responses to the previous utterance. As the rest of kinds of spoken interaction, free conversation has to show the corresponding tense related to the situation in which the interaction is taking place (1994: 19).

In the same manner, rules are connected to organization, since both are two of the most important factors to establish a correct conversation between two or more native speakers.

Once we have seen the set of rules together with its corresponding ordering and some examples about the organization of a conversation, it is important to emphasize

that turn-taking is the most important factor since it has a relevant role in conversation related to its organization, characteristics and ruling. We can see this in the following quotation by Sacks et al.:

[Turn-taking] seems a basic form of organization for conversation –“basic”, in that it would be invariant to parties, such that whatever variations the parties brought to bear in the conversation would be accommodated without change in the system, and such that it could be selectively and locally affected by social aspects of context. Depiction of an organization for turn-taking should fit the facts of variability by virtue of a design allowing it to be context-sensitive; but it should be cast in a manner that, requiring no reference to any particular context, still captures the most important general properties of conversation (1974: 700).

All in all, not only what has been explained along this section is important, but also, there are fourteen principles which can be observed in most conversations. These fourteen principles will be analyzed along the next section, since these principles can be considered as norms to carry out a free conversation.

### **3.2. NORMS**

As I said above, here we are going to see fourteen principles in which Sacks et al. reflected “how the system accounts for the facts” of conversation (1974: 706). These principles will be explained and demonstrated through examples taken from a clip from the third season of the American popular TV series *Friends*, which shows the characteristics and norms of turn-taking in free conversation. The transcript of the fragment under analysis can be found in Annex 1, and the turns have been numbered for ease of reference. Regarding the context, it is not a real conversation, but a fictional one, since it is a TV series. As for the length, it contains thirty-five turns in which speakers usually are talking one after the other; the participants are Monica, Phoebe, Ross, Chandler, and Rachel. The conversation shows both verbal and non-verbal communication, that is to say, from gestures, gazes, or postures to spoken interaction in which noises and imitations are included.

The principles which will be included below could be considered as the set of norms that a conversation needs to have when it comes to taking turns. As a result,

Sacks et al. (1974) offered “a simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking in conversation”, as the title of their article suggests. Similarly, this systematics consists of fourteen facts which reflect the central position when speech-exchange occurs, and also, there is a reflection of the social organization covering turns in the midst of parties (Sacks et al., 1974: 701). Since the principles are of great importance, we can appreciate each one through the following explanation with the corresponding examples, as said before, from the episode in the TV series. The facts suggested by Sacks et al. are the following.

- i. “Speaker-change recurs, or at least occurs” (Sacks et al., 1974: 706). This is related to the change and repetition of speaker, since there are possibilities of speaker-change in any turn’s construction (Sacks et al., 1974: 706). According to Sacks et al., this is due to the transition-relevance place, which can be reached where there is an implication of transfer of turn to the following speaker (1974: 706). However, as Sacks et al. also explained, change of speaker and repetition are not produced automatically since at each transition-relevance point the option provided in rule 1 is c (1974: 706), that is, if no next speaker self-selects, the current speaker may go on speaking. If this occurred, there would not be a change of speaker. We can see it more clearly in turn (1), where there is a sequence in which there is no change of speaker, considering Monica is not responded by Ross or Chandler, who are listening to her. Consequently, there is no speaker-change, but repetition.
- ii. “Overwhelmingly, one party talks at a time” (Sacks et al. 1974: 706), because any speaker has the right of being the first person taking the turn. In general, along the conversation there are sequences of three people speaking one after the other. Another feature suggested by Sacks et al. is that transfers of turns are coordinated around transition-relevance places, determined by the points completed for instances of the types of units (1974:706).
- iii. “Occurrences of more than one speaker at a time are common, but brief” (Sacks et al. 1974: 706). As can be seen, in (3), Ross says “hello” to Phoebe’s greeting in (2), and at the same time, Phoebe says “uuh” (4); therefore, there is an occurrence of two speakers, that is to say, Ross and Phoebe, showing an overlap. After that, as Sacks et al. explain, there is an overlap through the competition of self-selector for the next turn, each speaker projects their turn as soon as possible

at a transition-relevance place, whose starts are produced simultaneously (1974: 706-707). So these starts show the independent reflection for each party with possible points of completion of conversation that covers the current turn (Sacks et al., 1974: 707).

“Another basis of overlap derives from the projection of possible completion or transition-relevance places” (Sacks et al., 1974: 707). So, as they suggest, there is an overlap between a current turn and the next one which is produced by the last component of a turn (Sacks et al., 1974: 707). Also, according to Sacks et al., if there are elements after the first completion with no intention to continue, there would be overlaps (1974: 707); as a result, there can be structured gaps. Furthermore, Sacks et al. discussed that there are brief occurrences because these occurrences appear where interlocutors exit, eliminating an overlap’s component (1974: 708).

- iv. Commonly, most transitions show no overlaps or gaps (Sacks et al., 1974: 708). This is due to the transfer’s organization around transition-relevance places. Once we have seen this principle, we can appreciate a comparison between two examples, first, without gaps or overlaps, and then, with gaps. On the one hand, there is no gap between (4) and (5), that is to say, Monica talks just when Phoebe finishes her turn. On the other hand, we can observe a long space between (13) and (14), performed by Chandler and Phoebe; it seems that Phoebe is waiting for someone to respond and during the silence, she expresses herself by gazes and gesticulation.
- v. Turn order varies, because there is an allocation of single turns at a time, and there are options which allocate different next speakers (Sacks et al., 1974: 708). The fact that there is not a fixed turn order is reflected in the whole conversation. However, it is shown with more clarity by the talk from (14) to (18), since the order of speakers is **Phoebe, Monica, Phoebe, Ross, Phoebe**. As can be seen, Phoebe talks three times, while Monica and Ross just once.

Also, as Sacks et al. explained, the reason for speaker order’s variation is because speakers are locally controlled, that is to say, turn by turn. Therefore, the speaker who talks before the current one is selected to be the next speaker (1974: 708). For instance, in (15), Monica is talking considering she responds to Phoebe; consequently, the next turn (16) is allocated to Phoebe because she has talked before Monica. As a result, Monica, in (15) would be the current speaker, while

Phoebe, in (14), would be the previous speaker to the current; and therefore, she, in (16), should be selected as the next speaker, although Ross comes in to offer a comment on Phoebe's words. Similarly, in the following turns, (17) and (18), occurs the same, because Phoebe, in (16), is previous to the current; Ross, in (17), is the current speaker, and Phoebe, in (18), is selected to be the next speaker again. For this reason, there is a variation in the turn order.

- vi. The turn size is variable due to the construction of turn, produced from a range of unit-types (Sacks et al., 1974: 709). For example, what Monica uses, in (7), is a single unit, in this case, "okay". Furthermore, sentential constructions show variability in terms of turn size; these constructions can also be analyzed by a party or listener to project the possible directions and completion places of the constructions (Sacks et al., 1974: 709). A clear example of a sentential construction is (32), performed by Monica, where we find an expansion of length since it is a way of projecting completion.

Apart from the previous option, Sacks et al. also formulated that "[rule] 1c provides for the possibility that any current speaker may get a chance to produce more than a single instance of a unit-type" (1974: 709). This means that maximum turn size is not defined; however, minimal turn size is defined by the turn-constructural component (Sacks et al., 1974: 709).

- vii. Although there are constraints on how a conversation should be closed and what its duration should be, in a conversation length is not specified in advance (Sacks et al., 1974: 710), as has been reflected in figure 1. As far as I can tell, the conversation taken from the video has a standard length, taking into account that there are more talks within it, talking to each other; therefore, there is not an applicable example for this characteristic since it is known that the situation of the video is not a real one.
- viii. "What parties say is not specified in advance" (Sacks et al., 1974: 710). There is not any specific example for this quotation, since the most notable aspect here is that this point could be interpreted from the spectator's point of view. As a result, it could be seen as a funny conversation because the participants are talking about informal and comic topics.

The turn-taking organization does not prevent the content of a turn nor does it constrain what must be done in a given turn (Sacks et al., 1974: 710). In the first place, Sacks et al. suggested that first turns usually take greetings, and the

following turns can be constrained by previous turns (1974: 710). For example, we can see this in (19)-(21); this sequence of turns shows Rachel's greeting, in (19), that limits the following turns because the rest respond by saying "hey", and Rachel, in (21), says that she needs to talk to Chandler; therefore it is used as the next selection system.

It is known that in conversation there is a group of techniques called 'current speaker selects next'. Conversely, according to Sacks et al., these techniques cannot be used at random in any utterance (1974: 710). However, Sacks et al. kept in mind that "(a) no party is constrained in any turn to use a 'current speaker selects next' technique; and (b) any party interested in doing so has a considerable-sized set of utterance-types to choose from, each of which may accomplish the selection" (1974: 711). Consequently, there are limitations due to the organization of the types of sequences where parts are considered as the current speaker selects the next techniques (Sacks et al., 1974: 711). This point can be seen in (4)-(5), where Phoebe says to Monica that the dollhouse is very beautiful, and as a result, Monica responds because Phoebe is addressing her. These limitations refer to the use of a technique that selects a party concerning what is said in the turn allocated (Sacks et al., 1974: 711). For instance, if the technique is a question, the other speaker is obligated to answer, as in the sequence (9)-(10), where (10) is a response to the previous turn, (9), that is a question. The most notable aspect here is that this point could be interpreted from the spectator's point of view.

- ix. "Relative distribution of turns is not specified in advance" (Sacks et al., 1974: 711). Therefore, as has been mentioned previously, a suitable aspect to mention is that the conversation that has been chosen is a fictional one, and it has a total of thirty-five turns. Some participants have more turns than others. The person who talks the most is Phoebe with thirteen turns, while Monica has eight; Ross and Rachel have six turns each, and Chandler talks five times along the conversation. Furthermore, the conversation contains two focal points: on the one hand, it is focused on Monica's dollhouse; on the other hand, there is a change of topic when Rachel comes in and starts talking to Chandler, and therefore, this becomes the new center of attention.

Now, it is the turn to explain that "[t]he rule-set maximizes the set 'potential next speakers'" (Sacks et al., 1974: 711). This refers to the fact that rule 1a consists of

the current speaker selecting the next one; while in 1b anyone who is not the current speaker can use the self-selecting technique to be the next speaker (Sacks et al., 1974: 711).

As we saw in previous rules, Sacks et al. also explained that rule 1c results in including the possibility that the next speaker may be the current one; however, the system allows the use of that option to be considered as a within-turn event (1974: 711). As we can see, these authors speak about any over-all distribution of turns. Therefore, this norm is concluded with the following reflection:

Since relative distribution of turns is the cumulative outcome, at any current point in a conversation, of the turn-by-turn determinations of turn-order, the biases operative in turn-order determination [...] may result in skewings intrinsic to the turn-taking system, in the over-all distribution of turns to any point (Sacks et al., 1974: 712).

- x. “Number of parties can vary” (Sacks et al., 1974: 712); there can be current or next speakers, and length also can vary, that is, the variations which have been explained before. To illustrate this point with the conversation in *Friends*, it is necessary to remember that the conversation shows more than one center of attention, since Monica, Phoebe, Ross and Chandler are talking about Monica’s dollhouse when Rachel arrives, so there is a new focal point that means a change of topic. However, after this other conversation, Phoebe talks again about dollhouse. Therefore, firstly, there are four participants (Phoebe, Monica, Chandler, and Ross); later, when Rachel comes in, there are five people, and now the conversation focuses on Chandler and Rachel; finally, there are three participants (Phoebe, Monica, and Ross) talking again about Monica’s dollhouse. What I want to show with this example is that parties in a conversation can vary at any moment.

As this is related to the rules, Sacks et al. explain that in a conversation with two parties, the two speakers comprise all parts of the conversation without having to take into account turn-order; however, regarding the increment in the number of parties, the last as next bias remains invariable (1974: 712). For example, if there were three parties, one would be excluded if this bias operated severely; if there were four parties, two would be excluded, and so on (Sacks et al., 1974: 712).



Concerning turns, as Sacks et al. suggested, if there are two parties, the pertinent variability is not related to the differential turns' distribution; for this reason, the turns will be alternating, however, it is a differential turn size (1974: 712). Nevertheless, if there are three parties, Sacks et al. explain that "differential distribution of turns becomes relevant. While turn size remains relevant, a bias toward smaller turn size is introduced" (1974: 712). Then, if turn size is important, there is a bias toward a smaller turn size (Sacks et al., 1974: 712). As it is well known, next turn selection techniques are usually present. Thus, according to Sacks et al.:

With the introduction of a third party, 'next turn' is no longer guaranteed to [...] any current non-speaker. In two-party conversation, a current non-speaker can pass any given transition-relevance place which is non-obligatory [...] with full assurance of being 'next speaker' at some point; but with three or more parties, this is not assured (1974: 712).

If we talk about four parties, "[with] four parties, a type of variability we have not so far considered is introduced, i.e. variability in the number of turn-taking systems in operation" (Sacks et al., 1974: 713). As a result, as Sacks et al. also explain, mechanisms for the schism of a conversation into more than one conversation can operate if there are four parts because there are enough parties to establish two conversations simultaneously (1974: 713). Therefore, as Sacks et al. suggest, "[with] four parties, then, schism is a systematic possibility. We earlier noted that the turn order bias of 'last speaker being next speaker' becomes a relative distributional bias with three or more parties" (1974: 713).

- xi. "Talk can be continuous or discontinuous" (Sacks et al., 1974: 714). As Sacks et al. show, on the one hand, talk is continuous if it goes on across a transition-relevance place almost without any gaps or overlaps (1974: 714); on the other hand, it is discontinuous if a current speaker stops, and nobody goes on to speak, causing space considered as a lapse (Sacks et al., 1974: 7149). For instance, from (16) to (18), talk is continuous because there are neither overlaps nor gaps between the turns, however, after (18) nobody responds to Phoebe, causing a lapse or a discontinuity. This coincides with Rachel's entrance.

The fact that conversation can be continuous is shown by the set of rules in the previous section. According to Sacks et al., when no option of rules has applied, the result would be a lapse, or a discontinuous conversation (1974: 715).

“If rule 1a is employed in a turn’s talk, in selecting a next speaker to follow its possible completion, no lapse can properly occur” (Sacks et al., 1974: 715), which would mean a pause before the next speaker selection. Similarly, as Sacks et al. analyze, in that rule, a lapse will be produced if the rule is not applied (1974: 715). Furthermore, if rule 1a is not applied, the turn goes to the next speaker who will continue by self-selection (Sacks et al.: 1974: 715); also, if a current speaker does not use the self-selecting technique, rule 1a remains and there will be much more space available for self-selection (Sacks et al., 1974: 715). Finally, there can be rounds of self-selection by current and by others to continue, and so on (Sacks et al., 1974: 715). For instance, in the sequence between (21) and (25), we can appreciate a clear example of this point since there are continuities as well as discontinuities, with the occurrence of gaps. Firstly, in (21), Rachel is saying that she needs to talk to one of them, but she is not selecting a concrete speaker. Then, in (22), Ross uses the self-selection technique in order to respond as soon as possible; in this case, Ross has responded quickly and therefore there is no gap. In (23), Rachel says that the person she wants to talk to is Chandler, so that Rachel is selecting Chandler as next speaker, however, Ross is astounded, and in (24), he says that it is okay in a way that causes a silence while he is finishing the sentence. Finally, in (25), Chandler starts to talk when Rachel addresses to him a next-speaker selection.

- xii. “Turn-allocation techniques are used” (Sacks et al., 1974: 716). We have seen previously how turn-allocation works, and it is known that there are obvious ways to select a next speaker and for self-selection. Therefore, Sacks et al. offered a group of techniques:

- (a) A first obvious or special case refers to types of sequences sharing the possibility of next selection, such as a question, these are also called adjacency pairs (1974: 716). As has been seen in the previous section, that includes sequences such as greeting-greeting or invitation-acceptance (Sacks et al., 1974: 716). On the one hand, we can see an example of greeting-greeting in (2) and (3), in which Phoebe says “hey” and Ross says “hello”; on the other hand, in (28) and (29), there is an example of invitation-

acceptance considering Rachel is proposing something to Chandler, and he accepts the offer.

- (b) Different from the typical next-speaker selection, there are some techniques without addressing anyone in particular. On the one hand, there is a technique that is a variant of the question whose intonation is the same as a question such as “what?” or “who?” (Sacks et al., 1974: 717). On the other hand, repair techniques, and Sacks et al. explained, “constitute a central device that introduces the turn order bias” (1974: 717). Therefore, the only way of selecting a next speaker in this case is to select the speaker as the previous speaker to the next one (Sacks et al., 1974: 718).
- (c) It seems that technique (a) above constrains a turn where the current-selects-next technique is used (Sacks et al., 1974: 718). As a result, any turn of this type could be constructed as a first pair-part and current-selects-next, and there “would then seem to have no general operability, but be tied to utterances constructed as first pair-parts” (Sacks et al., 1974: 718). Also, some other expressions would be used as an exit technique for a turn (Sacks et al., 1974: 718). For example, “well” is a suitable opening expression for an ending turn in a sequence. This can be seen, in (16), when Phoebe tries to avoid talking more about ghosts; maybe she seems to be ending this talk. Also, in (24), Ross says “well” to conclude his turn of talking with Rachel when he realizes he is not the person Rachel wants to talk to. Apart from the previous expressions, “alright”, in (32), and “okay”, and “fine” in (33) can also be considered expressions for the exit techniques for a turn.
- (d) These authors illustrated this point with a specific example to understand better their inclusion of techniques that employ social identities in their operation (Sacks et al., 1974: 718). As a result, if a conversation is established between two couples, there would commonly be an invitation made by a speaker, who will select as the next speaker a person from the other couple (Sacks et al., 1974: 718). According to Sacks et al., these social identities are considered to be difficult “because one of the major aspects of the flexibility of conversation is that it is compatible with multiplicities of, and changes in, the social identities of some ‘same’ participants” (1974: 718).

- (e) “The basic technique for self-selection is ‘starting first’” (Sacks et al., 1974: 718); moreover, rule 1b indicates that when someone has the turn, they will be the first participant (Sacks et al., 2015: 719). Also, Sacks et al. added a technique where appositional beginnings such as “well”, “so”, etc., are used to limit the beginning of other speakers; therefore, these appositions are called pre-starts (1974: 719). These pre-starts can be found in the conversation from the video in (12), in which Phoebe says “well” to start her turn and not to be overlapped by other speakers. As there are pre-starts, according to Sacks et al., there are also post-completers, exit devices (1974: 719). One example of this can be seen when Ross, in (17), makes a question giving his opinion, while in (18), Phoebe tries to finish the conversation introducing “okay” as a way of exit.
- In conclusion, Sacks et al. proposed “that [appositionals] are to be understood as devices with important turn-organizational uses” (1974: 720).
- (f) Sometimes, self-selection may coincide with the presence of a previous self-selector, and this may result in more than one speaker at a time, where one of them may have started first (Sacks et al., 1974: 720). Apart from that, there are techniques for second-starters that depend on the type of utterance (Sacks et al., 1974: 720). Also, as Sacks et al. explained, “[when] a self-selector’s turn-beginning reveals his (*sic*) turn’s talk to be [...] addressed to a problem of understanding prior utterance, he (*sic*) may [...] get the turn, even though at the turn-transfer another started before him (*sic*)” (1974: 720).
- xiii. “Various turn-constructive units are employed for the production of the talk that occupies a turn” (Sacks et al., 1974: 720). Sacks et al. proposed here “that the allocation of turn-space [was] organized around the construction of talk [in] the turns” (1974: 720). As has been discussed previously, Sacks et al. identified the types of turn-constructive units as including a sentence, clause, phrase, or just a word (1974: 720).
- xiv. “Repair mechanisms exist for dealing with turn-taking errors and violations” (Sacks et al., 1974: 723). A clear example of this is the use of a repair technique in (23), where Rachel repairs Ross’s misunderstanding in (21) - (22) in which Ross thought that she was addressing him. This repair technique is helpful to clarify that Rachel is not talking to Ross, but to Chandler. There are a lot of ways of

repairing errors in conversation, and therefore, according to Sacks et al., expressions used for interruptions or asking for clarification are designed to solve problems about turn-taking organization (1974: 723-724). Apart from this type of repair, there is another one that implies the detention of a turn before its possible end; consequently, we can appreciate that repair systems can be found in the set of rules (Sacks et al., 1974: 724). As a result, according to Sacks et al., most repairs are used in the turn where repair occurs (1974: 724).

In short, as Sacks et al. summarized, “[the] turn-taking system and the organization of repair are thus ‘made for each other’ in a double sense” (1974: 724), since it is a basic element for repairing problems occurring along with the conversation.

On the whole, once we have seen these fourteen principles that reflect what characteristics can be found along a conversation, it is time to finish the theoretical framework, where the different specific and general terms in free conversation have been explained. The next section will focus on a didactic environment since it will show different explanations, expressions, and strategies for a conversation whose participants can be native as well as non-native speakers.

## **4. DIDACTIC FRAMEWORK**

Along this section, we are going to see expressions and techniques employed to establish a free conversation from a non-native speaker’s point of view, since this is intended to be the didactic component in this project. This is about how understanding between different English language speakers takes place. In addition, the expressions and strategies commonly taught in this context will also be mentioned, looking for the teaching of a correct interaction in the best possible way.

### **4.1. UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN DIFFERENT SPEAKERS IN ENGLISH**

Once we have seen the different aspects and elements that can be found in a conversation between native speakers of English, it is necessary to mention the different aspects that can be found when a free conversation is set between speakers having

different first languages. When two or more speakers set a free conversation, there are two important factors related to their mutual understanding, production and reception. These will connect, in turn, with speaking and listening, which are normally related to conversation between non-native speakers of English.

First of all, overall understanding involves coherence. As Bublitz remarked, both the person who speaks and the person who listens during a conversation should keep in mind coherence in order to construct a good conversation (1988: 26); as a result, the speaker and the other interlocutor(s) need coherence to be understood and to understand. Coherence is ascribed to utterances related to the participants' environment. And eventually, discourse topic is a fundamental factor in relation to coherence in conversation. Most everyday conversations are considered coherent, to the extent that even greeting sequences are necessary for communication to succeed (Bublitz, 1988: 32-33).

Secondly, from the non-native point of view, if a speaker does not speak English as a first language, and a conversation is established in English, Black points out that lack of expression may exist (1970: 4); this is because this speaker has not English as his or her mother tongue. Then, if these speakers treat British topics, Black suggested that speakers do not think in English because they still will focus on daily topics related to their environment (1970: 4).

Thirdly, understanding between a first and a second language speaker during a free conversation can cause troubles because there may be misunderstanding when it comes to listening, considering these interlocutors belong to different environments (Egbert, Niebecker & Rezzara, 2004: 178). When we go into some depth in this, Davies suggests that:

Different from the rest of language speakers, natives show a great flexibility in terms of expression as a set of syntactic and semantic alternatives in order to vary what is being said; and besides, messages can be repeated. Apart from flexibility of expression, natives are aware of being understood and think that they say what they wish (2003: 200).

This explanation makes reference to avoiding conflict during the interaction due to the preoccupation of speakers because they may or may not be understood. For this reason, from the native speaker's point of view, there is an expectation to be understood

and to understand non-native speakers. According to Davies, what interlocutors want is to establish intelligibility, and this may be frustrating for them if there is a low level of intelligibility, or even when intelligibility does not exist (2003: 201). However, if an interlocutor makes the effort to be understood, the other speaker should make the effort to ensure that he or she is understood (Bazzanella and Damiano, 1999: 834). Another important point related to understanding between different speakers is the problem caused by the difference of dialects or the presence of a native speaker with a specific dialect, which may not be understood by the non-native interlocutor, above all when it is a free conversation. Apart from that, Levinson (as quoted in Bazzanella and Damiano, 1999: 818) suggests that conflicts in face-to-face conversation are often due to misunderstandings caused by the balance between politeness and explicitness, noises, and so on.

When a free conversation is established by two or more native speakers, fluency is taken for granted due to their fluent spontaneous discourse; different from natives, if there are any non-native speakers present, the interaction is usually more difficult (Davies, 2003: 201-202). Therefore, as Chong suggests, there are some ways for native speakers' communication from an international perspective (2019), that is to say, effective ways by which native speakers can establish a conversation with non-native people in order to avoid misunderstandings taking into account some situations and ways to solve problems of understanding:

- i. Each speaker has a different style of conversation, and maybe we can even find our interlocutor to be rude. However, once we have found the reason why they speak in that way, we should look for an adaptation (Chong, 2019) to avoid misunderstandings, considering one speaker may seem to the rest of interlocutors to look odd.
- ii. Even when someone is understood, this does not mean that the interlocutor has understood correctly, for this reason, to make sure of this mutual understanding it is frequently necessary to summarize and paraphrase what the speakers have said (Chong, 2019).
- iii. Humor should be used carefully, because there can be misunderstandings (Chong, 2019) due to the speakers' different origins. As Chong demonstrates, this is due to the different speakers' forms of humor, since English humor is commonly considered as ironic from the non-native's point of view; so it could

sometimes be seen as bullying (2019). Furthermore, Fox (as quoted in Chong, 2019) points out that English native speakers often use irony as a sign of humor; however, foreign speakers probably find it difficult to understand. As a result, irony should not always be used in international interaction (2019).

- iv. Natives have to be aware of the way communication takes place if there are non-native speakers in the conversation, because the cultural references used may not be understood by the non-native speakers; therefore, they would feel excluded (Chong, 2019).

Once we have seen the above four possible causes of misunderstanding that can occur in a conversation established by natives and non-natives and the solutions that can be applied, it is the turn to explain understanding from the non-native perspective. Therefore, it may be necessary to mention that the Council of Europe's *Companion* to the previous *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* deals with the understanding of different non-native speakers from the highest to the lowest level, that is to say, from C2 to Pre-A1 (2018: 84). The *Companion* reflects that C2 speakers can understand any interlocutor, even on difficult topics which are not part of the speaker's environment (2018: 84); in a similar way, C1 speakers can understand a foreign language in detail although they may have to confirm details if an unusual accent, or even dialect, are used (*Companion*, 2018: 84). Similarly, according to the *Companion*, B2 level speakers understand in detail what is said to them in the standard spoken language, even if they may have difficulties to understand in noisy places (2018: 84). Nevertheless, regarding other intermediate level speakers such as B1 users, the *Companion* points out that speakers should understand everyday conversations although they may have to ask for repetition (2018: 84), and even for clarification looking for the understanding of certain words or expressions. Apart from these higher (C1 and C2) and intermediate (B1 and B2) level speakers, there are three more groups who can only understand basic conversations; these levels are A2, A1, and the lowest one, the Pre-A1 level. On the one hand, the *Companion* suggests that A2 speakers are able to understand in a clear, slow and direct way simple daily conversations, above all if there is a relation with familiar topics although interlocutors can ask for repetition (2018: 84). On the other hand, an A1 speaker is able to understand simple questions and expressions said in a careful way slowly (*Companion*, 2018: 84) in order to be understood. Finally, the lowest English language level, Pre-A1, according to the *Companion*, is one where



people can understand simple questions and instructions which deal with the speaker's personal life (2018: 84), such as "What's your name?" or "Where do you live?"; and even key words like months of the year, days of the week, numbers, and so on.

Also, Olsher affirms that a free conversation involves not only turns at talk, but also the interaction that can be interrupted through gestures, for instance (2004: 221). As a result, speakers can know how to behave and what to say when they set a free conversation with a non-native speaker. Consequently, speakers will use some techniques which will be explained in the next sections with the purpose of looking for a better comprehension between them through the use of common expressions and interaction strategies.

## **4.2. INTERACTION STRATEGIES**

As has been mentioned in previous sections, in spoken interaction there are different strategies that are used in conversation in order to make easier the communication, in which they can be used as reception or production strategies. Although there are three basic types of communication strategies, verbal, non-verbal and visual, this project focuses on verbal communication; however, sometimes the use of gestures can be useful to help interlocutors. The Council of Europe in the *Companion* reflects on second or foreign language speakers listening to others and on how they can use grammatical or other comprehension clues, in other words, they can understand something through context (2018: 67). In a similar way, in order to interact, there are other strategies to reach a better understanding between the interlocutors, which are turn-taking, cooperating and asking for clarification.

### *4.2.1. Turn-taking*

Even if turn-taking, also called "taking the floor", is a competence, it can also be addressed as an interaction strategy. It has to do with taking the initiative of the conversation since its function is helping to initiate, maintain or end a conversation (*Companion*, 2018: 11). Even though it is considered also an aspect of discourse competence, in this case, it will be explained as a strategy for spoken communication. As we saw throughout section 3 above, according to Sacks et al., turn-taking is used to avoid problems of interaction; for instance, as we saw, if there were two or more people

talking at a time, one speaker would stop to avoid communication problems (1974: 701).

According to Yang, “turn-taking is realized in many forms, including gestures and other body movements” (2007: 30) through which speakers understand each other with no necessity of talking. This statement makes reference to non-verbal communication, which also has an important role in everyday conversation.

Turn-taking is a strategy used for taking the turn, as a result, one of the participants in a free conversation can take the turn strategically; in example (7), we can see how interlocutors deal with “offer-acceptance or refusal” sequences:

- (7)     **John:** You are boring!  
           **Karen:** I’m playing with my mobile phone, thanks.

Here, there is a “pre-sequence” in which John is inviting Karen to play with the people present and Karen indirectly refuses the offer; and therefore, this is considered as a strategy, as it is used to invite another speaker to play, instead of saying “Do you wanna play?”.

As free conversation is established spontaneously, it is not important to follow rules strictly; however, expressions are fundamental to get ahead with a conversation which has been deflected by any kind of misunderstanding. For this reason, some turn-taking expressions have been taken from different sources to show how much variety there can be. We can see some examples of this in table 1.

MEANING	EXPRESSIONS
To take turns	“You start” or “Start” (British Council, n.d.)
To end interruptions	“Sorry, you were saying...” (Case, 2019)
To give examples making the turn longer	“Such as”, “so, in other words...” (British Council, n.d.)
To change the mind about interrupting	“No no, you go on.” (Case, 2019)
To indicate the end of the turn	“Etcetera etcetera” (Case, 2019)
To keep other interlocutors speaking	“Ha!”, “Amazing!”, “Nice!” (Case, 2019)

To talk when there is silence and the speaker needs time to think	“So”, “Erm...”, “Well...” (British Council, n.d.)
To ask for details	“And then?”, “Dish!”, “So?” (Case, 2019)
To give the opportunity of speaking	“...,right?”, “And you?” (Case, 2019)

**Table 1.** Expressions commonly used at transition points in turns

These expressions and many more phrases are common in turn-taking, above all when it comes to talking about “repair”, a useful strategy connected to turn-taking through which interlocutors correct their mistakes, and it may be also associated to asking for clarification; according to Yang:

If a participant makes mistakes maybe the speaker makes a self-correction, the hearer does not respond, the hearer corrects the person who is speaking at the moment, or the hearer makes the other repeat what he or she has said (2007: 21).

We can see this in example (8):

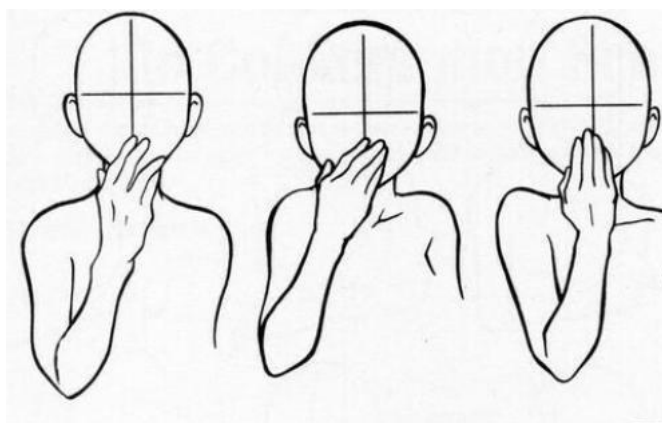
- (8) **Child:** I want strawberry candies.  
**Grandfather:** Please.  
**Child:** I want strawberry candies, please.

This can also be used as an example of correction of mistakes by the teacher; in this case, the grandfather, who corrects his grandchild, asks the child to use “please”, a single phrase which is commonly used as a polite expression.

It has been mentioned before that gestures have a fundamental role in free conversation. For instance, facial expression is important to transmit how interested the interlocutor is; in a similar way, proximity between two or more people is also a way of reflecting how the relation between them is; it can be shown by a hug, a kiss or shaking hands.

Also, the ways of looking at one another has an important role in free conversation, since through gaze interlocutors can express their emotions; consequently, in face-to-face everyday communication, as Yang indicates, gaze is common as a sign of attention and as a way of expressing that you want to talk. However, this strategy obviously cannot be used when the conversation is established by telephone (2007: 25).

Moreover, head nodding has an important role to take a turn; in this way it can be followed by verbal behavior for a better understanding (Yang, 2007: 26). Apart from these strategies, mime is a helpful method to interact when one of the speakers does not know how to express his or her feelings or what he or she wants to say (Houston, 2006: 67). For this reason, this is a common strategy in free conversation because when people are talking about their everyday topics they usually make gestures with their arms and hands. Similarly, according to Yang, laughing and smiling demonstrate interest to participate and as a request for taking the turn (2007: 26), and how the other interlocutor is feeling regarding the conversation. For instance, as has been mentioned before, some of the examples in free conversation could be, among others, moving the head when someone confirms understanding or to negate something or putting the hand on the mouth to express surprise, as is shown in image 1.



**Image 1.** Covering the mouth with the hand: surprise, crying, pensiveness (Pinterest, n.d.)

As we can see in this image, there is a representation of surprise gestures that are used in everyday interaction in which interlocutors can express themselves in a more effective way through movements; these gestures are clear examples of the popular idiom “a picture is worth a thousand words”. The movement of hands while people are talking helps to highlight those expressions which are considered relevant. A last but no less important point than previous non-verbal elements is posture, here is Yang’s explanation about postural shifts:

During a conversation, a person may shift the position of his (*sic*) legs or may shift his (*sic*) seat in the chair. The role that shifts of posture play in the turn-taking mechanism is unclear. But one can assume that people do not really sit still in their seats for an appreciable length of time. Listeners may be reclining for a time and then, as they prepare to take the speaking role, move to an upright position or even to a forward-leaning position. On the other hand, speakers at times “punctuate” their yielding of the floor by leaning back in their chairs as they finish their utterances (Yang, 2007: 26).

This quotation makes reference to the importance of posture in conversation, because the way of sitting or posture reflect attitudes and how the interlocutors are feeling at the moment.

In general, turn-taking has relevance in conversation since it is the reason why two or more speakers exchange information. It is considered as a central strategy to avoid communication problems and even as a method to organize a conversation.

#### *4.2.2. Cooperating*

As has been explained previously, cooperating could be difficult when the speakers have different foreign language levels or when they have different mother tongues, considering they do not share the same interaction norms.

Cooperating is an interaction strategy which helps to develop a free conversation showing the ability to participate with other speakers inviting each other to establish a good communication (*Companion*, 2018: 101). Furthermore, speakers of English as a foreign language are used to confirming comprehension to make sure that the other speaker has understood the information. As has been mentioned before, a common expression for that is “do you understand?” (Ava, 2018).

Here, there are many useful strategies, such as avoidance, paraphrase, borrowing, appeal for assistance and mime. However, the most common is paraphrasing, a common strategy in conversation between foreign and native language speakers looking for solving interaction problems (Houston, 2006: 67).

On the one hand, as Houston points out, avoidance refers to trying not to talk about a topic which the speaker is not fully familiar with, and even to avoid a message one of the interlocutors may stop in the middle of an utterance (2006: 66). Therefore, in

free conversation speakers are free to change any topic of conversation or even stop, omitting messages considering it is an informal interaction. On the other hand, paraphrase includes three subtypes shown in table 2: approximation, word coinage and circumlocution.

STRATEGY	EXPLANATION	EXAMPLE
Approximation	The use of expressions which are not correct, and the speaker knows that	“fish” for “whale”
Word coinage	Making up a new word looking for communication	“floating car” for “boat”
Circumlocution	Description of the item adapted to the target language	“Where you sit down” for “chair”

**Table 2.** Paraphrasing strategies (Houston, 2006: 67)

Then, borrowing involves a literal translation of the term translating it word-for-word from the speaker’s L1 (Houston, 2006: 67), for example “electrical stairs” for “escalator”.

Furthermore, as Houston suggests, appeal for assistance consists of asking for the correct term, it can be for the meaning or definition (2006: 67). An example of appeal for assistance could be “What is that?” or “What does it mean?”, among others.

On the whole, cooperation in free conversation is connected to turn-taking asking for clarification since the function of cooperation is to keep a correct development of the interaction; this will be seen in the following section, which deals with asking for clarification.

#### *4.2.3. Asking for clarification*

Apart from turn-taking and cooperating, asking for clarification is a strategy which indicates there are comprehension problems, and also to confirm that the speaker is following the conversation (*Companion*, 2018: 102). Due to the different conversation levels, skills and styles, it is probable that there are misunderstandings, and it is important to avoid making assumptions (Chong, 2019). Also, according to Chong,

if someone is not sure about what the interlocutor says, the best option is to make questions (2019).

Stoyanchev, Liu and Hirschberg suggest that clarification questions are important in order to get a good interaction. If there is not clarification, speakers may lose information and there can be a misunderstanding (2014: 1), as in the following example:

- (9)     **A:** Do you have a date right now?  
          **B:** Do you mean a relationship?  
          **A:** No! I'm asking if you have a date to see the doctor.

This example reflects the misunderstanding of the word “date” considering that it has a double meaning, and therefore, this word can be used for date in terms of “relationship” and for “time”. Speaker A is referring to time while speaker B thinks of a relationship; as a result, speaker B makes a question asking for the meaning used by speaker A, and in this way, A answers clarifying that he/she is talking about time.

According to Stoyanchev et al., this ability is relevant when there are interaction interferences, like the presence of lower level speakers or if the place does not help to communicate due to noise (2014: 1). For instance, two foreign young people, a German and a Spanish speaker, meet in the airport because they are going to be Erasmus students in Poland; they talk about where the bus stop is in example (10).

- (10)    **German speaker:** Excuse me, where's the stop?  
          **Spanish speaker:** Stop?  
          **German sp.:** Bus stop.  
          **Spanish sp.:** Oops! It's so close; it's in front of the airport.  
          **German sp.:** Do you mean opposite? I see nothing in front of the airport.  
          **Spanish sp.:** The what?  
          **German sp.:** The airport.  
          **Spanish sp.:** Oh, sorry, I don't hear you with this noise, you know.  
          **German sp.:** Don't worry thanks.

As it is shown, the German speaker asks for a “stop” referring to the bus stop, however, the Spanish speaker does not understand the item because this word could be considered as having two meanings, a simple STOP road sign and a bus stop; therefore, the Spanish person repeats the word “stop” in order to clarify the misunderstanding. Then the Spanish speaker says “in front of” instead of “opposite” since she finds a

relation between “in front of” and the actual meaning of “opposite”, that is, “enfrente de” in her own language; as a result, due to the error, the other speaker asks for clarification about what she means. After that, the Spanish speaker does not understand the German speaker’s last phrase because of the noise, and she uses another strategy suggesting repetition.

A common expression to ask for clarification is “I don’t understand what you’re saying!” (Chong, 2019), however, there are more useful phrases for the different situations, as we can see in table 3.

MEANING	EXPRESSION
To clarify	“Do you mean...?” (Chong, 2019) “So I believe what you are saying is...” (Chong, 2019)
To express lack of communication	“Sorry but I don’t follow you” (VOA Learning English, 2019)
To express that someone does not understand	“Huh?”, “Repeat!”, “What?” (FluentU English Educator, 2006)

**Table 3.** Clarification strategies

All of these phrases are common in free conversation, but the ones most commonly used are “Huh?”, “Repeat please” and “What?”, since they are the most informal for an everyday interaction; these expressions suggest repetitions due to possible interferences. Anyway, we will see this more clearly along the following section, where a set of suitable and useful common expressions to incorporate to free conversation are presented.

### 4.3. COMMON EXPRESSIONS

As has been mentioned previously, in free conversation speakers use a specific informal register, due to the context and the relationship that exists between the interlocutors. As a result, there are appropriate expressions or phrases which are usually shown in daily interactions. As Engelhardt points out, most often free conversation is related to informal situations, therefore expressions used should be direct to achieve a



better mutual understanding, and also said in a friendly way (2012: 5). They are required to be friendly because if someone speaks directly and in an unfriendly way, that speaker could seem to be rude; thus there could be misunderstandings between speakers. And also, a free conversation normally is introduced by “Hi”. However, being friendly or not usually depends on the situation which the interlocutors are living.

Tables 4 and 5 will show some of the most common expressions which are used in the different situations that we can find in free conversation, usually included in materials to teach English as a Foreign Language from different sources.

EXPRESSION	USE
“Hi” and “Bye”	For greetings (Eslbuzz, n.d.)
“What’s up?”	To ask how someone is (Lukić, 2018)
“Oh wow!”	To show surprise (Ava, 2018)
“Oh no!”	To respond to bad news (Lukić, 2018)
“I had to wait ages for a bus”	When someone arrives late (Eslbuzz, n.d.)
“It cost an arm and a leg!”	Phrase for prices (Lukić, 2018)
“D’you know...?”	To ask for information (Eslbuzz, n.d.)
“Do you wanna...?”	To invite someone (Lukić, 2018)
“You’re pulling my leg!”,	To say that someone is unrealistic (Eslbuzz, n.d.)
“Dream on!”, “Really?” and “as if!”	
“You know” or “you see”	To confirm that you are understood (Ava, 2018)
“Rubbish” and “nonsense”	When someone disagrees (Eslbuzz, n.d.)
“I’m starving!”	To show you are hungry (Lukić, 2018)
“Cool!”	To talk about good ideas (Eslbuzz, n.d.)
“Here you are!”	When something which has been looked for is found (Ava, 2018)
“Oops!”	To criticize errors (Eslbuzz, n.d.)
“Uh-huh!”	To confirm that you are understanding (Engelhardt, 2012: 7)

**Table 4.** Some useful expressions for conversation

Apart from the phrases or expressions which have been mentioned in table 4, there are some informal expressions very commonly used in free interaction that are included in table 5.

EXPRESSION	MEANING
“Well well”	It shows surprise lightly
“Fifty-fifty”	A fifty percent possibility of something happening
“So-so”	When something has a medium quality
“Chop chop”	When a person wants someone to hurry

**Table 5.** Other common expressions in free conversation (Eslbuzz, n.d.)

Each of the expressions in table 5 is constituted by two identical words, and this makes them different from the rest of phrases, showing a moderate quality about what is said in each situation, which is related to the context. Apart from these expressions, there are some others similar to the ones mentioned which are included in example (11):

- (11)    **A:** Hi, Nick! How’s it going?  
           **B:** Fine, thanks, and you?  
           **A:** Ok. Where are you off to?  
           **B:** To that restaurant, I’m going to meet there with my friends.  
           **A:** That’s great! Have a good meeting!  
           **B:** Thanks. Bye.  
           **A:** See you later.

This short free conversation is full of colloquial expressions. As is well known, “Hi” is a typical informal way of greeting showing pleasure; “How’s it going?” is an informal expression to ask how someone is. Then, speaker B answers saying that he/she is well, and asks about the other speaker, since he/she is interested in speaker A. Speaker A then says “Where are you off to?”, which is similar to “Where are you going?”, and speaker B answers with “To that restaurant”, a very common expression in free conversation in which the subject is omitted considering it has been used in the previous question. Finally, “See you later” is an informal expression used to say “Goodbye”.

In addition to the expressions mentioned, there are more expressions or phrases, such as references to pop icons, TV shows or political figures, which are typical from their corresponding country, as they are cultural references. If there is a conversation between a native and a non-native speaker, Chong suggests that including too many cultural references should be avoided, considering the non-native may not know what the native is saying (2019). If an English native speaker uses these or other cultural

references, this person may have to explain the meaning of the expression to the non-native interlocutor.

To sum up, expressions have an important role in conversation, in this case free conversation, considering that phrases and expressions are relevant elements to highlight the conversation style, as well as the approach.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Summing up, and after having researched free conversation, this end-of-degree project may lead to several main conclusions.

Firstly, we have seen that the concept “free conversation” plays a fundamental role in our daily life, since it reflects how a conversation takes place between native speakers, that is to say, two or more people who share the same mother tongue.

As has been explained, free conversation is spontaneous, and therefore, there is no limit when it comes to setting this type of conversation, since there are unfixed topics, several speakers, unlimited time, and improvisation and interruptions. Despite its spontaneity, it contains a set of rules that indicates how each speaker starts to talk, maybe by self-selection or selecting a next speaker, such as making questions.

In addition to these characteristics and rules, we have appreciated that a conversation can be analyzed by the fourteen principles explained by Sacks et al. Besides, we have also seen in some detail several examples taken from the TV series *Friends*, through which we have carefully observed the different principles step by step. Having studied these principles in this fictional sample, we have seen that a conversation usually contains speaker-change, as well as occurrences of more than two speakers talking at a time, among other features. Then, we have also sometimes found transitions showing short overlaps or gaps, which turn it into a discontinuous conversation. Also, the turn size and order vary, just like the number of parties, who have an unspecified distribution of turns. Another no less important point is the presence of repair techniques to deal with turn-taking mistakes.

As we have seen, although a free conversation is usually established by native speakers, a non-native speaker can also set a conversation with a native as long as they

both take into account the different techniques to make possible the understanding between them. However, the higher level non-native speakers have, the better they will be understood by and will understand the other interlocutor.

From this didactic point of view, we can appreciate the different interaction strategies to get good communication going, such as turn-taking, cooperating, and asking for clarification. Turn-taking is related to expressions used at transition points in turns; moreover, it emphasizes gestures and the use of gaze that are useful for selecting the next speaker. On the other hand, cooperating usually refers to paraphrasing strategies. Apart from these, we have learned that clarification strategies can be common in the conversation for making sure that what has been said is understood. Then, we have also seen that some common colloquial expressions are fundamental to make a conversation dynamic and to create a spontaneous environment.

To finish, thanks to Sacks et al. we have been able to know that a conversation needs to be analyzed step by step. Also, a conversation that is set between several speakers from different nationalities can be hopefully carried out thanks to some common expressions and strategies.

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**ANNEX I** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOeAThye5rQ>)

(1) **Monica:** Look at it! Oh. Wall paper's a little faded. That's okay. Carpet's a little loose. Hardwood floors!

(2) **Phoebe:** Hey.

(3) **Ross:** Hello.

(4) **Phoebe:** Uuh! Oh, Monica! It's so beautiful!

(5) **Monica:** I know!

(6) **Phoebe:** So I'm here, ready to play.

(7) **Monica:** Okay.

(8) **Phoebe:** I brought a bunch of stuff for the house. So check it out. Ha ha.

(9) **Monica:** What's this?

(10) **Phoebe:** That's a dog. Every house should have a dog.

(11) **Monica:** Not one that can pee on the roof.

(12) **Phoebe:** Well, maybe it's so big because the house was built on radioactive waste.

(13) **Chandler:** And is this in case the house sneezes?

(14) **Phoebe:** No, no that's the ghost for the attic.

(15) **Monica:** I don't want a ghost.

(16) **Phoebe:** Well, nobody wants a ghost. But you've got one. Because the house is sitting on an ancient Indian burial ground.

(17) **Ross:** Wait a minute, the house was built on radioactive waste and an ancient Indian burial ground? That would never happen.

(18) **Phoebe:** Okay, obviously, you don't know much about the US Government.

(19) **Rachel:** Hey!

(20) **The rest:** Hey.

(21) **Rachel:** I need to talk to you!

(22) **Ross:** Sure. What's up?

(23) **Rachel:** Oh, sorry. I meant Chandler.

(24) **Ross:** I I know. Well, if something comes up...

(25) **Chandler:** Well, I'm glad you guys have passed that little awkward phase.

(26) **Rachel:** Okay, my boss, Joanna...when you left she started asking questions about you.

(27) **Chandler:** Oh, oh, liked what she saw, huh? Dug my action, did she? Checkin' out the gentleman.

(28) **Rachel:** That was...surreal. Okay, what do you think? You interested at all?

(29) **Chandler:** Yeah, she seemed cool, attractive. I'll do it.

(30) **Rachel:** Oh, thank you, Chandler! This is so great! She's gonna love me.

(31) **Phoebe:** Hey, dinosaur attack. Quick, everybody into the house!

(32) **Monica:** Alright, Phoebe, you know what? T that's it. That's it. Right? No dinosaurs, no ghosts no giant dogs, okay? They're not the right size they're not Victorian and they just don't go.

(33) **Phoebe:** Okay. Fine. Come, dinosaur, we're not welcome in the house of no imagination.

(34) **Ross:** Uh, Phoebe, while we're hovering around the subject I just have to say that dinosaurs they they don't go "ruff".

(35) **Phoebe:** The little ones do.