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The suitability of film for modelling the pragmatics of interaction: Exploring authenticity

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ABSTRACT

Previous studies have highlighted the potential of film to promote the development of L2 pragmatics by presenting to learners the types of authentic, contextually-appropriate language use routinely absent from textbooks. However, the issue of authenticity is multifaceted and there has been little if any exploration of authenticity in terms of larger sequences within scripted texts. Sequence authenticity is particularly relevant to learners, as it demonstrates how actions are achieved over multiple turns, and how utterances are designed to 'fit' with previous turns and how they shape the next turn; difficulties in this domain can prove highly problematic. To explore the pedagogical potential of general-release films, the present study analysed dialogue from 20 popular English-language movies, and reports findings relating to invitation sequences and the overall structuring practices found in phone call openings and closings. The findings reveal systematic and highly recurrent ways in which film dialogues tend to deviate from ordinary speech. These findings are discussed in terms of the conventions of narrative film and key principles of drama.

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1. Introduction

Recent conceptions of communicative competence emphasise the complex challenge that ordinary social interaction can pose for second language learners (SLL) (e.g. [Celce-Murcia, 2007](#)). One line of inquiry, of interest from both a pragmatics and a Conversation Analysis (CA) informed perspective, has been how SLLs perform speech acts, such as making and responding to invitations, offers, requests and apologies. Such actions can prove highly problematic, with missteps at times leading to severe social sanctions (e.g. [House, 2003](#)).

However, the widespread teaching of speech acts is hamstrung by the often strikingly inauthentic models of interaction presented in textbooks (e.g. [Gilmore, 2004](#); [Wong, 2002](#)). This sense of *text authenticity* relates specifically to how well the text corresponds to conventions of language use in ordinary interactions.¹ The implications of inauthentic models are two-fold: not only are learners denied exposure to the interpretative norms that members of the speech community orient to, but they may be misled into mimicking problematic models. Historically, such inauthenticity has been associated particularly with the rise of 'materials-focused' approaches emphasising the simplification and staging of language ([Mishan, 2005](#)); more

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¹ See [Mishan \(2005\)](#) for an overview of other aspects of authenticity in language teaching materials, including suggestions for authentic film-viewing tasks.

recently, researchers have additionally highlighted striking discrepancies between the lay-intuitions of textbook writers and what actually occurs in naturally-occurring talk (Betz & Huth, 2014; Huth & Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006; Wong, 2002). This has led to recurring calls for the use of texts that originated in real-world communication, such as recordings of spontaneous talk (e.g. Wong & Waring, 2010). In response, numerous researchers and practitioners have nominated films as a suitable resource: they originate as 'real world' texts, are language-rich, offer a potential wealth of example actions, present relevant multimodal (aural, visual and contextual) cues to interpretation, and can be explored as authentic sources of cultural insight (e.g. Abrams, 2014; Bruti, 2015; Kaiser, 2011; Martínez Flor, 2007; Rose & Kasper, 2001; Tatsuki & Nishizawa, 2005).

However, a critical and largely unresolved assumption is that dialogues in films mirror the language patterns produced in ordinary, spontaneous talk. Within the field of film studies, film dialogue is a greatly neglected area of inquiry, regarded as "too transparent, too simple", and thereby reflecting "the field's long-standing antipathy to speech in film" (Kozloff, 2000, p. 6). Meanwhile, within linguistics, until quite recently film dialogue had been largely disregarded on the grounds of being scripted, and therefore lacking relevancy to the main object of most linguistic inquiry: spontaneous language use. However, these assumptions have increasingly been re-examined from a broader range of perspectives, producing often conflicting or disparate conclusions.

Those arguing that film dialogue fails to reflect the pragmatics of ordinary speech include Rossi (2011), Cohen (2008), Kozloff (2000), and Toolan (2011). Toolan (2011), for example, argues that film dialogue tends to be more cooperative (more Gricean) than ordinary talk (while arguing that the TV series *The Wire* makes a point of not doing so), while among other issues, Rossi (2011) discusses the frequent use in films of names in allocutive function, intended to orient the audience rather than to mimic ordinary talk. Where film dialogue is most patently different to naturally-occurring speech is in its 'tidiness', in which there are very few overlaps, false starts, repairs and so on. Although for listening purposes the lack of such 'distractions' has been cast as a positive attribute (Alvarez-Pereyre, 2011; Grant & Starks, 2001), this argument does invite challenge from a CA perspective, which highlights the order to be found within the apparent 'messiness' of ordinary speech, and where repetitions and pauses, for example, can be seen to be 'doing' something that may be interactionally relevant to the participants (Sacks, 1984).

Conversely, other researchers have argued that the ways in which film dialogue diverges from spontaneous speech are essentially superficial, and characterised by the same linguistic features (Dyner, 2011; Forchini, 2012; Martínez Flor, 2007); similar arguments have been made for both the television series *Friends* (Quaglio, 2009) and internet television (Lin, 2014). Among such studies, the monographs by Forchini (2012) and Quaglio (2009) stand apart as being particularly detailed and in-depth, both adopting the multidimensional discourse-grammatical approach of Douglas Biber. Forchini's (2012) analysis revealed striking similarity between film language and speech corpus data, including features such as tense selection, modality, pronoun choice, word frequency and lexical bundles. Quaglio's (2009) study, despite also reporting some interesting divergences (such as frequent signals of high informality in *Friends*), similarly reported a great deal of correspondence with ordinary speech. Both studies concluded that the similarities between scripted and spontaneous speech greatly outweigh the differences.

Although few studies have explored speech acts in film dialogue, these have tended to concur in their identification of both convergences and divergences from spontaneous speech. Most notably, results from two studies of compliments and compliment responses (Rose, 2001; Tatsuki & Nishizawa, 2005) and one of apologies (Kite & Tatsuki, 2005) each concluded that the syntactic formulas used in film dialogues closely resembled those reported for naturally-occurring corpus data; however, the dialogues were markedly inauthentic in relation to sociopragmatic elements, such as the gender distribution of who apologises or pays compliments to whom. Elsewhere, Martínez Flor (2007) concluded that films provide suitable models of request modifications, and Grant and Starks (2001) found that conversational closings in a soap opera generally paralleled naturally-occurring speech, with some simplification. In addition, Tatsuki and Nishizawa (2005) and Grant and Starks (2001) concluded respectively that film and television provide more authentic models than do textbooks. Overall, then, the weight of evidence to date cautiously suggests that films provide reasonably authentic models of at least some speech acts.

Nevertheless, the case for more general pragmatic authenticity in film dialogue is far from settled. Traditionally, the speech act perspective has been concerned with the actions performed with individual utterances in context (for an overview, see Sadock, 2004). However, an alternative unit of analysis is that of the *sequence*, which is a unit larger than a turn, and identifiable as counting as a course of action (Schegloff, 2007). A major set of sequence types are those based on adjacency pairs; here the view shifts from the individual utterance (e.g. an invitation) to include the response (e.g. acceptance or rejection), and to ways in which this core adjacency pair is expanded over other turns. For instance, an *invitation sequence* may include utterances paving the way for an invitation to take place (*Are you busy tonight?*), the actual invitation, the response to it, and reactions or negotiations thereafter. Such a sequence has a trajectory leading towards its accomplishment, and its turns are positioned in an orderly and coherent way. An analysis of such a sequence considers its various elements and how one turn is shaped by what has come previously and shapes what comes next (Schegloff, 2007). This relates to what is said, how it is said, and how it is normatively interpreted. This perspective is derived from the Conversation Analysis literature (especially Sacks, 1995); aspects most relevant to this study are outlined in the Methodology section.

1.1. Modelling pragmatic authenticity

Approaches to teaching speech acts/sequences typically emphasise the need to provide appropriate models (e.g. Cohen, 2008; Olshtain & Cohen, 1990). Perhaps surprisingly, there appears to be little discussion in the literature of how to

evaluate the appropriateness of candidate examples of authentic speech, aside from the overarching principle in functional syllabus design of prioritizing speech acts in their most frequently occurring and generalizable realizations (Breen, 1987). Thus, in relation to sequence, it may be useful to invoke 'ordinariness' as a concept.

The notion of ordinariness is appealing for the teaching and learning of L2 pragmatics and is congruous with other principles in teaching: just as one should learn the high-frequency and unmarked grammar and vocabulary first (Nation & Macalister, 2010), so presumably one should learn first the high-frequency, non-remarkable production of speech acts. That is, although being odd, impolite or outrageous may have its place in the interactional repertoire of high-proficiency speakers, the point of most L2 pragmatics teaching is to enable learners to carry out speech acts in non-remarkable ways so that misunderstandings are minimized.

It is important to note that ordinariness in this sense is not strictly synonymous with high-frequency, though ordinary behaviours presumably do occur more frequently. As discussed by Schegloff (1993), frequency is almost never reported in CA studies. Rather, ordinariness may be better assessed qualitatively through reference to notions such as that of *accountability*. For instance, a normative relationship holds between the turns in an adjacency pair, such as invitation + acceptance/refusal. If an invitation receives no response, or one that "does not 'fit', that is *an accountable matter*, a 'noticeable absence'" (ten Have, 2007, p. 130, italics added), and the speaker might reasonably be asked to explain why they responded in that way. When something is ordinary (or 'fits'), such questions are not reasonably asked.² This idea of ordinariness is operationalised in the Methodology section below.

2. The present study

The present study addresses the following general question and its sub-questions:

Q1: To what extent do sequences within popular contemporary English-language films suitably model authenticity in the pragmatics of sequence?

Q1a: To what extent do invitation sequences model interactional ordinariness through pre-expansion and addressee responses?

Q1b: To what extent do telephone openings and closings model ordinariness through the presence of terminal exchanges and a range of pre-closing sequences?

3. Methodology

3.1. Analysis of sequences

The purpose of this section is to establish some basic baseline criteria for evaluating aspects of the ordinariness of invitation sequences and the openings and closings of phone calls in the film dialogues. Invitations and their responses represent one type of *adjacency pair*, and phone call openings and closings are usually comprised of a series of adjacency pairs. To briefly define these terms, adjacency pairs are two turns, produced by different speakers, in which one speaker performs a particular action (e.g. makes an invitation, request, compliment etc.), and this elicits a specific type of response from the second speaker (e.g. accept or decline that invitation; deny or grant the request and so on) (see Schegloff, 2007). There is a natural order to these: the invitation necessarily comes before the accept/decline response as a *first pair part* (FPP), while the acceptance or decline follows as the *second pair part* (SPP); together these form a *base pair*. While the second speaker might do something other than a simple acceptance or decline in the next turn, one of the crucial things about a FPP is that it sets in motion a course action: if Speaker 1 makes an invitation, what Speaker 2 says next will normally be considered relevant to either producing an acceptance or a decline, even if not immediately (Schegloff, 2007).

Invitations represent a face-threatening act (Brown & Levinson, 1987), at least in English, and thus need to be handled carefully by both parties. One key practice is the use of *pre-invitations*, which are designed to minimise the risk of rejection (Schegloff, 2007). They involve a turn, such as 'Are you busy tonight?', which suggests the contingent possibility that an invitation may follow. For instance:

Example 1 (invented):

- 1 A: Are you busy tonight?
- 2 B: Not really
- 3 A: Wanna come over?
- 4 B: Sure.

On hearing Line 1, B anticipates that an invitation is likely and allows it to proceed through use in Line 2 of a *go-ahead*. The other options available to B would have been *blocking* the anticipated invitation (e.g. *Yeah, I've got to study for an exam*) or *hedging* (e.g. *How come?*). Such pre-sequences could be considered an essential element in learning L2 invitations.

² Consider, for instance the oddness of the third turn in the following (invented) dialogue: A: Wanna come over? B: Sure. A: Why?.

Also essential is learning how to decline an invitation in appropriate ways, in particular through the use of turns marked as being *dispreferred* (Pomerantz & Heritage, 2013), an aspect of *turn design*. This can be achieved through pauses, shows of appreciation (*That's very nice of you*) and explanations for the rejection (*I've got an exam tomorrow*), as well as a number of features to 'soften' the response, including delays (e.g. hesitations and *no* coming later in the turn) and phrases such as *I don't think* (Atkinson & Drew, 1979, p. 58). In other cases, invitees may avoid explicitly declining an invitation, and instead report being busy or otherwise unavailable (Drew, 1984). Again, these appear to be essential skills for language learners.

Telephone openings and closings exhibit a further type of organisation, in which there may be predictable series of adjacency pair types that occur in relatively fixed order. Briefly, openings in English typically comprise four stages in a particular order, beginning with a response to the call (often *Hello?*), identification-recognition (e.g. *Is that Paul? + Yeah + It's me*), a greeting (e.g. *Hi*) and *How are you* (Wong & Waring, 2010, p. 149). Closings are more variable and complex (Button, 1987). The most basic usually have at least two adjacency pairs: a pre-closing pair (e.g. *Alright + Okay*) and a terminal exchange (*Bye + Bye*), but may combine various other pre-closing sequence types, such as through making arrangements (e.g. *Call you tomorrow*), appreciation (*Nice talking to you*) and so on, often in combination (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973).

Further research has followed the emergence of Caller ID and mobile phones, which alongside the presumption of individual phone ownership, afford alternatively-shaped call openings. In particular, Hutchby and Barnett (2005) note occasions of *pre-voice sample identification* in which the call begins with either party orienting towards being able to identify the other; such practices include, for instance, saying the other party's name. Further, the transportability of mobile phones has made relevant *Where are you?* as an alternative to the *How are you?* sequence. That said, many mobile calls appear identical to landline calls, and Hutchby (2005, p. 663) argues that overall "there are few if any differences".

3.2. Films

For this study, 20 commercial, full-length English-language films were selected. The basis for the selection was a published list of 50 scripts recommended for learning the craft of script writing ("[50 of the best screenplays to read and download in every genre](#)," 2017). This was refined to a list of 20 according to the following hierarchical criteria:

- the script being available for download in a Foxit Reader compatible format
- preference given to popular, well-known American films released since 1990
- following Rose (2001, p. 314), we ruled out futuristic, fantasy and period films, "and slapstick comedies, genres for which one might reasonably expect something other than ordinary language use."

3.2.1. A full list of these films is provided in [Appendix 1](#)

To enable greater coverage of films within the constraints of the study, analysis was made of film scripts rather than transcripts of the film. This had the obvious advantage of being greatly more time efficient although at the cost of details about the actors' interpretation and delivery of lines (including pauses, intonation, and volume). Where possible, the final shooting script was used, but it is also worth noting that it is likely that changes are often made during filming and later during editing. Particularly where delivery (e.g. vocal emphasis) could affect interpretation, the film was also viewed for confirmation although no additions to the scripts were made.

3.3. Process

Based on a set of initial working definitions, the two researchers each independently coded the first two scripts for the openings and closing of phone calls and for invitation sequences. We then met to review and discuss each of the coding decisions. Through this process, the working definitions were refined as follows:

Phone calls: from the 'ring' to hanging up. Excludes messages left for answer phones. Excludes other audio-only devices such as intercom and walkie-talkies.

Invitations: "social occasions (e.g. party, meal, drink etc.) in which someone is verbally invited to take part" (Al-Khatib, 2006, p. 273). These were sub-coded into those involving future social events and those involving present events. Further coding resulted in distinguishing invitations from similar phenomena including offers (e.g. of food), summons to social occasions, and mutually formulated social arrangements.

Having settled on these definitions, the remaining scripts were assigned to one or other of the researchers for coding. Relevant sequences were highlighted and labelled, with initial analytical comments noted. The sequences and surrounding text were then copied and pasted into a master spreadsheet for further analysis. Once completed, the data were exchanged, with each code being independently analysed by the other researcher, who was tasked with analysing the sequential elements of each case; this switching of roles ensured that each case was carefully checked for consistency. While telephone calls were nearly always straightforward, it can be difficult to distinguish invitations from offers and requests (Schegloff, 2007, pp. 34–35); disagreements were discussed, and ambiguous cases removed from the dataset. Through this process, 95 telephone calls and 30 invitation sequences were agreed upon.

A mixed-methods approach to analysis was adopted. This was largely qualitative, drawing heavily on the CA approach which is explained in detail elsewhere (e.g. [ten Have, 2007](#)). As discussed, CA does not readily lend itself to quantification ([Schegloff, 1993](#)), and so too the approach here is largely the qualitative analysis of a collection of individual extracts, leading to aggregated findings (particularly in relation to the invitation sequences). Extracts were examined turn by turn to explore the underlying sequence organisation, with reference to the patterns identified in the literature ([Atkinson & Drew, 1979](#); [Davidson, 1984](#); [Drew, 1984, 2018](#); [Schegloff, 2007](#)). As discussed above, this especially took into account the notion of accountability in establishing ordinariness.

One area where the analyses could be supported by quantitative evidence was in the phone call openings and closings. Given that these pattern fairly regularly across a sequence of more obligatory and more optional elements, counts were made of the key actions. Openings were coded for the four core sequences ([Wong, 2002](#)), which are typically ordered as follows: summons-answer (e.g. phone ring + *Hello/Yeah* or *Hi*/self-identification, e.g. *John speaking*); caller self-identification³ (e.g. *It's me*); greeting (e.g. *Hi*); and *how are you/where are you*. Also noted were instances of pre-voice sample identification. Closings occurred less frequently and were coded for pre-closing sequences (e.g. pairs of items such as *Okay*; arrangements + response; announcements such as *I'd better go* and the response) and the terminal exchange (e.g. *bye* + *bye*) ([Wong, 2007](#)).

4. Findings

4.1. Telephone calls

Across the 20 films there were 95 telephone calls, not including the leaving of voice messages. An initial distinction relevant to the analyses was whether or not the script included the turns of both speakers⁴; these data are presented separately in [Table 1](#) (both speakers) and [Table 2](#) (only one speaker).

As presented in [Table 1](#), there were 63 two-sided calls; of these, 22 were presented in their entirety from opening to ending, with a total of 43 openings and 30 endings.⁵

A number of features of these calls are immediately apparent. The most striking feature was the frequency of calls with non-verbalised endings (70%), as in the following example:

Departed, p. 108	
Costello:	You heard nothing?
Colin:	No.
Costello:	Nothing about drugs. Nothing about new guys, nothing about Gloucester?
Colin:	No, Frank, not a thing. And I promise you I would have heard about it.

Costello hangs up and turns to Mister French.

Here, there appears to be no distinction between topic closure and call closure. Such endings appear largely suitable only to the world of film and would almost certainly seem very abrupt, unexpected and probably rude in everyday life. The second most frequent pattern (20.0%) was endings that included pre-closing signals but no terminal exchange, such as the following, in which there is talk relating to a possible future arrangement (*Maybe I'll see you there*) and appreciation (*Thanks*) but no goodbye:

Whiplash, S98	
Andrew:	... Got it. (silence; then-) Well ... Cool. Maybe I'll see you there.
Nicole:	Yeah, I'll check. I don't think he likes jazz though. I'll check.
Andrew:	Cool ... Thanks.

Nicole hangs up.

The absence of terminal exchanges is curious, with no instances where both a FPP and SPP occurred (i.e. both saying *bye* or equivalent); the three cases where one character said *bye* (*see ya* or *later*) were all from the film *Scream*. Thus, a rather striking finding was that none of the 30 endings included the normally minimally obligatory four-turn sequence of a pre-closing pair and terminal exchange. Thus, no case was found that could be considered a useful demonstration of the complex, extended closings found in ordinary phone calls.

Overall, phone call openings similarly tended to be highly attenuated. The majority did include a summons-response pair (79.1%); these were mostly 'hello' although self-identification was also common, perhaps as a way of establishing character names for the audience. Pre-voice sample identifications, in which one party orients towards the other being identifiable, also occurred relatively frequently (26%) (sometimes in tandem with *Hello?*), at times demonstrating access to Caller ID and at other times an expected call. However, other very typical features of opening sequences such as greetings and *how are you*

³ Other interactional steps can occur in this position to acknowledge recognition of the callers.

⁴ In several cases, just one or two turns were missing from one speaker, typically at the beginning of the call. These were coded as two-sided, but with no assumptions made about the form of the missing turn.

⁵ Only unambiguous endings were counted, such as when the script included a phrase such as 'hangs up' or the actions made this clear.

Table 1
Two-sided calls.

		N			
Total calls		63			
Openings	Summons-answer		43	34	
		<i>Hello</i>			21
		<i>Yeah or Hi</i>			
	Self-ID	10			
	PVSI ^a		11		
	Caller self-ID		6		
	Greeting		3		
	How are you		2		
	Where are you		2		
	Endings	Pre-closing	30	9	
Terminal exchange			3 ^b		

^a Pre-voice sample identification.

^b Each involved only a FPP.

Table 2
One-sided calls.

		N			
Total calls		32			
Openings	Summons-answer		12	6	
		<i>Hello</i>			3
		<i>Yeah or Hi</i>			
		Self-ID			
	Caller self-ID	4			
	Greeting	3			
	How are you	0			
Endings	Pre-closing	23	16		
	Terminal exchange		8		

were rare (14.0% and 7.0% respectively), and again, there was no case that could be considered a useful demonstration of how the four stages are ordered. A fairly typical example from a film is presented below:

Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri, S129

At the third billboard, her cellphone rings.

Mildred:

Hello?

Dixon:

It's Dixon.

Mildred:

(pause)

Tell me.

Dixon:

He wasn't the guy.

Mildred crumples down beside the burnt patch of ground.

Within the context of the preceding narrative, the brevity of this call seems appropriate as does the lack of turns preliminary to enacting the main purpose of the call; however, it appears unsuitable against criteria for a pedagogical model (Wong, 2002, 2007) as it lacks the standard features of a recognition response from Mildred, greetings and *how are you*s.

Turning now to an examination of single-sided calls, Table 2 highlights some notable contrasts to the two-sided calls. In particular, one-sided calls far more frequently included pre-closing signals (69.6%; compared to 30% in two-sided calls) and evidence of a terminal exchange (34.8% vs. 10%) albeit with the interlocuter's turns inferred.

Unlike any of the two-sided calls, several cases exemplified a rather authentic closing sequence of several steps, such as the following scene from *The Visitor*, which appears to include pre-closing signals (*OK*), an apparent response to arrangements (*Please do*), appreciation (*Thank you*) and the FPP of a terminal exchange (*Bye*).

The Visitor, pp. 90-91

Walter, Mouna and Zainab are sitting at a cafe. Walter is on his cell phone.

Walter:

OK.

OK.

Please do.

Thank you.

Bye.

He hangs up.

Table 3
Presence and absence of pre-invitation sequences.

	N
Invitation sequences	30
Invitation + response	27
Pre-invitation + go-ahead + invitation + response	3
Pre-invitation + block	0

Here (and in several similar cases) the one-sided dialogue serves no informational purpose for the audience other than to communicate that Walter is closing a phone call. It is presumably for this purpose that care has been taken to ensure that it mimics real calls: the audience is to interpret this as the ordinary closure of an ordinary conversation. To do so, the script-writer relies on the audience's communicative competence in inferring the types of missing FPPs that Walter is responding to, such as a possible announced closing like *I'd better let you go* (which Walter responds to with *OK*), promise to call again (*Please do*), and terminal exchange (*Bye*). Presumably such turns are usually omitted from two-sided dialogues due to their lack of propositional content. Such a clip could be easily adapted into a teaching activity.

Turning back to two-sided calls, although it is not the only film to make extensive use of phone calls, *Scream* is particularly interesting for the way in which it plays with the conventions of call sequences. The film begins with a series of six phone calls made in quick succession to Casey, a teenage girl, from an anonymous caller. Other sinister phone calls occur later in the film and throughout the three sequels (not included in this study). These calls prove to be particularly interesting as they present interactions in their entirety, with both voices, and appear to play on phone call conventions, producing initially slight deviations from normal sequencing to build suspense.

In Line 1 of the extract below, Casey answers the phone as expected, but in Line 2 the man repeats the *Hello* and a silence follows. This silence occupies the position in which callers normally identify themselves. With this not forthcoming, Casey prompts him with a 'yes' in Line 4, to which the man's response (*Who is this?*) violates the expectation of caller self-identification. At this stage, his first two turns are presented as if he was answering the call. In this way, his responses are not merely uncooperative but designed to be confusing and troubling. Over the next few minutes, there is an escalating creepiness to the follow-up calls, culminating in slasher-style murder.

Scream, p. 1		
Phone rings; Casey answers.		
1	Casey:	Hello.
2	Man's voice:	Hello.
3		(Silence.)
4	Casey:	Yes.
5	Man:	Who is this?
6	Casey:	Who are you trying to reach?
7	Man:	What number is this?
8	Casey:	What number are you trying to reach?
9	Man:	I don't know.
10	Casey:	I think you have the wrong number.
11	Man:	Do I?
12	Casey:	It happens. Take it easy.
13		<i>Click! She hangs up the phone.</i>

From an analytical perspective, these calls demonstrate the scriptwriters crediting the audience with a great deal of tacit knowledge of ordinary phone call sequencing (exactly what the body of CA shows), with the subtle subversion of these expectations used to generate plot tension. In this regard, however, *Scream* is a special case among the collection of films examined here.

4.2. Invitations

Across the 20 film scripts that were analysed, there were 30 invitation sequences, with 15 of these being in relation to something currently happening or about to happen and 15 relating to a future event. The initial focus of the analysis was for evidence of pre-invitation sequences, as presented in Table 3:

These figures highlight the predominance of cases in which the invitation was made without preliminaries. No case was identified of a pre-invitation + block and only three involving a pre-invitation and go-ahead. As an initial observation, then, we can note the relative scarcity of examples in which the speaker orients to potential obstacles to the recipient accepting the invitation. The presence of such examples, if resembling authentic patterns, would support the use of film for learning pragmatics; we will return to this question below.

Among the 27 invitations without a pre-sequence, there were arguably none that modelled what we take to be unexceptional, everyday use. The one that appeared the most unremarkable was the following sequence, involving an invitation to a present social event:

The Visitor, p. 28

Zainab enters

ZAINAB:

TAREK:

Tarek. It's eight-thirty.

Oh. We have to go.

(to Walter)

I have a gig tonight.

Zainab starts to put on her coat. Tarek picks up his drum.

TAREK:

Zainab shoots Tarek a glance.

WALTER:

TAREK:

WALTER:

TAREK:

Walter, you can come if you want

I have to get some work done but thank you

OK. Well maybe another time

OK

Bye

In this case, Walter responds to the invitation with a report of other time commitments, leaving Tarek to infer their consequence (Drew, 1984), and then also thanks him for the invitation. Tarek signals his acceptance with *Okay* and extends the offer to a vague future time, which Walter acknowledges with *Okay*.

Despite appearing to be the most unremarkable invitation sequence identified, this nevertheless contains elements that undermine the sense of it being a genuine invitation. The invitation utterance is delivered as an afterthought as Tarek and Zainab are hurriedly leaving, making clear that the main social arrangement is between Tarek, Zainab and others. The expression of the invitation (*you can come if you want*) appears designedly non-persuasive. This is followed by Zainab's 'shooting glance' – unseen by Walter – communicating her disapproval. Overall, there is a sense of this being an invitation for the sake of politeness only. While this may have potential for classroom application, it does not present the type of genuine invitation that would be most usefully modelled to language learners.

Of the invitations to future social events, perhaps the most ordinary FPP was in the following clip; however, the SPP is clearly unsuitable for teaching purposes in terms of language content, while also being exceptional in terms of its action:

Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri, S103

1	James:	So you wanna go out to dinner next week?
2	Mildred:	I'll go out to dinner with ya.
3		But I ain't gonna fuck ya.
4		(She heads off.)
5	James:	Well, I ain't gonna fuck you neither.
6		(quietly)
7		I guess.

The actual invitation in Line 1 closely matches one of the prototypical types commonly used in invitations: a *So*-prefaced contracted interrogative (Drew, 2018); however, for teaching purposes, the response is problematic even aside from issues of crassness. Firstly, rather than use a standard form of acceptance (such as *Sure, that sounds good*) Mildred uses a repetitional response, in this case repeating James' articulation *go out to dinner*. This response type achieves a different sort of action than more common alternatives, as has been demonstrated in studies of identical repeats confirming statements (Schegloff, 1996) and repeats in responses to questions (Heritage & Raymond, 2012). Specifically, Schegloff (1996) has argued that repeats agree with the previous turn, where the previous turn has made explicit "an understanding of what the recipient had conveyed without saying" (p. 181). Although we are not aware of literature discussing repeats in response to invitations, the above nevertheless seems a useful approach to adopt in interpreting what happens in this extract. Based on events in the film, the unstated prior understanding seems to be that a) James and Mildred are now bound together through their complicity in an arson and are on sufficiently friendly terms to go to dinner together, and b) Mildred 'owes' James for not turning her over to the police. James' invitation asserts this shared understanding.

Mildred's response in Line 2 (a near, but not identical repeat) is confirmation that the invitation is warranted. However, since accepting a dinner invitation can also be heard as accepting a date, and as a first step towards a potentially more intimate relationship, Mildred qualifies her acceptance rather crassly in Line 3. In doing so, her character is being both blunt and larger-than-life, which is in keeping with her portrayal through much of the film. The purpose of the scene is much more about contributing to Mildred's characterisation than about representing ordinary speech. The picture that emerges from such an analysis is of both a rather specialised type of invitation acceptance which is presumably of little importance in teaching, and of the extended sequence being pedagogically inappropriate.

To this point, we have considered in detail the non-ordinariness, and therefore limited suitability, of the two invitation sequences which at first glance appeared to be perhaps the least exceptional cases in these data. Further examples are presented in the appendices.

Turning now to invitations involving pre-expansion, in each case the screenwriter seemed to be targeting a particular awkwardness between the characters. For instance, in Scene 13 from *Whiplash* (presented here in its entirety), Andrew approaches Nicole to speak to her for the first time and invite her to dinner:

Whiplash, Scene 13 (reformatted)

Walks up the counter, takes a deep breath, and –

1 A:

2

3

Hey – look –

I – I don't know how to say this –

I see you in here all the time

4		and – I was just wondering –
5		(pause)
6		– if you'd want to get a bite to eat with me.
7	N:	(pause)
8		Please get away from me.
9	A:	I'm so sorry, I – I didn't mea –
10	N:	I'm kidding.
11		(pause)
12	A:	(laugh)
13	N:	That your dad you always come in with?
14	A:	Kind of bobs up and down when he walks? That's him.
15	N:	(laughs)
16		Andrew, right? I'm Nicole.
17	A:	Nice to meet you, Nicole ...
18	N:	Monday I get off at seven.
19	A:	Monday. Ok. Great. I'll be here Monday.

After initially getting Nicole's attention (line 1), and without waiting for any verbal responses, Andrew does some rather awkward preliminary talk (lines 2–4) before immediately launching into his invitation (line 6). The invitation is initially met with Nicole's pause, suggesting that a decline may be imminent, and then in line 8 she does indeed decline, and does so as a harsh rebuke. Lines 9 to 17 reveal the initial decline to have been a joke, and the characters then proceed with the introductions that Nicole evidently feels are appropriate preliminaries to accepting a dinner invitation from a stranger. This awkwardness is crucial to Andrew's character development and the ensuing relationship. Such awkwardness is played upon in other cases where pre-invitations are used in our collection, such as in *There's Something About Mary*.

The following example, from *Up in the Air*, uses pre-invitation in a different way. Just prior to the extract presented here, Ryan and Alex have been discussing the forthcoming wedding of Ryan's sister. With the wedding being topical, Ryan puts forth in line 1 a pre-invitation, which Alex interprets as a question regarding her opinion, not recognising it as being preliminary to an invitation. Ryan partially corrects her misapprehension by specifying 'Northern Wisconsin', before putting forward another pre-invitation in line 6, and this time Alex recognises its import, immediately rejecting the invitation (before eventually being persuaded 8 turns later).

Up in the Air, p. 80		
1	Ryan:	How do you like Wisconsin in February?
2	Alex:	Who doesn't?
3		I like it if you're there.
4		Besides, I know a killer burger in Milwaukee.
5	Ryan:	Northern Wisconsin.
6		What are you doing this weekend?
7	Alex:	No ...
8	Ryan:	What? I haven't even ...
9	Alex:	I can't.
10	Ryan:	Why not?
11	Alex:	I couldn't.
12	Ryan:	I'm being serious.

Of particular interest is the question in line 6 (*What are you doing this weekend?*). As noted above, such questions can be heard as preliminary to invitations; they can also be more or less equivocal between such signalling and simply being factual inquiries. As discussed earlier, the normal response to a pre-invitation is either a go-ahead (*Nothing much*), a block (*I'm tied up with work*) or hedging (*Why?*), but here Alex skips this response, and instead responds (*No*) to what has been projected by the pre-invitation: (something to the effect of) *Would you like to come to the wedding?* Although such a strategy could plausibly occur in everyday speech, we are not aware of similar findings from spoken corpora; intuitively, it seems to us that this strategy is rather infrequent, and might be prefaced with an expression such as *I can see where this is going*.

In response to *No*, Ryan appeals to the equivocal nature of the pre-invitation in line 8 (*What? I haven't even ...*), seemingly claiming that his question should not in fact be heard as foreshadowing an invitation. This could be interpreted not only as disagreement but also perhaps as a rebuke of the presumptuousness of Alex's response. Alex ignores this and reasserts her decline in line 9 (*I can't*), at which point Ryan pursues his invitation. Important also to note is that declining is a dispreferred response to invitations, yet Alex's responses (lines 7 and 9) contain none of the features of dispreference: no evidence of delay (at least in the script), no account of being unavailable or other explanation, no softening or show of appreciation. As this information is not provided, Ryan is warranted to ask *Why not?* in line 10, to which a vague answer of *I couldn't* is provided. Alex's response is presumably designed to be highly emphatic. Again, what this example reveals is that the extract appears to represent both 1) an unusual and probably infrequently-used strategy (this time for a SPP), and 2) a model that does not represent the types of ordinary speech act that should be prioritized in teaching.

To briefly summarise then, pre-invitations were relatively rare in these data, with only three cases among 30 invitation sequences, and with these few cases not modelling the ways in which pre-sequences facilitate coordinated and non-problematic achievements of invitation + accept or decline. As with the invitations without a pre-sequence, the examples found in these films appear to have limited suitability for English learning.

5. Discussion

The objective of the present study was to examine some aspects of sequence in film dialogue with a view to exploring the correspondence between the pragmatics of talk in film and in daily life. To do so, we examined invitation sequences and the openings and closings of phone calls, with our analyses informed by established empirical findings from CA. Specifically, we examined invitations for evidence of actions such as pre-invitations, go-ahead/block, and response; we examined phone call openings for the four core sequences of summons-answer, caller self-identification, greeting and *how are you/where are you*; and we analysed phone call closings for evidence of pre-closing sequences (which may be highly complex in real life) and the terminal exchange.

The quantitative analyses revealed a number of strikingly inauthentic features of phone calls, such as non-verbalised endings whereby speakers simply hang up after topic closure. Indeed, no two-sided call was found to present all of the normally obligatory elements of a minimally complete closing, let alone the more complex sequences often found in ordinary talk. Call openings were similarly attenuated. Among the 30 invitations, no case was identified of an ordinary pre-invitation + go-ahead + invitation sequence, nor of a pre-offer + block; thus there were arguably no suitable models for illustrating to students how to make unremarkable invitations which acknowledge “the possibility of trouble” (Schegloff, 2007, p. 31).

Close analysis of turn-by-turn progression further revealed that, in rather striking ways, the dialogues frequently appeared to be designedly exceptional in some way, despite being plausible within the world of the narrative. Specifically, there was typically a sense that utterances were designed to be either highly attenuated (i.e. removing ordinary ‘boring’ talk), entertaining (e.g. being surprising or quick-witted rather than ordinary), or through being ‘loaded’ as carriers of additional meaning about character, values and situation. The present data suggest, therefore, that sequencing in film dialogues often deviates substantially from ordinary talk, and in this way tends to lack pragmatic authenticity in terms of its correspondence to ordinary talk.

To account for the present findings, one crucial consideration is Sacks’s (1995) notion of *recipient design*, whereby utterances are shaped for their intended audience. In real life, utterances are designed for the addressee(s) though they may also take into account third-parties (such as eavesdroppers). In film, character-to-character turn design is merely part of the illusion; utterances are designed instead for the audience in the role of overhearers (Kozloff, 2000). To be sure, film dialogue must maintain the illusion of the fictional world through means such as plausible recipient design, but ultimately it is designed for a very broad third-party audience. This is crucial. As addressees in real-life interaction, people may display powerful emotional reactions and acute sensitivity to the nuances of speech, but as overhearers of dialogue between fictional characters, these reactions are far more muted. For example, rather than take offence at a character’s impoliteness, a viewer’s reaction is usually to interpret it as being relevant to a forthcoming narrative development (Culpeper, 1998). Consequently, the caution and reserve demanded in real life is superseded in film by the dramatic and expressive. The shackles on allowable talk are loosened.

A further factor is that, since audiences employ normative frameworks for understanding dialogue, film-makers can dispense with a great deal of mundane talk, relying on audiences to infer routine interactional accomplishments, such as the opening and closing of conversations. Thus, phone calls can be presented from one side only, be presented with certain omissions, and be cut short, as evidenced in the majority of telephone calls in our collection. When the characters treat the call as if it were normal, then the viewer treats it as normal. As McCann (2017, p. 42) advises in his advice for writers “No need for *hellos* or *howareyous*. No need for *goodbyes* either.” Abridged telephone calls could be considered a convention of fictional narrative.

A further possibility is that most central characters in films are not intended to be ordinary; rather, they may be designed to be remarkable in some way. This, in fact, resonates with the advice found in guides for fiction writers. Maass (2001, p. 112), for instance, declares that successful narratives include characters that are larger-than-life, who “do and say things that ordinary folk do not.” Film dialogue is, of course, a major tool for characterisation, and a few well-chosen utterances may provide vivid insight into the mind of the character (Piazza, Bednarek, & Rossi, 2011). Efficient characterisation of such characters is achieved through saying things in unexpected – rather than ordinary – ways.

Finally, with rare exceptions, films attempt to distil into 90–180 min events that ostensibly occur over much longer periods of time, sometimes months or even years. This necessitates being highly economical, often with a need for characters to mean much more than they say (Burroway, 1996, p. 137), which accounts for the ‘twist’ found in most of the extracts discussed and resulting in highly crafted and stylised language. The most ordinary of exchanges – exactly the types which may be of most value to a second language learner – are typically omitted. In their place is “larger-than-life language” that is “heavily scripted and rehearsed” (Cohen, 2007, p. 7).

To conclude this section, we turn briefly to comment on the notion of authenticity. Definitions of authenticity are largely based on either *correspondence* (relationship to the real world) or *genesis* (origins) (MacDonald, Badger, & Dasli, 2006), and in seeking to synthesize the two, a recent volume concludes with a call for further work theorizing their relationship (van Compernelle and McGregor, 2016, p. 237). The present findings relate most clearly to correspondence, revealing fundamental mismatches between film dialogue and the ordinary conversation on which it is ostensibly modelled. However, there are also more general grounds for problematising the genesis of film dialogue. In Goffman’s (1981) terms, within the notion of speaker there is a three-way distinction – which is collapsed in ordinary interactions – between the roles of animator (actor), author (screenwriter) and principal (character within the narrative). As such, the attribution of an utterance to a character is

one aspect of the ‘illusion of reality’ to which viewers willingly submit, as widely discussed in film theory (e.g. Allen, 1993). In accounting for the present findings, the preceding discussion has alluded to points of intersection between the two perspectives of authenticity, which can restated as follows: in relation to film dialogue (and fiction more generally), inauthenticity of correspondence may reflect the genesis of the utterances, arising as they do not from person-to-person interaction in real time – with all of the constraints and affordances that entails – but from a very different process with differing constraints and affordances, such as audiences positioned as overhearers (recipient design) and conventions of the medium (e.g. being non-ordinary).

6. Pedagogical implications

Although the present findings challenge the position adopted in a number of previous studies, they do not rule out the judicious use of film for teaching pragmatics. Indeed, the un-ordinariness of talk-in-film may represent a useful pedagogical starting point (Author1). That is, rather than searching for exemplary film examples of a particular speech act (which could prove long and fruitless), a film scene could be analysed in class and compared with transcriptions of spontaneous speech or with scripted talk that is more authentic. From there, a useful approach would be to task students with re-scripting and/or acting out scenes against criteria for authenticity. In Appendix 3, two such film scenes are presented in their original form alongside a modified form illustrating targets that students might work towards.

However, for the purposes of unguided self-study of pragmatics, the findings do raise doubt over the value of extensive film viewing, as learners seem likely to be exposed to largely inauthentic models. More useful would be viewing carefully chosen scenes from a curated database, as suggested by others (Bonsignori, 2018; Bruti, 2015; Kaiser, 2011); curation would involve selecting scenes based on whether they fulfil certain criteria for authenticity, as done in the present study. One caveat is that such scenes may be more difficult to locate than previously assumed.

7. Conclusion

The key finding of this study is that important aspects of the sequencing of talk are typically not reproduced in film dialogues, suggesting that films provide inauthentic models of conversation. Three main limitations of the study need to be acknowledged. Firstly, the collection of 20 films is modest in size, and may not be representative of other collections, particularly where other selection criteria have been used. Similarly, although 19 of the 20 films included phone calls, inevitably the distribution is uneven, with one film (*Scream*) contributing 13 cases. Secondly, as others have noted, film scripts inevitably vary from the released film, and it is possible that careful analysis of the actors’ delivery could prompt different analyses to some of those presented here. Thirdly, the observations about sequences discussed here are based on a particular range of communicative actions, and caution is appropriate in extrapolating to other aspects of sequence.

Future studies could usefully explore sequence in other speech acts (e.g. requests) and other areas of interest within CA, such as topic management, repair, and turn-taking. There may be considerable value in establishing a corpus of English-language film clips, transcribed and tagged by speech act. This would be a considerable undertaking but would facilitate further studies across a wide variety of films.

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CRedit authorship contribution statement

Jonathon Ryan: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Investigation, Validation. **Scott Granville:** Investigation, Validation, Data curation, Writing - review & editing.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

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