

Conversational Analysis



CHAPTER 5

What is Conversational Analysis?

□ **Conversational Analysis:** An approach to the analysis of authentic recorded spoken discourse.

▪ **It examines:**

1. How **spoken discourse is organised**.
2. How **conversations develop** as people carry out everyday interactions.
3. **Sequence and structure: Opening and closing, turn taking, adjacency pairs.**

○ CA is pioneered by **Harvey Sacks** in the early 1970s to analyse chunks of conversations to arrive at some **generalisations**.

✦ When we open and end a conversation, we follow a pattern.

○ Ordinary conversations are the most basic form of **communicating** and **establishing** social relations.

Book, P: 190, Example:

Charlotte: you're getting enga ↑ged.

Carrie: I threw up I saw the ring and I threw up (.5) that's not normal.

Samantha: that's my reaction to marriage.

Miranda: what do you think you might do if he asks.

Carrie: I don't know.

Charlotte: just say ye::::s::

Carrie: well (.) it hasn't been long enough (.5) has it?

Charlotte: Tray and I got engaged after only a month=

Samantha: =how long before you separated.

Charlotte: we're together NOW and that's what matters. When it's right you just know

Samantha: Carrie doesn't know.

Carrie: Carrie threw up=

Samantha: =so it might not be right

What is Transcription?



- **Transcription:** An important step in conversational analysis. **Spoken texts are transcribed to be written texts.** There are certain conventions that need to be followed **like:**
 - ↑ Shift into a high pitch
 - NOW** Loud sounds relative to the surrounding talk
 - :: prolongation of the immediately prior sound
 - (.) a brief interval (about a tenth of a second) within or between utterances.
 - (0.5) the time elapsed between the end of utterance/ sound and the next one
 - know Stress
 - = Latched utterance – no break or gap between stretches of talk. (overlap)
 - ? Rising intonation
 - . Falling intonation
 - , Unfinished intonational contour
 - + Interruption

Adjacency Pairs



Adjacency Pairs: Utterances produced by two successive speakers in a way that the second utterance is identified as related to the first one and expected to follow-up to it.

The two utterances form a pair.

Adjacency pairs are the **basic structural unit** in a **conversation**.

When a speaker produces the first pair part, an appropriate second pair part is expected.

1. Greeting - Greeting	Hello Hi
2. Summons - answer	Jimmy! Coming, mother
3. Complaint – Denial	My room is a mess! I was out!!
4. Complaint - apology	It's ten minutes past the hour? My car broke down.
5. Request - grant	Can I have some sugar? Sure
6. Request for information - grant	When is the bus arriving? After ten minutes
7. Offer -accept	Do you need help with that ? Definitely!
8. Offer - reject	Chocolate? I'm on a diet thanks .

More Examples on Adjacency Pairs



- **Book, P:115, typical conversation on the radio:**

Announcer: Sharon Stone's on the phone. (.) how are yo:::u.

Caller: very good.

Announcer: I bet you get hassled about your surname.

Caller: yes I do:::

Announcer: and what do you want to tell Patrick.

Caller: umm that I love him very much (.5) and I wish him a very happy birthday for today.

More Examples

Identify the Adjacency Pairs



- A: Give me that, I can fix it.
- B: No! I can manage!

Offer – reject

- On the phone: Hello, is this John?
The one and only!

Summons – answer

Two people meet face to face,

- A: Hello
- B: Hi

Greeting – greeting

- A: Is this seat taken?
- B: No, go ahead.

Request – grant

Point of View: Challenge - Response



- In **arguments**, once a **point of view** is mentioned, a **possible follow –up** would be a **challenge**, followed by a **response**.
 - **Example**
 - A: I think Turkish series are boring!
 - B: Come on!
 - A: You can miss ten episodes and everything is still the same!

Opening Conversations



Conversations do not simply begin and end. The opening and closing of conversations are **organized**:

1. Speakers use adjacency pairs to **open** a conversation such as (**greeting/greeting**)

Example: A: What's up

B: Not much, what's up with you?

2. The (first topic) is held back until the conversation develops from opening to a point where it can be introduced.

Example: A: I'm fine, I'm just upset because of this new manager at the office...

OPENING TELEPHONE CONVERSATIONS



Opening of telephone conversations follows a certain sequence:

1. Summons / Answer.
2. Identification / recognition.
3. Greeting.
4. How are you.
5. Reason for call.

(Schegloff, 1986) US phone calls, Page 111 in the book.

The Stage of the Conversation



THE CONTEXT AND STAGE OF CONVERSATION ARE VERY IMPORTANT FOR ASSIGNING A PARTICULAR ADJACENCY PAIR.

Example: 'Hello'

- Can be a **summon** in a phone call or a **response**.
- It can also be a way of **greeting** someone on the street.

Different Openings in Different Cultures



- **Australia:** The caller is self-identified in their **first** turn after recognizing the speaker rather than second turn. **Example:** Hello, this is Lucas.
- **China:** They go straight from summons identification to the topic without greeting. (Skips greeting).
- **Egypt:** The caller starts with demanding identification of the identity of the answerer. The reason is that many calls result in wrong numbers. **Example:** ألو مين معايا؟

Phone Calls



- **Question:**
- How would you describe the opening sequence of a phone call in our culture?
 - The call is from an **unknown number** to your **home** phone.
 - The call is from an **unknown number** to your **mobile**.
 - The caller is a **girl**, your **age**?
 - The caller is a **man**?

CLOSING CONVERSATIONS



Archetype closing:

1. **Pre-closing:** Two turn units ‘**Ok**’ or ‘**alright**’ and falling intonation.
2. **Closing:** Using ‘**bye bye**’ or similar expressions.

Pre-closing sequences:

- Referring back to something previously said.
 - ✦ **Example:** “ You did find your bags and that’s all that matters.”
- Expressing good wishes
 - ✦ **Example:** “Enjoy your vacation!”
- Restatement of the reason of calling.....etc
 - ✦ **Example:** “ Yeah I just called to make sure you’re doing well.”



A pre-closing technique

A proverb
or an
aphorism
to bring the
topic to a
close.

A: Ah you know, its very demanding..

B: Yeah well, things always work out for the best.

A: Oh certainly, All right.

B: Uh huh

A: Okay

B: G'bye

- انا فعلا محتارة، والله القرار مو سهل.
- أكيد، لا تستعجلين.
- يعني كل خيار فيه مميزات كثيرة.
- ايه أكيد، الله يقدم لك اللي فيه الخير.
- امين ايه، يالله.
- اوكي يا قلبي موفقه.
- شكرا.

Foreshortened or Extended Closing



The **closing** may be:

- 1- **Foreshortened:** When the archetype closing is skipped.
 - **Example:** “I have to go. Bye!”
- 2- **Extended:** By continued repetition of pre-closing and closing items.
 - **Example:**
 - A: Bye
 - B: Bye
 - A: Love you
 - B: Love you
 - A: Sleep well
 - B: You too



EXAMPLES

What went wrong with this closing?

A: Well, I must go now. We must get together soon.

B: All right, when?

A: Oh.... I'll call you

B: When will you call me? I'm busy Monday ...

- A wrong illocutionary reading to a pre-closing formula:
 - (B) understood that it was a request for commitment but it was a polite pre-closing formula.
- Possible reason for such misunderstandings: Different cultural backgrounds.

TURN TAKING



The **basic rule** in English conversation is that **one person speaks at a time**, after which they may **nominate another speaker**, or **another speaker** may **take up the turn** without being nominated.

(Sacks, 1974)

End of turn

& Holding on to a turn

Signalling end of turn:

1. **completion** of syntactic unit.
2. Use of **falling intonation**.
3. **Pausing**
4. **Fillers** (umm) (anyway)
5. **Eye contact, body language and movement**.

Holding on to a turn:

1. **Not pausing** too long at the end of an **utterance**, and **starting straight away**.
2. **Pausing** during an **utterance** not at the end.
3. **Increasing the volume** by **extending a syllable** or a **vowel**.
4. **Speaking over someone else's attempt** to take our turn.



Overlap is a strategy for:

1) taking a turn.

2) Preventing someone from taking a turn.

Example of taking the turn:

A: Did you hear the news! ab...

B: She got engaged! To a doctor..

A: Yes, you know? I just..

B: Of course I know! Her sister is my best friend...

Example of preventing someone from taking a turn:

Teacher: Mary, what do you think?

Mary: aah ..mm I guess

Donna: It's a declarative sentence!

Teacher: Mary? Do you think it is?

Mary: Maybe a quest.....

Donna: an interrogative !!

Turn-taking varies according to:

1. Situation: In a **classroom** for example a teacher nominates who can take a turn, a student may or may not respond. In a **court**, turn-taking is the least flexible.
2. Topic: People take a turn when they have something to **say** or when they want to **change** the topic.
3. Relationship: A **child** may be instructed not to speak with **adult guests** unless spoken to. Interaction with **friends** is different from more formal relationships.
4. Rank: To some degree, turn taking is **by rank**, the **right to talk** is an indicator of the **status** of the speaker.