Conversational Analysis

CHAPTER 5

Paltridge (2006)
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.
Charlotte: you’re getting engaged.
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 yes:
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: 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair Type</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Greeting - Greeting</td>
<td>Hello</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Summons - answer</td>
<td>Jimmy!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coming, mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Complaint – Denial</td>
<td>My room is a mess!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I was out!!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Complaint - apology</td>
<td>It’s ten minutes past the hour?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My car broke down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Request - grant</td>
<td>Can I have some sugar?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Request for information - grant</td>
<td>When is the bus arriving?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>After ten minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Offer - accept</td>
<td>Do you need help with that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Definitely!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Offer - reject</td>
<td>Chocolate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I’m on a diet thanks .</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 m**uch** (.5) and I wish him a very happy birthday for today.
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**
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!
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 of telephone conversations follows a certain sequence:

1. Summons / Answer.

2. Identification / recognition.


4. How are you.

5. Reason for call.

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**?
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

A: أنا فعلا محتارة، والله القرار مو سهل.
B: أكيد، لا تستعجلين.
A: يعني كل خيار فيه مميزات كثيرة.
B: ايه أكيد، الله يقدم لك اللي فيه الخير.
A: امين ايه، ياالله.
B: اوكي يا قلبي موقفه.
A: شكرا.
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
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.
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)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>End of turn</th>
<th>Holding on to a turn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Signalling end of turn:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Holding on to a turn:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>completion</strong> of syntactic unit.</td>
<td>1. <strong>Not pausing</strong> too long at the end of an <strong>utterance</strong>, and starting straight away.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Use of <strong>falling intonation</strong>.</td>
<td>2. <strong>Pausing</strong> during an <strong>utterance</strong> not at the end.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <strong>Pausing</strong></td>
<td>3. <strong>Increasing</strong> the <strong>volume</strong> by extending a <strong>syllable</strong> or a <strong>vowel</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. <strong>Fillers</strong> <em>(umm) (anyway)</em></td>
<td>4. <strong>Speaking</strong> over someone else’s <strong>attempt</strong> to take our turn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. <strong>Eye contact, body language and movement.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.