

# 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.