

Phonetics 2.

CONVERSATION ANALYSIS

Conversation: Life is, in many ways, a series of conversations



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Definitions

- If you have a conversation with someone, you **talk** with them, usually in an **informal** situation (Collins' COBUILD English Dictionary).

- ◎ **Informal** talk in which people exchange news, feelings, and thoughts(Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English).

● An **informal** talk involving a small group of people or only two; the activity of talking in this way

(Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary)

- The definition of 'conversation' requires further refinement (Thornbury and Slade 2006)

The nature of conversation

(Thornbury and Slade 1996)

- ◎ Conversation is spoken
- ◎ Conversation happens in real time.
 - Hesitations
 - Word repetition
 - False starts
 - Repairs
 - Unfinished sentences
 - ungrammaticality

- ◎ Conversation takes place in a shared context.
 - Frequent use of pronouns
 - Frequency of deictic items
 - Ellipsis

◎ Conversation is interactive

- Dialogic or multilogic
- Turn transition
- Conversation is co-constructed reciprocally
- Conversation is interpersonal (symmetrical)

◎ Conversation is informal

- ◎ (Due partly to its spontaneous and interactive nature and partly because of its interactional nature)

◎ Conversation is expressive of identity

- Through conversation people establish and maintain their affiliation with a particular social group.

Defining conversation

- ◎ Thornbury and Slade (2006: 25) define conversation as follows:
- ◎ *Conversation is the **informal, interactive** talk between two or more people, which happens **in real time**, is **spontaneous**, has a **largely interpersonal function**, and in which participants share **symmetrical rights***

CONVERSATION ANALYSIS

- Developed in the early 1960s in California.
- Harvey Sacks
- Emanuel Schegloff

- CA studies sequencing in interaction: it describes how sequences of actions are generated in conversation. (Hutchby and Woofit 1998).

- It can be applied both to informal conversation and to institutional talk (Drew and Heritage 1992), and to radio or television phone-in programs (Hutchby 1996)

- Participants are seen as mutually oriented and in collaboration to achieve a meaningful and orderly communication.

Basic Principles

(Hutchby and Woofit 1998)

- Talk-in-interaction is systematically organized and deeply ordered.
- The production of talk-in-interaction is methodic.

- ◎ The analysis of talk-in-interaction should be based on naturally occurring data.

Turn taking

- ◎ Sacks:
- ◎ One speaker speaks at a time, and speaker change recurs.
- ◎ When there is overlapping talk or long silences, there es a need for 'repair'.

- ◎ **Turn:** One or more Turn Constructional Units
- ◎ End of TCU: Potential Transition Relevance Place

- ◎ Projection of Transition
Relevance Place:

- ◎ Content, prosody,
grammatical structure and
non verbal behaviour

Allocation of next turn

- 1 Current speaker selects next speaker
or if this mechanism does not operate, then . . .
- 2 Next speaker self-selects
or if this mechanism does not operate, then . . .
- 3 Current speaker may (but does not have to) continue

- ◎ Simultaneous speech:
- ◎ Overlap (failure to detect TRP)
 - Generally near a TRP, short and repaired)

- **Interruption:** Not near TRP.
- It is considered hostile when the speaker who interrupts gets the floor.

● Simultaneous talk can be collaborative:

Ali: and she didn't she didn't like Katie she didn't ge[t on with Katie at all]

Beth: [no she didn't get on with] Katie

[brackets mark sequences spoken simultaneously]

- There may be cultural differences in the allocation of turns (Cameron 2001).

- Argentina: grab the floor and then talk until someone interrupts you.
- Sweden: wait for the other to finish before you start speaking

Sequencing: Adjacency pairs

- Question/answer

- Greeting/greeting

- Invitation/acceptance -
refusal

- Schegloff and Sacks (1973)
- “When a first pair part is produced, the speaker must stop at the first possible point and the next speaker must start to produce the second part of the pair of the kind of pair to which the first part belongs”.

- ① Second pair parts need not be produced immediately after the first pair part. But once the first part has been produced, the second part becomes relevant until it is produced.

- Adjacency pairs reveal understanding (or lack of understanding) between participants.

Preferred/dispreferred responses

Transcription conventions: ? = rising intonation; (.) = pause

1 Daphne: I was thinking we could have fish?

2 Julia: fine

3 Anita: well actually (.) I've stopped eating fish now because of you know

4 the damage it does to the ocean

Institutional talk

- ⦿ Different distribution of conversational rights
- ⦿ In Court: defendants are not allowed to ask questions

*Transcription conventions: italics = emphasis, (6) = pause duration in seconds,
– = short pause, [= simultaneous speech*

Magistrate: I'm putting it to you again – are you going to *make* an offer – uh – uh – to discharge this debt (6)

Defendant: Would you in my position

Magistrate: I – I'm not here to answer questions – you answer *my* question

Defendant: One rule for one and one for another – I presume (3)

Magistrate: Can I have an answer to my question – please (6)

The question is – are you prepared to make an offer to the court – to discharge – this debt (2)

Defendant: What sort of minimal offer [would be required

Magistrate: [it's not a bargaining situation – it's a *straight* question Mr H. – can I have the answer

- Drew and Heritage: Institutional talk may be associated with particular inferential frameworks

e.g.

- In court: defendants may understand questions not as straightforward questions, but as accusations.