

Fundamental Structures and Notions in a Talk-in-interaction: Analytical Study of a Casual Conversation

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Abstract

The present study intends to investigate some important and fundamental structures in a typical conversation from an analytical perspective. Thanks to the significance behind the emergence of conversation analysis (CA) and its typical definition, the researcher attempts to empirically and practically consult live data out of an 11-minute talk-in-interaction so as to both identify basic structures in the encounter and accordingly back specific-ordered and systematic structures and notions maintained by CA hypothetically. In doing so, to conduct the analysis of some significant and central structures of the conversation, the researcher zeroes in on four structures and concepts, i.e. turn-taking, overlap, repair and discourse markers.

Keywords: *Discourse Analysis, Conversation Analysis, Turn-taking, Overlap, Repair, Discourse markers.*

Introduction

Conversational analysis (CA) is the study of talk-in-interaction. CA generally attempts to describe the orderliness, structure, and sequential patterns of interaction; whether institutional (e.g. in the school, courts or elsewhere) or casual conversation. To put another way, conversation analysis is concerned with the detailed organization of everyday interaction.

The major focus of interest in recent years has been in the interpretation and analysis of conversation, particularly casual one. Casual interactions are carried out for social purposes rather than for obtaining goods and services (Nunan, 1999:305). The present research is accordingly based upon a casual conversation for social purpose entailing personal exchanges of opinions on a specific topic.

To have a better understanding of pivotal contribution of conversation analysis (CA) to applied linguistics, it is needed to consider the comments on the usage and significance of CA in brief. Conversational analysis (CA) is mainly associated with socio-linguists and sociologists of language (Shokouhi & Kamyab, 2004:87; McCarthy, 2001:50). Conversation analysis (CA) focuses on conversation because it offers a particularly appropriate and accessible resource for sociological enquiry (McCarthy, Matthiessen & Slade, 2002:61).

Methodology

For a better and reliable analysis of a conversation, one needs to explore naturally occurring conversations. This concern of using the appropriate methodology for the analysis of interaction has been frequently discussed by scholars. Arminen & Leinonen (2006:339) and Mitani (2005:1) suggest conversation analysis (CA) as the appropriate method for investigation of foreign language interaction. Accordingly, CA is the most tenable methodology for the analysis of naturally occurring conversation,

since it reveals the interactional orientations of the interactants in context, together with the structural organization of their interaction, through analyzing the details of the conversation. As Halliday properly states, perhaps the greatest single event in the history of linguistics was the invention of the tape recorder, which for the first time has captured natural conversation and made it accessible to systematic study (as quoted in Carter, 2003:6).

To conduct the research, two SLA speakers (two English teachers) were asked to have conversational dialogue about a topic of their interest so as to have a natural and typical interaction. They agreed upon talking on "the important inventions of the modern world" which was within the scope of their knowledge and interest. The encounter was accordingly recorded. It lasted 11 minutes. The recorded 11-minute conversation provides the actual and reliable source of required data for respective analysis. The conversation was fully transcribed and placed in discussion section, the utterances of each speaker (S1 and S2) were marked by number in order to eventually capture the track of concepts for analysis.

To conduct the analysis of some significant and basic structures of the conversation, the researcher concentrates on four structures and notions, i.e. turn-taking, overlap, repair and discourse markers.

Results & discussion

To cover the analysis of some significant and basic structures of a conversation, the researcher prefers to take turn-taking, overlap, repair and discourse markers into account. The recorded encounter is taken as a reliable and documented sample so that the investigator can keep track of mentioned structures and aspects within it. Primarily the transcription of the conversation is granted and then the basic structures and notions are discussed as follow with necessary explanations.

Transcribed Conversation:

1 S1: Hello

2 S2: Hi, how are you doing?

3 S1: Fine thanks

4 S1: You know, the ancient times...in the ancient times, the wonders, all of them, were buildings. What's your opinion about the wonders of the twentieth century, the modern world?

5 S2: Ok = I can say that buildings were most=, I think, the most interesting things in that time but now in this time I think the internet can be the most interesting thing I have ever known about it, ok?

6 S1: Yes

7 S2: So internet is such a strange phenomenon, every time I think about it, I get confused and ...mmm. For example, you know that I have got a computer recently and I have found a partner in the United States, every time I wanna ask him something about the English language,...he just tries to answer me, reply me, so rapidly. Every thing I want to know about United States, about the cities of United States, about the States, every thing I want, I can ask him and he answers me honestly. So this is the most interesting thing for me, because I have never spoken, I have never spoken with an American before. But now I have found an American friend and this is so marvelous and I couldn't imagine this day.

8 S1: You tell me that you use the internet and it changes our life very completely, yes?

9 S2: Yes, of course it changes our life so completely because, you know, other more than sending emails we can just search in the internet, find every thing we want on the internet and, you know, for example, I am so interested in the words of songs and in the words of films, transcripts. Every time I want to know about it, and..., I try search it in the internet, and so rapidly about two or three seconds I can have the whole words of a movie.

10 S1: So let's talk about the other wonders of the twentieth century. [So what's your opinion about the others?

11 S2:

[yes

12 S2: Of course, there are so many inventions in the world today. For example, the washing machine is marvelous invention, you know [that...

- 13 S1:** [do you have one in your house?
- 14 S2:** Yes, I have one and I think that the free time it creates is wonderful.
- 15 S1:** Yes. You mean that when we use a washing machine in our house we have a lot of free time, yes?
- 16 S2:** Yes. Of course we have a lot of free time. And the My wife is so relaxed using the washing machine, and I'm so happy to see her so relaxed and, you know, it's good for [us.
- 17 S1:** [But I think that when we use a washing machine in our house, it attacks our free time. Maybe we lose our free time in another way. For example, when we use a washing machine, we wash our clothes more and more. [And we fill our free time with it.
- 18 S2:** [Yes.
- 19 S2:** Yes
- 20 S1:** So we don't have more free time, when we use this [...machine
- 21 S2:** [umm
- 22 S2:** Of course, maybe you are right. But in my opinion it is the best. Maybe you are right.
- 23 S1:** For [example
- 24 S2:** [I..., I don't agree with you in this [...
- 25 S1:** [For example, with computer. One of the wonders of the twentieth centuries is computer, yes?
- 26 S2:** Yes
- 27 S1:** It changes our life completely. [But it attacks our freedom, when we use computer all the time, and we don't have any free time.
- 28 S2:** [yes
- 29 S2:** Yes. Of course, when I'm working with my computer, you know, it just, it spends a lot of time working with the computer. When... you want to have something and don't lose other things. If you want to have something, you have to lose other things. You know, if you want to work with a computer, so some time will be spent, so I think it's just right. Nothing wrong with it. You know.
- 30 S1:** So, I mean that suitable use is very... is better than use it all the time.
- 31 S2:** Ok. I don't agree with those people who use the computer all the time. You know, for example, I try to use a computer two or three hours in a day, but not all the time. Of course, sometimes I'm so embarrassed about using the computer, why? Because I think the computer is just trying to cover all my life.
- 32 S1:** Another wonders of the twentieth century is, for example, telephone. Some people use telephone all the time, [it is especially women.
- 33 S2:** [Yes.
- 34 S1:** So, they fill their free time with speaking with each other on phone, on telephone.
- 35 S2:** Yes
- 36 S1:** So, we fill our free time with another activity.
- 37 S2:** Yes
- 38 S1:** So, we don't have more free time when we use these inventions, these wonders.
[Do you agree?
- 39 S2:** [yes.
- 40 S2:** Yes. I agree with you. But you know that when women talk a lot on the phone, I think, this is something we have to consider. You know, a woman who talks a lot on the phone, maybe, maybe she is feeling alone and she tries to have somebody talked to. For example, you know not only women in

Iran, but other people in other countries. I have a brother who lives in United States and he has been alone for over twenty-five years. So, every time, he is just telephoning me, he always talks to me more than three hours or talks more than three or four hours with the family. So I think this helps him live his life, because, you know, after talking, he is so relaxed and [he....

41 S1: [they are exceptions.

42 S2: Of course, you are right they're exceptions but you know that exceptions are just a part of our life.

43 S1: So sometimes, I mean that sometimes exceptions are more than usual.

44 S2: Okay = for me, just yes. I think exceptions are just part of our life and we can not ignore them.

45 S1: So we can not say a rule for exceptions, they are separated from rule, they are completely....for example....

46 S2: Yes I know what you say but I have seen other people, I have seen other people who talk too much on the phone and they are so happy after telephoning, they feel so excited and you know all the worries are vanished after talking on the telephone. For me, always when I get home, I try to watch and look at my telephone, you know, I have an ID caller and to see who has telephoned me and if there is no one on the phone, no...no phone number on the display, I get so...I get so upset, I don't know why? But every time I see just two or three phone numbers, I get so excited, so happy, I don't know why? But I feel it, I don't know why=

47 S1: So at the end...I mean we should try to use inventions in a proper way, suitable way. [That way...

48 S2: [yes, yes.

49 S2: Of course, we have to use inventions in a suitable way but you know that using the inventions in a suitable way just is not suitable for all the people. I told you about my brother, he always feels so lonely and you know that he has to use the phone more than two, three, four hours just in a day.

50 S1: Yes. Thanks.

51 S2: Thanks.

Turn-taking

Turn-taking is one of the fundamental organizations of conversation. Without doubt turn-taking is one of basic components out of which conversation is constructed. In conversation analysis, the basic unit of speech is the individual speaker "turn" (McCarthy, Matthiessen & Slade, 2002:61). Turn-taking is defined as the process by which opportunities to speak are distributed between two or more speakers (Nunan, 1999:316). In other words, a unit is each occasion that a speaker speaks and a turn ends when another party takes a turn. In addition, the distribution of turns is also organized at points where there is a "transitive-relevance" place, so the selection of a speaker is not random but rule-governed (Schegloff, Koshik Jacoby & Olsher, 2002:6; as quoted in Shokouhi and Kamyab, 2004:90-91). Accordingly, turn-taking is based on social interaction in the first place rather than on any phonological, lexico-grammatical or semantic considerations (McCarthy, Matthiessen & Slade, 2002:61). As declared so far, recent comments place emphasis upon systematic and rule-governed nature of turn-taking. To capture the concept of turn-taking in practice, instances signifying this concept are mentioned as follows:

One of the techniques in turn-taking is the selection of the next party by current speaker. A current speaker may select a next speaker (as when he addresses a question to another party); or parties may self-select in starting to talk (Sack et. 1974; as quoted in Shokouhi & Kamyab, 2004:92). Frequent instances of turn-allocation techniques observed in this dialogue were of addressing question of one party, mostly the S1, to the other.

Lines 2, 4, 5, 8, 10, 13, 15, 25 and 38 take in questions assigning the floor to the other party.

- **2 S2:** Hi, how are you doing?

- **4 S1:** You know... What's your opinion about the wonders of the twentieth century, the modern world?
- **5 S2:** Ok = I can ..., ok?
- **8 S1:** You tell... completely, yes?
- **10 S1:** So let's talk about..... [So what's your opinion about the others?]
- **13 S1:** ...[do you have one in your house?]
- **15 S1:** Yes. You mean ..., yes?
- **25 S1:** [...One of the wonders of the twentieth centuries is computer, yes?]
- **38 S1:** So, we don't have ..., these wonders. [Do you agree?]

In case of lines 10, 19, 22, 30, 31,32, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 49, 50 and 51, self-selection is as a result of the speaker's stopping to talk and thus other partner starts to talk. In these cases, turn-taking coincides with overlap: lines 13, 17, 18, 25, 33, 41, and 48.

Overlap

Overlaps occur when other party starts talking at the same time the current speaker is still talking. When overlapping occurs, one of the speakers may either give up the floor by giving the floor to other party or raise his/her voice to speak louder in order to continue the talk (Shokouhi & Kamyab, 2004:96). Overlaps mainly occur as the starter of the talk (possibility of self-selecting) or completion points (Shokouhi & Kamyab, 2004:97).

As the starter of the talk, lines 10-11, 12-13, 17-18, 20-21, 23-24, 27-28, 32-33 and 40-41 were identified.

For completion points, lines 16-17, 38-39 and 47-48 are available. On the occurrence of the overlap at the completion point of the previous utterance, for example, in lines 16-17, by the time speaker 1 (S1) realizes the talk is being finished with the word 'us', he starts to talk, then consequently overlaps occur. The same explanation in essence also can be mentioned for other two instances.

Repair

As the term 'repair' self-indicates, it refers to change previous construction so as to correct or modify it. According to Shokouhi and Kamyab, many at times, for various, reasons we repeat ourselves, make changes or alter our syntactic constructions (2004:100). When these changes or repetitions occur, a repair has been commenced.

There are two main sorts of repair; self and other repairs. They are divided into self-initiated self-repaired, self-initiated other-repaired, other-initiated other-repaired, other-initiated self-repaired (Shokouhi & Kamyab, 2004:100). Regarding available extract of this research, there only exists one type of repair, that is self-initiated self-repaired in which the speaker repairs his previous construction by resorting to repetition.

Lines 4, 5, 24, 30, 34, 43 and 46 contain repaired constructions.

- **4 S1:** You know, *the ancient times...in the ancient times*, ...
- **5 S2:** Ok = I can say that buildings were *most=*, *I think, the most interesting things* in that time but now...
- **24 S2:** *[I..., I don't agree with you in this ...*
- **30 S1:** So, I mean that suitable use *is very... is better than use it all the time*.
- **34 S1:** So, they fill their free time with speaking with each other *on phone, on telephone*

- **43 S1:** *So sometimes, I mean that sometimes exceptions are more than usual.*
- **46 S2:** *Yes ... and if there is no one on the phone, no...no phone number on the display, I get so...I get so upset, I don't know why? But every time I see just two or three phone numbers, I get so excited, so happy, I don't know why? But I feel it, I don't know why=*

Discourse Markers

Discourse markers are frequently found in language and utilized for specific purposes. They are particular words or phrases used to mark boundaries in conversation between one topic or bit of business and the next (Carter, 2003:10). To classify the discourse markers out of the present data, the investigator refers to some of most often visited discourse markers in English classified by Stenstrom (1994:66, 83; as quoted in Shokouhi & Kamyab, 2004:119):

Backchannels: ..., of course,that's right, I see, mhm, right, yes

Call-off: OK

Answer: no, right, sure, yes

Reply: I see, mhm, oh, right

Frame: all right, anyway, now, OK, right

Appealer: all right, OK, Q-tag, right

Backchannels are responses in which the speakers give supportive feedback to each other. In other words, in some cases, they are responses which show that listener is still following the speaker and wishes him or her continue (McCarthy, Matthiessen & Slade, 2002:61).

- Lines 11 (yes), 15 (yes), 18 (yes), 19 (yes), 28 (yes), 29 (yes, of course), 33 (yes), 35 (yes), 37 (yes), 39 (yes) and 49 (of course) take in instances of backchannels.
- **Appealer:** lines 5 and 44 (ok)
- **Frame:** line 31 (ok)

Other discourse markers as stated by Shokouhi and Kamyab (2004:119) are y'know, well, I mean, so,...[also existing in this extract]

- *You know:* lines 31, 40 (four occurrences), 42, 46 (two occurrences) and 49 (two occurrences).
- *I mean:* lines 30, 43 and 47.
- *So:* lines 7 (two occurrences), 10 (two occurrences), 20, 29 (two occurrences), 30, 34, 36, 38, 40 (two occurrences), 43, 45 and 47,

Conclusion

A major contribution of conversation analysis has been to make everyday interaction a subject worthy of academic research. Thanks to the actual recorded data of naturally occurring encounters transcribed in great detail, the investigator attempts to explicitly expand upon basic structures and notions typically found in conversation from an analytical standpoint.

In particular, having introduced the four basic structures and concepts of an interaction; i.e. turn-taking, overlap, repair and discourse markers, the researcher defines each concept separately and then takes advantage of the recorded data so as to explain and identify the mentioned concepts in practice. Not only were the basic structures kept track and identified, but also the systematic and specific-ordered structure of conversation was significantly implied and hypothetically backed as well.

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