

CONVERSTATION AND PREFERENCE STRUCTURE

PRAGMATICS / S2

2016-2017

- Pragmatics is the study of what speakers mean when they say something, and how hearers understand it.
- Part of the meaning of a sentence is constant, and comes from the words used in it and how they are arranged, however, there is more to pragmatics than just understanding the context in which something is said.
- Pragmatics also refers to the rules, including knowing what context you need to provide to the listener, the rules that frame language interactions.

CONVESATIONAL ABILITIES

- An important part of our pragmatic skill set
- Even before we talk , we learn the rules of conversation.
- When parents speak ‘baby-talk’ to their infants, they do it in a vey structured way. They use exaggerated ‘pitch changes to attract the infant's interest and highlight these sounds that I’ making now are important
- Parents also articulate more carefully than when they speak with adults or children to help the baby understand which sounds are important in their language

- They treat the interaction as a real interaction, keeping up a turn taking format, even if the baby doesn't respond
- The pause between the parent's utterances is exactly what would be if they were in conversation with an adult.
- This aspect of parentese is an important part of training children in holding conversations, and indeed, children can take turns in a conversation making fake words that sound right before they even speak their first word .

- As we grow older, we learn more rules about the form in a conversation , like a question must followed by an answer, longer pauses are demands for more speech on your part, a hundreds other unspoken rules of the language
- All these are parts of pragmatics

CONVERSATIONAL ANALYSIS(CA)

- CA is the study of talk in interaction (both verbal , and non verbal in situations of everyday life).
- CA attempts to describe the orderliness, structure, and sequential patterns of interaction, whether institutional, or in casual conversations.
- CA was developed in late 1960' and early 1970' by sociologist *HARVEY SACKS* ,and his close associates *EMANUEL SCHEGLOFF & GAIL JEFFERSON* , inspired by ethno methodology of Goffman & Garfinkel

- Today, conversational analysis is an established method used in sociology, anthropology, linguistics, speech-communication and psychology
- CA is particularly influential in interactional sociolinguistics, discourse analysis and discursive psychology.
- Conversation analysis is an approach to the study of social interaction that focuses on practices of speaking that recur across a range of contexts and settings.

What is a conversation ?

- Conversation is a discourse type that contains several discourse strategies that are of interest to pragmatics
- Every piece of conversation consists of some acts that represent the speaker's intention .
- Many metaphors have been made to describe conversation structure . Conversation is like a dance, with the conversational patterns coordinating their movements smoothly.

- For others, conversations is like traffic crossing an intersection, involving lots of alternating movements without any crashes
- The most widely used analytic approach to conversation, is based on **an analogy with the workings of a market economy.**

How ?

The conversation ...a market economy

- In this market, there is a scarce commodity called the floor which can be defined as the **right to speak**
- Having control of this floor at any time is called a **turn**
- In any situation when control is not fixed in advance, any one can attempt to take control; this is called **turn taking**
- Turn taking operates in accordance with a local management system that is conventionally known by members of a social group.
- The local management system is set of conventions for getting turns, keeping them, or giving them away

- This system is need most at those points where there is a possible change in who has the turn.
- Any possible change of turn point is called a **Transition relevance place TRP**
- Within any social group, there will be features of talk (or absence of talk) typically associated with a TRP

PAUSES, OVERLAPS AND BACKCHANNELS

- Most of the times, conversation consists of two or more participants taking turns, and only one participant speaking at any time.
- Smooth transitions from one speaker to the other seem to be valued
- Transitions with a long silence between turns or with substantial **overlap** (both speakers trying to speak at the same time) are often felt to be awkward.
- *When two people attempt to have a conversation and discover that there is no 'flow', or smooth rhythm to their transitions, much more is being communicated than what is said*

- There is a sense of distance, an absence of familiarity or ease , as in the interaction show in example (1)

>Mr Strait: what's your major Dave?

*>Dave: English-well I haven't decided yet
(3 seconds)*

>Mr Strait:so-you want to be a teacher?

*>Dave: Non-not really- well not if I can help it
(2.5 seconds)*

Mr Strait:What-where do you –go ahead

Dave: I mean it's a-oh sorry//I em....

- As shown in this examples, very short pauses (marked with a dash) are simply **hesitations**

- The first silence (3 seconds) are not attributable to either speaker because each has completed a turn.
- If one speaker actually turns over the floor to another and the other does not speak, then the silence attributed to the second speaker and becomes significant; it's an *attributable silence*

- Example(2)

Jan: Dave I'm going to the store

(2 seconds)

Jan: Dave?

(2 seconds)

Jan: Dave-is something wrong?

Dave: What? What's wrong?

Jan: Never mind

- **Silence** at a TRP is not as problematic for the local management system as **overlap**
- If the expectation is that only one person speaks at a time, then overlap can be a serious problem.

- The type of overlap shown in example one is simply of a difficult first conversation with an unfamiliar person.
- There are other types of overlaps that are interpreted differently.
- For many speakers, overlapped talk appears to function like an expression of solidarity or closeness in expressing similar opinions. But the effect of the overlapping talk creates a feeling of two voices collaborating as one, in harmony, see example (3)

> Min: Did you see him in the video?

> Wendy: Yeah— the part of the beach

> Min: Oh my god // he looked so handsome

> wendy: he was so cool

> Min: and the waves // crashing around him

> Wendy Yeah that was really wild

In this example, **overlap communicates closeness**

- See another example (4) :

> Joe: when were in // power las-

wait CAN I FINISH ?

> Jerry: that's my point I said--

- In this example, **overlap communicates competition**. The speakers may appear to be having a discussion but , in fact, they are competing for the floor.
- By drawing attention to an expectation that he should be allowed to finish, the speaker in (4) is appealing to some of the unstated rule of conversation structure.
- Each speaker is expected to wait until the current speaker reaches a TRP , to take his turn.

- Normally , those who wish to get the floor will wait for a possible TRP (transition relevance place), and those holding the floor in a competitive environment will avoid providing TRP's .
 - To do so , they must avoid an open pause at the end of a syntactic unit, the speaker may fill his pauses with (hummm , or uuhhh), which are placed inside , and not at the end of, the syntactic units. See example (5)
- > *I wasn't talking about him—umm his first book that was--- really just like a start and so—uh isn't—count really*

- Another type of floor holding device is to indicate that there is a larger structure to your turn by beginning with expressions like : *there are three points I'd like to make, first...*
- Such expressions are used to get the regular exchange of turn process suspended and allow one speaker to have an extended turn. Within the extended turn , however speakers will expect their conversational partners to indicate that they are listening.
- Different ways can be used to do this, like smiles, head nods, and other facial expressions and gestures. The most common vocal indications are called '*backchannel signals*' or simply '*backchannels*'

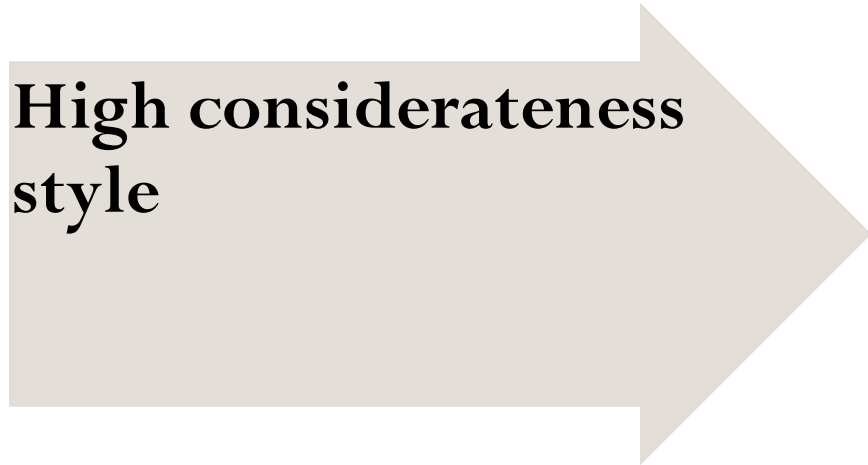
CONVERSATIONAL STYLE



High involvement
style



High considerateness
style



HIGH INVOLVEMENT STYLE

- Some individuals expect that participation in a conversation will be very active, that speaking rate will be relatively fast, with almost no between turns, and with some overlap or even completion of the other's turn.

HIGH CONSIDERATENESS STYLE

- It differs substantially from another style in which speakers use a slower rate, expect longer pauses between turns, do not overlap, and avoid interruption or completion of the other's turn. This non-interrupting, non imposing style has been called the **high considerateness style**.

- When a speaker who typically uses the first style gets into conversation with a speaker who normally uses the second style, the talk tends to become one-sided.
- The active participation style will overwhelm the other style.
- Neither speaker will necessarily recognize that it is the conversational styles that are different, instead the more rapid-fire speaker may think ,the slower-paced speaker just doesn't have much to say, is shy, and perhaps boring or even stupid. In return, he or she is likely to be viewed as noisy, pushy, domineering, selfish, and even tiresome.

ADJACENCY PAIRS

- Pairs of utterances in talk are often mutually dependent, a most obvious example is that a question predicts an answer, and that an answer presupposes a question.
- It is possible to state the requirements, in a normal conversational sequence, for many types of utterances, in terms of what is expected as a response and what certain responses presuppose.

EXAMPLES OF ADJACENCY PAIRS

Utterance
function

greeting

congratulations

apology

Inform

Expected
response

greeting

thanks

acceptance

acknowledge

- Pairs of utterances such as greeting-greeting, and apology-acceptance are called **adjacency pairs**
- The mutual dependence of such utterances is underlined by the fact that we can only be absolutely sure of the function of the initiating utterance (the first pair-part) when it is contextualized with the response it gets (the second pair-part), and vice versa, for example 'hello' in English could be a greeting, a request to a telephone caller ,or an expression of surprise; Hello, what's his here?

- The utterance of the first part immediately creates an expectation of the utterance of a second part of the same pair. Failure to produce the second part in response will be treated as a significant absence and hence meaningful.
- There are some forms which are used to fill the slots in adjacency pairs, **but there must always be two parts** to the pair. See examples in the next slide, p 88 in your book

FIRST PART

What's up ?

How's it going?

How are
things?

How are you
doing?

SECOND PART

Nothing much

Just hanging in
there

The usual

Can't
complain

Insertion sequences

- An insertion sequence is one adjacency pair within another.
See example :
 - agent: do you want the early flight? Q1
 - client: what time does it arrive ? Q2
 - Agent: nine forty-five A2
 - Client: Yeah-that's great A1
- The insertion sequence takes the form of **Q2-Q2-A2-A1**

Although it appears that there is a question (Q2) as an answer to question 1, the assumption is that once the second part of the insertion sequence is provided (A2), the second part of the initial question (Q1) will follow (A1)

- Adjacency pairs are of different types:

First pair-parts have identical second pair-parts(
hello-hello)

First pair parts expect different second pair-
parts(congratulations-thanks)

A second pair-part may presuppose a wide range of
first-pair parts(thanks-offers, apology, informing,
congratulations...)

**First pair-parts have various possibilities and
generate further expectations too(
invitation- reject or accept)**

Native Vs Non-natives use of adjacency pairs

- Scarella&Brunak compared the use of giving informal invitations between native and non-native users of English,
- It was found that native speakers preface their invitations , for example (I was wondering, we are having a party,) while non native speakers were too formal or too blunt (I would like to invite you to a part, I want you to come to a party)
- Similarly , it seems that native speakers usually preface disagreement second pair-parts in English with partial agreement like : yes, but ... , and with softeners(I'm afraid...)

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT?

- This observation had direct implications for the design of role play and similar activities and linguistic elements need to be pre-taught, where learners are instructed to behave in ways specified by the activity and where the goal is a simulation of 'real life' situations.

PREFERENCE STRUCTURE

- Adjacency pairs are not simply contentless noises in sequences, they represent social actions, and not all social actions are equal when they occur as second parts of some pairs.
- Basically, a first part that contains a request or an offer is made with the expectation that the second part will be an acceptance, this likelihood is called '*preference*'
- The term 'preference structure' is used to indicate *a socially determined structural pattern* and *does not refer to any individual's mental and emotional desires*.
- In this technical use of the word, preference is an observed pattern in talk and **not a personal wish**.

First part	SECOND PART	
	PREFERRED	DISPREFERRED
Assessment	Agree	Disagree
Invitation	Accept	Refuse
Offer	Accept	Decline
Proposal	Agree	Disagree
Request	Accept	Refuse

The general patterns of preferred and dispreferred structure (S.C.Levinson)

EXAMPLES SEE PAGE 90

SILENCE AS A RESPONSE?...

- Silence as a response often leads the speaker to revise the first part to get a second part that is not silence from the other speaker.

See example :

*Sandy: But I'm sure they'll have good food there
(1.6 seconds)*

Sandy: humm , I guess the food is not great there

Jack: Nah- people mostly go for the food.

- However, silence is an extreme case, almost risking the impression of non-participation in the conversational structure.
- In expressing dispreferred second-parts speakers use hesitations , pauses, and prefaces. For example:
 - Becky: come over for some coffee later
 - Wally: Oh-eh-hum-but you see-I-I'm supposed to get this finished – you know

- The expression of a refusal can often be accomplished without actually saying 'no'. Something that isn't said nevertheless gets communicated.
- In the previous example; after a preface like : uhh, emm, Oh , ehh , the second speaker produces a kind of appreciation to the invitation, then produces (you see-) to invoke another understanding , and then the account is presented , that she has to finish some work, to explain what prevented her from accepting the invitation.
- There is also a meaning conveyed here that the speaker's circumstances are not at his/her control because of an obligation to finish the work(I am supposed) , and once again expecting the inviter's understanding by saying (you know)

The effect of dispreferred second parts

- More time and language are used than in a preferred.
- More language essentially represents more distance between the end of the first part , and the end of the second part.
- From a pragmatic perspective, the expression of a preferred (in response to an invitation for example, clearly represents closeness and quick connection.
- From a social perspective, it is easy to see why participants in a conversation may try to avoid creating contexts for dispreferred.
- The best way to avoid dispreferred is not to get to the point where a first part of the pair is uttered.

- **As a conclusion, we can say that the amount of talk employed to accomplish a particular social action in conversation is a pragmatic indicator of the relative distance between the participants.**