pragmatics and discourse

conversation structure

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dialogue: predominant kind of talk in which two or more participants freely alternate in speaking (which generally occurs outside specific institutional settings like religious services, law courts, classrooms, etc.)

why study conversation structure?

- dialogue: prototypical language usage
- relevant to various pragmatic phenomena concerning language usage in dialogue
  implicatures: computed on basis of context (and conversational principles)
  speech acts: succeed or fail depending on conversational context
  presuppositions: constraints on the way information is presented to reflect participants' shared assumptions
  information structure: constraints on the way information is presented to reflect and affect context and participants' attentional states
- dialogue modelling for human-comupter interaction

conversation analysis (Sacks, Shegloff, late 60s–80s; Sacks, Schegloff, Jefferson (1974))

studies of converational interaction

aim: reveal organizational features of naturally occurring talk

understand and describe resources that speakers have and use to produce utteranaces and make sense of other speakers' utterances

- puts emphasis on interactional and inferential consequences of the choice of utterances, rather than syntactic rules
- empirical: analysis based on naturally occurring data rather than intuition
- inductive method: searches for recurring patterns across many records of naturally occurring conversations
- descriptive: avoid prior theoretical assumptions, premature theory construction

hypothesis: "Order at all points" (Sacks, 1984)
ordinary conversation is deeply ordered and can be described

conversation structure

- dialogue vs. monologue
- local conversation structure
    - turn-taking
    - adjacency pairs
    - preference organization
    - conversation sequences
- global conversation structure

dialogue vs. monologue

like in monologue, dialogue involves: cohesive devices, coherence/rhetorical relations, discourse markers, contextual references, recognising information status and intentions

unlike monologue, dialogue additionally involves:

- turn taking
  - dialogue structure manifested in dialog partys' contributions
  - participants (typically) obey turn-taking rules: who and $when$ talks next
- establishing common groung $\rightarrow$ grounding
  - participants (strive to) establish common ground
  - they signal $that$ and $what$ they hear, understand, and accept (or not)
  - repair misunderstandings
- identifying conversational implicatures
  - participants rely on interpreting utterances beyond literal meaning
  - they adhere to the **cooperative principle** and the **Gricean's maxims**

there is number of specific features to dialogue:

    joint collaborative activity
    communicative goals

    contextual interpretation (anaphora, ellipsis, world knowledge)
    mechanisms for correction and repair
    error recovery (handling mistakes and misunderstandings)

    turn-taking (some discipline in who speaks, when and how long)
    initiative (who's in "control")

    local structure (question-answer, greeting-greeting, etc.)
    global structure (opening, body, closing)

turn taking

dialog is made up of turns

speakers alternate: speaker A says something, then speaker B, then speaker A...

turn taking: *who* should talk and *when*

there appears to be some discipline to turn taking:

- – less than 5% of speech in overlap (simultaneous)
- – flexible management: works independently of number of participants, length of turns, order in which participants speak, etc.
- – cross-linguistic and cross-cultural similarities
- – formal settings (courtroom, classroom, etc.) deviate from pattern in conventionalized ways

    btw, children learn turn taking within the first 2 years of life (Stern74)

how do speakers know when its time to contribute a turn?

SSJ (1978): turn taking mechanism $\rightarrow$ *local management system*

turns consist of turn units

turn transitions occur at Transition Relevance Points (TRP) $\rightarrow$ end of a turn unit (predictable from signals, e.g., syntax, prosody, gesture, gaze, intonation).

at TRP **turn taking rules** apply

SSJ (1978): turn taking mechanism $\rightarrow$ *local management system*

turn taking rules: (C: current speaker, N: next speaker)

rule 1. at the first TRP of any turn
1. if C selects N in current turn, then C must stop speaking and N must speak
2. if C does not select, then any other party may self-select, first speaker gaining right to the next turn
3. if C does not select N and no other party self-selects, then C may continue

rule 2. at all subsequent TRPs
if rule 1.3 was applied by C at a TRP, then Rules 1.1-3 apply at the next TRP until speaker change is effected

SSJ (1978): turn taking mechanism $\rightarrow$ *local management system*

predictions:
- no strict limit on turn size (extensible nature of turn units and rule 1.3)
- no exclusion of parties
- number of parties in a conversation can vary
- only one speaker will generally be speaking at any time
- overlaps occur at competing starts (rule 1.2) or where TRPs mispredicted
- interruptions create overlaps, i.e., violate the rules
- pauses can be classified as:

> **gap** before application of rule 1.2 or 1.3;
> **lapse** on non-application of rule 1.1, 1.2 or 1.3;
> **significant silence** after application of rule 1.1

individual differences
> shy people pause longer and speak less and less often (Pilkonis, 77)
> mental disorders and depression affect turn taking skills

TRPs: identifying turn-yielding

> linguistic clues: terms of address, discourse markers
> pauses
> intonational phrase boundaries
> slowing speaking rate
> drawl at end of clause
> drop in pitch or loudness
> gestures
> attempt suppression signals (filled pauses, gestures)

some utterances specifically create turn-yielding a situation

in particular, those utterances that occur as paired action sequences

adjacency pairs

adjacent sequence of two utterances, produced by different speakers, ordered as First. . . Second, both of particular type

initiation : response pairs

    question : answer,

adjacent sequence of two utterances, produced by different speakers, ordered as First. . . Second, both of particular type

initiation : response pairs

question : answer, greeting : greeting, invitation/offer : acceptance, apology : minimization, complement : downplayer, accusation : denial, request : grant

adjacency pair rule (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973):

"given the recognizable production of a first pair part, on its first possible completion its speaker should stop and a next speaker should start and produce a second pair from the pair type the first was recognizable a member of"

adjacent sequence of two utterances, produced by different speakers, ordered as First. . . Second, both of particular type

insertions

(1) S1: Can I have a bottle of Mich? (Q1)
S2: Are you 21? (Insertion: Q2; reason: defer answer)
S1: No. (Insertion: A2)
S2: No. (A1).

strict adjacency requirement too strong

adjacent sequence of two utterances, produced by different speakers, ordered as First. . . Second, both of particular type

abandoned second

(2)	S1: May I have a vodka?	(Q1)
	S2: Are you 21?	(Q2)
	S1: No.	(A2)
	S2: Do you want apple juice instead?	(Q3)
	S1: Apple juice please.	(A3)

strict completion requirement too strong

adjacent sequence of two utterances, produced by **different speakers**, ordered as First. . . Second, both of particular type

self-completions

   (3)   S1: May I have a vodka?   (Q1)
           S1: Of course not, you only serve non-alco.   (A1)

completion not necessarily by different speaker

longer example...

(4)
S1:	I ordered some paint a week ago.	
S2:	Yes	
S1:	and i wanted to order some more	(R1)
S2:	how many tubes?	(Q1)
S1:	What's the price?	(Q2)
S2:	I'll work it out for you.	(Hold)
S1:	Thanks	(Accept)
S2:	3 pounds	(A2)
S1:	3 pounds?	(Q3)
S2:	Yes	(A3)
S1:	That's for the large tube?	(Q4)
S2:	Yes	(A4)
S1:	I'll ring back. I wasn't sure about the price you see	(account for no A1)
S2:	OK	

Q1/A1 far apart: (Q1(Q2(Q3(Q4-A4)A3)A3)A1), and neither R1 nor Q1 have the expected pair, BUT

reason why no Q1 is provided, acknowledged failure to produce A1 suffices to explain the lack of response to R1

adjacent sequence of two utterances, produced by different speakers, ordered as First. . . Second, both of particular type

$\rightarrow$ conventional pairing setting up *expectations* which need attending to

conditional relevance: given a First part of a pair, the Second part is immediately relevant and expected

- if a Second fails to occur it is noticeably absent;
  expectation must therefore be aborted by announced failure either to perform the requested action or to provide some preliminary action
- if other First occurs instead of expected Second, this First is interpreted as (relevant) preliminary to the Second

non-occurrence of a Second, does not result in an incoherent discourse, BUT Second may be explicitly elicited. . .

adjacent sequence of two utterances, produced by different speakers, ordered as First. . . Second, both of particular type

$\rightarrow$ conventional pairing setting up *expectations* which need attending to

conditional relevance: given a First part of a pair, the Second part is immediately relevant and expected

(5)   child: Have to cut these Mummy
         (1.3)
         child: Won't we Mummy.
         (1.5)
         child: Won't we.
         mother: Yes

(Hutchby and Woffitt 1998) repeatition of First: strategy to remedy completion failure; adult conversation: Firsts repeated up to about 3–5 times, not ad absolutum (not necessarily observed by children. . .)

adjacent sequence of two utterances, produced by different speakers, ordered as First... Second, **both of particular type**

(6)   A. How many tubes of paint should we buy?   (Question)

  a. B. Five.   (Answer)

  b. B. Well, we need to paint $20m^2$.

  c. B. I think we don't need any more.

  d. B. Wait, first let's do the cleaning, OK.

  e. B. How should I know?

  f. B. Ask Mark.

other Seconds acceptable

e.g.   responses to questions can be partial answers (6b), rejections of presuppositions (6c), denials of relevance (6d), statement of ignorance (6e), "re-routes" (6f).

preferred vs. dispreferred Second

preferred Seconds are unmarked, prototypical Seconds, e.g., (direct) answers to questions:

(7)   A: Could we meet tomorrow?
      B: Yes

dispreferred Seconds are the non-prototypical, marked ones, e.g., "indirect" answers, negative responses to requests, etc.

(8)   A: Could we meet tomorrow?
      B: Ah um. I doubt it.
      A: Uhm huh.
      B: The reason is I'm seeing Ann.

preferred vs. dispreferred Second

preferred (i.e. unmarked) Second turns have less material than dispreferred Second turns

dispreferred (i.e. marked) Second Turns are typically preceeded by delays, contain prefaces (hesitations, apologies, etc.) and/or are structurally more complex than preferred Seconds, and/or give an account why preferred Second not performed

dispreferred actions tend to be avoided

preferred vs. dispreferred Second

First	preferred Second	dispreferred Second
Request	acceptance	refusal
Offer/Invite	acceptance	refusal
Assessment	agreement	disagreement
Question	expected answer	unexpected or non-answer
Blame	denial	admission

exercise in interpreting silence. . .

interpreting silence

(9)   A: So I was wondering, would you be in your office on Monday?   (Q1)
      B: SILENCE
      A: Probably not.

silence here is interpreted as a **negative answer** to A's question:

- Q1 is a prelude to a request for an appointment
- for such questions as Q1
  - acceptance of request is preferred
  - refusal is dispreferred
- dispreferred Seconds tend to be marked by delays
- hence B interprets delay as marking a dispreferred answer to Q1, i.e., refusal

interpreting silence

(10)   (mom to child who just learnt to tell the time)
       m: What's the time?   (Q1)
       child: SILENCE
       m: (pointing at number) Now what number's that?
       c: Two.
       m: No it's not. What is it?
       c: It's a one and a two.

(11)   Telephone rings.
       B: Hello?
       A: Hi Charles.
       SILENCE
       A. This is Jon.

pre-sequences

P&D SS07 conversation structure

pre-sequence is a sequence which includes a turn recognizable as potential initiation of another specific type of turn, e.g.:

summon is a turn preceding an explanation for that summon

(12)   A: Mummy.   T1 (summon)

          B: Yes dear   T2

          A: I need a hat.   T3 (explanation for T1)

common types of pre-sequences:

pre-selfidentification (e.g., *Hi!*)
pre-invitation (e.g., *Are you free tonight?*)
pre-announcement (e.g., *You won't believe this.*)
pre-arrangement (e.g., *Would you like to make an appointment later on?*)
pre-request(e.g., *Do you have coffee to go?*)
pre-closing(e.g., *Okay*)

by prefiguring an upcoming action, pre-sequences invite *collaboration* in that action (as in pre-closings) or collaboration in avoiding explicit action (as in pre-selfidentifications)

pre-sequence result in following structures:

T1: an **initiation** ("question") checking whether some **precondition** obtains for the action to be performed in T3

T2: a **response** ("answer") indicating that/whether precondition obtains, often with question or request to proceed to T3

T3: the prefigured **action**, conditional on the 'go ahead' in T2. or:

T3′ if discouraged, intended action withheld (+ optional explanation of T1 in terms of what would have been done)

T4: a **follow-up response** to action in T3

distribution rule: one party A addresses T1 and T3 to another party B, and B addresses T2 and T4 to A.

(Note: tnstead of turn location, one should speak of **turn positions**, because other material (e.g. repair, hold) can be inserted between standard parts of pre-sequence)

(13)   A: **Do you have one 8 8?**   Q1 (Pos. 1)
       B: One 8 8?   Q2: Hearing check
       A: Yes.   A2: check OKed
       B: Can you hold on?   Q3: Hold
       A: Yes.   A3: Accept
       B: **Yes I've got one.**   A1 (Pos. 2)
       A: **Can you hold it for me?**   Q4 (Pos. 3)

position is a response to some prior but not necessarily adjacent turn.

if position rather than turn location used to define pre-sequence, we need to have a characterization of each position so that it can be recognized wherever in a sequence of turns it actually shows up

characterizing positions in *pre-announcements*

(14)   A: Did you hear the bad news?   (Position 1)
       B: No. What?   (Position 2)
       A: Dan died   (Position 3)
       B: Oh.   (Position 4)

general structure:

Position 1 (Precondition check): checks on newsworthiness of potential announcement in Position 3

Position 2 (Precondition validation): validates newsworthiness and requests to tell

Position 3 (Action): announcement delivered

Position 4 (Response): news receipt

characterizing positions in *pre-announcements*

(15)   A: Did you hear the bad news?   (Position 1)
         B: No. What?   (Position 2)
         A: Dan died   (Position 3)
         B: Oh.   (Position 4)

general properties:

Position 1: typically names or evaluates announcement to come; introduces a variable (wh-word) or indefinite (a good thing) or unspecific definite (the news) which will be instantiated in P3

Position 2: optionally contains a response to P1 taken as a question; mostly contains a question-like component which copy part of P1's material

Position 3: sometimes retains syntactic frame of pre-announcement in P1; alternatively, provides just the items filling the variable slot in P1

motivation for *pre-announcements*

to make a bid for permission to make extended turn (e.g. "want to know something?...")

to avoid telling Hearer something she already knows (P3 must provide NEW information → Grice's Quantity Maxim)

by pre-figuring a dispreferred action (e.g. telling of bad news), Speaker hopes to prompt Hearer's guess that will dispense her from performing the dispreferred action (ranking over alternative sequences)

Position 1 in *pre-requests*

(16)   A: Hi. Do you have size C batteries?   (Position 1, pre-request)
      B: Yes.   (Position 2, go-ahead)
      A: I'll have four   (Position 3, request)
      B: OK.   (Position 4, response)

P1 usually checks that conditions for successful **P3** obtains (i.e. check most likely grounds for rejection).

motivation for *pre-requests*

desire to avoid action (i.e. request) that would obtain a dispreferred response (rejection)

desire to avoid request altogether (i.e. to be granted what one wants without having to explicitly request it)

desire to avoid explicit offer (i.e. to be granted what one wants without other-party explicitly making the offer)

using *pre-requests*

avoid action (i.e. request) that could obtain a dispreferred Second (rejection) by checking most likely grounds for refusal; if grounds present, action can be aborted

(i) checking for ability/willingness:

(17)	A. Can you pass me the salt please?	(P1, pre-request)
	B. Sorry, my hands are sticky.	(P2, Reject)

(ii) checking for availability of goods:

(18)	A: Hi. Do you have size C batteries?	(P1, pre-request)
	B: No, I ran out.	(P2, Reject)
	A: OK. Thanks anyway	(P3, NON-request)
	B: OK.	(P4, acknowledge)

request with a dispreferred Second (rejection):

(19)	A: Hi. I'd like to have four size C batteries.	(P3, Request)
	B: No, sorry, I ran out.	(P4, Rejection)

using *pre-requests*

request can be avoided altogether (i.e. one can be offered what one wants without having to explicitly request it)

(20)   A: Hi. Do you have size C batteries?   (P1, pre-request)
       B: Yes. Would you like one of those?   (P2, Offer)

(21)   Hello. I was just ringing up to ask if you were going to Bert's party?(P1, pre-request)

       Yes. Would you like a lift?   (P2, Offer)

       Oh I'd love one.

pre-request prompts B to make A an offer of what A was going to request without A actually explicitly making this request; the offer explicit

using *pre-requests*

even the explicit offer can be avoided, i.e. one can be granted what one wants without the other party explicitly making the offer

(22)   A: Hi. Do you have size C batteries?   (P1, pre-request)
       B: Yes Sir (providing the batteries). (P4, Response to non-overt request)
(23)   A. Do you have coffee to go?   (P1, pre-request)
       B. Milk or sugar?   (P4, Response to non-overt request)

pre-request prompts B to give A what A was going to request and without B making an explicit offer

Note: in terms of conversational structure, indirect requests (indirect speech acts) are then P1 turns formulated so as to expect P4 turns in second turn

preference ranking for *pre-request*

(1) avoid an offer sequence, preference for a covert solution:
   P1: pre-request
   P4: response to non-overt request
(2) avoid request sequence by soliciting an offer:
   P1: pre-request
   P2: offer
   P3: acceptance of offer
(3) avoid request-rejection:
   P1: pre-request
   P2: go-ahead
   P3: request
   P4: response to request

pre-request in identification

recognition of identity through greetings preferred

(24)   A: Hello.   T1 (Identity display)

B: Hi. Susan?   T2 (Identity check)

A: Yes.   T3 (Identity confirmation)

B: This is Judith   T4 (Self identification)

A: Judith!   T5 (Identity recognition)

overt identifications dispreferred:

(25)   A: Hello. This is John.   T1 (Identity display)

B: Hello. This is Jack.   T2 (Identity display)

A: Hi Jack.   T3 (Identity recognition)

preferences for request-for-recognition ranks possible turns as follows:
⟨ Hi, Hello, Hello it's me, Hello it's me Penny, Hello it's Penny Rankin ⟩

re-analysis of indirect speech acts:

recall: Indirect Speech Act problem is that ISAs do not have the literal force allegedly associated by rules with their sentence types

    for example, a Y/N question, e.g., *Can you pass me the salt?* does not have a function of a Y/N question, but of a request

ISAs as pre-requests: conversation analysis explains such ISA as pre-requests avoiding the problems associated with the Literal Force Hypothesis (i.e., avoiding need to postulate direct vs. indirect speech acts and force)

summary

calculation of conveyed meaning in conversational analysis terms appeals to the local organization of conversation and to recurrent pre-sequences

recognizing a pre-sequence enables Hearer to collaborate in an action or in avoiding an action the Speaker intends

there is similarity here between conversational analysis approach and the speech act approach where the latter builds on felicity conditions, i.e., checking a felicity condition of a speech act implicates the corresponding speech act

pre-sequences capture standard ways of checking felicity conditions, for various kinds of actions (speech acts)

so, the insights obtained in both types of approaches can be combined. . .

global structure

P&D SS07 conversation structure

telephone conversations (Sachs and Schegloff '70s)

> belong to a general class of verbal interchanges in which social activity consists of talking

> structured as follows

> – **opening section**
>   (summons-answer, greeting-greeting, display for recognition/identification)
> – **substance section** (topical organization)
> – **closing section**
>   (organization ensuring coordinated exit, e.g., topic-less passing turns, terminal elements)

telephone conversations (Sachs and Schegloff '70s)

belong to a general class of verbal interchanges in which social activity consists of talking

C: Rings the telephone...

R: Hello?

C: Hi John this is Laurie.

R: Hi Laurie. How are you?

C: Oh I'm fine. Thanks. And you? ... I was wondering, would you like to go to the movies tonight?

... ...

C: OK then. We'll meet at 7:30 at the fountain.

R: OK. See you there. Bye.

C. Bye.

telephone conversations (Sachs and Schegloff '70s)

opening sections: typically constructed of adjacency pairs

1. Summon/Answer

(26) Telephone rings. (Summon)

      R: Hello? (Answer)

note: Summon/Answer pairs usually part of three-turn sequences, the third element giving the reason for the summon, e.g.

(27) Telephone rings. (Summon)

      R: Hello? (Answer)

      C: Hi John this is Laurie.
      The reason I call is ... (Reason for Summon)

(28) A: Mom? (Summon)

B: Yes darling?   (Answer)

A: I can't sleep.   (Reason for Summon)

the 3-turn structure establishes (i) an obligation for the summoner to produce a third turn (T3) and (ii) an obligation for the recipient to attend to T3

telephone conversations (Sachs and Schegloff '70s)

opening sections: typically constructed of adjacency pairs

2. Greeting/Greeting

(29)   C: Hi.
       R: Hi.

3. Identification/Recognition

(30)   Telephone rings.
       R: Hello.   (Display for recognition)
       C: Hi.   (Recognition acknowledgment; callers know each other)
(31)   Telephone rings.
       R: Dr. Jones   (Identification)
       C: Hello. This is John Smith.   (Accept+Identification; callers don't know each other)

note what difference it makes when C's identity is displayed on R's phone (i.e., no need for C identifying oneself, no need for R recognizing who calls)

telephone conversations (Sachs and Schegloff '70s)

opening sections: typically constructed of adjacency pairs

single turn may fulfill several functions:

(32) Telephone rings.   (Summon)
      R: Hello?   (Answer + Display1)
      C: Hi   (Greeting + Acknow1 + Display2)
      R: Oh Hi.   (Greeting + Acknow2)

minimal forms are often used to convey multiple and different functions

this is possible due to the **sequential location** and strong expectations about the overall organization of the conversation structure in a telephone call

telephone conversations (Sachs and Schegloff '70s)

substance section

opening section of a telephone call is usually followed in the **first topic slot** by an announcement of the reason to call

main body of the call is then structured by **topical constraints** in that new topics should be "fitted" to prior ones.

evidence:

– topic jumps are marked, i.e. signaled prosodically and lexically
– one might not manage to fit a topic unrelated to the main topic

telephone conversations (Sachs and Schegloff '70s)

substance section – topic change

attempt 1: topic can be characterized in terms of **reference**: A and B are talking about the same topic if they are talking about the same sets of referents or concepts

however. . .

telephone conversations (Sachs and Schegloff '70s)

substance section – topic change

attempt 1: topic can be characterized in terms of **reference**: A and B are talking about the same topic if they are talking about the same sets of referents or concepts

A: Any more hair on my chest and I'd be a fuzz boy.
B: 'd be a what?
A: A fuzz mop.
B: Then you'd have to start shaving.
A: Hey, I shaved this morning.   (Topic change)
   → **not sufficient**

A: If you're going to be a politician, you better learn how to smoke cigars.
B: Yes that's an idea.
A: And Jerry should buy himself a suit.   (No change)
   → **not necessary**

telephone conversations (Sachs and Schegloff '70s)

substance section – topic change

attempt 2: topics are constructed over turns by participants

open questions:

  how are new topics introduced and collaboratively ratified?

  how are they marked as "new", "closed" or "misplaced"? etc.

telephone conversations (Sachs and Schegloff '70s)

closing section

usually consists of:

- closing down of some topic
- one or more pairs of passing turns with pre-closing items (e.g. "OK")
- optionally typing of the call (e.g. "well I just wanted to hear you")
- final exchange of terminal elements (e.g. "Bye")

(33)   C: Okay then thanks very much George.

      R: All right. See you there.

      C: See you there.

      R: Okay.

      C: Okay. Bye.

      R: Bye.