Einführung in Pragmatik und Diskurs

Conversation Structure

Ivana Kruijff-Korbayová
korbay@coli.uni-sb.de
http://www.coli.uni-saarland.de/courses/pd/

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Conversation Structure

Lecture Plan:

- What is conversation?
- Local conversation structure:
  - Turn-taking
  - Adjacency pairs (First, Second)
  - Conversation sequences
- Preference organization
- Overall conversation organization

Basic reading:

Jurafsky and Martin 2000, Chapter 19;
Levinson 1983, Chapter 6;

What Is Conversation

= 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.

Motivations for studying conversation structure:

- prototypical kind of language usage
- matrix for language acquisition
- various aspects of pragmatic organization are centrally organized around language usage in conversation (e.g., implicatures, speech acts)
- dialogue modelling for human-comupter interaction

Features of Conversation (Natural Dialogue)

- Dialogue between humans shows a number of specific characteristics
  - collaboration (often, trying to achieve some goal together)
  - mixed initiative (who is "in control")
  - turn-taking (some discipline in who speaks, when and how long)
  - local structure (question-answer, greeting-greeting, etc.)
  - overall structure (opening, body, closing)
  - contextual interpretation (anaphora, ellipsis, world knowledge)
  - mechanisms for correction and repair
  - error recovery (handling mistakes and misunderstandings)

Conversational Analysis

(e.g., Sacks, Shegloff, Jefferson)

Conversational analysis tries to describe and explain how is coherence and sequential organization in conversation produced and understood.

- Emphasis on interactional and inferential consequences of the choice between alternative utterances – rather than on syntactic rules
- Inductive method: search for recurring patterns across many records of naturally occurring conversations
- Empirical: appeals to what is found in data rather than to intuition
- Descriptive in the first place: trying to avoid premature theory construction

Turn Taking

Turn Taking

Although talk is distributed among the participants, there appears to be some discipline in **who speaks, when and how long**.

- Transcript analysis shows that less than 5% of the speech stream is delivered in overlap (two speakers speaking simultaneously).
- The mechanism managing this turn taking is very flexible: it works independently of the number of participants, the length of each participants' turns, the respective order in which participants speak etc.
- Similarity of most informal, ordinary conversations, to some extent also across languages and cultures
- More formal settings (classrooms, courts etc) deviate in conventionalized ways

Local management system

Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1978) proposed a mechanism for governing turn taking, the **local management system**

- Turns consist of turn units
- Turn-taking occurs at a transition relevance place (TRP) = end of a turn unit (predictable from signals, e.g., syntax, prosody, gesture, gaze, intonation).
- Turn-taking rules (operate on the turn units)

Turn-Taking Rules

(C = current speaker, N = next speaker):

Rule 1. applies at the first TRP of any turn

1. If C selects N in current turn, e.g. by using an address term, then C must stop speaking and N must speak next. The transition occurs at the first TRP after N-selection
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. applies at all subsequent TRPs

When Rule 1.3 has been applied by C at a TRP, then Rules 1.1-3 apply at the next TRP until speaker change is effected.

Turn Taking Predictions

- There is no strict limit on turn size (because of the extensible nature of turn units and Rule 1.3)
- There is no exclusion of parties
- The number of parties in a conversation can vary
- Only one speaker will generally be speaking at any one time in conversation.
- Overlaps occur at competing first starts (Rule 1.2) or where TRPs have been mis-predicted.
- Interruptions create overlaps, i.e., violate the rules.
- Pauses are classified as:
  - **gap** before application of R. 1.2 or 1.3;
  - **lapse** on non-application of R. 1.1, 1.2 or 1.3;
  - **significant silence** after application of R. 1.1

Local Conversation Structure:

Adjacency Pairs

Adjacency Pairs

Initiation-Response = fundamental unit(s) of conversational organization –e.g., question-answer, greeting-greeting, offer-acceptance, apology-minimization, . . .

Schegloff and Sacks's (1973) AP characterization':

(i) adjacent sequence of two utterances
(ii) produced by different speakers
(iii) ordered as First:Second
(iv) typed, i.e., a First requires a particular (range of) Second(s)

Rule governing the use of APs:

> Having produced a first part of some AP, current speaker must stop talking and next speaker must produce a second part to the AP.

Ajacency Pairs: Problems

Strict adjacency is too strong a requirement:

Insertion sequences: First and Second can be far apart, due to material (other APs) inserted between Q and A.

(1) A: May I have a vodka? (Q1)
B: Are you 21? (Q2)
A: No. (A2)
B: Then not. (A1).

Abandoned APs: First might even not receive a Second!

(2) A: May I have a vodka? (Q1)
B: Are you 21? (Q2)
A: No. (A2)

B: Do you want apple juice or orange juice? (Q3)
A: Apple juice please. (A3)

Self-response: First and Second may be by the same speaker

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

A more complex example...

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

- Q1/A1 far apart: (Q1(Q2(Q3(Q4-A4)A3)A3)A1)
- Neither R1 nor A1 ever receives its Second
  - An explanation (account for not A1) is provided for not answering Q1.
  - The acknowledged failure to produce A1 suffices to explain the lack of response to R1.

Conditional Relevance

What binds First and Second is not a syntactic convention but the setting up of **expectations** which need attending to.

Conditional relevance: given a First part of a pair, the Second part is immediately relevant and **expectable**.

- If a Second fails to occur it is noticeably absent; The expectation must therefore be aborted by the announced failure either to perform the requested action or to provide some preliminary action
- If some other First occurs rather than the expected Second, this First is interpreted as some preliminary to the doing of the Second.

The non-occurrence of a Second, does not result in an incoherent discourse.

The problem with Typing

The typing requirement says that a particular First requires a particular Second:

(5) 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.

However, other Seconds are also acceptable: e.g. responses to questions can be partial answers (5b), rejections of presuppositions (5c), denials of relevance (5d), statement of ignorance (5e), "re-routes"(5f).

Preferred vs. Dispreferred Seconds

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

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

- Dispreferred Seconds are the non-prototypical, marked ones, e.g., "indirect" answers or negative responses to requests;

  (7) 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 Seconds

- **Preferred (i.e. unmarked) Second Turns** in different adjacency pairs have in common that they have less material than dispreferred Seconds.
- **Dispreferred (i.e. marked) Second Turns** in different adjacency pairs have in common delays and parallel kinds of complexity. Usually they are delayed, contain prefaces (hesitations, apologies, etc.) and/or 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 Seconds

Observed correlation of content and form in APs

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

An Application

We now illustrate by an example how the above principles may be applied to yield insight into the meaning of specific conversations.

Example We see how **silence** can be interpreted in different ways on the basis of its structural location in conversation.

Interpreting Silence

(8) A: So I was wondering, would you be in your office on Monday? (Q1)
B: SILENCE
A: Probably not.
B: Hmm yes.
A: You would?
B: Yes.
A: Could you give us 5 mn of your time?

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

How?

- In the given context, 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 are often marked by delays.
- Hence B interprets the delay as marking a dispreferred answer to Q1, i.e., refusal.

Interpreting Silence

(9) A: What's the time? (Q1)
B: SILENCE
A: Now what number's that?
B: Two.
A: No it's not. What is it?
B: It's a one and a two.

(10) Telephone rings.
B: Hello?
A: Hello Charles. (T2, greeting + request for recognition)
SILENCE
A. This is Jon.

Pre-Sequences

Pre-sequences

A **pre-sequence** is a sequence which includes a turn recognizable as potential initiations of another specific type of turn.

For example, a summon is a turn prefiguring an explanation for that summon.

(11) A: Mummy. T1 (summon)
B: Yes dear T2
A: I need a hat. T3 (explanation for T1)

Pre-sequences

Frequent types of pre-sequence:

- pre-selfidentification (e.g., *Hello.*)
- 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).

Characterizing Pre-sequences

A pre-sequence has the following properties:

(a) 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, then withholding intended action, perhaps an explanation of T1 in terms of what would have been done)
T4: **follow-up response** to action in T3

(b) Distribution rule: one party A addresses T1 and T3 to another party B, and B addresses T2 and T4 to A.

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

Characterizing Pre-sequences

(12)	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)

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

But if turn position rather than turn location is used to defined pre-sequence, we need to have an 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

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

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

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

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, P3 sometimes provides just the items filling the variable slot in P1

Motivations for Pre-announcements

- To make a bid for permission to make extended turn (e.g. "want to know something daddy?)
- To avoid telling H 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), S hopes to prompt a guess by H that will dispense her from doing this dispreferred action (ranking over alternative sequences)

Characterizing Position 1 in Pre-requests

(15) 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).

- 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

An action (i.e. request) that could obtain a dispreferred second (rejection) can be avoided by checking the most likely grounds for refusal. If the grounds are present, action can be aborted.

(i) checking for ability/willingness:

(16) 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:

(17) 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)

A request with a dispreferred second (rejection):

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

Using Pre-requests

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

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

(20) Hullo. 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.

The 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 is 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.

(21) A: Hi. Do you have size C batteries? (P1, pre-request)
B: Yes Sir (provides). (P4, Response to non-overt request)

(22) A. Do you have coffee to go? (P1, pre-request)
B. Milk or sugar? (P4, Response to non-overt request)

The 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-requests

(1) Avoidance of an offer sequence, preference for a covert solution:
P1: pre-request
P4: response to non-overt request

(2) Avoidance of request sequence by soliciting an offer:
P1: pre-request
P2: offer
P3: acceptance of offer

(3) Avoidance of request-rejection:
P1: pre-request
P2: go-ahead
P3: request
P4: response to request

Pre-request Use in Identification

Recognition of identities is achieved through greetings is preferred:

(23) 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 are dispreferred:

(24) A: Hello. T1 (Identity display)
B: Hello T2 (Identity display)
A: Hi. T3 (Identity recognition)

The 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 ⟩

Pre-requests: a re-analysis of indirect speech acts

Recall. The ISA problem is that ISA do not have the literal force allegedly associated by rules with their sentence types.

For example, a Y/N question, e.g., *Can you reach that book?* does not function as a Y/N question but as a request (to hand in the book to the S).

We now see how conversation analysis straightforwardly explains such ISA (concentrate on requests), avoiding the problems associated with the "Literal Force Hypothesis", i.e., avoiding the postulation of direct vs. indirect speech act (force).

Pre-requests: Conclusion

The actual calculation of the conveyed meaning in conversational analysis terms appeals to the local organization of conversation and to recurrent kinds of pre-sequences. Recognizing a pre-sequence enables the hearer to collaborate in an action or in avoiding an action the speaker intends.

There is some similarity here between the 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 Organization

Telephone Calls

- Belong to a general class of verbal interchanges in which social activity consists of talking
- Consist of:
  - **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)

    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.

Opening sections

are largely constructed of adjacency pairs e.g.

1. Summon/Answer

(25) Telephone rings. (Summon)
R: Hello? (Answer)

Compare with:

(26) A: Mummy? (Summon)
B: Yes darling? (Answer)

Note: Summon/Answer pairs are 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)

This 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.

Opening sections

2. Greeting/Greeting

(29) C: Hi.
R: Hi.

etc.

3. Identification/Recognition

(30) Telephone rings.
R: Hello. (Display for recognition)
C: Hi. (Recognition acknowledgment)

(31) Telephone rings.
R: Dr. Jones (Identification)
C: Hello. This is John Smith. (Accept+Identification)

Note: Familiar C and R in (30), unfamiliar in (31).

Note also 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).

Opening sections

A single turn may fulfill several functions:

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

Very minimal forms are often used to convey multiple and different functions. This is made possible by **sequential location** and strong expectations about the overall organization of the conversation structure in a telephone call.

Substance section

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

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

Evidence for this is that:

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

What's a topic change?

It has been suggested that 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:

Not sufficient.

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 necessary.

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)

Morale: 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.

Closing section

Usually consists of:

- A closing down of some topic
- One or more pairs of passing turns with pre-closing items (e.g. "OK")
- Sometimes a typing of the call (e.g. "well I just wanted to hear you")
- A 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.