

Turn Taking in Conversation Analysis

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Abstract – The present article aims to cover some concepts related to conversation analysis and turn taking. What they are, what components they have, and what problems people may have if they ignore these two. Nowadays we live in the world of technology and communication, therefore we need to know how to communicate well with people around us and be able to convey what we mean. Conversation analysis and turn taking introduce and define some concepts, methods and strategies about how to be more understandable by others and also how to manage our talks in order to avoid insulting those around us.

Keywords: conversational analysis, turn taking, communication, social interaction

I. INTRODUCTION

It is agreed that conversation analysis (CA) aims to study and research about social interactions which might be both verbal and non-verbal in everyday life. First of all, CA focused on daily conversations but gradually its scope spread more to daily tasks and interactions in work places and organizations such as hospitals, courts, universities, TV and so on. The well-known sociologist Harvey Sacks and his colleagues, Schegloff and Jefferson, started working on CA in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Goffman, 1983). It seems nowadays CA can be applied in sociology, anthropology, linguistics and also psychology. Conversation analysis seems to be an important part of our everyday lives. Every day we hear people talk around us everywhere about different topics. Sometimes misunderstanding others could cause serious problems. Therefore, it is important to analyze what others tell us well in order to avoid misunderstanding and embarrassment.

II. REVIEW AND RESPONSE

A. How to collect data for CA

It seems collecting data for a conversation analysis research is somehow the same everywhere. Usually a researcher first is to choose where his favorite place is to collect data from. For example, an office, an organization, a hospital, a school or even their own home could be his target place. The data which must be collected is usually in the form of video or audio recorded conversations from the desired place and people which must be transcribed in

complete details. Then the researcher tries to analyze what they hear inductively through repeated patterns of interaction (Kaplan, 2014). Analyzing the collected data can be somehow challenging and not so easy because the data can be analyzed from different aspects e.g. in terms of the words, phrases, sentences, the tone of the speakers, the grammar they have used. So many other things can be taken into consideration to be analyzed.

B. Turn Taking

According to Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974), turn taking attracted attention after a large number of studies had been done on conversation analysis. Turn taking was an eminent component of conversation analysis and also participants of any conversation made use of various methods to declare it. The simplest way of turn taking is called adjacency pair which is applied in two party conversations. However, turn taking is more complicated in multiple party conversations. All of us have experienced situations in which we wanted to talk in a group but others have not allowed us to do so. Some participants in a conversation are polite enough to let others take part in a conversation too, although there are some people who unfortunately will not respect others enough to share their opinions in a group either because they are not aware that others have a right to speak as well or they just do not care about it. Turn taking is an interesting topic to be investigated and explained about. It has some components which are worth to be mentioned.

C. Turn Taking Mechanisms

According to CA, turn taking includes two main parts which are allocational mechanism, which is responsible for distributing a turn, and the lexical components that participants use to fill that turn. Allocational mechanism means any kind of signal we use either verbal or non-verbal to show our listener it is their turn to start speaking. It could be a sound, a cough, a word or even a look. Surely the lexical component refers to each person's point of view about how to start and continue speaking. Also there is another term known as *turn constructional component* out of which turns are created and also called *turn construction unit or TCUs* which could be in the form of lexical, clausal, phrasal and sentential clues (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974).

D. Sequence Organization

Schegloff (2007) has defined four important concepts in terms of turn taking which are as follows:

Adjacency pair. It means two people are needed in order to have an adjacency pair who can make a conversation. For instance, one of them asks a question and the other answers it. When it comes to conversation, it means at least two persons must be present to share ideas there. However, there are some people who talk to themselves when they are alone, such talking is not considered as pair talking.

Pre-sequence. Sometimes we answer the person who has asked us something in a way that we declare we are ready for whatever that person wants e.g. *Guess what! / What?, What are you doing? / Nothing!* Imagine a kid who is waiting for their parents to take them somewhere to have fun. This kid is ready to accept or cancel anything to be able to go have fun. The example above is a good example of such a situation and even adults sometimes are so happy about some event they have ahead which makes them so happy and energetic that they answer other people's question this way in order to hear good news faster.

Preference organization. This means we prefer some kind of reaction or response to some other kind e.g. when a person invites us to a party if our answer is yes, we respond immediately because we like it but if our answer is no, we do not know how to respond or we do not like to say anything because we think we may upset that person. (Pomerantz, 1984 & Davidson, 1984). Even pre-sequences can be considered as a part of the preference organization. (Schegloff, 2007).

Repair. Repair means how speakers or participants of a conversation correct their mistakes or misunderstandings in a conversation. It could be done by the self and by others. It has nearly happened to everyone. Suppose we are talking when suddenly you pronounce a word in a funny or embarrassing way, or we say something and we do not mean to insult others but after a while we find out our audience are really insulted. We can correct our mistakes immediately or we can apologize to the person we have insulted after the conversation is ended. It just depends on the speaker how to compensate for their mistakes.

E. Turn Taking and Gender

As Hirsch (1989) believes, usually men tend to take the floor while speaking and do not let women speak much. Although women do not stay quiet and talk about what they want, the main speakers are male ones when both men and women are present. Zimmerman (1975) found out when in a conversation both parties are men, interruption and turn taking happen equally between both sides, but in opposite sex pairs, usually most of the interruption takes place by men. The mentioned ideas seem not to be absolute because men and women everywhere have their own characteristics and we cannot say surely all men are talkative and they do not let women talk in a party. Actually in most cultures these are women who are more talkative and it is surprising to hear men talk more.

F. Cultural Variation

Hiroko (2001) believes turn taking is greatly affected by culture. For instance, Japanese culture is group oriented and they pay much attention to social structure. They try to let their listeners react and respond too by being careful about turn taking, but Americans are not so and they like to rush and interrupt their listeners' speech. The mentioned idea seems logical because we learn respecting or insulting others by interruption first from our parents and then from the society we live in. When all people around us are polite, we learn respecting others; otherwise, we will not bother respecting our listeners and will behave in any way we feel good about.

G. Overlapping Talk While Turn Taking

Schegloff (2000) believes when more than two people are participating in a conversation, the possibility of overlapping talk or interruption is high. He has introduced four types of overlapping. The first one is called *Terminal overlaps* which means the hearer is about to finish his speech, so they start talking and overlapping happens. The second one is called *continuers* which means sometimes the hearer wants to confirm the speaker so he nods and may produce a sound in confirmation of the speaker. The third one is called the *conditional overlap* which means the speaker invites the hearer to say something or answer a question. Finally the last one is called *chordal* and means the speaker and the listener say something simultaneously for example they laugh together and overlapping happens.

H. Eye Contact and Turn Taking

Novick (1996) has emphasized on the effect of eye contact on turn taking. Sometimes speakers gaze at each other and they show their speech is finished or it is their turn to start speaking. There are two kinds of eye contact which are *mutual break* and *mutual hold*. *Mutual break* means there is a pause in the conversation, so the two speakers gaze at each other, stop talking, and again after some time they break the gaze and start talking again. *Mutual hold* means after the pause in the conversation, the two speakers gaze at each other and keep this gazing until one of the speakers starts speaking again.

I. Timing and Turn Taking

Cowley (1998) has mentioned timing as a good tool to determine if it is somebody's turn or not. Actually this is a very essential point to remember. If we are invited to a conference to talk, surely there are a lot of people there waiting to present their work. If one of the speakers in the conference does not pay attention to how much time he actually has, other lecturers would start complaining because the conference time is usually divided equally between the participants.

J. Contrast to other Theories

Sacks (1984) has mentioned a difference between competence and performance concept presented by Noam Chomsky and conversation analysis. CA has studied naturally occurring talk and shows that spoken interaction is systematic in all its aspects and it is not something limited or unchangeable that we are just born with it. Indeed being able to manage our conversations with others is a skill which can be improved through time and has no limitation.

III. CONCLUSION

Language learning, speaking, listening, making relationship with others, trying to make them happy or surprised, sympathy, empathy, trying to compensate our mistakes with others all and all are related to a concept known as conversation analysis. If as a human we can manage what we say, how long it takes, or how it affects others, we have been able to live and make relationship with others successfully; therefore, it's worth paying more attention to conversation analysis. CA may seem some easy concept to deal with while deeper analysis reveals its different aspects which need to be taken care of and whose misunderstanding may cause serious problems in our daily lives. Concepts like turn taking mechanism, sequence organization, repair, the relation between turn taking, timing and gender, overlapping talk and so on indicate that CA is not as simple as it may look.

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