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English Department

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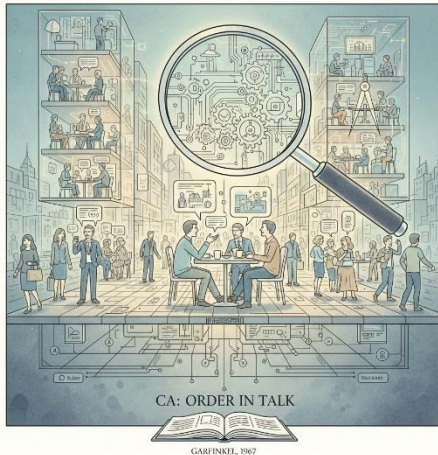


Applied Linguistics
Conversation Analysis (Part Two)

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2.2 Methodological issues in CA



Conversation Analysis (CA) holds **the basic belief** that society is constituted primarily through conversation and talk-in-interaction, with language as a crucial element.

- **Purpose and Method:** The purpose of CA is to search for order in talk, viewing it as one of the "rule governed activities of everyday life" (Garfinkel, 1967). CA adopts a highly empirical approach to examine the fine detail of talk and the underlying structures members use to constitute their social world, as they accomplish their lives through talk-in-interaction.

- **The Principle of "Unmotivated Looking"**

The principle of "unmotivated looking" (Psathas, 1990) requires analysts to avoid intuitive interpretations based on native speaker competence. The goal is to uncover how participants themselves understand their actions by examining data with minimal assumptions and not dismissing anything as accidental, disorderly, or trivial. Ethnographic information, recollections of events, and macro-social assumptions (e.g., about "doctors" or "women") are treated as secondary unless the participants demonstrably make them relevant in the talk. The aim is to minimize preconceptions, although achieving perfect "unmotivated looking" is difficult.

- **Analytical Procedure and Participant Roles**

The analytical method developed by Sacks involves studying a short piece of real interaction, considering its achieved effects, and asking how those effects were accomplished (what underlying methods and procedures are used). The goal is a partial account of a situated instance of an action, not a general one (e.g., an invitation). Analysis proceeds by examining each utterance within its sequential context, not by referring to external phenomena like gender or politeness. Roles, relationships, and participant characteristics are included in analysis only if they are made relevant in the data by the participants themselves. In institutional settings, for instance, roles are observed as they are oriented to rather than being assumed *a priori*. The methodology demands constant attention to demonstrable interactional evidence.

- **Data Collection and Transcription**

CA's general procedures involve analyzing talk based on evidence from conversational communities and discussing findings among analysts. CA data consists of audio or video recordings of naturally occurring events (e.g., conversations, meetings, trials). The events should occur as naturally as possible

despite being recorded. Analysis is conducted through repeated listening and transcription using systems like Gail Jefferson's, which serves as both a means and a tool for analysis, leading to close familiarity with the data.

- **Criticisms and the Concept of Context**

CA has been criticized for its intense micro-level or "molecular" focus and neglect of larger socioeconomic and historical contexts. A counter-argument is that any description is inherently incomplete, can be indefinitely extended, and cannot be handled by extrapolation (Sacks, 1963); CA's procedure is to start with a detailed, micro-level description of only what is hearable and seeable in the data, without the presumption of aiming for comprehensiveness.

- **Context and Talk in CA**

The CA notion of context refers to the context of actions in talk. Any utterance is **context-shaped** (by preceding activity and the environment) and **context-renewing** (it maintains, alters or adjusts any generally prevailing sense of context) (Drew & Heritage, 1992). An utterance's interpretation is based on what was just said (context-shaped), and it provides context for the next utterance (context-renewing). Ethnographic information is only relevant if it's displayed by participants.

Bateson's "**Blind Man with a Stick**" metaphor illustrates this approach to context: what is relevant for a blind man walking through the city with a stick could be indefinite but what really matters are *only* the features made perceptible or relevant by participants (or through the tapping of the stick). However, this metaphor is limited because in talk participants are not only in the event, but they are also creating the event. (Goodwin & Duranti, 1992).

Schegloff (1988) summarized the CA approach to context by focusing on sequential contexts—how prior talk shapes subsequent talk and how participants orient to this sequence. Temporality and sequentiality are central: utterances occur in turns, turns in sequences, and these sequences shape the projects being carried out. Thus, context is not a set of external variables but stands in a mutual reflexive relationship with talk—talk shapes context just as context shapes talk (Goodwin & Duranti, 1992).

3. Principal Findings in CA

In this section, there is a sketch of some important findings in the fields of turn-taking, sequence organization, repair, turn design, and prosody.

3.1 Turn-taking



The study of turn-taking in Conversation Analysis (CA), developed by **Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974)**, explains how people manage speaking turns in conversation so that talk remains organized and smooth.

Turn Constructional Unit (TCU): Each part of speech (a word, phrase, or sentence).

Transition Relevance Place (TRP): The point at the end of each TCU where another person can appropriately start talking.

Turn-taking Rules: Turn transitions occur at **TRPs** (Transition Relevance Places), where it becomes possible or appropriate for another speaker to take the floor.

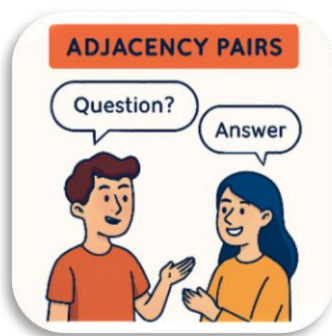
Rule 1 – At the first TRP of any turn:

- a) Selection by Current Speaker (C): If the Current speaker (C) selects the Next speaker (N), then C must stop and N must start.
- b) Self-selection: If C does not select anyone, any participant may self-select and gain the turn.
- c) Continuation by Current Speaker: If no one self-selects, C may continue speaking.

Rule 2 – At all subsequent TRPs:

- The same set of rules (1a–c) is applied repeatedly until speaker change happens. These rules provide a basic system that keeps talk orderly, though they mainly describe **casual, everyday conversations**.

3.2 Adjacency Pairs and Sequence Organization



Adjacency pairs are a key element of conversational organization, referring to **paired actions** produced by two different speakers, placed next to each other in sequence. The idea was formulated early in CA by **Schegloff and Sacks (1973)**.

Example of Paired Actions: A question is typically followed by an answer, a greeting by another greeting, and an offer by either acceptance or rejection.

When the first part of a pair is produced, the next speaker is expected to respond with a matching second part. The absence of an expected response is noticeable.

• *Types of Adjacency Pairs*

First pair parts: questions, offers, invitations, advice, requests, informings.

Second pair parts: answers, acceptances, rejections, agreements, disagreements.

• **Expansions:** Adjacency pairs can be expanded in three ways:

Pre-expansions: Occur *before* the first part to prepare for the main action (e.g., asking "What are you doing?" before an invitation to check availability).

Insertion sequences: Used *between* the first and second part to clarify misunderstandings or seek more information.

Post-expansions: Occur *after* the second part, to repair (clarify) a misunderstanding of it, to acknowledge it, to express a thanks for it, or to expand it.

• **Preference Organization is shown in how responses are done:**

Preferred responses (e.g., positive responses: agreements, acceptances) are straightforward, immediate, and brief.

Dispreferred responses (e.g., declines, disagreements) are delayed, preceded by markers like "well," or accompanied by an account for the rejection, or a thanks for the invitation.

Adjacency pairs and their expansions provide a structured framework for sequencing conversational actions and maintaining coherence.

3.3 Repair



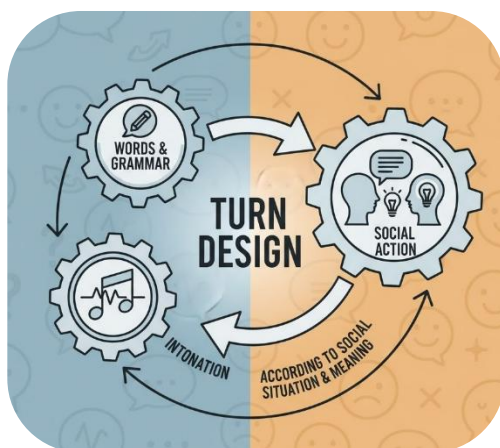
Repair refers to how speakers fix problems in hearing, speaking, or understanding during talk. Communication breakdowns are rare because people usually correct problems quickly.

Self-repair: Most repairs are done by the speaker themselves while they are still talking (e.g., "He go—he went to school").

Collaborative repair: Occurs when the listener notices a problem and asks for clarification (e.g., "Pardon?", "Who?").

Preference for Self-repair: The person who made the mistake usually corrects it, even if another speaker initiates the repair.

3.4 Turn Design



Turn design refers to how a speaker constructs their turn—the choices of words, grammar, and intonation used to perform a specific social action. Speakers design their speech according to the social situation and the meaning they want to express.

• **The Relationship between Form and Function:** The morphosyntax and lexis of an utterance and the action it is designed to achieve. The form of an utterance depends on the **function or purpose** it serves in conversation. Grammar and vocabulary are shaped flexibly by the immediate context.

• **Early and Later Studies**

Early CA (Sacks et al., 1974): Identified the **Turn Constructional Unit (TCU)** as the basic unit (word, phrase, or sentence).

Later Developments (Ford & Thompson, 1996): Found that speakers build sentences in real-time, adapting grammar to fit the flow of interaction. Syntax is a flexible tool.

- **What is a Turn Constructional Unit (TCU)?**

A turn is constructed on several layers: phonological, grammatical, and pragmatic (a unit of meaning or action).

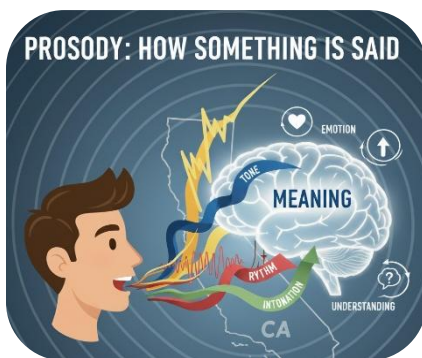
- **Findings by Ford & Thompson (1996)**

Speaker change happens most often when **three factors coincide**:

- Syntactic completion (grammar is finished).
- Intonational completion (pitch/tone falls to closure).
- Pragmatic completion (meaning or action is complete).

All three systems work together to predict speaker change.

3.5 Prosody



Prosody means the **tone, pitch, rhythm, and intonation** of speech—how something is said. In CA, prosody helps us understand how people use their voice to show meaning, emotion, or emphasis.

This area was developed by the field of **Interactional Linguistics** (e.g., Auer, Couper-Kuhlen, and Selting), which connected prosodic features with grammar and interaction in real conversations.

4. CA and Applied Linguistics

Conversation Analysis (CA) is relevant to Applied Linguistics as both fields share a concern for **how people use language-as-talk** to communicate and accomplish actions. This common ground was recognized early in university programs, leading to a generation of applied linguists with CA awareness.

In the 1990s, strong cross-over training in CA for applied linguists emerged at UCLA and has since spread to other countries. This resulted in a growing corpus of research in **"applied conversation analysis."**

Applied linguists are interested in CA for two main reasons:

- first, for its study of institutional talk.
- second, for its more recent, direct contributions to traditional areas like language teaching, testing, and second language acquisition.