

Turn

In any culturally situated communicative activity involving at least two people, participants rely on recurring communicative practices through which they contingently bring about speaker change at appropriately non-random points in everyday, institutional, face-to-face, co-present, and electronically mediated conversational settings. Analysis of such practices indicates that turns at talk are emergent units dynamically designed in real time to be recognizable as now just beginning, now still in progress, and now ending.

There is no universal definition of "turn" for all types of culturally situated communication because different activities are organized by different turn-taking systems. For example, a turn in one form of institutional two-way radio is not considered complete (and thus not implicating an appropriate change in speakership) until the current speaker says "Over." In oratory, a participant may have an extended turn lasting many minutes and comprising many utterances, until some culturally familiar discourse genre is recognizably created. In broadcast news interviews, journalists may preface a question with one or more background assertions, and interviewees will typically refrain from responding until a hearable question has been articulated. In turn, journalists may negatively sanction interviewees for responding to a preparatory assertion instead of waiting for the question. Even in everyday casual conversation, in which speaker change tends to occur frequently, one participant may get an extended turn, comprising many utterances, to tell a funny story or explain something in detail, because recipients, having recognized the speaker's bid to maintain the floor past the next possible turn unit completion point, are willing to refrain from taking a next turn until the story or explanation has hearably come to an end. Recipients may then collaborate in the achievement of the speaker's multi-unit extended turn by producing only minimal verbal and non-verbal recipient responses, such as "unh-hunh," "you're kidding!," and nodding the head.

Scholars who study turn-taking in everyday conversation have provided rich descriptions of many of the practices through which participants design and recognize the most basic unit of a turn: the Turn Constructional Unit (TCU). These scholars' interactional perspective on turn-taking is that speakers' multiple and simultaneous practices for designing turns at talk provide the resources which allow potential next speakers to monitor an emergent TCU so as to locate possibly appropriate (and even inappropriate) points to begin a next turn.

One such resource is the linguistic design of a TCU. The emergent grammatical shape of a TCU in progress makes it possible for a potential next speaker to estimate the first possible point of TCU completion and thus to be ready to start the next turn at talk as soon as that first possible speaker Transition Relevance Place (TRP) is arrived at. Based on English-language corpora, the earliest conversation analytic descriptions of turn-taking identified four grammatical types of TCU:

- (1) lexical (a single word)
((phone rings))
→ A: Hello?
- (2) phrasal (two or more words in a non-clausal arrangement)
A: The green line indicates the transition.
→ B: The true phase transition.
- (3) clausal (a dependent clause)
A: Is there anything you don't eat?
→ B: That you're bringing?
- (4) sentential (an independent clause)
→ A: Do you need cigarettes?
B: YES.

Researchers have also shown that grammatically "complex" TCUs (e.g., if-then structures, well-known aphorisms) are more vulnerable to speaker change before a next possible completion point is reached. This means that some instances of speaker change do not coincide with the start of a wholly new turn but instead achieve the collaborative completion of one TCU by more than one speaker, as in the following example (a co-constructed sentential TCU):

- A: Okay, so are you coming up to, ummmm . . .
→ B: Vermont.

The dynamically emergent intonational and paralinguistic contours of a TCU in progress also permit a potential next speaker to predict the next possible completion point. Intonation patterns (rising, falling, etc.), syllable and word stress, and placement of pitch peaks in a tone unit all combine to give a projectable musical shape to a TCU. Current speakers can even manipulate the intonational and paralinguistic design of a TCU in progress so as to

discourage speaker change at the first possible point of grammatical completion. Potential next speakers also monitor the emergent grammatical and intonational shape of a TCU in progress to determine where not to start a new turn and where to co-construct a single TCU in progress before it reaches possible completion.

Non-vocal comportment of participants in face-to-face and co-present communication also contributes to the design and recognition of a possibly complete TCU. The dynamic trajectory of a speaker's hand gestures, gaze direction, facial expressions, body positioning, and breath capacity can be routinely monitored by potential next speakers looking for an appropriate (or inappropriate) turn transition relevance place. While their own TCU is in progress, current speakers may also inspect a recipient's non-vocal comportment for signs that she or he is gearing up to take the next turn. Shifts in a recipient's body positioning or a visible taking in of breath may instantaneously influence how a current speaker designs the rest of the TCU in progress, i.e., whether to allow for or discourage imminent speaker change.

The design and positioning of utterances in an ongoing sequence of utterances also contributes to whether a TCU in progress is likely to be vulnerable to speaker transition at the first possible completion point. For example, if a speaker begins a turn saying, "I want to make two points," a recipient may refrain from responding until two hearable points have been made, regardless of how many TCUs it takes for the speaker to make them. Thus the extent to which a TCU in progress can be heard as approaching a point of possible ideational, actional, or pragmatic completion is a further aspect of emergent talk that participants orient to, as speakers and as recipients. In short, if a TCU in progress can be heard as coherently linking to prior talk and accomplishing something in its own right such that a next action is made sequentially relevant, it can be heard as a possibly complete turn at talk and an opportunity for speaker change.

(See also *acquisition, competence, control, gesture, grammar, narrative, participation, poetry, socialization, theater, vision*)

Bibliography

Ford, Cecilia E., Barbara A. Fox, and Sandra A. Thompson

1996 Practices in the Construction of Turns: The "TCU" Revisited. *Pragmatics*, 6(3):427-454.

Ford, Cecilia E., and Sandra A. Thompson

1996 Interactional Units in Conversation: Syntactic, Intonational, and Pragmatic Resources for the Management of Turns. In *Interaction and Grammar*. Elinor Ochs, Emanuel A. Schegloff, and Sandra A. Thompson, eds. Pp. 134-184. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jefferson, Gail

1984 Notes on Some Orderliness of Overlap Onset. In *Discourse Analysis and Natural Rhetorics*. V. D'Urso and P. Leonardi, eds. Pp. 11-38. Padua, Italy: CLEUP Editore.

Kelly, John, and John Local

1986 Projection and "Silences": Notes on Phonetic and Conversational Structure. *Human Studies* 9:185-204.

Lerner, Gene

- 1996 On the "Semi-permeable" Character of Grammatical Units in Conversation: Conditional Entry into the Turn Space of Another Participant. *In* *Interaction and Grammar*. Elinor Ochs, Emanuel A. Schegloff, and Sandra A. Thompson eds. Pp. 238–276. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ochs, Elinor, Bambi Schieffelin, and Martha Platt

- 1979 Propositions across Utterances and Speakers. *In* *Developmental Pragmatics*. Elinor Ochs and Bambi Schieffelin eds. Pp. 251–268. New York: Academic Press.

Sacks, Harvey, Emanuel A. Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson

- 1974 A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn-taking for Conversation. *Language* 50:696–735.

Schegloff, Emanuel A.

- 1982 Discourse as an Interactional Achievement: Some Uses of "Uh Huh" and Other Things That Come between Sentences. *In* *Georgetown University Roundtable on Languages and Linguistics*. Deborah Tannen, ed. Pp. 71–93. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

- 1996 Turn Organization: One Intersection of Grammar and Interaction. *In* *Interaction and Grammar*. Elinor Ochs, Emanuel A. Schegloff, and Sandra A. Thompson eds. Pp. 52–133. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Streeck, Jürgen, and Ulrike Hartge

- 1992 Previews: Gestures at the Transition Place. *In* *The Contextualization of Language*. Peter Auer and A. di Luzo, eds. Pp. 135–157. Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Department of Communication
University of New Hampshire
Horton Social Science Center
20 College Road
Durham, NH 03824-3586
swj@hopper.unh.edu