

Introduction to Discourse Analysis – Assignment 2

Task 5

1 Introduction

2 Theoretical background

Within Conversation analysis as focused on *actions* in talk, not just on speaking itself, Sequential organisation explores how actions (requesting, inviting, telling...) are ordered when they surface in interaction (conversation); how an action influences successive actions so that orderly sequences of talk are created.

The concept of *conditional relevance* ([Schegloff, 1968](#)) describes how one action makes certain next action(s) relevant (suitable, or even or required if the talk is to proceed orderly), e.g. a question inviting an answer. Thus, long action sequences consist of basic action pairs – *adjacency pairs*; defined by [Sidnell \(2010, p. 64\)](#) as:

1. Adjacent
2. Produced by different speakers
3. Ordered as a first pair part (FPP) and a second pair part (SPP)
4. Typed, so that a particular FPP provides for the relevance of [occasions] a particular SPP (or some delimited range of SPPs)

The type of a pair can be e.g. greeting-greeting or question-answer, an example adjacency pair of the latter type being:

(E1) from [Liddicoat \(2007, p. 107\)](#)

John: What time' s it?
Betty: Three uh clock.

Notice too how John stops speaking to give Betty space to produce a SPP (or else there would be no interaction!) and how Betty produces a relevant SPP – if she stayed silent,

John could repeat his question (a FPP requiring a SPP) or interpret Betty's silence as a response. By producing a matching SPP, Betty also shows understanding of the preceding FPP and the conversation continues smoothly.

Importantly, an FPP can occasion multiple SPPs (including non-verbal actions, e.g. Betty showing John her wristwatch), but they are often unequally valued – “some responses are problematic for social relationships, while others are not” (Liddicoat, 2007, p. 111). Usual/unsurprising reactions are termed *preferred* (e.g. Betty's particular answer in (E1)); the less socially appropriate/normal are *dispreferred* (e.g. if Betty answered “I don't know”). Aware of social norms, participants typically treat the two types differently in speaking: preferred reactions (e.g. accepting an invitation) surface as short and immediate:

(E2) from Casson et al. (1981, p. 58)

B: Why don't you come up and see me some[times]

A: [I would like to

while dispreferreds surface in ways that mitigate their potential negative social impact:

(E3) adapted from Liddicoat (2007, p. 110)

Harry: I don' have much tuh do on We:nsday.

(.)

w' d yuh like tuh get together then.

(0.3)

Joy: huh we::llhh I don' really know if yuh see

i' s a bit hectic fuh me We:nsday yih know

Joy's rejection is not overt at all, comes with 0.3s delay, a hesitant “we::ll”, hedges (“I don' really know” and “a **bit** hectic”), and explanations (accounts) rather than a clear refusal itself. These common signs – *dispreference markers* – contrast with the shortness, overtness and lack of account (*preference markers*) in (E2).

Importantly, FPPs can be dispreferred too (e.g. requests) and are then “held back as later topics” and “accompanied by accounts and mitigations, which occur before the request itself” (Liddicoat, 2007, p. 122):

(E4) from Liddicoat (2007, p. 122)

Jim: well my car has broken down an they don' know

if it will be fixed by then an' I w' z wondering

if I c' d borrow your car.

Following Jim's previous (preparatory) explanations of his pitiful situation, first 2 lines provides a lengthy account, before making the actual request in an indirect way using “was

wondering” and “could”.

pairs can be expanded to create longer sequences: pre-, post- and inserts. w.r.t. preference, a dispreferred tends FPP e.g. the main request sequence tends to be preceded by a pre-sequence which checks if preconditions are met (e.g. if the person needs their car atm), and which may make the request more relevant (and less dispreferred) by perhaps explaining the reasons for it.

3 Analysis

At a high level, the data (shown in [Fig. 1](#)) is a short call, whereby Donny calls Marcia and starts describing how his car broke down in Glen while he needs to be in Brentwood – supposedly fairly soon, and he supposedly needs a new car to get there. Marcia interrupts him and explains how she would love to help, but she needs to leave for some duties very soon (supposedly using her car). Then, Donny closes the talk very quickly, planning to call someone else (supposedly to borrow a car from them).

I will now chronologically step through and describe the excerpt’s sequential organisation, particularly with respect to Marcia’s account (L21-23). (All adjacency pairs I also marked directly in [Fig. 1](#).)

L1-2 summon-answer pair, notice non-verbal action L1 L2 as FPP inquires who the caller is, upon which Donny identifies himself (L3+5). Marcia’s interruption (L4) is not clear, but could signal that she recognised Donny already from L3, or that she confirms her identity after Donny addressed her by name in L3. Either way, Donny was not finished and ends his FPP in L5. L3+5 with L6 is a classical greeting-greeting pair which ends the opening section of the call. Note that this is a short form; a common, longer one would also add “how are you?” to the greetings, potentially lengthening the call opening with further chit-chat.

L7-8 is a pre-sequence, a typical pre-telling pair: Donny signals he has something to tell and Marcia gives him a “go-ahead” signal. Then, the telling itself runs from L9-L20 (which will later turn out to be a long pre-sequence). Donny’s FPP (L9) announces unfortunate news, making perhaps a sympathetic SPP relevant, but silence follows (L10), attributable to Marcia’s lack of relevant reaction. Thus Donny makes a post-expansion (L11) by introducing further bad news, making a sympathetic reaction from Marcia even more relevant (if not required!). To L11 as a FPP, Marcia finally responds (L12-13), but her “Oh::” likely merely signals her receipt of the new information from Donny¹, but she goes silent (L13) instead of taking a stance or assessing Donny’s situation. Donny accepts this and definitely

¹see detailed analysis of the role of “oh” ([Heritage, 1984](#))

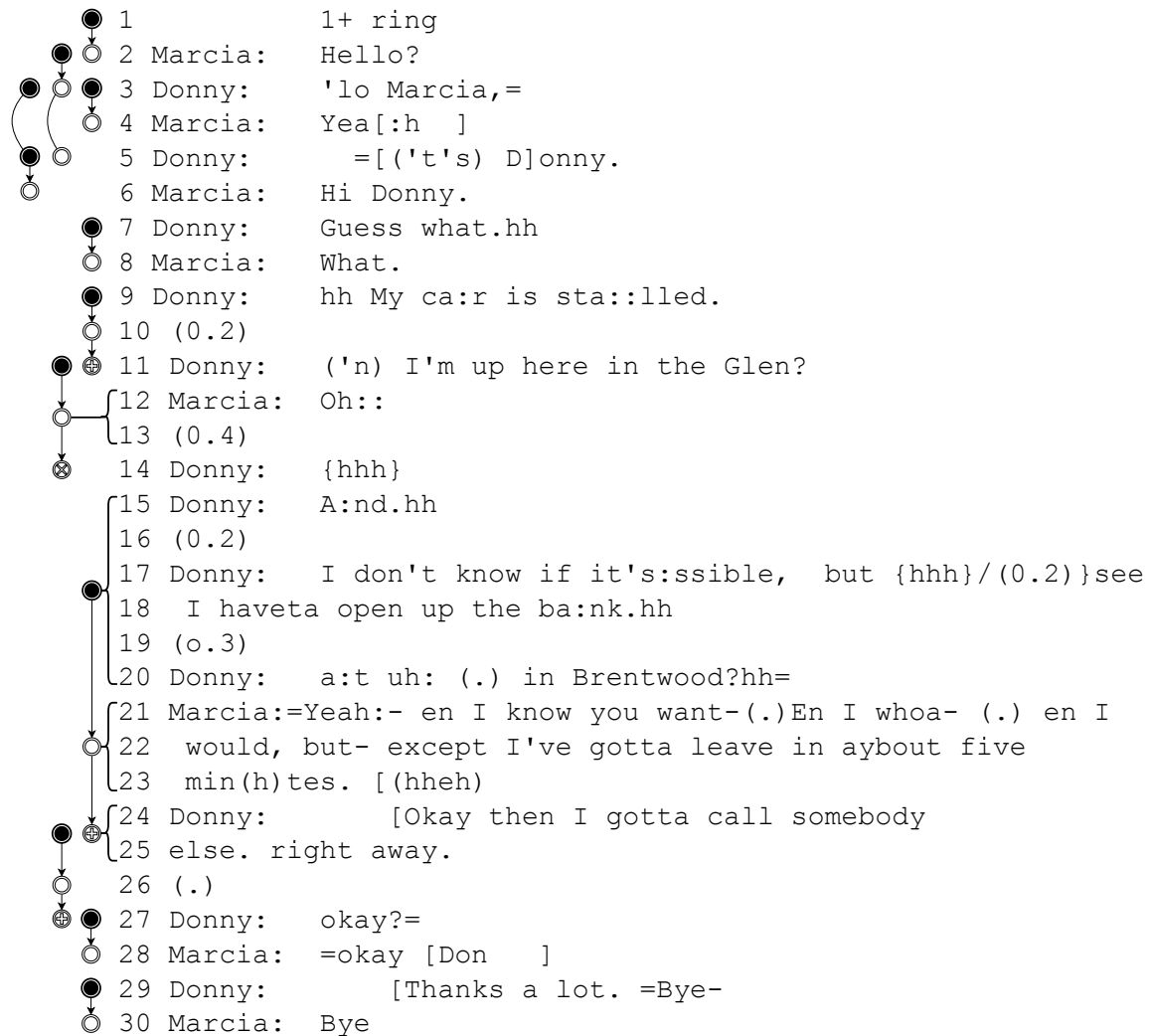


Figure 1: The data with sequence organisation graphically added by me on the left. Black circles mark FPPs, blank circles SPPs; \otimes marks minimal post-expansion and \oplus non-minimal post-expansion. Where connected by lines without arrowheads (lines 3, 5), and similarly where curly braces are used (e.g. lines 21–23), it means that multiple lines of the transcription form one pair part.

closes the sequence by adding a minimal post-expansion (L14) – merely an outbreath – so that he can move on to his point.

Across L15–20, Donny starts the main sequence (for which his telling in L7–14 was a pre-

sequence), and puts forward his request as one very long FPP. The dispreferredness is realised using multiple common markers: hesitations (L15, then breathing in L17, and tokens “a:t u:h” in L20), pauses (L16, 17, 19, 20), only slowly moving to the point itself, placing it after a hedge (“I don’t know if it’s:ssible”) and a warrant (“see I haveta open up the ba:nk”). Without directly asking Marcia for her car, the request comes across very clearly and Marcia reacts, producing the SPP in L21-23.

Marcia’s reaction is also dispreferred and heavily marked: containing short pauses and hesitations where she stops (see the **word-** pattern) to repairs her talk. Starting with a sympathetic “Yeah:”, acknowledging Donny’s pitiful situation, she then confirms she understands the request (“en I know you want-”) and shows her willingness to help (“en I would”), before finally providing an account for her inability to help right now (“I’ve gotta leave in aybout five min(h)tes”).

Without ever directly refusing the request, Marcia’s SPP is understood by Danny; he post-expands the sequence (L24-25), acknowledges the refusal (“Okay then”) and lessens its dispreferredness by outlining his contingency plans (to call someone else). The action also becomes a FPP which, being a summary of his situation, starts a typical *sequence-closing sequence*. Such sequence, as discussed by Liddicoat (2007, p. 168), consists of 1) a summary/assessment proposing to close, 2) a go-ahead signal for closing, 3) the final turn, closing the sequence. However, Marcia doesn’t co-operate – stays silent (L26), which makes Donny post-expand (L27), repeating his suggestion to close more explicitly (“okay?”). To his post-expansion as a new FPP, Marcia responds quickly with the preferred SPP (L28), agreeing to close the sequence, after which Donny readily ends the conversation with a typical closing pair (L29-30).

Looking back at the sequences in Fig. 1, besides the very short opening and closing ones, the conversation consists of: a pre-telling (a pre-pre-sequence, L7-8), a pre-request pre-sequence (L9-14), and the main request sequence with a dispreferred SPP and a lengthy closing (L15-28).

4 Conclusions

References

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Appendix – the raw data

Marcia and Donny, stalled

1 1+ ring
2 Marcia: Hello?
3 Donny: 'lo Marcia,=
4 Marcia: Yea[:h]
5 Donny: =[('t's) D]onny.
6 Marcia: Hi Donny.
7 Donny: Guess what.hh
8 Marcia: What.
9 Donny: hh My ca:r is sta::lled.
10 (0.2)
11 Donny: ('n) I'm up here in the Glen?
12 Marcia: Oh::
13 (0.4)
14 Donny: {hhh}
15 Donny: A:nd.hh
16 (0.2)
17 Donny: I don't know if it's:ssible, but {hhh}/(0.2)}see
18 I haveta open up the ba:nk.hh
19 (o.3)
20 Donny: a:t uh: (.) in Brentwood?hh=
21 Marcia:=Yeah:- en I know you want-(.)En I whoa- (.) en I
22 would, but- except I've gotta leave in aybout five
23 min(h)tes. [(hheh)
24 Donny: [Okay then I gotta call somebody
25 else. right away.
26 (.)
27 Donny: okay?=
28 Marcia: =okay [Don]
29 Donny: [Thanks a lot. =Bye-
30 Marcia: Bye