THE PLACE OF ADJACENCY PAIRS IN CONVERSATION

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ABSTRACT

Conversations particularly the structure in which they are held are as important as the contents of the conversations themselves. This paper is therefore a general introduction to conversations, how they are usually started and the concept of the adjacency pairs.

The paper specifically consider the structure of question-answer, summons-answer, and offer-acceptance/rejection pair types and notes that generally, the first pair part serves as a stimulus to the response of the second pair part.

1.0. INTRODUCTION

People interact socially. The mode of such interactions varies considerably from one social circumstance to another. As the main concern of this paper is conversational interaction, the paper is therefore more interested in ascertaining how this interaction takes place.

As conversation can and do take a wide range of activities, the scope of this paper will therefore be limited to what one might be tempted to describe as the minimal unit of conversations analysis, which is adjacency pairs, which allows, even in the oddest of circumstances for verbal exchange to occur.

However, to achieve this, the paper will first of all be devoted to a general survey of conversations and how they are organised, i.e. how turns are distributed in them. It will then consider the adjacency pairs, their features, types and general uses in day-to-day conversations.

Conversations are not realised just by the mere production of words and sentences by interlocutors. The speech encounters whose goals are primarily internal, i.e. those that are not primarily seen to make reference to 'anything' in particular are referred to as chats. But where the focus of attention is directed inwards, towards, the participants and the creation of the shared world which that piece of discourse creates and promotes, then conversation is said to have ensued (Cheepen and Monaghan, 1990). Conversation is thus a speech encounter characterised by a number of features such as overall interactional goal, topic shift without the contexts of a predetermined topic schedule, and equality of participant status.

Conversations are begun in a variety of ways depending upon the situation of the interactants and the relative familiarity between them. One of the ways a conversation is begun, as Heritage (1982 p. 7) suggested, is through an assessment of what someone has done, e.g.,

"Oh, how nice your drawing is".

Even though one cannot guarantee or even be definitive about how the one being assessed will react to such a remark as he may accept it silently by a mere smile, he may say 'Oh, thank you,' etc. But the issue here is that a conversation has begun.

A conversation can also be started with an invitation like:

'I hope you will come to my party'

or it could begin in the form of a proposal like

"I want you to marry me".

Offers are equally capable of starting a conversation e.g. "I offer you =N= 2,000 for the job".

Infact conversations need not start verbally. A tap on one's shoulder could invite response like "Oh you frighten me", from the person touched. A kick on one's leg or even an unpleasant slap on one's cheek could elicit a response from those affected.

The general idea behind attempts at initiating conversations is to get the intended interlocutor to react either verbally or non-verbally. A conversation so initiated is intended to elicit a particular behaviour: doing what has been initiated by the pairs concerned. However, the person prompted has a choice of how to react: he may do the preferred action "directly with little or no delay" or the dispreffered action which "is commonly accomplished in mitigated or indirect form" (Heritage 1982 p.8)

2..2.   TURN-TAKING IN CONVERSATIONS

However, when people eventually get to talk to each other in a conversation. "they normally do not all speak at once" (Scollon & Scollon 1083 p. 15). What they do is to take turns.

And if someone, incidentally. passes by a group of people and observes that everybody is talking at the same time, one assumption that readily comes into mind is

that there is something wrong with the group. I think, a better assumption is to take it that "more than one conversation is going on" (Scheglogg 1968 p. 1076)

In most cases, in a two-party conversation, their sequencing is alternating whereby one party talks at a time, as in

(1)   Mohammed: I - I'm not going to - to stay here, er em to have you insult me.

     Musa: Wait a minute, wait a minute. Who's trying to insult you anyway.?

Though this may not always be the case as either speaker may decide to interrupt or talk simultaneously with the other to indicate "unwillingness to go with the presumed social agreement" (Scollon and Scollon 1983 p. 160) or it may just be that one of the speakers has waited his 'normal' length of time, a pause slightly longer than the other and just as he was about to take his turn the other has begun speaking and he finds himself coming simultaneously with him. Or it may just show the extent of trust between the two pairicipants as friends.

It has also been observed that in a single two-party conversation "speaker change recus" (Schegloof and Sacks 1974 p. 237). This is to say that speakers get a chance to speak again after a preceding turn. A problem with this feature is that it will present problems for the pairicipants. Coulthard (1977 p.60). asks:

     "How can they achieve change of speaker while maintaining a situation in which at least,   but not more than, one speaker speaks at a time ? "

Though it is observed that listeners can tell when it is to take and manage their entrance as speakers without difficulty, this entrance is usually negotiated when the current speaker pauses or at least causes some delay in trying to "decide whether or not someone else is going to claim a turn at talk" (Scollon and Scollon 1983 p. 159). It is during this period of 'waiting' that the next speaker makes his entrance.

What then is a turn and how is it technically allocated? A turn, is an opportunity given to a pairy to contribute his own quota to an ongoing conversation. What that opportune understandably person does with the turn may vary accordingly: While a particular pairy may decide to express his opinion in a string of complex sentences, another may decide to utter just 'mm' while yet another may do less than that by maintaining a period of silence or a pause thereby eventually foregoing the turn to the 'faster' one who might have "waited a 'normal' length of time, hears no response and so concludes that he may continue by taking another turn himself" (Scollon and Scollon 1983 p. 160).

I would like to talk about three turn-allocating techniques in a two-part y conversation as discussed by Sacks, Schegloof and Jefferson (1978 pp. 29-32).

First, the current speaker may select a next speaker using a question, as in (2) below:

(2`   A :· Sarah what can you add to this point?

B : I think it has been exhausted already.

C : What about you Salamatu?

D : Well, I think we address ourselves to ....

An observation here is that even though a currant speaker has this degree of control over the next turn, "there is no mechanism in conversation by which the currant speaker can select the next but one speaker" (Coulthard 1977. p. 61). Consider (3) below:

(3)   A : Mairo, are you going home?

             B : Yeah, why do you ask?

             C : Just curious. That's all.

This is to show that sometimes before the current speaker could exercise his control over the choice of the possible next-but-one speaker, a question throw back at him by the second speaker can stop its realisation. However, such a choice of next-but-one speaker is more realisable in formal situations, say classroom, where the teacher has extra authority to select several successive utterances. Even this does not remove the possibility of turn 'stealing' by some students. (see Abdul, Unpublished)

Second is by self-selection. Listeners who decide to take their turns without waiting to be selected by the current speaker either for reason of attrition, utter disagreement or the like may come out successively and the "first starter" acquires the right to a turn. This is obvious in that in conversations where unintentional simultaneous utterances are 'shot out', apologies like "I'm sorry" could be heard rendered by the seeming intruder to the one who might have actually started a bit earlier than the other(s). And from that it follows logically that the next speaker after the first starter ends his turn will be that 'seeming intruder' unless his point of view had been expressed by the preceding speaker.

And in cases where simultaneity does not occur the self-selector uses apposition beginnings like 'well', 'but', "I think", etc. to negotiate his entrance after the current speaker.

Third is that, if a turn so thrown to the other speaker (s) is not utilised, the current speaker may, but need not, continue, unless another self-selects. For the current speaker to show the willingness to continue speaking past the particular "possible completion period, he may use the utterance incomplete technique by making use of words like, 'and', 'however', 'but', 'although', etc. Coulthard (1977) however, observes that 'such a technique is not smooth enough, rather the 'incomplete markers' like 'if', 'since', be used as they inform the other pairicipants that "there will be at least two clauses before the first possible completion" (1977 p. 64). This argument, to me, is cyclical. The use of utterance incompletors have the same effect with incomplete markers: They both show that the current speaker has not exhausted his points. Where I do agree with Coulthard, however, is the suggestion that the current speaker may use devices like:

"I'd like to make two points" or simply say 'first' which shows that a second is coming.

The above has been an attempt to give an aerial view of conversation and how pairicipants get their 'fair' share of turns. The next part will be devoted to a closer look at the conversational structure of utterance specifically as it relates to adjacency pairs.

3.0.   THE ADJACENCY PAIRS

3.1   Ordinarily, a pair of things are two things of probably the same size and shape that are intended to be used together. If two people are said to be a pair they are seen to have some thing in common: gentility, stupidly or both. Similarly, in conversation analysis, there is a pair known as "the adjacency pair" which David Crystal (1985 p. 7) defines as "a single stimulus-response sequence by the pairicipants". Though Crystal is not categorical as to which of the pairs, first or second, provides the stimulus and which produces the response, the first pair is a stimulation of the second. And if conversation can be carried out both verbally and non-verbally, is a smile from 'A' that attracts a grin from 'B' a pair ? Certainly the smile is the stimulus while the grinning the response.

Heritage (1982 p. 5) sees the concept of the adjacency pair as dealing with the proposal that "the production of a first member of a pair pair of actions (e.g. a first greeting or a question) projects and "requires the relevant occurrence 'next' of a complementary second action" produced by another speaker.

What can be made of the above definitions is that as a pair of anything has two pairs, the adjacency pairs have a "first pair pair" and a "second pair type" which when affiliated form a "pair pair". A question that attracts an answer, a greeting that is reciprocated likewise and an offer that is either accepted or refused are examples of pair types.

However, Schegloff and Sacks (1993 p. 238) pointed out the interdependence of two - pair units of dialogue, such as question - answer and summons/answer, and show that just as the Occurrence of a 'first pair' of such a pair will, in some way, define what comes next as the appropriate 'second pair', so the uttering of second pair in a similar way helps to define what precedes it as the appropriate first pair. In other words, the first and second pairs are in complementary distribution so the semantically speaking, a husband does not make a linguistic sense without a wife. In the same vein, whenever a person conceptualises something being beautiful, he must have thought of its ugly side i.e. beauty has no meaning without ugliness.

3.2   FEATURES OF THE ADJACENCY PAIRS

They are two utterance length. This is to say that there is usually a first utterance which is followed by a second utterance as in (4) below:

(4)   A : Hello Mohammed.
       B : Hi Sani.

This does not however mean that, I hope, we cannot have a one first pair pair utterance followed by a two second pair utterance, consider (5) below:

(5)   A : Good morning, young men.

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B : Hello Good morning
C : I'm not sure (if it's a good morning).

Another feature of the pairs is that there is an adjacent positioning of component utterance. for example. a question is put side by side with its answer:

(6)   X : Are you coming home ?
         Y : Yeah

a request goes with its acceptance or rejection, etc. It is expected that through the use of such adjacent positioning "appreciation failures, corrections. et cetera. can be themselves understandably attempted". (Schegloff and Sacks 1974 p. 240)

That different speakers produce each utterance is another feature of the pairs. That is, there must be a speaker A who is different from a speaker B with each producing an utterance, e.g.

(7)   A : Welcome home.
         B : Thanks.

The question one may like to ask is that must there be two different speakers before a pair could be produced ? I would like to think and postulate that sometimes a single speaker can produce a pair of utterances with the first serving as a stimulus to the production of the second as its response and sometimes even the third. The abobe is predicted on tht psycological reality on the individual personality structure as explained by Hilgard et. al (1979) in relation to the concept of 'Id'. 'Ego' and 'Superego'. Psycologists are in agreement that there is a "process of information transfer which goes on within the individual" (James and Soolar 1990 p. 15) otherwise known as intrapersonal communication which is realisable as thinking allowed or better still soliloqy. Therefore a person who soliloquises and produces two utterances. one a representation of his 'idi' (the non - bashful self) and the other a representation of his 'ego' (the boastful self) as shown below:

(8)   Id :   Do not do this. (It's not moral)
         Ego :   (Forget about morality) Do it.
has certainly got an adjacency pair.

It is a feature of the adjacency pairs that there is a relative ordering of parts: the first pair part proceeds the second pair part. Therefore. wherever there is a answer, a question must have been asked, e.g.

         Q : Are you sick or something ?
         A : Yes I think I am.
In the same vein. a refusal or acceptance should come after a request not before it. But I think it is not uncommon to hear comments like:

         "He said he was not going to help me even before I asked him".

The adjacency pairs have discriminative relations i.e. the pair type of which a first part is a member is relevant to the selection among the second pair parts. It is therefore expected that a 'good morning' anticipates a 'good morning' or something similar and not 'I don't accept the invitation'. Such an answer does not reflect what constitutes the first pair part.

3.3   **PAIR TYPES**

The pair types to be considered here are   the Question-Answer, Summons-Answer and Offer - Acceptance/rejection. In a two - party conversation irrespective of which of the above pair type is in use, the first speaker always expects the second speaker to respond positively to the piece of language directed at him.

3.2.1   **QUESTION - ANSWER** : In this combination, one party does the questioning and the other provides the answers. It is the property of many question-answer (QA) sequence that "the asked of a question has the right to talk again but not an obligation to do so" (Schegloff, 1968 p. 1081).

A : How are you today ?

B : Fine.

C : Have you seen the man looking for you ?

The above does not in any way mean that every question asked will attract an answer. Coulthard (1977 p, 70) observes that "it is not a difficult matter to discover a question not followed by an answer." This is so because the party greeted may decide not to respond at all, let alone give the asked the right to talk again. Even when the person asked responds to the question, he may decide to do it a way that the asker's right to ask another question or whatever is the wasted. Consider.

A : **Did you go to the cinema** ?

B : Yeah, what **about you** ?

A : I did.

Speaker A's second utterance is therefore seen not to be an exercise of his right but as a response to speaker B's question.

There are even instances when a question answers another question. This occurs most especially "if the hearer thinks of the question as an attempt to trap him" (A Bennett 1982 p.102) e.g.

A : Have you receive your salary yet ?

B : Why do you ask ?

(B might owe A some money which he does not wish to pay).

3.2.:2   **SUMMONS - ANSWER** :   A summons is described as an attention-getting-device. This can be achieve by a telephone ring, or by using terms of address like 'waiter' 'vendor'. 'Mallam Mohammed ?' The same effect could be achieve by using courtesy phrases like 'pardon me' 'Excuse me' etc. When trying to approach someone nor familiar to the speaker to get his attention. Equally effective is the use of physical devices like tapping on one's shoulder, waving of a hand to some one far, raising of a hand to signal an intention to say something, etc. All these are ways of starting a summons-answer sequence.

Like a question, a summons may be answered or ignored. There is no obligation to answer summons.

A : Excuse me   B : Yes

and   B : Excuse me   B : (looked up)

Like the QA sequence, it is the summoner who incurs the obligation to talk again. Though such an obligation may sometimes not be realised. Consider:

A : Mohammed

B : Yes, Oh, Sani, lest I forget, have you seen the person looking for you ?

Here B treats the situation as if the call was incidental and behaves as if he is the summoner.

Summonses once uttered are not repeatable without strong reason for doing so. It is therefore not common to have:

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A: Mohammed?   B: 'Yes'.   A: 'Mohammed?'

The SA sequence unlike the QA pair type cannot properly stand as the final exchange of a conversation. "It is a specific feature of the SA sequences that they are preambles, preliminaries or prefaces to some conversational or bodily activity" (Schegloff 1968 p. 1091). In an exchange like:

A : Musa, have you been sleeping?

B : Who told you?

B's response to A indicates that not only is an answer expected from A but it (the reply) was equally triggered off by something - a summons.

3.2:3   OFFER - ACCEPTANCE/REJECTION: Here, we also have two speakers, the first makes the offer, the second accepts or rejects it. Consider:

A : I will pay =N= 100 for the job.

B : OK I will do it.

As has been suggested the first pair part of this type allows for alternative seconds. Acceptances are short and clear and are preferred while rejections or dispreferred seconds are uttered with delays, prefaces, accounts and the like. If B above rejecting the offer, he would produce something like:

"Uhh, well, that's really kind of you....... but I'm not sure if I can agree to that ah-ah- the cost of materials has soared. I'll end up not getting anything out of it, any way".

3.3   THE USE OF THE ADJACENCY PAIRS IN CONVERSATION

Bearing in mind the above features and pair types, etc. the general uses of the pairs can be summed up, thus:

1.   It is with the use of the adjacency pairs that people can actually get to communicate with others meaningfully for whatever reason.

2.   If not for the pairs, questions, summonses, offers will never be answered, accepted or rejected or as the case may be.

3.   Adjacency positioning allows the achievement of 'sequential implicativeness' (Heritage 1982 p. 239) whenever one pairy is specifically concerned with, say the close order sequence of an utterance they have a chance to produce, the use of the first pair parts is a way they have of providing for such a sequence. As was earlier noted, the second turn is almost always a reflection of the first. It is therefore within the confines of this adjacency positioning that if current speaker wants to switch on to another topic, he may decide to ask a question in that direction and the next speaker is "thereby induced to employ the chance to talk to produce what is appreciable an answer (Heritage 1982 p. 239)

4.   The pair enable interactants to achieve ordering. In turn taking and in instances where there is no way of assuring that "a more or less eventually aimed-for successive utterance type will ever be producal" (Heritage 1982 p. 239) i.e. in situations where the next speaker does not do what is expected of him, or does something which is not it thereby complicating things by providing for a further next that should not be it and if what follows it is free and does not do the originally aimed-for utterance etc., close ordering then becomes the only basic generalised means of ensuring that some desired event will even happen even if it does not happen at the desired moment.

5.   The adjacently positioned second allows the next speaker to show that he understands what a prior utterance means and that he is willing or not to go along with it. Consider:

A : please, read this for me.

B : o.k. Let's see (and he reads)

and

A : please, read this for me.

B : (lokks up at A and goes away)

B's latter response can be interpreted too men he heard or understood

A. but he was just unwilling to do as requested for obvious reasons.

Similarly, the doer of the first pair can see that what he intended was indeed understood, and that it was not accepted, even though it is always difficult to decipher speaker intention as in:

A : That's the phone.

B : I'm in the bath

(Widdowson 1978 p. 29)

but when the first utterance is looked upon as constituting a request and the second as a failure to oblige, speaker A will be saying something like "That's the phone. (can you answer it, please?)" and speaker B in turn saying "(No, I can't answer it because) I'm in the bath". As long as each speaker can listen carefully and consider the other's utterance with its range of possibilities, the pairs are always there to help.

CONCLUSION

This paper is an introduction to the concept of the adjacency pairs their features, types and uses in conversations. To achieve that objective conversations generally were looked at and how people get in and get of them were considered. The one message which the paper seems to be conveying is that for conversations to be effective, some ordering has to be done regarding the various roles of the conversations.

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