CHAPTER 7

Conversation Analysis

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we will consider the approach to spoken interaction known as Conversation Analysis (CA). There are strong reasons for focusing on conversation in Discourse Analysis, because, as noted by Levinson (1983: 284), ‘conversation is clearly the prototypical kind of language usage, the form in which we are all first exposed to language – the matrix for language acquisition.’ CA was developed within the context of sociological enquiry and was pioneered by a breakaway group of American sociologists, sometimes also referred to as *ethnomethodologists*, under the leadership of Harold Garfinkel and followers such as Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson. Given their sociological background, these researchers were interested in studying how language was employed in social interaction rather than developing linguistic theory. Instead of applying some overarching theory concerning social structure, however, they worked inductively with empirical data in the form of recordings of naturally occurring talk, which was transcribed in a detailed fashion. The aim was, and remains to this day in ongoing work, to describe social interaction in terms of the actions it is used to perform, not from the outside, but from the inside, from the perspective of the user (referred to as an *emic* perspective).

According to CA, conversation is conceived of as speech actions which build together to create coherent social interaction. CA does not apply any model of speech acts such as those reviewed in Chapter 4 (indeed, it does not use the term *speech act*). Rather, true to their ethnomethodological approach, conversation analysts use, as far as possible, categories employed by the participants involved in interaction themselves. Actions that they are interested in include asking, answering, disagreeing, offering, contesting, requesting, teasing, finessing, complying, performing, noticing, promising, and so forth (Schegloff, 2007: 7). Working inductively from the bottom up with categories such as these, CA has been able to reveal a rich body of facts about conversation and demonstrate that it follows an elaborate, but systematic, set of rules, or architecture.

7.2 METHODOLOGY AND TRANSCRIPTION SYSTEM

The methodology of CA involves the meticulous transcription of naturally occurring audio- or video-recorded talk (Jenks, 2011). The repeated playing of the recording in order to make the detailed transcription means that the analyst becomes increasingly familiar with the data. The analysis normally proceeds through a number of stages. First, a particular conversational phenomenon is identified – for example, a linguistic token, a particular social action or sequence. Second, a preliminary collection of the selected phenomenon is assembled. Third, this is broken down into subsets and the most significant subset is singled out for analysis. Fourth, the clearest examples of this subset are analysed. Fifth, less clear examples are analysed. Sixth, and finally, any deviant cases are considered
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(Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2008). There is also another approach for more targeted analysis, referred to as 'single case analysis' (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008), in which 'the resources of past work on a range of phenomena and organizational domains in talk-in-interaction are brought to bear on the analytic explication of a single fragment of talk' (Schegloff, 1987: 101).

Because of the need for a very detailed written record, a special transcription system was developed by Jefferson (2004). A glossary of some of the major symbols of Jefferson's model is as follows (developed by Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008).

(0.5) The number in brackets indicates a time gap in tenths of a second.
(.) A dot enclosed in a bracket indicates a pause in the talk of less than two-tenths of a second (also referred to as a micropause).
(=) The 'equals' sign indicates 'latching' between utterances.
[ ] Square brackets between adjacent lines of concurrent speech indicate the onset and end of a spate of overlapping talk.
.hh A dot before an 'h' indicates speaker in-breath. The more h's, the longer the in breath.
hh An 'h' indicates an out-breath. The more h's, the longer the breath.
(( )) A description enclosed in a double bracket indicates a non-verbal activity. For example ((banging sound)). Alternatively double brackets may enclose the transcriber's comments on contextual or other features.
soun– A dash indicates the sharp cut-off of the prior word or sound.
sou:::nd Colons indicate the speaker has stretched the preceding sound or letter. The more colons, the greater the extent of the stretching.
(!) Exclamation marks are used to indicate an animated or emphatic tone.
( ) Empty parentheses indicate the presence of an unclear fragment on the tape.
(guess) The words within a single bracket indicate the transcriber's best guess at an unclear utterance.
word. A full stop indicates a stopping fall in tone. It does not necessarily indicate the end of a sentence.
word, A comma indicates 'continuing' intonation.
word? A question mark indicates a rising inflection. It does not necessarily indicate a question.
↑↓ Pointed arrows indicate a marked falling or rising intonational shift. They are placed immediately before the onset of the shift.
ā: Less marked falls in pitch can be indicated by using underlining immediately preceding a colon.
a: Less marked rises in pitch can be indicated by using a colon which is itself underlined.
Under Underlined fragments indicate speaker emphasis.
CAPITALS Words in capitals mark a section of speech noticeably louder than that surrounding it.
° ° Degree signs are used to indicate that the talk they encompass is spoken noticeably quieter than the surrounding talk.
Tha(gh)t A 'gh' indicates that the word in which it is placed had a guttural pronunciation.
> < Inward chevrons indicate that the talk they encompass was produced notice-ably faster than the surrounding talk.
⇒ Arrows in the left margin point to specific parts of an extract discussed in the text.
[H:21.3.89:2] Extract headings refer to the transcript library source of the researcher who originally collected the data.
One thing that immediately strikes the reader of talk transcribed using this system, as will be seen from the transcribed examples of talk included in this chapter, is how much it diverges from folk beliefs about talk. Talk does not occur in complete sentences, as is often believed to be the case, for one thing. Talk does not occur in discrete turns, either, but with quite a lot of overlapping. In addition, words do not always occur in discrete units, but are frequently assimilated together. Furthermore, speech is often interspersed with non-verbal ums, ers and ahs (referred to as continuers), which are only noticed with a very careful transcription. Many of these features are often ignored in language-teaching materials, already demonstrating the potential value of CA for language teaching.

### 7.3 TURN-TAKING

Even advanced learners of a second or foreign language are likely to have experienced the difficulty of gaining and holding the floor, especially in multiparty talk. This is because of a lack of command of the turn-taking system. Turn-taking is, in fact, the starting point for CA. CA begins with the unremarkable observation that conversation takes place with one speaker following another taking turns at talk. In a seminal paper, Sacks et al. (1974/1978) outlined how speakers organise turn-taking in conversation. Turn boundaries are marked when one speaker stops talking and another takes over. During this exchange of turns there may be some gap between turns or some overlap, but this is usually minimal.

Turns are made up of what are referred to as turn construction units (TCUs). TCUs consist of various linguistic units which include sentential, clausal, phrasal and lexical constructions. They may also contain, or, indeed, be uniquely made up of, non-verbal elements such as silence, laughter, continuers, and bodily and facial movements. Liddicoat (2007) gives the following example to show the diversity of TCUs, drawing attention to ‘at’, which is a lexical unit, but which is recognised as a TCU in the fourth turn by the mother, who responds to it. In this example, we also see sentential, phrasal, lexical and non-verbal elements contributing towards TCUs.

1  Ther: What kind of work do you do?
2  Mother: Food service
3  Ther: At?
4  
5  Mother: (A) / (uh) post office cafeteria downtown main post office on Redwood
6  Ther: °Okay°

(Liddicoat, 2007: 55)

Each speaker has the right to complete one TCU and then the next TCU is up for negotiation, that is to say, there is the possibility of another speaker taking over (see below). In some cases – stories, for example – more than one TCU is possible per turn. In the above example, however, each turn corresponds to one TCU.

How do interlocutors know when a turn has finished, or is about to finish? Three criteria come into play here: syntax, intonation and pragmatics. A turn may be recognised as complete if it represents a syntactically complete unit, that is, a sentence, a clause, a phrase or a lexical item. A TCU may be recognised as complete according to its intonational pattern. More critically, a TCU may be recognised as such if it represents a recognisable pragmatic or social action (in some cases more than one). A further criterion that has been posited for TCUs is that of non-verbal behaviours, especially gaze (Goodwin, 1981), although, as Liddicoat (2007: 59) points out, this must be less important than the other features, as TCU completion is still possible where visual cues are not present, for example, telephone conversations.

Interlocutors have the ability to project possible completion points of turns. This is evidenced by overlapping talk, as in the following example.
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1. Joe: B't he wannid the] dawg dih bıte iz wife.
2.  
3. ( ) : [ ehhh°
4. Joe: [ So ™g come[s h:o·me one] night ] =
5. Carol: [heh heh heh] heh he] h =
7. → Carol: = heh hehw] [bit hı:m.]

(Liddicoat, 2007: 56)

In this example, Carol is able to complete Joe's TCU with him, clearly indicating that she has anticipated how it will be completed.

Places where TCU completion is possible are referred to as transition relevance places. Transition relevance places are not fixed at the end of a TCU because of interlocutors’ ability to project the completion of TCUs. Schegloff (2007: 4) refers to the transition relevance place as ‘the span that begins with the immanence of possible completion’.

7.4 RULES FOR TURN-TAKING

The rules for the allocation of turns, following the principle of transition relevance, were set out by Sacks et al. (1974/1978) as follows:

1. At the transition–relevance place of a turn:
   A. where the next speaker is selected by the current speaker:
      the current speaker must stop talking and the next speaker must take over
   B. where the next speaker is not selected by the current speaker:
      any speaker may, but need not, self-select, with first speaker acquiring rights to a turn.
   C. where the next speaker is not selected by the current speaker:
      the current speaker may, but need not, continue if no other speaker self-selects.
2. Whichever choice has been made, then 1. A–C come into operation again.

(adapted from Sacks et al., 1974/1978: 13).

It is not claimed that these ‘rules’ are consciously applied or even known by interactants, but that they are naturally acquired, implicitly understood and automatically employed each time interaction takes place. The rules are deceptively simple, but are general enough to apply to different settings, numbers of participants, sets of relationships, topics and contexts (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008: 51). Some institutionalised contexts, nevertheless, vary. The ordering of turns in debates, for example, is pre-allocated, and other institutionalised speech events such as committee meetings, school classroom lessons and trials also have their own turn-taking rules. There is also the possibility that the rules may differ across cultures. In Burundi, for example (presumably in formal settings), the order in which individuals speak in a group is strictly determined by seniority of rank (Albert, reported in Levinson, 1983: 301). In spite of this evidence for cross-cultural diversity, Levinson (1983: 301) claims that there is ‘good reason’ for thinking that for ‘informal, ordinary kinds of talk’ the rules are valid for all cultures. Hatch (1983: 133), whilst agreeing that the turn-taking system itself ‘may well be universal’, cites studies which indicate that pause length, which often indicates the place for turn-taking, does vary across language groups. Certain North American Indian tribes, for example, tolerate much longer
pause length. Indeed, in a well-known study, Scollon and Scollon (1990) have shown how, in intercultural interactions, Athabaskans in Alaska tend to observe longer pause lengths between turns than do their American and Canadian counterparts, resulting in miscommunication, due to the fact that the Americans and Canadians interpret these longer pauses as a desire not to speak.

7.5 ADJACENCY PAIRS

Focusing now on the relation between pairs of turns, it has been noted that certain classes of turns are closely related to others. Closely related pairs are referred to as adjacency pairs. Pairs which be identified in the literature include:

- accusation–denial/confession;
- announcement–response;
- apology–acceptance/refusal;
- assertion–agreement/dissent;
- boast–appreciation/derision;
- challenge–response;
- closing–closing;
- complaint–apology/denial;
- compliment–acceptance/rejection;
- greeting–greeting;
- insult–response;
- invitation–acceptance/refusal;
- offer–acceptance/refusal;
- question–answer;
- request–acceptance/rejection;
- summons–answer;
- threat–response.

Adjacency pairs are defined by Schegloff (1972, 2007) and Schegloff and Sacks (1973) as having the following features:

1. two-utterance length;
2. adjacent positioning of component utterances;¹
3. different speaker producing each utterance;
4. relative ordering of parts (that is, first pair parts (FPPs) precede second pair parts (SPPs));
5. discrimination relations (that is, the pair type of which an FPP is a member is relevant to the selection among second pair parts).

7.6 CONDITIONAL RELEVANCE

The key point in the definition of adjacency pairs above is point 5, which accounts for how one utterance circumscribes the utterance which follows. This notion is developed further by the concept of conditional relevance (Schegloff, 1972: 76). According to the principle of conditional relevance, one utterance provides for the relevance of a following type of utterance by setting up an expectation of what is likely to follow. If the expected type of utterance does not occur, then it is ‘an event’ and is deemed to be ‘officially’, or ‘notably’ absent (Schegloff, 1972: 76). It is important to note the difference between this type of rule and the rules of syntax. In syntax, sequencing rules are prescriptive
– for example a subject is followed by a verb – but with adjacency pairs this is not the case. In fact, it is those situations where an anticipated SPP does not occur which demonstrate the robustness of the concept of conditional relevance.

### 7.7 PREFERENCE ORGANISATION

A refinement to the concept of conditional relevance is provided by the further notion of preference. Some adjacency pairs have only one central type of SPP. Greetings and farewells are examples of such pairs. For example, a greeting such as Hi may have various return greetings, such as, Hi! Hi there! or Hello!, but the return greeting is the only type of SPP. Such reciprocal pairs (farewells are another example) are the exception, however. Most adjacency pairs have more than one possible type of SPP. For example, the expected response to an invitation is either an acceptance or a refusal. Similarly, a request may be granted or rejected. But the members of these pairs of responses are not equal in value; they are not ‘symmetrical alternatives’ (Schegloff & Sacks, cited in Schegloff, 2007: 59); one is ‘preferred’ over the other, which is said to be ‘dispreferred’.

Preference is not a psychological characterisation, but a structural one; preferred responses are typically simpler, whilst dispreferred responses tend to be marked by various kinds of complexity, including delays, prefaces and accounts, (Pomerantz, 1984; see also Levinson, 1983: 334–335 for details and examples). Preference can thus also be thought of as an action that is played out structurally in various ways.

Compare the following two extracts. The first is an invitation and straightforward (preferred) acceptance, while the second is another invitation, but this time followed by a (dispreferred) decline.

**Invitation – accept**

1. Amy: w’d yuh like tuh come over t’morrow night
2. Jane: yea:h.= that’ d be nice.

[Schegloff, 2007: 64, modified]

**Invitation – decline**

1. Harry:  I don’ have much tuh do on We : nsday
2. ()
3. w’d yuh like tuh get together then.
4. (0.3)
5. Joy:  huh we : : I lh I don’ really know if yuh see
6. i’ s a bit hectic fuh me We : nsday yih know
7. Harry:  oh wokay

[Schegloff, 2007: 64, modified]

In the second of these examples, with the dispreferred SPP decline, we can see a number of delaying tactics and, in fact, there is no direct rejection at all. Dispreferred declines can be seen as rude or hostile, so extra conversational work is required in their performance.

The next example of an SPP decline is simpler, but it is still mitigated and attenuated; it is not a direct decline:

A:  Is it near Edinburgh?
B:  Edinburgh? It’s not too far.

Because agreement is preferred over disagreement, (dispreferred) disagreement may be presented as if it were (preferred) agreement:
A: How about friends. Have you friends?
B: I have friends. So-called friends. I had friends. Let me put it that way.

(Sacks, cited in Schegloff, 2007: 66, modified)

In this pair, B’s answer is shaped initially as an agreement, I have friends, but this apparent agreement is then mitigated as it becomes clear that s/he does not in fact have any friends, with the addition of So-called friends and the past tense I had friends.

As well as overall preference for agreement, where possible, there is preference for contiguity (Sacks, 1987). While it is possible for question-and-answer turns to contain extra information, there is a preference for FPPs and SPPs to come immediately next to each other. It only tends to be FPPs followed by dispreferred SPPs that are not contiguous. Such FPPs followed by dispreferred SPPs may contain a gap in between them, with the silence representing a gap in the continuity of the two parts; or the SPP may be prefaced with a delay, such as uh, a hedge (I dunno) or some other discourse marker such as well, or anticipatory accounts, as in the following example, where there is a combination of a turn initial marker (well), a hedge (I don’t know), and an account (I got a lot of things …).

A: Yuh comin down early?
B: Well, I got a lot of things to do before getting cleared up tomorrow. I don’t know. I w– probably won’t be too early.

(Schegloff, 2007: 69, modified)

7.8 EXPANSION SEQUENCES

Adjacency pairs may be expanded in various ways. They may be prefaced by pre-expansions; they may be extended by post-expansions; and they may be expanded by insert expansions, where a sequence is inserted between the FPP and SPP of a base adjacency pair. Because these expansions are usually sequences in their own right, they are also referred to as pre-sequences, post-sequences and insertion sequences. Although they are sequences in their own right, however, they are treated as expansions of base adjacency pairs because they combine together with a base adjacency pair in the performance of a particular basic action.

7.8.1 Pre-expansions

Pre-sequences prepare the ground for what is to follow. They may be specific to particular actions, for example, pre-invitations (I’ve got two tickets for the rugby match …), pre-requests (Are you busy right now?), and pre-announcements (You’ll never guess!). In addition, they may be generic, designed to project forward to any form of talk.

For reasons of space, we will only look at pre-invitations of the specific types, followed by the generic class. Schegloff divides pre-invitations into three types: go-ahead, blocking and hedging.

The go-ahead type promotes progress for the recipient to proceed with the base FPP which the pre-invitation is projecting. Clara’s acceptance in the following example (l. 7, Yeah) is thus foreshadowed by Nelson’s pre-invitation (l. 4, Watcha doin’ .).

1 Clara: Hello
2 Nelson: Hi.
3 Clara: Hi.
In the blocking type of pre-invitation, the pre-invitation raises the possibility that the invitation, if tendered, will be declined and thereby discourages, or blocks, the invitation in the first place. Thus, in the next example. Judy's *Well, we're going out* (l. 12) blocks John from following up on his pre-invitation FPP *Ha you doin' – say what 'r you doing.*

1  Ring
2  Allen:  Hello?
3  John:  Yeah, is Judy there?
4  Allen:  Yeah, just a second.
5  ((silence))
6  Judy:  Hello,
7  John:  Judy?
8  Judy:  Yeah,
9  John:  John Smith.
10 Judy:  Hi John
11 John:  F pre → *Ha you doin' – say what 'r you doing.*
12 Judy:  S pre → Well, we're going out.

(Schegloff, 2007: 30)

In the third type of pre-invitation, the hedging pre-invitation, a full response is contingent on what the invitation is going to be. Thus Judy, in the next example, gives grounds for not proceeding to the invitation (l. 3 *We're going out*), then follows with a hint that the answer might change her response (l. 3 *Why*).

1  Judy:  Hi John.
2  John:  F pre → *Ha you doin' – say what 'r you doing.*
3  Judy:  S pre → Well, we're going out. *Why.*
4  John:  → Oh, I was just gonna say come out and come over
5  → here and talk this evening, [but if you're going=
6  Judy:  [Talk,' you mean get
7  → drunk, don't you?]
8  Judy:  [out you can't very] well do that.

(Schegloff, 2007: 31)

It is to be noted that a block or hedge may or may not result in the invitation sequence occurring, but it is still classified as a pre-sequence even if it does not occur; ‘It was done as a pre-invitation, in order to accomplish that action; it was heard that way and responded to that way as accomplishing that action’ (Schegloff, 2007: 34).

Turning now to the generic type of pre-expansion, this is a sequence that is not designed to prepare for any particular type of action, but rather to gain the attention of an interlocutor in order to initiate any form of talk. It takes the form of summons–answer. A very common context for summons–answer is in conversational openings. Before it is even possible to begin a conversation, it is necessary to gain the attention of the chosen interlocutor. In the following example, in fact, the summons is repeated, presumably because it was not heard the first time:

1  Judy:  Hi John.
2  John:  F pre → *Ha you doin' – say what 'r you doing.*
3  Judy:  S pre → Well, we're going out. *Why.*
4  John:  → Oh, I was just gonna say come out and come over
5  → here and talk this evening, [but if you're going=
6  Judy:  [Talk,' you mean get
7  → drunk, don't you?]
8  Judy:  [out you can't very] well do that.

(Schegloff, 2007: 31)
1  C: Anne
2  → A: ((Silence))
3  → C: Anne
4  A: What


So, in this example, we have two adjacency pairs: first a summons–answer in lines 1 and 2, and then a greet–greet in lines 3–4.

Summons–answer sequences are not limited to conversational openings, however. They may also be found in ongoing talk where it is necessary to gain the attention of the intended interlocutor – ‘where an intended recipient is currently engaged in some other activity, such as talking to a third participant, where the recipient has temporarily left the room, or where the intended recipient is not currently one’s recipient in a multi-party conversation’ (Liddicoat, 2007: 128). Levinson provides a simple example, presumably from a dinner-table setting:

A: John?
B: Yeah?
A: Pass the water wouldja.

(Levinson, 1983: 310)

The FPP in the summons–answer sequence takes a variety of typical forms. It may be the name or title of the addressee, a politeness marker such as *Excuse me*, or physical contact (Schegloff, 2007: 127). SPPs may be performed by the addressee redirecting eye gaze to the summoner and with verbal forms such as *what*, or *yes/yeah* (Goodwin, 1981).

As with other pre-expansions, as well as go-ahead devices (as in the previous example), the summons–answer sequence has various blocking and hedging variations. Blocking may be effected by non-response to the summons, while hedging may involve some sort of forestalling or delay to further talk, such as ‘I’m busy,’ ‘Just a moment,’ ‘Be right there,’ ‘I’m in the bathroom’ and ‘Leave me alone!’ (Schegloff, 2007: 51).

With all pre-expansions, it is important to bear in mind that, although they are sequences in their own right, they are not complete. It is only in their relevance to what is to come next in the following base pair that they achieve their coherence, in projecting forward that some further talk will follow.

### 7.8.2 Post-expansions

Post-expansions follow and extend a preceding base adjacency pair. They may consist of a single turn or of a pair of turns. Single turns of this type are referred to as minimal post-expansions and are also called *sequence-closing thirds* (SCTs). SCTs typically take the form of particles or combinations of evaluative particles such as *oh* and *okay*, as in the following example.

1  Harry: I don’ have much tuh do on Wensday.
2  ()
3  w’ d yuh like tuh get together then.
4  (0.3)
5  Joy: huh we:ilh yuh see things a bit hectic fuh
6  me Wensday yih know I don’ really know
7  → Harry: Oh wokay

(Liddicoat, 2007: 157)
They may also take the form of evaluative lexical items such as *good* or *great*, as in the following sequence:

1. Annie: we were wondering if you’d like
2. to come over Sat’ day night for a few drinks.
3. Sue: Yeah we c’d do that.
4. Annie: Goo::d.

(Liddicoat, 2007: 156)

Where a post-expansion takes the form of a pair of turns, its function is not to evaluate and close the base pair it is attached to, as was the case with the SCTs, but, on the contrary, to create a context for further talk. This is often the case when there is perceived to be some sort of trouble with an SPP and some form of repair is required. In the following sequence, for example, Nick, in his second turn, repeats part of what Sasha has just said [*sixth*], and this is confirmed by Elvis [*yeah*]. The initial adjacency pair is thus extended with a further (post-expansion) pair:

Nick: on– [*which*] day’ s your anniversary?
Sasha: Sixth. June.
Nick: the sixth,
Elvis: yeah,

(Liddicoat, 2007: 159)

### 7.8.3 Insert expansions

*Insert expansions*, also called *insertion sequences*, are adjacency pairs which expand other pairs by being inserted, or nested inside them. The function of the insert expansion is to clarify something on the part of the addressee before responding to the FPP, as in the next example.

L: how would you describe (*yourself*)
and your appearance and so on
(1.0)
R: describe my appearance,
(1.0)
L: Yeah
R: su– su– slightly longer than average hair
((goes on to describe appearance))

(Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008: 169)

Here, R’s first turn in reply to L’s FPP question is what Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008: 169) refer to as a ‘question-seeking clarification/confirmation’. A response to this FPP is required, (l. 0) (*yeah*), before R provides the SPP to the initial question of the first turn.

In fact, there may be multiple nesting, referred to as *expansion of expansions* (Schegloff, 2007: 109), such that it may take a long time before the conditional relevance of an FPP is confirmed by the occurrence of its SPP (see Schegloff, 2007: 111–113 for a long example).

### 7.9 TOPIC MANAGEMENT

So far, we have seen how CA has looked at turns and pairs of turns (adjacency pairs), and also at various types of expansions. In all of the examples of data we have looked at thus far, however
(except for the embedded insertion sequences), the sequences have been relatively short. Sometimes, sequences are longer than those we have been looking at. In order to manage such longer turns, conversational participants need to be able to manage topics. This means being able to initiate topics, develop topics once they have been initiated, shift from one topic to another and terminate topics when a conversation reaches a close. The brief account of topic management which follows is based on that of Wong and Waring (2010).

### 7.9.1 Topic initiation

Topic initiation may occur at the beginning or end of a conversation, following a series of silences, or after the termination of a prior topic. There is a range of devices for initiating topics, including topic initial elicitors (for example, What’s new? How are you doing?), specific news enquiries (When are we going to get that new three-piece suite?), news announcements (I went to the ballet last night), pre-topical sequences (What do you do for a living? Where do you live?), setting talk (Nice weather we’re having, This train is taking a long time to get here).

### 7.9.2 Topic pursuit

It is not always the case that topic initiations are taken up. Where this is the case, participants may further insist on pursuing the introduced topic. In the following example, Maggie has elicited a topic with What have you been up to?, but Lawrence is not very responsive. Maggie, accordingly, follows up with a topic initial elicitor (specific news enquiry), You’re still in the real estate business Lawrence?

1 Maggie: What have you been up to.
2 (0.5)
3 Lawrence: Well about the same thing. One thing
4 Anoth [er. I should
5 Maggie: → You’re still in the real estate business
6 Lawrence?

(Button & Casey, cited in Wong & Waring, 2010: 113)

### 7.9.3 Topic shift

Topic shift occurs within a given topic sequence when one of the participants proposes that they move to another topic. It may happen in one of two ways: disjunctive topic shift and stepwise topic shift.

The following is the list of disjunctive markers provided by Crow (cited in Wong & Waring 2010: 116). These markers are used when a participant wants to mark a move into a new topic as abrupt or not highly relevant to the ongoing conversation.

- Anyway;
- All right;
- Oh;
- Speaking of X;
- That reminds me of;
- Oh say;
The following is a good example of disjunctive topic shift, with the use of the marker anyway:

1 Lesley: He had a good innings did [n't he.
2 Mum: I should say so:
3 Yes
4 (0.2)
5 Mum: Marvelous,
6 Lesley: hhh Anyway we had a very good evening on
7 Saturday ...

(Drew, cited in Wong & Waring, 2010: 118)

Stepwise topic shift is a smoother way than disjunctive topic shift of moving from one topic to another. It is smoother because a transition, rather than a break, is marked between the two topics. In the following example, the three examples of Okay both at the same time refer to the topic in progress, in signalling agreement, and prepare the way for new topical activity. Furthermore, in the first example, there is a semantic link between the two topics, as represented by Jill, who is a participant in both of them:

1 C: I guess the band starts at nine.
2 D: Oh really?
3 C: Yah from what Jill told me.
4 D: Okay when's Jill gonna go.
5 C: Same time (0.2) we're gonna meet her there.
6 D: Okay um (0.5) so you want to take your car
7 C: We can take your car if you want.
8 D: hhh hhh I mean you want-- you wanna have your
9 car there so you can leave.
10 C: Yeah I think that's be a better idea.
11 Okay.
12 (0.5)
13 D: Okay hhhh we;; what what time is it now *I don't
14 have my watch on.
15 C: Six o'clock.

(Beach, 1993, cited in Wong & Waring, 2010: 121)

7.9.4 Topic termination

Topics can be closed down by pre-closing items such as well or okay. Assessment tokens such as great, good, that's good, oh splendid, and lovely are typically used to close off topics and whole conversations, as in this next example, with the pre-closings okay and well and the assessment token lovely, which is the final topic of the conversation:
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7.10 STORIES

An important frequent manifestation of longer turns is when individuals tell a story. Stories do not happen in isolation, however, and, in studying stories, it is important to consider the interactional context in which they occur. Speakers need to create a space within the ongoing action in which to insert the story and to establish the fact that they are going to take a longer turn. And recipients need to indicate their understanding of the ongoing talk as they listen, by the use of continuers, which indicate that they are forgoing the opportunity to take a complete turn. They also need to do this at the end of a story, to indicate their understanding that the story has been completed, show their appreciation of its meaning and its potential to generate further talk.

We can see how these features function by taking an example of story-telling from Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008: 127).

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26 go along t’th’sale ’n do what we could, (0.2) we
27 hadn’t got a lot () of s:e– ready cash t’spend.
28 (0.6)
29 L: In any case we thought th’ things were very
30 expensive
31 J: Oh did you.
32 (0.9)
33 L: AND uh we were looking round the stalls ’n poking
34 about ’n he came up t’ me ’n he said Oh; h:hello
35 Lesley, () still trying to buy something f’nothing,
36 t.ch.t.h[hahhhhhhh!
37 J: [hhoonnnn!
38 (0.8)
39 J: Oo: [ : L e s l e y ]
40 L: [oo:: [ehh heh heh ]
41 (0.2)
42 J: ls[ n ’t ] [he
43 L: [What] do y[ou say.
44 (0.3)
45 J: Oh isn’t he dreadful.
46 L: °eYe::s °
47 (0.6)
48 J: What’n aw::ful ma[:n
49 L: [eh heh heh heh
50 J: Oh:: honestl[y] I cannot stand the ma[n it’s just
51 (no:: )
52 L: I thought well I’m gon’ tell Joyce that, ehh heh

(Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008: 124–125)

In this example, the story begins with a preface. Following the canonical structure of story
prefaces, the preface we have in this story is a three-part structure of: (1) story preface: You know,
I’m broiling about something; (2) a request to hear the story on the part of the recipient: What? and
(3) the beginning of the story itself, with the recipient suitably prepared for the story: Well, that sale
at the vicarage. As the story progresses, we see how, although transition relevance points occur and
the recipient of the story is given plenty of opportunities to take the floor, these opportunities are not
taken up, the recipient merely indicating that she is orienting to the story with, for example, oh yes
(l.14), oh did you (l.31), yes (l.46), and no (l.51) and with non-verbal acknowledgements (for exam-
ple, 1.19, l.39, l.49). As indicated by Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008), there is a lot more going on in this
extract, but these are perhaps the points of most interest with regard to a CA approach to stories.
One feature not discussed by Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008), however, with regard to this story, is the
ending. We can note how the recipient, J, in line 50–51, indicates that she has understood that the
story has come to an end, Oh:: honestly I cannot stand the man, another important role of the recipi-
ent in the joint negotiation of stories.

7.11 REPAIR

Repair refers to the suspension of ongoing talk, in order to deal with some sort of trouble, where
trouble refers to hearing, production or understanding. Repair is not a negative phenomenon,
indicative of some deficiency, but a natural self-regulating device which is prevalent in all talk.
Indeed, repair plays an important role in maintaining the overall coherence of talk and making total breakdown the very rare occurrence that it is.

There are four main types of repair (see, for example, Wong and Waring (2010) for further sub-categories): (1) self-initiated self-completed; (2) self-initiated other-completed; (3) other-initiated self-completed; and (4) other-initiated other-completed.

### 7.11.1 Self-initiated self-completed

The speaker himself or herself identifies the cause of the trouble and resolves it:

1. Olive: Yih know Mary uh::: (0.3) oh::: what was it.
2. Uh::: Thompson.  
   
   (Schegloff et al., 1977: 363, modified)

### 7.11.2 Self-initiated other-completed

The speaker himself or herself identifies the cause of the trouble, but the recipient resolves it.

1. A: He had dis uh Mistuh W– whatever k– I can't think of his first name, Watts on, the one thet wrote l/ that piece,
2. B: Dan Watts.  
   
   (Schegloff et al., 1977: 364, modified)

### 7.11.3 Other-initiated self-completed

The recipient of the trouble identifies it and resolves it himself or herself.

1. A: Hey the first time they stopped me from selling cigarettes was this morning.
2. B: From selling cigarettes?
3. A: From buying cigarettes. They // said uh  
   
   (Schegloff et al., 1977: 370, modified)

### 7.11.4 Other-initiated other-completed

The recipient of the trouble identifies it and the speaker resolves it.

1. Joy: Kerry’s no good. She’s haven a fight with Sally.
2. Harry: Yih mean Sarah dontchuh. Those two are always fightin’  
   
   (Liddicoat, 2007: 190, modified)

It is important to note that there is a general preference for self-initiated over other-initiated repair (Schegloff et al., 1977).

Repair is clearly a significant topic for language teaching. Both teachers and learners need to be made aware that repair is a natural part of linguistic interaction and that self-correction and
other correction are an intrinsic part of the negotiation of meaning. Such knowledge can, indeed, be liberating for learners.

7.12 INSTITUTIONAL TALK

So far, in our account of the major patterns identified in CA, we have taken examples from everyday conversation, which was the original focus of CA and remains today the canonical form. Levinson (1983: 318) wrote as follows, ‘there are ... many kinds of talk – for example, courtroom or classroom interrogation – which exhibit features of conversational activity like turn-taking, but which are clearly not conversations’. It was not soon after CA began, in fact, that attention began to be turned to other more institutional forms of talk such as the courtroom and classroom mentioned by Levinson.4

Institutional talk is investigated by taking everyday conversation as the benchmark and looking for distinctive features of the institutional talk in question (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2002: 140). Institutional talk is not fundamentally different from everyday talk, but involves either a reduction in the turn-taking options available in everyday talk or a specialisation of the range of practices taken up (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2002: 140). Furthermore, institutional talk can be categorised into two types: formal and non-formal. The formal type includes courts of law, many kinds of interview and ‘traditional’ teacher-led classrooms. Non-formal types, which are more loosely structured than the formal types, include doctor consultations, counselling sessions, social work encounters, business meetings, service encounters and radio phone-ins (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2002: 140).

In the formal category of institutional talk, participants orient to a specific turn-taking format, referred to by Atkinson and Drew (1979) as turn type pre-allocation. In the types of institutional interaction in question, institutional participants ask the questions and the lay participants, whether they be witnesses, pupils or interviewees, are expected to provide the answers. The following example, which is taken from a rape trial, clearly shows this pattern:

1 A: You have had sexual intercourse on a previous occasion haven't you.
2 B: Yes.
3 A: On many previous occasions?
4 B: Not many.
5 A: Several?
6 B: Yes.
7 A: With several men?
8 B: No.
9 A: Just one?
10 B: Two.
11 A: Two. And you are seventeen and a half?
12 B: Yes.

(Levinson, cited in Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008: 142)

Traditional classroom teaching, another type of institutional talk, also has its own preferred pattern of turn type pre-allocation, commonly referred to as IRF (initiation–response–feedback/follow-up),5 as in:

Teacher: What's the capital of France?
Pupil: Paris
Teacher: Yes, good.
In non-formal institutional talk, as already stated, the constraints are less rigid than with the formal type. Although there might be a general orientation towards institutional goals, there is much more room for variation in the turn-taking patterns. This permeability between the institutional and everyday domains presents a challenge for the analyst. One way to deal with this challenge, as mentioned earlier, is to take everyday talk as the benchmark and examine to what extent the non-informal type deviates from the everyday. With regard to the medical interview, Maynard and Heritage (2005: 431) have commented as follows:

interactional practices through which persons conduct themselves elsewhere are transported from the everyday world into the doctor’s office. Accordingly, studies of the medical interview draw upon the plenitude of previous CA research concerned with ordinary conversation.

Thus, studies of the various phases of the medical interview, including its opening, its closing, its history, physical exam, diagnosis, and treatment recommendations have all drawn on similar patterns in everyday talk (Maynard & Heritage, 2005). Heritage (1997: 164) lists six areas where the ‘institutionality of interaction’ might be investigated:

1. turn-taking organisation;
2. overall structural organisation of the interaction;
3. sequence organisation;
4. turn design;
5. lexical choice;
6. interactional asymmetries.

With regard to pedagogy, CA approaches to various types of institutional talk are clearly relevant to work in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (Bowles & Seedhouse, 2007). CA’s emphasis on the permeability of the interface between everyday and institutional talk is an important one for ESP, with potential for a more sophisticated approach to the question of specific versus general approaches to teaching.

7.13 CA ACROSS CULTURES

CA studies of talk across cultures can provide the basis for comparison of L1 and L2 norms, with its potential for application to pedagogy (see Schegloff et al., 2002, for references). Schegloff et al. (2002) argue that CA may offer a broader conception of Interlanguage Pragmatics than the current model (see Chapter 5); where Interlanguage Pragmatics is limited to the single speech act as its unit of analysis, CA can offer sequential organisation.

As a first example of how this might work, Paltridge (2005/2006: 116) reports a study by Béal (1992) of workplace English involving French and Australian speakers of English. The Australians in the workplace in question were frustrated when, in response to their greeting of Did you have a good weekend? their French counterparts gave what they considered to be over-lengthy accounts of their activities. The Australians did not realise that these accounts could be explained by the fact that Did you have a good weekend? is not a normal way to open a conversation for French speakers and that it was interpreted as a real request for information. This example shows how FPPs and their corresponding SPPs can differ across cultures.

As a second, lengthier, example, the results of a monograph by Cheng (2003) contrasting Hong Kong Chinese (HKC) and Native English speakers of English (NESs) and using a CA framework also demonstrated differences in how these two groups perform certain sequences. Cheng had five major findings in the conflict management situations she studied.
1. HKC employed a greater number of instances of and more elaborate redressive language in their disagreements than did the NE speakers.

2. HKC responses to compliment ranged from no verbal response or a continuer to outright rejection of the compliment, while NES responses were always in the form of accepting the compliment. (Cheng explains this finding in terms of the Western notion of minimising or avoiding self-praise [Pomerantz, 1984] and the contrasting Chinese politeness notion of ‘self-denigration’ and ‘other elevation’ [Gu, 1990]).

3. HKC preferred a ‘one-at-a-time’ model to turn-taking, while the NESs favoured more overlapping of turns.

4. HKC were more likely to initiate topics than NESs.

5. HKC preferred an inductive style of sequencing information as compared to the more deductive style of the NESs.

These findings clearly have significance for intercultural communication and language teaching.6

7.14 CRITIQUE

One of the challenges to CA is the difficulty of doing it. Wilkinson and Kitzinger (2008: 69) describe this challenge as follows:

CA work is extremely demanding of the researcher. It is very time-consuming and labour-intensive – from initial transcription (which is a pre-requisite for analysis), through the various phases of analysis itself. It is also extremely complicated, and requires extensive training in concepts and techniques before it can be used effectively.

From a theoretical perspective, CA has been critiqued on a number of counts. First, it has been criticised for its lack of systematicity (Eggins & Slade, 2005). There is no finite set of adjacency pairs and there is no set of criteria for recognising them. In addition, CA is not a quantitative approach (for the most part). There is no way of comparing the relative frequencies of the various units of analysis (Eggins & Slade, 2005). Furthermore, CA has been criticised for its failure to take account of context or the psychological motivation of the participants in turn-taking, as is the case in alternative theories, such as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) or ethnography (see Waring et al., in press for review). Based on these criticisms, there have been various calls to combine CA with other social research methodologies, such as CDA or ethnography (for example, Stubbe et al., 2003).

Notwithstanding these critiques, CA offers a theory and methodology which allow us to understand how talk is used in interaction in both everyday and institutional practices. It offers a clear and replicable methodology and a body of research findings against which ongoing studies can be bench-marked.

Specifically regarding foreign- and second-language learning contexts, contrastive work offers the possibility of highlighting differences in how talk is organised across cultures, with its potential for feeding into syllabus and materials design. More broadly, CA offers a powerful model of talk which can serve as a target for learning and for understanding and intervening in classroom interaction.
7.15 APPLICATION TO PEDAGOGY

7.15.1 CA and research in second-language acquisition

Until the late 1990s, Chomsky's rationalist theory of universal grammar had been predominant in second-language acquisition (SLA) research. Since then, however, in line with a more social view of learning (also referred to as socially distributed learning) and along with other recent sociolinguistic and sociocultural approaches (for example, Kramsch, 2000; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001), CA has begun to take up a place in SLA research and theory building.7

While the Chomskyan approach is theory-driven, based on the idea that research is conducted to test the theory (in the case of SLA, Chomsky’s theory), as we have seen, CA is based on a more social, participant-relevant account. The argument for CA for SLA (more recently referred to as CA-SLA) is that the microanalytic methodology, based as it is on participant behaviour, allows researchers to reveal the detailed features of interaction and develop an account which has the potential to elucidate how and when learning comes about or fails to come about.

As with mainstream CA, the focus of CA-SLA is on sequence organisation, turn-taking, repair, the structure of speech events and integration of speech with gesture.8 This focus, in common with mainstream CA, is achieved through the examination of detailed transcriptions of collections of cases of ordinary or individual cases of (classroom) practices (Brouwer & Wagner, 2004). One particular aspect of this developing focus is a move towards more longitudinal studies, given SLA’s interest in language development (Brouwer & Wagner, 2004; Markee, 2008).

Typical findings of CA-SLA are to be found in the work of Markee (2000). Markee has highlighted, for example, the interactional differences between teacher-fronted and small-group second-language interactions; he has also shown how, in second-language interactions – in common with first-language interaction – there is a preference for self-initiated repair over other-initiated repair; he has, furthermore, shown how learners may cannibalise TCUs that occur in prior interactions in order to recycle them in novel, complex ways (Markee, 2000). Other specific findings of CA in SLA that are worthy of mention include those of Wagner (2004), who has shown how teachers and learners orient to different participant frameworks and shift their orientation as an interaction progresses. Further interesting findings are provided by Ohta (2001), who has demonstrated how, in the IRF pattern of classroom interaction, material which recurrently appears in the teacher’s follow-up turns eventually emerges in students’ production, thus demonstrating the teaching potential of the IRF pattern. As a final example, Waring (2009) has demonstrated how certain participation structures create speaking opportunities for fellow participants in learner–learner interactions.

An important limitation of CA in SLA is that it is often not possible to identify successful learning, because there is no external behaviour to demonstrate it. Only a relatively small part of SLA is thus observable through talk, but CA is nevertheless a powerful tool with which to examine what there is (Markee, 2008).

7.15.2 CA and teaching and learning

An appreciation of the principles and practices of CA can develop awareness on the part of teachers of the nature of talk, which is the target of the teaching of speaking and listening skills in both first- and second-language contexts. More than this, though, in its focus on what Heritage and Atkinson (cited in Kasper, 2006: 86) refer to as ‘the competences that ordinary speakers use and rely on in participating in intelligible, socially organized interaction’, CA provides a goal for teaching and learning. In second-language research, these competences are referred to together as interactional competence and, according to Markee (2000), they include three practices: sequential organisation,
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turn-taking and repair. Kasper (2006) breaks interactional competence down further, into the following capacities:

- to understand and produce social actions in their sequential contexts;
- to take turns at talk in an organised fashion;
- to format actions and turns, and construct epistemic and affective stance, by drawing on different types of semiotic resources (linguistic, non-verbal, non-vocal), including register-specific resources;
- to repair problems in speaking, hearing and understanding;
- to co-construct social and discursive identities through sequence organisation, actions-in-interaction and semiotic resources;
- to recognise and produce boundaries between activities, including transitions from states of contact to absence of contact (interactional openings, closings) and transitions between activities during continued contact.

How might this operate in practice? To take an example, awareness of the intricacies of the turn-taking practices of the target culture can help learners communicate more effectively and avoid cross-cultural pragmatic failure (Thomas, 1983). Familiarity with the typical wordings of certain types of turn, to take another example, can similarly assist in the development of interactional competence. As Wong and Waring (2010: 125) put it, ‘little words and phrases such as actually, anyway, or by the way carry nuanced interactional meanings’. Understanding of the importance of recipient design and the importance of continuers in story-telling is another salient example of how the findings of CA can benefit learners. Awareness of the conventions of topic shift and of repair is similarly invaluable in developing oral proficiency.

Insights from CA can help textbook writers in designing more authentic learning materials, as is increasingly being recommended (for example, Thornbury, 2005b). Too often, textbook dialogues fail to represent what talk is actually like (Wong, 2002, 2007). This is a problem from the very beginning of learning, where, for example, there is a lot of emphasis on opening a conversation. CA has placed a lot of emphasis on examining this crucial stage of spoken interaction. Unfortunately, the findings are too rarely applied by materials designers.

Bowles and Seedhouse (2007) present a model for applying CA findings to the classroom in Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) contexts. The model consists of two stages. In a first stage, a CA description is created of the target interaction. This then forms the basis for the second stage, which applies the description to develop pedagogical methods and materials. Following Basturkmen and Crandell (2004), Bowles and Seedhouse (2007) call for analysis on the part of learners of CA transcripts, arguing that this can have positive effects on students’ perception of appropriacy and bring them closer to native speaker targets. At the same time, they critique Basturkmen and Crandell (2004) for not providing a detailed enough transcript in their article, arguing that the omission of pause length marks, for example, makes the transcript resemble a Pinter play rather than a genuine conversation. For Bowles and Seedhouse (2007), a detailed transcript is essential if interactional competence is to be the goal and not just pragmatic competence.

Bowles and Seedhouse (2007) argue that, for LSP, interactional competence will be specific to each institutional domain, although they add that the same principles can be applied to general-purposes language teaching. In LSP, the approach can be to compare transcripts from general and institutional contexts. Bowles and Seedhouse (2007) give the example of Wong (2007), who showed the importance of focusing on particular practices that have been identified by CA as significant in the target domain, in Wong’s case the problematic feature of ‘moving out of closings’, where signalling procedures are essential for successful conversational closure.

Bowles and Seedhouse (2007) also have specific recommendations for classroom activities with transcripts. Following Burns et al. (1997), they recommend listening and transcription comple-
tion exercises for identifying particularly significant interactional features. In addition, transcripts can be the focus of classroom discussion, which might include comparison of successful and less successful interactional features of conversations. Furthermore, Bowles and Seedhouse (2007) suggest comparing authentic transcriptions with published learning materials and highlighting the reality observable in the authentic data vis-à-vis the inadequacies of the published materials. Another recommended classroom activity is the comparison of L1 and L2 transcripts (Burns et al., 1997).

Bowles and Seedhouse (2007) sum up their discussion by noting that ‘there is now a growing body of LSP classroom methods and activities which can make use of CA results in order to provide the interactional focus we are advocating for LSP materials’. Most of these activities, it might be argued, are equally applicable in non-specific, general language teaching.

Wong and Waring (2010) highlight the relevance of CA findings in three areas of instructional practices: repair, task design and management of participation. For repair, they show how CA descriptions provide for a wider range of alternatives for dealing with problematic learner contributions. For task design, they demonstrate how analysis has shown that the most authentic tasks in the language classroom often turn out to be the off-task talk. This is because, when off task, learners can be engaged in solving real-life problems. Wong and Waring argue, therefore, for the relevance and usefulness of off-task activity. For the management of participation, they argue that teachers need to consider how their actions affect learner participation. For turn design, for example, teachers can encourage participation by, for example, leaving their turns incomplete or leaving the F (feedback/follow-up) slot empty in the IRF sequence.

CA clearly has a lot to offer language pedagogy, both in terms of providing goals for learning and in terms of specific classroom practices.

### 7.16 QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Think about what might be the challenges in teaching everyday conversation. Make a list of five such challenges.
2. Consider the rules for turn-taking in section 7.3. Write a similar set of rules for the interaction in a typical university seminar.
3. Look at the list of adjacency pairs in section 7.5. Select the five pairs that might be most useful for a beginners’ course.
4. Write short dialogues for language learning, illustrating: (a) pre-sequencing; and (b) insertion sequencing.
5. Why is topic management important in conversation?
6. Why is repair important in language learning? What are the differences, if any, between L1 and L2 repair?
7. Can you think of any cross-cultural differences relating to conversation, such as those reported by Béal and Cheng in section 7.13?
8. Look at the dialogues in a language learning course book. To what extent do they correspond to authentic conversational patterns? If they are different, what are these differences and what are the possible drawbacks and advantages of this?
9. What do you consider to be some of the most important insights from CA for language learning and teaching? List five.

### 7.17 FURTHER READING