

Conversation Analysis: A Way to Identify the Components of Conversations Resulting In Better Teaching and Better Learning

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Abstract: *The purpose of this paper is to record, transcribe and analyse the language used in three different conversations on (a) an event where advice is sought in an academic setting, (b) a situation where two friends talk sharing some common troubles, and (c) a situation where compliments are given by children and elders. That is, to identify the utterances containing the functions, where the utterances containing the mentioned functions appear in the conversations, whether there are any devices used to give face to the interlocutor, identify the components of conversations and how the conversations differ from one another. The findings make the researcher think that if teachers are capable of analysing conversations, they will be able to understand the nooks and crannies of the learners' interactive talks and thus the understanding and relationships among teachers and students which will lead to better teaching and better learning.*

Key words: *conversation analysis, speech acts, speech events, compliments, advice*

I. Introduction

Conversation analysis is an approach to the study of natural conversation both verbal and non-verbal in situations of daily life, especially with a view to determining the participants' ways of turn taking, constructing sequences of utterances across turns, identifying and repairing problems, and employing gaze and movement. It also determines how conversation works in different conventional settings.

Conversation analysis was developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s principally by the sociologist Harvey Sacks and his close associates Emanuel Scheghoff and Gail Jefferson. In the present age conversation analysis is an established method used in sociology, anthropology, linguistics, speech-communication and psychology. It is particularly influential in interactional sociolinguistics, discourse analysis and discursive psychology, as well as being a coherent discipline in its own right. Recently, Conversation analysis techniques of sequential analysis have been employed for instance by phoneticians to explore the fine phonetic detail of speech (Kelly and Local 1989)

1.1 Speech acts:

In analyzing conversations one should, among other things, be aware of speech acts. According to Austin (1962), the acts performed by uttering something are called speech acts. There are three levels at which speech acts are analysed. They are as follows:

(i) Locutionary Speech Act : A locutionary speech act is the performance of an utterance only. For example the utterance of , "Please give me a glass of water' is a locutionary speech act.

(ii) Illocutionary Speech Act: An illocutionary speech act is a complete speech act, made through utterances that consist of the delivery of the propositional contents of the utterance and a particular illocutionary force, by which a speaker asserts, suggests, demands, promises. For example, the meaning of the above mentioned utterances is the illocutionary speech act.

(iii) Perlocutionary Speech Act: A perlocutionary speech act is a speech act that produces an effect, intended or not, achieved in an addressee by a speaker's utterance. For example if the addressee complies with the illocutionary speech act, that means, if he/she carries out the act of bringing a glass of water, it will be a perlocutionary speech act.

1.2 Speech events:

As per Richards et. al (1985) speech events are activities that are ordered by norms and rules for the use of human speech. Language users in such events use language that indicate the way the participants belong to or their social interactions. In analyzing conversations speech events are also to be considered.

1.3 Compliments:

Compliments serve to invigorate, establish or create or hearten solidarity between the speaker and the hearer. Holmes (1986) says, "Compliments are positive expression or evaluation, which are directed either explicitly or implicitly to someone for something valued positively by the speaker and the hearer." So, it is evident that the function of compliments is to establish and maintain social connections and amiability between participants.

II. Transcription of data

For the purpose of analyzing the interactive talks or conversations in discussion, the researcher has transcribed the tape recorded audio data broadly to give it a written form following the conventions outlined by Levinson (1983).

III. Method

The conversations were first audio recorded, then transcribed and finally analysed and explained as per the established guidelines laid out by the experts of conversation analysis..

IV. Analyses

4.1 A Conversation where a father is complimenting his daughter on her success in a music examination and its analysis:

Father : Nuha(.) How was your exam today?

Daughter :My exam was fantastic.=My teacher told me, 'Well done'!

Father : CONGRATULATIONS!

Daughter: Thank you.

Father : You are welcome!

Daughter: I have an art exam tomorrow.

Father : O.K. Practice it. =You can do well in that also.

Among a number of functions of compliments, Hatch (1992) says, one is 'to reinforce and encourage good performance'. Analysing the above conversation it has been found that the language used is of politeness. Next, the function of the compliments is a positive evaluation of the daughter's performance in the examination she has done well. This compliment on the part of the father will work to enhance the bonds between the father and the daughter. Again, this conversation has 'turn-allocation component of the turn taking system'. It means that the speaker and the hearer know when to speak and when to end. Then, the adjacency pairs are also conspicuous. For example, 'congratulations, thank you, and 'welcome' have been used in usual sequence. Furthermore, the event structure of the compliment can be described as 'compliment + acknowledgement/acceptance + bridge ('congratulations + thank you + I have another exam...').

4.2 A conversation involving academic advice in an admissions office of a university (Bangladesh University, Dhaka) and its analysis:

Student: Hello! (Can I have some information?)

Adviser: Hello! O yea. DEFINITELY. (Can I help you?)

Student: I would like to know about your MA courses in your university + MA in English.

Adviser: Mmmm(.3) + We have + we offer MA in English over here++ We have it on literature+MA in literature.

Student: What is the duration of the course?

Adviser: Mmmm actually we have two options mmm over here. Like + if you were a student with honours' degree + a bachelor's degree in English, then the one-year course for you. Mmm(.2) but mmm if you don't have a bachelor's degree in English + then it is a two-year course.

Student: Don' have a MA in ELT?

Adviser: Mmm. actually at the moment we don't have it + haven't Mmm(.2) MA ELT but we are planning to start from next year.

Student: Do you have hostel facilities for girls?

Adviser: O yea + of course + we have a very good facility over here for girls only. Mmm, + yea + for girls.

Student: O.K. Thank you.

Adviser: Any other questions?

Student: No, no, I will come later.

Hatch (1992) notes that the components of advice follow a predefined sequence. Normally, a group of components for seeking and giving advice mostly follow the order: (a) opening, (b) participant identification (c) problem statement (d) symptom negotiation (e) diagnosis (f) advice negotiation (h) advice acceptance (thanks) (i) preclosing and (j) closing.

Here in this advice speech event conversation also the sequence of components occur like adjacency pairs. After the opening the advice seeker poses a question whether she may have some information and when she asks the question, 'if they (the university) have MA in English course', the problem is revealed and that should be solved by the adviser. The advice seekers, as in here, normally spend much time to know in detail about their query. Then the advice giving sequence begins. Sometimes, the advice is readily accepted but sometimes not. As is the case in here, the advice is not readily accepted. It is assumed that some more negotiation is required.

When the first questions 'whether the university has MA in English, what the duration is, were answered, the advice seeker does not say she has accepted the advice. Rather she goes on asking whether they have a MA in ELT and hostel facilities. Here the advice seeker does not seem to accept the advice because at the end of the advice session she just thanks the adviser. When asked whether she has any other questions, she says 'no' and adds that she will come again. However, whether the advice is accepted or rejected, the sequential order of the components of the advising speech event has been maintained.

4.3 Analysing a conversation where a husband and a wife share a common trouble.

Husband: Shisir!+Without eggs, breakfast is difficult.

Wife : Yes, it is! Eggs are all toxic. What to do?

Husband: Government has banned toxic poultry feed already.

Wife : Who cares? Nobody + will listen to it.

Husband: But we should have some alternatives.

Wife : Without eggs Nuha will NOT have her breakfast.

Husband; Then, where to get non toxic eggs? All the poultry farms feed the toxic food to their chicken.

Wife : You can try for eggs in the village. The eggs that domestic chickens produce.

Husband: That's a good idea + I'll check in the market in the suburb today.

Some people are naturally positive and optimistic, whereas others tend to see the world in a more negative light and always think the glass is half-empty which is half-full. Therefore, it is only natural that some people tend to complain more than others do. However, complaining is not always a measuring device to judge how pessimistic a person is. Just because some people complain a lot, it cannot be said that they are unhappy. Obviously, there is some connection between what happens in someone's life and the things that they complain about.

Researchers like Hatch (1992) have shown that complaints have patterns that are influenced by the social need to maintain good relationships. Many people want to avoid complaining situations because 'it is difficult to complain and still maintain and give face'. Hatch (1992) adds 'when people resort to complaint making, the complaints are usually addressed to those who are not responsible for the problems they gripe'. A complaint speech event usually has an opening that includes an identification of the complainer and the justification of the complaint, the complaint act, a possible justification of the addressee's action, an apology, a negotiated remedy and a closing.

Here also the husband gripes about the toxic eggs that are a health hazard and the event opens. Next, the addressee also shares that without eggs their daughter will not have breakfast. And then a negotiated remedy is found out when she suggests that local eggs be used, and the complaint act comes to a closing when the complainer agrees to the remedy suggested by the wife.

V. The Differences Among The Three Speech Events:

The first one was a speech event of compliments which comprise greetings, appreciation, expression of liking and disliking. The second one is an advising event which has its own sequence of components viz. opening, identification, advising, acceptance, non-acceptance, and closing. And the third one is complaint speech event which is different from the other two as the nature of the situation of speech event is totally different.

VI. Reflection On Data Collection And Transcription Exercise:

The data collection part of the research work was pretty interesting as it involves practical life experience. For the compliment speech event the author has used his practical experience with his daughter who has done well in a music examination of her music school. The data for the advice speech event were also taken from a university admissions office. And the third one also was taken from the author's day to day life where he finds that eating farm produced chicken-eggs is a health hazard. Though at the beginning the over all experience of data collection seemed to be challenging, ultimately it was found to be a rewarding job.

VII. Conclusion

Through the findings of the research, the researcher has come to see practically the patterns of conversation that the scholars have found out and established. Moreover, the nuances of interactive talks, that means, the chuckles like ‘uhm’, ‘yuh know’, ‘right’, ‘yeah’ etc. and speech particles like ‘uh’, ‘oh’ etc., which the researcher previously considered problems of conversational interaction, are now acceptable to the researcher. Now, to the researcher these nuances are acceptable as a part of the normal course of conversation, and he finds that they even sometimes enhance the beauty of the conversation. For teachers who have to deal with a lot of students everyday, this kind of study in conversation analysis may be helpful in understanding and evaluating the learners’ motives and problems, which presumably be ultimately beneficial for the development of student – teacher relations that may lead to better learning and teaching, because the interactive talks between teachers and learners are very much concerned with advice seeking and giving, exchanging greetings and sharing problems.

As limitations of this research work, the researcher thinks that if the conversations were videoed without the notice of the participants instead of audio recording the conversations, the results might be a little different. However, utmost care has been taken to follow the parameter of conversation analysis in conducting this research.

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