

## **Dynamics of House Rental Interactions: A Conversational Analysis of a Discourse between a Potential Tenant and Real Estate Agent**

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### **Abstract**

The study extensively examined a discourse on the subject of Conversational Analysis, its proponents, fundamental principle; inter-subjectivity, actions, and applications in everyday communication. It evaluated language and communication patterns used in conversation such as, turn-taking, adjacency pairs, and preference organization. The significant impacts of some fore-bearers of conversational analysis, as well as the methodological approaches to conducting conversational analysis and the interaction between the potential tenant (Princess) and the real estate agent (house agent) were discussed. The Jefferson Notation System was used to analyze data collected through a cell phone recording. The study outcome addressed the significance of conversational analysis in understanding micro-level social interactions, and their potential interdisciplinary relevance.

**Keywords:** Conversational Analysis, Micro-analysis, Macro-analysis, Ethno-methodological.

## Introduction

Conversation analysis (CA) is the study of how people use language in conversation to accomplish their goals, such as conveying information, expressing emotions, or establishing social relationships.. It is the method of studying social interactions, particularly through language use in conversation. According to Ezeifeke (2018), CA is an approach to the study of social interaction embracing both verbal and non-verbal conducts in situations of everyday life. Conversation analysis is a branch of linguistics that involves the systematic analysis of verbal and non-verbal behaviors in conversation to understand how people interact with each other.

According to Norquist (2019), conversation analysis, also called talk-in-interaction is the study of talk produced in the course of ordinary human interactions. A key issue in conversation analysis says Brian Partridge "is the view of ordinary conversation as the most basic form of talk. For conversation analysts, conversation is the main way in which people come together, exchange information, negotiate and maintain social relations" There are different types of CA, including microanalysis ( a detailed examination of specific features of

conversation: turn-taking, repair, and topic management). Macro-analysis (involves the larger patterns in conversation: structure of narratives, or use of particular speech art), Ethno-methodological analysis (concerned with the understanding of the social norms and practices that underlie conversational interaction).

## Proponents

Conversation analysis was developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s principally by the sociologist Harvey Sacks and his close associates Emmanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson. Sacks was inspired by Harold Garfinkel's (1967) ethnomethodology and Erving Goffman's conception of the what came to be known as the interaction order, but also a number of minor sources of contemporary influences such as the generativism of Noam Chomsky and its focus on building an apparatus. Sacks in his research began examining ‘‘the talk’’ as an object in its own right, as a fundamental type of social action, rather than primarily as a resource for documenting other social processes. In short, Sacks came to recognize that the talk itself was the action. It was in the details of the talk that we could discover just how what was getting done in the activity was accomplished, systematically

and procedurally, then and there, by the co-participants themselves. Of note is Gail Jefferson notation transcription model. Jefferson developed the widely used transcription notation system known as the Jeffersonian transcription system, which enables researchers to capture the various features of conversation, such as pauses, overlaps, intonation, and nonverbal cues. This detailed transcription process allowed for a more precise analysis of the sequential and turn-taking structures in conversation. They believe that the analyst must not come to the data with pre-defined categories but rather must wait for the data to yield the real categories that the participants themselves orient to in talk. The focus of conversational analysis is on the characteristic of spoken interaction. mechanisms, agreements, disagreements, openings, closings, compliments and various issues relating to institutionalized talk and non-verbal inputs in conversation. Sacks' theory of conversation analysis is rooted in the belief that conversation is a fundamental social activity that plays a crucial role in the construction of social reality. He argued that the sequential organization of talk, the turn-taking system, and the various practices employed in conversation all contribute to the collaborative creation of meaning.

### **Tenets**

Sacks and colleagues identify three basic elements of conversation, the speaking turn, the adjacency pair and the sequential implicativeness (Sacks *et al.*, 1974). Sequential implicativeness is the systematic organization of sequence in conversation; the orderliness of a conversation. It is the way actions and utterances in a conversation are structured and interconnected. His research revealed that conversations follow specific sequential patterns, with one action or turn often leading to a particular response or next action. Conversation analysis focuses on analyzing two foundations in conversation: 1) actions (what people do in talk) and 2) sequences (how they go about accomplishing it) (Clift, 2016).

### **Intersubjectivity**

Another important concept in conversation analysis is intersubjectivity. Human dialogues are concentrated around the collaborative aspects of constructing a shared understanding of the situation, what they want to achieve, and the other's contribution (Rommetveit, 1992). It is the assumption that 'communication is a means of bringing participants in it to a mutual awareness, a common

perception of an idea, an emotion, a presentation, a governing structure and so on' Taylor and Cameron (p. 161). It is so central to the study of verbal communication in modern times that it might be called its fundamental principle. Ezeifeka quoting Sacks states that the most fundamental level of intersubjective understanding concerns the understanding of the preceding turn displayed by the current speaker, just like any turn at talk is produced in the context shaped by the previous turn. It shows the speaker's understanding of that previous turn. There is a mutual understanding of the character or the expectation of a previous turn whether it is a request, a command or a solicitation. Speaker and hearer share a common view of the conversation because they both know from what components a conversation may be constructed. Example: "Come" as a turn can be a request or a command, and should be understood for what it is to elicit the right response.

**Action:**

Another strong focus of CA is action. Sack has said that Talk is actually the action. The study of action focuses on the description of the practices by which turns at talk are composed and positioned so as to realize one or more actions. This includes openings and

closings of conversation, assessments, storytelling, and complaints. Opening and closing often make use of pairs of utterances, such as Hi, How are you and Bye, See you later which are not meant to be taken literally. Action involves turn-taking and sequence. Actions involve what people do with words: There are five basic kinds of speech act of utterance in speaking. (Searle in Levinson (1983: 240); a) representatives, b) directives, c) commissives, d) expressives, f) declaratives. There are four basic key conversation concepts in the structure of CA; turn-taking, adjacency pairs, preference organization, and repair.

**Turn Taking**

Turn-taking refers to the process by which speakers take turns in a conversation. It looks at the rules, practices, and strategies used by speakers to initiate, maintain, and end a conversation. Turn-taking is the foundation of conversation. Humans do not have the cognitive capacity to listen to language and speak it simultaneously. In order to have a conversation, the conversationalists must therefore take turns, where one speaker talks while the other listens, and vice versa. We have an ABAB distribution in conversation. Example: two people talking

a) How are you? b) strong a) good to hear b) thanks for your care How do speakers know when it's their turn to speak in a conversation? While there is no formally established signal that guarantees that we have finished our turn (consider radio communications where each turn ends with the speaker saying "over"), there are several cues that we implicitly give each other to signal it: pauses, intonation, eye contact, or by the implications of what was said. Our partners must also project when they think we have finished our turns. If our partners project correctly, we let them begin their turn. If they project incorrectly, then you may seek to take back the turn using different strategies. A turn begins when a speaker takes the floor, and ends, when another speaker takes over. One example of turn-taking in conversation analysis is the "floor holding" phenomenon, where a speaker continues to hold the floor and speak despite other participants' attempts to interrupt or take their turn. Turn-taking structure within a conversation has three components (Sacks, Schegloff, Jefferson, 1960) a) Turn-taking component or turn construction component b) Turn allocation component c) Rules that govern turn construction.

a) Turn construction component: It contains the main content of the utterance and have various unit types (turn construction units). These units help participants estimate the extent or shape of a talk. Units could be one word turn: Lexical: Example; move, drive, shout, bend, come. Turn unit as phrases: phrasal; on the table, change the dial, grow up. Clauses, sentential, and discoursal. The end of Turn Construction Units (TCU): is a point where the turn of a current speaker may end and a new speaker may begin, known as a transition relevance place or TRP/

b) Turn allocation components: It is a process of distribution of turns for orderly ,sequential flow of conversation. It comprises techniques that select the next speaker. There are basically two types of techniques: those where the current speaker selects the next speaker and those where the next speaker selects themselves. Example: a) in a class discussion, where the lecturer was teaching, the lecturer has the floor, as the current speaker, she could pause and call in a particular student to take the speaking floor to answer a question or make other contributions.

Self-select: in a class team discussion, one of the participants as the current speaker and at a transitional relevance place, another

participant, takes the floor, or self-select without an overt invitation of the current speaker. There are many issues that you can explore with turn-taking. How do parties manage turn-taking? What happens when two parties want to speak at the same time? How do you recognize and manage overlaps, backchannels, interruptions to avoid breakdown in conversation? How do you determine possible transitional relevance place? What happens when we want to take back our turn? These are all issues that Conversation Analysts explore under the term “turn allocation” (Ford, 2013). Overall, turn-taking is not a hard-and-fast rule like a board game; it is a guideline that partners use to project when their opportunity to speak should occur.

c) Rules that govern turn construction and allocation: Fundamentally, it is a speaker at a time. It could be by nomination or self-selection. This is affected by the context of the conversation.

Once a Transition Relevance Place is reached, the following rules apply:

a) The current speaker selects the next speaker and yields the floor.

b) Another speaker self-selects, and when there are more than one indications, the first to speak takes the turn

c) If no other speaker self-selects, the current speaker might still hold the floor, until another Transition Relevance Place, or the conversation ends. The rules serve to maintain order and avoid the breakdown in conversation, minimizing gaps, lapses and interruptions.

### **Silence**

Silence is relevant in conversation, it carries varied interpretations, since silence is a component of discontinuity in speech. Silence can be positive or negative depending on context and duration. Positively, it can help discussion go deeper, it can indicate topic switch or disagreement. It leads to awkward situations among speakers and shows trouble in conversation flow.. Three situations that bring silence include: a) Gap: a period of silence between turns. When a speaker stops without selecting another speaker causing silence until another self-selects. b) Lapse: A period of silence when no sequence or other structured activity is in progress. When the current speaker stops, did not select, and no other self-selects. c) Pause: A period of silence within a speaker’s TUC, during a speaker’s turn, when sentence is not complete.

### **Timing**

Another cue associated with turn-taking is timing. Timing varies within a turn and may be subjective.

### **Conversation Irregularities**

While it may be tempting to think that all conversations follow the one-at-a-time rule, there are certainly exceptions to this practice. For example, we might engage in simultaneous laughter at a joke; you do not take turns laughing when you and your partner see something funny. When you first greet someone, you might also engage in a simultaneous greeting of delight, or you might be engaging in backchannel feedback as you listen to your partner tell a very riveting story that causes you to express emotions, sympathy, and awe. CA looks at interactional phenomena like pauses, interruption, pauses, laughter, and many other properties and strategic moves of spontaneous talk (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Drew & Heritage, 1992). In such cases, you and your partner “overlap” each other, but it’s not a problem to be fixed as if you had rudely interrupted your partner.

### **Overlapping**

Overlaps can be competitive or cooperative: Goldberg (1990) claims one is a power interruption, the other a display of rapport

### **Adjacency Pairs**

Adjacency pairs are a pair of utterances that are expected to go together (Have, 2010). It is an example of conversational turn-taking, a pattern of organization in conversation where one turn is followed by a related turn. The first utterance in an adjacency pair is called a first-pair part (FPP), and the response is called the second-pair part (SPP). They are linked by a relation of ‘conditional relevance’ produced by different speakers in an interaction. Conditional relevance is the property that unites FPPs and SPPs because the relevance of the second action is contingent upon the production of the first. The FPP and the SPP are of the same pair parts. Richards and Schmidt as cited in Paltridge (2000, p.87) explained that adjacency pairs are utterances produced by two successive speakers in such a way that the second utterance is identified as related to the first one as an expected follow up. Adjacency pairs are the smallest units in conversation and are considered to be one of the factors that contribute to the flow of conversation.

### **Categories of Adjacency Pairs**

According to Paltridge (2000:91-99), there are 11 kinds of Adjacency pairs, they are:

requesting–Agreement: Assessment- Agreement: Question–Answer: Compliment- Acceptance/rejection, Leave taking: Complaint –Apology: Greeting – Greeting: Warning –Acknowledgement: Blame–Denial: Opinion Provider–Comment, Threat–Counter threat Question-Examples a) A: thank you (FPP) B: You’re welcome (SPP) b) Danny: Where is Amanda? (FPP) Julia: She went for school runs. (SPP) c) Don: I will be glad to have you on my graduation program (FPP) Fab: I will be there d) Mike: Do you know what time it is? Carol: Six O’clock Adjacency pairs can be expanded with additional adjacency pairs at three logical positions (Schegloff, 2007). These three positions are a) before (pre-expansion:preliminary to the main course of action):Examples: Guess what!/what?, what are you doing?/Nothing.b) inside (insert expansion, it comes between the FPP and SPP): Example: Customer: I would like a turkey sandwich, please. (FPP base) Waitress: White or wholegrain? (Insert FPP) Customer: Wholegrain. (Insert SPP) Waitress: Okay. (SPP base) c) after (post-expansion, it comes after the base SPP is constructed): Example: Customer: Thanks (after he received the sandwich) Waitress: You are welcome. Talks occur in sequence of pairs and sequence expansion allows talk

which is made up of more than a single adjacency pair to be constructed and understood as performing the same basic action and the various additional elements are as doing interactional work related to the basic action underway. Other examples, before you ask your friend to lunch, you can do a pre-invitation where you ask your friend You: “are you doing anything this weekend?” (Pre-invitation FPP1) Friend: No (Pre-invitation answer SPP1) Once your friend says no, then you can issue the invitation. You: Then have lunch with me. (Invitation FPP2). Once your friend hears the invitation to lunch, your friend might want to know when and where the lunch will take place before giving an official “yes” or “no.” Friend: “what time and where?” (Insert expansion: Question on invitation FPP3) You: At Chilis, at 1pm (Insert expansion: answer to expansion question) Friend: I will be there. (Invitation Answer SPP) You: Cool, see you there. (Post-expansion: Reply after Invitation Reply. FPP4) “ What time and where? would be an insert expansion within the adjacency pair since it occurs between the invitation (FPP) and the reply (SPP). Once you give an answer that it would be at Chili’s at 1pm, your friend can then reply with a “yes.” Once your friend says “yes”, you might then



say “cool, see you there” which would count as a post-expansion since it speaks of what occurred after the invitation has been replied to.

Another example of adjacency pairs expansion:

A: Hey, do you have any plans this weekend? [Pre-invitation, FPP1]

B: No. [Pre-invitation answer, SPP1]

A: Do you want to go see a movie at 5:00 on Saturday? [Invitation, FPP2]

B: What movie? [Insert Expansion: Question about invitation, FPP3]

A: Passion of Christ. [Insert Expansion: Answer to question, SPP3]

B: Ok, sure. [Invitation Answer, SPP2]

A: Great, I'll pick you at 4:00. [Post-expansion: Reply to invitation answer, FPP4]

Another Example This data is taken from ‘Six Minutes English’ conversation script of BBC Learning English on 24th February 2016 entitled “The Commute”. The adjacency pairs pattern in the ‘Six Minutes English’ are as follows: (1) Greeting – Greeting Neil: Hello and welcome to 6 minutes English, I'm Neil Alice: ...and I'm Alice (2) Question – Answer Neil: How do you get to work? Alice: I cycle 3) Opinion provide – Comment Alice: Well, I'll have to see if I can catch you on your way into the

building. I'm intrigued about this sporty Neil I didn't know about! Neil: ‘Intrigued’ means to be very interested in something. Well, Alice, I'm flattered. And today's show is about commuting –or travelling between your home and your work. (4) Assessment – Agreement Neil: The American researcher must be talking about commuters who aren't engaged in active travel, mustn't she? because if you cycle a longer distance, then you are being more physically active. Alice: I think you are right, for once, Neil! (5) Suggestion – Acceptance The suggestion pattern looks like the Question – Answer, however the meaning is different in contextual. Neil: Why don't you hop on your bike, Alice? Then we can both wear Lycra to work. Alice: That's fantastic idea, Neil! Moving on!

### Preference Organization

Preference Organization is the concept that there are sequences that are “preferred” and do not require explanation for their occurrence, and there are actions that are “dispreferred” that do require explanation for their occurrence. Example of Preferred Action: Suppose your friend invites you to his/her house warming. If you said “yes,” you would not need to explain why you said

“yes.” Accepting an invitation is a preferred action. However, if you said “No” to the invitation, your friend will probably expect an account for why you will not attend. Declining an invitation is generally a ‘dispreferred’ action that then requires some accounting for why the preferred action did not occur. Generally, preferred responses are ones that enable an action to be completed, dispreferred are ones that prevent it from doing so (Schlegloff, 2007). More abstractly, conversations work on a preference for agreement. When our response is in agreement with our partner, then our actions are in “flow” of the conversation and do not require justification. Consider the phrasing of the question, “Did you win?” The question is phrased to where the expected answer is in the affirmative “yes” to winning. Compare that phrasing to “Did you lose?” The latter question is phrased to where the expected answer is a “yes” to losing. In the former phrasing, if you did win, you can just say “yes.” If you lost, then you might need to explain what happened. In the latter phrasing, it is the opposite. “Were you blessed?” The preferred sequence would be a ‘yes’ and the conversation will progress, but a ‘no’ would need an justification.

There is much deeper theory and research behind what a preferred action is, how culture impacts these norms, and what constitutes preference for agreement. For now, just know that conversation rests on participants “going with the flow” with each other’s actions. If there is a “bump in the road” regarding a dis-preferred response, then it may require the participant to explain his/her actions. Or it just might require “repair”.

### **Repair**

Conversational repair is a set of methods that we use to fix problems that arise with conversing. Repair sequences refer to how participants repair communication breakdowns in conversation. (Sacks *et al.*, 1960) Repair involves various practices used to address misunderstandings, correct errors, or clarify meaning These methods can either be self-initiated or other-initiated (Kitzinger, 2013). Repair is categorized into four classes based on who has initiated the repair and who has taken steps to resolve it: self-initiated self-repair (SISR), other-initiated self-repair (OISR), self-initiated other-repair (SIOR) and other- initiated other-repair (Schegloff, 1997; Schegloff, 2000). For example, you can self-repair a mistake that

you made in your own turn. You might say: (SISR)+ ‘ ‘ I need a new paint for my table – um, for my door.’’ (SISR) + ‘ ‘I’ll see you Thursday...I mean Friday.’’ (OIOR) or a partner might correct you after you say, ‘ ‘I’ll see you Thursday’ ’ by saying ‘ ‘Do you mean Friday?’ ’ (OIOR) + ‘ ‘ I travelled to Lagos, the Nation’s capital.’ ’ Your listener intercepted with a question Lagos? Abuja not Lagos is the capital. + OISR) a partner might respond to ‘ ‘I ‘ll see you on Thursday with ‘ ‘thursday? Most likely it was a Thursday. And you repair with ...I mean Friday. Repair is a way of ‘ ‘correcting’ ’ someone. There are risks to constantly correcting someone; you might profile as condescending, rude, or disagreeable.

You might be afraid to correct someone like your boss or a person who exercises significant power over you. What do you do in those situations? There are strategic ways that you can repair as well. You can just simply repeat what the person said and let that person catch the error and self-correct accordingly or you can implicitly correct the person. Suppose you are walking your dog and passer-by asks ‘ ‘What’s her name?’ ’ If your dog is actually male, you might just say, ‘ ‘His name is Jack.’ ’ By doing that, you are implicitly correcting the passer-by

without making it too much of an attack. The passer-by can then correct their language choice accordingly Overall, turn-taking and repair have been two large topics widely studied by Conversation Analysts (Mortensen & Wagner, 2012).

### **Scholars who worked on conversation analysis**

John Heritage: One of Heritage's notable contributions is his research on the organization of repair in conversation. Charles Goodwin: Goodwin's approach to conversation analysis is heavily influenced by ethnomethodology. His contributions are the concept of "sequential organization" in talk, and his research on embodied interaction, highlighting the importance of nonverbal behaviors, gestures, and bodily movements in shaping conversational dynamics.

Marjorie Harness Goodwin is known for her extensive research on the social dynamics and organization of talk-in-interaction. Goodwin's work focuses on understanding how people use language and nonverbal communication to construct and negotiate social identities, relationships, and power dynamics in everyday interactions.

### **How to Conduct Conversation Analysis**

Conversational data can be collected from voice calls. However, stopping at the data collection phase only brings a few benefits. Many social listening tools highlight keywords and phrases that occur frequently by using speech analytics. Conversational analysts insist on spontaneity that is the use of audio or visual recordings of naturally occurring conversation. Here are the standard steps in conversation analysis: 1. Select the conversation to analyze. It can be a recorded conversation, a transcript, or a live conversation that you record .

2. Transcribe the conversation: Transcribe the conversation word for word. Include pauses, overlapping speech, and nonverbal cues.
3. Identify the sequence of actions: Analyze the conversation to identify the sequence of actions that occur
4. Identify patterns: Look for patterns in the conversation, such as the use of particular words or phrases.
5. Analyze the conversation: Apply the principles of conversation analysis to analyze the conversation.
6. Write a conversation analysis report: Write a report that summarizes your analysis. Include a description of the conversation, your analysis of the

conversation, and your conclusions about the conversation

**Princess' conversation with a house agent who could not deliver on his end**

Princess: Hello! Good afternoon

Agent: Yeah afternoon

Princess: This is princess, that lady that paid for an apartment around slot area who was informed that they'll use her room for the burial... I have not gotten my refund up till today

Agent: Why are you calling now, was it not Monday the landlord agreed to pay you back? If he did not give you the money wouldn't you work towards it?

Princess: When you speak like this I don't understand you, how would I work towards it? He said on Monday... (agent interrupts)

Agent: As he didn't give you the money, you would have come so we go meet him together (princess cuts in)

Princess: See as it is now I don't have any money on me even to go out, I don't know what we are going to do. On that Monday, he agreed to pay back, he called and begged that I should give him till Friday that he would pay back unfailingly but he didn't so I had to reach out to the other agent you shared his contact with me, he told me he

will speak with the landlord and get back to me but till today I have not heard from him

Agent: Okay, no problem I've heard. You would have called me since that day. You shouldn't have been quiet cause as its taking long it gets complicated. (princess interrupts)

Princess: So what will happen now cause I don't have a dime with me and I just need my money back

Agent: That is not what we are trying to say, what we are saying is how you'd get your apartment or your money back (princess interrupts)

Princess: I don't need the apartment again, I told you my rent expired since January, they've given me quit notice so I don't need the house, I just need my money.

Agent: Let me reach out to the other agent now, I will get back to you.

Princess: Okay

**Analysis:**

Analysis is based on Jefferson Notation system. This is Princess (-) pause sign. The essence of the pause was for Princess to establish her person, a reminder to the agent. The second utterance by princess another noticeable pause (-)

Agent (pause) by the agent. Agent voice raise + rising of the pitch symbol of raise voice

Princess: noticeable pitch use of voice \_ a pause sign (-)

Princess was in noticeable distress by the attitude of the agent

Princess was interrupted, an overlap by the agent. the overlap symbol {

Agent: noticeable pause after money.

Princess: (overlapped) introduction

Arrow

Pause (after) out (.)

See is underlined (louder)

Pause (.) after Monday

Pause (.) after back

Pause (.) after me

< > inward arrow faster speech by princess

Agent: timed pause symbol (2.6) okay, no problem

Princess: interruption →

< > by princess –fasten speech-

Agent: > < slower by agent

Princess: interrupts → I don't need the apartment again.

Pause after (again) (.)

Pause after (Jan) (.)

Pause after (house) (.) other elements observed adjacency pairs: Adjacency pair of greeting- greeting between princess and agent: Sequential organization is fraught

with communication breakdown, so we saw repairs as Princess corrects the agent over default in information. Preferred /dispreferred actions: I don't need the apartment again. Analyzing the conversation, it was not a friendship conversation. It was rather a distress call. The conversation is replete with pauses which show the impersonal nature of the talk. WE have 12 pauses in the conversation. We have two instances of accentuated voice raised by Princess and one by the agent. The first was by the agent most probably as a ploy to intimidate Princess,

well that did not succeed because fired back at him interrupting with a heightened pitch. We have four occasions of interruptions: Three by Princess and one by the agent, at each point the Princess was either trying to correct an error. We have two instances of faster speech by Princess, which again depicts her mental state of near anguish. Interestingly, the agents voice kept scaling down towards the close of the conversation, we a have timed pauses from him as he accented to assist Princess recover her rent.