

## Conversation Analysis and Transcription Notation

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### **Abstract**

This work will vividly look at the definitions and semantic interpretations of conversation analysis by various linguistic experts and luminaries. It will take a critical look at the purpose and aims of conversation analysis. The work will also take a close look at adjacency pairs and its substructures, advantages, limitations and future directions of conversation analysis, focus of conversation analysis, inter-subjective understanding, transcription, transcription notation, transcription notation symbols, notable notation symbols, data for conversation analysis, data for conversation analysis and importance of recorded data in conversation analysis.

**Keywords:** Conversation Analysis, Transcription, Notation.

## Introduction

Conversation analysis emerged from the alliances of two theoretical initiatives in sociology. The first derives from Erving Goffman who, in a long series of theoretical writings, argued that social interaction forms a distinct institutional order comprised of normative rights and obligations that regulate conduct in interaction, and that functions as the medium for the operation of other societal institutions. From Goffman, C.A adopted the essentially Durkheimian perspective that these normative conventions and autonomous and independent of the social and psychological characteristics of persons and their particular motivation and projects, and indeed are the vehicle through which the particular characteristics of interactants are made manifest in conduct.

In sociolinguistic, conversation analysis is the study of the task produced in ordinary human interactions. Conversation analysis is an approach to the study of social interaction embracing both verbal and non-verbal conduct in situations of everyday life. Duologue is an interaction/talk between two people while dialogue is a talk/interaction between two or more people.

**NON VERBAL CONDUCT** – eg a football coach giving tactical instruction to his players during a competitive match – the players in most situations tend to understand the body language and gestures and countenances of their gaffers. According to Richard Nordquist (September 05 2019) conversation analysis also called talk-in-

interaction and ethnomethodology is the study of talk produced in the course of ordinary human interactions.

Conversation analysis is an approach to the study of social interaction that focuses on practices of speaking that recur across a range of context and settings. Conversation analysis is an inductive micro-analytic and predominantly qualitative method for studying human social interactions.

Conversation analysis is an approach to the study of social interaction embracing both verbal and non-verbal conduct in situations of everyday life. Conversation analysis originated as a sociological methods but has spread to other fields. It began with a focus on casual conversation but its methods were subsequently adapted to embrace more task and institution-centred interactions such as those occurring in doctor's offices, courts, educational settings, the mass media and focus on non-verbal activity in interaction, including gaze, body movement gesture. Conversation analysis is an approach within the social sciences that aims to describe, analyse and understand talk as a basic and constitutive feature of human social life. Conversation analysis is a well-developed tradition with a distinctive set of methods.

## ADJACENCY PAIRS

One of the most common structures to be defined through conversation analysis is the adjacency pair, which is a call and response type of sequential utterances spoken by two different people. Here are some examples:

It is a two-pair exchange in which the second utterance is functionally dependent on the first – the speaking of the first utterance provokes a responding utterance.

It is a sequence of two related utterances by two different speakers.

### **Summons/Answers**

Can I get some help over here?

I will be right there.

### **OFFER / REFUSAL**

Sales Clerk: Do you need someone to carry your packages out?

Customer: No thanks: I have got it.

### **COMPLIMENT / ACCEPTANCE**

That's a great tie you have got on.

Thanks: It was an anniversary present from my wife.

### **AIMS OF CONVERSATION ANALYSIS**

Principally, it is aimed at discovering how participants understand and respond to one another in their turns at talk, with a central focus on how sequences of action are generated:

The objective of conversation analysis is to uncover the tact, reasoning, procedures and social linguistic competencies underlying the production and interpretation of talk in organized sequences of interactions.

E.g

1. Poor you – an unenlightened person might think that they are being referred to as an indigent person.

2. Is your cousin the madam of that building – your conversation partner may not know that you are referring to a woman who owns a brothel.

3. Your nephew is a wizard – your conversation partner may not know that you are saying that your cousin is an expert in his field.

4. Our teacher is a witch – your listener may think that the teacher being referred to has magical powers.

### **PURPOSE OF CONVERSATION ANALYSIS**

The main purpose of conversation analysis is to characterize and explain the ways in which those engaged in conversation maintain an interactional social order by examining the technology of conversation (Sacks 1992:339).

### **ADVANTAGES, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

What is distinct about conversation analysis is its approach to the phenomenon of interest. The type of analysis that is produced can formally specify structures of talk, locate endogenous order and systematically illuminate the patterns that characterize everyday interactions. What is most notable about the conversation analytic approach is its appreciation of and attention to detail. Each detail is treated as an analytical resource.

Moreover, it is through the painstaking analysis of detail that conversation analysts come to an appreciation of how institutions are created,

sustained, identified, conveyed and altered and how relationships are formed through social interaction.

The main disadvantages of conversation analysis lies in the limitations. It imposes on the type of data suitable for analysis recorded (video or audio) data.

Although this constraint guaranteed the veracity of the data, it severely limits the scope of examinable phenomenon. In addition, some of the language surrounding conversation analysis and the related literature is highly specialized and difficult to understand for experienced practitioners. Although the transcription system is relatively standardized, it too can appear obscure or difficult and is likewise time-consuming to learn, sometimes giving the impression of a foreign language. Conversation analysis represents a way of thinking about the world and the interactions that comprise lived social experiences. As a micro-interactional approach to order, conversation analysis is in its infancy. With the variation in conversation analysis research, the potential for extension into the realm of previously ignored social interaction is unlimited.

### **FOCUS OF CONVERSATION ANALYSIS**

Conversation analyses on three dimensions of talk in interaction:

1. Action
2. Inter-subjective understanding
3. Structure

### **ACTION**

Conversation analysis involves such actions as:

1. **Opening and Closing Rituals:** This involves attracting someone's attention, may by using vocatives or greetings (at the beginning) and checking that they have no more to say (at the end).
2. Turn-talking with participants constructing and allocating turns.
3. In between opening and closing rituals people may do things with words describing, questioning, requesting, complimenting, promising, complaining, excusing, insulting, informing, give invitation, tell stories, make complaints tell about troubles and others.
4. Conversations involve avoiding silences/gaps, negatives, overlaps and interruptions or trying to account for them.

### **INTERSUBJECTIVE UNDERSTANDING**

This involves, according to Alkinson and Heritage (1984:11) how participants intentions, their state of knowledge, their relation and stance towards the talk about objects and events are created, maintained and negotiated. Sacks (296) claim that the most fundamental level of intersubjective understanding concerns the understanding of the preceding turn displayed by the current speaker.

### **STRUCTURE**

In conversation analysis, human social action is thoroughly organized and structured. In pursuing their goals participants have to adapt themselves to rules and structures that make their actions possible.

These structures take the following forms:

1. Rules of turn-taking
2. Sequence of organization
3. Preference organization

## TURN-TAKING

In conversation analysis, the basic unit of speech is the individual speaker turn. A turn starts at each occasion that a speaker takes the floor and begins to speak and ends when another speaker takes over. Analyzing turns involves the following components.

- i. Turn construction component
- ii. Turn allocation component.

## TURN CONSTRUCTION COMPONENT

This describes the basic units of which turns are fashioned. Those units allow participants to anticipate possible extent/shape of a turn and so project its actual completion also called possible completion points.

### Unit Types Include:

- a) Lexical-one word turn. E.g No, wait.
- b) Phrasal-turns in the form of a phrase. E.g in the fridge, across the town.
- c) Clausal-turns that are clauses: Eg: that he should come, because he came
- d) Sentential-let him come, I told him of my health challenge
- e) Discoursal-beyond the sentence level.

## URNS ALLOCATION COMPONENT

It is a process of distribution of turns by which interactants allocate rights and obligations to take a turn. It describes the rules governing the co-ordination of turns-transfer from one speaker to the other to effect smooth transition of turns.

## THE INTEREST OF CONVERSATION ANALYSIS

1. How do speakers allocate turns.
2. How do speakers know when to talk and when to keep silent.
3. How does one know when to end speaking and another when to begin, that is, how do speakers recognize possible completion points.

## TRANSCRIPTION

This is something fully written out or the process of fully writing something out. An example of transcription is someone writing out their complete job description and responsibilities.

## TRANSCRIPTION NOTATION

This is a pause long enough to time and subsequently show in transcription, (square brackets denote a point where overlapping speech occurs ← arrows surrounding talk like these show that the pace of the speech has quickened.

## TRANSCRIPTION NOTATION SYMBOLS

A number of transcription notation symbols are available in conversation analysis but many of them are developed by Gail Jefferson – Jeffersonian Transcription is a conversational analysis code used by academics looking at speech patterns.

## NOTABLE TRANSCRIPTION NOTATION SYMBOLS

1. (.) – just notable pause
2. (.3), (2.6) – example of timed pauses
3. ↑ word ↓ word – onset of noticeable pitch rise and fall

4. Wo(h)rd – (h) is a way of showing that the word has “laughter” bubbling within it.
5. Wor-(-) a dash shows a sharp cut-off
6. Wo::rd – colons show that the speaker has stretched the preceding sound
7. ( ) – unclear talk. Some transcribers like to represent each syllable of unclear talk with a dash.
8. → Analyst’s signal of a significant line-some arrows may indicate interruption.

### DATA FOR CONVERSATION ANALYSIS

Conversation analysis researchers are insistent on the use of audio-or video recordings of conversational episodes happening naturally, that is non-experimental, non-contrived interaction as their basic data. This persistent insistence is vital as such data sources yield veritable information about what people actually say as against manipulated data. Interviews, expression of opinions, attitudes or description of scenes not witnessed by the researcher does not usually provide useful data for conversation analysis.

### IMPORTANCE OF RECORDED DATA IN CONVERSATION ANALYSIS

1. Tape recorded data serves as a control on the limitations and problems of intuition and recollection.
2. It exposes the researcher to a wide range of interactional materials and circumstances.
3. It helps to make the data available for public scrutiny in a way that minimizes the influence of individual preconception.

### CONCLUSION

There is no disputing the fact that conversation analysis and transcription notation are key components of discourse analysis. Intersubjective understanding, turn taking, turn construction component, this allocation component have become important and interesting features of discourse in all its ramifications and have continued to excite discourse analysts, semanticists, pragmatists and grammarians because of their relevance in contemporary linguistics.

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