

# **An Appraisal of Adjacency Pairs in Selected Conversations from the Gospel According to St. John**

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## **Abstract**

This paper aims at investigating the use of adjacency pairs in the selected conversations of Jesus with the Samaritan woman and Nicodemus as recorded in the gospel according to Saint John chapters 3 and 4. The paper employs qualitative descriptive research using Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson's (1974) model of conversation analysis because it presents a systematic methodology for analysing the organization of turn-taking. Such adjacency pairs as: question-answer, offer-accept/reject, agreement/disagreement, apology/acceptance, and farewell/farewell were investigated in order to establish whether they really served as cues for next speaker, and to also validate which among them are prevalent in the conversations examined. At the end of the analysis, it was found that question and answer is the most frequently used type of adjacency pairs in the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman/Nicodemus. The study concluded that adjacency pairs can be used to unravel the nuances of empathy, persuasion and assessment in conversations including religious conversations. This in turn underscores the timeless significance of understanding conversation patterns in fostering meaningful connections and effecting transformations in the realm of communication.

**Keywords:** Adjacency pairs, conversation, dispreferred response, preferred response, turn-taking

## **Introduction**

Conversation serves as an avenue for connection, understanding and exchange of ideas. They shape and service our relationships, perspectives and our world as well. Conversation as an essential part of communication comprises of a speaker and a hearer who occupy their own functions and tasks (Baiat, Coler, Pullen, Tienkouw, & Hunyadi, 2013; Hagoort & Meyer, 2013). A speaker, as the name implies, is a doer in a conversation whose task is to send information to a hearer. The hearer is one who receives the information sent by the speaker. In a conversation, the task of both the speaker and the hearer is clearly autonomous which means that each of them knows what they have to say and what they should respond based on the preceding utterance made by the speaker. This is, then, called turn taking which allows each speaker and hearer take turn during a conversation (Duncan, 1972; Garcia, 1991; Sack, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974).

However, conversation is always challenging for speakers and hearers. This is because conversation is a complicated process through which the speaker and the hearer share their roles. Each role can be mutually opposed between the speaker and the hearer as both of them propose similar or different speech acts during conversation. For example, a speaker who proposes a question should be followed by an answer from the hearer. Yet, such expected response might be different when the hearer asks another question to the speaker. Thus, it has been a common ground that each speaker has a response in mind which is expected or which is not expected by the first speaker (Coates, 2004; Orestrom, 1983).

The present study therefore arose from the need to interrogate the conversations of Jesus and some characters in the Bible in order to find out in order to find out how adjacency pairs are used and to establish whether they really served as cues for next speaker. Also, the study sought to validate which among the adjacency pairs are prevalent in the conversations examined.

### **Adjacency Pairs/Turn-Eliciting Signals**

In a conversation, both the speaker and the hearer do take their turn during conversational exchanges, but the acts as implied can be either preferred or dispreferred acts. Each conversation has its systematic pattern and the patterns are predictable though sometime they are not easily predicted. This refers to the term adjacency pairs. Schegloff (2007) states that adjacency pairs are sequential turn of a speaker and a hearer whose speech can “be tracked for where they came from, what is being done through them, and where they might be going” (p.3) during conversation. Conversation consists of an orderly sequence as uttered by speaker and hearer. Such sequence is known as pairs of utterances which are expected to be interrelated. Furthermore, Schegloff and Sacks (1973) state that in adjacency pairs, there are particular acts as produced by the speaker and the hearer and these are usually noticeable such as greeting-greeting, question-answer, offer-accept/decline etc.

Adjacency Pairs consist of first pair part and second pair part. Each pair part is identified by looking at the utterance as produced by the speaker and the hearer. The first pair part allows the second pair part to be adjacent (Schegloff, 2007). Coulthard (1985, p. 70) defines adjacency pairs as “contributive exchanges in a conversation” since they help determine the first speaker whose task is to initiate a conversation and the second speaker as the hearer who gives a response based on the speaker’s initiated act. Also, adjacency pairs help in maintaining the role of both the speaker and the learner and to ensure that they do not abuse their turn in the course of conversation. This is supported by Yule (1996) who believes that adjacency pairs are systematically produced in at least two utterances from both the speaker and the hearer respectively. Additionally, Yule (op. cit) noted that every conversation has its orderly exchange which is identified in form of acts between first and second utterances. Examples include:

A: What’s up? (Question)

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B: Nothing much (Answer)

A: Could you help me with this? (Request)

B: Sure (Accept)

A: Thanks (Thanking)

B: You're welcome (Response).

All of the above are interrelated but are not expected to be interchangeable. In the same vein, Richards and Schmidt (1985) state that in adjacency pairs, first utterance is always followed by second expected response which proves that both speaker and hearer have completed their turn successfully. Each particular response is preceded by a particular proposed act. For example, if the first speaker greets the hearer, then the hearer greets the first speaker. However, an expected response does not always follow a particular utterance. This means that first utterance might not be always followed by a preferred response uttered by the hearer. So, the response can be either preferred or dispreferred depending on the hearer who has another conversational objective. Preferred response (Pomerantz, 1984; Sacks, 1987) can be identified when the first pair part "makes conditionally relevant distinct alternative types of responding actions" (Schegloff and Lerner, 2009 p. 113). As noted earlier, in adjacency pairs, a response may not only be preferred second part, but also dispreferred second part. The difference between the second parts is that preferred second part is produced without delaying time, while dispreferred first part is influenced by the second speaker who hesitates and pauses expected response. Such dispreferred responses do not mean that the first speaker rejects the response. It may be a matter of natural response (Levinson, 1983; Schegloff, 2007). In line with that, dispreferred second pair part is said to be reasonable in a conversation as each speaker or hearer uses different views and contexts during conversation (Yule, 1996). Examples include- "request" followed by "acceptance" (preferred) and "refusal" (dispreferred); "offer/invite" followed by "acceptance" (preferred) and "refusal" (dispreferred); "assessment" followed by "agreement" (accepted) and "disagreement" (dispreferred) (Fezter, 2014).

In the turn-taking system suggested by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974), the transfer occurs at a point referred to as a transition relevance place (TRP) for any turn. TRP is regarded as the possible structural completion spot of a one-word lexicon, phrase, clause, or full sentence. In natural conversation, interactants often ignore the rule of the turn construction unit. It is suggested that the mental strategy the participants adopt when they negotiate and exchange a turn should be investigated. In another discussion, a set of six specific and discrete cues is suggested as a turn-eliciting signal (Duncan 1972): intonation, drawl, body motion, sociocentric sequences such as *but uh*, or *something, you know*, pitch or loudness accompanied with sociocentric sequences, and syntax. Other turn-eliciting cues include: adjacency pairs (Schegloff & Sacks in Oreström 1983), in which the first part uttered by a speaker demands the second part to be uttered by the next

speaker so that they form a pair; a silent pause after a grammatically complete utterance which signals completion of a turn (Jefferson in Orestrom 1983); and a question which is generally followed by some kind of response (Orestrom 1983).

### **Previous Studies**

A number of researches related to adjacency pairs have been conducted in terms of its conversational structure, language functions (Fitriana, 2013; Jalilifar & Dinarvand, 2013; Rendle-Short, 2015), adjacency pairs and consciousness (Cui, 2016), patterns of adjacency pairs (Isgianto, 2016; Permatasari & Listiyanti, 2017). Tampubolon (2019) interrogated the application of different types of adjacency pairs in a conversation script “Malala Yousafzai” in a talk show of Ellen DeGeneres. The writers used the conversation analysis approach to support research in analysing data adopting qualitative descriptive research. Findings from the study revealed six types of adjacency pairs used in “Malala Yousafzai” conversation script in Ellen DeGeneres’s talk show.

Likewise, Qodriani and Wijana (2020) carried out a study on an online learning activity through SPADA- Learning Management System (LMS) in 12 tertiary classes in a private university in Bandar Lampung, Indonesia, by systematic virtual observation. They investigated how everyday exchanges of text messages among the virtual classroom interaction and detailed linguistic analysis contributed to understanding the adjacency pair’s practices and categories. Findings revealed that there are no prominent differences between spoken adjacency pairs and online written communication; however, some linguistics details may ‘renew’ it in the form of uses that can be considered for future online learning communication.

Similarly, Sari, Marwa, and Muliardi (2023) conducted a research on turn-taking patterns and adjacency pairs found in classroom conversation of English Language Education students at Lancang Kuning University using conversation analysis (CA). Based on the results of the analysis, in the Turn-Taking analysis the pattern that often appears is overlap and in the adjacency pair’s analysis the pattern that often appears is question and answer.

In spite of the bulk of research conducted on adjacency pairs, not much has been done in terms of investigating both preferred and dispreferred adjacency pairs in the conversation of Jesus and the Samaritan woman/Nicodemus. Therefore, this study focuses on identifying both preferred and dispreferred pairs as uttered in the conversations between Jesus, the Samaritan woman and Nicodemus as recorded in John chapters 3 and 4. Findings from the study will not only add to the body of knowledge on adjacency pairs, it will enrich our understanding on how to communicate properly especially based on shared knowledge of turn taking.

### **Methodology**

In this paper, conversations from the book of John chapters 3 and 4 are selected because of the high prevalence of turn-taking which provides data for the analysis considering the topic of discussion. The study employs qualitative research which

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focuses more on deep understanding towards the concept of an object being investigated rather than analysing data by using statistical analysis. As for the data, this study was undertaken to construct descriptive data based on the utterances of the speakers during their conversations. The qualitative study enabled the researcher to determine the structures of Adjacency Pairs turn-eliciting signals in the conversations between Jesus and Nicodemus; Jesus and the Samaritan woman. Such adjacency pairs as– greeting-greeting, question-answer and offer-accept/reject were investigated in order to establish whether they really served as cues for next speaker, and which among them are prevalent in the conversations examined. To collect the data, the researcher read the stories severally in order to get a deep understanding of every utterance in conversation and then randomly selected the utterances that are suitable for the analysis.

The study employs Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) model of conversation analysis because it presents a systematic methodology for analysing the organization of turn-taking in conversations. This model deals with the rules of conversation address turn-allocation, transitions, overlaps and gaps, repair organization, and many other important features, such as adjacency pairs which is the focus of the current research. They submit that adjacency pairs are sequential units containing the first pair-part and the second pair-part of a conversation (e.g., question/answer). Speakers receiving questions are expected to deliver answers (not excuses, refusals, greetings, etc.), as only answers are relevant in this adjacency pair. Schegloff (1972, 114) writes about their relationship thus: “Questions are specially ‘demanding’ in that respect, because they make an answer conditionally relevant.” Another methodological innovation is related to the analysis of subsequent turns: Speakers display understanding of the previous turn(s) when producing the next turn. This next-turn proof procedure (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974) tells the hearer, and others, how the speaker understands the previous turn. In doing so, speakers’ understandings are displayed in the course of ongoing interaction (Sidnell 2014). Sacks emphasized “order at all points” (Sacks 1995a, 484), which underlines the fact that every tiny detail of naturally occurring data should be analyzed properly.

### **Findings**

The conversations that Jesus engaged in as recorded in the gospel of John chapters 3 and 4 were shaped by questions; either the ones asked of Him or the ones that He asked of others. Such conversations as revealed by the findings of the study are usually led by an initiating question and are fuelled by the questions that follow in response to statements that are made by other conversation partners. They are driven by the curiosity of Jesus, or the other persons who are truly interested in knowing what Jesus thinks and why He thinks it. Therefore, this kind of engagement demands interest that is demonstrated by asking questions that provoke conversational response. The different types of adjacency pairs used in the

conversations analysed consist mainly of questions and answers as summarised in tables 1 and two below.

**Table 1:** Analysis of Adjacency Pairs in Jesus's Conversation with the Samaritan Woman

S/N	SPEAKERS	UTTERANCES FROM THE TEXT	TYPE OF ADJACENCY PAIRS
1.	A B	Give me water to drink. How is it that you being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?	Request Answer-Question
2.	A B	“If you knew the gift of God, and who says to you, ‘give me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.” “Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water?”	Request Answer-Question
3.	A B	Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life. Sir, give me this water that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.	Opinion Request
4	A B	Go call your husband, and come here.  I have no husband	Instruction Answer

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**Table 2:** Analysis of Adjacency Pairs in Jesus’ Conversation with Nicodemus

S/N	Speakers	Utterances from the text	Type of Adjacency Pairs
1.	A B	Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.” Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.	Assessment Answer
2.	A B	How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb and be born?  “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God	Question Answer
3.	A B	“How can these things be?” “Are you the teacher in Israel, and do not know these things?”	Question Question

**Discussion on Findings**

In the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman as recorded in John 4, the utterances that signal turn-eliciting and turn-holding are mostly question and answer utterances. The woman does most of the asking while Jesus responds. Therefore, adjacency pairs as presented in this conversation are structured in such a way that a question is followed by an answer whether preferred or dispreferred. Here, questions serve as cues to the next speaker’s turn. They are therefore, regarded as turn-eliciting signals. The conversation is initiated by Jesus (first speaker) requesting for a drink from the woman- a Samaritan (second speaker) as demonstrated in the excerpt below:

**Except 1**

**First speaker:** Give me water to drink

**Second speaker:** How is it that you being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?

Here we see a typical case of a conversation initiated by a request. The first speaker makes a request and waited for the second speaker to take her turn. Meanwhile, the second speaker did not respond appropriately or what Schegloff (2007) and Levinson (1983) refers to as a dispreferred response unlike in pragmatics where the context of the second speaker's utterance is taken into cognisance for its proper interpretation and understanding. Such dispreferred second pair part is a matter of natural response (Schegloff, 2007; Levinson, 1983). In line with that, dispreferred second pair part is said to be reasonable in a conversation as each speaker or hearer uses different views and contexts during conversation (Yule, 1996).

We see the dispreferred response of the second speaker in this scenario not as a rejection but as a natural response and reasonable too because the first speaker does not contest that but rather initiates a different topic in the next turn as illustrated below:

### Excerpt 2

**First speaker:** if you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, "Give me a drink you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water".

**Second speaker:** ...where then do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?

There is another instance of dispreferred response as noted in the conversation held between Jesus and Nicodemus in John chapter 3 verses 3 & 4. In this very instance, first speaker initiates a conversation with the second speaker through an affirmative/assessment kind of statement. However, the response of the second speaker does not seem to align with the statement of the first speaker. The response of the second speaker is a dispreferred response as illustrated below:

### Excerpt 3

**First speaker:** Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.

**Second Speaker:** Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

In this instance, instead of the second speaker to see the response of the first as a rejection, he bombards the first speaker with multiple responses all in form of questions in a single turn as demonstrated below:

### Excerpt 4

**Second Speaker:** how can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born?

We see a similar scenario playing out in the conversation between Jesus (first speaker) and the Samaritan (second speaker) woman too. This is in form of a response at the end of the second speaker's questions. The first speaker comes up



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with more new information that demystifies all the questions raised by the second speaker. This is found in the excerpt below:

### Excerpt 5

**First speaker:** whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.

**Second speaker:** sir, give me this water that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.

In response to the second speaker, first speaker dared to pry deeper into the second speaker's private life by requesting that she brings her husband. This is illustrated below:

### Excerpt 6

**First speaker:** go call your husband, and come here.

**Second speaker:** I have no husband

The rest of the conversation is marked by simple statements eliciting responses and turn taking between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. This can be classified under appropriate or preferred second response. This is seen in the way the first speaker responded to the second speaker- "*You have well said...*"

From the discussion that ensued, it could be rightly deduced that the transition relevance place that signalled or served as the cue for next speaker's turn included the end of statements indicated by full stop and a question mark since the data is drawn from a written text. The question-form utterances that elicit turn taking uttered by the second speaker all have falling tone. This is because they are all WH-questions. The first speaker responded using statements-from utterances providing the next speaker with new information. This is demonstrated from the response the first speaker gives the second speaker to the question- "*how is it that you being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?*" Second speaker responded thus- "*if you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'give me a drink' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water*".

An interesting twist to the structure of adjacency pairs that we find in the whole of the conversations is that the structure is more of statement followed by a question pattern instead of the normal question followed by an answer. However, a closer look at the content of the statements/requests made by the first speakers as contained in John chapters 3 and 4 reveal issues that are obscure and that would naturally require the second speaker to respond in a question form in order to allow for a seamless process of the conversation.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper is an interrogation of the the conversation between Jesus, the Samaritan woman and Nicodemus as recorded in the gospel according to John

chapters 3 and 4. The study was able to establish that adjacency pairs create obvious meanings in social interaction through conversation and that the way they are patterned determine the meaning being delivered and minimize misunderstandings between participants. The different types of adjacency pairs used in the conversations analysed consist mainly of questions and answers. Therefore, it is concluded that this research is not only an addition to the many studies previously carried out on adjacency pairs but that it offers profound insights into the dynamics of communication as stipulated by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974). The study was able to unravel the nuances of empathy, persuasion and assessment through the use of such adjacency pairs, underscoring the timeless significance of understanding conversation patterns in fostering meaningful connections and effecting transformation change.

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