CONVERSATION

**Conversation is any interactive spoken exchange between two or more people and can be:**

face – to – face exchanges

non – face – to – face exchanges

broadcast materials

## CONVERSATION ANALYSIS

- Sequencing – adjacency pairs, exchanges
- Organisation – turn-taking, discourse markers, filled pauses, backchannels...
- Cooperation

## Adjacency pairs

- An adjacency pair is composed of two turns produced by different speakers which are placed adjacently and where the second utterance is identified as related to the first. Adjacency pairs include the following patterns: question/answer; complaint/denial; offer/accept; request/grant; compliment/rejection; challenge/rejection, and instruct/receipt.
- Adjacency pairs typically have **three characteristics**:
- they consist of two utterances;
- in most cases, the utterances are adjacent, that is the first immediately follows the second; and
- different speakers produce each utterance.

**ADJACENCY PAIR**

Question - Answer
Invitation - Acceptance
Request for favor - Granting
Apology - Acceptance
Complaint - Denial
Complaint-Apology
Blame-Denial

**Response: Preferred - Dispreferred**

Would you open the window?

Open it yourself.

**Request for favor - Rejecting**
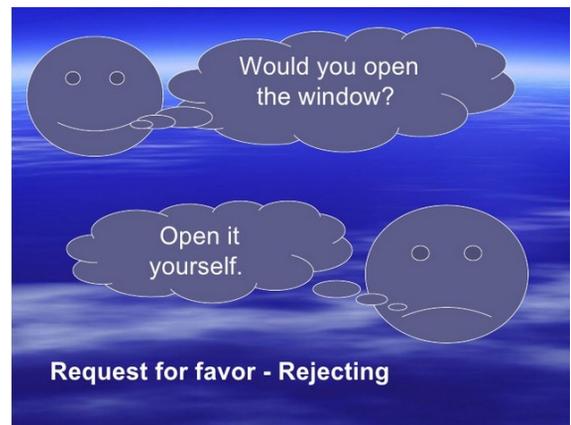
I am sorry to disturb you.

That's all right what can I do for you?

**Apology - Acceptance**
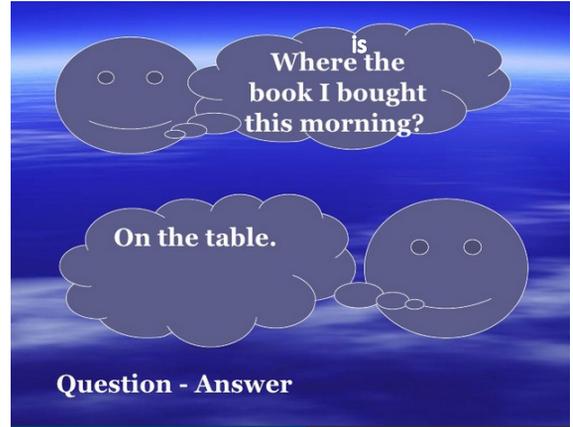
Where the book I bought this morning is?

On the table.

**Question - Answer**
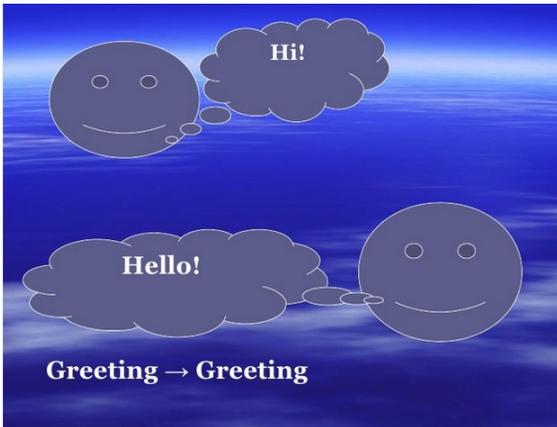
Hi!

Hello!

**Greeting → Greeting**
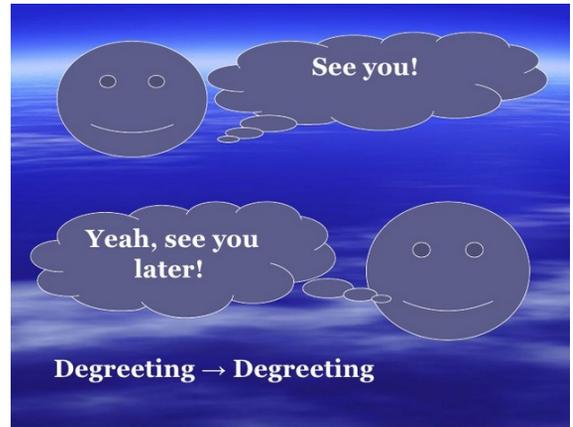
See you!

Yeah, see you later!

**Degreeting → Degreeting**
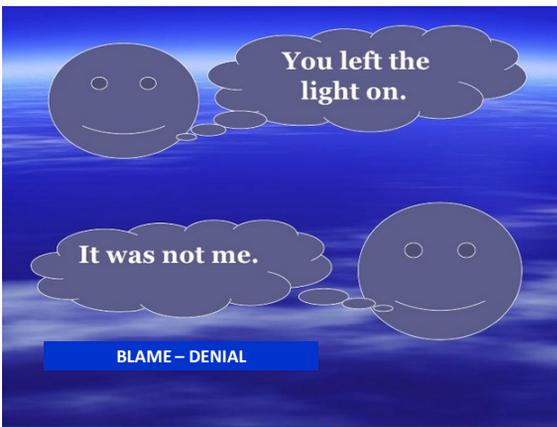
You left the light on.

It was not me.

**BLAME – DENIAL**
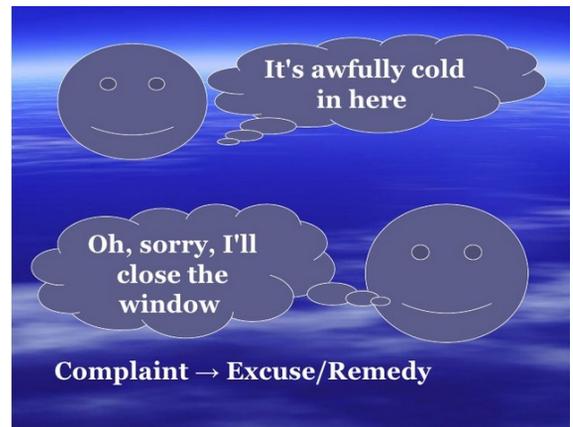
It's awfully cold in here

Oh, sorry, I'll close the window

**Complaint → Excuse/Remedy**

## Adjacency pairs, exercises

1. "*I really like your new haircut!*"
→ "*Oh, thanks.*"
**Compliment / Acceptance**
2. "*I really like your new hair colour!*"
→ "*Oh, you're just saying that... I don't believe you.*"
**Compliment / Refusal**
3. "*Your phone is over there.*"
→ "*Oh, yes.*"
**Information / Acknowledgement**

4. "*Hiya!*" → "*Oh, hi!*"
**Greeting / Greeting**
5. "*Would you like to visit the museum with me this evening?*" → "*I'd love to!*"
**Offer / Acceptance**
6. "*Would you like to visit the museum with me this evening?*" → "*Sorry, I can't make it.*"
**Offer / Refusal**
7. "*What does this big red button do?*" → "*It causes two-thirds of the universe to implode.*"
**Question / Answer**

8. "*Is it OK if I borrow this book?*"
→ "*I'd rather you didn't, it's due back at the library tomorrow.*"
**Request / Rejection**
9. *"Joe!"*
→ "Joe: Sir? *"*
**Summons / Answer**
10. *"Look! Look what you made me do! "*
→ "I made you do? I made you do? I wasn't near you."
**Accusation / Denial**
11. *"You scared her when you yelled. It was funny."*
→ "It was not yelling. I was warming up my voice. It was a voice exercise. "
**Assertion / Disagreement**

## Insertion sequence

1. Bob: What about my face?
2. Gage: What?
3. Bob: My face! Nobody's doing anything.
4. Joe: Oh, I'll help you apply the lotion.

**Utterances number 2 and 3 are called insertion-sequences.**

## Identify the insertion sequences:

Linda: I'll forget my lines.
Gage: What?
Linda: I'll forget my lines.
Gage: No you won't Linda. You're just nervous.
……………

Bob: Mr. Gage would you please check my makeup?
Gage: Oh my, who did that?
Bob: I did.
Gage: Give me a tissue. We've got to get it off.

3

A: I wanted to order some more paint.
B: Yes, how many tubes would you like, sir?
A: Um, what's the price with tax?
B: Er, I'll just work that out for you.
A: Thanks.
B: Three nineteen a tube, sir.
A: I'll have five, then.
B: Here you go.

A: I wanted to order some more paint. (Request)
B: Yes, how many tubes would you like, sir? (Question 1)
A: Um, what's the price with tax? (Question 2)
B: Er, I'll just work that out for you. (Hold)
A: Thanks. (Acceptance)
B: Three nineteen a tube, sir. (Answer 2)
A: I'll have five, then. (Answer 1)
B: Here you go. (Acceptance)

## Insertion Sequences: two functions - clarification and delay

A delay is an item used to put off a dispreferred second part.

A dispreferred second part is a second part of an adjacency pair that consists of a response to the first part that is generally to be avoided or not expected.

– A refusal in response to a request, offer, or invitation
– A disagreement in response to an assessment
– An unexpected answer in response to a question
– An admission in response to blame

A: Can you do it?
B: What?
A: Can you take care of it?
B: Now?
A: If that's all right.
B: Well, [pause] I mean, no, I'm afraid not.

## Pre-expansions

- Sometimes, an adjacency pair is inserted before another (related) adjacency pair, in order to

a) Set the stage        E.g. Pre-announcement

   A: Did you hear the news?        Q1
   B: No, what?        A1
   A: I'm engaged!        core: announcement
   B: WOW!        reaction

b) Protect the speaker        E.g. Pre-invitation

   A: Are you busy tomorrow night?        Q1
   B: No, no plans.        A1
   A: Shall we go to the movies?        core: invitation
   B: Sure!        acceptance

c) Protect the listener  E.g. Asking something delicate

A: Can I ask you something kind of personal?     Q1
B: Yeah, go ahead.                               A1
A: Exactly how do you feel about Norman?         Q2
                          (core: delicate question)
B: I like him a lot, but there's nothing between us,
if that's what you mean.                         A2

# Post-expansions

- Post-expansions are (related)APs that occur after another (core) AP. They may also be used for clarification.

- A:  Who was it that said you couldn't go?   Q1 (core)
- B:  Steve.                                   A1
- A:  Who's he?                                Q2
- B:  He's in charge of registration, he said they were full up.                                        A2

# Exchanges

Adjacency pairs can also be extended into adjacency triplets. Commonly known as exchanges, they consist of three moves.

Sometimes, an adjacency pair will have a third part to it. This is called the Sequence Closing Third (SC3):

– A: Could you do this for me?             request
– B: Sure!                                 acceptance
– A: Great!              assessment / appreciation

This is a type of post-expansion.

- Initiation + response + follow-up/feedback:

  - How many brothers have you got?
  - Three!
  - Oh so you've got three brothers! That's a big family!

- What time is it?    - Mark's coming tomorrow.
- 5.30.               - Oh, yeah.
- Thanks.             - Yes.

# Preferred/dispreferred responses

- A question is expected to complemented by an answer. This is considered the **preferred response**. Not to answer a question, or to answer at inappropriate length, either too shortly or at excessive length, or to answer a question with another question, are considered **dispreferred responses** and tend to interrupt the smooth flow of a conversation.

- A preferred response is acceptance and is usually short, without hesitation or elaboration
- A dispreferred response is refusal and is usually performed hesitantly and elaborately
- The theory is very easy: If you ask someone to marry you, you hope a "yes" and you fear a "no". Anything that is not a "yes", including "maybe" (which is uninformative), extra information, being asked back something else, jokes, irony, *anything*, is a dispreferred response.

D: I was thinking we could have fish.

J: Fine.

A: Well, actually, I've stopped eating fish now because of you know the damage it does to the ocean.

- J's response is a **preferred response**; it is short and not hesitant
- A's response is a **dispreferred response**; it is hesitant and elaborate

Table: Preferred and Dispreferred Second Parts to various First Parts:

| SECOND PARTS: | FIRST PARTS: | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Request | Offer/Invite | Assessment | Question | Blame |
| *Preferred:* | acceptance | acceptance | agreement | expected answer | denial? |
| *Dispreferred:* | refusal | refusal | disagreement | unexpected answer or non−answer | admission? |

Analyse the following in terms of the sequence structure and decide whether the response is preferred or dispreferred:

A:   Can I have a bottle of whiskey?
B:   Are you over twenty-one?
A:   No.
B:   No.
-----------------------
Rose: Why don't you come and see me sometime.
Bea: I would like to.
Rose: Great.

- Do you need a lift?
- Thanks, but I'm waiting for my friend.
------------------------------
- Hello.
- Goodbye.
------------------------------
- I'm sorry.
- That's OK. Don't worry about it.
------------------------------
- I love you.
- Thanks.

- A: May I please speak to Rodney?
- B: May I ask who's calling?
- A: Alan.
- B: Just a minute. I'll get him.
--------------------------------
- A: Gimme a beer.
- B: How old are you?
- A: 21.
- B: Okay. Coming up.

## Turn-taking

- For the most part, two or more people take turns at speaking.

- Some features of conversational interaction:
  - Typically, only one person speaks at a time.
  - Usually, silence is avoided.
  - If two people talk at the same time, one of them stops.

## Turn-taking

- Completion point: the point which signals that the speaker has finished speaking.

- **Signalling end of turn:**
1. Completion of a syntactic unit.
2. Use of falling intonation.
3. Pausing.
4. Fillers (mm) (anyway).
5. Eye contact, body language and movement.

## Turn-taking

- **Holding on to a turn:**
1. Not pausing too long at the end of an utterance, and starting straight away.
2. Pausing during an utterance not at the end.
3. Increase the volume by extending a syllable or a vowel.
4. Speak over someone else's attempt to take our turn.

## Turn-taking

**Turn taking varies according to…**
- **The situation:** in a classroom for example a teacher nominates who can take a turn, a student may or may not respond….
- **The topic** : people take a turn when they have something to say, or when they want to change the topic.
- **Relationship:** a child may be instructed not to speak with adult guests unless spoken to…
- **Rank:** To some degree, turn taking is by rank, the right to talk is an indicator of the status of the speaker and the degree to which all participants are from the same rank.

Speakers are permitted to talk in the following situations:
- nominated.
- self-selection.

## Fillers

**Fillers** are sounds or words that are spoken to fill up gaps in utterances.

They include filled pauses and discourse markers.

## Fillers

- End-of-turn fillers
  - DM ...and I went to the store, **you know**.
  - FP ...and I went to the store **um**

- Fillers at the Start of a Turn
  - **See Ø** my company has a much stricter policy than yours.
  - **Um the th** the one thing I'm thinking is, that it might be hard to see the stage from way back here. (filler + disfluency)

- Fillers as Complete Turns
  - A: But it's just really bizarre, if you ask me.
    B: **Um**
    A: The whole criminal justice system.
    B: **Um Ø** but I don't think, the police are the biggest system.

## Discourse markers

A Discourse Marker (DM) is a word or phrase that functions primarily as a structuring unit of spoken language.

To the listener, a DM signals the speaker's intention to mark a boundary in discourse (**framing move**).

DMs are active contributions to the discourse and signal such activities as change in speaker, taking or holding control of the floor, relinquishing control of the floor, or the beginning of a new topic.

## Discourse markers

Examples:
- That gets on my nerves, too. Anyway, tell me about your new job.
- A: So, how do you make this soup?
  B: First you take a couple of carrots and chop them. Okay. And then you fry them in butter.

## Discourse markers

We consider as DMs only those instances that structure the discourse and do not carry separate meaning.

It can sometimes be difficult to distinguish when a word or phrase is functioning as a discourse marker and when it is acting as a content word.

## Discourse markers

### Some common DMs

- actually
- basically
- anyway
- and yeah
- yeah
- I mean
- let's see
- like
- oh

- now
- okay
- see
- so
- well
- you know
- you see
- you know what I mean

## Backchannels

Backchannels are words or phrases that provide feedback to the dominant speaker by indicating that the non-dominant speaker is still engaged in the conversation (though not actively participating at the moment).

All types of fillers can be used as backchannels (both discourse markers and filled pauses).

## Backchannels

In the example below, *okay* is functioning as a backchannel rather than a DM:

A: I've lived in Friendship Heights for years.
B: **Okay**.
A: But I'm thinking of moving a little further out .

## Backchannels

Karen: Brent might learn a little lesson if his security camera got stolen.
Hank: **Yeah.**
Karen: By someone.
Hank: **Hmm.**
Karen: Someone he trusts.
Hank: **Yeah, I suppose.**
Karen: Someone he would never suspect.
Hank: **Yeah.**
Karen: Plot the camera's motion and approach from a blind spot. You could pull it off.

## Exercise 1

- **Identify the first and second pair parts of the adjacency pairs:**

A: Are you coming tonight?
B: Can I bring a guest?
A: Male or female?
B: What difference does that make?
A: An issue of balance.
B: Female.
A: Sure.
B: I'll be there.

P: Martin, would you like to dance?
M: Is the floor slippery?
P: No, it's fine.
M: Then I'd be happy to.

Mother: Do you know who's going to that meeting?
R: Who?
Mother:  I don't know!
R: **Um**… probably Mr. Murphy and Dad said Mrs. T. an' some of the teachers, **you know**.

## Exercise 2

- **Identify the adjacency pairs in the following dialogues. Which are core? What role does the other adjacency pair play in relation to the core pair? Are the second pair parts preferred or dispreferred? Name the function of the words in bold.**

A: **OK**. Do you have the spanner?
B: Yes.
C: Can I have it please?
B: [silence]

A: Oh, hello Anne, what's up?
B: Nothing much.
A: There's something I want to ask you.
B: Alright, go ahead.
A: I'm kind of broke. Could you lend me some money by Friday?
B: You're always broke, you should be more careful about your money.

## Exercise 3

- **Identify the function of the first and second pair parts in the following adjacency pairs:**

-Hello.
-Hi.
**Greeting / Greeting**

-Jimmy!
-Coming, mother.
**Summons / Answer**

-The room is a mess!
-I was out!
**Complaint / Denial**

-It's ten minutes past the hour?
-I'm sorry, my car broke down.
**Complaint / Apology**

-When is the bus arriving?
-In ten minutes.
**Q/A, Request for information / Grant**

-Do you need help with that?
-Definitely!
**Offer / Acceptance**

-Chocolate?
-I'm on a diet, thanks.
**Offer / Rejection**

Well, I have some stuff to do now.
- Oh, before you go, what time do you want to meet tomorrow?
**Degreeting / Degreeting**

-Can I have some sugar?
-Sure.
**Request / Grant**

## Exercise 4

- **Identify the discourse markers and explain the role they have.**
- *CONTEXT: We want to launch our web site by Thursday.*
- Also, we need to optimize the site's speed.
- **Also, adding**
- So… what needs to be done before that time?  (=um…)
- **So…, hesitation**
- Okay, then you want all the details settled by Wednesday midnight.
- **Okay, summarising**

- Wow! So soon?
- **Wow, surprise**
- OK, I'll do the database.
- **Ok, acceptance**
- So!  What you are saying is that we have to have everything ready by then.
- **Grabbing attention, my turn to speak**
- Admittedly, he thinks it's better to be ready before the weekend.
- **Admittedly, conceding**

## Exercise 5

- **Choose the correct discourse marker:**
1. ……………………… nurses are overworked and underpaid.
 In particular, Broadly speaking, For instance, Except for
**Broadly speaking**
2. I don't believe in ghosts. …………………….. I haven't seen one yet.
Thus, At least, In other words, That is to say
**At least**

3. I think he should be acquitted. …………………… he is too young to know the difference between right and wrong.
After all, Well, Honestly, I suppose
**After all**
4. The man was sleeping soundly on the river bank. …………………… a crocodile was creeping closer.
Despite this, As a result, Meanwhile, By contrast
**Meanwhile**
5. The child didn't get any medical attention. ……………………, she died soon after.
Despite this, As a result, In this case, In spite of this
**As a result**

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## Exercise 6

- **Write down two three-part exchanges that might occur in every-day conversation.**

## Exercise 7

- **Break down the following classroom conversation into exchanges. Use // to mark the boundaries between exchanges.**

T: Let's just have a look at these things here. Can you tell me first of all what's this?
P: Paper.
T: Piece of paper, yes. And hands up. What cutter will cut this?
P: The pair of scissors.
T: The pair of scissors, yes. Here we are the pair of scissors. And as you can see it's going to cut the paper. Tell me what's this?
P: Cigarette box.
T: Yes. What's it made from?
P: Cardboard.
T: Cardboard yes. What will cut the cardboard?
P: Scissors.
T: Scissors yes. Here we are. The scissors is cutting the cardboard.

### The Cooperative Principle

The 'rules ' of conversation were first formulated by the Paul Grice (1975) as the **Cooperative Principle**. This states that we interpret the language on the assumption that a speaker is obeying the four maxims (known as Grice's Maxims) of:

1    QUALITY (BEING TRUE)
2    QUANTITY (BEING BRIEF)
3    RELATION (BEING RELEVANT)
4    MANNER (BEING CLEAR)

## Conversational implicature

Grice argues that although speakers, usually choose to co-operate, they can also refuse to abide by that principle, or, in other words, **flout** it.

If a maxim is deliberately broken, it is normally done so to achieve a very specific effect and communicate a specific meaning, known as a **conversational implicature**, in other words, the special meaning created when a maxim is flouted.

## Which of the maxims is flouted? Is it intentional or unintentional? What is the implicature?

1.    A: "Would you like to go out with Beatrice?"
B: "Is the Pope Catholic"?
**Maxim of Relevance–Intentional**

2.    A: "So tell me, do you like what I did to my hair?
B: "Er . . . what's on TV tonight?"
**Maxim of Relevance–Intentional**

3.    A: "So what color are you painting your house?"
B: "The walls are going to be off-white to contrast with the black sofa and Regency aurmchairs that I inherited from my great-aunt. (Bless her soul, she passed away last year after a long but distressing marriage to a man who really wasn't able to appreciate her extraordinary love of the visual and performing arts.) Then the trim will be peach except near the door,which Alice said should be salmon because otherwise it will clash with the yellow, black, and red Picasso print that I brought back from Spain–I vacationed in Spain in August of, let's see, 2002, and I bought it then. Or was it July? I forget, actually, Gosh! Time goes fast, don't you think? Oh, never mind. And the stairway leading to the bedrooms will be a pale yellow . . ."
**Maxim of Quantity–Unintentional**

A: "Would you like to hear my rendition of 'Feelings'?"

B: "Yes, of course. I'd love to." [it's actually the last thing you want to hear]

**Maxim of Quality–Intentional**

5.  A: "Tony is one of the cheapest people I know."

B: "Yeah, he's someone who never parts with a dime"

**Maxim of Quality–Intentional**

A: "How are your son and daughter doing?"

B: "Cindy is in her second year of med school–she's doing fine." [silence follows]

**Maxim of Quantity-Intentional**

7. A: I might win the lottery.

B: Yes, and pigs might fly.

**Maxim of Quality, Maxim of Relevance–Intentional**

8.  A: "You're soaked! It must be raining pretty hard outside."
B: "You're a regular Sherlock Holmes."
**Maxim of Relevance, Maxim of Quality–Intentional**

9.  A: "Hmmmm, I thought I left my watch in my desk drawer before I left for Spring Break."
B: "Well I definitely didn't take it. Absolutely not. There's no way I would take someone else's property. Besides, I already have my own watch. And I would never steal from someone, never."
**Maxim of Quantity–Unintentional**

10.  A: "I wonder why Dave didn't answer the phone. I know he's home."
B: "ER is on."
**Maxim of Relevance–Intentional**

11.  A: "Let's stop and get something to eat. The kids must be hungry."
B: "Okay, but not M-C-D-O-N-A-L-D-S."
**Maxim of Manner–Intentional**

12.  A: "Hey, Kenny! What are you reading?"
B: "A book." [abrupt silence]
**Maxim of Quantity–Intentional**

13.  A: "Kathy's cooking tonight."
B: "Better stock up on Alka Seltzer."
**Maxim of Relevance–Intentional**

14.  A: "So here we are–look up. That's the Sear's tower."
B: "That's an awfully small building!"
**Maxim of Quality–Intentional**

## Suggested topics for further reading

- Backchannelling in everyday conversation
- Discourse markers in spoken interaction
- Common adjacency pairs
- Conversation analysis: three-part exchanges
- Conversation analysis: turn-taking
- Cooperative principle