

## Iranian EFL Learners' Turn Taking

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### ABSTRACT

The focus of this study is to investigate the possible relationship between Iranian EFL Learners' General Proficiency and having any trouble in taking the floor for extended periods. To this end, the total number of forty English Translation students of Islamic Azad University at Arak Branch participated. They were all female whose age range was between 20-24. The Results confirmed the fact that advanced learners do not have any trouble compared with intermediate learners.

**KEY WORDS:** turn taking, advanced, intermediate, general proficiency, adjacency pair.

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### INTRODUCTION

In conversation analysis, a number of features are observed. One of them is "Turn-taking". The Turn-taking organization was first introduced by three sociologists, who are Harvey Sacks, Emanuel A. Schegloff and Gail Jefferson[3], in 'A simplest systematic for the organization of turn-taking for conversation.'

Turn-taking refers to the exchange between the role of speaker and hearer, which is a feature of the conversation ( Coulthard [1]). It is only one speak during the process of the conversation every time, and his words is continuous which means that all the participants involved in conversation were not able to speak at the same time; secondly, they negotiated the right to speak during the process repeatedly (Cameron[5]). In this process, only one participant is speaking (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson [6] ), the right to speak is changed between two participants. But of them can keep the turn to speak by pausing or prolonging discourse in the middle or end of the sentence.

Turn-takings are widely used in people's daily conversations. Therefore, the study of turn-taking practice is one of the major preoccupations of conversation analysis. The study of turn-taking practice was started by Harvey sacks in 1960s.

Turn-taking organization consists of two major components which are (i) the turn-constructive components and (ii) the turn-allocation component.

The turn-constructive components are the constituents that are set by the speakers to construct a turn. The core part of turn-constructive component is the turn-constructive unit.(Shopen[11]) The types of turn-constructive units vary in different languages. In English, syntactically, there are four types of the turn-constructive units: (a): Sentential, (b): Phrasal, (c): Clausal, and (d): Lexical. Each completion of turn-constructive units implies that one action is completed in one specific transition relevance place, i.e. a turn is completed. (Shopen, 2007) The transition relevance place is the time which is available for another participant of the conversation to speak.

The turn-allocation component the way that 'specifies how a next speaker is chosen' in a particular transition relevance place.( Durante[8]) Suggested by Sacks and his colleagues, there are two major groups of techniques, either by other-selected or self-selected. The speaker may choose to continue if the situation is neither one mentioned above. (Schegloff, Jefferson, Sacks)

In this group, the next speaker starts his turn by the nomination of the previous speaker. The previous speaker has the power for the selection of the next speaker.[7]

In this group, the next speaker starts his turn by the nomination of himself. The next speaker Self-obliged himself the right to speak and self-selected to be the next speaker.

The turn-taking practice usually has no time gap and no overlapping when the transitions of turns take place. The turn order is not fixed, but usually varies. In the real situation, people will not keep a fixed turn order all the time. (Schegloff, Jefferson, Sacks, )

According to Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks, the phenomena is produced by the combination of two characteristics of the turn-taking system (i) single turn are allocated at a time, and (ii) for each allocation, a series of options are provided, each of them can be provided, each of them can provide to different next speakers. (Schegloff, Jefferson, Sacks, ) Thus, it is very common to see people change their orders of turn.

During turn-taking, some linguistic devices or non-verbal devices would be used to remind the listeners the transition relevance place. These means can be roughly divided into three categories: (i) Clues for ending a turn, (ii) Clues for getting a turn, and (iii) clues if not taking a turn when available.

Both linguistic and non-verbal means are usually used as clues for the purpose of ending turn. Take an example, the British would use a rising tone while they are listing things in order to show that have not finished listing. Thus, the next speaker needs to wait until the tone goes down, which indicated the turn is end. Also, some linguistic means will be used when the next speaker want to interrupt normal flow of conversation. These interruptions such as ‘Chairman, I wonder if may say something’, ‘if I may’, and ‘hang on a minute’ can usually be observed when a speaker is ‘unable to enter the normal flow of turn-taking’ Even when one has the opportunity to speak, he may choose to be silent. But he can still give appropriate response to the current speaker to show he is listening. Back-channel signals like ‘yeah’, ‘uh-uh’ are one typical example of this kind of linguistics means (Wang, )

So, some strategies to understand turn are Intonation, grammar, facial expression, body language, movements and nodding head that encourage the listener to take turn in the on-going conversation. Thus, we can divide Turn-taking into implicit indicators like Gesture, body language and explicit indicators like asking question, suggestion, intonation, request, quesection tag, grammar. These indications are not followed in emotional conversation, the speaker or listener may disturb each other before arrival of their turn.

This advice is an important tool used in dialogues. Drama is a genre of literature where dialogues play a significant role. Turn-taking is used to convey what the speaker wants to say in turn to the other character in the play.

In pragmatics, a branch of linguistics, an adjacency pair is an example of conversational turn-taking.

Adjacency pairs (APs) are fundamental units of conversational organization. The concept of ‘adjacency pairs’ is a central notion in discursive psychology that is derived from studies in conversation analysis. Adjacency pairs point to the fact that some utterances conversationally came in pairs. They are “sequences of two utterances that are: (i) adjacent; (ii) produced by different speakers; (iii) ordered as first part and second part; (iv) typed, so that a part requires a particular second “(or range of second part)” (Levinson [4] 1983:303). These defining constraints should probably be relaxed a bit, in particular to allow insertions between the first and the second part. This structure provides us with an essential distinction, between utterances that are *first part* (1) vs. *second part* (2) of an AP. This distinction is not *a priori* linked to the dimensions mentioned above, though there are speech acts that function preferably as (1) or (2). The question arises whether an utterance can play both roles, i.e. be a second part to a previous utterance, and a first part to further utterance. Comparing this distinction with the independent forward-function and backward-function, the answer seems to be affirmative: some utterance could serve both as (1) and (2). But on other hand, it is likely that such an utterance would be made of two subparts, each with a different function such as Q1→ Q2→ R2→ R2 (imprecatd APs), we wouldn’t say that Q2 is an answer or a second part to Q1, but rather an “unexpected second”, which does not cancel the expectation of an answer to Q1 (finally R1). So we could hypothesize that an utterance is either a first part or a second part. A supplementary piece of information in this dimension would be to link effectively first and second parts, and assign a label to the link (is in the ICSI AP task).

Refinement of adjacency pair information is based on commonly observed types of first/second pairs. Here is a list form (Levinson 1983:336) \_ the second part is written as “preferred/dispreferred second”:

- \* Request → accept/refuse
- \* Offer → accept/refuse
- \* Invite → accept/refuse

- \* Assess → agree/disagree
- \* Question → expected answer/unexpected answer
- \* Blame → denial/admission

We may also add less structured set:

- \* Apology → downplay (minimization)
- \* Thank → welcome
- \* Greeting → greeting

Questions and answers, greetings and return greetings, but also invitations and acceptances or invitations and declinations are well-known examples. What counts for these adjacency pairs is that given the condition of a first pair part being uttered (e.g. a question is asked), the second part of that pair then becomes relevant (e.g. an answer to the question is given). The latter has been termed “conditional relevance” (Schegloff, [9]), a branch of which, as we have seen in the example of the greeting that is not returned, is referred to as a notable absence (Schegloff[9]).

It is important to point out that this notable absence is a participant’s category, rather than something that is identified by the researcher.

Adjacency pairs[10] are ordered in ways that suggest a clear difference between the first and the second part of the pair and ideally, first pair parts should be produced next to second pair parts. In practice, however, this is not always the case. What is the case is that particular types of utterances are conventionally paired such that on the production of the first part, the second pair part becomes relevant and remains relevant also if it is not produced immediately in the next serial turn. Now, in the line with the argument put forward by Heritage[2] the notion of adjacency pairs is not intended to point to some empirical generalization as to whether first pair parts are always followed by second pair parts. What is important though is normative character of adjacency pairs, and the inferences that are drawn upon if the second part of adjacency pair is not produced. Again, this is similar to the example of the greeting that was addressed above. Consider how the example of the greeting that was not returned does not suggest that it is no longer appropriate to greet people back. Rather, what we see is that not returning a greeting makes available a whole set of different inferences in which the non-appropriate of the second pair part is subsequently accounted for. Because of this accountability feature, the analyst can point to these sequences as robust interactional phenomena that do not only illustrate how turn-taking operates but works to illustrate its normative accountability as well as the kind of interactional work that can be accomplished in subsequent accounts.

Are adjacency pairs related to dialogue grammars or sequencing rules? Such normative structures for dialogues, often proposed by discourse analysts (e.g. Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975; Geneva school), were criticized by Levinson (1983:288-294) and others. The idea is first to associate speech acts to utterances (but the algorithm is seldom specified by these grammars, and the speech act framework seems too restrictive to be used here), then, second, to find sequencing rules that constrain the utterances in a dialogue (but it seems there are no such constraints, only preferences). Such models are thus very far from providing a full theory of dialogue. But this does not mean that they cannot contribute with something to our understanding.

According to Levinson (1983:293-4), “... sequencing constraints in conversation could in any case never be captured fully in speech act terms. What makes some utterances after a question constitute an answer is not only the nature of the utterance itself but also the fact that it occurs after a question with a particular content – ‘answer hood’ is a complex property composed of sequential location and topical coherence across two utterances, amongst other things; significantly, there is no proposed illocutionary force of answering.

## **METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH**

At first, a General Proficiency Test was administered in a group of 40 female English translation students at Islamic Azad University, Arak Branch. Based on their raw scores, they were divided into two groups of intermediate and advanced. Then, each student was asked to tell an anecdote in order to see which one takes a longer turn.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results indicated that those advanced students used some techniques rather than students in intermediate group while telling an anecdote. These techniques were presequencing and signals like a short pause, particular types of laughter or some filler words such as 'anyway' or 'so', structuring the competence, parallelism, use of cohesive devices, ellipses, substitution, conjunction.

## CONCLUSION

Turn taking is a fundamental concept to conversation and is governed by certain principles. Interlocutors in conversation have to know when and how to take one's turn, and when and how to stop conversational activities. The findings of the study emphasize on the fact that phenomenon of turn-taking as a pragmatic instrument should be exploited effectively in the classrooms. Teachers can frame some turn-taking strategies in manipulating turns appropriate to the level of students.

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