

## TURN-TAKING SEQUENCE IN DISCOURSE: A TOOL TO EFFECTIVE CONVERSATION IN A RELATED SPEECH OF INTERLOCUTORS

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### **Abstract**

The absence of appropriate sequencing of turns in conversation has resulted to ambiguities and ineffectiveness in communication among interlocutors in English discourse. This paper reviews the place of the current speaker in a discourse floor by locating the role adequate segmentation of conversation play in discourses and establish the relationship between the use of language and its application in a discourse and also established language as a core factor and regulator of the social and interpersonal relationship in a connected speech of interlocutors. Descriptive method of research was adopted using Speech Act frame work theory as propounded by Austin J. and Searle. The paper discovered that proper sequence of turn-taking in conversation provided a free flow interaction in the various discourses as it is difficult and almost impossible for a particular participant in a discourse floor to be a speaker and a listener simultaneously. This in turn underscored the fact that turn-taking is a chaining principle of give-and-take which when adequately implemented exterminated inconsistencies and ambiguity in a discourse processes. The paper recommended that proper Turn-taking sequencing in a Discourse is a tool to effective communication in a related speech of Interlocutors.

**Keywords:** Current Speaker, sequencing, turn-taking, role, Interlocutors.

### **Introduction**

The effectiveness of conversation depends on turn-taking which refers to the sequential occurrence of turns, in which a party starts to talk, stops and another takes over the discourse floor. Turn-taking cannot be discussed in isolation from turn-allocation. Turn allocation is a process in conversation where speakers are allocated turns in sequence which is one of the most crucial aspects of discourse. Acts make up moves and moves make up turns. In sync, a turn is the totality of what a participant says when he holds the discourse floor. (Schegloff, 1972). A turn may be simple (if its component is a single move) or complex- bi-directional (if its component is more than a single move and each refers to different exchanges). The way conversations are represented in writing, makes it tempting to think of a conversation as consisting of a bit of talk by one speaker, then a bit of talk by another, then by another, and so on. These units are often called "turns". A turn begins when one speaker starts to speak, and ends when he or she stops speaking. Turns defined this way, are often relevant to how conversations are structured.

There exists sometimes, the absence of appropriate sequencing of turns in conversation which has resulted to vagueness and ineffectiveness in communication among interlocutors in English discourse. This paper therefore sought to carry out the conversational sequence of a spontaneous face to face discourse and to achieve this; it focuses on establishing the

relationship between the use of language and its application in a discourse and on language use as a regulator of the social and interpersonal relationship in a discourse. This is determined by the linguistic genres of language and the derivational pattern of meaning analyzed under the auspices of conversational tools of; discourse roles and turn allocation technique. Descriptive method inquiry was used to achieve the objectives of this paper.

**Conceptual frame work**

The paper adopts the Speech Act theory as propounded by Austin J. and Searle. This concept states that in every utterance, an interlocutor is carrying out an action. This theory was popularized by Searle and according to J. Austin (1962) in every utterance, a person performs an act such as stating a fact, an opinion, confirming or denying something, making a request giving an order, permission and so on. Verbs play important roles in speech act theory because they are action. The types of speech acts are; Locution (literal meaning of an utterance), Illocution (non- linguistic act performed through a linguistic act by the hearer), Perlocution (the real effect of the utterance and action as a result of the perceived message).

**Turn Participation**

Positing from the view point that in every utterance, an interlocutor is carrying out an action, the level of turn participation by interlocutors are closely knitted by the age of the participants and can simply be represented with the following chart;

**Turn participation chart**

<u>Age</u>	<u>Status</u>
Ages 0 – 3 months	Cognitive participant.
2 months -2years	Simultaneous vocalization
2 years - adulthood	Speaker/listener

(This excludes an impaired child)

It is very correct to recognize the existence of turn taking in conversation. However, this claim must be modified to account for a structured discourse situation. First, it is not usual that a speaker is allowed to hold the talk floor, as long as he likes, especially in some speech occasions like debates where there is time limit for which each participant may hold the discourse floor. This privilege is not extended, however, to some participants like the witnesses and accused persons in courtroom talk (Dairo&Onadeko, 2008). Maiyanga (2009) used unstructured naturally occurring conversations as data for his study and suggested that the mechanism that governs turn taking and accounts for the properties of discourse is a set of rules with organized options, which operate on a turn-by turn basis. Hence, a speaker will be socially and/or professionally assigned initially just one of the units. The end of such unit constitutes a point at which the interaction may change. The change point he calls “a Transition – Relevance – Place (TRP)” at which the rules that govern the transition of speakers then come into play. Secondly, a participant may have to wait patiently for another to finish talking before he starts, especially if the prior speaker is a participant who holds the “+HIGHER” role (Dairo&Onadeko, 2008). Turn at talk is “opportunity to hold the floor, not what is said while holding it.” A floor may, therefore, consist of several turns, just as it is possible to take a turn without having the floor. A person can even continue to control the floor while she/he is not talking. These units are called “turns”. In written representations of conversation such as play scripts, turns are easy to identify. According to Johnstone, (2010 :102),

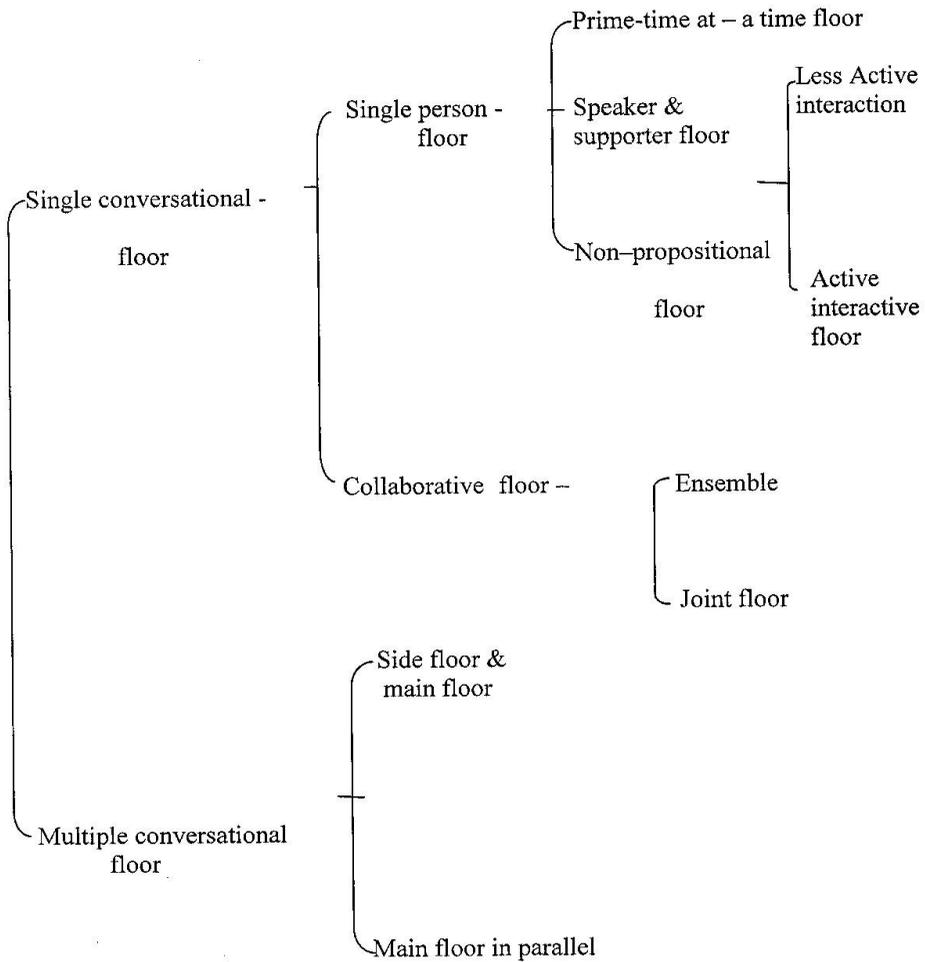
turns are often relevant to how conversations are structured, getting the conversational floor takes less work when a second speaker waits until the first speaker has indicated that he or she is finished talking, via phrase-final intonation or grammar, eye or body movement, or some explicit means for allocating the next turn to someone else.

Schegloff (1972 :75) observes that “discourse can only occur when there is turn taking process in which one participant talks, stops and another one takes over the floor”. According to him, “if turn taking really occurs in talk, there must be turn as one of the categories of discourse”. Levinson (1983), which is based on Sacks *et al.*, (1974), postulates this when he maintained that there are units out of which turns can be constructed. These units they refer to as Turn-constructive units (TCU). These units can be single lexical items (“yes”, for example), phrases, clauses, or sentences. To him, if a new speaker wants to interrupt a turn, he or she has to talk louder, say something like “excuse me,” or acknowledge in some other way or the other. Another way in which turns are relevant to how conversations are structured is that certain types of turns may call for particular corresponding types of turns to follow them: questions call for answers, complaints for responses, a greeting for a return greeting. When conversationalists fail to respond with the expected turn type, extra work is necessary to repair the problem. In turn-taking system, each speaker is at first allotted one of these TCUs. The end of such a unit constitutes a place where speaker change occurs: that is, at this point another person could begin talking”. The end of a TCU is thus a transition-relevance place (TRP). According to him, for a transaction to be orderly and successful, the following rule must apply;

- a, If the current speaker selects a next speaker in current turn, then current speaker must stop speaking, and that next speaker must speak next, transition occurring at the first TRP after next-speaker selection.
- b, If current speaker does not select next speaker, then any (other) party may self-select, first speaker gaining rights to the next turn.
- c. If current speaker does not select next speaker, and no other party self-selects under option (b), then current speaker may (but need not) continue.

These rules provide a foundation for making sense out of simultaneous talk in a discourse transaction. Postulating from the point of view of Hayashi (1996), the concept of floor may be further subcategorized into two main types. One is a single conversational floor which reveals only one floor in the current conversation. Whenever two or more single conversational floors occur simultaneously one may refer to it as a multiple conversational floor. Levinson (1985 :6) stated that “If the current speaker selects a next speaker in current turn, then current speaker must stop speaking, and that next speaker must speak next, transition occurring at the first TRP after next-speaker selection”. This can be diagrammatically represented as follows;

**Classification of floor**



Classification of floor (Hayashi 1996 :71)

### **Conversational Analysis (CA)**

According to Olateju, it is quite difficult to say with authority the origin of Conversational Analysis (CA) because so many researchers in different periods in different fields started works, which led to the birth of CA. However, “Conversational Analysis could be said to have started in the 1960s with the work of Harvey Sacks and his colleagues in their attempt to study social organisation of everyday conduct”. According to her, Sacks was a fellow at the Los Angeles suicide prevention center in 1963. He was able to make audio recordings and transcriptions of telephone calls to the clinic of interactional conduct. His findings formed the basis for their initial work in Conversational Analysis. (Oyeleye2003:103). Thus, Conversational Analysis was developed by the Sociologist Harvey Sacks and his close associates Emmanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson. Today, Conversational Analysis is an established method used in sociology, anthropology, linguistics, speech-communication and psychology. It is particularly influential in interactional socio linguistic discourse analysis and discourse psychology. Recently, Conversational Analysis have been employed for instance by phoneticians to explore the fine phonetic details of speech (Lakeoff,1973).

Conversation Analysis (CA) places a lot of emphasis on the interactional and inferential consequences of the choice between alternative utterances. According to Oyeleye (2003), “it is situation and it attempts to discover how particular aspects of conversations are viewed by speakers themselves”. Sociologists also gave some promotions to CA, right from Durkheim (1895) who focused on social fact, which de Saussure adopted in his “la parole” and “la langue”. Between linguistics and sociology, discourse has always been one of the natural interfaces. Durkheim is one of the major contributors to CA, and he paid attention to heuristic devices used by individuals to construct social worlds. CA does not only present one of the methods, it is part of the social world which is under construction. In addition, within philosophy, there exist monumental works like Austin’s (1962) which was on Speech Acts, and Grice’s (1975) which were on conversational maxims (how to maintain cohesion in discourse).

### **Language as a Medium of Communication**

Human beings are known to be engaging in many communicative activities, and the most crucial among them is talking. Talking with the use of language is otherwise the basic feature that differentiates humans from other animals. Using language as a medium, Human beings are able to talk, converse, argue, discuss, tell stories and engage in all other kind of communicative activities which is otherwise known as conversation. Scholars, such as, Osisanwo (2008), posits that a conversation occurs when at least two people are talking and for it to be a conversation, each person must talk one after the other. There must be a string of at least two turns. Even if the second person does not talk, the person must show an evidence of having heard the utterance by carrying out an action such as nodding with the he

ad, gaping or starring at the person in disbelief or winking in response. The listener or hearer can also communicate through silence. It is then that a conversation is deemed to have

taken place. According to Sacks et. al (1974), conversations are interactional episodes, they are speech events that contain a beginning, middle and an end.

Schegloff (1972), observes that conversation is a game of give and take. To him, conversational sequence can be described by the formula ababab, where ‘a’ and ‘b’ are

parties to the conversation.” He maintains that participants in a conversation find it difficult, if not impossible to talk and listen simultaneously. Conversation, therefore, can be viewed as the sum total of the interaction between interlocutors or participants within a specific discourse floor and the analysis of this interaction is known as Conversational Analysis.

It is pertinent to note here that conversation does not occur in a vacuum. Rather, before a conversation can take place, a medium must be involved. This medium is referred to as language. Language can therefore, be simply defined as a vehicle that transports thoughts, feelings, ideas etc from one entity to another for the purpose of communication. This can be in form of oral, written, sign or body language. According to scholars such as Halliday (1975), language could be defined in various ways depending on whether one is interested in dialects and those who speak them, words and their histories, the differences in language as an art medium, uses of language and the like. However, to Osisanwo (2008), Language is human vocal noise or the arbitrary graphic representation of this noise, used systematically and conventionally by members of a speech community for purposes of communication. Finch (1998), in his own view, states that language weaves together the fabrics of our society that one of the extraordinary things about language is the way in which we take it for granted as though it were a given fact of life. To Sapir (1921), language is purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced sounds. Azikiwe (1995), opines that Language is a fluid, dynamic and negotiable system and learning it is as a result of interaction and integration of a number of factors. Positing from the standpoint of Keefe (1979), language have the cognitive, affective and physiological aspect which are relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment. To him, the factors that interact and integrate for a language to be learned are related to the visual, auditory, kinaesthetic and tactile preferences of the learner, and also the preferences for individual or group differences. Having an informed knowledge of what medium a conversation can be conveyed, it is appropriate to critically view how conversation is analyzed.

For a format conversation to be effective, the conversational sequence of that particular interaction must be segmented in such a manner that both the encoder/sender and the decoder are mutually benefited. For this to occur, conversational segments have to be adequately analysed. Hence, Conversational Analysis as a concept, is an aspect of both formal and functional linguistic discourse that takes into consideration basically, how talk between two, three, four or more people is organized; how meaning is derived and what makes it coherent or incoherent or meaningful in human inter-relationship in the multi-dynamic and multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-faceted society of today’s world. This in turn, is determined by the linguistic genres of the particular language in use and the derivational pattern of meaning adduced. According to Sacks (1988:p.87);

Conversational Analysis is the most basic and widespread linguistic means of conducting human affairs that aims at studying how participants understand and respond to one another in their terms at talk, with essential focus on how sequence of actions are generated and maintained through the use of language.

According to him, Conversational analysis therefore, focuses on transcribing data, identifying and describing format of talk, their emergence and “doings” in interactional context. It provides an interactional account for linguistic and communicative phenomena. These linguistic tools help in maintaining a systematic correlation in the various structure of language for effective communication, by eliminating inconsistencies and ambiguity in a discourse process.

Maiyanga (2009) posits that “the more we understand the cognitive and communicative structures of language, the better we are able to recognise and control the pathological or destructive elements in communicative discourse”. To him, branches in linguistic studies like stylistics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics and discourse analysis have made public the peculiar nature and features of the language of literature, politics, law, advertisement, journalism, medicine and other conversational fields of human endeavour.

According to Mazur (2006), the term conversational analysis can be construed in a broad sense to mean “any study of people talking together in oral communication or language use”. To Lamidi (2000), conversational analysis is a useful tool for the integration and maintenance of a society.

This paper carries out the conversational analysis of the discourse strategies of a spontaneous face to face interaction among interlocutor of a courtroom session. This owes to the fact that conversational analysis, unlike other fields of study such as discourse analysis and pragmatic analysis, focuses on the spontaneous and naturally occurring face-to-face exchanges. It is worthy to state here that, there exists a marked difference between discourse analysis, pragmatic analysis and conversational analysis. The difference are; while pragmatic analysis is context based, discourse analysis is the study of “language in use” and discourse analysis according to Stubbs (1995) as quoted by Dairo (2008) is the study of larger linguistic units including written texts. Both failed to capture the fecundity of this paper as it is geared towards the analysis of only the naturally occurring (face-to-face) exchanges. Owing to the fact that conversational analysis can be construed in a broad sense to mean “any study of people talking together in oral communication”. Dairo posits that;

The study of both written and spoken discourse is known as Discourse Analysis, the analysis of spoken discourse only is called Conversational Analysis, and the analysis of written discourse only is text linguistics. (2008:p.83).

Positing from this standpoint, discourse analysis involves larger conversational exchanges and is not restricted to the organization of exchanges in spontaneous conversation (face-to-face). According to him, the difference here is that to include the “written text” in general is to lump discourse analysis with text- linguistics.

The paper adopts the perspectives that view language as chains of actions and establishes that through their linguistic acts, interlocutors effected changes in their discourse domain. This perspective is traceable to the Speech Act framework as propounded by Austin J. and Searle. These theories form the basis for the descriptive analysis which this paper adopts.

Positing from the stand point that Conversation occurs when at least two people are talking as mentioned in the introductory part of this paper, Schutz’s (1970) posited that “conversations are interactional episodes. They are speech events that contain a beginning, middle and an end”. The ethno methodologists view this concept from a different perspective. They do not discuss what goes into the medial part of conversation, but only treat its opening and closing. For instance, Schegloff & Sacks (1973), Benson & Hughes (1983) discuss the opening and the closing episodes in telephone exchanges, and this one sided segment of telephone exchange cannot be considered adequate (Maiyanga: 2009).

Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974), deal exclusively with data on the verbal structuring of conversation in the form of transcriptions of tape recordings. The information they offer is presented in terms of what one speaker or an interlocutor after another does verbally that contributes to the regulation of the ongoing talk. However, they propose a number of strategies they believe hold true in interpersonal discourse. They view turn-taking as “talk exchange systems”. Among those features as observed by Onadeko (1979) are the following.

- i. Speaker change reoccurs, or at least, occurs.
- ii. Overwhelmingly, one party talks at a time
- iii. Occurrence of more than one speaker at a time is common, but brief.
- iv. Transition from one turn to the next with no gap and no overlap between them is common
- vii. Turn allocation techniques are obviously used. A current speaker may select a next speaker as when a current speaker addresses a question to another party, parties may self-select.

### Conclusion

The rightful use and proper application of language is a deciding factor for effective language use, planning, effective communication, and better inter human relationships in every society, more so in a multiethnic, multilingual multicultural, multifaceted and dynamic society of a country like Nigeria. Hence, it is necessary to state that turn- taking is influenced by a number of social factors, personality and professional variables and that is to say that conversational sequence has complex implications. Studies on the adequate segmentation of turns in conversational sequence of a discourse have become imperative in a society as dynamic as ours.

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