

○ **A.J. LIDDICOAT, AN INTRODUCTION TO CONVERSATION ANALYSIS**

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An Introduction to Conversation Analysis makes a valuable contribution to the study of talk-in-interaction by fulfilling the promise of the title: this book is a clear and systematic guide to the methodology (and method) of conversation analysis for those who are new to the field.

The book opens with a brief history of the sociological roots of conversation analysis (CA) and then progresses in three stages: the first dealing with turn taking (chapters two and three); the second is concerned with the sequential organisation of turns (chapters four, five and six) and the third describes particular contexts in which turn taking and the sequential organisation of talk have been studied at length, in conversational openings and closings and storytelling in conversation (chapters seven, eight and nine). This structure is likely to prove useful as a reference guide for students looking for explication of a particular feature of interaction studied by conversation analysts.

The introductory chapter does not so much set up the scope of the book but instead briefly covers some essential ground in conversation analysis by identifying key tenets of orderliness and recipient design. This first chapter does well to stipulate that ‘context needs to be seen more as something which is invoked in interaction, rather than something which impacts on interaction’ (p.8) underscoring a preoccupation in CA with what *participants* treat as relevant at any given point.

Anthony Liddicoat makes the sagacious decision to present the transcription conventions of CA early in the piece, introducing the reader to the tools used for the ‘unmotivated looking’ that characterises the analysis in CA. Chapter two presents a logical and useful guide to transcription – particularly of paralinguistic features of the interaction – which provides an ideal place for the student to begin. This chapter presents a more comprehensive account of how nonverbal features of the interaction can be captured in a transcript (particularly gaze and interaction with inanimate participants e.g. computer) than is provided elsewhere. The introduction to transcription in CA provided in this book is an excellent resource for a novice – or indeed experienced – reader.

Chapter two also provides a background to the extracts that are used throughout the remaining chapters to illustrate key principles of talk-in-interaction. Chapter three sets out the most fundamental of these by illustrating the properties of turn-taking, namely the turn constructional component, turn allocation, transition relevance place,

and – most helpfully – the distinction between a turn at talk and a turn constructional unit. This chapter focuses on the performative aspects of turn-taking but places less emphasis on the analytic significance of the fact that turns are sequentially ordered; that is, that how speakers understand one another is on display because of the fact that one turn occurs directly after another.

Chapter four is in effect a continuation of chapter three as it deals with the role of gaps and overlaps in turn-taking, claiming that ‘both of these possibilities have an interactional importance above and beyond speaker change itself’ (p.79). Silences are indeed hearable and attributable, and more could be made of the fact that attribution is made by the speaker and content of the next turn, rather than intrinsic to the pause or gap itself. The range of possible inferences of latching and overlapping in conversation are comprehensively described, demonstrating speakers’ sensitivity to timing in transition spaces through a number of well-selected examples. In this chapter, Liddicoat does a particularly good job of explaining the possible inferences of overlap, including prematurely predicting the completion of a TCU (turn constructional unit), gaining the floor, displays of enthusiasm, confusion rather than competition over speaker selection or more problematic instances of overlap where the speaker is clearly interrupting.

A sound and straightforward definition of preference organisation is provided in chapter five (following the brief introduction to adjacency pairs that opens the chapter) identifying the ‘extra conversational work’ that goes into dispreferred turns. The notion of a *trajectory* for second pair parts is a thoughtful way of articulating typically expected responses rather than claiming that certain actions (e.g. agreement) are universally preferred. This chapter includes a concise review of assessments as a particular type of response to another speaker.

Chapter six guides the reader through variations of expansion sequences and provides further consideration of why speakers might use these conversational devices (eg pre-invitations to establish if an acceptance is likely to be forthcoming). This chapter similarly details examples of other pre-sequences, insertion sequences, and post-sequences, including how speakers use *okay* and *oh* to as tokens of acknowledgement, agreement, assessment and opportunities to close the conversation.

The resource that speakers have for fixings false starts, mis-hearings, misunderstanding and other conversational troubles is detailed in the discussion of repair. Throughout chapter seven, Liddicoat makes a clear distinction between who it is that identifies the trouble source (self- or other-repair), who does the repair and where this repair might be done (the multiple repair space). Although present in the discussion, there is little emphasis here that it is the sequential organisation of turn-taking that allows for the repair

of any troubles (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974, p. 724). The discussion of preference for self-repair that concludes this chapter manages to succinctly capture that conversation is ordered so as to allow greater opportunity for the speaker to repair their own talk – thereby protecting face concerns as well as providing a system for self-regulating conversation.

The presentation of remaining chapters which outline the interactional achievements of openings (chapter eight), closings (chapter nine) and storytelling (chapter ten), perhaps obscures that these sequences are not something ‘other’, but rather have proven a productive site in CA research to uncover the systematic nature of turn-taking, repair, adjacency pairs, and sequences in interaction. That said, presenting these chapters as discrete topics does allow for further detailing of social actions that are achieved in talk, such as speaker identification in telephone calls, bringing about the end of a conversation, and the interactional accomplishment of telling a story.

An undoubtedly minor point – but it seems a pity that the photograph on the front cover suggests that conversation analysis is (simply) the study of everyday conversation. This does not capture the fundamental notion – one that is mentioned in the first chapter of this book – that in CA, studying conversation is the vehicle to understanding the order of social action, how it is that people go about getting people to agree with them, avoiding political challenges, constructing roles in medical or legal interactions and so on, and moreover is concerned with the implications of these behaviours as organising social phenomena. CA is concerned with the intricacies and predictability of ordinary conversation in order to understand how people make sense of each other and the world, rather than an interest in these mundane features of talk for their own sake.

However, with this book, Anthony Liddicoat has provided an ideal precursor to less accessible (critical) introductions which make an argument for conversation analysis in favour of other approaches to discourse (e.g., Wooffitt, 2005) or more technical, complex texts which require some familiarity with the methodology of conversation analysis (e.g., Schegloff, 2007). Arguments could be made that any introduction to conversation analysis should provide epistemological and ontological accounts for this approach to the study of interaction, that scholars cannot locate themselves in the field without knowing where others have stood before them. Yet for an apprentice, developing an understanding the basic machinery of conversation analysis can be a way into understanding this approach as distinctive in ethnomethodology. Harvey Sacks comments, ‘I decided to spend the first session telling people something that I take it could hardly *not* be of interest to them. Then ... they would at least have heard what I figure would be worth the price of

the course' (Sacks 1984, p. 413, emphasis in original). Anthony Liddicoat's text achieves this essential goal.

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