

Omosho Moses Melefa¹
Department of English & Literary Studies
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

God'sgift Ogban Uwen
Department of English and Literary Studies
University of Calabar, Nigeria

Amuchechukwu Victoria Ozor
Department of English & Literary Studies
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

CONVERSATIONAL STRUCTURE AND TURN-TAKING MANAGEMENT IN INTERACTIONS BETWEEN CLIENTS AND OFFICERS AT A DRIVERS LICENSING OFFICE IN NIGERIA

Abstract: This study examines conversational structure and turn management in interactions between clients and officers of the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) at a Nigerian drivers licensing office in order to unveil how sociocultural nuances shape the structure of conversations in this context. The data comprised 21 samples of interaction sequences which were purposively selected from over 13 hours of tape-recordings and analysed using Conversation Analysis. The findings reveal that the interactions are organised in adjacency pairs and expanded most of the time with insertion sequences. Also, turns are shared between the officers and clients through self-selection, current-speaker-selects-next and sustained-turns procedures, which are largely within the control of the officers. There are various cues of silence and pauses, socio-centric sequences, adjacency pairs, drawls, pitch, overlap and interruptions, which are turn-taking and turn-giving cues in the interactions. These features reveal the interactions as institutional talk, which is peculiar to this social environment.

¹moses.melefa@unn.edu.ng

Keywords: *Conversation analysis, drivers licensing, FRSC, interactions, Nigeria, turn-taking.*

1. Introduction

Conversational interaction reveals the organisation of social activities. Schegloff (1989) argues that conversational interaction may be thought of as a form of social practice through which human actions are organised through talk in interaction. Interaction in society is considered a form of social action. It reveals how participants orient their methods while organising social action through talk (Mazeland, 2006). So, conversation analysis examines how language embodies practices and structures used in talk-in-interaction as forms of social action (Schegloff, 1989). It discusses the rules and methods that participants in interaction orient themselves to in organising social action.

The Drivers Licence Office of the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) is a public service institution statutorily responsible for road safety related literacy activities, media advocacy, public enlightenment, enforcement of traffic laws, and the production and issuance of driver's licences (Uwen & Ebam 2019; Uwen & Ekpenyong 2022). The concern of this study is the discourse on the production and issuance of a driver's licence. This process is marked by various activities like reception of applications, validation of data, capturing of people's identification, documentation, issuance of driving licence, reception of complaints and other internal official duties. These activities feature an officer who delivers services and the client who receives these services. They interact through the use of language to achieve these set objectives. Therefore, they serve as participants in the interaction. It is expected that the participants in these interactions possess the ability to communicate with one another to achieve these roles. What is crucial to conversation and discourse in general is the negotiation of meaning to achieve the expected goals. As such, Johnstone (2010) notes that there is no pre-set way or pattern of interactions. Left for institutional talks of a certain kind, all conversations are instances of discourse, which is shaped by the circumstance and participants in the talk. Whenever there is a break-down in communication within the sequence of interaction, there is always a call from the other participant, to 'the repair' of the conversation and the sequence is said to be complete and successful once the participants are satisfied and the interactions end without collapsing.

Analysis of institutional interactions has cut across classrooms, job interviews, market places, hospitals and even court rooms. However, conversational structure

and the management of turns in interactions between FRSC officers and their clients in Nigeria seem not to have been given any specific scholarly attention. This is a platform where people from all walks of life converge in order to get a permit to drive. The aim of this study, therefore, is to examine conversational structure and the management of turns in interactions between officers of FRSC and their clients. The study will specifically provide insight into how the nuances of socio-cultural features and the institutional norms of the FRSC shape the structure of interactions in this work place. This will build on existing studies, which discussed the structure of organisational interactions.

2. Literature review

Studies on institutional interactions within the framework of Conversation Analysis (CA) have focused on various contexts of interaction and text types. The focus of the early studies on institutional interactions range from the context of therapy counselling (Silverman & Peräkylä, 1990; Peräkylä, 1995), gossip (Bergmann 1993), talk at work (Drew and Heritage 1992a&b), newspaper interviews (Heritage & Greatbatch 1991; Greatbatch 1988), classroom interactions (McHoul 1978, Mehan, 1979), to police call openings (Whalen & Zimmerman (1987), and communications in court (Atkinson & Drew 1979). These studies discussed the organisational structure of these various institutional talks. A common trend that runs through them is the submission that the organisational structure of institutional talks is shaped by institutional norms. While discussing the structure of talk in therapy counselling, Silverman & Peräkylä (1990) note that pauses and hesitations play crucial roles in showing the sensitivity of the issues at stake and the attitudes of parties in the interaction. They further note that 'delicate' items such as sexual intercourse and contraceptives attracted hesitations and recurrent pauses from both patients and professionals. Heritage & Greatbatch (1991) point out the highly specialised nature of the structure of a newspaper interview. They also show that the conversational sequence begins with the interviewer and that the interviewee's role, mainly, is to provide responses to the questions. Bergmann (1993) presents the structure of gossip as a triad that begins with a subject to the gossip producer and oscillates to the gossip recipient. The study shows that the sequence is situationally embedded and characterises work places. Boden's (1994) study on work meetings shows that meetings reveal the institutional structures in action in an organisation. This means that the organisational structure of interactions in a meeting reveals the norms of an operation within an organisation and its interactional practices.

In the 21st century and in more recent times, much has also been done on talk-at-interaction within institutional settings. This includes works on news interviews (Clayman & Heritage, 2002), the structure of good and bad news delivery in clinical settings (Maynard 2003), classroom interaction, foreign language use and repair in interaction (Schegloff, 2000, Gardner & Wagner 2004, Thornton & Noemi 2006, Svennevig 2018), work place interaction (Stubbe, Lane & Hilder 2003), etc. While Forrester (2008) examines the emergence of self-repair in interaction, Filippi (2009, 2015) investigates the development of various aspects of interactional competence and recipient design. These studies foreground how social norms shape interactions in these contexts in addition to providing insights on the structure of interactions in these interactional settings.

Attempts have also been made to examine the structure of institutional interactions in the Nigerian context. Analysis has focused largely on doctor-patient (Adegbite & Odebunmi 2006, David, 2019), teacher-student interactions (Olateju 2004, Ayeni, 2020), lawyer-client interaction (Uwen, 2020), and interactions among (para)military agents as identity construction (Uwen & Ekpenyong 2022). The studies on doctor-patient interactions look at discourse tact in medical communication and the structure of conversations between doctors and their patients in the North-Central part of Nigeria. Again, turn allocation techniques of teacher-student interactions were discussed. Uwen (2020) claims that lawyers employ frequent interruptions, topic control and technical terminologies to widen the social distance and exercise social power on their clients. Uwen & Ekpenyong (2022) identify *esprit de corps* as a (para)military identity marker that introduces a social divide between members of uniformed services and others. However, conversational structure and the management of turns at a Nigerian drivers licensing centre has not enjoyed any specific research attention. Since the centre provides an opportunity for people from all walks of life to converge in order to get a permit to drive, there is the need to discuss the structure of their conversations and how turns are managed in them in order to unveil the structural nuances of conversations in this context and to expand the literature on the application of CA to various sociocultural contexts.

3. Theoretical framework

Data analysis in this study is hinged on Conversation Analysis (CA, henceforth). It is considered adequate because of its well-structured mechanisms for accounting for conversational structures, deployed in various studies. It focuses on the sequences

of interactions found in a particular context of talk (spoken or written), bringing out the elements of the interaction sequence, which include turn-taking, turn components and structural organisations of the interactions. Its primary focus is the sequential organisation of talks. Essentially, it is concerned with the organisation of interaction, about the syntactic, semantic, and prosodic qualities through which turns are designed, and about the pragmatic connections between turns (Arminen, 1988).

Historically, it was developed by the following sociologists: Harvey Sacks, Emmanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson. According to Liddicoat (2007), these proponents of the theory studied interactions through a recipient design, which implies that speakers design their talk in order to be understood by the recipients. CA's key concern has been ordinary conversations since its inception until 1974, when it grew from the ethnomethodology concept of Garfinkel and Goffman in studying informal talks, to studies of institutional talk by Heritage, Drew and so on. Johnstone (2010) states that sociologists and linguists are interested in conversations because they are a good site to look at how people evoke and create structures in the process of interacting. According to Heritage (2009), there are three fundamental ideas underlying this notion of CA, which are: a) Whenever there is a speaker, there is presumably a next speaker. b) There is sequential contextuality in turns as participants share turns in interaction. c) That the production of next actions indicates the understanding of the previous ones or a move to understand the previous actions. This implies that understanding could either be confirmed or become an object of repair in the next turn. Turns are studied in the concept of turn-taking.

Turn-taking, which is a basic mechanism of interactions, is interactionally enacted rules on how people manage and take turns in interaction, which are developed and employed by parties in the conversation themselves (Liddicoat, 2007). Turn-taking has identifiable components which include: turn constructional components, turn allocational procedures, transitional relevant places and turn-taking cues.

Turn constructional components or a turn constructional unit (TCU) is basically the design a turn has as its structure, which could be in terms of syntactic structure, prosody or, generally, the peculiar context the turns are constructed in. Syntactically, it could either be lexical, phrasal, clausal or sentential (Wooffitt, 2005; Mazeland, 2006). In addition, Mazeland (2006) submits that prosody could be a statement in a high or low degree of sound; it could be elongated in its realisation in terms of a word, or rushed over. In context, utterances which involve turns like

yes, no, mm, mhm, etc., are meaningful only when they are placed within a context of interaction that gives rise to them. They are important as they help participants prescribe when to take the turns in interaction and what should constitute their speech.

Furthermore, Mey (2001) looks at the concept of hedges and hesitations, a false start, showing a certain insecurity, which are considered as vital components of talks. In hedges, there is a lot of irrelevant information which indicates that something is being glossed over and conjured away by talk. This is a very crucial aspect of adjacency pairs. The ability of speakers to know when it is appropriate to start to talk is considered under Transition Relevant Places (TRP). A property of any turn construction unit is that at its completion, another speaker may start. TRP is a place where turn-transfer may be initiated. It can be anticipated. Its beginning is the supposed end of a TCU (Liddicoat, 2007).

Turn-taking cues are essential in discussing turn management. They are like markers or signals in turn allocation. They help participants in previewing TRPs (Mey, 2001). A set of six specific and discrete cues is suggested as turn-eliciting signals, which include: intonation, drawls, body motion, socio-centric sequences such as: *but uh, or something, you know*; pitch or loudness accompanied with socio-centric sequences, and syntax. Other turn-eliciting cues include: adjacency pairs, 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, and a question, which is generally followed by some kind of response. Eye contact also signals turn-taking, especially in British culture, the speaker looks away during his/her turn and looks back to the listener in his/her eye at the turn-end (Kato, 2000).

The concept of overlapping is an important feature in CA. It occurs when the beginning of a speaker's statement coincides with the ending of another speaker's and blurs the transition space. It occurs in places that are just prior to the conclusion of TCU or TRP (Mazeland, 2006; Liddicoat, 2007). There are two other concepts which are important features of talks. These are *interruptions and repairs*. Interruptions are said to be 'hostile movements' which signals a turn grabbing attempt. *Repairs* are equally employed in CA as remedies or reconnections to a turn sequence due to distortions in inference on the side of the second speaker. This comes as a move for a repeat of turn so that the second speaker can meet up with the interaction's sequence organisation (Mazeland, 2006). They are 'generic conversational practices through which all interactional troubles can be managed and repairables corrected' (Arminen, 1988). It comes in so many structures

depending on the context of the talk. Analysis of interactions between the officers of FRSC and their clients is based on the theoretical framework of CA.

4. Methodology

Data for this study were recorded from the FRSC office, RS DLC 9.11 Nsukka Unit, Enugu State, Nigeria using the Audio Recorder feature of a Tecno P5 Android phone. The recordings were done during two sessions. The first recording was done when the office had technical challenges due to the malfunctioning of their biometric capturing machine. The second phase of the recording was when the capturing machine was repaired and they resumed the data capturing and issuance of licences.

The data involved 21 sample interaction sequences purposively selected from over 13 hours of recordings during many regular visits to the office in 2016. The interactions involved four different officials who attended to many clients within the period of the recordings. The sequences of interaction cut across the four interaction sequences at the licencing office, which include: issuance of licencing inquiries, complaints and application for licencing. The data were generated using participant observation and audio recording. Paralinguistic features that could not be captured via audio recording were observed and taken note of and recalled during transcription and analysis. They include body movements of the clients and officers as they use the camera, thumb printing machine, signature and eye test machines.

The analysis of data was qualitatively done and focused on the structure of conversation and turn taking management at the FRSC drivers' licence office. Recurring patterns were counted, converted to simple percentages and discussed within the analysis. The samples were transcribed with few modifications. Due to the dire need for anonymity, participants' data, like their names and phone numbers, were not mentioned anywhere in the samples except when relevant to the analysis. Officers were identified with the letter **A**, while clients were identified as **C**. The transcripts were organised as excerpts numbered 1 to 21. The analysis was grouped into the identifiable features of conversational structures stated in the theoretical framework, which includes the organisational sequence of the interactions, turn constructional components and turn management components observed in the interactions.

5. Data analysis and discussion

The analysis of interactions between FRSC officers and their clients focus on the structure of the conversation, which embeds a sequence organisation of the interactions, the description of the constructional components of the turns in the interactions and the description of turn-taking management in the interactions. These are presented in the subsections that follow.

5.1 Sequence organisation of the interactions

Sequence organisation refers to the ways conversationalists connect turns to one another as coherent series of events (Mazeland, 2006). The interactions at the FRSC office are peculiar to the kinds of duties discharged, which involve the issuance of a driving licence. The issuance process involves: application, validation of data, capturing of client's identities and the issuance of licences. These processes give rise to inquiries and complaints the office attends to most of the time. These activities have been found to have shaped the structure of interaction in the office into two observable sequences (Olateju, 2004; Filippi, 2009, 2015). These are adjacency pairs and insertion sequences.

The interactional sequences observed are organised in adjacency pairs. This organisational sequence marks it off as an institutional talk that is characterised by a pre-allocation of turns in interactions (Mazeland, 2006). The sequences' openings and closings are in adjacency pairs except for some closings that end in a remark like *alright*. Usually, the sequences require clients to answer questions on the application processes, which is usually on paper, confirm the already submitted data with the office in an oral validation process, respond to demands from the officer in the capturing of the identity process, as well as lodge complaints, if any. This social role creates an asymmetry and positioned the officer as the social superior in the discourse and the client as subordinate in the interactions. The officer controls the interactions by asking questions or making comments and the clients perform the role of providing responses, which formed the second pair to what the officers initiated. These are illustrated in the excerpts below:

Excerpt 1

Greeting/Response

C *How una[dey?](How are you doing?)*

A *[Fine sir*

C *Well done (...)*

A *You are welcome sir = welcome sir*

C *Hmm (sits down)*

Excerpt 2

Inquiry/Response

C E- a - ok, please, can I ask this question [please

A [Yes sir

C Can I use that ehm copy you gave me to do the capture at ehm. . . at

Enu[gu

A [No sir

C Okay . . . I will continue to wait

Excerpt 3

Question/Answer

A Your mother's maiden name is Eze?

C Her name is Ig_____

A Your mother's maiden name- Eb?

C I get it

A Is it a yes?

C Yes

A Your date of birth is 14 February [194_____

C [199_____

Excerpt 4

Summon/response

A Ch_____zo I_____e= Ch_____zo I_____e (0.2)

C Yes

A C_____l is it C_____l?

C That is me _____

Most of the sequences were observed to have been expanded using three elements of insertion sequence initiated by the participants in the ensued interactional sequence. The elements include repairs, comments and interruption, which manifest in Excerpts 1, 2, 3, and 4. The case of interruption brought a kind of suspension of some ongoing sequences, which saw the officer attending to another client or he/she takes a call or the client takes a call after which they resumed the sequence. This extended the duration of the ongoing sequence and showed that there was no strict adherence to official protocol in this workplace. This is exemplified in Excerpts 3, 4 and others in the data. Excerpt 5 illustrates a case of repair and comment insertion sequences.

Excerpt 5

A Chi _____ I _____ e

C Aa. . . am all here

A Your name sounds like an 18 year old girl

C *bia*,

A Your name[_____] [an 18 year old girl, [Chiazio

C [Sounds like _____] [it means Lord saves me

A I said it sounds like a little child's name=it is a modern name= it don match
abi like your age = no but with this Chiazio =these [are the reigning names

C [It is an ancient name God is saving me is constant is always there whether
now or in the future God is saving me hab[ahab

A [Chiazio = but there are kinds of names we hear in your days those native
names like Ifeoma, Chizoba. It's the same thing with Chizoba

[Yours is modified

C [Yeab _____] [yes yes yes – yes it's always been there

A O.k. You're welcome

C It's alright _____ =

The fourth line of Excerpt 5 is the client's move for clarification, which is responded to by the officer through repetition in the following turn. The development of the turn is primarily a comment initiated by the officer, which should have attracted a yes-or-no definite response. However, the client responded to it with another comment. The sequence expanded through five turns to the point that the appropriate response emerged at the 10th line where the client utters *yeab* and they continued the identity capturing process.

The interaction has, in general, three layers of structure, which includes an opening, middle and closing. These are described below:

Opening

This is the stage of initiation of the talk between the client and the officers as the case may be. It involved greetings and responses, which are in adjacency pairs. The client and the officer initiated the sequence. Both sides spoke first at different intervals.

Excerpt 6

A Good afternoon sir,

C *Unu na-aruru ebe a.* (You are committing an abomination here.)

A yes Sir

C *How una[dey?](how are you?)*

A *[Fine sir*

The institutional structure of the office controls who speaks first. It is an open office and sometimes through the interruption of an ongoing sequence, new sequences were initiated by other clients in a bid to solicit the attention or audience of the officers. This is illustrated in the excerpts below:

Excerpt 7

C *O positive*

A *Your next of kin's phone number*

C *_____390*

C2 *Good afternoon, Achorom –mm- I've come to collect a I was called to come and collect original (...)]*

A *[Good afternoon = This is the original now =*

In this illustration, C2-A sequence interrupts sequence C-A through greeting.

In other instances, an opening is found to have re-occurred in an already initiated sequence as a result of breaks in the sequence of the interaction. This is because of the structure of the activities of the FRSC institution that give rise to the interaction. The licence issuance involves three different stages. The clients who applied for a licence assemble in the office and submit their forms or inform the office of their presence if their forms are already with the office and then wait for the capturing process to commence. The officers initiate and take control of the interaction. This is in line with Uwem (2020) who observes that lawyer take a firm control of interactions with their clients. They initiate this opening by a 'summon' of the clients by their names. This brings about a 'summons/response' process as a form of initiation of talk in the interaction.

This is illustrated in Excerpt 8:

Excerpt 8

A *P_____ O =O _____P*

A2 *They are calling P_____*

A *O_____ P_____ IFEANYI*

C *Yes sir, ((enters and sits beside officer facing the monitor)) =*

Moreover, there is an observation where the opening is intermingled with the middle segment. This is clear in Excerpt 8, where the client greeted the officer and delved into the reason for coming without waiting for the officer's response.

Middle

Under this interaction layer, the clients indicated the purpose for the interaction just after the greeting. Middle segments in the interaction involved inquiries, complaints, validation and capturing of identities, as found in Excerpt 9:

Excerpt 9

C2 Good afternoon, Achorom – mm – I've come to collect a =I was called to come and collect original [(..)]

C I'm looking for one Sunday Ogbodo =

C I came to collect eh. . . the permanent eh=

C M choro ime capturing (I want to do capturing)

This segment is initiated by the clients who state why they have come to the office. There were situations where the officers asked the clients questions like, *what is the problem? How may we help you?* Most of the sequences under this segment have their middle segment initiated by the clients against few instances initiated by the officers. However, the middle segment is controlled by the officers through a different question/response sequence, which is in line with the institutional authority they control (Uwen & Ekpenyong, 2022). There were instances where the officers grabbed the turn from clients and took over the floor as well as held onto it till the conversation ended. Again, in another sequence, an initiated sequence through interruption was not attended to, but totally ignored until the ongoing turn with a client was concluded. This is illustrated in Excerpt 10 below:

Excerpt 10

A So gradually till now get back to where it was. (0.15) that is what am saying now, they will they fit even sell at the rate of N50 or N120

C2 Okay

A It's alright sir

C4 Good afternoon

A Welcome sir. When are you travelling?

C Hmm

A When are you travelling?

C (..) ((not audible))

A This . . . is not your fault = (after talking with the previous customers)

A You are welcome (.) are you the one eh... Yusufsent?

C4 yes

A O.k. = What is the discussion?

C4 We discussed

The attempted interruption in the above was rebuffed and conversation with the current speaker was maintained by the officer.

Closings

The closing layer of the interaction is also in adjacency pairs. There are two exceptional cases of closings in single terms – *alright* (Excerpt 11) – and *bye* (Excerpt 11). Others are in adjacency pairs. Excerpt 11 is a sample of the closing sequence:

Excerpt 11

- =
C *Alright*
A *You are welcome sir*
C *Thank you*
A *Bye sir. (He walks away)*

The licence processing involves breaks which include validation breaks, capturing breaks and then the general closing, which marks the termination of the interaction and a client's departure from the office. The last stage of licence issuance – the issuance itself – marks the closing segment of the process and embedded in it is the closing of the interaction. This is evident in Excerpt 12.

Excerpt 12

- A *Nnachetam (0.5) Ngwadee afa gi ebea dee date of birth na (. . .) ((He writes and collects the licence))*
C *Thank you sir*
A *Okay bye bye*

Pre-closings are not common in the interactions. The closings of the conversations were done in definitive terms. There were clear indications that the interactions were ending. This is evident in Excerpt 12.

5.2 Constructional components and turn management features of the interactions

5.2.1 Turn constructional components

Turns in the interaction are constructed in two specific structures, which are syntactic and prosodic structures. This pattern was also observed in Mazeland (2006). The syntactic structures of the turns include sentence, clause and phrase. These structures are evident in Excerpt 13.

Excerpt 13

C I want to do my (...)

A You = one, do you have the old one now?

C The old one not the, not this present one

A The driving one, do you have it? =

Simple sentences constituted a greater percentage of the verbal expressions used in the interaction, which range from affirmative sentences, shortened to 'yes', 'okay', 'alright' and were realised in their full expressions. There were negative sentences, shortened to 'no', 'nothing', 'none' in their full expressions. The structures also include vocatives, which include expressions that bear the names of clients, the second person pronoun and its possessive form – *you, your*, referential noun expressions for masculine and feminine gender such as *ma, sir, mummy, madam, oga*, etc. There were imperative sentences, which include commands like *wait outside, take it to the next office, let me see it*, etc., and interrogative sentences, which include *wh*-questions, direct questions, suggestive questions, etc.

Imperative expressions are not so dominant in the interaction except those that manifested in the process of validation and capturing in expressions like *wait first, wait outside, come closer etc.* This is common in the interaction. Declarative sentences dominate the response pair of the sequence or most of the time the second pair. There are instances where declarative sentences occupy the first pair. However, outside the vocative sentences, they constitute the largest sentence occurrence in the turns. It is produced by officers and clients alike as they interacted.

Interrogative sentences were predominantly used in the interaction. Many forms of interrogative statements were used. The *wh*-questions, direct questions and suggestive questions, which are all evident in Excerpts 1-5 and others. These forms had a predominant occurrence in the turns and were also dominant in inquiries and validation interactional processes. There is no single sequence that is devoid of the interrogative sentence in the interactions.

Phrases observed in the turns were more in occurrence than clausal structures. They constitute a large part of the entire turns and were observed in participant's repetitions in the form of backchannels, correction or affirmation of already made statements in a turn. Instances in the data include: *A driving school certificate?, before the processing?, the original driving school certificate?, after 25days?*, which were used interrogatively by the officers to initiate the middle segment of the interactions when the client was not forthcoming with the reason for coming to the office.

There were sounds made by the participants as the interactions progressed, which exist as turns but are non-linguistic. Some of the sounds are realised with

differences in the pitch of the voice (Kato, 2000). They functioned as turn units in the interaction. They play the role of backchannels, which are in the form of requests and questions for clarity of aforesaid statements in the preceding turns. They took forms such as interrogations like *eh?*, *mm?*, *sorry?* *hia*, and affirmations of what the current speaker was saying to show the participant was following e.g. *mm*, *eh*, *mbu*, *eheb*.

5.2.2 Turn management features

These involve the observable features and components of turn-taking in the interactions. They include the turn allocation procedures, the turn cues and TRPs (transitional relevance places) in the interactions.

Turn Allocation Procedures

The two procedures for the giving and taking of turns observed in the interaction include current speaker selects next, and self-selection.

Current Speaker Selects Next:

The interaction is made up of numerous vocative sentences that were used by the two sides of the participants in identifying the addressees and yielding turns to them. Expressions like *good afternoon sir*, *how may we help you*, *any problem sir*, *Oga*, *please come*, *Ebe my man I beg come*, *how far*, etc., were directly referring to the next speaker who took up the floor as the next speaker was approaching the TRP (Mazeland, 2006). In the validation and capturing interaction, the officer was in control of the interaction and initiated the turn through a 'summon' process. The next speaker responded as the bearer of the name is called out and in the interaction the second person pronoun and possessive pronouns directed the turn to the next speaker even when there were other people in the office at the time. These are in all interactions involving validation and data capturing as well as those of inquiries, complaints and applications.

Self-selection:

Most of the interaction sequences involved just two participants holding the floor at a time, an officer and a client. Whether there was calling of names or use of pronouns or not, the next speaker took the turn at the next available TRP in the sequence (Mey, 2001), as the conversation only involved two people. This turn-taking feature was observed in nearly all excerpts.

There were two observable cases where more than two speakers adopted the procedure of self-selection. However, this gave rise to many overlaps in the sequences. In the data, two officers who attempted to assist a client initiated an

overlap in their bid to respond each to the client at the same time. This is illustrated in Excerpt 14.

Excerpt 14

C [what is the name [of

A [NIM

((A2 speaks in Hausa to A, proffering a better direction then joins in the conversation))

A That is why I don't know whether he will be com[ing

A2 [he will, he will meet him, that is what I =that person, I directed this
em= NIM =I gave him NIM I will give you him NIM number and
you will call him [and ehm

A [or will you go and meet [him

C [NIM

A Mm...

C yes I get the guy numbe[r in =

There is an adopted strategy by speakers in self-selection to grab the turn. This is done through the raising of the voice of a participant. This is always the case in points of overlap. The officer involved in the conversation below raised her voice, was heard over the others as she grabbed the turn. This is evident in Excerpt 15:

Excerpt 15

A [May be your name appeared in those lists that you [you =

↑
Turns sustained by the current speaker

The above feature is common in the interaction especially with the participants who are officers of FRSC. An officer practically sustained the floor for the most part of the sequence. He only allowed breaks for the client to indicate that he was following him by realising the socio-centric signal – *I think you understand*. Most of the turns in validation and capturing processes are sustained by the officer while the clients supply backchannels and initiate repairs when the need arises.

Turn cues and TRPs

There are six turn cues in the data studied. These are divided into turn-giving cues *a – d* and turn taking cues *e – f*. The turn giving cues include: silent pause after a grammatically complete utterance, socio-centric sequences and adjacency pairs and draws. The turn-taking cues identified in the literature include, pitch and loudness of the voice and overlapping (Arminen, 1988; Liddicoat, 2007).

a) *Silent pause after a grammatically complete utterance:*

Silence is adopted by the officers to control the turns. In the data, silence signals the end of an ongoing conversation as well as TRP for another to take over the turn. It is common in the data when a complaint is being made, or a vital issue is addressed by the officers and clients for clarity purposes. It is equally dominant in the officer's guide provided to clients during validation and capturing or directions on other enquiries as the case may be. This is evident in Excerpt 14, in involving validation and capturing, enquiry and request. The use of silence for interactional control by the officers marks it off as an institutional talk.

b) *Socio-centric sequences:*

This sequence is common among the officer participants in the interaction. Socio-centric sequences that are common in the interaction include *I think you understand? ba, mm, eh, etc.*, which are meant to signal the other speaker to take the turn. The officers do most of the talking in the interaction while the client followed the sequence with terms like *mm, yeah, eh, etc.*, showing support and participation in the interaction process. This is illustrated in Excerpt 16:

Excerpt 16

- A I don give many people my number and eh they have been disturbing me
so the . . . we are hoping that [this week*
C [well, well this
*A [No this is not this, this... this is government day something, this is not
this [individual some[thing, I think u under[stand*
C [I know I know I know
*A [So if I tell you this week, this week don't think that this week it will be
possible, I think you un[derstand*
C [Mm[
*A [o.k It is not only when government decided that okay let me go and see
that . . . I think you understand*
C Mm

Excerpt 16 shows that the officer projects TRP but not in the bid to give up the turn for the client to make a contribution. He used *I think you understand* to ensure that he is being followed by the client. He immediately takes it back when he is sure that the client was following the long talk. As explained above, this feature is common in sustained turns in the interaction; however, long talks are not common in this interaction. But the few instances realised were dominated

by the officers. The socio-centric sequences showed support of the client for the officers to continue with the turn.

c) *Adjacency Pairs*

These include sequences of greeting/response, inquiry/response, question/answer, and moves/response, which are predominant in this interaction. The end of every first pair part signals the TRP (Kato, 2000). A next speaker becomes either the clients in case of validation or the officers in excerpts involving inquiries. Excerpt 17 illustrates this.

Excerpt 17

A Your mother's maiden name is _____

C Yes eh

A Date of birth is 8th January 1978

C Yes

A Your blood group is O⁺

C Yes sir

(d) *Drawl*

In some turns, there were cases of stuttering. There is also insertion or realisation of non-linguistic sounds observed in some turns including Excerpt 18 and Excerpt 21, which prompted the next speaker to take over the turn as a form of assistance to the clients/officer in completing the turn. In calling names of people, places and other comments peculiar to the clients by officials during validation, clients tend to take the turn immediately their names are mentioned to confirm or correct the names mentioned, as the case may be (see Excerpt 18). Instances like those mentioned above signal TRPs to next speakers who take over the floor and realise their own turns. In the turn below, the officer attempts to call the name of a local government he is not familiar with and the client steps in and completes it. This plays the role of repair of the sequence and enabled the progression of the sequence. It is also the only place that the client was allowed to take a turn in the validation interaction. This can be seen in Excerpt 18:

Excerpt 18

A You from Igboeze South, Ishienu Aka

C Iheaka

A O! Iheaka bu Ihe a? (0.2) Ishienu Ibeak

There were other instances of the above in data.

e) *Pitch and loudness of the voice*

Variation in the pitch of the voice is observed in the data as a turn-taking cue. For example, in Excerpt 19, the officer involved raised her voice to be heard in the midst of an overlap and tussle of voices.

Excerpt 19

- = C2 *[Eh . . . I thought my [ah*
A2 *[Why do[you need again uh*
C2 *[Why are they sending[the*
A *[that's why the hhhdid theyh sayh youh should come[here*
C *[Why*
A *[May be your name appeared in those lists that you [you*
C *[Ah I've collecte[d =*

In Excerpt 19, emphasis is equally laid on a turn through the raising of the officer's pitch in a single turn over the rest. This is to make him see the seriousness of his case as well as to elicit a turn from the client in response to that. This is equally observed in other excerpts. The pitch of the participants' voice was also raised in summons/response pairs. The officers make use of this strategy in initiating a turn with the clients and once summon is made, it automatically signals a response. This preponderates in interaction sequences involving validation, capturing and issuance. In a particular sequence, however, it was the client that summoned the officer. The summoned officer although bewildered by the development replied with the expression, *me?* Using the question, *I hope am safe*, he later took over the conversation as he asked the client to wait outside for him to meet him. This act of raising voices in the interaction is a peculiar signal to clients and officers to take over the floor, as response is usually elicited by such moves.

f) *Overlapping and Interruptions*

Most of the overlapped turns are realised because the clients and the officers initiated their turns at a perceived TRP and they are sustained in the interaction. The officers occupy the dominant role in initiating the turns in the interactions while the clients simply follow. In Excerpt 20, the client perceived the TRP before the last word from the officer's mouth is released and he responded with his own turn immediately. These are tolerable in the interactions, at least to a certain extent.

Excerpt 20

- A *[Your oga, you have a problem with [him?*
C *[Yes I have a problem with him. This is a car of ehm what I should (...)?*

I don't know why he should be playing me... I was a ... 1992 ... If I'm still learning why are you playing me like this?

In this interaction, intentional overlaps were created. Some clients intentionally introduced overlaps in ongoing sequences of interaction as they step into the office. This is a way of initiating their own sequences with the officers. It causes interruptions in the interaction. There are inter-sequence interruptions and inter-turn interruptions observed in the data. Below is a particular case of inter-sequence interruption observed in the data:

Excerpt 21

A Your wif[e's number =

C [Actually, [a h ah that's why dadada...

A =[Listen[(0.1) I said listen now

C [Mb[u mm

A your wife's number [is your=is the next of kin = for the form you fi[lled

C [mbu [for the form I filled eh

A you can use any number to send this message, I think you understand me= it is not necessary that you must use your number or your wife's number, I think you understand (0.1) mm?

C mb[m

In Excerpt 21, the officer intentionally cut the client off the turn to assert control over the interaction as the dominant participant. He did this to initiate order in the sequence. His act became an internal interruption of C's turn, which equally was an overlap of A's first turn above. There is also another internal interruption observed in the data, which is peculiar to both clients and officers, that is, phone call interruption. They tend to take calls within the sequence of their ongoing interaction after which they resume the suspended sequence. Most of the sequences of this interaction are embedded in other sequences ongoing before they were initiated. This is due to the structure of office. It is an open office and a client could walk into the office and initiate a new sequence when there is an ongoing sequence between the same officer and another client. There are eight sequences involved in this external interruption and three sequences of inter-sequence interruption in the interaction.

6. Summary of findings and conclusion

This study examined conversational structure and management of turns in interactions between clients and officers at the Federal Road Safety Commission

(FRSC), a drivers licencing office in Nigeria. From the data, the sequence organisation of the interactions is found to be adjacency pairs and insertion sequences, which expand the sequences through comments, backchannels and ordinary conversations. The interaction is, basically, in three segments – opening, middle and closing. Irrespective of the component of the activities leading to the interaction, it follows this order. While application, inquiry and complaints are basically simple in the three-layered structure, the issuance of licence' interactions have breaks and a reopening within the middle segment before the closing.

Just as reported in previous studies (see Mazeland, 2006; Liddicoat, 2007), the turns are constructed in two forms using syntactic and prosodic structures. There are more sentence structures than are phrases and clauses. The different meanings of certain sound expressions are determined by the prosody of their realisations, which appear as affirmations, assumptions, repairs and exclamations.

The turn-taking features of the interactions include the turn management procedures of self-selection, officers summon clients most of the time as “next” and with the use of vocative sentences to maintain this procedure, and partial sustenance of the turn mostly by the officers. The dominant holder of the floor is also found to be the officers who seem to sustain their turns while clients supply the backchannels showing that they were following. The officers use this feature to index their institutional authority. The turn-taking cues are divided into turn-giving and turn taking features shaped the structure of the conversations. The turn-giving cues include silent pauses and grammatically complete utterances, socio-centric sequences, adjacency pairs and drawls; while the turn-taking cues include pitch and loudness of the voice, overlapping and interruption. Overall, these features revealed the conversations here as functioning within the confines of an institutional frame, which governs the structure of the talk-in-interaction and the affordances that participants are allowed in the interactions.

References

1. Adebite, W. & Odeunmi, A. (2003) Discourse tact in doctor-patient interactions in English: An analysis of diagnosis in medical communication in Nigeria. *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 15(4), 499–519.
2. Arminen, I. (1988) *Institutional interaction: Studies of talk at work*. England, Ashgate Publishing Ltd.
3. Atkinson, M. J., & Drew, P. (1979) *Order in Court: The organisation of verbal interaction in judicial settings*. London, Macmillan.
4. Boden, D. (1994) *The business of talk: Organizations in action*. New York, NY, Polity.

5. David, S. O. (2019) Conversation of doctor-patient discourse in North Central Nigeria: A study of Nassarawa State University, Keffi Health Services Unit. *Journal of Languages, Linguistics and Literary Studies*, 8(1), 29–37.
6. Greatbatch, D. (1988) A turn-taking system for British news interviews. *Language in Society*, 17, 401–430.
7. Filipi, A. (2009) *Parent and toddler interaction: The development of interactional competence through pointing, gaze and vocalisations*. John Benjamins.
8. Filipi, A. (2015) The development of recipient-design in bilingual parent-child interaction. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 48(1), 100–119.
9. Forrester, M. A. (2008) The emergence of self-repair: A case study of one child during the early preschool years. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 41(1), 99–128.
10. Johnstone, B. (2010) *Discourse Analysis*. 2nd ed. UK: Blackwell Publishers.
11. Heritage, J. (2009) Conversation analysis as social theory. In Turner B. (ed.) *Blackwell Handbook of Social Theory*, 300–320.
12. Kato, F. (2000) Discourse approach to turn-taking from the perspective of tone choice between speaker. Diss. University of Birmingham.
13. Liddicoat, A. J. (2007) *An Introduction to Conversation Analysis*. London: The Tower Building.
14. Mazeland, H. (2006) Conversation Analysis. In K. Brown (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, 153–163. Elsevier.
15. McHoul, A. (1978) The organization of turns at formal talk in the classroom. *Language in Society*, 7, 183–213.
16. Mehan, H. (1979) *Learning lessons: Social organization in the classroom*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.
17. Mey, J. L. (2001) *Pragmatics: An introduction*. United Kingdom, Blackwell.
18. Negretti, R. (1999) Web-based activities and Sla: A conversation analysis research Approach. Universite di Verona.
19. Olateju, M. (2004) Turn allocation techniques in ESL chemistry lessons. In A.L. Oyeleye, (ed.) *Language and Discourse in Society*. Ibadan, Hope Publications Ltd. 156–167.
20. Peräkylä, A. (1995) AIDS counselling: Institutional interaction and clinical practice. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
21. Shepherd, M. A. (2010) A discourse analysis of teacher-student classroom interactions. Diss. Faculty of USC Graduate School, University of California.
22. Silverman, D. & Peräkylä, A. (1990) AIDS counselling: the interactional organisation of talk about 'delicate' issues. *Sociology of Health and Illness*. 12(3), 293–318.
23. Stubbe, M., Lane, C., Hilder, J., Vine, E., Vine, B., Marra, M., ... & Weatherall, A. (2003) Multiple discourse analyses of a workplace interaction. *Discourse Studies*, 5(3), 351–388.
24. Svennevig, J. (2018) Decomposing turns to enhance understanding by L2 speakers. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 51(4), 398–416.

25. Thornton, S. & Noemi, R. (2006) Analysing classroom interactions using critical discourse analysis. *Proceedings 30th Conference of the International Group for the Psychology of Mathematics Education*, 5, 273–280.
26. Uwen, G. O. (2020) Politeness strategies in lawyer-client interactions in English in selected law firms in Calabar, Cross River State. *University of Uyo Journal of English and Literature*, 12, 255–258.
27. Uwen, G. O. & Ebam, P. O. (2019) Road traffic signs' literacy and its implications on road users in Calabar. *Journal of the Reading Association of Nigeria*, 18(2), 163–171.
28. Uwen, G. O. & Ekpenyong, B. A. (2022) "Esprit de corps". Ingroup identity construction and contextual conceptualisations among the (para)military discourse community. *Journal of Language, Identity and Education*. 1–16.
29. Whalen, M., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987) Sequential and institutional contexts in calls for help. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 50, 172–85.
30. Woofitt, R. (2005) *Conversation analysis and discourse analysis*. London, Sage Publications Ltd.

Омотошо М. Мелефа

Годсгифт О. Увен

Амучечукву В. Озор

Одсјек за енглески и књижевне студије

Универзитет Нигерије у Нсуки

**СТРУКТУРА РАЗГОВОРА И УПРАВЉАЊЕ
ПРЕУЗИМАЊЕМ УЛОГА У ИНТЕРАКЦИЈАМА ИЗМЕЂУ
СЛУЖБЕНИКА И КЛИЈЕНАТА У ЈЕДНОЈ КАНЦЕЛАРИЈИ
ЗА ИЗДАВАЊЕ ВОЗАЧКИХ ДОЗВОЛА У НИГЕРИЈИ**

Резиме

Ова студија бави се структуром разговора и преузимањем улога у интеракцијама између клијената и службеника Федералне комисије за сигурност путева у једној од канцеларија за издавање возачких дозвола у Нигерији у циљу објашњења како социокултурне нијансе обликују структуру разговора у овом контексту. Материјал садржи 21 узорак интерактивних секвенци које су пажљиво одабране унутар корпуса од 13 сати снимљених разговора и које су пажљиво обрађене уз помоћ анализе разговора. Резултати откривају да се ове интеракције остварују у облику повезаних парова и да се, у највећем броју случајева, шире уз помоћ уметнутих секвенци. Поред тога, улоге у разговору између службеника и клијената распоређују се према принципу самоодабира, према процедурама у којима тренутни говорник одређује следећи

садржај и гдје се пружа подршка изговореном садржају, које углавном контролише службеник. Постоје разноврсни сигнали за тишину и паузу, социоцентричне паузе, повезане парове, отезања, висину гласа, преклапања и прекиде, који представљају сигнале за преузимање улоге говорника у разговору те њено уступање. Наведена обиљежја откривају да су ове интеракције институционална врста разговора, што је особено за овакву врсту друштвеног окружења.

► **Кључне ријечи:** анализа разговора, издавање возачких дозвола, Федерална комисија за сигурност путева, Нигерија, преузимање улоге говорника.

Preuzeto: 23. 12. 2023.
Korekcije: 1. 5. 2024.
Prihvaćeno: 20. 5. 2024.