

Turn-Taking-Free Conversation

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Turn taking is the salient principle that organizes talk-in-interaction. Ideally, in a conversation, one party speaks at a time (their turn), and then another party (whether nominated or self-selected) takes up a turn to speak (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974). However, many a time, a conversation does not proceed as smoothly as depicted by turn taking. There are scenarios where turn taking is not observed, for certain communicative reasons, obviously. Such cases involve gaps, silence, simultaneous talk, overlaps, interruption, etc.

An interesting phenomenon of talk-in-interaction which violates almost all principles and practices of turn taking is the 'how are you' exchange between two persons who have not seen each other for a while in Saudi Arabia, especially in Qassim region. The Properties of this type of conversation include the following. (a) No turn taking is observed; that is, there is a lot of overlap. In fact, the whole exchange is simultaneous talk: Interactants talk over each other throughout the conversation. (b) There are no adjacency pairs. It is not a question-response exchange. Actually, each person speaks a sort of chain-of-utterances, so to speak. (c) The exchange might last for about a minute or two, with the same string of utterances repeated over and over. (d) There might not be eye contact at certain points in the interaction.

Interestingly, this type of exchange does not seem to be a 'counter' in Schegloff's (2007) sense (e.g., how about you? as a response to 'how did you like it?'). Further, overlaps here do not seem to "result from a competition for the turn - space between speakers at and around turns' possible completion points" (Hayashi 2013: 175).

Schegloff (2007:1) proposes that most of the talk-in-interaction can be explained in terms of action, rather than topicality. That is, we should look at what a particular turn (including extended turn) is doing rather than what it is about. It seems that the type of interaction at hand can be explained along these lines. That is, instead of studying individual turns in the conversation, which would be a hard task, we could better look at the (social/communicative) actions accomplished by the exchange as a whole. In particular, it seems that with such 'turn-taking-free' exchange, the participants attain certain communicative purposes. The participants try to establish their social bond (phatic expressions). Further, repetition of the exchange all over might serve the function of avoiding potential odd silence. Finally, the whole exchange seems to accomplish the action of 'I-miss-you' greeting. A typical 'I miss you' exchange in Qassimi would go as follows.

Rakan : ja hala(.)akhbarak?(.)wish luunak?(.)asaak Tayyeb?(.)asak bkheir?(.) ulumak
hey hi your news how are you hope you good may you Ok your news
Turki :ja hala(.)akhbarak?(.)wish luunak?(.)asaak Tayyeb?(.)asak bkheir?(.) ulumak
hey hi your news how are you hope you good may you Ok your news

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