

# Conversation

Section 24.1 in Textbook

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T-725-MALV

# Turn-Taking

- **Time between turns** very **short** (if any), less than the time it takes to plan an utterance!
- How do speakers know when it is the proper time to contribute their turn?
- There are places where the structure of the language allows a speaker shift: **Transition-Relevant Places** (TRP)
- In addition to linguistic cues, there are **nonverbal cues** to indicate TRPs

# Turn-Taking

- At TRPs certain **turn-taking rules** govern what happens (according to Conversation Analysis):
  - If during this turn the current speaker has selected A as the next speaker then A must speak
  - If the current speaker does not select next speaker, any other speaker may take next turn
  - If no one else takes the next turn, the current speaker may take it

# Adjacency Pairs

- The next speaker is sometimes chosen to complete an **adjacency pair**, a two-part structure which includes things like:
  - QUESTION-ANSWER
  - GREETING-GREETING
  - COMPLIMENT-DOWNPLAY
  - REQUEST-GRANT

# Speech Acts

- An utterance in a dialogue is a kind of an **action being performed** by the speaker
- This is very clear in **performative** sentences:
  - "I now pronounce you husband and wife"
  - "I sentence you to 2 years of community service"
  - "I declare a truce"
- The spoken acts here really **change the state** of the world

# Speech Acts

- Lexical semantics don't fully describe the speech act. That is one reason philosopher Austin divided an act into three distinct parts
  - **Locutionary**: The act of speaking, syntax and lexical semantics. Discourse devices.
  - **Illocutionary**: The act that was intended, such as to ask or answer. Discourse function.
  - **Perlocutionary**: The effects of these acts on the receiver, such as to frighten or worry.

# Speech Acts

- Some types of syntactical forms are frequently associated with speech acts

Syntactic Form (Locutionary)	Speech Act (Illocutionary)
Affirmatives or declaratives	Assertions, statements
Imperatives	Orders, commands
Interrogatives	Questions

# Speech Act

- One cannot always derive speech acts from the form or formal structure of utterances
- Example
  - "Close the window!"
  - "Can you close the window?"
  - "It's getting warm in here..."

# Speech Acts

- Instead of locutionary-based classification, many use illocutionary classification by Searle:
  - **Assertives**: "This is a window"
  - **Directives**: "Close the window!"  
"Can you close the window?"
  - **Commissives**: "I promise to close the window"
  - **Declaratives**: "I charge you with treason"
  - **Expressives**: "Pardon me"

# Grounding

- Dialogue is a **collective act** performed both by speaker and hearer
- They must constantly establish common ground through the act of **grounding**
- This follows the **principle of closure**
  - Agents performing an action require evidence, sufficient for current purposes, that they have succeeded in performing it

# Grounding

- **Methods** available to hearers to ground a speaker's utterance (starting with weakest):
  - **Continued attention**
  - **Next contribution** (may combine with other)
  - **Acknowledgement** (backchannel or assessment)
  - **Demonstration** (reformulating or completing)
  - **Display** (verbatim)
- **Nonverbal cues** are very important because they allow grounding without taking the turn

# Conversation Structure

- There is cohesion in how utterances follow one another, but also larger structures that indicate **overall organization**
- Some have received particular attention, e.g. **conversational openings:**
  1. Enter conversation (summons-response)
  2. Identify speakers
  3. Establish joint willingness to converse
  4. Raise first topic (by caller)

# Implicature

- Speakers often seem to expect hearers to draw certain **inferences** from an **implicature** like this:

"Do you know where the library is?"

- How does a listener here come to the conclusion that the speaker would like directions to the library?

# The Gricean Maxims

- Assumptions listeners make about speaker's production that help them with interpretation
  - **Truth** (Quality): Do not say what you believe to be false or for which you lack evidence.
  - **Information** (Quantity): Make your contribution informative but not too loaded.
  - **Relevance** (Relation): Be relevant.
  - **Clarity** (Manner): Avoid obscurity and ambiguity. Be brief and orderly.

# The Gricean Maxims

- Interpretation that assumes speaker follows the maxims is the **most likely interpretation**.  
Notice seemingly flaunted maxims!
  - A: "Are you coming tonight?", B: "I have an exam tomorrow" (Relevance?)
  - A: "What is your name?", B: "John, Gunna's husband" (Information?!)
  - A: "Good food... good food!" (Brief?!)
  - A: "Why did the chicken cross the road?" (Truth)