

UNIT 6: CONVERSATIONAL ANALYSIS – ‘REAL-LIFE’ DIALOGUE

Introduction

The purpose of this discussion is to provide you with additional guidance that will assist you to focus on the objectives of Unit 6. As indicated in the module, upon completion of the section you are expected to be able to:

- discuss the differences between dramatic dialogue and conversation;
- demonstrate an understanding of why conversations should be studied;
- analyse conversations in accordance with conversational analysis and transcription conventions;
- reflect an understanding of conversational conventions
- show that you understand the cultural norms that relate to conducting conversations

Outcome 1 focuses on the differences between dramatic dialogue and conversation.

In this unit your attention is drawn to the fact that there are differences between the genres of dramatic dialogue and real-life dialogue. In spite of this however, you should also note that there are also similarities that arise because conversations are regarded as a ‘type of dramatic expression’ (p75) and drama is usually an enactment of what happens in real life. (p76). For purposes of this discussion, we will only highlight the differences. The major difference is that dramatic dialogue does not occur naturally. It is contrived and emanates from prepared scripts. In addition to this, the analysis of dramatic dialogue is different from that of real-life dialogue. (Refer to Unit 5, Section 4, p 66)

Real-life dialogue, is, as the term suggests, a reflection of real conversations that occur naturally as part of everyday social interactions and speech actions. The characteristics of conversation are listed on p 76 of Unit 6 for your reference.

Outcome 2 focuses on the question: Why should we study conversations?

There are a number of reasons why we study conversations (Refer to pp.77 & 78). You have also been provided with a list of interactions in your study guide to illustrate the fact that the different scenarios would require different talk-in-interaction approaches. (p76). Pause for a moment and think about the implications of approaching an important interview in the same manner as you would a conversation with your friend.

Or, consider, for example what would happen in a classroom when learners communicate in a disrespectful manner with a teacher. Or if the teacher and

learners all spoke at the same time without allowing each other the opportunity to get a chance to express themselves individually. You will, no doubt, agree that this would have a negative bearing on communication in these instances.

Outcome 3 looks at conversational analysis strategies and transcription conventions – what are they?

The three main dimensions of conversational analysis are discussed on pp. 78-80. They are: actions, structure and inter-subjective understanding.

Communication is impaired when participants ignore the strategies that facilitate effective communication such as:

- **organising** conversations – this has to do with both **actions** and **structure** (pp. 78,79, 80 & 81)
- **adjacency pairs** – this refers to speech actions that correspond with each other, for instance a question that requires a particular answer. (p79)
- **turn-taking** – refers to the actions that speakers take to manage the conversation, such as giving each other the opportunity to air their views or voice their opinions while using appropriate non-verbal communication (Refer to pp. 78,79 & 82 to find out more about this).
- **inter-subjectivity** – making sure that all participants in the speech event have the same understanding about the issue they are discussing. It also involves an inter-play between verbal and non-verbal communication. (pp. 79 & 80 provide you with more information about this)
- **co-operative principles** – which are about politeness (p85) and co-operation in a conversation. They involve: (1) the amount of information speakers give, (2) the truthfulness and integrity of the utterances as well as their (3) orderliness and (4) relevance (Grice, 1975). These also include tone – which involves pitch, mood and register, which is in turn about the way in which we address different people. For example, we do not use an informal register for authority figures and a formal register for our friends.
- **Implicature** – refers to what is suggested or implied in an utterance. See, for example, the conversation on p80 and the words between brackets that give you an indication of what is implied in the utterance.

Transcription conventions are the symbols we use to analyse conversations. Note that for our purposes, however, we will not do an in-depth discussion of these. We will only look at a few examples.

(1.5) A number in brackets indicates a timed pause. The number represents the length of the pause in seconds. The number in brackets will, therefore, vary depending on the duration of the pause.

... Three dots indicate an untimed pause

[...] Three dots between square brackets indicate that some material of the original transcript or example has been omitted, or that the transcript starts or ends in the middle of further talk.

= Equal signs indicate 'latching' – that is, two utterances that follow one another without any noticeable pause.

// This denotes the point at which overlap by the next speaker begins.

(words) Words between parentheses represent the best guess when there has been talk that was difficult to hear.

so: This represents lengthening of the last sound.

.hh, hh This denotes in-breaths and out-breaths.

Outcomes 3 and 4 are aimed at enabling you to analyse actual conversations by using the appropriate transcription conventions.

Refer to the example of the conversation between a doctor and a nurse on pg 82 to see how the conversational conventions are used.

Outcome 5 draws your attention to the cultural norms that govern conversations. Refer to p85 for more information regarding this.

Conclusion

We trust that this discussion, in conjunction with the information you are presented with in the module and text book, has assisted you to organise your thoughts around the expectations of Unit 5 and to gain a better understanding of what conversational analysis is about.

Unit 6: Conversational analysis

Feedback for Activity 1

There is no standard response to this question because your responses are informed by the type of automated message you have listened to. In this activity you are expected to pay attention to the fact that the message is modelled on normal speech interactions that facilitate effective communication. The analysis of the conversation, would, therefore, take into account the three main conversational strategies that facilitate social communication such as actions, structure and inter-subjective understanding as indicated in the unit. An understanding of transcription conventions and symbols is important, as this will help you to take note of the different pauses, which in an automated message serve a significant purpose because they give you the opportunity to respond to the prompt. You would also have to indicate the openings, turn-taking mechanisms and closings (p79).

For example, as you listened to the automated message you would have noticed that the recorded speaker gives you cues and information and gives you an opportunity to signal your choice and interact, just as in a 'normal' conversation, where there are adjacency pairs and politeness.

Failure to respond appropriately to the prompt would result in a breakdown in communication. This would effectively mean that the transaction would not be processed. In other words, it would mean that the speech act would have failed to achieve its purpose.

The intention of this activity is to illustrate the fact that different speech events and actions serve different purposes. In the case of automated message the assumption is that in order for a particular service to be rendered, there has to be cooperation between the speaker in the automated message and you as the recipient of the service. It is therefore important to pay attention to social conversational conventions in order for successful communication to take place, regardless of the context or medium of communication.