

Abstract

Title: 'How to subvert the turn-taking rules of conversation'

Conversational turn-taking rules are so constructed as to have a bias towards speakers being allocated only a single unit of talk (one turn-constructive unit or TCU) at a time. Notwithstanding this bias, most conversations are replete with multi-unit turns (more than one TCU in a turn, or MUT), some of which come to completion after a second TCU, others of which – for example, some stories – can continue for many minutes. How can this apparent subversion of the turn-taking rules be explained?

In our project on MUTs, we have created the most detailed inventory yet of how speakers claim a second or subsequent TCU, with 24 different practices (a list is based on, and expanded from, Schegloff's lectures at UCLA). In all cases, participants have to employ one of these practices to secure any extra TCUs in their turns. Some of these resources have been known for a long time; others have been discovered more recently.

The list will almost certainly continue to grow.

In this talk, I will not provide examples of all 24, but will show how speakers can project a MUT from a range of positions in their emerging talk: before the initial TCU; at the beginning of the initial TCU; in the middle of the initial TCU; at the end of the initial TCU; through the whole of the initial TCU; or interactively with the other participants.

Short bio

Rod Gardner is an Honorary Associate Professor at the University of Queensland, and a member of the Conversation in Aboriginal and Remote Australia (CIARA) ARC Discovery team, which is administered at Macquarie University. Rod has been using Conversation Analysis for over 30 years, with his early publications in the field on listeners' response tokens. Later, with Professor Ilana Mushin, he was engaged in a series of projects using CA on early childhood classrooms (Prep to Year 3): first, an almost exclusively Aboriginal school in Central Queensland, and later a low SES and a high SES school in Brisbane. Most recently, the CIARA work has studied conversational practices in four Australian languages, as well as Australian English in remote towns in the Kimberley. Currently the CIARA team are writing a book on multi-unit turns using the English data.