

3 Minimal, two-turn adjacency pair sequences

Although adjacency pair organization provides a resource for the construction of sequences of various sizes, an adjacency pair in its basic, minimal two-turn form can itself constitute the whole of a sequence.¹

Minimal adjacency pair sequences are common, and virtually formulaic, in the opening and closing sections of conversations and other types of episodes of talk-in-interaction.²

In openings, for example, greetings and "how-are-you" sequences may run off as minimal adjacency pairs, as in Extracts (3.01) and (3.02) (previously Extract [2.04]) respectively:

(3.01) TG, 1:01-04

1 ring
2 Ava: H'ello:?
3 Bee: F → hHi:,
4 Ava: S → Hi:?
5 Bee: hHowuh you:?

(3.02) MDE-MTRAC 60-1/2,1 (previously 2.04)

1 ring
2 Mar: Hello:?
3 Ton: Hi: Marsha?
4 Mar: Ye:ah.
5 Ton: F → How are you.
6 Mar: S → Fi:ne.
7 (0.2)
8 Mar: Did Joey get home yet?
9 Ton: Well I wz wondering when 'e left.

¹ Some students of talk-in-interaction take the basic minimal size of a sequence to be *three* turns (Coulthard, 1977; Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975; among others). From this point of view, two-turn sequences are elliptical; they are missing something, ordinarily their third turn – a view which may reflect its origin in the study of classroom interaction. The discussion in the text which follows, and the numerous exemplars which are displayed there, are meant to ground the claim that the basic, minimal form of a sequence is *two* turns, and that sequences composed of more are expansions. On the former view, it is the absence of a third turn in a two-turn sequence which requires explanation. On the latter view, it is the presence of additional turns in sequences longer than two turns which requires analytic accounting.

² In what follows, single instances of such sequences stand proxy for vast numbers of virtually identical recurrences which it would be redundant to reproduce – although some of these sequence types may, of course, also occur in more-than-two-turn versions.

In Extract (3.01), the "Hello" at line 2 does not serve as a greeting but as a response to the summons embodied in the ring of the phone. Bee's greeting at line 3 is what initiates the greeting exchange, the return greeting at line 4 is its second pair part, and the following turn initiates a new adjacency pair. And in Extract (3.02), Tony's "How are you" initiates a sequence with a first pair part at line 5, Marsha responds with a second pair part at line 6, and a new adjacency pair begins at line 8.

In closing sections of interactional occasions, as well, various component sequences may be formed up as two-turn sequences, composed only of the first and second pair parts of an adjacency pair. Extract (3.03) is the closing of a telephone conversation in which Charlie has called Ilene to tell her that a car trip on which she had planned to get a ride has had to be canceled.

(3.03) Trip to Syracuse, 2

1 Ile: =Thanks inneh- e- than:ks: anyway Charlie,
2 Cha: Ri:ght.
3 Ile: Oka:y?
4 Cha: Oka[y,
5 Ile: F → [Ta:ke keyuh
6 Cha: S → Speak tih you [()
7 Ile: F → [Bye: bye
8 Cha: S → Bye,

Here the terminal exchange at lines 7-8 is accomplished in a minimal adjacency pair-based sequence, as is the pre-terminal exchange at lines 5-6 by which the parties mutually converge on closing.³ These sequence types are generally accomplished through two turns. The exchange of "okay"s at lines 3-4 (which commonly form the pre-terminal exchange) here may represent the tail end of the preceding, extended "business" sequence of the conversation, and would then not exemplify the free-standing, maximally pared-down form of sequence which we are examining.

It is not only telephone conversations whose closings may be worked through with such minimal sequences. In Extract (3.04), Carol is leaving after a brief drop-in to an ongoing interaction in a college dormitory.

(3.04) SN-4, 5:32-6:04

1 Car: I don't want them tih see me when I l(h)ook
2 t(h)his good.
3 (0.2)
4 Ru?: ((cough))(H)(H)UH 'h h h h=
5 Car: =N(h)o one des(h)erves it. ((hoarse voice))
6 (0.2)

³ If the phrase "take keyuh" appears strange, it is because the transcript is designed to convey how the utterance was actually delivered, rather than how it is properly spelled. Ilene speaks with a marked New York City accent, and so her "take care" comes out as "take keyuh." Readers who find some utterance in a transcript initially inaccessible might try saying it as printed to see if that helps grasp what was being said by its speaker.

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<http://www.cambridge.org/9780521532792>

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS
www.cambridge.org

ISBN 0-521-53279-5



9 780521 532792

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Sequence Organization in Interaction

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A Primer in Conversation Analysis | Volume 1

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- 7 (?): Tch 'hh=
 8 Car: F → I'll see you all later,
 9 Rut: S → Awri:ght,
 10 (1.4) ((door opening, Carol leaves))
 11 Mar: F → Where were we.
 12 (0.5)
 13 She: S → I dunno.= 've you been studying lately;
 14 Mar: No, 'not et aw-° not et a:ll:. I hafta study
 15 this whole week.

Here Carol is finishing an account for not having brought an ice-cream sandwich which the others had expected, and then leaves with the start of a closing exchange (line 8) initiated with a common formula in closings, an invocation of future interaction (see line 6 in Extract [3.03] above), whose answering second pair part (at line 9) ends the sequence and the interaction (with Carol).

But Extract (3.04) also offers a display of a minimal two-turn adjacency pair which is *not* being used as part of the opening or closing (and is therefore not simply "ritual," as might otherwise be suspected). Carol's arrival had prompted a cessation of the interaction then in progress, and, following her departure, one tack (out of several alternatives) which the remaining parties can take is to return to what had been in progress, but was interrupted. This Mark seeks to do at line 11 (not surprisingly, perhaps, for it was he who was in the process of telling about a supposed "orgy"), but seeks to do with what might be called a "resumption search," a common occurrence after interruptions have run their course. Sherry at least prefers to steer the talk in a different direction, and, at line 13, first responds to Mark's resumption search, and then launches a new sequence of her own with a question (a new first pair part). The resumption search sequence ends up being a minimal two-turn sequence.

Even more remote from openings and closing are the final two instances to be offered here of two-turn sequences.

(3.05) Chicken Dinner, 3

- 1 Sha: eh hu[h huh hih hih hih]-]hee-yee hee-ee] [aah=
 2 Nan: [eh-heh-hih-hih-hnh-hnh]h n h-h n_h hnh]-hn[h
 3 Sha: =aah aah
 4 (0.5)
 5 Sh?: °'hhh°
 6 (.)
 7 Sha: (Hih) .
 8 Mic: ha-ha.
 9 Sha: (Hih) .
 10 (2.3)
 11 Mic: F → Nance kin you- kin you cut my chicken.
 12 (0.3)

- 13 Nan: S → Do yer own c[ut(h)'n(h)n(h)n]
 14 Sha: [Are those peas]any good?
 15 (0.7)
 16 Nan: [Ther good ^for you,]
 17 Mic: [I don' know I I 'av]en' looked at['e m .] I]haven'
 18 Sha: [Theh g]ood]faw you?
 19 Who knowss:. Wuh wuh u-who aa-oodih you en authority?

(3.06) SN-4, 13:28-14:02

- 1 Mar: Hev en English takehome I 'aftuh do over the weekend, 'n-
 2 (0.7)
 3 Mar: study on Sunday 'n Monday,
 4 (')
 5 Rut: ('Oh: I'm s:[:- (0.2) ((sn]eeze))
 6 Mar: ['r that e:con test.]
 7 (2.0)
 8 She: F → Howijuh like t'do our dishes.
 9 (0.6)
 10 Rut: eh huh-huh
 11 Mar: S → Can't wai:t.
 12 Ma?: 'hhh hhhh 'hh
 13 (2.2)
 14 Kar: One a'these nights we gotta go swim la:ps.
 15 Mar: ('Too narrow.)/(°Dinero.)

Each of the exchanges marked by the arrows involves a sort of request, but in both instances these appear to be done and understood as mock requests. In Extract (3.05), two couples are having dinner at the apartment of one of them, seated somewhat awkwardly on the floor around a coffee table, and one of the guests asks his companion to cut up the portion of chicken on his plate. Her rejection of his request is gradually infiltrated by laughter, progressively displaying an understanding that the request was not serious, or could be treated as non-serious. Still, serious or not, the request sequence runs off in two turns.

In Extract (3.06), a hiatus has momentarily settled over this interaction in a dormitory suite, whose occupants Sherry, Ruth, and Karen have been dropped in on by Mark. The silence is broken by Sherry's request (or "invitation") to Mark that he wash their dishes. The laughter of Ruth registers the non-seriousness of this proposal, which is very likely to be understood as on her behalf as well, for the request comes from the residents as a "party"; this laughter colors the turn to which it is affiliated (rather than responding to it), much as the laughter in Nancy's turn in Extract (3.05) colors her turn, and displays an understanding of, and a stance toward, the talk which it targets. It is, then, not a separate "part" or position in the sequence. The sequence closes with Mark's rejection of the proposal at line 11, which returns the state of talk to the hiatus from which Sherry had with

this sequence undertaken to extract it. Here again, then, a minimal two-turn sequence.⁴

It is clear that conversation does not lack for sequences fully composed by the minimal two-turn form of the adjacency pair, sequences which give no evidence in their execution or in the context surrounding them of being reduced, or elided, or missing some part. Indeed, unsystematic observation of interaction in real time (that is, not recorded data available for repeated examination) suggests that interactional settings which are badly under-represented in the data bases gathered until now may be even more common environments for two-turn sequences. I have in mind those interactions elsewhere called "continuing states of incipient talk" (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973:325), in which the participants are committed to co-presence by an event structure not shaped by the interaction itself. Sometimes this involves familiars, and even intimates, as with families in their home environment, co-workers in their work environment, etc., but it can include strangers as well, whose juxtaposition is wholly incidental, as with seat-mates on an airplane. In such settings, talk may proceed sporadically, in fits and starts, separated by long silences. Although there is at present no hard evidence, casual observation suggests that many such fits and starts may be realized in two-turn sequences.

Once having registered the robust presence in talk-in-interaction of sequences fully constituted by a single, basic, minimal adjacency pair, we need next to go on to note that a great many sequences involve expansion of this basic unit. Such expansions involve additional participation by the parties through additional turns (in contrast with expansion of the turns themselves), over and above the two which compose the minimal version of the sequence. These expansions occur in the three possible places which a two-turn unit permits: before the first pair part, in what we will call pre-expansions; between the first and the projected second pair part, in what we will call insert expansions; and after the second pair part, in what we will call post-expansions.

- ← Pre-expansion
- A First pair part
- ← Insert expansion
- B Second pair part
- ← Post-expansion

As we will see, various forms of expansion can occur in each of these sequential positions, by which the parties accomplish (or seek to accomplish) a variety of interactional outcomes. Expansion in each of these positions can

⁴ As will become clear later (in the discussion of "post-expansion"), these two-turn sequences are especially striking because of the rejections in them, a type of response which ordinarily leads to sequence expansion.

be substantial, and (with a few exceptions) expansion can occur in all of them for any given sequence. As a result, then, very long stretches of talk can be understood as elaborate structures built around a single underlying adjacency pair. In the chapters which follow, we will refer to this underlying adjacency pair as "the base pair," in contrast with its expansions.⁵

Indeed, the view underlying the orientation of this volume is not that they "can be understood" in this way, but that they *should* be understood this way, or even *must* be; and that many long stretches of talk cannot otherwise be understood for the coherent events which they were for their participants. If we take a unit like the adjacency pair to be the basic unit for sequence construction, then it is the *participants* whose unit it is, for it is *they* who do the constructing. And if talk is built around and between the parts of the basic adjacency pair in expanding it, it is the *parties* who do that talk, and design it for those places, as expansions and elaborations of that basic adjacency pair structure. If that is how the parties go about producing and understanding the talk and building sequences of talk-implemented courses of action, then that is what we must describe in understanding that construction of the interactional world, and giving a proper account of it. It is not, then, a metaphor only to say that very long stretches of talk may be supported by the armature of a single adjacency pair; it is a claim about how such stretches of talk were produced and understood by the participants, in their course, in real and experiential time.

⁵ And in the annotation of the data extracts, the base pair will be marked by the subscript "b" (F_b and S_b), and pre-expansions, insert expansions, and post-expansions will be marked by the subscripts "pre," "ins," and "post" respectively. The reader has already encountered this usage in the data included in the discussion of counters in the preceding pages.