

## **The Aspect of Turn-taking in *Hayavadana***

**Dnyaneshwar P. Suryawanshi, M.A., Ph.D.**

=====

### **Abstract**

Conversational turn-taking is a prominent feature of face-to-face interaction. To make an interaction successful, turn-taking has to be a well organized event involving a set of aspects. This paper makes an attempt to explore the aspect of turn-taking in Girish Karnad's play *Hayavadana* (1975). After analyzing two extracts from the play, it has been observed that mutual interest and attention during conversation are vital factors determining the outcome of an interaction. Conversational floor is often influenced due to auditor's inattention and disinterest in the ongoing conversation. It has been found that backchannels occasionally suggest interlocutor's lack of interest while communicating. Pause, aposiopesis, hedging, hitches, machine-gun-question and answer have their significance in the talk at hand.

**Keywords:** turn-taking, turn-avoiding, turn-constructive-unit, follow-up move, backchannels, adjacency pairs, markedness, machine-gun-question and answer.

### **1. Introduction**

The aspect of turn-taking in Karnad's *Hayavadana* has been closely examined in this paper. This turn taking is investigated in order to understand how various conversational strategies are maneuvered in the play. It has been found that turn-taking in plays bears a close resemblance to day-to-day, face-to-face interaction. However, turn-taking in plays has some distinct features of its own that one can find while reading or watching a play.

For the purpose of analysis, two passages from the play have been chosen. These passages are analyzed as per the following components.

#### **i. Conversational Passage**

Some information in brief is given here about contributors to the interaction along with the nature of the speech event.

## ii. Background Information

Here, some necessary background about the conversation is given. Moreover, a few details about the nature of the characters' turn-taking are provided.

## iii. The Passage

The actual extract from the play is provided here. All the details appearing in the original text are given.

## iv. Analysis

In analysis all the aspects under turn-taking are discussed.

## 2. Conversational Passage 1

The passage is a piece of conversation between two intimate friends Devadatta and Kapila. The main topic of this interaction is Kapila's wrestling and Devadatta's falling in love.

### Background Information

This conversation shows how Devadatta and Kapila are obsessed, each with the matter of his own interest. Through their interaction we come to know that Devadatta is a man of intellect, whereas Kapila is known for his physical traits.

*[Devadatta enters and sits on the chair. He is a slender, delicate-looking person and is wearing a pale-coloured mask. He is lost in thought. Kapila enters. He is powerfully built and wears a dark mask.]*

KAPILA: *[even as he is entering]* Devadatta, why didn't you come to the gymnasium last evening? I'd asked you to. It was such fun...

DEVADATTA: *[preoccupied]* Some work...

KAPILA: Really, you should have come. The wrestler from Gandhara — he's one of India's greatest, you know — he came. Nanda and I were wrestling when he arrived. He watched us. When I caught Nanda in a crocodile-hold, he first burst into applause and said...

*[Notices that Devadatta isn't listening and stops. Pause.]*

DEVADATTA: *[waking up]* Then?

KAPILA: Then what?

DEVADATTA: [*flustered*] I mean... what did Nanda do?

KAPILA: He played the flute.

DEVADATTA: [*more confused*] No... I mean... you were saying something about the wrestler from Gandhara. Weren't you?

KAPILA: He wrestled with me for a few minutes, patted me on the back and said, 'You'll go far'.

DEVADATTA: That's nice.

KAPILA: Yes, it is... Who's it this time?

DEVADATTA: What do you mean?

KAPILA: I mean — who — is — it — this — time?

DEVADATTA: What do you mean who?

KAPILA: I mean — who is the girl?

DEVADATTA: No one. [*Pause*] How did you guess?

KAPILA: My dear friend, I have seen you fall in love fifteen times in the last two years. How could I not guess? (*Hayavadana*, pp. 11-12)

### Analysis

This passage encompasses a follow-up move. The prominent features of the conversation are unsmooth turn-taking, uneven floor management, back-channeling, interruption, repair, pause, aposiopesis, hitches and so on. The most striking feature of the conversation is conversational breakdown.

The mechanism of turn-taking is quite problematic in this passage. The manner of turn-taking is unsmooth, because it is affected by repair initiation and actual repair. Here, turn-taking is extensively hampered by Devadatta's inattention, his self-engrossment, flustering, confusion and pausing during the progress of interaction. Besides, Devadatta's initial turns show that he has the least interest in conversation, and consequently, repair imitation and repair work is undertaken. Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) claim that interest in conversation is a chief motivation for smooth turn-taking (STT). Here, one of the participants is devoid of interest during interaction and, as a result, it seriously affects the system of turn-taking to a great extent.

In this passage a single conversational floor is underway. This floor is functional at the thematic level as it roughly deals with the matter of Kapila's wrestling and Devadatta's recent love affair. The overall floor management is quite uneven as it fails to properly develop the ongoing topic. In his second turn, Kapila wanted to retain the floor to narrate the whole episode of his wrestling. But he discontinues after finding that Devadatta has hardly any interest in conversation. This incomplete turn shows that even floor retention is affected by the auditor's inattention and his lack of interest in communication.

Apart from unsmooth turn-taking, the event of turn avoiding is a significant factor in this conversation. If we closely observe the length of both the speakers' turns, we may easily come to note the minimal turn-length of Devadatta's utterances. Although he is recursively pressurized to speak, he keeps his turn length markedly shorter. Except his single turn, all turns of Devadatta are enveloped in five to seven words. His utterances, for instance, "Some work..."; "Then?"; "That's nice"; "What do you mean?" suggest that he hardly has any interest and desire to interact with Kapila. It means that he just undertakes his verbalization not to properly interact with Kapila, but to indicate that he wants to avoid his turns. He goes on to do so by keeping his turn size extremely minimal. So this interaction suggests that turn-avoiding is accomplished not only by escaping verbalization, but also by making it very minimal.

The present extract has two occurrences of back-channels initiated by Devadatta. His first back-channel "Then?" implies that he is unwilling to carry on the conversation. Likewise, the second back-channel "That's nice" is of the same kind. These two back-channels are of phrasal type which is a category suggested by Iwasaki (1997). Backchannels in the passage suggest that rarely they fail to enhance the quality of interaction.

There are two cases of interruption in the passage. Of the two, Devadatta's interruption "Some work..." shows his apathy towards the conversation as he is lost in his own thoughts. Kapila's interruption "Really, you should have come..." is rapport-oriented which he introduces to secure the turn space. In Makri-Tsilipakou's (1994) opinion, sometimes interruptions are affiliative since they do not show aggression or disagreement. Kapila's interruption is thus an affiliative verbal act.

According to Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977), some repair initiations do not yield successful solution as witnessed in the passage. Here, we find a complicated repair mechanism. Kapila's repair initiation "Then what?" fails to draw repair from Devadatta because Devadatta himself initiates a repair - "I mean... what did Nanda do?" Kapila introduces repair as "He played the flute." After this repair, Devadatta repairs his repair initiation - "No... I mean... you were saying something about the wrestler from Gandhara..." Now, Kapila undertakes repair and reports "He wrestled with me... patted me... and said 'you'll go far'." There is one more case of repair which also is quite intricate. Kapila's repair initiation "Who's it this time?" meets counter repair-initiation "What do you mean?" by Devadatta. Once again Kapila initiates repair which too fails to draw appropriate repair from Devadatta as he launches counter-repair initiation "What do you mean who?" Finally, Kapila repairs his previous repair initiation and launches repair initiation for the third time. Only after this repair initiation, the actual repair work Devadatta undertakes in his words - "No one." These repeated repair initiations and their counter initiations are the outcome of Devadatta's inattention and lack of interest while interacting. Such tricky repair mechanism damages the quality and output of conversation as seen in the example above.

Devadatta's last turn includes a within turn pause. The stage direction shows that it is an unfilled pause. According to Goodwin (1981), pause often indicates speaker hesitation. Here Devadatta's pause implies his hesitation to speak about the girl mentioned by Kapila. With the help of this pause, Devadatta accomplishes transition from his first turn-constructive-unit "No one" to the next "How did you guess?"

This interaction comprises an aposiopesis by Kapila. His utterance "When I caught Nanda... he first burst into applause and said..." does not meet completion because he notices that Devadatta is not listening to him. So finding Devadatta's disregard, Kapila leaves his utterance incomplete. So, this aposiopesis is the result of auditor inattention. This aposiopesis is followed by a pause as the floor remains inoperative for a brief period. Wales (1989) claims that the occurrence of aposiopesis is the indication of serious speech breakdown, which we witness in the above passage.

In this passage there occurs a hedging maxim. Kapila's utterance particle "you know —" is an example of hedging. This hedge suggests that Kapila does not wish to forcibly drag

Devadatta in the conversational activity. As per Allott's (2010) observation, such kind of hedging maxim indicates a weakened commitment on the speaker's part.

There is some unevenness in the articulation of utterances which produces hitches in this conversation. For instance the utterances like "No... I mean..."; "Yes, it is.... Who's it this time?"; "I mean — who — is — it — this — time?" indicate explicitly marked departure in the production of speech. Kapila deliberately segments his utterance to let Devadatta understand it properly. Schegloff (2000) names this phenomenon as hitches. He correctly observes that hitches often create momentary arrests in the production of talk as seen in the above conversation.

### 3. Conversational Passage 2

The present interaction takes place between Kapila and the young lady Padmini. It occurs following Kapila's search for the girl who has captivated Devadatta by her beauty.

#### Background Information

As Devadatta was craving for a girl who had become the subject of his recent poetry, Kapila had promised Devadatta that he would find all the details of the girl. Therefore, he starts searching for the girl his friend is longing for. Finally, he succeeds in doing so. The following interaction takes place between Kapila and Padmini who are meeting for the first time.

KAPILA: [*Gapes at her, Aside.*] I give up, Devadatta. I surrender to your judgment. I hadn't thought anyone could be more beautiful than the wench Ragini who acts Rambha in our village troupe. But this one! You're right — she is Yakshini, Shakuntala, Urvashi, Indumati — all rolled into one.

PADMINI: You knocked, didn't you?

KAPILA: Er — yes...

PADMINI: Then why are you gaping at me? What do you want?

KAPILA: I — I just wanted to know whose house this was.

PADMINI: Whose house do you want?

KAPILA: This one.

PADMINI: I see. Then who do you want here?

KAPILA: The master...

PADMINI: Do you know his name?

KAPILA: No.

PADMINI: Have you met him?

KAPILA: No.

PADMINI: Have you seen him?

KAPILA: No.

(*Hayavadana*, pp. 16-17)

### Analysis

Interaction in this passage is mostly accomplished through adjacency pairs. The prominent features of this conversation are STT, adjacency pairs, markedness, interruption, machine-gun-question and answer, hesitation, etc. However, the phenomenon of adjacency pairs is relatively striking than rest of the features.

In this conversation a single conversational floor is in function. To follow Hayashi's (1991) functional level of floor structure, the present floor is functional at the turn level as it specifically regulates Kapila's turns. This floor appears to be influenced by Padmini's impatience indicated through her recurrent questions.

The transfer of turns is usually smooth throughout the interaction. This STT is possibly the outcome of three factors. The main reason behind this STT is the projection of politeness by both of the speakers, particularly by Kapila. Sacks et al. (1974) assert that politeness is one of the prime intrinsic motivations for unproblematic turn-taking. It is observed that Kapila properly responds to Padmini's questions to avoid being rude and unmannerly. The second reason behind Kapila's ordered turns is that he was there in Padmini's home while interacting. It is generally found that we avoid contradicting those interactants who are in *their* own houses, where we are outsiders. So, outsiders feel insecure and therefore take their turns smoothly. Lastly, it seems that Kapila lacks that much courage to cross that girl who he was trying to *find* out. This act of finding involved a lot of risks from elders in Padmini's family. So, fear on Kapila's part compels him to interact with Padmini in a smooth fashion. In this way politeness, the feeling of insecurity and fear are three driving forces of STT.

Turn taking in this passage is mostly accomplished by the means of adjacency pairs. The passage consists of seven adjacency pairs. In each pair the first part is produced by Padmini and the second by Kapila. These pairs are in the form of questions and their adjacent answers. Following Cook's (1989) terminology, Kapila's responses to Padmini are preferred responses, as they are expected second pair parts. In this context, the higher frequency of adjacency pairs might be due to the interaction between strangers. It is because conversation among strangers generally takes place in the form of adjacency pairs. The main factors producing adjacency pairs are formality and deference. In a way, relationship and acquaintance largely influence the frequency of adjacency pairs.

Kapila's two responses are distinctly marked. His utterance "Er — yes..." denotes his hesitation while taking the responsibility of knocking on the door. Kapila's another turn "I-I just wanted..." is a repetition which too highlights his shaky manner of speech. There are two components which give the marked status to the utterance. They are "Er-" and "I-." Allot (2010) thinks that the marked items are extraordinary. It is believed that the marked items have marked meaning. In this context these marked items suggest Kapila's marked feeling, that is, anxiety as he knocked on the door to find out a girl. Kapila's utterances suggest that speech is context sensitive.

Padmini's utterance, "Then why are you gaping at me?" is a floor-taking interruption. Murata (1994) suggests that most floor-taking interruptions convey interrupter's aggression to the interruptee. Through her interruption, Padmini indicates her aggression to Kapila over knocking on the door. As per Makri-Tsilipakou's (1994) categorization, this utterance is a shallow interruption as it occurred finally during Kapila's articulation of his final word "Yes..." This interruption results in Kapila's hesitation while speaking.

In this conversation, there occurs a machine-gun question. Padmini darts her question "Do you know his name?" immediately after Kapila's utterance "The master..." Tannen (1981) observes that the machine-gun questions are timed to begin instantly after the previous speaker's utterance is complete, as observed in the above case. Through this question, Padmini suggests her impatience as she does not want to wait until Kapila finishes his utterance.



Padmini's machine-gun-question produces latching. Her question occurs without leaving a noticeable gap after Kapila's utterance. It is likely that Padmini already knew when Kapila was about to end his utterance. Auer (1983) suggests that such a 'recognition point' gives an idea to the latcher regarding the end of the previous turn. So, Padmini introduces latching after recognizing the terminal point of Kapila's turn. This latching indicates her impatience while speaking.

As mentioned earlier, Kapila's marked utterances "Er-yes..." and "I- I just wanted..." indicate his hesitation. This hesitation suggests uncertainty in his mind while producing his talk. Following Maclay and Osgood's (1959) observation, a speaker's hesitation sometimes comes up in the form of filled pauses and even repeats. Kapila's filled pause is indicated by his non-lexical device "Er-." Kapila's repeat "I-I" is semantically non-significant as it does not convey any meaning. It is evident that Kapila's anxiety during his speech is the main source of his hesitation. This hesitation slightly affects the flow of Kapila's speech.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Following the analysis of the two passages, some conclusions can be drawn. The first passage suggests that interactants' mutual interest and attention during conversation are crucial factors. Without these two driving forces, conversation in general and turn-taking in particular lose their very purpose. Minimal turn length is the indicator of turn-avoiding. Occasionally, floor retention is affected by interlocutors' inattention and disinterest while communicating. Here, back-channels convey unwillingness to undertake the interaction and they fail to supplement its quality. Interruptions in this passage are the indicators of affiliation. The unsuccessful repair process hampers the quality of interaction in the passage. Pause in this conversation is the sign of hesitation. It is found that aposiopesis is the outcome of auditor inattention. The hedging maxim showcases weakened commitment of the speech. Hitches in this interaction create brief arrests in the continuity of talk.

In the second passage the chief motivations for STT are politeness, the feeling of insecurity and fear. The floor is influenced by the speaker's impatience while interacting. This conversation points out that interaction among strangers generally takes place in adjacency pairs. The marked utterances are the outcome of hesitation, whereas, hesitation is

the outcome of anxiety. The occurrence of machine-gun question and latching convey the interlocutor's impatience.

---

### Primary Resources

Karnad, G. (1975). *Hayavadana*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

### Secondary Resources

Allott, N. (2010). *Key terms in pragmatics*. London: Continuum.

Auer, J. C. P. (1983). Review of Orestrom's turn taking in English conversation. *Linguistics*, 21, 742-748.

Cook, G. (1989). *Discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Goodwin, L. (1981). *Conversational organization: Interaction between speakers and hearers*. New York: Academic Press.

Hayashi, R. (1991). Floor structure of English and Japanese conversation. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 16, 1-30.

Iwasaki, S. (1997). The Northridge earthquake conversation: The floor structure and the loop sequence in Japanese conversation. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 28, 661-693.

Maclay, H. & Osgood, E. (1959). Hesitation phenomena in spontaneous speech. *Word*, 15, 19-44.

Makri-Tsilipakou, M. (1994). Interruption revisited: Affiliative vs. disaffiliative intervention. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 21, 401-426.

Murata, K. (1994). Intrusive or cooperative: A cross-cultural study of interruption. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 21, 385-400.

Sacks, H., Schegloff, E. A., & Jefferson, G. (1974). A simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking in conversation. *Language*, 50, 696-735.

Schegloff, E. A., Jefferson, G. & Sacks, H. (1977). The preference of self correction in the organization of repair in conversation, *Language*, 53, 361-382.

Schegloff, E. A. (2000). Overlapping talk and the organization of turn taking for conversation. *Language in Society*, 29, 1-63.

Tannen, D. (1981). The machine-gun question. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 5, 383-397.

Wales, K. (1989). *A dictionary of stylistics*. London: Longman.

=====

Dnyaneshwar P. Suryawanshi, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor and Head  
Department of English  
Vivekanand Arts, Sardar Dalipsingh Commerce & Science College  
Aurangabad 431001  
Maharashtra  
India  
[dssurya@gmail.com](mailto:dssurya@gmail.com)