A Conversation Analytic Look at Understanding and Meaning Making During Group Work Interaction

Rizwan-ul Huq
Language and Culture in Europe
2nd Term, 1st Year
Supervisor: Alia Amir
# Table of Contents

1. Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 3

2. Aim of the Study .................................................................................................................. 3

3. Theoretical Framework ......................................................................................................... 4
   a. Conversation Analysis ........................................................................................................ 4
   b. CA Approach to Language ............................................................................................... 5
   c. Turn Taking ....................................................................................................................... 7
   d. Turn-construction Unit ..................................................................................................... 9
   e. Competence/Performance ............................................................................................... 10
   f. Interactional Competence and Co-construction of Meaning ............................................. 11

4. Methodology ......................................................................................................................... 13
   a. Principles of Conversation Analysis ................................................................................ 13
   b. Setting ............................................................................................................................ 13
   c. Recordings and Transcriptions ....................................................................................... 14
   d. Role of the Observer ........................................................................................................ 15
   e. Methodological Considerations ...................................................................................... 15

5. Sequential Analysis of a Group Conversation .................................................................. 16

6. Discussion ............................................................................................................................. 25

References .................................................................................................................................. 28
Appendix ..................................................................................................................................... 30
1. Introduction

A successful scientific endeavor intends to investigate the meaning. Conversation Analysis (CA) is no exception to this tradition as it unearths the intricate existence of meaning in our day-to-day conversations. As an essential part of every human communication, interaction carries meanings. This meaning is not only conspicuous to the participants who do take part in the meaning-construction process but also to every scientific observer who wants to examine the process of construction and to analyze the actual details. This is no surprise that many scientific language studies claim the way to understand the meaning. CA, as a scientific study of language as a social phenomenon, specifies a definite interest with the meaning-construction process in talk-in-interaction and champions the argument that the process of observation should transcend the literal, semantic interpretation of what we do see or understand through the interaction. The more an observer looks into the meaning of the interaction the more s/he is supposed to find the interactional architecture of meaning running through the talk-in-interaction. Under the semantic superstructure of meaning, an infrastructure is to be found between the participants where all the parties take part in a collaborative meaning-construction process maximizing the interactional competence and turn-taking systematics of talk-in-interaction.

2. Aim of the Study

The study may invoke different themes or issues to the study of CA but the prime focus of the study is to discuss some of the important elements of CA in the context of naturally occurring instances of talk-in-interaction. The study aims at the understanding of how the talk-in-interaction takes place through the ‘turn-taking systematics’ of the participants. In doing so, the study also focuses on the relation between the interactional competence and turn-taking system. The study appreciates the fact that human communication and its success depends highly on the interactional competence as every human individual does share a process of co-construction of the meaning through the interaction. As every interaction entails a mutual, collaborative understanding, the interaction maximized through the turn-taking systematic helps the participants to build a workable architecture of meaning. This architecture of meaning is a not something
individual or personal because all the participants who take part in this meaning-building process do share the intended meaning they produce through the interactions. This is a reciprocal relationship. However, the aim of the study is to understand how the participants accommodate themselves in the turn-taking system and co-construct the intended meaning through their interaction.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.a Conversation Analysis

Conversation Analysis (CA) has emerged as a scientific study of human interaction in the later part of the twentieth century. One of the main reasons behind the emergence of CA is the advancement of the technology, especially the technology for audio-recording services. As the technological inventions, like—telephone recordings, audio and video recording technology, software programs and so, have made it easy to study the details of conversation, CA has ensured a significant space in intelligentsia. Although many other disciplines of linguistics concentrate on conversation, CA has exclusively emphasized on the details of the conversation and its orderly composition. In *Language*, Edward Sapir (1921: 2) has drawn attention to the fact that the general tendency towards language is to conceptualize ‘language as a merely conventional system of sound symbols’. He also explores, ‘This is the well-known observation that under the stress of emotion, say of a sudden twinge of pain or of unbridled joy, we do involuntarily give utterance to sounds that the hearer interprets as indicative of the emotion itself’ (Sapir, 1921: 2). So, conceptualization of language as an incidental thing is nothing new to the linguistic intelligentsia, and this also applies to CA as many linguistic traditions have ignored the facts that there is a certain organization inherent within the everyday talk process. For an example, Noam Chomsky, a noted linguist on ‘generative grammar’ has specified what a linguist should do or not do. In *Aspects of theory of syntax*, Chomsky (1965 : 3) has emphasized on the principle that the study of language should focus on the use of language in standard situations and must avoid the non-linguistics considerations, like—‘memory limitations’, ‘distractions’, ‘shifts of attentions and interest’, ‘errors’, and so on. Well before the emergence of CA, thus, a tradition is on way to portray ordinary conversation as a least-considerable field of interest to any linguist. Contrary to the proposition, CA has developed a focus on ordinary
conversation practices. Harvey Sacks, in response to his study on suicidal emergency calls, have found a significant space for ordinary conversation in linguistics. Although the everyday conversations seem very disorderly in appearance, there is a certain ‘order at all points’ (Sacks, 1984: 22). This statement is quite radical as well as revolutionary as it has focused the point of attention to the analysis of conversation focusing the study of language on mundane talk. Without any presuppositions, CA has endeavored to investigate what is out there, what is really happening during verbal and non-verbal communication of the people in everyday occasions. CA has discovered the organization of the naturally occurring conversation as methodic and systematic. In comparison to other studies on human interaction or speech system, CA stands quite brilliantly. In this regard, Hutchby and Wooffitt (2005: 20) refers to the ‘Speech act theory’ which focuses on human ‘utterances’ and its affect on human ‘actions’. Still, CA is quite distinct to unearth the intricate details of day-to-day conversation and the meaning which evolves through the talk-in-interaction. ‘Discourse Analysis’ also shares the interest in conversation, though many CA analysts, like Paul Seedhouse (2004 : 56), have criticized the principles of DA and ranked CA distinctively as a method to understand the real-time talk-in-interaction. As an effort to understand the most gifted power of human intelligence, human interaction through language, CA has endeavored to explain the intricate details of the interactions, and the scientific exploration confirms that findings of the last few decades bestowing a solid ground to Conversation Analysis.

3. b CA Approach to Language

CA approach to language is quite different from other methods of the study of language. Seedhouse (2004:3) explains that there is a considerable difference between the ‘CA mentality’ and ‘linguistic mentality’. The ‘linguistic mentality’ has always focused on the language as its basis of investigation and research. Here, the prime concern of a linguist is to understand how a language works and other essential elements of concern regarding the functions of language. On the contrary, CA proposes something that demands the investigation of ‘language as a social phenomenon’. This is quite revolutionary as it tries to conceptualize the way language is used during the real-time interaction of real people. The concern is not what the language should be or can be, rather what the language is and how it is used in the interaction as a social
phenomenon. Hutchby and Wooffitt (2005: 14) have explained the idea that CA is the study to explore the ‘tacit reasoning procedures and sociolinguistic competencies underlying the production and interpretation of talk in organized sequences of interaction’. CA approach appreciate the study of ‘recorded, naturally occurring talk-in-interaction’ (ibid.) and the focus is not only to analyze the talk as ‘semantic units’ (ibid.) like other linguistic approaches but also to understand the negotiations behind the units used through the ‘verbal instantiation of language’ (ibid.). According to Hutchby and Wooffitt (ibid.), thus, CA has differentiated itself from ‘linguistically oriented analysis’ (ibid.) by assigning the effort to understand the meaning beyond the mere structures of language. Hence, there is a considerable difference between ‘CA mentality’ and ‘linguistic mentality’.

Another feature that makes CA different from other methods of study of language is its ‘emic’ perspective to language. The term was first introduced by Kenneth Lee Pike in 1967 as a part of the anthropological and other human behavioral disciplines that try to mark the two sets of data-collection methods. The ‘etic’ perspective observes the facts and events being an outsider to the occurring event. In this case, the observer or the process of observation is exclusive to the system that is studied. On the contrary, the ‘emic’ perspective is inclusive. It tries to analyze the data being a part of the observation. There is a certain degree of involvement to the process of observation and the process is truthful to the account of the actual happenings of the data field. This is also an extraordinary departure from traditional scientific methods of studying the human behavior and interaction as the traditional scientific methods have always placed the observer as someone excluded to the phenomenon of the study, whereas the ‘emic’ perspective used through CA highly emphasizes on the inclusiveness of the observer in the process of the observation. Most interestingly, the observation, which is inclusive and emic, is always ‘unmotivated’ (ten Have, 1999: 121). Being emic, it does not necessarily mean that the observer has the access to interrupt the interaction that takes place between the participants.

CA approach to language is also influenced by some other traditions of scientific research, like Ethnomethodology. Harold Garfinkel’s (1967) works are quite pioneering in this regard. Seedhouse (2004: 7) explains the relation between CA and Ethnomethodology. He suggests CA shares some of the features of Ethnomethodology.
The most important feature followed in CA is the ‘indexicality’ or ‘context-boundness’ (ibid.) of the interaction. It means the interaction that takes place have a share with the context the participants are creating all through the interaction. Next, CA borrows the idea of ‘the documentary method of interpretation’ (ibid.). It means the study tries to explore the real-time events to match the patterns of the type as documented before. CA also shares ‘the reciprocity of perspectives’ (ibid. : 9) from Ethnomethodology. It appreciates the fact that the researchers are following the same line of perspective of the participants of the study. Moreover, the ‘normative accountability of actions’ (ibid. : 10) is also a common factor between CA and Ethnomethodology. The feature claims that the events between the participants are influenced by the norms, not by the rules. If someone greets with an expression like—‘hello!’, the response is not supposed to be some particular, regulative sets of expressions. Instead, the participant has every liberty to respond or not to respond by sticking to the norm of expressions (in this case ‘greeting’), rather than the rule of expressing certain sets of expressions. Last, ‘reflexivity’ (ibid. : 11) is a feature that supports the idea that participants and interpreter utilize the same set of actions as a tool to analyze the utterances or actions that take place through the interaction. This means, the interpreter who interprets the interaction will rely on the same set of information which have led the participants respond in the like way during the interaction. This principle helps CA to be aware from any kind of probability or guess-work from the interpreter. Altogether, CA is highly influenced by Ethnomethodology.

3. c Turn Taking

Turn-taking is an important part of every conversation as the free-flowing fluency of the conversation depends on the systematic organization of the turn-taking. The system is extremely robust. Even if many people do talk together, turn taking takes place quite systematically. In general, people do believe that ordinary talk is a disorderly collection of human utterances but with the advent of technology this assumption has changed reasonably. The emergence of CA has reexamined the system of turn-taking in conversation. This supposition do emphasize on the fact that every trivial detail can bring a new interpretation to the interaction that takes place between common people in
common events. For this reason, turn-taking, which apparently seems a matter of chance, do demand a close scrutiny of the organization of the system.

The most important thing with turn-taking, as defined by Sacks et al (1974 : 3), is that turn-takings is ‘organized’. Although the ‘size of turns’ (ibid.) and ‘ordering of turns’ (ibid.) may vary, the ‘transitions’ (ibid.) are always organized and finely managed through the conversation. Moreover, turn-taking can develop both features—‘context free’ (ibid.) and ‘context sensitivity’ (ibid.)—as every conversation has the capacity to accommodate a wide range of situations, different identities and different combinations. This concept is apparently contradictory as the question is quite prevalent that how can turn-taking be a ‘context-sensitive’ and a ‘context-free’ altogether. George Psathas (1995 : 36) explains that turn taking is ‘context-sensitive’ because turn-taking is related to the context of the interaction. For this reason, whatever changes do take place in the context of the talk, it affects the turns as well as the ‘preceding talk’ (ibid.) It means if a participant moves with a particular context with the utterances, it affects the next turns as the next speaker responds to the context the first speaker is creating. In this way, the context of the talk moves dynamically all through the interaction affecting the entire context of the interaction. On the contrary, this is also true that ‘turn-taking’ is ‘context-free’ (ibid.). The identity of the speaker, the duration of the speech, the surrounding setting of the conversation, or the issue the speaker is talking about—these things have no relation with the turn-taking system. For this reason, turn-taking is also a ‘context-free’ system. The macro issues of social sciences, for example, ‘the age, sex, social class, education, race, religion, and ethnic background’ of the participant (ibid.), does not affect the turn-taking system. Whether the talk is institutional (like-a courtroom session or a debate) or non-institutional (like—any informal talk between high-school friends), the turn-taking system is existent in the same way.

Turn-taking has a preserving relation with ‘Transition-relevance place’ or ‘Transition-relevance point’ (TRP). Schegloff et al (2002 : 6) terms TRP as an ‘interactive dimension’ of talk-in-interaction. It takes place in a point of conversation where the turn-taking is relevant and expected to do occur (Seedhouse, 2004 : 28). During the conversation, turn can take place in three different ways: First, a current speaker can select the next speaker (Sacks et al, 1984 : 3), second, other speakers can select themselves as the speaker of the turn (ibid.), and third, the current speaker can continue
the talk even after a relevant point of TRP (ibid.) The role of the participants decides how these transition-points will be managed to turn-taking system. The third principle, as explored by Sacks et al, suggests the gap or overlap between two turns is as little as possible unless there are some potential reasons. Sacks et al (1984 : 18) suggest that any talk, whether ‘continuous’ or ‘discontinuous’, is influenced by these ‘transition-relevance points’. When ‘a sequence of the transition-relevance places’ (ibid.) is carried away by the current speaker or the next speaker without any or minimum level of ‘gap or overlapping’ (ibid.), the talk is continuous. On the contrary, when the current speaker ends his/her talk in a transition-relevance place and no other speaker starts the next turn, the talk is ‘discontinuous’ (Sacks et al : 18). Often the ‘gap’ is more than a ‘gap’, rather a kind of ‘lapse’ (ibid.). So, turn-taking is a dynamic issue to the interaction as a successful interaction depends on successful management of ‘turn-taking’ and its ‘transition-relevance places’.

3. d Turn-construction Unit

Turn-construction Unit (or TCU) or Turn-construction Component (or TCC) has a significant relation with the ‘turn-taking’. In a real-time conversation, any verbal (or even non-verbal) expression can be considered as a TCU. In ‘A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn-taking for Conversation’, Sacks et al (1984 : 6) have described the necessary criteria of any ‘Turn-construction unit’ (or TCU) or ‘Turn-constructional component’ (or TCC). A TCU can be ‘a sentence, a clause, a phrase, or a lexical construction’ (ibid.). Most necessarily, TCU is not something to be defined like any grammatical item. A TCU is only definable in the context of a ‘potentially complete turn’ (Setling, 2000 : 479). Unless a turn is complete or it takes place, TCU is never existent. When a participant completes his/her turn, the completion marks the TCU. It can easily transcend the boundary of linguistic norms and can be a single word like ‘oh’ or ‘hmm’. The mutual understanding of the speakers assigns the acceptability of TCU as a TCU. If the speakers do mutually agree and do understand that the non-linguistic expression is a TCU, it is accepted as a TCU. For this reason, what is a TCU and what is not is entirely relative and depends on the specific reference to the interaction of the participants. Even, according to Paul ten Have (1999 : 128), TCU can take place through non-verbal signs as the mutual understanding of the meaning crowns a TCU as
a TCU. In this regard, Seedhouse explains, ‘A TCU is essentially a social concept rather than a linguistic one and cannot therefore be delimited in linguistic terms. Since it is an emic or participant’s concept it cannot be specified in etic terms.’ (2004: 30).

3. Competence / Performance

The idea of competence denotes the idea of ‘individual performance’ (Young, 2008: 93). It is believed as a common fact that competence is something individual inherent within the person who expresses it through his real-time performance of real-time events. Historically, the conceptualization of ‘competence’ has always been in binary opposition to ‘performance’ (ibid.). Competence and performance have a great coinage with Noam Chomsky. Chomsky has made a distinction between ‘competence’ (1965: 4) and ‘performance’ (1965: 10) and this distinction invokes criticism against such a distinction. The competence Chomsky coins is the ‘linguistic competence’ (1965: 3) which prefers a neutral account of the language events with a conceptualization of grammar for ‘the ideal hearer-listener’s intrinsic competence’ (ibid.: 4) in mind. The Chomskyan ‘competence’, thus, stands principally on the meaning which derives from grammatical or formulaic arena of language (Katz, 1980) and this approach is quite against the CA approach to language.

According to Young, the idea of ‘competence’ and ‘performance’ can be inspired by the landmark ideas from Ferdinand de Saussure. In Course in general linguistics, Saussure (1916) has produced an idea of ‘la langue’ and ‘la parole’. It seems, the concept of ‘performance’ can be a re-conceptualization of ‘la parole’ in Chomskyan way. Young suggests performance is an ‘individual’ (2008: 94) act of individual whereas ‘la langue’ is the ‘result of a social contract, formed through social action and not by individual cognition’ (ibid.). Instead, the concept of ‘la parole’ contains the existence of meaning in social phenomenon and interaction. For this reason, there are considerable amount of criticism against the Chomskyan way of defining ‘competence’ and ‘performance’. As an example, Dell Hymes (1972) has proposed a departure from Chomskyan conceptualization of ‘competence’ and ‘performance’.

Dell Hymes has termed the ‘linguistic competence’ as ‘grammatical competence’ (1972: 54). Instead, he suggests of ‘communicative competence’ (ibid. : 57). This idea prefers
communicative competence as a theory to manifest the competence of the learner or speaker who takes part in the process of interaction and materializes it. Communicative competence takes away the focus of competence from semantic units of the verbal interaction to the meaning and interpretation of the real-time socio-cultural actions. In this way, the focus is on socio-cultural perspective of the language rather than the formulaic presentation of language. The point of argument is now on the issue that the competence of an ‘individual’ is nothing individual rather the ‘competence’ stands on the practice of the individual in ‘actual social situations’ (Young, 2008 : 95). This rejection of Chomskyan formulation of ‘competence’ and ‘performance’ opens the opportunity to go further with the concept with new interpretation.

3. Interactional Competence and Co-construction of Meaning

The coining of ‘communicative competence’ has paved the way for a new term in linguistics, namely ‘interactional competence’ (Kramsch, 1986). Before we start with the idea, we can have a brief look on the three distinct ways to view ‘competence’. There are certain groups of people who suggest that competence is something ‘grammatical, morphological, lexical, and phonological systems of language’ (Young, 2008 : 101). This is quite prevalent with Chomskyan linguistics. Second group suggests competence as ‘a methodological tool to distinguish an abstract concept that pertains to a language (or in general all languages) and not to a person’ (ibid.). Last but not the least, the third view is to ‘recognize competence as an ability belonging to an individual who employs the ability in all social contexts and those who recognize that social contexts involve at least two participants , and for this reason , an individual’s competence varies according to what the other participants do (ibid.). ‘Interaction competence’ is the offshoot of the third group of scholars. Claire Kramsch (1986) has coined the term with a presupposition that every human interaction relies on a successful accentuation of ‘interactional competence’. Kramsch suggests a successful interaction demands a ‘shared knowledge of the world’ (1986 : 367) and this knowledge is not only the ‘external context of the communication’ (ibid.) but also the ‘internal context of intersubjectivity’ (ibid.). According to Kramsch, interaction follows the negotiation of ‘intended meanings’ (ibid.). Thus, the meaning built through the interaction is not individual or personal, rather collaborative and interactive, and
interactional competence points out the inherent capacity of the participants to be part of the meaning-building process, of construction and negotiation of the meaning of the interaction.

In CA, we can investigate the applicability of the term through the ‘turn-taking’ system. Young (2008: 102) suggests, there are three distinct aspects of turn-taking, namely—‘selection of next speaker, identification of turn-constructional units (TCUs), and projection of transition relevance places (TRPs)’. The management of the system of turn-talking confirms the coinage of the ‘interactional competence’. Young draws an example from real-life experience. He refers to the activity of the participants in a disappointing lecture class. Apparently, the participants have nothing to share with the lecture as the teacher is liable for what s/he delivers in the class. Contrary to this believe, the participants are part of the entire process too. Although they are doing nothing, they also share the responsibility of the lecture that is taking place. They have wide ranges of options. They can leave the lecture, they can put question, and they can share some questioning gaze. So, being present to the lecture, they are constructing the meaning, negotiating with the meaning, even if they do not take part and sit idle all along the lecture class. Young gives another example of a ‘mother’ and a ‘son’ (2008: 103). In a picture, it is showed that a mother is pointing towards something and the baby is looking towards it. Although apparently the picture shows nothing in its own, it speaks a lot. The gaze of the baby that follows the finger of the mother shows how he is giving feedback to the message from his mother. If he is reluctant to gaze to the point or keep his eyes close, it will then give a different dimension of meaning to the picture suggesting the lack of communication of rapture between the participants. Thus, interactional competence does suggest that meaning is not a single possession of an individual rather a possession to all the participants who take part in the meaning-making process, a collaborative progress of the meaning.
4. Methodology

4. a Principles of Conversation Analysis

To ensure the sound methodological backgrounds, CA principles should be analyzed in comparison to the data collection method of the study. The following discussion aims at the recapitulation of methodological concerns in the context of CA. To start with, Conversation Analysis (or CA) is a bottom-up approach to language study that acknowledges the fact that ‘there is order at all points in interaction’ (Sacks, 1984 : 22). The studies and research carried on talk-in-interaction confirms the fact that every single thing, even if it appears trivial and insignificant, carries a potent meaning to the architecture of the interaction (Scehegloff, 1987). In the current study, the interaction of the participants also carries a sense of ‘order’ all through the process of interaction, and the data-field is interpreted keeping an eye to this particular orientation of CA.

In the next place, CA also confirms the fact that the interaction is simultaneously a ‘context free’ and ‘context sensitive’ (Sacks et al, 1974 : 3) process. The interaction carried out away by the participants confirms the principle suggesting the context-boundedness and context-free leaning of the interaction. It is important part of the study as the successful accentuation of the study result highly depends on these issues. Moreover, CA also shares an inductive, bottom-up approach. This means the study aims at the interpretation of the collected recordings without any presupposition. As the research is carried away, the first and foremost important thing to the study is the real-time data and to analyze the data without any preconceived idea or theory in mind. This is a kind of ‘unmotivated looking’ (Psathas, 1995 : 22-24) which helps the researcher to understand and interpret the result as it is in the real-time, naturally occurring situation. Thus, it is really important to keep away from any external influence to the setting of the data, and the research is carried away following these principles as truly as possible.

4. b Setting

This study was carried on a group interaction of university students. The participants, as per their academic purpose in mind, take part into the conversation. Both participants
are members of the same project group and the prime goal is to develop a project plan. The project plan is assigned to them as a part of their study curriculum. The assignment includes a detailed conceptualization of a project plan for a business company. They are supposed to develop the detailed and graphical presentation of the work-plan in a corporate context. They have used computers and different technical software quite freely (like: Microsoft Project 2007). Apart from these, the medium of communication is English. This is a cross-cultural setting. One student is from Bangladesh and the other is from India. Although both students have a common access to Hindi (as many South-Asian people do understand Hindi/Urdu), they have hardly used. Both are non-native speakers (NNS) of English and the variety of English is South Asian. Although they have enough efficiency in ESL (English as a Second Language), considerable mistakes regarding the spelling and pronunciation can be found as well.

4. c Recordings and Transcriptions

The recordings of this talk-in-interaction takes place in audio format. Although contemporary researchers prefer video-recordings (Goodwin, 1980), this study employs audio-recordings giving an opportunity to study the details of meaning-construction process which is evident even through the audio-recording.

After having the recordings of the conversation, the conversation is transcribed in the standard CA method. The transcription has maintained the scientific norms of the Conversation Analysis. The recordings were attentively studied and listened times and again to ensure the proper and authentic representation of the factual event. The minute details of the interaction along with the idiosyncratic manifestations of the participants are also studied carefully and duly analyzed.

CA always follows a detailed study of the interaction. Apparently it seems that it is quite mechanistic and rigorous but the process ensures the validity of study as well as its result. This is a scientific process of decoding the real events into analyzable parts and to understand what really happens in a naturally-occurring interaction. This detailed reproduction of the specific social act is a kind of ‘empirical orientation’ (Seedhouse,
2004 : 15) to the data. In this case, the study follows a detailed analysis of the data-transcription ensuring the empirical orientation of the data.

4. d Role of the Observer

The role of observer is quite important regarding the methodological considerations. The participants are free to interact in their natural way without any particular instructions from the observer. I have taken due permission from the participants ensuring the secrecy and confidentiality of their privacy and the purpose of the recording. As it is a peer-group interaction, it is highly sensitive to record and transmit this kind of data for academic purpose. As it is often found, peer-group interaction is often open and direct in interaction. For this reason, participants in a study need to be properly assured of the ethical concerns and their privacy. Participants do know that the study does not aim at any kind of harm to their personal or public life. The real identity is kept secret. I have used pseudo-names in the transcription to assure the privacy of the participants. Written documents have been produced from my part ensuring the purpose of the study. Other than these, I have not shared any particular information regarding the topic or theme of the research to be safe from any kind of manipulation from my part. The entire talk takes place in a natural setting, and we can hope that the conversation is also natural in its content without any external manipulation or stimuli to the naturally occurring data field. Moreover, the observer also bears in mind the fact that this is an ‘emic’ study and all the principles should be correctly followed during the observation as well as the interpretation of the collected data of the naturally occurring interaction.

4. e Methodological Considerations

As the participants are engaged in the development of the project plan, their conversation particularly focuses on the transmission of the technical know-how for their assigned project. The Indian student (in transcription he is titled as Sumon) shows his counterpart (titled as Tausif in the transcription) how to develop the plan. They have often used technical terms throughout the conversation. To add an example, the term ‘gang chart’ seems quite unfamiliar to everyday use of English, but they have used the term more often as they this term is part of the technical knowhow of the participants.
5. Sequential Analysis of a Group Conversation

In the following excerpts, the talk-in-interaction between the interlocutors is analyzed with a focus on turn-taking systematics of the participants as well as the maximization of transition-relevance points. The context of the interaction is quite important as the real understanding of the ‘turn-taking systematics’ depends on the context. The participants are working on two different computers, sitting side by side. Still, they often do share their feedbacks. Oftentimes, they also guide their partners or show some details on the computers. This is evident through the statements they have made as well as the statements that confirm the intended action of the participants during the interaction. The analysis of the excerpts demand the conceptualization of the contexts it bears during the interaction.

Excerpt 1.1

1 Sumon *jo thā sab kar dia?*  
   (whatever there was, have you done all)
2
3 Tausif *we (. ) we just included in the—*
4 activity list↑ resource ↑
5 (1.5)
6 Sumon mm.
7 (4.00)
8 Tausif *so ⁰we should check out the⁰—*
9 xxxxxxxxxx.
10 (13.00)
11 a::ny guideline↑ for (. ) like—
12 (0.5)
13 in (. ) in this chart ↑
14 what things (. ) we should input ?
15 (0.50)
16 like a::ny guideline in the
17 Sumon critical path is a must.
18 (1.00)
19 Tausif ok.
In this excerpt, Sumon and Tauseef get together in the computer lab to do some work on the computers. In this sequence, Sumon initiates by asking the question in line 1. He speaks this sentence in Hindi. Tauseef, through other-initiated repair and without aligning to his question, responds in English. Since there are only two interlocutors and Sumon’s question has only two possibilities that either Sumon continues to talk or Tausif takes the turn. But Sumon’s question is followed by a pause and Tausif is hesitant to answer and repeats “we” two times. When he repairs ‘we’ and code switches into English, there is visible hesitancy. A potential ‘transition-relevance point’ appears in line 3 and he abruptly leaves his sentence in the middle. Sumon does not initiate or says anything at this point and misses a place of potential turn. For this reason, the current speaker continues. Sumon takes the turn in line no 6. In response to the initiations of Tausif, Sumon does not align and with a bit of hesitance by saying “mm”. Here, it should also be noted that both the interlocutors are working on the computer and trying to work out the problems in the program as well, the pauses do not necessarily indicate problem in the talk. Moreover, as I have only access to the audio conversation of this whole sequence, it is difficult to comment on other aspects of the interaction. However, the mutual intelligibility of the talk is confirmed through this turn.

In the next few lines, Tausif again continues his talk between lines no 8 and 16. There are many ‘transition-relevance places’ here. In many points, Tausif jumps into the next line without finishing the present statement. Sumon could have taken those turns as a speaker, but he does not align. Although Tausif faces difficulty in saying what he is saying, Sumon does not indicate that he wants to take a turn and lets Tausif explains. In a mutual recognition of the meaning that is taking place, the present speaker continues the talk. In line no 14, Tausif asks a question to Sumon and after that he stops. Here an adjacency pair of a question is an answer but Sumon misses this opportunity and pauses for a second and does not select himself as a speaker of this turn. Tausif again selects himself as a speaker.

In line 16, the statement is a continuation to the preceding talk and the statement is unfinished. In this point, it is expected that Sumon should give some response to the preceding talk. If Sumon ignores this turn, this can mean the lack of mutual understanding of the meaning that takes place through the talk. In this turn, Sumon speaks and gives a strong response in the context of the previous statements. In line no
19, as response to what Sumon says, Tausif acknowledges that he conceives the meaning.

Excerpt 1.2

1 Tausif [so:
2 Sumon just] see↑ that.
3 (0.50)
4 the [skadule] is per:: (.) sixty days. no—
5 ninety days.
6 Tausif ok.
7 Sumon I think it is >more than< ninety days.
8 right?
9 (1.00)
10 is this the gang chart ↑ that I have sent you? or is [this
11 Tausif yea] yea
12 Sumon yours?
13 Tausif yea (. ) you have [sont].
14 Sumon yea yea.
15 Tausif yea you have sent this. ((a self-repair))
16 Sumon ok ?
17 ( .)
18 Tausif ok.
19 (0.5)

The talk continues between the interlocutors. In excerpt 1.2, they have expanded the talk further. This time, Tausif and Sumon have an overlap start in this sequence. In the line no 1, Tausif overlaps with Sumon. As there is a long lapse between the preceding excerpt and current one, neither of the participants do know who will start with. The overlap indicates that Sumon’s response to Tausif’s “so” indicates his understanding of “so” as a sort of explanation demanded by his “so”. In this TRP, Summon self-selects himself and shows his alignment by saying “just see that”. In line no 2, Sumon finishes the statement and after that a pause takes place. Although a transition is quite prevalent, Tausif does not take the turn until line number 6. So, Sumon continues with the talking explaining some details of the project they are developing. After Sumon explains that what should be the criteria of the chart they are developing, Tausif should take the turn
or let Sumon continue in response to what Sumon says. This time, the turn takes place as a quick response to the things Sumon has explained to him. As a sequential analysis, it shows his understanding of the prior turn.

In line no 10, Sumon asks a question. In response to the question, Tausif takes the turn in line no 11. In this point, an overlapping takes place as Sumon’s preceding statement is unfinished. Although Tausif takes the turn, this is a quick and short response of Sumon’s question asked in the preceding line. In line no 12, Sumon finishes the turn he has started with. As he has finished with the statement, a ‘transition-relevant point’ is prevalent. It is expected that either the next speaker will answer to the preceding talk or the current speaker will continue to add more to the things he has said. Here, Tausif picks the turn and starts from where he has left in his preceding turn. This is continuation of the answer he has started in line no 11. Quite interestingly, Tausif misspells ‘sent’ as ‘sont’. He is well aware of the mistake as a self-repair takes place in line no 15. Although he has misspelled, no repair takes place from Sumon’s part in line no 14. Instead, he picks the turn and agrees with the meaning Tausif wants to convey.

**Excerpt 1.3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tausif</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>total↑ time (.) should be (.) like—</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>three months.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sumon</td>
<td>yea si: ninety days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Tausif</td>
<td>yea ehm:: excluding the holidays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sumon</td>
<td>yea weekdays (.) weekends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>(.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Tausif</td>
<td>yea so here already—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>(.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>uhm::</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>saturday sunday is already—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Sumon</td>
<td>excluded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Tausif</td>
<td>yea: in uh: (.) considered [ here ↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Sumon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td>so you cannot—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Tausif</td>
<td>just↓ I am just checking the option xxxxxxxx.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In excerpt 1.3, Tausif continues with the talk. It is quite evident that Tausif faces difficulty to accomplish the statements. Although the ‘transition-relevant points’ are available, Sumon does not pick the turns on his behalf. As an example, in line 2, Tausif clarifies the total time mentioned in the chart. He says it is ‘three months’. In the next turn, Sumon shows understanding of the prior turn by saying ‘ninety days’. In response to Sumon’s turn, Tausif continues the statement of Sumon giving the meaning. The information he shares with Sumon gives a complete meaning to Sumon’s turn. Accordingly, Sumon also continues his turn explaining what Tausif has said in line 6. In continuation, Tausif carries on his turn, along with his difficulty to accomplish the statements, from line no 7 to 10. Sumon lets Tausif continue the talk. In line no 10, Tausif ends the statement abruptly. In line no 7, he keeps his statement unfinished. Actually, Tausif is trying to reconfirm the meaning he has understood Sumon’s turn. As Sumon has pointed it out that the ‘weekdays’ or ‘weekends’ are excluded, Tausif is also showing his response that he has understood the conveyed meanings. To confirm his understanding, he is trying to say that ‘saturday sunday is already’ excluded. In both cases, he leaves the statement abruptly. In line no 12, Sumon takes the turn to complete the statement with a suitable word. As Sumon shows that he has understood that Tausif is trying to say and is facing problem to clarify the statement for twice, he completes the meaning to the unfinished statement by taking the turn. In response, Tausif confirms that Sumon is quite correct with the meaning he has received and he tries to re-confirm the unfinished statement of his preceding turn. This time we see a hesitation as he faces difficulty to find the proper word he wants to use. The low intonation of his statement suggests his lack of certainty regarding the word he wants to use. Tausif wants to place a suitable synonym to the word ‘excluded’. In doing so, he places a wrong word, ‘inconsider’. As there is no such word as ‘inconsider’ in proper English, Tausif has a hesitation to place the word out. Still, in the next turn, no repair takes place to the word. Instead, Sumon’s confirmation in line no 18 does suggest that he has understood what Tausif wants to say.
Excerpt 2.1

1 Tausif yemm.
2 Sumon look at the slides of how to use the [ gang chart yea hmm ]
3 (0.50)
4 Tausif ok ?
5 (0.50)
6 Sumon and see ↓ what are the ( . ) important parameters
7 (.)
8 (.)
9 hmm.
10 (.)
11 that are studied in the gang chart .
12 (0.50)
13 Tausif hmm.
14 (0.50)

In this excerpt, Sumon tries to show something to Tausif when he says “look at the slides”. As it is evident through the conversation that takes place, Sumon draws the attention of Tausif. In response, Tausif confirms his attention in line no 3. In response, Tausif confirms his understanding after a pause. In the line no 5, Tausif responds to the development that takes place in second line. Now, Sumon takes the turn between the lines no 7 and 11. He shows some details in the computer, as evident through the conversation that take place. As he continues, Tausif does not align with the turn until Sumon has finished his turn in the line no 11. Although a ‘transition-relevance point’ is here in the line no 9, Tausif waits for detail clarification of the statement that take place. At the end of Sumon’s turn, Tausif confirms that he has understood by a ‘super-linguistic expression’ like ‘hmm’.

Excerpt 2.2

1 Sumon The other thing is xxxxx mean to ( . ) a buzzer ↑ on this [ also
2 Tausif yea ]
3 (0.50)
4 Sumon = probably. NEED all to do that ?
In continuation to the preceding talk, Sumon now takes the turn and explains some technical details of the procedure to accomplish the chart-making process. This time, Sumon continues his talk though he has been interrupted or other-initiated repair takes place. In line no 2, Tausif is confirming what Sumon is saying. Sumon takes the turn again and continues. There is an overlap in line no 1 and 2. Still, Sumon carries on the turn. After he finishes his turn in the line no 3, a pause takes place. This marks a ‘transition-relevance point’. Now, in response to the statement shared by Sumon’s following turn, Tausif confirms that he has understood all those things. Here, Tausif continues his talk until it overlaps with Sumon. Interestingly, the turn Tausif has carried out is unfinished. He is interrupted by Sumon. He says ‘‘you just’’. In response, Tausif continues his turn picking his next turn form the word ‘‘just’’. From 7 to 17, we find a long stretch of statements, one after another. Through these lines, he tries to explain
what he understands by the chart. This time, lots of ‘transition-relevant points’ are available to the other participant, but Sumon helps Tausif to keep the turns. For example, in line no 7, the statement ends abruptly. So, Sumon could have picked the turn. In line no 10, Tausif puts a rhetorical question. This also leaves a transition-relevant point, as in the next line, Tausif pauses for a while. It suggests that Sumon can pick the turn if he has wished to. Next, in line no 12, 14, and 16, Tausif continues his talk giving explanation to the procedure. Considerably, line no 13, 15, and 17 follow pauses. This suggests the ‘transition-relevant point’ is still open to the next participant. Finally, Sumon takes the turn in line no 18 with a short ‘super-linguistic’ expression. In the preceding line and after, the same process repeats till the end of the excerpt.

Excerpt 2.3

1  Sumon  the project that you worked on earlier?
2  Tausif  yea.
3  (1.50)
4     this is th::e (.) thing
5     (0.50)
6     and and
7     (0.50)
8     if you want (.) "any" critical path (.) "means this one".
9     (2.50)
10  Sumon  yeehm a critical path will be xxxxlined.
11     (1.50)
12  Tausif  yea (.) um.
13     (1.50)
14     uhmm.
15     (4.50)
16  Sumon  just close it and
17     (1.00)
18     click on view.
19     (0.50)
20     there will be an option xxx critical path.
In excerpt no 2.4, turn-taking also take place as per the mutual understanding of the shared meaning of the utterances. The excerpt starts with a question from Sumon. In its response, Tausif picks the next turn as well as the next few turns. A few pauses are there. Sumon can easily pick the turns, if he has wished to. Still, Tausif carries out the turn as he is striving to reach the meaning to his partner. The statement in the line no 4 and 6 are unfinished. Although the ‘transition-relevance point’ is evident, Sumon waits for a significant, detailed statement from Tausif. As soon as Tausif makes a clear statement of what he is trying to say, Sumon picks the next turn. Before that, there is a huge pause in the line no 15. The preceding lines do confirm that they are engaged with the some developments in the computer as Sumon says ‘close it’. The statement clarifies the situation that they are engaged with the development and the pause stands for their concentration to the actions they are taking, not as a failure to response or pick the turn. From 16 to the end, Sumon carries on the turn as it is quite clear that he is dictating some items to his partner. Although the transition-relevance places do follow pauses, Tausif does not maximize those turns. Evidently, they are focused with the meaning they are sharing through those turns. Although the ‘transition-relevance points’ are available, they utilizes those turns which are essentially assisting to their meaning-building process.
6. Discussion

The analysis of the talk supports the fact that both participants have a mutual understanding of what they are doing and saying. As Schegloff et al (2002 : 5) suggests, people maximize conversations not only with an aim to transfer the information, but also to ‘accomplish’ (ibid. ) the things. Unless, a mutual recognition is established between the participants, it is hardly possible to accomplish the actions in reality. In this case, both participants have shared their turns as per their mutual understanding. Sacks (1984 : 22) suggests every turn takes place in three different ways, first: a speaker selects the next speaker, second: the next speaker selects himself, and third: current speaker continues his turn. The conversation that takes place between Sumon and Tausif mainly follows two turn-procedures. In these excerpts, either the speaker continues his speech or the next speaker selects himself as a speaker even after a ‘transition-relevant point’.

Tausif has often faced difficulty to accomplish the meanings to his statements. His ‘turns’ often end abruptly, switching a statement to another, without finishing the current turn. In those cases, Sumon, his counter-part, have either helped him to co-construct the meaning by giving supporting information through the maximization of his own turn or have left Tausif the freedom to accomplish the meaning he intends to build. The same process is also evident to Sumon’s case. Even in some cases, instead of ‘other repair’ form the next turn of the speaker, ‘self-repair’ occurs from the current speaker. Although the counterpart does not object to the mistakes done by the other party, they maximize the ‘transition-relevant points’ to make the statements more meaningful even if the meaning is already transmitted and received according to the intended meaning of the speaker. In Excerpt no 1.2 and 1.3, there are two examples of ‘transition-relevance points’ where the counter-interlocutor could have maximized the turn on his behalf to repair the mistakes done by the current participant. Instead, either the interlocutor leaves the next-turn to be carried out by the current speaker to have a self-repair or showing consent to the meaning the current speaker has wanted to carry through the statement of his turn. The most important thing is that the participants help each other to build the meaning of the entire conversation through the distribution of their ‘turn-taking systematics’. The process of turn-distribution is quite collaborative as both of the interlocutors are trying to establish meanings to their interaction.
Next, the turns often do follow gaps, pauses, and overlapping. Apparently it seems contradictory that how a conversation be a successful one if the turns follow gaps, pauses and overlapping. In these excerpts, overlapping happens occasionally and the ‘overlap management’ (Schegloff, 2000: 5) of the participants is quite successful to go with the ‘turn-taking systematics’. As the interaction is co-constructing, a resolution is quite evidently found. Apart from this, the most important obstacle which stands against the co-constructive phenomenon of the interaction is the pauses or gaps. This stands against the principle that there is certain ‘order at all points’ during the conversation. As an example, the gap between line no 1 and 3 of excerpt no 1.1 is a strong obstacle to claim that the turn-taking systematics is ordered and consequent. The basic reason to this is the ‘context-sensitiveness’ (Sacks et al: 3) of the conversation. Both participants are using some software programs and having the conversation simultaneously. Thus, this is easy to grasp that the gaps or pauses or overlapping can be a good reason behind the context they are sharing with. The statements also share the fact that they have a due engagement with the development that takes place in their computers along the talk-in-interactions. In the rest of the cases, the principle of ‘order at all points’ have been maintained through the ‘transition-relevance places’. In this regard, the Excerpts like 1.1, 2.2 and 2.3 show the potential answer. In Excerpt no 1.1, Tausif struggles to convey the meanings he wants to share with his partner. In doing so, his ‘turns’ follow a few pauses. In response, Sumon has often left the space quite flexible so that Tausif can establish the intended meaning of his turns. Considering these points, we can conceptualize the co-existence of the gaps and a successful meaningful conversation which takes place through a successful materialization of the ‘transition-relevance points’.

Moreover, the turn-taking system relevant through the entire conversation also points towards the fact that meaning is created through co-participation. The excerpts of these conversations indicate that there is a spontaneous ‘co-construction’ of the meaning. This is extremely bizarre to think that the participants evolve with different meanings at a time. In that case, the meaning the participants do share even through ambiguous utterances and unfinished statements of their turns will lead to two different ends to their meanings. Whenever they are using some ‘superficially linguistic items’, like—‘hmmm’, ‘yea’, ‘uhhh’ or so, to conform the understating of the intended meaning carried by the current speaker of turn, they share the meaning as a co-participant to this meaning-making process. If one interlocutor continues for long
without any response, the talk-in-interaction will not end for long. To cite an example, excerpt no 2.2 (the turns between line no 7 to 17) or excerpt no 2.3 (the turns between 2 and 9) marks the fact that if any participant continues his turn for a long stretch of time, current interlocutor needs to be assured by his next participant that the intended meanings of the statements are conspicuous. Thus, this leads to the conclusion that as a participant of the conversation they do share an ‘interactional competence’ which provides necessary support to create the meaning of the entire interactional process. As all the participants are taking part, either taking the turn or giving silent consent to the continuation of present-speaker’s turn, in the interaction process, they reach a meaning, co-constructed by the ‘turn-systematics’ and ‘transition-relevance points’ that take place all through the talk-in-interaction. Following the argument of Young (2008: 103), even if the participants are not sharing the co-constructing of the meaning, they are part of the meaning-building process as there is no negation to the process they are part of.

In conclusion, the following discussion takes the point into consideration that the meaning co-constructed through the interaction of the participants is inspired by the interactional competence of the participants. Both participants have a well understanding of what they are doing through the conversation. By showing their ability to maximize the transition-relevance places, they have shared a mutual understanding of their meaning-building process. As a participant to the process of this talk-in-interaction, they are co-constructing the intended meaning of this interaction.
References


Appendix

The transcription keys used in this transcription are as follows:

er::: : prolongation of the utterance
[ : overlapping of the utterance of the participants
] : termination of the overlapping
(.) : micro-pause
(0.2) : interval in seconds
YES : exclusively loud sounds than normal utterance
x : inaccessible words
(xx) : observer’s guess
what : translation in English
yaar : word in Hindi
○ ○ : quieter sounds than surrounding talking environment
(() : translator’s note
> < : quicker pace
< > : slower pace
? : rising terminal intonation
. : falling terminal intonation
= : latching between utterances
he : laughter
↑ : rising pitch
↓ : lower pitch
hhh : speaker in-breath
hhh. : speaker out-breath
[skadule] : inaccurate pronunciation of an English word.