Sequence Organization in Interaction

A Primer in Conversation Analysis I

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least potentially relevant to our central preoccupation, although we will not give them any special attention.

Our examination of adjacency pair-based sequences will be organized as follows. First, we will spell out the main features of the basic minimal form of the adjacency pair, and the minimal sequence which it can constitute (pp. 13–27). Second, we will explicate some of the ways in which sequences can expand well beyond the minimal, two-turn sequence which the adjacency pair itself constitutes — pre-expansions (pp. 28–57), insert expansions (pp. 97–114), and post-expansions (pp. 115–68), yielding extensive stretches of talk which nonetheless must be understood as built on the armature of a single adjacency pair, and therefore needing to be understood as expansions of it. In the course of describing these expansions, we will examine a key feature of adjacency pairs — their “preference” structure (pp. 58–96). Third, we will take up larger sequence structures to which adjacency pairs can give rise and of which they may be building-blocks — such as topic-proffering sequences (pp. 169–80), sequence-closing sequences (pp. 181–94), and sequences of sequences (pp. 195–216). Fourth, we will touch on some respects in which sequences and the practices which give rise to them can vary in particular contexts (pp. 220–30), and can be flexibly deployed in ways that give rise to non-canonical forms (pp. 231–250). At the end (pp. 251–64), we will take up some suggestions for using the materials that have been presented so that they can become part of the reader’s analytic resources, ready to be activated by the data you, the reader, have occasion to examine.

2 The adjacency pair as the unit for sequence construction

We begin with the most elementary features of adjacency pairs and their basic mode of operation.

In its minimal, basic unexpanded form an adjacency pair is characterized by certain features. It is:

(a) composed of two turns
(b) by different speakers
(c) adjacent
(d) these two turns are relatively ordered; that is, they are differentiated into “first pair parts” (FPPs, or Fs for short) and “second pair parts” (SPPs, or Ss for short). First pair parts are utterance types such as question, request, offer, invitation, announcement, etc. — types which initiate some exchange. Second pair parts are utterance types such as answer, grant, reject, accept, decline, agree/disagree, acknowledge, etc. — types which are responsive to the action of a prior turn (though not everything which is responsive to something else is an S). Besides being differentiated into Fs and Ss, the components of an adjacency pair are
(e) pair-type related; that is, not every second pair part can properly follow any first pair part. Adjacency pairs compose pair types; types are exchanges such as greeting—greeting, question—answer, offer—accept/decline, and the like. To compose an adjacency pair, the FPP and SPP come from the same pair type. Consider such FPPs as “Hello,” or “Do you know what time it is?,” or “Would you like a cup of coffee?” and such SPPs as “Hi,” or “Four o’clock,” or “No, thanks.” Parties to talk-in-interaction do not just pick some SPP to respond to an FPP; that would yield such absurdities as “Hello,” “No, thanks,” or “Would you like a cup of coffee?,” “Hi.” The components of adjacency pairs

1 Schegloff and Sacks (1973:295–96). A major resource on the adjacency pair may be found in the Sacks lectures for spring 1972 (Sacks, 1992b:521–69); another early treatment is Schegloff (1968). Jefferson and Schenkel (1978) take a different view of what the minimal unexpanded unit of sequence organization is and what should be treated as expanded. What they treat as “unexpanded” is what will be later treated here as “minimally post-expanded,” and involves the addition of a third turn. The Jefferson and Schenkel analysis is compelling for the data which they examine, but those data represent but one configuration of sequence organization, through which a particular kind of interactional dynamic is pursued. The account offered here is designed for different goals and, in particular, for more extended and general scope. It should be compatible with the Jefferson and Schenkel account for sequences of the type they address.
are “typologized” not only into first and second pair parts, but into the pair types which they can partially compose: greeting–greeting (“Hello,” “Hi”), question-answer (“Do you know what time it is?”, “Four o’clock”), offer-accept/decline (“Would you like a cup of coffee?”, “No, thanks,” if it is declined).

The basic practice or rule of operation, then, by which the minimal form of the adjacency pair is produced is: given the recognizable production of a first pair part, on its first possible completion its speaker should stop, a next speaker should start (often someone selected as next speaker by the FPP), and should produce a second pair part of the same pair type. The product of this practice and these features may be represented schematically in a very simple transcript diagram:

A. First Pair Part
B. Second Pair Part

None of these features – (a)–(c) above and the basic rule of operation – is rigid or invariant, and they all require some elaboration. As part of their exploitation as a resource for sequence construction, adjacency pair-based sequences can come to have more than two turns (though still two basic parts), they can be separated by intervening talk (what will be discussed later as insert expansions), they can on occasion be articulated by the same speaker as a way of conveying two “voices” (though this use relies on the basic property that Fs and Ss are produced by different speakers), some utterance types can be used as both Fs and Ss (for example, complaint can be used to initiate a sequence but also in response to an inquiry; an offer can be an FPP but also a response to a complaint) and, under specified circumstances, as both Fs and Ss at the same time (as when someone asks you to repeat your question, and you do – thereby doing both an F and a S in granting their request and an F, since in doing so you re-ask your question, etc. In the next several pages, we take up a number of observations about the minimal, basic unit, the adjacency pair, which elaborate its features and explore some of its flexibility.

**Adjacency, nextness, contiguity, progressivity**

Among the most pervasively relevant features in the organization of talk-and-other-conduct-in-interaction is the relationship of adjacency or “nextness.” The default relationship between the components of most kinds of organization is that each should come next after the prior. In articulating a turn-constructual unit, each element – each word, for example – should come next after the one before; in fact, at a smaller level of granularity, each syllable – indeed, each sound – should come next after the one before it.

So also with the several turn-constructual units that compose a multi-unit turn; so also with the consecutive turns that compose a spate of talk; so also with the turns that compose a sequence, etc. Moving from some element to a hearably-next-one with nothing intervening is the embodiment of, and the measure of, progressivity. Should something intervene between some element and what is hearable as a the next one due – should something violate or interfere with their contiguity, whether next sound, next word, or next turn – it will be heard as qualifying the progressivity of the talk, and will be examined for its import, for what understanding should be accorded it. Each next element of such a progress can be inspected to find out how it renews the understanding-so-far of what has preceded, or favors one or more of the several such understandings that are being entertained, or how it requires reconfiguration of that understanding. For our purposes in this book, what will matter most is the relationship between successive turns; and what matters most immediately is the difference between the adjacent turns relationship on the one hand and adjacency pairs on the other.

The relationship of adjacency or “nextness” between turns is central to the ways in which talk-in-interaction is organized and understood. Next turns are understood by co-participants to display their speaker’s understanding of the just-prior turn and to embody an action responsive to the just-prior turn so understood (unless the turn has been marked as addressing something other than just-prior turn). This is in large measure because of the way turn-taking for conversation works; namely, one turn at a time – and, specifically, exclusively next turn allocation. That is, each turn comes to possible completion and transition to another speaker becomes possibly relevant; it is transition to a next speaker that is at issue. If the turn is to be allocated by the current speaker selecting someone, it is next speaker that is being selected; and no selection by just-ending speaker is done and another participant self-selects, it is for the next turn that they are self-selecting. However this contingency is handled, each participant has to have been attending to the just-ongoing-about-to-be-possibly-complete turn to determine (a) if he or she has been selected as next speaker, or (b) if anyone has been selected as next speaker in order to determine whether they can properly self-select as next speaker, and (c) what action(s) are implicated by the just-ending turn, relative to which any next turn will be understood. Each next turn, then, is examined for the understanding of the prior turn which it displays, and the kind of response which it embodies, and this is endemic to the organization of conversation without respect to adjacency pairs. The

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2 Note that this discussion is focused on conversation in particular. Because different organizations of turn-taking can characterize different speech-exchange systems (Sacks et al., 1974/701 n. 11, 729–31), anything that is grounded in turn-taking organization may vary with differences in the turn-taking organization. It is a matter for empirical inquiry, therefore, how the matters taken up in the text are appropriately described in non-convosational settings of talk-in-interaction, for example, in courtrooms-in-session, in traditional classrooms, etc.
adjacency relationship taken up in this paragraph operates most powerfully backwards, each turn displaying its speaker's understanding of the prior.

The adjacency pair relationship is a further organization of turns, over and above the effects which sequential organization invests in adjacency per se. Adjacency pair organization has (in addition to the backwards import just described) a powerful prospective operation. A first pair part projects a prospective relevance, and not only a retrospective understanding. It makes relevant a limited set of possible second pair parts, and thereby sets some of the terms by which a next turn will be understood — as, for example, being responsive to the constraints of the first pair part or not. And, as we shall see, the adjacency pair relationship invests a specially indicative import in the relationship of contiguity between first and second pair parts. Even if they are in adjacent turns — that is, no turn intervene between them — other sorts of elements may be counted as obstructing or violating their contiguity, with considerable interactional import being attached to such a positioning.

### Alternative second pair parts

Most adjacency pair types have alternative types of second pair part, a matter to be discussed in Chapter 5 under the rubric "preference organization." But some sequence types (a very few) seem to have only one type of second pair part. The prototypes here are greetings and farewells or terminal exchanges ("bye byes"). Although there may be a variety of greeting forms with which to respond ("Hello," "Hi," "Hiya," "Howdy," etc.), and a responder may have a favorite or signature, or aim to return the same as was received (or different), these are not alternative types of response; they all reciprocate the greeting. And the same is the case for terminal exchanges ("Bye," "Seeya," "Ciao," "Cheers," "Later," etc.). Actually, with great regularity greetings and their responses are done with the same form ("Hi," "Hi"), as are farewells ("Bye," "Bye"), and we may note that, where there are not alternative types of SPP, the actual SPP utterance frequently is not different from the FPP (at least in its lexical composition). But, with very few exceptions, there are alternative types of SPP with which to respond to an FPP.

### Counters

There are alternatives to doing an appropriate SPP next after an FPP, and they will be taken up as part of our discussion of sequence expansion (and in particular, insert expansion, in Chapter 6). Virtually all such alternatives to an SPP in next turn are understood as deferring the doing of an SPP until a bit later, and are done in the service of a later SPP. But there is one alternative to an SPP in next turn whose effect is quite different, and it requires mention at this point. That next turn is the "counter"; that is, before (or without) responding with an SPP to the just completed FPP, the same FPP (or a closely related modification of it) is redirected to the one who just did it.

A familiar experience may exemplify this tack anecdotally, before a display of more determinate empirical instances. Readers may recall emerging with a companion from some entertainment or cultural event — a movie, performance, exhibit, etc. — especially one testing the boundaries of familiarity, and asking, "Well, what did you think?" or "How did you like it?" and getting back not an answer, but instead, "How did you like it?" or "What did you think?" or just "How about you?" These are counters; they do not serve to defer the answering of the question (though the one doing the counter may end up answering later nonetheless); they replace it with a question of their own. They thus reverse the direction of the sequence and its flow; they reverse the direction of constraint.

Here are several empirical instances. In the first, a mother and her child of just over a year and a half are looking at a children's picture book together:

(2.01) Tarplee, 1991:1

1. Chi: F  →  What's this
2. Mom: Fons  →  orrm (...) yulu t'ell me: what is it
3. Chi:  →  ["() "]
4.  
5. Chi: S  →  gzi:bra
6. Mom:  →  zgbra: yes

In line 1, the child has asked a question (an FPP), but in the next turn the mother does neither an answer nor a form of turn which projects later answering of the question. Rather, she redirects the same question back to the asker, for its asker to answer. Nor does she herself answer the question later.

The second instance is taken from a psychotherapeutic session:

(2.02) Schefflen, 1961:114, as adapted in Peyrot, 1994:17

1. Pat: F  →  Do you think I'm insane now.
2. Doc: Fons  →  Do you think so?
3. Pat: S  →  No, of course not.
4. Doc:  →  But I think you are.

In this exchange, the doctor does end up answering (at line 4) the question which the patient asked, and so his redirecting it to the patient and getting an answer (at lines 2–3) ends up having only deferred the answer, and inserted one question-answer exchange inside another. But, following the sequence, as the participants did, in real time, when the doctor's question was asked at line 2, it did not project a later answer. It redirected the question, and could easily have been used to launch a line of inquiry by the doctor (e.g., at line
4. “Why not,” etc., or “Why did you ask me then,” etc.). Again, then, the
counter reverses the direction of the sequence.
In the third instance, Vic is a janitor/custodian, socializing with buddies
in a local used-furniture store. His wife Carol comes to the door and “calls
him” (lines 4–5).

(2.03) US, 3:10-23 [previously appeared as (1.06)]
1 Mike: jum wan’ home, [‘when y’wen over there]
2 Vic: [ I didn’ go by theh.]
3 Vic: I left my garbage pail in in [hallway.-
4 Car: [Vic,]
5 Car: [Vic(tuh),
6 Vic: =Yeh?
7 Car: F ➔ C’monere for a minnit.
8 Vic: F➔ C’tel me how.
(0.7)
9 Vic: Y’come here. [please?
10 Car: [You c’come back,
11 Vic: I haft go t’the bathroom.=
12 Car: =Oh.
13 (3.5)

When Vic responds from a distance (line 6), Carol asks him to detach
himself from his friends and come closer (line 7); this is a first pair part—a
request. What it requests is a physically realized action, not one implemented
by an utterance (though it is not uncommon that, when such a requested
action is done next by the recipient of the request, it is accompanied by
some utterance—for example, a compliance token such as “sure”). Such
requested physically enacted actions are under the same constraints as talk-
embodied ones would be: the first pair part makes relevant the occurrence of
an appropriate second pair part, which should come “next.” In this episode,
however, what comes next is not Vic’s compliance with the request, not the
projected second pair part, but rather a counter; he reverses the sequence
(line 9), and makes Carol the recipient of the same request she had directed
to him.

In the fourth instance, Tony has called his ex-wife Marsha about the
return of their teenage son Joey, who ordinarily lives with him, after the
son’s holiday visit to his mother in a city some four hundred miles away.

(2.04) MDE-MTRAC: 60-1/2, 1
1 ring
2 Mar: Hollo!
3 Ton: Hi: Marsha?
4 Mar: Ya:ah.
5 Ton: How are you.
6 Mar: Fine.
7
8 Mar: F ➔ Did Joey get home yet?
9 Ton: F➔ Well I wz wondering when ’e left.

In this exchange, Marsha’s question to Tony at line 8 is not followed by
an answer, even though an answer may be understood to be conveyed by
implication in the following turn. Instead of answering, Tony asks his own
question, a version of the same question but as seen from the point of view of
the destination of a trip rather than from its point of origin. In effect, then, this
is a counter to Marsha’s question, and it is Marsha who ends up answering,
not Tony (nor does Tony answer later). Here again, the counter reverses the
direction of the sequence, and it reverses the direction of constraint.

What does that mean, “reverses the direction of constraint”? In order to
make clear what is meant by “reversing the direction of constraint,” we need
to take up what we call “relevance rules,” because the adjacency pair is one
main locus of relevance rules, one place in talk-in-interaction where they
have a specially notable bearing. Because this is an important topic in its
own right, we will linger on it a bit, but the discussion will come back to
the sense of “reversing the direction of constraint.”

Relevance rules and negative observations

The organization of turn-taking provides a way (for co-participants
and for us as external observers) to say non-trivially that someone in
particular is not speaking, when in fact no one at all is speaking. It is by virtue
of a “rule” or “practice” having been invoked or activated which makes it
relevant for that particular “someone” to be talking. Even though no one
is talking, it is the relevance introduced by a prior speaker having selected
someone as next speaker that makes that person be specifically singled out
as not talking, even when there is general silence.

But this is just a special case of a much more general issue, one concerning
what we will call “negative observations.” There is an indefinitely large and
extendable number of things that have not been said, of events that have
not happened, of persons who are not speaking, of actions that are not
being performed by someone who is speaking. This paragraph has not so
far reported who won the American Presidential election in 1992, or 1998,
or . . ., etc. Any asserted observation of an absence is at risk of being
but one of a virtual infinity of absent occurrences or activities, and in that
sense a trivial observation or assertion (however true). For the noting of an
absence to be non-trivial, we need a “relevance rule” that makes it relevant
for something to happen or be done or be mentioned, etc. Then, if it does not
happen (or is not done or is not mentioned, etc.), it is "missing" in a different sense than the sense in which everything that does not happen is missing, and with a different import. We can then speak of it as a "noticeable absence" or an "official absence" or a "relevant absence." Negative observations imply relevant absences, and relevant absences imply relevance rules. Noticing that someone in particular is not speaking constitutes a claim of sorts that this is a relevant absence (as set against the non-speaking of everyone else), and turns on some relevance rule that makes it so — such as a prior speaker having selected the noticed one as next speaker. The turn-taking organization, then, constitutes (among other things) a set of relevance rules.

Adjacency pair organization is also a major locus of relevance rules. What relates first and second pair parts can be termed a relationship of "conditional relevance." "First" and "second" do not refer merely to the order in which these turns happen to occur; they refer to design features of these turn types and sequential positions. The very feature of "first-ness" sets up the relevance of something else to follow; it projects the relevance of a "second." It is the occurrence of a first pair part that makes some types of second pair part relevant next; that relevance is conditioned by the FPP. If such a second pair part is produced next, it is heard as responsive to the first pair part which preceded. If such a second pair part is not produced next, its non-occurrence is as much an event as its occurrence would have been. It is, so to speak, noticeably, officially, consequentially, absent. The relevance of some turn type which can be a second pair part is conditional on the occurrence of a first pair part from the same pair type. Often enough, the person who can be observed (relevantly) to be "not talking" (by reference to the turn-taking rules) can be heard as well to be "not answering" when their "non-talking" follows a prior utterance which was a question. Thus, the silence in a room can nonetheless often be characterized (and, in the first instance, heard) specifically for who is not talking, and what kind of talk they are not doing. The first of these is furnished by turn-taking organization, the second by adjacency pair organization, and specifically by hearing to be missing the kind of second pair part (or some kind of second pair part) made relevant by a just-preceding first pair part.

But relevance rules contribute not only to how silences get heard, but also to how the talk itself gets heard. Just as not talking after a question can thus be "not answering," so a great variety of talk after a question invites hearing as, and does get heard as, "answering" (even if, on occasion, "answering indirectly"). Academic inquiry is sometimes puzzled by how some apparently semantically unrelated talk gets heard as an answer, especially when trying to build the "artificial intelligence" for computers to answer questions "naturally" or to recognize answers. (For example, how can "It's raining" — or even "Isn't it raining?" — be a recognizable answer to "Are we going to the game?") What is critical here is that the action which some talk is doing can be grounded in its position, not just its composition — not just the words that compose it, but its placement after a question. Talk after a question invites hearing for how it could be answering, and invites it from those who can bring all the particulars of the setting to bear, rather than by some general rules of interpretation. Just as the questioner presents a puzzle of sorts to its recipient, so does the one who responds; that challenge is, "how is this an answer?" and "what answer is it?" At the same time, doing something which is analyzable/recognizable as a relevant second pair part is its speaker's way of showing an understanding that the prior turn was the sort of first pair part for which this is a relevant second. Doing something which can be an answer displays an understanding of the prior turn as a possible question.

Adjacency pairs organize with special potency these relevance rules, which can imbue the talk following a first pair part with its sense or meaning, and can imbue the absence of talk with sense or meaning or import as well. Given, via the turn-taking organization, that the absence of talk can be an event in its own right, the adjacency pair's relevance rules imbue it with a specifiable action import. The first pair part thus sets powerful constraints of action (what the recipient should do) and of interpretation (how what the recipient does should be understood) on the moments just following it. Relevance rules are a key part of the glue that binds actions together into coherent sequences.

The earlier observation that counters following first pair parts "reverse the direction of constraint" should now be more readily accessible. The recipient of some first pair part is put under certain constraints by it — either to do a relevant second pair part, or be heard as "not doing" such a relevant second pair part. We will see in Chapter 6 that recipients of first pair parts are not without resources for dealing with these constraints. But for now we should notice that "counters" take the very constraints that were just cast on the recipient of the first pair part and shift them back onto its speaker; they "reverse the direction of constraint."

**Upshot**

What relevance rules do, then, is to set the initial terms for conduct and interpretation in the next moments following their invocation. They do not define those next moments and what occurs in them; virtually nothing in interaction is that unilateral. But it is by reference to a first pair part that what follows gets selected, done, and understood. The first pair part casts a web of meaning and interpretation which informs the surrounding talk. But "surrounding talk" can include more than just second pair parts. As we bring under examination more of the sequences which can grow out of adjacency pairs, we will see how much more, and where.
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. 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.

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) T2G, 1:01-04
1  ring
2 Ava: \H'illo?\n3 Bee: F → \Hi!
4 Ava: S → \Hi?
5 Bee: hHowuh you?

(3.02) MEK-MTRAC 60-1/2,1 (previously 2.04)
1  ring
2 Mar: Hello?
3 Ton: Hi: Marsha?
4 Mar: Yeeah.
5 Ton: F → How are you?
6 Mar: S → Pi::me.
7 (0.2)
8 Mar: Did Joey get home yet?
9 Ton: Well I wz wondering when 'e left...

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 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 Ileno 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- o- than:ks: anyway Charlie.
2 Cha: Ri:ght.
3 Ile: Ok: ya?
4 Cha: Ok:ly,
5 Ile: F → Ta:ke keyuh
6 Cha: S → Speak tih you [ ]
7 Ile: F → Bye ya.
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. 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)is good.
3 (0.2)
4 Ru?: ((cough)) (H) (H) UH 'hhhh=
5 Car: =0(h)ne des(h)erves it. ((hoarse voice))
6 (0.2)

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. Here speaks with a marked New York City accent, and 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.
7 (?): Tch 'hh='
8 Car: F I'll see you all later,
9 Rut: S Aright,
10 ((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 Gill'. I hafta study 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 huh hih hih hih hih hih-hhee-yee hhee e] [aah=
2 Nan: [eh-hhh-hhh-nhh hnh hnh n h n h h n hhh hnh] hnh
3 Sha: =aah aah
4 ((0.5))
5 Sh?: "hhe"
6 ((.)
7 Sha: (Hih ).
8 Mic: he-he.
9 Sha: (Hih ).
10 ((2.3))
11 Mic: F Nance kin you -kin you cut my chicken.
12 ((0.3))

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.²

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 
familiar, and even intimate, 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.

A First pair part

   ← Pre-expansion

B Second pair part

   ← Insert expansion

   ← 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 
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 
only 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.

¹ And in the annotation of the data extracts, the base pair will be marked by the subscript “b” 
(a₁ and s₁), 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.

² 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.