

## **Can Lexical Priming be detected in conversation turn-taking strategies?**

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Turn-taking strategies in spoken communication have been widely researched and discussed in recent literature (see, e.g. McCarthy, 1998, Myers: 2009; Archer et al, 2012). Taking turns refers to when the first speaker indicates that they have finished their part of the conversation and subsequently open the floor for another speaker and, conversely, for a conversation partner to realize they can start speaking without interrupting or appearing to be impolite

There are many prosodic, non-lexical indicators used, such as the the phonetic pointers employed by English speakers (cf. Yngve, 1970; Duncan, Jr. 1972; Knowles, 1987; Rod Gardner, 2001). Furthermore, the issue has been addressed with reference to pragmatics (see, amongst others, McCarthy, 1998; Myers: 2009; Archer et al, 2012). While anecdotal evidence, careful listening in fact, might hint at what constitute markers within conversation, a more empirical approach can be found where corpus-based evidence is used as a point of reference, as in Tao (2003), Carter & McCarthy (2006), and O'Keeffe et al (2007), and others.

This paper will look in how far the concept of textual colligation (cf. Hoey, 2015, p.13) can be applied to the production of casually spoken material. It must be noted that textual colligation has so far only been demonstrated for written texts, though it is predicted to apply to turn-taking (see McCarthy, 2010 or Evison, 2012, for details). Hoey links the subconscious process of textual colligation to the phenomenon known as Lexical Priming – where speakers and listeners are primed through repeat exposure (cf. Hoey, 2005; Pace-Sigge, 2013) of a word or set of words: primes signal what can be expected next.

When looking at evidence of signals of turn-endings or turn-starts, however, the nature of spoken language presents a number of clear difficulties (cf. Halliday, 2004). The issue becomes difficult when one tries to find clear lexical signals of either turn-givers or turn-takers in a transcript. While there are a large number of turns between speakers in any conversation, there is no direct correlation between a clearly defined set of words and the length of turns. This is partly due to the mental processing power of any speaker and the online nature of conversations (cf. Cheng, 2012, pp. 13f.) and partly due to the nature of free-flowing, casual dialogue between (fairly) equal parties, which follows no fixed norm (unlike formal dialogues or conversations between unequal parties – for example doctor-patient, teacher-student).

Yet, following the tenets of psychological priming that form the basis of Hoey's lexical priming theory, some kind of trigger item should be in evidence, showing a listener that a turn is given up. Levinson and Torreira suggest a form of "long range prediction in comprehension" (2015). Likewise, the first speaker should receive a notification whether the listener is prepared to either forgo or take the turn. When we look at the lexis employed, informal speech appears, on first sight, too anarchic to employ a formulaic, standardised protocol. In order to facilitate smooth and fluent conversation, turn-taking must, however, follow a structured recognisable pattern.

Following research presented by Evison (2012), this paper will a) describe some salient signals used that become apparent when monologues are directly compared with dialogues. The paper then focuses on b) lexical items that appear to be prevalent triggers

to hand over a turn or markers of turn-starts. The research presented here shows preference or dispreference for select categories of words and key items. Key items have been found to be prevalent at the start and end of turns; these items appear with a statistically significantly higher rate of occurrence.

Based on this it will be argued that turn-taking does appear to follow a structured, recognisable pattern, lexically, in order to facilitate conversation.

The material used for this investigation will be exclusively British English spoken data. The corpora used for this investigation are the section of the SCO Corpus (2013) which has clearly identifiable turns, the Lancaster SWAT corpus (2003) and the 2009 "Linguistic Innovators Corpus" (LIC) of young and older speakers in both Hackney and Havering (i.e. North London and a part of 'Greater London'). This third sub-corpus presents the largest part of the data and the largest number of turns identified.

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## Corpora

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(Gabrielatos,C., Torgersen, E., Hoffmann,S. & Fox,S.: 2010) – for details see <http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fss/projects/linguistics/innovators/>  
Material kindly provided by Paul Kerswill.  
*The Scouse – Liverpool English – Corpus* (SCO). 2013. For details see Pace-Sigge (2013) above.