Beyond the adjacency pair*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the descriptive power of the *adjacency pair* as a basic unit of conversational organization. It applies the notion to the analysis of conversational data and points out that there are utterances which are important contributions to the conversation and yet for which the notion fails to account. They are utterances which are not the component parts of an adjacency pair and yet form a bounded unit with it. This raises the question of which is more adequate as a basic unit of conversational organization: a *three-part exchange* or an *adjacency pair*? This article proposes that it is the former, based on the observation that the third part of an exchange is a very important element of conversational interaction, and that when it does not occur, it is often withheld for social or strategic reasons. The article argues for the nontrivial absence of the third part by showing its relevance of occurrence (Sacks 1972:342). An investigation is made of its functions by examining where, when, and why it does not occur, and where, when, and why it does occur in conversation. The discussion is exemplified by face-to-face and telephone conversation data. (Sociolinguistics, ethnomethodology, discourse analysis, pragmatics)

INTRODUCTION

In examining conversational organization, Schegloff and Sacks (1973) noticed that there is a class of sequences which is widely operative. It consists of the following features: (1) two-utterance length, (2) adjacent positioning of component utterances, (3) different speakers producing each utterance, (4) the component utterances being related to each other in such a way that the first component is a *first pair part*, the second a *second pair part*, and they form a *pair type*. Schegloff and Sacks call such utterances an *adjacency pair*. *Question-answer, greeting-greeting, offer-acceptance/refusal* are some examples of adjacency pairs, the basic rule of operation of which, as stated by Schegloff and Sacks (1973:296), is: "Given the recognizable production of a first pair part, on its first possible completion its speaker should stop and a
next speaker should start and produce a second pair part from the pair type of which the first is recognizably a member.”

The concept of an adjacency pair as a description of conversational sequencing and an organizational unit has been questioned. For example, some of the conditions have been criticized as being too strongly stated. A first pair part is not necessarily followed immediately by a second pair part, as in the case of an insertion sequence (Schegloff 1972:76–79); the two pair parts are not necessarily produced by two different speakers, as in the case of a speaker answering his or her own question (see, e.g., Coulthard [1977] 1986; Goffman 1976; Levinson 1983; Ventola 1987). This article focuses on the question of an adjacency pair as a basic unit of conversational interaction. It observes that there are certain utterances in conversation that are not component utterances of an adjacency pair and yet they form a bounded unit with it. This raises the question of whether the basic interactional unit is the adjacency pair, as is widely accepted, or a potential three-part exchange. This article proposes that it is the latter. It justifies the relevance of occurrence (Sacks 1972:342) of the third part of an exchange by discussing its pragmatic functions and accounting for its absence when it is not found in conversation. The discussion is illustrated with data from telephone and face-to-face conversations.

**ADJACENCY PAIRS VERSUS THREE-PART EXCHANGES**

Let us start by applying the notion of an adjacency pair to the following frequently occurring kind of conversational interaction.

\[(1)\quad A: \text{Can you close the door please?} \quad (1\text{st pair part})
B: \text{Sure. (+NV)} \quad (2\text{nd pair part})
\rightarrow A: \text{Thanks.} \quad (? \text{ ? ?})\]

The three parts in the exchange are coherent and form a bounded conversational unit. If we analyzed them in terms of adjacency pairs, we would have difficulties in characterizing A's second utterance. It is not a second pair part because it follows a second pair part, nor is it a first pair part because it does not invite a second pair part. Yet, it is a very important contribution to the interaction. As Goffman (1971) pointed out, it is a display of gratitude for the service rendered (which Goffman referred to as an appreciation) which not only shows that A is fully aware of the virtual offense committed by asking B to close the door and the favor rendered but also informs B that the generosity is appreciated (see Goffman 1971:141–42, see also Goffman 1976:265).

The unsatisfactoriness of the adjacency pair in accounting for conversational data such as in Example (1) has already been noted by Goffman (1976):
BEYOND THE ADJACENCY PAIR

A response will on occasion leave matters in a ritually unsatisfactory state, and a turn by the initial speaker will be required, encouraged, or at least allowed, resulting in a three-part interchange; or chains of adjacency pairs will occur (albeit typically with one, two, or three such couplets), the chain itself having a unitary, bounded character. (1976:272) (See also his formulation of supportive exchanges and four-part remedial exchanges [1971: 62–187] and also the treatment of those by Owen [1983:49–103].)

Goffman also pointed out that sometimes what appears to be a two-part interchange, or an adjacency pair, is in fact a three-move interchange. For example:

(2) (Goffman 1976:390)
   A: [Enters wearing a new hat]
   B: No, I don't like it.
   A: Now I know it's right.

Here, B's utterance is not a statement (a first part) but rather a response (a second part) to A's wearing a new hat. Hence, taking into account the non-linguistic first part, we have a three-move interchange. Goffman further noted: “Bringing together these various arguments about the admixture of spoken and nonlinguistic moves, we can begin to see how misleading the notion of adjacency pair and ritual interchange may be as basic units of interaction” (1976:290).

Goffman, however, did not regard this insightful observation as a basis for analysis in itself but made it in passing. In the latter part of the same article, he noted that a first pair part can be followed by anything since it cannot put total constraint on the occurrence and the actual content of a second pair part. The next speaker always has the freedom to choose to attend to the first pair part, raise a question in relation to it, or ignore it altogether and introduce something new. Furthermore, Goffman proposed it is very often hard to distinguish a statement from a response because a response can be so tenuously related to the immediate statement that it can be taken as a statement and a statement can be so closely guided by how it fits into the current topic of talk that it can be taken as a response. Therefore, he concluded:

our basic model for talk perhaps ought not to be dialogic couplets and their chaining, but rather a sequence of response moves with each in the series carving out its own reference, and each incorporating a variable balance of function in regard to statement–reply properties. In the right setting, a person next in line to speak can elect to deny the dialogic frame, accept it, or carve out such a format when none is apparent. This formulation would finally allow us to give proper credit to the flexibility of talk. . . . (1976:293–94)
Goffman was right insofar as he pointed out that conversations often do not proceed in a tidy fashion. A statement is not necessarily followed by or addressed to an immediately expected response, and a response may not be responding to the preceding statement – it could be responding to only an aspect of it or to nonlinguistic elements in the environment. However, Goffman’s initial observation of a three-part interchange, in which the first part may be unspoken, is still valid as a basic model of conversational organization because it is socially motivated and adequately captures the structural relation between each element (spoken or unspoken) of an interchange. And it is this relation in terms of what is expected to occur upon the production of one element that enables us to interpret what actually occurs in conversation. As Berry (1982) pointed out:

a rule such as A predicts B is not to be taken as a claim that A always will be followed by B; it is a claim that A will always be expected to be followed by B and that whatever does follow A will be interpreted in the light of this expectation. (38)

Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), in analyzing the sequencing pattern in classroom discourse, made an observation similar to Goffman’s initial one. They pointed out that classroom discourse is typically organized in terms of three-part exchanges: an initiation from the teacher followed by a response from the pupil which in turn is followed by a feedback from the teacher which evaluates the response provided by the pupil. (The third move is later revised to a follow-up move.) An exchange which consists of two parts is perceived as the marked form in which the third part is withheld for strategic reasons.

Mishler (1975), in a study of the structure of natural conversation in first grade classrooms, made a similar proposal: a basic unit of conversation is a three-part unit which is a sequence of three successive utterances initiated by an utterance, including a question, from the first speaker, followed by a response from the second speaker, and terminated by a further utterance from the first speaker. He further pointed out that the question-answer sequence, which is widely accepted as an appropriate and coherent unit of communication, may be applicable to testing and interview situations but is totally inapplicable in “more ‘open’ natural conversation” (1975:33). He argued that just as a question demands a response, a response also demands a further response from the questioner. This further response, according to Mishler, is “a ‘sign’ on the part of the questioner that his question has received a response, adequate or inadequate, appropriate or inappropriate” (1975:32).

Burton (1981:63), however, asserted that three-part exchanges are highly classroom specific because the follow-up move hardly occurs outside the classroom. She argued that a three-part exchange like the following is deviant in nonclassroom discourse:

548
BEYOND THE ADJACENCY PAIR

(3) A: What's the time please?
    B: Three o'clock.
    *A: Well done.

Burton maintained that if a follow-up move does occur in casual conversation, it will be used as a sarcastic device.

Berry (1981:123) disagreed with Burton's claim that the follow-up move seldom occurs in nonclassroom discourse. She suggested that it occurs frequently not only in speech events like quizzes but also in adult leisure conversations when solving puzzles. She further asserted that in certain types of nonclassroom exchange, the follow-up move is obligatory, whereas in others it is optional, and that it is necessary to distinguish between them. She proposed that the distinguishing criterion is which of the two interlocuters is the primary knower. For example:

(4) (Berry 1981:122)
    I Quizmaster: In England, which cathedral has the tallest spire?
    R Contestant: Salisbury.
    →F Quizmaster: Yes.

(5) (Berry 1981:122)
    I Son: Which English cathedral has the tallest spire?
    R Father: Salisbury.
    →F Son: Oh.

According to Berry, the follow-up move in (4) is obligatory, whereas that in (5) is optional because, in the former, the quizmaster is the primary knower and therefore a follow-up move to evaluate or confer the correctness of the response provided is necessary. In the latter, however, because the son is the secondary knower, there is no need, or rather, he is not in a position to evaluate or confer the correctness of the response. The correctness of the information provided in the response is already conferred upon by the father, who is the primary knower. Hence, the follow-up move is optional.

One can go further than this and ask: Is talk organized basically in terms of two-part adjacency pairs or three-part exchanges? Which is the more adequate as a basic unit of conversational organization?

In order to answer these questions, we need to look at the function of the third part of an exchange, or the follow-up move. From the debate described earlier, it is apparent that the function of the follow-up move is perceived as evaluative (except perhaps for Mishler 1975, in which the function of the third move is more general than evaluating the response). If providing an evaluation of the correctness of information supplied in the response were indeed the only function of this third move, then I would agree with Burton's observation that it seldom occurs outside the classroom (except for speech events such as quizzes or puzzle-solving sessions, as pointed out by Berry). We do not usually go around asking questions to which we already have an answer. However, is providing an evaluation the only function of the follow-up move, or is it just one of the realizations of a more general function?
AMY B. M. TSUI

Mehan (1979) noted that the third component in a three-part sequence which occurs in classroom discourse is different from that which occurs in everyday conversations. For example:

(6) (Mehan 1979:194)
   A: What time is it, Denise?
   B: Two thirty.
   →A: Very good, Denise.

(7) (Mehan 1979:194)
   A: What time is it, Denise?
   B: Two thirty.
   →A: Thank you, Denise.

He asserted that while the third component in (6) evaluates the content of the response, that in (7) seems to be more an acknowledgment of the previous reply than an evaluation of it (see Mehan 1979:194).

Berry (1987:47), on examining three-move exchanges in doctor–patient interviews, observed that third moves of these exchanges are usually different in character from those of classroom exchanges – they do not have an evaluative function. For example:

(8) (Coulthard & Ashby 1976:80)
   Doctor: How long have you had those for?
   Patient: Well I had’m a week last Wednesday.
   →Doctor: A week last Wednesday.

(9) (Coulthard & Montgomery 1981:21)
   Doctor: How long have you had these quick pains on the right side of your head?
   Patient: Well again when this trouble started.
   →Doctor: Again for about two years.

Berry commented: “And intuitively, one feels that they are not so much commenting on the quality of the patient’s reply as acts of noting and/or reinterpreting the reply for the doctor’s own benefit” (1987:48). As we can see, that the follow-up move has functions other than making an evaluation of the response has already been noted. To the best of my knowledge, however, no detailed investigation of its functions has been made.

PRAGMATIC MOTIVATION OF THE FOLLOW-UP MOVE

Let us begin with a consideration of the pragmatic motivation for the follow-up move. Discourse is an interactive process during which the meaning and illocutionary force of utterances are negotiated between the speaker and the addressee, not an interchange of utterances with speaker-determined illocutionary forces (see Franck 1981:226). Hence, the initiating utterance that the speaker produces is subject to the interpretation of the addressee, who displays his or her interpretation in the response. However, the interaction does not stop there. The addressee may need to know whether the speaker has understood his or her response, whether the response is acceptable, and whether
the addressee has correctly interpreted the speaker’s utterance. This may require a further contribution from the speaker (see Tsui 1987a:337, 1987b:375, see also Mishler 1975:32,38). Therefore, just as Schegloff and Sacks (1973:297–98) argued that an adjacently positioned second is necessary to show that the addressee (who produced the second pair part) understood what a prior aimed at and is willing to go along with that, and to let the speaker (who produced the first pair part) see that what was intended was indeed understood and that it was or was not accepted, I argue that the third move is likely for the same reason: to let the addressee know that the speaker has understood the addressee’s response, that he or she has provided an acceptable response, and that the interaction has been felicitous. I support my argument with some examples, such as the following:

(10) (Labov 1972:123)
Linus: Do you want to play with me Violet?
Violet: You’re younger than me. (Shuts the door)
Linus: [puzzled] She didn’t answer my question.

Here, Violet’s response is a way of saying no to Linus’s question. She assumes that Linus will be able to interpret her response as a version of no on the basis of the shared knowledge among children that big girls don’t play with little boys. It is only when Linus produces a comment on her response that we know her assumption is wrong: he fails to see the relevance of her response. If Violet had waited for Linus’s reaction (instead of shutting the door), she would have known that in fact the interaction has been infelicitous because Linus does not have the shared knowledge and therefore her response has not been understood.

The following piece of data is another example:

(11) (Davidson 1984:102)
A: What time you wanna leave.
(0.3)
B: (smack) Uh::smack clo:ck?
(0.5)
A: Six (uh) clo:ck? hh=
→ B: =is that good.

Here, B proposes a time to leave in response to A’s question. However, the interaction is not completed at B’s making a proposal because B needs to know if the proposal is acceptable to A. In other words, after producing a second pair part to A’s first pair part, B is looking to a third turn to see if the proposal is acceptable. This can be seen from the fact that when the proposal is not immediately endorsed by A but is followed by A’s repeating the proposed time with a rising intonation, B interprets the latter as expressing some doubt and B immediately checks to see whether the proposal is acceptable or not.

Finally, consider the following piece of data:2,3

551
(12) (Data A:A:25–26)
C is working in a bank.

1 B: Mind you it's not bad really, banking business, I suppose, it's a clean job.
2 C: Yeah, it's that kind of image. I don't really go for that, you know.
→ (2 sec)
→ C: Do you know what I mean though, I mean it suits you.
4 B: Yeah.
→ C: I mean, I'm not being insulting or anything, but I can't see myself being a bank manager.
7 B: [(laughs)] Oh I can see myself being a bank manager.
8 C: You could, yes, that's what I mean, - ( )

After C's response, there is a pause of about two seconds. The fact that a third turn to acknowledge the response is not forthcoming from B is noticed by C (see line 3) as an indication that the interaction may have been infelicitous: B may have misinterpreted C's response as an insulting remark (see line 5). Therefore in the exchanges following, C tries very hard to clarify his own intentions.

From the examples given, we can see that the follow-up move is an important element of an exchange, not only in classroom discourse, but in other types of discourse as well. It is an element on which further interaction is based. We may say that it has a general function of acknowledging the outcome of the interaction that has taken place in the initiating and the responding moves. As Heritage and Atkinson (1984) observed:

Any third action, therefore, that implements some normal onward development of a sequence confirms the adequacy of the displayed understandings in the sequence so far. By means of this framework, speakers are released from what would otherwise be the endless task of explicitly confirming and reconfirming their understanding of one another’s actions. (10)

When this third turn does not occur, we may say, following Sacks (1972:341), that it is absent. However, as Sacks pointed out, in order to show that the absence of something is not trivial, that its absence is not just one among a host of other things that might equally be said to be absent, we need to show its relevance of occurrence. "Nontrivial talk of an absence requires that some means be available for showing both the relevance of occurrence of the activity that is proposedly absent and the location where it should be looked for to see that it did not occur" (Sacks 1972:342). In other words, we need to show the relevance of occurrence of the follow-up move when it is not found in an exchange and we need to be able to account for its absence.

RELEVANCE OF OCCURRENCE OF THE FOLLOW-UP MOVE

Classroom exchanges
A classroom exchange provides us with a very good starting point. In a classroom exchange, as Sinclair and Coulthard (1975:51) pointed out, when the
follow-up move is not found after an initiating move and a responding move have occurred, one is confident that it has been withheld by the teacher for some strategic purpose. For example:

(13) (Sinclair & Coulthard 1975:65)
1 I T: Can you think why I changed 'mat' to 'rug'?
2 R P: Because er
3 I T: Peter.
4 R P: Mat's got two vowels in it.
→5 I T: Which are they? What are they?
6 R P: 'a' and 'f', 'a' and 't'.
→7 I T: Is 't' a vowel?
8 R P: No.
→9 F T: No.

In Example (13), the follow-up move is not found until utterance 9. Yet we can clearly see that it could have occurred after utterances 4 and 6, where the teacher could have provided an evaluation of the pupil’s response. Because the evaluation would have been a negative one had it occurred, its absence could be seen as deliberately withheld by the teacher in order to avoid giving an explicit negative evaluation. This is supported by the fact that the follow-up move occurs when the pupil produces a correct answer. Teachers who do not want to discourage pupils from answering questions often use this strategy. The absence of the follow-up move implies that the pupil has not produced the correct answer, or, to put it in another way, implies that the answer is incorrect, hence implying a negative evaluation. A comparison of the following two pieces of classroom data supports this point:4

(14) (Tsui 1985:20)
1 Teacher: Are you hungry now? Have you had your breakfast? Is it a good breakfast?
2 R Pupil: Yes.
→F Teacher: Right.
1 Sit down.

(15) (Tsui 1985:20)
1 I Teacher: (name) Are you hungry now? Did you have breakfast this morning?
2 R Pupil: Yes.
3 F Teacher: Yes.
4 I Good breakfast?
5 R Pupil: No.
→6 I Teacher: Sit down.

(14) occurred immediately before (15). In (14), a follow-up move which gives a positive evaluation occurs after the pupil has provided a response. In (15), the teacher asks more or less the same question. However, a follow-up move which accepts the pupil’s answer is found after the first response but not the second.

What is happening in the somewhat bizarre interaction in the second exchange in (15) is that the teacher’s questions are intended as language practice questions but they are taken as genuine questions by the pupil. The pupil’s response in utterance 5 (which is a perfectly appropriate answer) does not accord with the response that the teacher intends to solicit. It is consid-
ered unacceptable by the teacher and the latter withholds the follow-up move to imply a negative evaluation (see also Hewings 1987:227).

Conversational exchanges

Just as we can account for the relevance of occurrence of the follow-up move in classroom exchanges, so can we in nonclassroom exchanges. In the following, I make a detailed examination of the circumstances under which the follow-up move does not occur and those under which it does. By examining when, where, and why it is absent, and when, where, and why it is present, we will hopefully be able to gain further insights into its functions. But before we do that, it must be pointed out that in face-to-face interaction, the follow-up move is often realized by nonverbal means such as a nod, a smile, a raised eyebrow, and so forth. For example:

(16) (Data C:2:A:2)

J wants to pay S for the stamps that she has given her.

S: I think you better just keep it because I don't have change anyway.

J: Well, next time I'm in the money as far as stamps are concerned.

→S: ((laughs))

S's laugh is a contributing move in the exchange. It is a nonverbal acknowledgment of J's accepting her suggestion to just take the stamps for free.

Nonverbal gestures such as that in (16) are often not recorded in transcriptions, giving the illusion that the follow-up move is absent. Stenström (1984), in her study of transcriptions of telephone conversations and face-to-face conversations, observed that the follow-up move occurs much more frequently in the former than in the latter. This observation is likely to be the result of not taking into account those which are realized nonverbally in face-to-face interaction. In telephone conversations, the follow-up move must be verbalized, since it cannot be conveyed otherwise, hence giving the false impression that it occurs more frequently than in face-to-face conversations.

What are the circumstances under which the follow-up move may not occur and what are those under which it may?

First, in conversations between interlocuters who know each other very well, the follow-up move is more frequently absent. Stenström (1984:243), in her study of eleven transcribed texts, discovered that the conversations between a married couple have far fewer follow-up moves than any of the other texts. This can be explained by the fact that interlocuters who know each other very well share a large common ground so that there are not likely to be hitches in their interpretation of each other's utterance. Hence, an explicit follow-up move to acknowledge the outcome of the exchange may not often be necessary. Moreover, for interlocuters such as husbands and wives, the ritual constraint (Goffman 1976:266–67) which necessitates the production of a follow-up move in expression of appreciation of service rendered can be relaxed. The following exchange is by no means uncommon: 5

554
BEYOND THE ADJACENCY PAIR

(17)  Wife: Will you pass that paper dear.
Husband: Yup. (+NV)
Wife: ☺

Second, since to acknowledge the outcome of an exchange is an important function of the follow-up move, it stands to reason that when the interaction has not been felicitous, the speaker is likely to withhold it. The infelicitous interaction may be due to some misunderstanding, mishearing, or a gap in shared knowledge. Consider the following piece of data, which contains what Schegloff (1979) referred to as a third position repair.

(18) (BCET:A:3)
    I C: Do you get anything knocked off if you’re late?
    R B: No, you get an apology announcement at Victoria Station.
    I C: No, I mean at work, do you get anything knocked off your wages.
    [ ]
    ^R) B: Oh.
    R B: No.

B has misunderstood C’s question and C, instead of acknowledging B’s response, corrects B, who in turn gives a correct response in the subsequent move. If there were no misunderstanding on B’s part, C would have produced a third move to acknowledge that B’s response has been understood and adequate.

It should be noted, however, that sometimes even when there is misunderstanding, mishearing, or a gap in shared knowledge, the speaker may choose to go along with the misunderstanding, and so forth, and produce an acknowledging third move, rather than a repair. For example:

(19) (Heritage & Atkinson 1984:14)
    E: She gets awful depressed over these things yihknow
    she’s real (0.2) political minded’n,
    (0.3)
    L: Ye:ah
    E: wo rk -
    [ ]
    L: She a Democrat?
    →E: .t.hhh I vote eather wa:y.h
    ()
    →L: Yeah,

Heritage and Atkinson (1984:14–15) pointed out that the piece of data in (19) is a clear case of the speaker (L) not making any attempt to correct the addressee’s (E) mishearing, or mistreating, of her prior utterance. When this happens, the speaker is behaving as though the addressee has provided an adequate response and the interaction has been felicitous (see also Tsui 1987a:338).

Third, a follow-up move may also not occur when the speaker is not happy with the response provided or the outcome of the interaction. Consider the following examples:

555
Different from (18), there is no misinterpretation of meaning or intention here. Rather, C finds the response hard to believe. He therefore reinitiates the question to seek confirmation.

(21) (BCET:A:43)
ex. 1 I: C: Are you sure you don't want a cigarette?
R: B: No, I couldn't take your last but one.
ex. 2 I: C: Well, the last one actually - that would be my last one.
R: B: No thanks.
ex. 3 I: C: Go on, have it Rob.
R: B: No, no I'm not having it, I'd feel too bad.
F: C: Okay.

In this piece of data, the follow-up move is not found until the third exchange, when C finally accepts B's refusal of his offer, after which B and C move on to another topic. It does not occur in the first two exchanges because C is not happy with the negative outcome, or at least he behaves as though he is not happy about the fact that his offer is refused. This is supported by the fact that in the third exchange, C re-offers. It is only when he concedes to accept the negative outcome that he produces the follow-up move. That the absence of the follow-up move can be accounted for as the speaker's not accepting the negative outcome can be further supported by comparing (21) with the following:

(22) (Davidson 1984:127)
A: You wan' me bring you anything?
(0.4)
B: No: no: nothing.
→A: AM: kay.

Different from (21), A is happy to accept B's rejection of his offer and he produces a follow-up move to accept the negative outcome. (For further examples, see Davidson 1984. She referred to third moves which accept rejections as rejection finalizers.)

From the discussion and the examples given so far, we can see that to evaluate the correctness of the response is only one of the realizations of the general function of the follow-up move, which is to acknowledge the outcome of the interaction in an exchange. Other realizations are: to show understanding of the response (Examples (8) and (9)), to show that the response is acceptable (Examples (21) and (22)), to show an appreciation of the response (Examples (i), (7), also (30) to follow), and to show a change of state of knowledge or information (Example (5), also (29) to follow) (see Heritage 1984:309).

556
BEYOND THE ADJACENCY PAIR

CONVERSATIONAL SEQUENCE

So far, we have been looking at the functions of the follow-up move at the level of organization of an exchange. Let us now examine its function at a higher level of organization – a sequence.7

Consider the following example:

(23) (Data B:E:B:2:5)
H called X to ask if they could both go and get a donated computer and some disc training. X could not go because he had to meet the donor of the computer. H agreed to go on his own. They then talked about where they should put the computer when H got it.

I H: Alright, so when I when I get it um where should I put it?
R X: Well, I'll tell um Hunston to move out today then.
I H: Oh I'll tell him, I'll tell him right now, so ah he's right there, he's right
R X: oh he's - okay,=
I =Yeah, tell him we're going to get one tomorrow and so he should ah get some help to get out.
R H: Okay.
→F X: //p

Okay=
I =Sorry, I c- I'd love to join you and I'd love get the the basic disc training but ah as as the donor is here ((laughs))
R H: Okay.

Here, the follow-up move is acknowledging the outcome of the interaction of not only the preceding exchange but the entire sequence. In other words, it marks the end of the sequence and interlocuters can now either move on to a new topic of talk or bring the conversation to a close. This can be seen from the fact that X's okay is spoken in low key. As Coulthard and Brazil (1981:95) pointed out, a low termination marks the point at which prospective constraints stop. It can also be seen from the fact that it is followed by X's reinvoking things talked of earlier in the conversation, typically occurring in the closing section of a conversation, which is an attempt to bring the conversation to a close (see Schegloff & Sacks 1973:317).

The following is another example:

(24) (Data B:E:A:2:2)
H and X are making arrangements to go out for a meal. He suggested a restaurant called the Spring Deer.

I H: And what what time shall we meet there?
R X: um ((pause)) Spring Deer, Okay.8
I H: Seven?
R X: What time um
I H: Seven-thirty?
R X: Yeah, I guess that's a good time.
I H: Between seven and seven-thirty then.
R X: Alright, between seven and seven-thirty.
I H: Or or you're going to make it definite, say seven-th -
y'know, seven-th - or seven o'clock or or seven fifteen.

557
Here, the follow-up move occurs when a time agreeable to both has been reached. Prior to that, that is, when H and X are still negotiating the time, the exchanges consist of only two parts. The occurrence of the follow-up move marks the end of a sequence. H then moves on to the topic of making reservations. Similar to (23), the final Alright is spoken in low key.

It should be noted, however, that not all sequence endings are marked by a follow-up move. They can be marked by other means, such as a boundary marker (Sinclair & Coulthard 1975:40) or a topic-closing initiation. The following is an example in which the end of a sequence is marked by a topic-closing exchange followed by a boundary marker.

(25) (Data B:A:A:3:8-9)

I: you know, I think the real scandal is that probably some very good people aren't doing any work. It's not their own fault. But I mean there's - some sharp people could be=

[R]X: Yeah, yeah.

K: =doing something making contribution.

R: Yeah.=

—I =Well, let's you and I stay working as long as we can.=


I: =Okay, I read two things by you recently.

The first arrowed utterance is what Schegloff and Sacks (1973) referred to as a topic-binding technique, which is typically used to bring a topic to a close. They noted:

Another “topic bounding” technique . . . involves one party’s offering of a proverbial or aphoristic formulation of conventional wisdom which can be heard as the “moral” or “lesson” of the topic being thereby possibly closed. When such a formulation is offered by one party and agreed to by another, a topic may be seen (by them) to have been brought to a close.

(1973:306)

X’s topic-closing initiation is agreed to by K and followed by a boundary marker Okay, which is spoken with a high-fall (or i+ tone) (Halliday 1976:101) that is typical of boundary markers (see Sinclair & Coulthard 1975:40).

The following is another piece of data in which signaling the end of the sequence is performed by a topic-closing initiation.

(26) (Data B:A:A:1:1)

I: So maybe we have we have lunch tomorrow?

R: Okay, yeah, it’s, yes it’s fine, yes.

[I] H: I'll
BEYOND THE ADJACENCY PAIR

I I'll give you a call, I'll give you a call tomorrow then alright? ah sometime

[ ]

R X: ( ) um hang on, one thing, I'm lecturing, -
I um that's okay.=
I =I'm lecturing, I finish at twelve-fifteen.
R H: Okay, twelve-fifteen.=
I =we'll go to Shatin or some place.
R X: Yeah, yeah, sounds good.
→I H: Okay then.
→R X: Okay.
I H: How do you feel by the way?

Similar to X's okay in (25), H's okay then is spoken with a high-fall. When it is responded to by okay from X, the two utterances constitute a topic-closing exchange, which brings the topic to a close.9 Topic-closing exchanges such as those in (25) and (26) often mark that topic as possibly a last one, hence accomplishing the possible preclosing section of the entire conversation (Schegloff & Sacks 1973:306). This is supported by H's use of a misplacement marker, by the way, in the succeeding utterance. A misplacement marker indicates that the utterance is out of place because it is reopening a conversation which has been closed already (see Schegloff & Sacks 1973:319).

In (24), we have seen that the exchanges in which interlocuters are negotiating the time consist of only two parts. This kind of structure is not peculiar to this piece of data. Exchanges which are preliminary to something else typically consist of two parts. In these exchanges, the follow-up move often does not occur until the main business of the interaction is under discussion or is completed. These preliminary exchanges are referred to as presequences by conversational analysts (see, e.g., Atkinson & Drew 1979; Merritt 1976; Terasaki 1976 – quoted in Levinson 1983). The following is an example:

(27) (Data C:t:A:2)
1 H: Do you get the TESOL Quarterly?
2 S: Yeah.
3 H: Did you get this issue?
4 S: What - month is it?
5 H: um number two June eighty-three.
6 S: Yeah, I think I probably did.
→7 H: Can I just borrow this for a day - for a day or two?

H’s questions in utterances 1 and 3 lead up to the request in utterance 7, which is the main business of the interaction. (Conversational analysts refer to questions like utterances 1 and 3 as prerequests.)

Not only do these so-called pre-sequence exchanges typically consist of two parts, exchanges which form the main business of the interaction may also consist of two parts. Take the following piece of data for example:

(28) (Data B:D:B:1)
M called H to ask him to give a message to Larry, her husband.

ex. 1 M: Can you get a message to Larry, he's not home and he's not in the office.
R H: Yes.

559
ex. 2 I M: He'll be in his office.
    R H: Alright.

ex. 3 I M: He has a four-thirty class ( ) four o'clock. Just give the message that he's supposed to pay our amah today?
    R H: Alright.

ex. 4 I M: Tell him twenty-six times fourteen.
    R H: Twenty-six time fourteen. Sure.

ex. 5 I M: Okay?
    R H: Okay, I'll

[ ]

ex. 6 I M: She worked twenty-six hours.
    R H: Alright.

ex. 7 I M: Then tell him I'm not going to make it home in time . . .

All of the exchanges in (28) consist of only two parts. The first two exchanges lead up to the main business of giving the message, which starts in exchange 3. From exchange 3 onward, all the exchanges are the components of the message that M wants H to pass onto Larry.

Taking into consideration the structure exhibited in (27) and (28) and that exhibited in (23), (24), and (26), in which endings of sequences of two-part exchanges are marked by a follow-up move, a topic-closing exchange, or a boundary marker, we may say that the lack of a third element in an exchange may be an indication that the topic of talk is not finished yet and that something else is upcoming (see also Example (21)). (Cf. Heritage 1984.)

To summarize, we may say that at the level of organization of an exchange, the follow-up move has the general function of acknowledging the outcome of the interaction in an exchange. This general function can be realized specifically as evaluating the response; showing understanding, appreciation, or acceptance of the response; and showing a change of state of knowledge or information as a result of the response. At the level of organization of a sequence, the follow-up move has the function of signaling the end of the sequence. These two functions may be realized separately or simultaneously. For example:

(29) (Data B:C:A:3:1)
    I: B: Where where is he staying?
    R A: He's staying at the ah Chung Chi Guest House.
    F B: //p OH // r I see //

(30) (Coulthard & Brazil 1981:95)
    I: A: Have you got the time?
    R B: It's three o'clock.
    F A: //p //

THANKS

In (29), B's follow-up move I see is spoken in mid-key and referring tone, which indicate that it is not sequence final. Hence, its function is only to acknowledge the outcome. In (30), A's follow-up move is spoken in low key and proclaiming tone. As Coulthard and Brazil (1981:95) pointed out, given that the exchange occurred between strangers in the street, the follow-up
BEYOND THE ADJACENCY PAIR

move terminates the entire encounter. In other words, its function is not only to acknowledge the outcome but to signal the end of the encounter as well.

CONCLUSION

From the previous discussion, we can see that the follow-up move, which is the third component part of an exchange, is an important element in conversational interaction. Its occurrence is pragmatically motivated. It has the functions of endorsing the felicitous outcome of the interaction and signaling the end of a sequence.

It may be too strong a statement to say that when the follow-up move does not occur, its nonoccurrence is noticeable and noticed in the way the absence of a second pair part is. But it is certainly true that when it does not occur, it is often perceived by participants to be deliberately withheld for social or strategic reasons. This suggests to us that a potentially three-part exchange, which may contain nonverbal component parts, is more adequate than an adjacency pair as a basic unit of conversational organization.

It should be noted, however, that while a potentially three-part exchange is the basic organizational unit, it is possible for exchanges to consist of more than three parts. This happens when, following a follow-up move, the next speaker produces a further response to it. Goffman provided the following example:

(31) (Goffman 1976:265)

A: Do you have the time?
B: Sure. It's five o'clock.
A: Thanks.
→ B: (gesture) it's okay.

Here, A's appreciation is responded to by what Goffman called a minimization, in which the speaker indicates that enough gratitude has been displayed, resulting in a four-part exchange (see Goffman 1976:265-66).

A four-part exchange may also result when, following a follow-up move, the next speaker produces a further move in which it is indicated that the speaker wishes to relinquish the floor. For example:

(32) (Coulthard et al. 1981:19)

I: D: but it's only the last three months that it's been making you feel ill.
R: P: ill with it yes
F: D: yes yes
→ F: P: yes doctor

Here, we have another bounded unit which consists of four parts. The patient's last utterance follows a follow-up move and yet it is clearly not a new initiating move because it does not expect a further response from the doctor. What the patient is doing here is instead of taking the floor and introducing a new topic or continuing with the current topic, the patient is
indicating that he or she has no more to say and wishes to relinquish the floor. (See turn-taking rules in conversation in Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson 1974.) We could say that the patient’s utterance serves as a *turn-passing* signal. Coulthard et al. (1981:19) characterized utterances like these as second follow-up moves. Coulthard et al. observed that theoretically, it is possible to have an infinite repetition of the follow-up move but in real life, exchanges which have more than three follow-up moves seldom occur.

Taking into consideration data such as (31) and (32), we could say that the basic organizational unit of conversation is a potential three-part exchange with an optional fourth or fifth part. This is a more adequate description of a basic unit of conversational organization than an adjacency pair because it accounts for important contributing moves in conversation which the latter does not. Moreover, a potential three-part exchange allows us to encompass an adjacency pair as well. And, finally, the greater scope may allow us to recognize the presence and absence of the third element as a criterion for distinguishing among relationships, styles, groups, and cultures.

**NOTES**

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1. The word *talk* refers to talk in the English language.

2. Data A and C are face-to-face conversations. Data B are telephone conversations. All interlocuters are native speakers of English. The author wishes to thank the English Department of the University of Birmingham, U.K., for allowing her to use their data, which are coded [BCET], standing for Birmingham Collection of English Texts. The BCET data used in this article are all face-to-face conversations.

3. The transcription conventions of the author’s own data basically follow those of Gail Jefferson, except for ( ), which stands for an interpolated utterance, and [ ], which stands for an attempted utterance. There is a certain amount of idealization in the transcriptions. The transcription conventions of intonation follow those of David Brazil (see Brazil, Coulthard, & Johns 1980, for a detailed explanation).

4. The data are recordings from an English lesson in a Chinese-medium secondary school in Hong Kong. The author herself observed the lesson.

5. See Wolfson (1986) on the greater frequency (“bulge”) of devices such as compliments, invitations, greetings, partings, gratitudes, and refusals between participants who are neither intimates nor strangers.

6. Heritage referred to third turns which are realized by *oh* (as in (5)) as “Oh”-receipts which function to confirm that the transmission of information from an informed to an uninformed party has taken place. He observed that (question)–(answer)–(“oh”-receipt) sequences are massively recurrent in conversation.

7. The term *sequence* is used in a nonstructural sense, roughly corresponding to a series of exchanges with a shared topic (see Coulthard 1981:27–31, for sequence identification).

8. It should be noted that X’s utterance is not responding to the immediately preceding question but to H’s suggestion to go to the Spring Deer, which is not shown in the text.

9. If H had said *okay* and had spoken it in low key, it would realize a follow-up move, which would be sequence final. Then it is not likely that X would produce a further *okay* in response to it.
BEYOND THE ADJACENCY PAIR

10. Heritage (1984) suggested that since an "oh"-receipt (or some equivalent) serves to confirm that a change of state of knowledge or information has taken place, its production may be avoided by questioners so as to propose that they have not been informed.

REFERENCES