

Final Exam (MSK 1)

– *Sample* –

Please note: For the purpose of demonstration, all tasks in this sample target the same basic concept (viz. *preference*). This need not be the case in the final exam, where each task may deal with or focus on a different aspect.

1. Explain the concept of *preference* as it relates to responsive actions in a sequence (action-based response preference).

First pair parts (FPPs) in adjacency pairs generally make a type-matched second pair part (SPP) conditionally relevant next as a response. While for some FPPs there is only a single type of responsive action (e.g. greeting – return greeting), most FPPs make a set of alternative responses/actions relevant next. Invitations, for example, make either an acceptance or a rejection/declination relevant next. The notion of ‘preference’ reflects the fact that, for the participants, these alternative responses are not of equal status (e.g., in terms of their socio-relational consequences). With a few exceptions, preferred responses generally promote the course of action initiated by the FPP, whereas dispreferred responses discourage or curtail its further development. So in response to invitations, acceptances are preferred, whereas declinations are dispreferred. Their non-equivalence is most visibly reflected in the use of different turn-shapes for doing one or the other. Preferred responses/actions are generally performed straightforwardly and without delay, whereas dispreferred responses/actions routinely show one or more of the following features:

- *they are delayed in their turn*
- *they are prefaced or qualified in their turn*
- *they are accomplished in mitigated or indirect form*
- *they are accounted for.*

It is important to realize that the distinction between preferred/dispreferred responses refers to these structural features and not to psychological preferences (desires or dispositions) of the speaker. So speakers may perfectly well offer a preferred response in straightforwardly accepting an invitation, even though they would tacitly rather not go.

2. Describe the general organization of preference for responses to assessments in assessment sequences, such as the following:

01 A: isn't he CUTE,
02 B: O::h he's aDO::Rable.

In general, first assessments make agreement/disagreement relevant next, with agreement generally being preferred and disagreement being dispreferred. So disagreements with first assessments are generally delayed, mitigated, accounted for and/or prefaced with pro-forma agreements.

Agreement/disagreement can either be done with agreement/disagreement tokens (e.g. "yes/yeah" or "no") or by producing a second assessment in response to a first. Agreeing second assessments can either upgrade the assessing term of the first assessment (as in the example above), they can offer the same evaluation (Isn't that nice > yeah it's nice), or they can offer a downgraded evaluation (isn't he adorable > yeah, he's kinda cute). Second assessments that offer same or downgraded evaluations are commonly (oriented to as) implying disagreement. So agreeing second assessments, too, are ordered, such that upgraded ones are preferred over those that offer same evaluations or are downgraded.

However, there are exceptions to this generalization. In response to negative self-assessments (so-called self-deprecations), like 'I am such an idiot!', the preference structure outlined above is reversed. In this sequential context, disagreement would be the preferred response option, whereas agreement can be shown to be dispreferred.

3. Consider the following example. Using conversation analytic methods, analyze how the participants manage preference in this excerpt.

[NB II: 2: 17-18 (slightly modified and simplified)]

((Taken from a phone call between Emma and Nancy, who are friends and live close to each other. Roul is Nancy's estranged ex-husband. As it turns out a little later, Roul's mother has sent Nancy a letter complaining about her son, whereupon Nancy has promised to call her.))

01 Emm: Do you wanna come do:wn 'n' have a bite of lu:nch with me?=
02 =I got some beer'n stu:ff,
03 (0.3)
04 Nan: Well you're real sweet hon: uh:m
05 (.)
06 Emm: Or do you have something [else °(to do)°]
07 Nan: [No: I have to:] uh call
08 Roul's mother, I told her I:'d call her this morning
09 I [got a letter] from her an' .hhhhhh A:nd uhm
10 Emm: [° (Uh huh.)°]

In line 01 of this excerpt, Emma invites Nancy over for lunch, using the polar interrogative “Do you wanna come down and have a bite of lunch with me?”. This invitation makes an accepting or declining response from Nancy relevant next. By immediately adding that she has “beer and stuff” (l. 02), Emma offers an extra incentive and pushes for an accepting response.

In line 03, a gap of (0.3) seconds emerges during which a response from Nancy is noticeably absent. So when Nancy begins to respond in line 04, her response is already delayed, suggesting that a dispreferred response might be in the making. Nancy’s turn in line 04 begins with a “well”-prefaced appreciation (“well you’re real sweet hon”), which displays her understanding that Emma’s interrogatively formatted turn in lines 01-02 has been an invitation, but also delays the production of the accepting or rejecting response Emma’s invitation made conditionally relevant. Nancy’s appreciation is then followed by further delaying devices (see the “uhm” at the end of line 04 and the micropause in line 05). All of these features suggest that a dispreferred response (i.e., a rejection) is in the making.

In line 06, Emma orients to these signs of dispreference by adding “or do you have something else (to do)”, which anticipates a possible reason (or account) for a rejection of the invitation and displays Emma’s understanding – based on Nancy’s turn-so-far – that Nancy might not be available.

Moreover, Emma’s turn in line 06 reverses the preference structure of the sequence. It invites a confirming response for the ‘blocking’ account and thus makes it easier (in fact, possible) for Nancy to reject the invitation without having to do so explicitly. (And although Nancy does not seem to do this at first [see her “no” in line 07], the telling she then launches does offer an account for why she is unavailable and thus ratifies Emma’s anticipation of a problem with her invitation.)

So in this case, the participants manage to circumvent the production of a dispreferred response (a rejection of an invitation) and the organization of preference provides them the resources to do so.