The Analysis of the Main Conversation Ending Strategies of Persian Phone Conversations

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Abstract - How to start and end a conversation in daily interactions is usually interesting in discourse analysis. In this article we aim to discuss different strategies by which a friendly conversation may end. In other words, after detecting these strategies, we try to show that how speakers enjoy these techniques to put an end to conversations. Since ending a conversation is directly related to addressee’s “face”, we will highlight some of the strategies used by speakers to save this factor. In this research, 20 phone conversations have been collected and then analyzed. By analyzing our data, we found that speakers tend to use a pre-closing part before finishing their conversation. It is believed that these strategies are mostly related to face saving. Since these strategies are mainly cultural and non-native speakers usually feel confused by these totally culture-dependent strategies, a good method can be applied to teach these conversation ending strategies in language classes.

Keywords - Pragmatics, Phone Conversation, Pre-closing, Turn-taking, Face

1. Introduction

Conversation analysis (CA) is a large and diversifying field of study. At the most basic level, CA is the study of talk (Hutchby, I & Wooffitt, R; 2088). In CA we can find how participants understand and respond to each other in their turns at talk. According to Schegloff and Sacks (1973), conversations do not just end, rather they must be closed through an elaborate ritual and this happen because of the turn-taking mechanics of conversation. Schegloff and Sacks (1973) believe that in order to close a conversation we should consider two points: 1- it is a proper initiation of the closing section and 2- it is terminal exchange. It means that one proposes to close the conversation by saying "goodbye" and the other accepts it by answering to his goodbye.

One basic unit of conversation is the adjacency pair. Each Adjacency pair has two parts, by different speakers. The speaking of the first part provokes a responding to the second part. As Brown and Levinson (1978) propose, in any particular society face has a cultural notion. They point out "This notion is subject to cultural specifications of many sorts – what kinds of acts threaten face, what sorts of person have special rights to face-protection and what kinds of personal style are especially appreciated.” Also notions of face are related to some of the most fundamental cultural ideas about the nature of the social persona, honor and virtue, shame and redemption and thus to religious concept. (1978:13)

Telephone calls all over the world have presumably the same basic structure but cultural variation is to be expected (Clark and French 1981). The structure of telephone closings has been well explored in conversation analysis (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973). Coppock (2005) points out that closing a conversation may be interpreted to mean that one does not wish for the conversation to continue. It means that the conversation is not enjoyable at least for one of the participants. In this article we will analyze 20 telephone conversations to see how, when and by whom they are closed.

This topic is an interesting topic in discourse analysis. Schegloff and Sacks in the early 70s did many researches on English telephone conversations which led to draw many researchers’ attention in different languages to such studies, for example, Dutch (Houtkoop-Steenstra 1991), Greek (Sifianou 1989), German and Greek (Pavlidou 1994), and Swedish (Lindstrom 1994). (Sun, 2005)

Albert, S .Kessler, S. (1978) discuss certain classes of verbal behavior: content summary statements (Sc); affective summary statements (Ss); continuity (C), justification (J), and well-wishing (W) statements; and statements of positive affect (P). These statements are shown to increase during the terminal phase of a social encounter as a function of whether
the conversation is between friends or strangers and whether it is structured or unstructured. Taleghani-Nikazm (2002) contrasted ritual routines in telephone conversation openings in Iran and Germany. She discovered that telephone conversation opening in Persian follows four sequences 1) a summon-answer, 2) an identification-recognition, 3) greeting, and 4) the how are you. Coronel- Molina (1998) investigates how verbal sequences are in the opening and closing of the Spanish conversations according to Schegloff’s canonical schema of universality. He has introduced four steps to end the conversation. 1- pre-closing. 2- New topic introduction. 3- Recapitulation. 4- Final closing.

2. Methodology

In this article, 20 Persian phone conversations were collected. It should be said that these conversations were made in different contexts and by different individuals. Most of the conversations were recorded (with permission) by a sound recorder and part of our data was collected by friends. In order to keep the data more natural, participants were briefly informed about the strategy. The next step was 1) detecting the strategies by which a conversation ends, 2) where, when and how a conversation ends and finally 3) whether the conversation is ended by the speaker or listener. We use (A) and (B) to refer to participants instead of their real names. It is obvious that many factors (gender, age, social class, education,...) are not considered in this article, this is why we are looking for strategies by which a conversation ends in Persian and not more.

3. Data Analysis

A conversation always has an ending part. This ending may occur naturally (when addresses tend to put an end to the conversation which they are involved in), or by one of the speakers involved in the conversation. When the latter occurs, the speaker should be careful about the listener’s face (not to damage his/her face). Otherwise the speaker may be considered as an impolite or rude person.

Every speaker has some options to end the conversation; some of these strategies are listed below:

The first strategy is ending the conversation by whom the conversation has started. It may show that the conversation has been satisfactorily made and the addressee’s face will be saved.

A: sælam
Hello

B: sælam,xubi
Hi. Well Being-2nd-sing

How are you?
A: mersl .to iʃetori?
Thanks, you how-Being-2nd-sing

Thanks, how are you?

I
.
.
.
.
A: xoʃəl fɔdæm sedato fəndæm

happy become-past-1st .-sing your voice hear- past-1st

I became happy to hear you

B-mænæm hamintor
I too
Me too

A:feʃən xodahafez
now god protect

goodbye

\footnote{1 - A part of the conversation which is not necessary to be mentioned in the paper.}
B: xodahafez
   god protect
   good bye

In this conversation, (A) as the conversation starter, puts an end to the conversation by saying “xoʃhəl jodəm sedato fənidəm” and correspondingly (B) in order to save (A)’s face allows him to close the conversation politely.

“xoʃ” is the only word observed in the conversation implicitly used to express “I have nothing to say”. “xoʃ” is a pre-closing item through which the listener notices that “interlocutor” has nothing to say and tends to close the conversation. This is more probable when there is a silence after uttering this item and the utterer is not the conversation starter. Sometimes “xoʃ” can be multifunctionally used to finish a conversation and may lead to a new conversation too.

Example 1.
A: xoʃ... fierda mibiæmet
   Ok... Tomorrow see-1st-sing-you
   Ok. ...See you tomorrow
B: bəʃe,haʃəmən ,məmmun ke zæn zædi
   ok. Sure. Thanks that(relative) call hit-past-2nd-sing
   Ok, Sure. Thanks for calling

A: xaʃef miñonæm, kari nædari
   Beg  do-1st-sing .Order(work) no-have-2nd-sing
   You’re welcome. Do you have any further business ?

B: sælam beresun
   hello  send-2nd-sing
   Say hello to your family for me

A: sælamæt bəʃ. xodahafez
   Healthy  be-2nd-sing
   Be well !

B: xodahafez
   God -protect
   Goodbye

Example 2.
A: sælam
   Hi
B: sælam .xubi?
   Hi. Well Being-2nd-sing
   How are you?
   .
   .
   .
B: xeʃi xob...
   Very ok...
   Alright ....

A: xoʃ, kari nædari?
   Ok. Order(work) no-have-2nd - sing
   Ok. Do you have any further business ?

B: næ, be xanevade sælam beresun
   no. to family Hello  send-2nd-sing
   no. Say hello to your family for me.
A: hætmæn. to hæm sælam beresun
certainly you too Hello send-2nd-sing
certainly. Say hello to your family for me too.

B: xodahafez
God – protect
Goodbye
Example 3.
A: Sælam
Hi
B: xob ke intor……
ok. That this-way……
Alright

A: are ... rasti ketabæmno pejda kærdæm
yeah.by the way book-of –my-obj find-past-1st-sing
yeah.by the way I found my book.
B: e ... xosa ro fokr. xob kocæa bud?
Eh...God-obj –marker gratitude. Ok. Where be-past-3rd
Eh...Alright thank God. Where was it?

We can see that B by saying “xeyli xob” and then a silence, tries to express “I have nothing to say” and A well notices this hint and says “xob”. This is an item leading to closing the conversation. In example (3), A is not willing to close the conversation, so he offers a new topic to discuss.

3. Uttering some sentences to express satisfaction with the conversation, but simultaneously tendency to close the conversation:

xob xejli xofhal fokedex
ok, very happy become- past-1st-sing
Alright, I became so glad to (hear your voice)

hazæm æz in kara bekon
again-also from this work-plur do-imper
Call me again and

xeyli xofhal fodore sedato fenidæm
very happy become- past-1st-sing voice-of your-obj hear-past-1st-sing
I became so glad to hear your voice

By saying such sentences (mostly articulated by A), listener’s face will be saved. On the other hand B shows that although he is satisfied with the conversation, he is willing to close the conversation.

By analyzing our data, it was found that if B tends to close the conversation, He apologizes and after saying the reason, closes the conversation:

bebæxdid, daraæ æn æn ænænænæ, bayæd beræm
Sorry, prog marker call hit-3rd-plur, must go-1st—sing
Sorry. It's ringing. I must go.

xodæm behetæ æn æn ænænænæ. ælæn bayæd beræm. xejli diræm fode. to ro xoda bebaæxjida

I will call you. I must go now. it's too late. Excuse me.

e.. bebaæxjida, mobailæm dare æn æxæxæxæxæ. behetæ æn ænænænæ

Eh... Excuse me, cell phone my prog marker call hit-3rd—sing. To you call hit-1st-sing.
Excuse me, my cell phone is ringing. I'll call you.

After apologizing, it is probable to face with some sentences showing obligation to close the conversation, however the speaker is superficially willing to continue it. This strategy is technically called justification. (Albert & Kessler, 1978)
5) There is another way to close the conversation: coming back to the first topic of the discussion.

A: sælam
Hi
.
.
.
A: je zekhmæti vasæt daʃàem
an inconvenience for- you have-past-1st - sing
I ask you to do something for me, although I know it can be an inconvenience for you.

B: xaʃeʃ mikonæm, ʃi kar mitunæm bæræt ændʒæm bedæm
Beg do-1st - sing, what work can-1st - sing for-you give-1st - sing
You're welcome. What can I do for you?

A: un ʃjæmedun bozoræto mixæm æge lazæmæʃ nædaræi færda bedæ æli bæræm bijare
that suitcase large-obj marker want-1st - sing. if need- that no-have-2nd -sing give-imper Ali for-me bring-3rd -sing.
I want your large suitcase. If you don't need it, then give it to Ali to bring me tomorrow.

B: næ æzizæm lazæm nædaræm. ðʒa-ii mixæi beri?
No honey-my need no-have-1st -sing. Somewhere want- 2nd -sing go- 2nd -sing
No honey, I don't need it.do you want to go somewhere?
.
.
.
B: pæs gofti feGæt ʃjæmedunæmo mixæi?
So say-past- 2nd -sing only suitcase-my-obj marker want- 2nd -sing
So you said you just want my suitcase

A: dæøet dærd nækone
Yeah. Hand-your pain no-do-3rd -sing
Yeah. Thank you

B: bæʃ færdæ vasæt mifreʃteʃæm. æge ʃjæz ægi hæm xusti hætæm bægu.
Ok tomorrow for-you send-past-1st -sing-that. If something else want-past- 2nd -sing certainly tell-impr
Ok. I will send it for you tomorrow. If you need anything else just tell me

A: lotf mikoni. mæmnun
Kindness do-2nd -sing. Thanks
Thank you.

B: movazæbe xoøet bʃ
careful-of yourself be-2nd -sing.
Take care

A: bæʃ sælam xæli bæresun
OK. Hello a lot send-2nd -sing.
OK. Say hello to your family a lot

B: hætæmæn. to hæm sælam bæresun
certainly. you too Hello send-2nd -sing
certainly. Say hello to your family for me too.
A: hætæm. xodahafez
   certainly. God—protect
   certainly. Goodbye

B: xodahafez
   God—protect
   Goodbye

In this example, B is unwilling to continue the conversation, so he comes back to the main topic which is “suitcase”. By offering this topic once more, he gives the listener an opportunity to close the conversation, and A notices this hint and explicitly says “are” to finish the debation.

6) “Thanking” is another strategy for a speaker to close the conversation. For example it is usual to say some sentences like “mersi æz inke žæng zædì” or “mæmænun ke be yadæm budi” to show tendency for closing the conversation (it is important that “face” will be saved in this strategy).
   mersi æz inke žæng zædì
   Thanks of this-that(relative) call hit-past-2nd-sing
   Thanks for calling

   mæmænun ke be yadæm budi
   Thanks that (relative) to memory-me be-past-2nd—sing
   Thanks for remembering me.

7) Sometimes we want to tell the addressee “however the conversation is ended (forcibly), we will have another conversation in the future”. This strategy is called continuity. (Albert & Kessler 1978)
   færdæ mæbææmet
   Tomorrow see-1st -sing-you
   See you tomorrow

   bazææm žæng beææn
   Again call hit-imper
   Call me again!

8- There is always a goal for which a conversation starts. It is obvious that as soon as speakers achieve their desired goal(s), they tend to end the conversation.
   A: sælæm
   Hi
   .
   .

   A: e. pæs xøf moGe žæng zædæm.gofæte budi jomæreæc doktor X ro dari.gofæte emruz ke bikaræm beræm doktor.
   mixæææm jomæreæjæ azææt begiræm
   eh...then good time call hit-past-1st -sing say-past participle be-past-2nd - sing number-of doctor X obj marker have-2nd -sing. Say-1nd-sing today that(relative) unemployed-be-1nd-sing go-1st-sing doctor. Want-past-1st -sing number-his-obj marker from-you take-1st-sing
   eh...then I called on time. You had told you have Dr. X’s phone number. I thought that today I’m free so I can go to the doctor.
I need his phone number

   B: ææ. deïæææ sæb kon ta biææææf
   yeah, one minute patience do-imper until bring-it
   yeah. Wait a minute to bring it.

   A: bæfe
   OK

   B: jædaæj kon....
   OK. Note do-imper
OK. Take a note

A: xob, ḏāṣtēt dārd nākone ʿaḏīzīm, xejī lotf kārdī.
Well. Hand-your pain no-do-3rd -sing honey-my.a lot kindness do-past-1st-sing

B: xāhef mīkonem, kārī nākārdām

A: mozahemēt nemīṣem digē
bother-of-you no-become-1st-sing else

B: xāhef mīkonem, xoḥal jodam

A: ʾsālam āberesūn
hello send-2nd -sing

B: bozorgvarito miresunem

A: xoḏahafez
God -protect

B: xoḏahafez
God -protect

The goal of this conversation is “getting the doctor’s phone number”. As soon as the speaker arrives at this goal, he tries to close the conversation by saying “xob, ḏāṣtēt dārd nākone”. Sometimes a bundle of strategies can be applied to close a conversation as in example 8 in which two strategies (2) and (7) are applied. In this article we did not face with the examples where one of the addressees is unsatisfied with the conversation and ends it.

4. Conclusion

In this article, we analyzed different strategies by which a conversation ends. By analyzing our data, we noticed that this process is a complicated phenomenon. Pre-closing part helps us detecting when and where, speakers aim to close the conversation. Results show that almost all conversations follow specific patterns. In other words, before saying “goodbye”, there is a pre-closing part which paves the way for the ending part. It was figured out that pre-closing part mostly includes blessings like “xoḏahafez”, “ḏāṣtēt dārd nākone”, “qorbunet berēm”, zende “baʃī”, etc. As far as face is concerned, we found that speakers are excessively careful about saving this factor, in other words speakers usually try to avoid face damaging. It is believed that face-saving is a common phenomenon in every culture and is reflected in different contexts as in telephone conversations. It was also noticed that indirect speech acts are more remarkably used than direct speech acts in pre-closing part; hence pre-closing part is not explicitly started. By using these strategies, one can show that conversation is not suddenly closed. Otherwise the speakers may be identified as impolite (or perhaps angry) persons and naturally addressee’s face will be damaged. So these strategies can softly prepare the context for closing the conversation. Pre-closing part not only shows speakers’ tendency toward ending the conversation, but also makes a good opportunity to offer new topics to discuss. It seems that these strategies are totally culture-dependent and need to be learnt in certain social contexts. It is clear that non-native speakers have difficulty with some of these strategies so a good methodology seems to be necessary while these foreigners are learning Persian.

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