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Close proximity of turn-continuation to possible turn-completion in conversation

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Highlights

- speakers can continue turns in maximally close proximity
- to points of possible turn-completion
- close-proximity features include continuation of voicing and
- articulatory anticipation
- close-proximity continuation helps ensure the speaker will get to
- continue
- method combines techniques of phonetic and sequential analysis

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Abstract

Speakers in conversation are in the first instance allocated the space in which to produce a single unit of talk which could figure as a complete turn. One way speakers can continue talk beyond a point of possible turn-completion is by producing a continuation in maximally close proximity to the point of possible turn-completion. This article extends our understanding of how speakers do this, and to what interactional effect. Several phonetic features characterising close-proximity continuations are described. These include continuation of voicing, articulatory anticipation and other phonetic features. It is argued that close-proximity continuation helps ensure speakers get to continue their turn past a point of possible turn-completion. This argument is supported by close inspection of the talk leading up to the point of possible turn-completion, the start of the continuation, and the responses of co-participants – especially with regard to whether the point of possible turn-completion engenders incoming talk or not. The method combines analysis of phonetic and sequential details of 240 points of possible turn-completion in audio recordings of unscripted American English telephone calls.

Keywords: conversation; phonetics; pragmatics; prosody; turn-continuation; turn-taking

1 Introduction

Speakers in conversation are in the first instance allocated the space in which to produce a single unit of talk which could figure as a complete turn (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). Continuing a speaking turn past a point of possible completion therefore may require some kind of 'work' on the part of the speaker (Schegloff, 1987). Over the years some analytic attention has been devoted to how speakers continue their talk beyond a point of possible turn-completion (Couper-Kuhlen & Ono, 2007; Ford, Thompson, & Drake, 2012; Local, 1992). One way speakers can do this is by producing a continuation in maximally close proximity to a point of possible turn-completion (Local & Walker, 2012). This article extends our understanding of how speakers do this, and to what interactional effect. Techniques of sequential (turn-by-turn) and phonetic analysis are brought together to do this.

The findings emphasise several important analytic points. In order to understand turn-continuation (and thus the organisation of turn-taking) it is not sufficient to consider only syntax and action, a line suggested by findings reported by de Ruiter, Mitterer, and Enfield (2006) (though see Bögels & Torreira, 2015 where this is challenged). It is essential that as wide a range of phonetic details as possible receive due attention. They emphasise the need to make use of general phonetic techniques, rather than looking only at pitch and other prosodic features. As part of studying and describing phonetic features in the data-set, various acoustic records are presented which are important resources in phonetic analysis (spectrograms,

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