

ENG 2602- GENRES IN LITERATURE AND LANGUAGE: THEORY, STYLE AND POETICS

UNIT 6: CONVERSATIONAL ANALYSIS- 'REAL-LIFE' DIALOGUE

The purpose of this discussion is to provide you with additional guidance that will assist you to focus on the objectives of Unit 6. Note that Conversational Analysis is a vast field which explores various theories and aspects related to conversations. These will, however, not be explored in this unit. For now you only need to ensure that you are familiar with the aspects and features that are covered in your study material.

As indicated in the module, upon completion of the section you are expected to be able to:

- discuss the differences between dramatic dialogue and conversation;
- demonstrate an understanding of why conversations should be studied;
- analyse conversations in accordance with conversational analysis and transcription conventions;
- reflect an understanding of conversational conventions
- show that you understand the cultural norms that relate to conducting conversations

Outcome 1 focuses on the differences between dramatic dialogue and conversation.

In this unit your attention is drawn to the fact that there are differences between the genres of dramatic dialogue and real-life dialogue. In spite of this however, you should also note that there are also similarities that arise because conversations are regarded as a 'type of dramatic expression' (p75) and drama is usually an enactment of what happens in real life. (p76). For purposes of this discussion, we will only mention the differences. The major difference is that dramatic dialogue does not occur naturally. It is contrived and emanates from prepared scripts. In addition to this, the analysis of dramatic dialogue is different from that of real-life dialogue. (Refer to Unit 5, Section 4, p66). However, in this unit, we will not focus on this.

Real-life dialogue, is as the term suggests, a reflection of real conversations that occur naturally as part of everyday social interactions and speech actions. These conversations are also referred to as speech acts (Goatly, 2000:146). The characteristics of conversation are listed on p 76 of Unit 6 for your reference.

Outcome 2 focuses on the question: Why should we study conversations?

There are a number of reasons why we study conversations (Refer to pp.77 & 78). You have also been provided with a list of interactions, in your study guide, to illustrate the fact that the different scenarios would require different talk-in-interaction approaches. (p76). Pause for a moment and think about the implications of approaching an important interview in the same manner as you would a conversation with your friend.

Or, consider, for example what would happen in a classroom when learners communicate in a disrespectful manner with a teacher. Or if the teacher and learners all spoke at the same time without allowing each other the opportunity to get a chance to express themselves individually. You will, no doubt, agree that this would have a negative bearing on communication in these instances.

Outcome 3 looks at conversational analysis strategies and transcription conventions- What are they?

The three main dimensions of conversational analysis are discussed on p. 78. They are namely, **actions, structure and inter-subjective understanding**.

Communication is impaired when participants ignore the strategies that facilitate effective communication such as:

- **Organising** conversations- this has to do with both **actions** and **structure** (pp. 78,79, 80 & 81).
- **Adjacency pairs**- this refers to speech actions that correspond with each other, for instance a question that requires a particular answer (p79).
- **Turn-taking** - refers to the actions that speakers take to manage the conversation such as, giving each other the opportunity to air their views or voice their opinions while using appropriate non-verbal communication (Refer to pp. 78, 79 & 82 to find out more about this).
- **Inter-subjectivity**- making sure that all participants in the speech event have the same understanding about the issue they are discussing. It also involves an inter-play between verbal and non-verbal communication. (pp. 79 & 80 provide you with more information about this).
- **Co-operative principles**- which are about politeness (p85) and co-operation in a conversation. They involve what Grice (1975) refers as the four maxims which can briefly be described as follows:

(1) The maxim of **quantity**: The amount of information speakers give in a speech act. This refers to a speaker's ability to provide information that is informative yet precise and to the point without any unnecessary details.

(2) The maxim of **quality**. This involves the truthfulness/veracity of the utterances and the integrity with which information is conveyed. Speakers are required to provide information that is accurate and credible.

(3) The maxim of **(manner)**. When speakers adhere to this maxim they are expected to make clear utterances in an orderly manner that is not difficult to understand.

(4) The maxim of **(relevance)**. This maxim requires speakers to provide information that is relevant to the discussion.

Try and think about what would happen in conversations if speakers were to ignore the above maxims. Failure to observe co-operative principles is also referred to as **flouting**. If, for example, a speaker is asked a question and s/he responds irrelevantly then we would say that the speaker has **flouted the maxim of relevance**.

These also include tone -which involves **pitch, mood and register** -which is about the way in which we address different people-for example, we generally use a formal register for authority figures and an informal register for our friends.

- **Implicature**- refers to what is suggested or implied in an utterance. See for example, the conversation on p80 and the words between brackets that give you an indication of what is implied in the utterance.

Outcomes 3 and 4 are aimed at enabling you to analyse actual conversations by using the appropriate transcription conventions.

Refer to the example of the conversation between a doctor and a nurse on p 82 to see how these conventions are applied.

Outcome 5 draws your attention to the cultural norms that govern conversations. Refer to p85 for more information regarding this.

We trust that this discussion, in conjunction with the information you are presented with in the module and text book and the various resources on *myUnisa* will assist you to organise your thoughts around the expectations of Unit 6 and to gain a better understanding of what conversational analysis is about. Now let us look at what the activity on p78 would require you to pay attention to.

Unit 6: Conversational analysis

Feedback for Activity

There is no standard response to this question because your responses are informed by the type of automated message you have listened to. In this activity you are expected to pay attention to the fact that the message is modelled on normal speech interactions that facilitate effective communication. The analysis of the conversation, would, therefore, take into account the three main conversational strategies that facilitate social communication such as **actions, structure and inter-subjective** understanding as indicated in the unit. An understanding of **transcription conventions and symbols** is important as this will help you to take note of the different pauses, which, in an automated message, serve a significant purpose because they give you the opportunity to respond appropriately to the prompt. You would also have to indicate the **openings, turn-taking mechanisms and closings** (p79) and the purpose they serve in the conversation.

For example, as you listened to the automated message you would have noticed that the recorded speaker gives you **cues and information**. It further affords you an opportunity to signal your choice and interact, just as in a 'normal' conversation where there are **adjacency pairs and politeness strategies**.

Failure to respond appropriately to the prompt would result in a breakdown in communication. This would effectively mean that the transaction would not be processed. In other words, it would mean that the speech act would have failed to achieve its purpose.

The intention of this activity is to illustrate the fact that different speech events and actions serve different purposes. In the case of an automated message the assumption is that in order for a particular service to be rendered there has to be cooperation between the speaker in the automated message and yourself, as the recipient of the service. On the whole, it is important to pay attention to social conversational conventions in order for successful communication to take place, regardless of the context or medium of communication.

A brief word about responding to Assessment Questions

- You are expected to pay careful attention to the requirements of the questions. Make sure that you understand all the elements of the question. For example, if a question requires you to demonstrate how the different aspects of conversation analysis are featured in a conversation, you should not merely describe what the speakers are saying. In that case, you are expected to demonstrate how the aspects are reflected in

the conversation. You should bear in mind that an analysis is not the same as a description.

The information that is provided in **Tut Letter 301/3/2015** provides you with more general information about what you should take into account when you write academic essays.

- After writing your response to an exam question or essay read it carefully to ensure that it is an appropriate response to the requirements. Also re-read it to check whether it makes sense. Re-reading will also help you to eliminate any unnecessary errors relating to, among other things, **syntax** (how the sentence is structured and how the words are combined) and **semantics** (are the words joined together in a manner that makes sense?).

Remember, you should not just write for the sake of writing or filling the page. Make sure that what you have written is coherent and relevant. It should also contribute meaningfully towards your discussion/analysis. In addition, you should also look at whether your essay has an appropriate introduction. Bear in mind that an introduction serves the purpose of providing a context and point of departure. It also creates an expectation of what to expect in the body of the essay. A conclusion sums up your ideas and restates the gist of what you were discussing in your essays to bring it to a logical end. Note that you do not have to divide your discussion into these different segments, i.e. introduction, body and conclusion but there should be a natural progression that leads the reader from one part to the other through the use of relevant logical connectors.

- As it has been pointed out in various resources (on *myUnisa*) and, specifically, in Tut Letter 301/3/2015, you should guard against **plagiarism** because failure to do so can result in you being heavily penalised. Of course you do not want to find yourself in that position. Note that if, in your discussion/essay, you bring in additional information that you have obtained from a particular source, you have to **acknowledge the source** from which this information was obtained to avoid being charged for plagiarism.

Lastly, you should take note that good writing is a by-product of reading. I, therefore, encourage you to create the habit (if you have not already done so) of being a reader who does not just read for academic purposes or studying. Get into the habit of making time to read widely and as much as you can. This will help you to increase your vocabulary, which you will need when you write and to acquire the knowledge you need to grow and develop as a well-informed individual.

I trust that you will find this information useful as you do your best to succeed in your studies.