

Assignment #1: Observing Natural Language (part 1)

This natural conversation took place on the Saturday following Christmas at a little café in Astoria, Queens. It took place between 10:35 a.m. and 10:57 a.m. The café was rather busy during the conversation. Espresso machines were running in the background, people talking casually at surrounding tables, the door opening and closing, and customers and workers moving around every now and again. The speakers seemed calm and relaxed, even though there was a lot of commotion in the background. This demonstrated that they were used to being there.

Anna and Maya (pseudonyms) were sitting at a little square table in the middle of the café, facing each other. Anna drank coffee, and Maya drank hot chocolate, and they each took sips of their drinks while they talked. They were open and interested in each other's bodies. They leaned slightly forward toward each other, looked at each other often, and utilized hand gestures while they talked. Because they were so near to each other, the encounter felt relaxed and personal.

Anna and Maya looked to be about the same age, and one of them said her age during the talk. The other one looked like she was about the same age. The way they talked to each other, including how they talked about memories they had in common, past events like Friendsgiving, how they made plans together, and how easy it was for one person to cut off the other, made it appear like they were close friends and maybe even roommates. Their interaction demonstrated that they had a deep relationship and knew each other well, which undoubtedly grew over time.

The tone of the talk altered as time went on. It began in a quiet, slightly sleepy voice, then evolved into a more active and joyful planning phase, and lastly into a more thoughtful and supportive style while talking about work stress. Alterations in prosody, facial expression, and body language also happened with these tone alterations. For instance, people laughed more, talked over each other when things were thrilling, and spoke more slowly when things were more serious.

The two speakers were dressed in casual attire that seemed "alternative" or artistic. Maya's knitted hat, which Anna had given her as a Christmas gift, got a short list of compliments. This revealed how close they were. The compliments were given with grins, overlapping affirmations, and less straightforward answers, which is common among close friends who want to make each other feel good.

Overall, the way they talked to each other was really friendly and helpful. They shared the floor, had a lot of overlap, helped each other out, and worked together to make meaning.

Transcript:

1 Anna ((sips coffee)) I still can't believe this is the Saturday after Christmas.
2 Everything feels kind of blurry.// =
3 Maya = // ((laughs)) same.
4 I feel like I haven't really caught up with you yet.
5 Anna I know. (0.7)
6 Okay but we need to talk about New Year's. =
7 Maya = Right.
8 Maya Are we actually hosting this year?
9 Anna I think we should.
10 I don't really want to bounce around again.
11 Maya Same.
12 And we already did Friendsgiving //so
13 Anna //Yeah this would be like the second thing
we've hosted this winter.
14 Maya Which honestly feels kind of nice.
15 Anna It does.
16 ((glances at M's hat))
17 Also, that hat still looks so good on you.
18 Maya ((smiles)) Thank you.
19 I'm really glad // you like it.
20 Anna // No, I love it.
21 It looks very you.
22 Maya Okay good.
23 I was nervous giving it to //you.
24 Anna // No, it's perfect.

25 Okay wait.

26 If we host, I want it to actually be fun.=

27 Maya =Mmhm.

28 Not just people standing around.

29 Anna Exactly.

30 Maya What if we did something during the day too?

31 Anna (.) Like New Year's Day? =

32 Maya = Yeah::: (0.5)

33 Make it kind of an all-day thing.

34 Anna I actually really like that.

35 ((reaches into bag))

36 I'm writing this down. =

37 Maya = ((laughs)) of course you are.

38 Anna Okay.

39 All-day New Year's party.

40 Maya What if we did some kind of game?

41 Like a scavenger hunt? =

42 Anna = Oh my god.

43 Or something like Sherlock Holmes.=

44 Maya = YES.

45 Like puzzles.

46 Almost like an escape room.

47 Anna That would be so fun.

48 We could split everyone into teams.

49 Maya How many people though?

50 Anna Probably our usual group.

Assignment #1: Observing Natural Language (part 2)

Speech Acts: According to Searle, representative speech actions are comments that reveal how the speaker sees the world (Archer et al., 2012). In the conversation, both speakers communicate about their plans, thoughts, and experiences that they both believe are accurate. For example, Anna says in line 1, "I still can't believe this is the Saturday after Christmas," and Maya agrees in line 3, "same." This shows that they both think about time and how to deal with the holidays in the same way.

There are a lot of commands in the conversation, but they are usually more collaborative than commanding. Anna's comment in line 6, "Okay but we need to talk about New Year's," is a command that initiates a new topic, yet it is still presented in a way that everyone can understand. There are also expressives, as when the speakers talk about their thoughts or opinions, like when they give compliments ("that hat still looks so good on you," line 17) or discuss how weary or dissatisfied they are with work (lines 63–69).

Other speaking acts aren't direct. Maya's comment in line 68, "I just feel kind of stuck," is an example of both a representation and an implied call for empathy and approval. Anna says, "That's really frustrating," on line 70, which shows that she understood what Maya meant.

Conversational Patterns: The speakers take turns talking, and they both talk for the same amount of time. People often take short turns and mix them up, which suggests that they are on the same page and understand each other. There are a lot of lines that repeat in the transcript (for example, lines 2–3, 12–14, and 19–21), but these overlaps are helpful, not hurtful. This shows that individuals are interested and paying attention, not interrupting.

There aren't many breaks, and when there are, they're short and vital. For example, the pause in line 5 (0.7) looks like it's a move from just looking at something to formulating plans, and the pause in line 32 (0.5) looks like Maya is coming up with an idea. These pauses don't mean that the conversation is over; they are interactional resources.

Most of the time, the speakers obey Grice's rules, but there are moments when they use too many words on purpose, like when they work together to elaborate on ideas (for example, the long planning sequence

from lines 26 to 47). The exchange also displays conversational implicature, such when Anna admits she's weary earlier (line 60), and it implies that working together to plan made her feel better without expressing so directly.

Impact of Social Attributes and Interpersonal Relationships: The way these people talk to each other suggests that they are on the same level and are close to each other socially. The fact that the speakers may easily talk over each other, finish each other's sentences, and change the subject demonstrates that they are close friends. Friendsgiving, being tired in the past, and giving gifts all make this friendship even greater. There is no need for politeness or respect because the speakers look like friends and peers. In this kind of relationship, people can be open about their feelings and be vulnerable (for example, by saying they feel "stuck" at work) and make decisions together without worrying about what others will think. The encounter indicates that knowing someone well changes how they talk and how the conversation goes, making it easier and more open.

Politeness Forms and Features: Brown and Levinson (1987) assert that the interaction is replete with positive face-enhancing methods. Both speakers regularly reinforce one another with agreement tokens ("yeah," "same," "exactly"), collaborative completions, and praises. These tactics make each speaker feel like the other person gets them, cares about them, and agrees with them.

It's especially vital to provide compliments, like when Anna remarks about Maya's hat (lines 17–21). This conversation involves reciprocal mitigation. Maya downplays her confidence at first by saying, "I was nervous giving it to you" (line 23), and Anna gives more positive face support by saying, "No, it's perfect" (line 24). There are no clear behaviors in the encounter that could hurt someone's face. When people talk about sensitive subjects like being unhappy at work, they exhibit empathy and understanding instead of delivering advice or condemnation.

Non-Verbal Communication: Non-verbal acts are particularly significant for retaining the tone of the relationship in the conversation. The speakers are close to each other at a little table, lean in as they chat, and gaze each other in the eye for a long period. All of these things demonstrate that they are close and

interested in each other. People typically move their hands around, especially when they're holding beverages, which makes the mood even more relaxed and casual.

Prosodic elements such as laughter, elongated vowels (e.g., "yeah::: in line 32"), and variations in pitch indicate enthusiasm and emotional resonance. The transcript includes physical activities like sipping coffee, smiling, and writing notes. These acts also indicate how the exchange is collaborative.

Conclusion: This interaction illustrates how common social characteristics, intimate relationships, and collective communication objectives influence language usage at both structural and pragmatic levels. The speakers utilize a lot of good politeness methods, taking turns, and expressive speech acts to keep their relationship strong and make sense of things together. Their words and body language work together to generate a helpful discourse, supporting and bringing people together.

References:

- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.
- Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics* (Vol. 3, pp. 41–58). Academic Press.
- Billmyer, K. (2026). *Lecture slides: Politeness, directness, and conversational structure*. Columbia University.