

Adjacency Pair Of The Characters Utterances In Breaking Bad TV Series

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ABSTRACT

Language plays a vital role in daily interaction, enabling people to convey meaning, build relationships, and coordinate social actions. In spoken discourse, adjacency pairs function as key structural units that organize conversation and guide turn-taking. Although conversational analysis has been widely explored in linguistic theory, its application to authentic or scripted dialogue—particularly in popular media—remains limited. This study addresses that gap by analyzing how adjacency pairs operate in exchanges between Walter White and Jesse Pinkman in the TV series *Breaking Bad*. The research identifies the types of adjacency pairs used and examines how the characters respond to each other's utterances. Using a qualitative descriptive method, the study analyzes transcriptions from the third season and categorizes data based on established adjacency pair types. The findings show that all types appear, with question-answer and request-accept/refuse pairs occurring most frequently. Overall, the study demonstrates how fictional dialogue mirrors real conversational patterns and reveals character dynamics.

Keywords: adjacency pairs, breaking bad, conversation, language.

1. Introduction

Adjacency pairs function to maintain the flow and structure of conversation. When a listener interprets a speaker's utterance as the first pair part of a particular adjacency pair, the expected response serves as the corresponding second pair part (Mazeland, 2006). By providing an appropriate second part, the listener not only acknowledges the speaker's turn but also upholds the social norms that organize and regulate conversational interaction. Conversational analysis, particularly the study of adjacency pairs, has been widely explored in previous research. For example, Negara (2021), a student of Udayana University, examined the types of adjacency pairs and the preferred or dispreferred responses in character interactions in *Avatar* (2009). Similarly, Sitepu, Hanafiah, and Zein (2020) analyzed conversational patterns in an interview with Prime Minister Julia Gillard on Sky News Australia, while Alqatwana and Quba (2024) investigated conversational analysis in press conference debates involving Donald Trump, media reports, and journalists. Collectively, these studies offer valuable insights into conversational analysis and the role of adjacency pairs in shaping interaction.

Adjacency pairs in the theory of sequence organization within conversational analysis explored by Schegloff (2007) consist of two parts spoken by different participants. It includes pairs, such as greeting-greeting, question-answer, offer-accept/decline, etc (Schegloff, 2007). The first pair parts impose relevance expectations on the subsequent turn, which are then applied to interpret the actions that immediately follow, whether they involve speech, nonverbal cues like cough, raised eyebrows, or even silence. Providing a relevant second pair part (SPP) is the primary way for a listener to demonstrate their understanding of the previous turn's intent and its implications for what should happen next, thereby affirming the effectiveness of the initial turn as a meaningful action. There are some types of adjacency pair proposed by some scholars, they are Schegloff, Paltridge, Brown, and Yule. It includes Greeting – Greeting, Questions – Answer, Offer – Accept/Decline, Request – Accept/Refuse, Complaint – Denial/Apology, Invitation – Accept/Decline, Assessment – Agreement/Disagreement, Farewell – Farewell, Blame – Admission/Denial, Apology – Minimization, Summons – Answer.

It is relevant to be discussed since it can lead to communication problems if it is not used effectively. This can cause misunderstanding and misinterpretation between the participants of a conversation. The second part of a conversational exchange can be one of the instances. For instance, when the response or the reply is delayed for an extended period. This prolonged pause may result in uncomfortable silences, causing participants to feel uneasy or uncertain about how to proceed. In some cases, the conversation may drift off the topic or lose focus as people attempt to fill the gap. In fact, the phenomena can negatively affect the flow and coherence of the dialogue. In this study, the analysis focuses on the types of adjacency pairs found in the utterances of Walter White and Jesse Pinkman in the *Breaking Bad* TV series, including the eleven types mentioned previously. This study aims to identify how these adjacency pairs are used in the characters' dialogues and how they contribute to the interactional meaning within the narrative context.

2. Methods

The data for this research were obtained from conversations between the characters Walter White and Jesse Pinkman in the third season of the American crime drama *Breaking Bad*, created by Vince Gilligan and released from 2008 to 2013. This series was selected because of its complex character dynamics and its dialogue, which closely reflects real-life communication, providing numerous instances of adjacency pairs suitable for detailed analysis. These conversational exchanges offer rich material for examining sequence organization within the conversational analysis framework proposed by Schegloff (2007), particularly in relation to adjacency pairs. Data were collected using the documentation method, with note-taking employed to gather, record, and organize relevant utterances. The analysis was conducted using a

qualitative approach, specifically descriptive qualitative methods, to interpret and describe the conversational structures found in the interactions between the two characters.

3. Findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study based on the analysis of adjacency pairs found in the conversations between Walter White and Jesse Pinkman in the *Breaking Bad* TV series. It outlines the types of adjacency pairs identified in the characters' utterances and examines each example within its conversational context to illustrate how the characters construct meaning, respond to one another's actions, and sustain the flow of interaction. The discussion also relates these findings to the theoretical framework of conversational analysis, demonstrating how adjacency pairs shape and organize the characters' dialogue.

Greeting – Greeting

Greeting – greeting is a type of adjacency pair commonly used to initiate interaction and demonstrate readiness to engage in conversation. As the first pair part, a greeting serves as a social signal acknowledging the presence of the other person, fostering interpersonal connection, and setting friendly tone for the exchange.

(1) Greeting – Greeting

00:17:41 --> 00:17:45

(GR) Walter White : “Hi.”

(GR) Jesse Pinkman : “Man, I'm sorry. I needed to talk to you, but you weren't
at your apartment.”

This data occurred in Episode 4, where Jesse unexpectedly waits for Walter outside the school. Without Walter's prior knowledge, Jesse stays inside the car, parked near Walter's vehicle. As Walter approaches his car, Jesse signals his presence by honking the horn, catching Walter's attention. Noticing Jesse, Walter walks over to his car, appearing somewhat puzzled by the surprise encounter. Upon reaching Jesse, Walter initiates the interaction with a simple greeting, saying “Hi,” which reflects both his acknowledgement and confusion. However rather than returning the greeting directly, Jesse immediately proceeds to explain the reason for his presence. This interaction represents an adjacency pair of greeting and greeting, where Walter's initial “Hi” function as the first pair part. However, Jesse responds the greeting by explaining his presence, shifting the focus directly to the purpose of the meeting.

1. Question – Answer

The question – answer pair is the most frequently occurring type of adjacency pair in the data. A question functions as the first pair part, typically used to seek information from the

interlocutor. The corresponding answer, as the second pair part, provides the requested information.

(2) Question – Answer

00:37:06 --> 00:37:16

(Q) Walter White : “You’re better? Really? What, the rehab? It helped?”

(ANS) Jesse Pinkman : “Yeah. I’m done using.”

This data occurred in Episode 1, shortly after Jesse returns home from a drug rehabilitation shelter. During a quiet and reflective moment, Jesse and Walter engage in a conversation that cautiously test the emotional distance between them. As part of that interaction, Walter brings up the money he intends to give Jesse, but clarifies that he will only give it once Jesse is better. In response, Jesse makes a self-assessment, stating that he is better, signalling both his recovery and his readiness to re-engage with Walter, at least on a surface level. Still unsure, Walter follows up with a question aimed at confirming Jesse’s state, “*Does the shelter help?*” This question reflects Walter’s doubt and possibly concerned, as he seeks some reassurance about Jesse’s claim to being sober and stable. Jesse responds immediately and with certainty, saying, “Yeah. I’m done using.” His answer is clear, decisive, and emotionally grounded. This interaction exemplifies the adjacency pair of question and answer.

2. Offer – Accept/Decline

Offer – accept/decline is a type of adjacency pair in which the first pair part conveys the speaker’s intention to give or do something for the listener. When the listener responds with an acceptance, it is aligning with the speaker’s expectations. Otherwise, when the listener responds with a decline, it is not aligning with the speaker’s expectations.

(3) Offer – Decline

00:32:17 --> 00:32:43

(OF) Walter White : “It’s more than an assistant. Partners. We’ll be partners again. Split everything fifty-fifty, just like before. One-point-five million dollars each.”

(DCL) Jesse Pinkman : “No.”

This data occurred in episode 7, where Walter presents an offer to Jesse, proposing a partnership in their methamphetamine production. He emphasizes that Jesse would not merely be an assistant but an equal partner, with the profits being split evenly at fifty-fifty ration. However,

Jesse immediately rejects the offer without hesitation or even providing any justification for his refusal. This interaction exemplifies the adjacency pair of offer and decline.

3. Request – Accept/Refuse

Request – accept/refuse is one of the adjacency pair types in which the speaker initiates a request to prompt the listener to carry out a particular action. The request serves as the first pair part, aiming to influence the listener's behaviour. While accept/refuse serves as the second pair part to respond the first speaker's utterance.

(4) Request - Accept

00:37:41 --> 00:38:15

(RQ) Walter White : "Say it. Say it."

Walter White : "Private domicile and I won't be harassed."

Jesse Pinkman : (Listen to Walter's scenario, and panicked.)

Hank Schrader : "I'll give you three seconds to get your ass out here. One,
two..."

(ACP) Jesse Pinkman : "This is my own private domicile and I will not be
harassed. Bitch"

This data occurred in Episode 6, where Jesse and Walter find themselves inside a van, which previously served as their makeshift methamphetamine lab. Unexpectedly, Hank, a DEA agent and Walter's brother-in-law, arrives after tracking Jesse's movements. Unaware that Walter is also inside the van, Hank attempts to get Jesse to follow a specific scenario that would protect them from being caught. This exchange exemplifies the adjacency pair of request and accept. Walter initiates the interaction by making a request, urging Jesse to adhere to the planned cover story. Jesse promptly accepts Walter's request without resistance or additional negotiation, ensuring the conversation progresses smoothly within the given context.

4. Complaint – Denial/Apology

Complaint – denial/apology is an adjacency pair in which the speaker initiates a complaint to express dissatisfaction, disapproval, or criticism about a particular issue, behaviour, or situation. While denial/apology become the second pair part to respond the complaint of the first speaker.

(5) Complaint – Denial

00:00:22 --> 00:00:30

(CP) Jesse Pinkman : “Dude, this isn't even 7 grand, all right? My guy wants 85.”**(DNL)** Walter White : “This is all the money I have in the world.”

This data occurred in Episode 5 where Walter gives Jesse a sum of money intended to be used for purchasing a recreational vehicle (RV), which they plan to convert into mobile meth lab. This moment is a significant step in the development of their partnership, as it marks the beginning of their independent methamphetamine production setup. After receiving the money, Jesse takes a moment to count the money and immediately complains that the amount is not enough to buy a decent RV that can meet their operational needs. Jesse's complaint reflects not only his dissatisfaction with the amount but also his concern about the practicality and safety of using a low-budget vehicle for such a risky enterprise. In response, Walter firmly denies the complaint by stating “That's all the money I have in the world.” This utterance signals refusal to provide more money, effectively closing down Jesse's protest. Walter's response is not only a refusal but also serves to assert his own financial limitations, which subtly implies that Jesse must make do with what he has. This exchange exemplifies the adjacency pair of complaint and denial.

5. Invitation – Accept/ Decline

Invitation – accept/decline is a type of adjacency pair where the speaker initiates an invitation to suggest a future activity and encourage the listener's participation. This first pair part serves both a social and functional purpose, promoting connection and shared engagement. The second part may involve either accepting, which shows agreement and willingness to join, or declining, which politely refuses the offer while often giving a reason to maintain social harmony.

(6) Invitation – Decline

00:05:08 --> 00:05:12

(IN) Jesse Pinkman : “Are you coming?”**(DCL)** Walter White : “Yeah, in a minute.”

This data occurred in Episode 10, when Walter becomes increasingly suspicious about the missing amount of methamphetamine from their last batch. He starts obsessively trying to figure out what went wrong, unaware that Jesse himself has secretly taken the extra product. Jesse, trying to divert Walter's attention, offers possible explanations for the discrepancy, such as

measurement errors or residue loss, despite knowing the real cause. Jesse's attempt to cover up his own actions subtly reveals his internal conflict. Eventually, Jesse suggests that they wrap up for the day. He does this by inviting Walter to leave the lab together, saying something like, "Are you coming?" which is an attempt to shift the mood and bring the intense work session to an end. Walter, however, does not accept the invitation immediately. Instead, he responds with a delayed "Just a minute," indicating that he is not ready to leave yet. This interaction exemplifies the adjacency pair of invitation and decline, where Jesse initiates an invitation, and Walter's delayed, non-committal response functions as a subtle form of decline.

6. Assessment – Agreement/Disagreement

Assessment – agreement/disagreement is a type of adjacency pair in which the first speaker offers an evaluative comment, expressing a personal view, emotion, or judgement about a specific topic, event, or previous remark. The second speaker then either agrees, showing support or alignment with the assessment, or disagrees, signalling a differing option or perspective while still maintaining the flow of the conversation.

(7) Assessment – Disagreement

00:37:34 --> 00:37:48

(AS) Walter White : "You know, hmm in spite of how bad things got... it really could be looked at like a wake-up call for both of us. I mean, you know, just to get our lives back together again... and on the straight and narrow."

(DIS) Jesse Pinkman : (Remains silent.)

This data occurred in Episode 1, where Jesse returns home after completing a stay at a drug rehabilitation shelter. The atmosphere is tense but quiet as he reunites with Walter. Attempting to reestablish their connection and assess where they stand after recent traumatic events, Jesse's stint in the rehab and the collapse of Walter's marriage, Walter initiates a reflective conversation. He attempts to frame their situation as an opportunity to reset and regain control over their lives, subtly suggesting that they should return to their former partnership and rebuild from the chaos. Walter's statement functions as an assessment, implying a shared understanding or agreement about their circumstances and what should follow. However, Jesse does not verbally agree or even acknowledge the assessment. Instead, he responds with silence, followed by a shift in topic deliberately avoiding any emotional or explicit reaction to Walter's remarks. This interaction exemplifies the adjacency pair of assessment and disagreement.

7. Farewell – Farewell

Farewell – farewell is an adjacency pair typically used to mark the end of an interaction. The first speaker initiates the closing with a farewell, which serves as a polite and socially appropriate signal to disengage from the conversation. The second speaker usually responds with a farewell in return, acknowledging the closure and showing mutual respect as the interaction ends.

(8) Farewell – Farewell

00:05:14 --> 00:05:16

(FW) Jesse Pinkman : “All right, see you tomorrow.”

(FW) Walter White : (Does not respond, keeps searching for the missing product.)

This data occurred in Episode 10, during a moment in the lab where Walter is visibly distressed and distracted, still obsessively trying to locate the missing portion of their latest methamphetamine batch. Unbeknownst to him, Jesse had secretly taken the extra product earlier, making Walter’s anxious search ultimately futile. As the scene progresses, Jesse, who is growing increasingly uncomfortable with Walter’s behaviour, decides to leave the lab for the day. Before walking out, he casually says goodbye to Walter as a form of social closure and acknowledgment of the end of their interaction. However, Walter does not respond to Jesse’s farewell. His silence is not necessarily intentional but rather a reflection of his preoccupation with the missing yield. This exchange exemplifies the adjacency pair of farewell and farewell, where Jesse’s utterance represents the first pair part, functioning as a polite and socially expected leave-taking.

8. Blame – Admission/Denial

Blame – admission/denial is an adjacency pair in which the first speaker attribute fault or responsibility to another for a perceived misdeed or failure. This act often reflects disapproval and may be conveyed through direct accusations or implicit criticism. In response, the second speaker may either admit to the fault, accepting responsibility, or deny the accusation, rejecting the blame and possibly offering an explanation or defence.

(9) Blame – Denial

00:37:57 --> 00:38:13

(BL) Jesse Pinkman : “You know it was Jane's dad who accidentally crashed them together... because he was so torn up?”

(DNL) Walter White : “Okay, look, let me stop you right there, all right? You are not responsible for this. Not in any way, shape or form, all right?”

This data occurred in Episode 1, shortly after Jesse returns home from a drug rehabilitation shelter. In one of their first serious conversations since his return, Jesse and Walter discuss the recent and tragic airplane crash, a catastrophe that has deeply affected both of them. During the conversation, Jesse comes to a painful realization that the air traffic controller who caused the crash was Jane's father, that his actions were likely a result of emotional distress following Jane's death from a drug overdose. Overcome with guilt, Jesse begins to blame himself for the crash, connecting the dots between Jane's death. Jesse's self-blame is intense and emotionally raw, as he acknowledges that he was high with Jane when she overdosed, which further deepens his sense of responsibility. Walter, however, intervenes and cuts Jesse off, denying his blame. He tells Jesse not to blame himself, attempting to shut down the emotional spiral Jesse has entered. This interaction exemplifies the adjacency pair of blame and denial. Where Walter's response, though seemingly supportive on the surface, feels abrupt and almost dismissive, as though he is eager to shut down the conversation rather than explore Jesse's pain.

9. Apology – Minimization

Apology – minimization is one of the recognized adjacency pair types in conversation. An apology, as the first pair part, is a speech act used to express regret and take responsibility for an offense or mistake, aiming to restore harmony and social connection. The second speaker often responds by downplaying the offense or assuring that it is not a major issue, which helps reduce tension and maintain positive social relations.

(10) Apology – Minimization

00:07:49 --> 00:08:01

Walter White	: “This is... I...”
Jesse Pinkman	: (Remains silent.)
(AP) Walter White	: “Jesse, I'm... I am so sorry for this. This should not have happened.”
Jesse Pinkman	: “But it did.”
(MNZ) Jesse Pinkman	: “No thanks to you.”

This data occurred in Episode 7, following a critical turning point in Jesse and Walter's relationship. After executing a risky plan to mislead Hank, Walter's DEA brother-in-law by faking a call that Marie, Hank's wife, had been in a car accident, Hank rushed away from his investigation and violently assaulted Jesse. As a result, Jesse ended up hospitalized, suffering serious injuries. In the aftermath, Walter visits Jesse in the hospital and, upon seeing the consequences of their plan, expresses remorse and offers an apology for what happened.

However, Jesse's response is emotionally charged and distant. Rather than minimizing the apology, which would be the expected or socially preferred second pair part in this type of adjacency pair, Jesse remains cold and unaccepting. His silence and visible frustration show that he holds Walter responsible for his condition and is unwilling to offer any comfort or forgiveness. This interaction exemplifies the adjacency pair of apology and minimization.

10. Summons – Answer

Summons – answer is one of the recognized types of adjacency pairs in conversation. A summons, acting as the first pair part, is a verbal or non-verbal signal intended to gain the listener's attention and initiate communication. It serves as a gateway to interaction, ensuring mutual awareness before continuing the exchange.

(11) Summons – Answer

00:27:14 --> 00:27:16

(SM) Jesse Pinkman : "What, Mr. White?"

(ANS) Walter White : (Remains silent.)

This data occurred in Episode 6, following a tense phone conversation between Walter and Hank. During the call, Hank questions Walter about Jesse's recreational vehicle, suspecting it to be a mobile meth lab. This triggers Walter's concern that Hank is getting dangerously close to uncovering their operation. Alarmed, Walter immediately attempts to warn Jesse by calling him. Jesse answers the call, expecting urgent information. However, Walter unexpectedly goes silent mid-call, as he suddenly realizes that the phone line might not be secure and fears that law enforcement could be monitoring their communication. Jesse, confused by Walter's silence, attempts to summon him by calling out his name, trying to prompt a response or explanation. Despite Jesse's efforts to regain clarity, Walter chooses to remain silent, prioritizing caution over communication. His continued silence leaves Jesse without an answer and creates an atmosphere of tension and uncertainty. This interaction exemplifies the adjacency pair of summons and answer.

All eleven types of adjacency pairs appeared in the interactions between Jesse Pinkman and Walter White in Breaking Bad season 3. The most common was question – answer, reflecting their frequent need for clarification and negotiation. Request – accept/refuse and assessment – agreement/disagreement also occurred regularly, showing moments of power struggle and disagreement. Complaint – denial/apology and blame – admission/denial highlighted recurring conflict and shifting responsibility. Less frequent types such as offer – accept/decline, invitation – accept/decline, and apology – minimization appeared in specific scenes, often tied to emotional tension or failed attempts at reconciliation. Summons – answer functioned to initiate exchanges, while greeting – greeting and farewell – farewell appeared

rarely, as their relationship was often focused on urgent matters rather than social rituals. These patterns illustrate the complexity and strain in their interactions.

4. Conclusion

The analysis of adjacency pairs in the dialogues between Walter White and Jesse Pinkman in the *Breaking Bad* TV series demonstrates how various conversational structures—such as greeting–greeting, question–answer, offer–accept/decline, request–accept/refuse, and complaint–denial/apology—play a key role in maintaining coherence and interactional flow. These adjacency pairs not only facilitate the exchange of information but also reveal the characters' shifting relationships, power dynamics, and emotional states throughout the narrative.

By applying the sequence organization framework within conversational analysis, this study shows how adjacency pairs contribute to meaning-making and shape the development of dialogue in fictional contexts that closely resemble real conversational behavior. The findings further underscore the importance of appropriate second pair parts in preventing miscommunication and sustaining the integrity of conversational exchange.

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