

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF
THE STRUCTURES OF ENGLISH AND MYANMAR
CONVERSATIONS**

Ph D DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Conversations may be said to form the major portion of daily communication. A number of studies have been conducted on the structural units of conversation – turn-taking, adjacency pairs, preference organization, topic initiation and development, feedback, repair, interruption, overlap, conversational openings and closings, discourse-makers and response tokens. However, there have been no known studies on the comparison of the structures of conversations in English and Myanmar languages. Thus, this study explores the forms and functions of turn-taking, overlaps and interruptions, adjacency pairs and repairs in English and Myanmar conversations. Ten Myanmar conversations on different social contexts and interaction environments are recorded in natural settings and ten English conversations on the same topics of the Myanmar data is taken from the book “Exploring Spoken English” by Ronald Carter and Michael McCarthy (1997). The data are quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed according to the turn-taking model proposed by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974). As regards turn-taking, it is found in the data that English speakers use discourse markers for holding turn twenty times more than Myanmar speakers. In using address terms to give turns, one significant difference is that Myanmar speakers use address terms according to the status, rank and age when giving turns. Both English and Myanmar speakers use syntactical units which are subject and predicate or predicate alone to signal giving up their turns, but Myanmar speakers frequently use predicate only. With respect to overlaps, Myanmar speakers use more overlaps in their conversations than English speakers. Myanmar speakers start their overlaps midway in the other speaker’s utterance and the interrupted one drops out quickly. It is found that the amount of Simultaneous Onsets produced by both language speakers is nearly the same. Both language speakers try to complete other’s incomplete turns when there seems to be a problem within the fluency of the ongoing turn. Concerning interruptions, in the data Myanmar speakers interrupt their interlocutors very often, but English speakers seldom interrupt. In studying adjacency-pairs, both English and Myanmar speakers use first part of question-answer adjacency pairs when they yield turns. Concerning repair types, in the data both English and Myanmar speakers repair whenever they want to correct themselves as well as others who make mistakes in giving information and at the syntactic level and at the morphological level. Myanmar speakers use Self-initiated other repair (SIOR) frequently, but English speakers tend to use more Self-initiated Self repair (SISR) than Myanmar speakers. This study also reveals the use of backchannel cues in both languages, with Myanmar as low and English as high in the frequency of backchannel cues.