

Pomerantz, A. (1984). Agreeing and disagreeing with assessments: some features of preferred and dispreferred turn shapes. In J.M. Atkinson. & J. Heritage, (Eds.), *Structures of social action* (pp. 57-101). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

In her introduction, Pomerantz sets the stage for an in depth look at talk in interaction by saying that “when persons partake in social activities, they routinely make assessments. Participating in an event and assessing that event are related enterprises.” Pomerantz claims that the proffering of an assessment marks the assessor as a participant, showing that they have awareness of the assessed referent. She marks this by providing examples of turns in talk that demonstrate the requesting of an assessment that is not proffered because the speaker does not have sufficient knowledge of the referent. A second locus of assessments, she says, occurs within speakers’ reports of their partaking in activities; telling someone that you saw a particular movie and telling if you liked it or not in the same turn would be an example of this. Thirdly, assessments are often conjoined with second assessments by co-participants; it’s in describing these second assessments that Pomerantz focuses the rest her paper.

Moving forward Pomerantz describes second assessments as assessments produced by recipients of prior assessments. In other words, if someone mentions that the weather is horrible and another person agrees with them, the agreement is a second assessment. Pomerantz begins her descriptions of second assessments with preferred agreements. Preferred agreements come in different flavors; as upgrades (saying the day is beautiful after someone calls it pretty); as same evaluations (eg. saying “yes it is” or “I like it too”); or even as downgrades (saying the day is pretty after someone calls it beautiful).

Downgraded agreements frequently engender disagreement sequences. One way conversants disagree is by reasserting their previous position, often more intensely. Citing Pomerantz’s example:

A: She’s a fox.
L: Yeh, she’s a pretty girl.
→A: Oh, she’s gorgeous!
(p. 68)

She continues to describe different disagreement constructions such as those prefaced with delay devices, including silences, “uh’s”, “well’s” etc. These disagreements are often seen

as weak due to their being mitigated by the delay devices. Stronger disagreements are often directly contrastive to the initial assessment such as insisting a subject is important after someone told you it wasn't. However, disagreements don't have to be strong or weak, they can fall somewhere in the middle by giving a partial agreement using words like "essentially" or "yeah but's".

Pomerantz further describes how the use of delays can be heard as disagreements by showing how participants who make initial assessments and are met by silences often elect to resume talk. When they resume talk they often make reversals or backdowns of their prior assessments. This shows that silences after initial assessments are often heard as a form of disagreement. Alongside silences, hesitations, question repeats, requests for clarification and weakly stated agreements can also be signs of potential disagreement.

After this basic explanation of agreeing and disagreeing, Pomerantz digs into the nuances of how these responses play out in regards to self-deprecating initial assessments. With these types of initial assessments, agreements and disagreements take almost opposite forms to what Pomerantz explicated previously. For instance, agreeing to a self-deprecating statement would be dis-preferred whereas normally agreements to assessments are preferred. Disagreements can often take the form of compliments in this light. If someone says they are a lousy golfer, disagreements can take a compliment form such as "no, you're a great golfer." Also, where silences were seen as disagreements before, in self-deprecating assessments they are often heard as agreements.

Conversation analysis (CA) has been a key interest of mine since it was introduced to me in 2009. Pomerantz is a pioneer in the field who has worked closely with CA authorities such as Harvey Sacks and Emanuel Schegloff. This paper, in its very detailed and thorough account of how turn/sequence organization operates with respect to the preference or dis-preference status of the actions, has illuminated aspects of everyday language that largely go unnoticed. It's not until someone does a close analysis such as this that we realize that a silence *can* be heard as an

agreement or a disagreement in specific contexts, as opposed to only understanding this intuitively. Identifying and categorizing these patterns in human communication provides a valuable resource for researchers in a variety of fields, especially in my own field of TESOL.

To a layperson, CA may seem unnecessarily detailed, but as the field demonstrates, these details have a huge impact on how we communicate. When we examine these details, patterns emerge, and we can use these patterns to model the linguistic input we give our students. For example, using Pomerantz study we see how silences coming right after initial assessments are heard as a form of disagreement with the assessment. Knowing that this is a pattern in communication we can teach this to our students so that they can either use silences to disagree or so that they are aware that their silences can be heard as disagreements and avoid miscommunication.

I have used CA in my own research on interlanguage pragmatics and have found it to be a powerful supportive component to a thesis. Listening to the recorded conversations of my research subjects for instances of interlanguage pragmatics is profoundly different from transcribing their turns at talk and analyzing it on paper, where I can visually see the prosody, pauses, and overlaps of the speech. Although I wouldn't use CA as the sole supporting piece of evidence to a thesis, I wouldn't submit research on linguistic action without first running it through a CA filter.