

# First saying and second saying in aphasic conversations

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## Abstract

*Objective:* This present study investigates first and second saying in aphasic conversations to demonstrate the ability of qualitative methodologies (in this case conversation analysis) to study the ways in which persons with aphasia achieve conversation success through verbal repetition in the form of first and second sayings.

*Method:* For this explorative case study, the author drew on data from AphasiaBank, a multimedia database of discourse samples gathered from individuals with aphasia and from healthy controls. Using the framework of conversation analysis, the author discusses its position, composition, and action.

*Results:* We demonstrated the role of the practice of recycling elements of one's own prior utterances in building socially meaningful action, presenting an image of the speaker with aphasia as someone who is competently and confidently managing throughout her impairment.

*Discussion:* The author discusses the potential of conversation analytical techniques as tools to study the complex phenomenon of conversation as the primary vehicle for human social action.

*Conclusion:* Through the study of 'first saying and second saying' in aphasic conversation, this study contributes to our understanding of how persons with aphasia strategically employ their limited linguistic resources to negotiate meaning and social action.

**KEYWORDS:** CONVERSATION ANALYSIS; FIRST SAYING; SECOND SAYING; APHASIC CONVERSATION

## 1. Introduction

While verbal repetition has been investigated extensively in the study of aphasia, it is during the last decade that we have seen an increasing interest in the systematic investigation of it in the conversation of persons with aphasia and their conversational partners. In particular, researchers working within the tradition of conversation analysis have revealed the orderliness of repetition in aphasic conversations, as well as the strategic use of ‘the practice of repeating’ (Schegloff, 1997) by persons with aphasia in their negotiation of meaning and social action. For example, Oelschlaeger and Damico (1998) carried out a detailed investigation of spontaneous verbal repetition of a person with aphasia during conversation. They found that repetition was used effectively to accomplish a number of social actions and meanings (e.g., displays of uncertainty, agreement, alignment, and acknowledgment) in many different conversational contexts. By focusing on ‘the practice of repeating’ in aphasic conversations, Oelschlaeger and Damico were able to highlight the practical significance of this discourse device and the collaborative nature of conversation (i.e., the success of any conversation is dependent on the collaboration between participants), regardless of the level of language proficiency of the participants.

This present study sets out to investigate one form of repetition in aphasic conversations – first and second saying – that has not been touched upon in the study of aphasia. Through a detailed discussion of its position, composition, and action, the author attempts to demonstrate the ability of qualitative methodologies (in this case conversation analysis) to study the ways in which persons with aphasia achieve conversation success through verbal repetition in the form of first and second sayings.

## 2. Defining first saying and second saying

Sometimes speakers repeat things. They do so in a number of different ways for a number of different reasons. For example, Peterson and McCabe (1983) have observed that ‘children will occasionally say the exact thing several times for the purpose of evaluation (e.g., “He cried and cried and cried”)’ (p. 117). We sometimes repeat for the purpose of elaboration, clarification, or correction.

Repetition is also a naturally occurring behavior in the conversation of a person with aphasia and other communication disorders. Echolalia or echoing, typical of children on the autistic spectrum, is defined as ‘the repetition of utterances or parts of utterances produced by another speaker or on another occasion’ (Tarplee and Barrow, 1999: 450), and delayed echoing is used as an interactional resource (Tarplee and Barrow, 1999).

Similarly, spontaneous verbal repetitions are used effectively in aphasic speakers' efforts concerning the negotiation of meaning and social action (Oelschlaeger and Damico, 1998). Consider the example in (1) where Ed, who is a person with aphasia, is talking with his wife M about the features of a 'walkie-talkie' they are considering purchasing from Radio Shack.

**(1) [Oelschlaeger and Damico, 1998: 596; example 3 (conversation D)]**

01 M: Saturday afternoon, the, what, the twenty-third, twenty-fourth one  
 02 of those days. Twenty-fourth. Okay. Radio Shack has adult (price  
 03 ones). There's two. One is fifty dollars each and the other is  
 04 seventy for the pair. And they both go about a **quarter of a mile**.  
 05 Ed: **Quarter of a mile?**  
 06 M: Ra-range.

In this example, Ed's conversational talk consisted of a spontaneous repetition of a portion of the previous speaker's verbal production. In line 5, Ed seemed to indicate that he was uncertain about what the previous speaker (i.e., his wife M) was saying. His recycling of the last three words of M's previous turn with a rising tone functioned as a question about what M was talking about in the previous turn.

This present study is concerned with a different form of repetition in aphasic conversations that has not been observed previously. In this form, the person with aphasia produces a 'second saying' subsequent to a 'first saying' within the same turn, with an inserted element between the first saying and the second saying (Wong, 2000). The second saying of an utterance is virtually identical to the first saying of it, and the element that gets recycled can be 'as long as a sentence or clause, or as short as a single lexical item' (Wong, 2000: 415). The example in (2) illustrates a case where the repeated element is the prepositional phrase 'in the snow.'

**(2) [Shimanoff and Brunak, 1977; Colorado Snow Storm, Lehman, 1976 ts.]**

Female voice: cuz I've been in quite a few um and I especially in the  
 → snow and when you know that feeling I've been in a couple  
 car accident (.6) in the snow.

The example in (2) differs from the example in (1) in three crucial ways. First, the two occurrences of the repeated element are produced by the same speaker. Second, the repetition occurs within the same turn. And finally, the second saying of the repeated element is separated from the first saying by some other elements (i.e., the repetition is not immediate). It is this difference that prompts the present investigation of this form of repetition.

As Wong (2000) has noticed, this form of repetition is only briefly discussed in prior literature on ordinary conversation as *verbal bracketing* (Shimanoff and Brunak, 1977) or *repair repeat* (Norrick, 1987). However, its occurrence in

aphasic conversation has often escaped the attention of researchers interested in the investigation of authentic language use. The aim of this study is therefore to explicate the contribution of this form of repetition of a person with aphasia to the social action and meaning of conversation.

### 3. The data

For this explorative case study, the author drew on data from AphasiaBank, a multimedia database of discourse samples gathered from individuals with aphasia and from healthy controls (MacWhinney, 2000). This original data set was contributed by Dr. Audrey Holland, and was orthographically transcribed and segmented for each participant (Holland, 1982). For the purpose of the present study, transcripts of three recordings of naturally occurring conversations between an aphasic client (CLI) and a speech and language clinician (EXA) were analyzed. The time lapse between these three recordings was one month.

### 4. First saying and second saying in aphasic conversations

The candidate phenomenon termed ‘first saying and second saying’ in aphasic conversation can be exemplified in the following instance (target text is highlighted here and thereafter, and those elements starting with \$ in the brackets are transcriptions of non-verbal information).

#### (3) [23-May-1982 conversation 3]

- 131 EXA: <well that> [/?] you know what <i> [/?] I have a  
feeling that
- 132 probably a lot of people do ask you those things  
and it can get kind
- 133 of monotonous [\$rev] [\$tc].
- 134 CLI: mhm [\$sl].
- 135 CLI: **I don't pay them no mind** really [\$tc].
- 136 CLI: I'm just used to saying that stuff when I been  
drinking and **I**
- 137 **don't pay them no mind** [\$con].
- 138 EXA: when you're drinking [\$q].
- 139 CLI: mhm [\$sl].
- 140 CLI: half the time I don't even answer then half the time I  
answer them
- 141 [\$tc].
- 142 CLI: I forget about it the next day anyhow, next five  
minutes [\$inc].

The client was in the hospital, and the examiner (EXA) was discussing with the client (CLI) the kinds of questions that the client's visitors had asked. The client told the examiner that she didn't quite care what kind of questions they would ask, because as she mentioned later in line 142 she could not keep track of those questions anyway. What concerns us here is that the client produced two sayings of the highlighted element 'I don't pay them no mind' within the same turn. We suspect that this form of repetition is not merely some type of 'redundant repetition' used by 'unsophisticated' speakers, in contrast to Shimanoff and Brunak (1977). The question, then, is what's going on here? And what does this form of repetition mean to the participants?

First, the frequency of this form of repetition is worth mentioning. Within the three five-minute-long conversations, 10 instances were observed. Wong (2000) notes that first and second sayings are generally not found in conversations between non-native speakers of a language, and she argues that this absence is due to their lack of communicative competence in the second language. If we follow this reasoning, then the successful development and deployment of this form of repetition is an important aspect of pragmatic skill in aphasic conversation. Thus, the frequency and regularity of this discourse device itself demonstrates its functional significance in discourse organization. Of course, even among aphasic speakers, we might expect to find different levels of success in using such a device to promote conversation. Therefore, future efforts might develop methods for assessing the level of communicative competence through an examination of the strategic use of first and second sayings by aphasic speakers. In any event, an appreciation of this unique form of repetition and its role in promoting social negotiation of meaning and social action will contribute to 'more socially conscious and effective management of communication in people with aphasia' (Simmons-Mackie and Damico, 1996: 42).

Second, Wong (2000) notes that 'different interactional tasks are brought to bear depending on who is responsible for the repeated element' (p. 411). According to her, a repetition produced by the same speaker may perform and achieve different sorts of action from that initiated by another speaker. Might different tasks be accomplished by the same-speaker repetition (i.e., the target phenomenon) and the other-speaker repetition that is exemplified by (1)? Oelschlaeger and Damico (1998) have identified four main uses of spontaneous verb repetition of some elements produced by the previous speaker's verbal production in aphasic conversations. According to them, a person with aphasia uses such other-speaker repetition as in (1) to display uncertainty in *clarification* sequences, or agreement in *question and answer* and *joint production* sequences, or alignment in *assessment* sequences, or acknowledgment in *continuation* sequences. By contrast, the composition of the first and

second sayings obviates the possibilities of its displaying uncertainty in *clarification* sequences, or agreement in *question and answer* and *joint production* sequences, or alignment in *assessment* sequences, or acknowledgment in *continuation* sequences, which are all tasks accomplished by the form of verbal repetition in (1). There is simply no turn sequence involved in the unique form of repetition in the present study. Instead, what is interesting about (3) is that the element being recycled initiates the turn, is followed by some other elements in between, and the element being recycled then wraps up the turn. It is as if the client is hammering home the point she was making at the beginning of the turn by repeating the same point at the end. In a sense, she is reiterating her ideas by way of a summary. By doing so, she is presenting an image of herself to her speaking partner (i.e., the speech therapist) as someone who knows what she is talking about. Unfortunately, however, the audio/video recordings were not accessible at the time of writing this article. It would be ideal to use the rich audio and video data to ‘examine the interweaving of talk, gesture, and expression’ (Silverman, 2000: 46). While it may be true that ‘secondary analysis of other people’s data is to be commended rather than recommended’ (Silverman, 2000: 45), some important information may not be available if the data are not complete.

## 5. Conclusion

The past two decades have seen increasingly serious attempts at obtaining more authentic, functional, and naturalistic data on aphasia with the help of more qualitative research methodologies (Tetnowski, Tetnowski, and Damico, 2021). Thanks to the concerted endeavors of various researchers, the application of qualitative research methodologies has increasingly enriched our knowledge of communication and communication disorders in general, and of aphasia and its impact in authentic settings in particular (cf. Damico, Simmons-Mackie, Oelschlaeger, Elman, and Armstrong, 1999).

As Heritage (1987) pointed out, ‘[t]he central objective of conversation analysis is to uncover the social competences which underlie social interaction, that is, the procedures and expectations through which interaction is produced and understood’ (p. 258). Through a detailed study of ‘first saying and second saying’ in aphasic conversation, the author hopes to have demonstrated in this study the potential of conversation analytical techniques as tools to study the complex phenomenon of conversation as the primary vehicle for human social action.

There is an urgent call for a paradigm shift from a medical (cognitive-experimental) approach to a sociolinguistic (conversation analytic) approach to aphasia (Heeschen and Schegloff, 2003). Assessment and intervention

involving persons with aphasia should involve ‘naturally occurring conduct – including (perhaps preeminently) conduct in interaction’ (p. 269), and should consider what they can do as well as what they cannot do with their limited linguistic resources.

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