

## افتتاح وإنهاء المكالمات الهاتفية

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كلية: الآداب - جامعة: البعث

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### ملخص البحث

لقد تناولت هذه الدراسة افتتاح وإنهاء المكالمات الهاتفية وفي البداية تم توضيح الفروقات بين الذكور والإناث في إجراء المحادثات الهاتفية. كما وتم تسليط الضوء على الفرق بين الحديث الرسمي وغير الرسمي.

أما عن العينة التي أجريت عليها الدراسة فقد ضمت خمسين من خريجي و خريجات اللغة الإنكليزية السوريين. كما تم جمع البيانات عبر استبيان تم توزيعه على الأشخاص المذكورين في العينة وذلك ليختاروا الإجابات المناسبة. بعد ذلك تم تحليل الإجابات التي وردت في الاستبيان وفقاً للعناصر الأساسية الأربعة لافتتاح وإنهاء المكالمات الهاتفية عند شيغلوب. واتضح أن كل حالة في الاستبيان أدت إلى نتائج معينة. وبهذا يمكن أن تساعد نتائجها متعلمي اللغة الإنكليزية المهتمين بتقنيات المحادثة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الجواب على الاستدعاء، التعريف بالنفس، التعرف، الترحيب، الرسمية، غير الرسمية، المحادثة، الافتتاح، الإنهاء، قبل الإنهاء.

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# **Opening and Closing Telephone Calls**

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## **Opening and Closing Telephone Calls**

### **1. Abstract**

This study is about opening and closing telephone calls. First of all, the difference between men and women in call conversations is explored. Besides, the difference between formality and informality is highlighted.

The sample chosen for this study consists of fifty Syrian male and female graduates of English. The data is collected using a questionnaire handed to the members of sample to choose suitable answers. After that, the answers of the questionnaire are analysed according to Schegloff's four core sequences of opening and closing telephone calls. It is clear that every situation in the questionnaire leads to specific conclusions. Therefore, the findings might be helpful to learners of English who are interested in conversational techniques.

**Key words:**

Summons-answer, identification, recognition, greeting, formality, informality, conversation, opening, closing, pre-closing.

## 2.Introduction

Telephone conversation is a social activitie established by talk itself. Closings in telephone calls are usually longer than openings. Schegloff (1979) suggests that a completed summons-answer sequence cannot properly stand as the final exchange of a conversation. He investigates how the initiation of conversational interactions is coordinated. "Summons-answer-sequence" is composed of closely linked parts. The occurrence of the expected answer cannot properly be the final turn in the conversation. After each answer, the summoner is expected to speak again to provide the reason for the summons.

It will be shown that opening and closing telephone calls in English are not random, i.e. several factors affect what is formal or informal in different contexts. This research will test Syrian learners of English to see how they try to open and close telephone calls in formal and informal situations. Gender differences are highlighted as they affect the way of opening and closing telephone calls.

### **3.Theoretical Basis**

#### **3.1 Availability of Talk**

The importance of studying telephone calls comes not only from the call itself, but also from the talk that occurs in the call. Actually, this leads to study the sequencing in telephone conversations, that is the talk in telephone conversations cannot be studied separately. Caller identity refers to the role the identity of the caller plays in shaping the conversation in telephone calls. Gender of callers can affect the conversation as well. The occurrence of the expected answer cannot properly be the final turn in the conversation. After one part's answer, the summoner is expected to speak again to provide the reason for the summons.

Conversation is an activity with a minimal requirement of two participants. The presence of an answer establishes the availability of the answerer. That is to say, s/he is obligated to listen to the summons. In other words, the failure to complete the sequence establishes the unavailability of the answerer. In the telephone interactions, the lifting of a receiver without doing anything establishes the presence of a person at the called number, but not the availability of that person for further

conversation. We can define the conversation analysis as the analysis of talk produced between people in various situations, and their interaction during this talk.

### **3.2 Adjacency Pairs**

Adjacency pairs include greeting-greeting, question-answer and invitation-acceptance/ declination. The production of the first leads to the occurrence of the second. Adjacency pairs are a basic feature of conversation analysis that are very important for conversation openings and closings, as they are used in both of them. They can be characterised as paired utterances that are divided into a first pair part and a second pair part. The speaker who produces the first pair part selects the type of the second pair part. The feature of adjacency does not always have to be fulfilled. For Levinson (1983), the first and the second pair parts can be many utterances apart. Rather, they are conditional relevant; the utterance of a first pair part makes a second pair part necessary and waited for.

### **3.3 Archetype Closing**

#### **Example 1**

A: Well [pre-closing]

B: Okay [second close component ]

A: Good bye [first terminal turn]

B: See you [reciprocating]

( end of call)

One cannot identify when the closing starts. That is because the last topic often overlaps with the initiation of closing.

Conditional relevance in SA (Summons- Answer) sequence suggests that the occurrence of one item allows the occurrence of another. Also, the nonoccurrence of an item makes the second one absent.

## **Example 2**

001 A: Hello

002 A: Track Records

003 B: Hello Saucy

004 B: It's Justin

005 A: Hi

006 B: You all right

007 A: Jesus

008 A: Give me heart attack

009 A: Justin

010 A: Who's Justin

011 A: How you doing

012 B: Ok

In the above-mentioned conversation, the answer to the summons represents a self-identification in lines 001 and 002. It is usual in business conversations to present the name of the company to reassure the caller that he dialed the right number. It is clear that the speakers have not talked to each other for a long time.

### **3.4 How-are-you Inquiry**

After greeting, some personal exchange follows (Fritz, 2014 p.6). It may be neutral, positive or negative. This stage follows the negative answer, and asks for the reason of being not positive.

#### **Example 3**

001 A: So

002 A: So how are you



003 B: I'm ok

004 B: I'm all right

005 B: I got

006 B: I haven't been well actually

007 A; Why

008 A: What

009 A: Since I spoke to you yesterday

010 B: Yeah I mean stomach cramps squiffy botty and things

The personal state inquiry between strangers and close friends differ from each other. Speaker A asks speaker B in line 002 about her state. In line 003 and 004, speaker B assumes that she is fine. However, she changes rapidly and talks about her real feeling in line 005 and 006. Since both speakers are very close, they ask each other about the reason of negative feeling in line 007, 008 and 009.

Consequently, personal state inquiries change due to the level of acquaintance. On the one hand, it differs between strangers and on the other hand, among family members. “ Although it may be difficult to locate the boundary between completion of the last topic and initiation of the closing section , there are

several cues which signal the speakers ‘ orientation towards termination of the call: foreshadowing the closing and possible pre- closings”( Pavlidou, 2002 p.223).

In most cases, pre-closing leads to a further topics. The conversation may stop at a certain point. Then, a new topic follows. The interesting thing here is that one conversation may have more than one pre-closing. That is, new topics can be proposed. Pre-closing may also be a sum-up of previous topics. Pre-closing also includes planning for future calls and meetings.

#### **Example 4**

Sue: Yeah

Dad: Yeah

Dad: So I'll see you Saturday morning

Sue: Okay

Dad: Alright

Dad: Hh and uh. We'll have a good time this weekend let's hope the weather stays nice ayie,

Sue: And can I've something

Dad: You are going to cook some dinner, aren't we, hhh

Dad: Ayie?

Sue: Shall we do a Chinese fry up

((talk continues about what they'll do))

In this conversation, we see that Dad gives a regular closing utterance, a reference to their next meeting on Saturday, Sue then responds with an affirmation. Then, her dad talks about future plans. In many closings especially those of relatives, social arrangements are included.

### **Example 5**

Gran: Alright then, I'll see you on Saturday.

Sue: Yes

Gran: Right bye for now

Sue: What time you're coming hhh

Gran: Uh. Well it be about ...we'll leave about eleven.. I suppose like.. the normal time we come if we were going for a picnic.

Sue: Well we're going home, aren't we?

Gran: We're going home, yes and I'll bring you a drink, hh and some grapes to eat in the car.

Gran: Alright okay

In this example, Sue talks with her uncle, Gran. Before they close, they arrange when and how they will meet. This arrangement occurs after the pre-closing in line three. Then, they turn to the actual closing in the last line 'alright okay'. Although there is an opportunity for the call to move towards closing, there is a terminal exchange or an alternative form of offer to close. When the two participants talk about something they will share, they feel happy. This shows that co-participants ask about the interests of the other. Because of this, they feel enthusiastic about planning for future activities and elaborating descriptions of them.

### **Example 6**

Mum: Alright then, are you going to go?

Sue: Yes

Mum: Alright I'll talk to you tomorrow night

I'll look forward to it ma darling alright?

Sue: Yes

Mum: Hh alright. I love you

Sue: I love you.

In this example, the participants offer the possibility to either close or to continue by giving the green light to the other to add anything more than they wish to. As well as talking about next meetings, participants also show their desire to engage in next conversations.

### **3.5 Endearment Terms and Audible Displays of Care**

The use of endearment terms and audible displays of care is explained in the way they contribute to the function of closing the telephone as in the following conversation:

#### **Example**

7

Mum: Okay ma sweetheart

Cra: Alright

Mum: Time to sleep

Okay right then (whispery voice)

Cra: Yaba:h

Mum: Have happy dreams

Cra: Yeah

Mum: Bah bye (whispery voice)

Bye bye ma sweetheart, love you lots, bye bye

Cra: And I bye

Dad; right well I'm going to go now darling cus I've got lots of teeth to make

In this conversation, Mum refers to Craig using a term of endearment, she uses (ma) instead of (my) indicating relational aspect. Also, we see Mum use a whispery voice which indicates intimacy.

Before they end the conversation, the participants ask each other about the readiness to go and whether they have anything to do. This is almost optional. Also, there are very elaborated references to next calls as a "something to look forward to". The endearment terms, soft intonation and voice quality indicate the intimate relationship between participants.

#### **4.Methodology**

Gillham (2000) states that interviewing, on any scale, is enormously time-consuming although this is not true of some forms of highly structured interviewing. An interview is usually used when the number of participants is limited and the questions are open. An observation is a way of obtaining data. It is not what people do but what they say they do. A questionnaire is a research instrument consisting of a series of questions and other prompts for the purpose of gathering information from respondents.

Dorneyi (2003) states that questionnaires are good for researcher time, researcher effort and financial resources. By submitting a questionnaire to a group of people, you can collect a huge amount of information in less than an hour. Furthermore, if the questionnaire is well-organised, collecting data results can be fast and straightforward ,especially by using some modern applications like survey application which I used in my research. Cost-effectiveness is not the only advantage of questionnaires. "They are also very versatile, which means that they can be used successfully with a variety of people in a variety of situations targeting a variety of topics" (Dorneyi, 2003 p.10).

For the purpose of collecting data, a multiple-choice questionnaire is handed to fifty male and female graduates of English. They are supposed to choose an option for twenty situations. After reading the participants' answers, data is collected by "Survey" application to produce the accurate statistics.

## 5. Data Analysis

### Situation One

Imagine your friend calls you and asks you to send him/her the last lecture you had and you want to apologise for ending the call, what would you say?

A sorry, I couldn't be more helpful

B I don't have more time to talk

C Please accept my apologies for ending the phone call

The telephone call occurs between two friends. The first one asks his/her friend for the lecture. Option A offers a polite apology for ending the phone after sending the lecture. The data show that only 22.5% participants choose this option. Most of them are females.



Option B is chosen by males more than females. Only 17.5% participants choose this option. It is informal to say direct expression ( I don't have more time to talk ). However, speaking with friends tends to be informal.

Option C is chosen by 60% both males and females. Although it is a formal apology, the data show that Syrians use it with their friends. Maybe, this is due to the exposure to English. In other words, they are often exposed to formal English at university, interviews, etc.

### **Situation Two**

Imagine you are talking to your boy/girlfriend and you want to end a call, what would you say?

A I look forward to hearing from you

B Speak to you then

C See you then

Ending the telephone conversation with friends differs from that conversation with strangers. Option A is chosen by 30% male and female participants. It is a formal and polite attempt to end a call. It refers to future contact and intimacy between callers.

Option B is chosen by 30% male and female participants. The caller arranges time to speak before actually ending the call. It is clear that it is informal not to mention the subject (speak to you then). Case (2016) states that if you are not sure if "see" or "speak" is correct in your situation, "Speak" is the safe choice because it can also cover face-to-face conversations such as meetings.

The data show that Option C is chosen by 40% males and females. Although it is informal, participants use such expressions to arrange time to meet before the real closing of the conversation. Luke (2002) states that some people pre-close with arranging time to meet (See you then).

### **Situation Three**

Imagine you are talking to a family member. Before you actually end a call, what would you say?

A Have a good evening

B Have fun

C Take care

Ending telephone calls with family members tends to include intimacy phrases. Patterson (2009, p.112) explains the difference between family talk and institutional talk. "In the

former, there are additional contingencies with which a participant has to deal, which are features of that particular framework".

The data show that Option A is chosen by 20% males more than females. It is clear that women speak in detail, especially when talking to a family member.

The data show that Option B is chosen by 17.5% males. It is noticed that intimacy words are found in family conversations. Moreover, (have fun) is an informal expression which cannot be used in formal contexts.

The data show that Option C is chosen by 62% males and females. It seems that speaking with a member of family tends to have asking about the well-being and caring about health.

#### **Situation Four**

If you are an employee, how would you answer the phone?

A Hello. This is ....(your name). Thank you for calling ....(the name of company). How can I help you?

B Hello, ...(your name) speaking.

C Hi, it's me.

This situation is in a business context which differs from social one. Speaking in companies has to be formal. In fact, employees at companies should speak formally with customers. Fritz (2014) states that an employee should start with greeting, naming the company and finally offering help. The data show that Option A is chosen by 82% both males and females. It is known that females are more polite than males. However, when it comes to business, males tend to be as polite as females.

The data show that Option B is chosen by 15% both males and females. It seems that participants who choose this option do not know how to open an economic telephone call.

Option C is chosen by only 2.5% participants. Actually, such opening (Hi, it's me) is used with close friends only.

### **Situation Five**

If you want to ask to speak to someone, what would you say?

A Is ..... available?

B May I speak to ..... ?

C I'd like to talk with .....

Sometimes, the caller provides what Schegloff (1979) calls a switchboard request in which the caller clarifies that s/he wants another person to talk with. Option A is chosen by 10% participants in this situation. The data show that only males choose this option as they tend to be direct and less polite than females.

Option B is the most used by 57.5% females more than males. Using (may) is polite when asking for something.

Option C is chosen by 32.5% both males and females. In fact, (I'd like to talk with) is less polite than Option B (May I speak to.....?).

### **Situation Six**

Imagine you are calling a company to make an application for a job there. How do you introduce yourself?

A My name is.....

B Allow me to introduce myself.

C It's ..... speaking.

Identification occurs in the beginning of the call. It differs due to the context of the call. Here, introducing the self in making an application for a job should be formal. Option A is a direct introducing of the self. The data show that it is chosen by 42.5% both males and females.

Option B is chosen by 50% males more than females. When it comes to making an application for a job, it seems that males tend to be more formal.

Option C is only chosen by 7.5% both males and females. It is informal in this context. The data show that Syrian people are aware of sticking to formality in business contexts.

### **Situation Seven**

Imagine you need some money . You call your close friend to ask him/her for help. What would you say?

A I was wondering if you might be able to give me some money.

B I am having a problem and I need your help.

C Can you give me some money?

Patterson (2009) states that the words of the speaker reveals his/her social status. So, it is easy to know the social background of a speaker by the words s/he provides. Option A is too formal to be produced with friends. The data show that only 20% participants use this option.

The data show that Option B is chosen by 53% women talking to their friends. Although this option is polite, it is less formal than Option A. Since women are more polite, they choose this way of asking for help.

Option C is chosen by 27.5% males more than females. The data show that males use informal language with their friends even when asking for help. When it comes to females, they try to be polite even with friends.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study discusses the opening and closing of telephone calls. Opening and closing are studied according to sociolinguistic factors such as politeness, gender and social distance. Moreover, this study analyses the way of opening and closing telephone calls and the relationship between the caller and the answerer. Although this study is limited to a small number of

participants, it can be a key for further research. Openings often contain recognition, greeting, identification and how-are-you inquiry. Females are more polite than males at least in telephone conversations. However, males tend to be more polite and formal in business conversations. Furthermore, formal conversations often start with “Hello”. While formal conversations often start with “Hi”. Formal conversations should contain the speaker’s name. Unlike formal conversations, informal ones do not necessarily contain the speaker’s name. Pre-closings usually precede closings in most conversations. “Good bye” is the formal closing expression, and “Bye bye” is the informal closing expression.

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