

Hao kana: Minimal Recipientship in Pashto Conversations

Dr. Abdullah Jan Abid¹

Muhammad Sheeraz²

Abstract: *Conversation is a very vital activity of human life. It has various components, minimal response is one of them. The present study aims at exploring the process of minimal recipient ship in Pashto conversation. The data for the purpose was collected during conversation events in Nowshehra. It was analyzed in the light of the principles of the conversation analysis. It was found that Pashto has a wide variety of minimal responses and that on the basis of purpose and appeal there are three main categories of minimal responses i.e. strong minimal responses, weak minimal responses and polite minimal responses.*

Keywords: Minimal responses, conversation, Pashto

1 Introduction:

Conversation is the most frequently practiced of all human activities. Humans talk, chat, speak or interact universally, in spatial and temporal terms. They communicate through conversation for various reasons: to share information, to cajole, to conspire, to entertain, to earn livelihood, etc and in various settings: formal and informal, indoors and outdoors, publicly and privately, etc. Conversation is like respiration, unavoidable and non-stop, and just like that it involves two participants where listener is like oxygen. So this process is very necessary to be studied deeply. Its significance was realized by the linguists, now named as conversation analysts, who endeavored to trace patterns in conversation and described its mechanics. Now most of them agree that conversation is orderly and follows certain principles (See Paul Grice's 1975, for example).

¹ :Chairman, Department of Pakistani Languages, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad

² : Ph.D. scholar, Department of English, International Islamic University, Islamabad

“Conversation analysis is an approach to the study of social interaction that focuses on practices of speaking that recur across a range of contexts and settings” (Sidnell 2009). The available literature on the subject shows that the early studies in the area focused only the conversation in English. However, recently, studies into the conversation in other languages and communities have also begun to take place (Sidnell 2009). The various studies conducted in the area show that a conversation is embedded in the society and it happens the way individuals want it to happen. “Conversation Analysis may then be conceived as a specific analytic trajectory which may be used to reach a specific kind of systematic insight in the ways in which members of society 'do interaction'” (Have 1990).

As conversation is a broader area with a variety of features like turn-taking, cooperativeness, politeness, pragmatic and contextual meanings, non-verbal communication, interruptions, code-switching etc, therefore certain minor elements of it have been found to be ignored by the researchers, particularly by those exploring Pakistani languages like Pashto. Minimal responses (Coates 1986; Fellegly 1995) – also termed as continuers (Schegloff 1982), reactive tokens (Clancy et al. 1996), response tokens (Silverman 1998), acknowledgement tokens (Jefferson 1984, 2002), listener response/listener tokens (Fujimoto 2007), response tokens, response cues (He 2009), alignment tokens (Sohail 2010), etc – are such ignored elements. To our knowledge, no study has been carried into the area in Pashto language, so far. Minimal responses are basically the indicators of a listener’s participation in the conversation. They are verbal and non-verbal indicators of a person’s co-participation in a conversation (Reid, 2005:8). However, the present study gives a discussion into only the verbal minimal responses in Pashto conversations.

A large number of English verbal items have been identified as minimal responses e.g. Zimmerman and West (1975:108) identify um hmm, uh huh, and yeah as minimal responses. Similarly Kendon et al. (1975: 204) asserts that yes, quite, surely, I see and that’s true are also the minimal responses in English. Sohail (2010) identifies hmm, sahi/thik, ham⁰/ji, bilkul and acha as the minimal responses (which she terms as alignment tokens) in Urdu.

Though the process of minimal recipient ship is complex but has been found to follow certain rules e.g., unlike discourse markers, they are not to introduce a new turn or to grab the floor; secondly, they do not answer the current speaker's questions; thirdly, they are very brief; fourthly, they are made as responses to the current speaker (He 2009). Structurally, the minimal responses may consist of: empty words such as *hmm*, *umm* *hmm*; single words such as *yes*, *yeah*, *ok*; phrasal utterances such as *oh really*, *oh my God*; and short clause sentences *that's right*; *that's true*, etc.

Why to use these minimal responses? According to Andersen, their use "increases immediacy, signals that the listener comprehends the speaker's message, and reinforces the speaker's role in a conversation" (1999:201). Minimal responses have different forms and therefore they have different functions. Broadly, minimal responses in English such as *yeah*, *uh-huh*, and *hmm*, show the good listener ship which is supportive to the current speaker. However, if these responses are made rapidly, they may convey to the current speaker to stop (Knapp and Hall, 1997:427). They are also used to provide support and feedback, and more importantly to show an uninterrupted attention (Schegloff 1982; Fujimoto 2007).

Minimal responses are also present in Pashto to perform various functions given above. The most commonly used of them are: *hao kana* (yes), *hmm* (*hmm*), *hao* (yes), *ji* (yes), *ao* (yeah), *hao ji* (yes), *ao ji* (yes), *kha* (yes), *khaa* (yes), *kha ji* (yes sir), *teek* (right), *sahi* (right), *dera kha da* (very right), *pa dwara stargo/pa sar stargo* (yes from the core of my heart), *zarore* (indeed), *bilkul* (certainly), *khamakha* (of course), *aromaro* (for sure), and *wale na* (why not).

2 Methodology:

The data was collected through audio recording from real life conversations among the native speakers of Pashto in Nowshehra. In almost all the five hours long audio recording, the conversation takes place in pairs. All the conversations are ordinary and between people having a variety of relationships like co-workers, friends, spouses and blood relations etc. The data was analyzed in the light of the principles of conversation analysis particularly those related with minimal

responses. All the major minimal responses frequently used in recorded Pashto conversations have been discussed one by one. The minimal responses as well as the sample utterances in which they were used have been presented in Roman (in parenthesis) as well as Pashto (Arabic) scripts, and with English translation. No phonetic transcription was given as the pronunciation is not a focus here. In the given sample texts, 'S' refers to speaker while 'L' to listener. The main focus of the discussion is the strength of individual minimal response and the purpose behind the selection of a particular one.

3 Minimal Recipient ship in Pashto:

The data shows that the listeners in a Pashto conversation are selective in their use of the minimal responses and they do not express the recipient ship randomly. Their selection of a particular minimal response out of many is dependent upon the context (Sohail 2010) and the statuses of the participants of the conversation event. The listeners use strong, weak or neutral minimal responses to express agreement, to show affiliation, or to acknowledge understanding on the basis of the content of the speech and the social status they enjoy during the conversation event. In the discussion below, on the basis of the data, we have divided these minimal responses into three categories i.e. strong, polite and neutral/weak minimal responses. The examples given in order to describe them have been taken from the audio recording specially done for the purpose.

3.1 Strong minimal responses:

There are certain minimal responses which, as the context of the data shows, are strong as they not only acknowledge the understanding of the speech event but also show encouragement and affiliation. / هاؤ کنه ولې نه (Hao kana, zarore/bilkul /aromaro/wale na?/dera kha da/pa dwaro stargo/pa sar stargo) may be taken as the strongest of all Pashto minimal responses. The following examples from the data show their use:

وروره! يو کار به راله ونه کړې؟ S:

(Wrora yao kar ba rala wa na kare)

Oh brother! Would you like to do one of my works?

L: ولي نه

(Wale na)

Why not

S: سبا له د کچهر و نه یو ستیام به راله رانه وړې

(Saba la da kacharo na yao stam ba rala ra na wari)

Would you like to bring a stamp paper from the court by tomorrow?

L: په سر سترگو ، ولي نه

(wale na , pa sar stargo)

Yes, by the core of my heart

It is interesting to note here that these strong minimal responses are usually used by the listener in response to a question, request or order. The speech event and the context are responsible in making such a response. The minimal response 'hao kana' is perhaps the most frequently used minimal response, which is also employed in genres other than conversation like songs, poetry, etc. This response is strong and contains a light touch lubricated with love and affection.

3.2 Weak minimal responses

Some minimal responses are weak in their appeal and purpose. They only show participation and acknowledge understanding of whatever is being said. (hmm/ ao/ hao / jee/ khaa/ kha/ teek/ sahi) of Pashto may be included in weak minimal responses. The following examples show their use.

S: هلکه! اسلام مړ شو

(Halka aslam mar sho) !

Oh! Aslam has died.

L: هن

(Hmm)

Hmm

S: د زره په دوره

(Da zara pa dora)

Of heart attack

L: يار ډېر ښه انسان ؤ خدای دې وبخښي

(Yar der khe insane wo khudai de ubakhei)

Dude he was very nice person. May God bless him.

S: نن ستا چټی ده؟

(Nan sta chutti da?)

Is it your holiday?

L: او

(Ao)

Yeah

3.3 Polite minimal responses:

All the strong minimal responses are polite. However, the addition of certain lexical item to the weak minimal responses also makes them polite. In Pashto the listeners usually opt for 'ji' or 'saib' and add them to the weak minimal responses making them polite. The example below may describe the use of these politeness minimal responses:

S: څه اوس هلته لار شه

(Za os halta lar sha)

Now you may go there.

L: ښه جي

(Kha jee)

Yes sir.

So the additional lexical item i.e. جي (ji) turned the very commonly used weak Pashto minimal response ښه (kha) into a polite response. This sort of modification is usually made by the listener with younger age or lower social status than the speaker.

Conclusion:

To conclude, we suggest that the Pashto minimal responses are used very systematically by the participants of the conversation. The choices are made on the basis of the prior statement and the listener's age group, purpose and status. As culturally Pashtoons respect their elders, therefore a younger listener usually opts for polite minimal responses. Similarly, if the purpose of the listener is just to acknowledge the recipient ship, s/he would employ a weak minimal response but if the purpose is to show affiliation, agreement or encouragement, then the listener may opt for a strong minimal response that also expresses politeness.

References

Andersen, Peter A. (1999). *Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions*. CA: Mayfield Publishing Company.

Clancy, P. M., Thomson, S. A., Suzuki, R. & Tao, H. (1996). The conversational use of reactive tokens in English, Japanese, and Mandarin. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 26, 355-387

Coates, J. (1986). *Women, men and language: A sociolinguistic account of sex differences in language*. London: Longman

Fellegly, A. (1995). Patterns and functions of minimal response. *American Speech*. 70, 186-199

Fujimoto, D. T. (2007). Listeners responses in interaction: A case for abandoning the term, backchannel. *Journal of Osaka Jogakuin 2year College* 37, 35-54, Osaka, Jogakuin College

Have, Paul ten (1990) 'Methodological issues in conversation analysis', Bulletin de Méthodologie Sociologique, Nr. 27 (June): 23-51

He, Y. (2009). An Analysis of Gender Differences in Minimal Responses in the conversations in the two TV-series *Growing Pains* and *Boy Meets World*

Jefferson, G. (1984). Notes on a systematic deployment of the acknowledgement tokens “yeah” and “Mm him”. *Papers in Linguistics* 17, 197-206

Kendon, Adam, Harris, Richard, M. & Key, Mary Ritchie. (1975). *Organization of Behavior in Face-to-face Interaction*. Walter de Gruyter.

<http://books.google.com/books?id=rNy1hVGq2sMC&hl=zh-CN>.

Accessed 8 June 2011

Knapp, Mark L. & Hall Judith A. (1997). *Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction*. 4th ed. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College

Reid, J. (2005). Gender differences in minimal responses. <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/linguistics/LaTrobePapersinLinguistics/Vol%2005/08Reid.pdf>. Accessed 12 June 2011

Schegloff, E. A. (1982). Discourse as an interactional achievement: Some uses of “uh huh” and other things that come between sentences. In: D. Tannen (ed.), *Analyzing Discourse: Text and Talk*. (Georgetown University Roundtable on Languages and Linguistics). Washington, D. C.: Georgetown University Press: 71-93

Sidnell, J. (2009). *Conversation Analysis: Comparative Perspectives*. Cambridge University Press

Silverman, D. (1998). *Harvey sacks: Social science and conversation analysis*. Oxford: Policy Press

Sohail, A. (2010). Alignment tokens in ordinary Urdu conversation. *Kashmir Journal of Language Research*, 13 (1), 77-93

Zimmerman, D.C. & West, C. (1975). Sex Roles, Interruptions and Silences in Conversation. <http://www.stanford.edu/~eckert/PDF/zimmermanwest1975.pdf>. Accessed 10 June 2011
