

## **“Yes...er...ok...”: Linguistic and Turn-Taking Strategies in Negotiation**

**Thilagavathi Shanmuganathan and Jariah Mohd. Jan\***

*Department of English Language, Faculty of Languages and Linguistics,  
University of Malaya, Pantai Valley, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*

*\*E-mail: jariah@um.edu.my*

### **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates how unacquainted interlocutors negotiate meaning, which is realized via turn-taking, and contributes to the sequence and organization of the entire negotiation process in the context of the sale and purchase of second-hand property. The study argues that even though interlocutors are unacquainted with no set agenda as in business meetings, they demonstrated the negotiation of organized turns and that negotiation is an ordered activity. The theoretical approach adopted for this study is based on Conversational Analysis (CA) as provided by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974), where the turn-taking features that determine people's use of language are explored. Two out of twelve audio recordings gathered are used for this study. The interlocutors are non-native speakers of English who use English as their lingua franca and are involved in the context of sales and purchase of property. Data analysis is focused on the sequential emergence of turns, while the use of a standardized transcription notation system, adapted from Jefferson's conventions (1978), is used to capture the details of the conversational production. The findings of this study show that organized, sequential turn-taking strategies are used in negotiations.

**Keywords:** Turn-taking, conversation analysis, naturally-occurring, negotiation, meaning, second-hand property, Malaysia

### **INTRODUCTION**

This study investigates how unacquainted interlocutors conduct negotiation in the context of the sale and purchase of second-hand property. The study intends to reveal how the process of negotiation can be realized via the co-construction of turns and how these turns form a sequence that eventually make up the entire process of negotiation between the potential buyers and real estate agents (REA hereafter). The goal of the interlocutors involved in this particular kind of negotiation requires that they come to a consensus and decide whether to purchase the property, and this study focuses on establishing the manner in which the turn-taking

sequence contributes towards the co-construction of the negotiation process.

Unlike meetings where negotiation is the focus, the unacquainted interlocutors from both sides come to the meeting with pre-arranged agenda. However, in the case of the current study, the interlocutors have no set agenda, instead co-construct each agenda as they take turns with no written rules. It is this co-construction of the process of negotiation that makes this study significant.

The interactions between the interlocutors in the study are naturally-occurring and as Stubbs (1983, p. 33) notes “the importance of naturally-occurring discourse derives from the interest in

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\*Corresponding Author

describing how interlocutors create, negotiate and structure social reality for some stretch of time,” in response to immediate situational demands, which characterizes most spoken language including everyday conversations. Jariah Mohd. Jan (1999, p. 20) further reiterates that “naturally-occurring discourse may also be termed as formal goal-oriented spoken discourse.”

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY / OBJECTIVES**

As studies in the past have mostly been concerned with simulated negotiation situations where native speakers of English were asked to role-play, the purpose of this study is to show how unacquainted interlocutors who are non-native speakers of English co-construct a sequential organization of turns and manage the naturally-occurring negotiation in the context of sales and purchase of Malaysian real-estate property.

The study also aims to show that the phases of negotiation make up the entire construction of a negotiation event and reveal how the unacquainted interlocutors construct spontaneous strategies in the negotiation process that emerge as the interlocutors co-construct a particular phase.

### **WHY NEGOTIATION?**

Negotiation is almost always associated with conflicts and crises that need immediate action. Previous research on negotiation has mostly focused on conflict resolutions (e.g. Menkel-Meadow, 1984; Tribe, 1994; Baguley, 2000; Barnes, 2004). However, negotiation does not need to deal with high profile cases where there is conflict or the need for highly-skilled negotiators or mediators (Shanmuganathan, 2008). Negotiation is almost always associated with conflicts and crises that need immediate action. This study argues that negotiation does not necessarily include disagreement or conflict and this supports Firth’s (1995, p. 7) view that:

‘Although disagreements and various other forms of conflict *may and often do arise* during negotiation activity, these are neither pre-conditions nor obligatory reasons for the activity.’

Negotiation is ubiquitous and could take place at any common locations such as at the workplace, marketplace, shops, property sites, clinics, and on the telephone.

In this study, negotiation refers to the effort taken by interlocutors as they co-construct turns and negotiate the meaning of prior utterance to produce a feedback or response. The continuous negotiation of meaning ensures the progress of the interaction, indicated by the use of certain features of turn-taking such as the turn construction unit, transition relevance place, backchannels, overlaps, and interruptions.

The emergence of the sequence of turns and the negotiation of meanings all contribute towards the construction and reconstruction of a set of phases which make up the negotiation process in this study. Although the phases in this study may differ from other types of negotiation, interlocutors would be able to recognize and identify the unfolding patterns according to the type of negotiations that they would have to deal with in future. This recognizing and identifying abilities, as well as spontaneous strategizing, are evident from the analysis of data in the current study.

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

The study uses a qualitative approach to discuss how the turn-by-turn construction of the negotiation phases is constructed, while the Conversation Analysis is used as a basis for the analysis. It is the Conversation Analysis that enables the study to establish common patterns that in turn provide the avenue to determine where the phases of negotiation emerge. It is therefore necessary to discuss the emergent turn-taking sequence for a better understanding of the construction.

Research on spontaneous or naturally-occurring interaction has always been concerned

with the features of speech or the patterns of turn-taking (e.g. Fairclough, 1992; Sacks *et al.*, 1974; Jariah Mohd Jan, 1999; Hutchby and Wooffitt, 2002). This research is part of a larger Ph.D study (Shanmuganathan, 2008) which looks at how interlocutors construct phases of negotiation via patterns of turn-taking.

The patterns of turn-taking are based on the Conversation Analysis which is concerned with the detailed transcript analysis of audio-recorded utterances. The following sections discuss some of the features that are of concern for the current study.

### *Turn-Taking*

When an interlocutor initiates a conversation by constructing a particular word or utterance (also known as *Turn Construction Unit* or TCU), the interlocutor expects a form of feedback or response. When the recipient of the message negotiates the meaning intended by the interlocutor and responds in any form of either a word or a sound, a turn has then been taken and this pair makes up what is known as an ‘adjacency pair’ of for example, question-response or tactic-counter-tactic.

In the entire conversation, many adjacency pairs are constructed where turns are constantly exchanged and the interlocutors take turns at being interlocutor and recipient (Shanmuganathan, 2008). However, how do the interlocutors recognize the point where the turn is supposed to be taken? Through experience, interlocutors are able to recognize a rising intonation in an utterance as a question form or doubt and a falling intonation as the end of sentence at the point where the recipient can take a turn, and this is also known as the *Transition Relevance Place* (TRP) (see Sacks *et al.*, 1974).

The way in which the turns are organized with the counter response, and how tactics are drawn on and the counter-tactic used by the interlocutors display a highly synchronized organization of turns, even though all this happens in split seconds within each utterance (Shanmuganathan, 2008). In fact, the exchange has many occurrences of “overlaps minus

gaps between the turn allocations indicate the spontaneity in which interlocutors managed the turn-taking system” (ibid., p. 240).

### *Overlaps and Interruption*

Overlaps and interruptions occur when one interlocutor fails to recognize the point where the utterance ends (TRP), therefore constructing his/her own utterance (TCU) which results in overlaps. The difference between overlaps and interruptions is in the outcome of the TCU, i.e. if the interaction continues on the same issues discussed prior to the TCU, it would then be an overlap, and if the issue discussed prior to the TCU was no longer pursued or another topic was introduced, it would then be an interruption in the conversation (Sacks *et al.*, 1974).

The study recognizes these overlaps as acts of solidarity and not as interruptions that intend to disrupt interaction. The framework of the analysis in this study is based on the conversation analysis since it is perceived to be most significant in uncovering and documenting all kinds of systematic organisations of talk in verbal interactions as they take place in real life. The conversation analysts also attempt to describe and explain the ways in which conversations work. Their prime concern is to examine the manner in which conversational participants are able to produce intelligible utterances, and in turn successfully interpret the utterances of others, negotiate and exchange meanings as well (Sacks *et al.*, 1974).

### *Backchannel*

Schegloff (1972, p. 379) suggests that recipients of a conversation signal their understanding of and show attentiveness using assent terms such as ‘mmhm, uh-huh, yeah, yes, er, ok, and right’ which are also called minimal responses or backchannels (Zimmerman and West, 1975). These backchannels ensure the continued flow of interaction and in the case of the current study the flow of the negotiation process.

Backchannels could be overlapping talk but this feature exhibits agreement, solidarity

and co-operation, more than what interruptions would. In fact, studies have raised the awareness that the absence of backchannel support can make the speaker think that his/her recipient is uninterested in what s/he is saying, or disagrees with his/her utterance (Zimmerman and West, 1975). Jariah Mohd Jan (1999, p. 68), in her study on *Power and Solidarity in Inter-gender Verbal Interaction*, suggests “delayed backchannel support produces signs of anxiety in the speaker.”

Although these are not competitive uses of the feature, they should be seen as an intended response albeit minus the active input towards conversation. Nevertheless, it is possible that “backchannel support may have a competitive variant, in the event that a speaker exploits the backchannel to claim the main channel” (ibid.).

In sum, the co-construction of this organized sequence of negotiation is achieved through the turn-taking procedures constructed by the interlocutors, the awareness of the overlap and interruption features in the conversations, as well as the responsibility of the interlocutors to constantly negotiate meaning from prior utterances and provide backchannel support-all contributing towards a well-choreographed, organized negotiation process.

**MATERIALS AND METHOD**

The data gathered for this study were obtained from two audio recordings of the negotiation between five potential buyers and two REAs in the states of Selangor and Kuala Lumpur.

With the help of acquaintances known to the researcher, prior consent was obtained from either one of the interlocutors for audio-recording purposes (Shanmuganathan, 2008). The justification for gaining consent from either one party is discussed at length in Shanmuganathan (2005).

A total of 12 audio recordings were obtained with each recording lasting between 20 to 45 minutes. For the purpose of analysis, the current study only dealt with two data for in-depth discussions and comparisons. The details of the interlocutors (self-explanatory) are shown in Table 1.

In the first data, there were one REA (S) and two potential buyers (P and Y) at the site, while in the second data, there were one REA (R) and three potential buyers (A, J, and E). Their conversations were audio-recorded and later transcribed and coded using an adapted version of Jefferson’s (1978) transcript conventions (see *transcript notation below* Table 1). This set of conventions show the distribution of turns between the speakers, allowing readers to see the relative length (number of words) and frequency of a speaker’s turn. In addition, this convention also provides information about the occurrences of overlaps or interruptions. More importantly, the study reveals the sequential emergence of the turn-by-turn talk in the negotiation of sales and purchase of property.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings show interlocutors co-constructed a well-choreographed, organized turn-by-turn

TABLE 1  
Demographic details of the interlocutors for Data 1 and 2

Data	Real Estate Agent (REA)	Potential Buyers
Data 1	R - Eurasian male, 15 years experience	E – Malay male (early 30s) A – Malay female, E’s fiancée (mid 20s) J – Malay female, A’s sister (mid 30s)
Data 2	S - Chinese male, house owner, who is also a freelance REA	P – Indian male (early 50s) Y – Indian female, P’s wife (early 50s)

sequence of negotiation in the context of the sale and purchase of second-hand property. The interlocutors were able to recognize and identify the unfolding patterns in the process of negotiation while taking turns and negotiating meaning throughout the interaction. The interlocutors also used the following spontaneous strategies to negotiate meaning:

- Confirmations,
- Backchannels,
- Repetitions,
- Evaluation.

This recognizing and identifying abilities, as well as spontaneous strategizing, are especially of interest in this study since both unacquainted parties worked towards negotiating meaning with the sole purpose of achieving individual goals. The REA wanted to sell at the highest possible price to get a higher commission, while the potential buyers wanted to buy at the lowest possible price.

The findings for selected phases of negotiation that emerged as a result of the co-construction of turns by the interlocutors are summarized in the form of tables. The selection is necessary as it enables thorough discussion of the phases and to list the types of spontaneous strategies that emerge as the interlocutors co-constructed a particular phase. For this purpose, the phases of interest would be the opening phase (i.e. Phase 1), which is the phase where introductions of self and others are made and social niceties exchanged. As this is their very first meeting, it is important to establish how interlocutors break the ice and help make the first meeting more comfortable.

Phases 3 and 4 are also discussed next. In these phases, interlocutors pose certain tactics that need counter-response to the tactics. In the current data, both interlocutors employ the fault finding tactic, referring to the potential buyers finding fault with the property with the purpose of reducing the price of the property. This is a common tactic used by all potential buyers in the current study, and as such warrants in-depth investigation of how the interlocutors posed

tactics, negotiated the actual meaning of the prior utterance, and then counter-responded.

Finally, Phase 6 is also discussed as this is the phase where the interlocutors ended the negotiation process. In this final phase, the interlocutors had to make decisions or non-decisions, and in this study, this phase appeared to be just as challenging as the opening phase.

### *Phase 1 – Introductions*

This is the phase where the interlocutors meet for the first time and exchange greetings. In Data 1 and 2, the potential buyers had called the REAs before coming to the property site. Although they have talked before, they do not know how the other looks like, and thus the general introductions where the interlocutors introduced themselves and others are generally what make up this phase. Table 2 presents a summary of the first phase and the strategies used in the short exchange.

The first interlocutor S, an REA began with a minimal greeting form ‘Hi, hi Mr. P/’ in Data 1. This minimal greeting is the usual social nicety that people accord those they meet even if they are strangers. However, S moved immediately into posing a query within the same sentence to confirm whether he was addressing the correct recipient. In this sentence, S posed a query in a rising intonation ‘Mr. P /’ (line 1) which was intended as a question that required a response. P responded and confirmed that it was he (line 2), ‘uh, yes, yes’ and proceeded to remind S that he had ‘called just [now]’ (line 3).

As P drew towards the end of his Turn Construction Unit (TCU), S pre-empted a possible Transition Relevance Place (TRP) with P’s rising intonation and proceeding to overlap at the word ‘now’ to show agreement. The first strategy used in this data was the repetition ‘yes, yes’ in line 2 by the potential buyer P to emphasize his confirmation.

In lines 4 – 5, the REA posed another query which was still in the introductory phase, ‘so you live round here?’ as a form of ice-breaker. In negotiating the direction and meaning behind the line of S’s questions, P provided answers to

TABLE 2  
Summary of Phase 1 and strategies of turn-taking

Data 1	Strategies	Data 2	Strategies
1. S: Hi, hi Mr P / ← {P1}	Greeting-confirm	1. E: Hi are you (.) R?	Greeting-confirm
2. P: Uh, yes, yes I called	(BC) Confirmation	← {P1}	Query
3. just [now] This is Y	Confirmation-	2. R: E is it?	Confirmation
4. S: [yah] yah hi. So you	Query	3. E: ye[s ]	Confirmation
5. live around here?	Disagreement-	4. R: [R F ] her[e]	Agreement
6. P: No, uh in Subang	Repair Clarification	5. E: ok, [ok]	Greetings-social niceties
7. S: which part?	Giving facts	6. R: [hi] hi ( <i>while</i>	
8. P: USJ 9	(BC) Clarification	7. <i>nodding to the</i>	
9. S: oh, Taipan [there-]lah?	(BC)	8. <i>ladies</i> ) nice to see	
10. P: [uh..ah ]	Disagreement-	9. you	Others-introduction
11. Taipan is 10, USJ 10	Clarification	10. E: ok, this is my sister-	
12. we are in 9	(BC) Confirmation	11. in-law, J[ am]	Greetings
13. S: ah ya ya I know, I		12. R: [hi]	Greetings
14. work in Taipan. I have		13. J: [hi]	Others-introduction
15. a restaurant there, I am	Agreement	14. E: [an]d this	
16. in the food business		15. is my ah (.9) ah	
17. Y: oh [I see I see]	PHASE 2	16. <i>tunang[-lah]</i>	Clarification - other repair
		17. R: [oh,oh] fiancée'	Repetition
18. P: [so can we] see the house?		18. [ ah]	
← {P2}		19. E: [A, m]y	Backchannel
		20. fianc[ée]	Greeting
		21. R: [ah a]h ok	
		22. A: [hi]	PHASE 2
		23. E: so we want to view,	
		24. which one is it?	
		← {P2}	

**Legend**

P – Potential buyer, Indian male  
Y – Potential buyer, Indian female  
S – REA

E – Potential buyer, Malay male  
J – Potential buyer, Malay female  
A – Potential buyer, Malay female  
R – REA

**Transcript Convention**

[ - onset of overlap  
] - end of overlap  
/ - rising intonation  
(.9) - .9 seconds pause  
← {P1} – Phase 1 starts  
← {P2} – Phase 2 starts

the question (in line 6) in which he disagreed to the suggestion that he lived near that particular residential area. In fact, P proceeded to offer a repair and gave a general location, 'Subang' (line 6). S seemed to know that 'Subang' is a really large residential zone and so pursued by asking P, 'which part?' (line 7) which required a more specific answer.

S was curious to know the exact location of P's current home, while P did not seem too eager to provide the answers from all the backchannels

that he had posed as strategies to show his reluctance. P was indirectly negotiating with S to not pry too much into his personal details but S did not seem to understand the reluctance, one-word answers or deliberately ignored them.

However, P still proceeded and offered to give more information by stating 'USJ 9' (line 8) and S sought even more clarification on whether the possible location was 'Taipan there-lah' (line 9). The fact that 'Taipan' is a particular location in Subang allowed P to now pre-empt that S was



moving towards a TRP thus overlapping on S’s ‘there’ (line 10) to initiate his TCU. This overlap is not unusual as the pronoun ‘there’ is redundant and it does not contribute much in terms of providing extra information and the fact that P did not want S to ask too many questions.

P overlapped with a brief backchannel ‘uh, ah’ (line 10) that suggested a reluctant answer indicating that the location stated by S was not exactly ‘Taipan’. The next part of the response by S appeared a bit strange as he agreed that ‘ah, yah yah I know I work in Taipan’ (in line 13). This response suggested that S was actually using the strategy of evaluation to see if P was really being truthful in telling S that he is living in USJ 9 Subang.

From this exchange, it is clear how the interlocutors P and S negotiated meaning using the strategy of backchannel to show reluctance and the strategy of evaluation to check for genuine buyers from those who were merely ‘browsing’ for good deals. S did stop querying after P made a stressed statement that ‘Taipan is USJ 10, we are in USJ9’ (lines 11-12), and S finally relented with a ‘oh, I see’ in line 17 which is an indication to that he was done with the introductions.

In Data 2, the potential buyer E greeted R, the REA and wanted to confirm if he was addressing the right person (line 1). This data provide a slightly different form of adjacency pair of question-response, in that there is a second adjacency pair inserted into the main sequence, was clearly shown in *Fig. 1*.

This type of insertion sequence is common in naturally-occurring interaction, which does not replicate any textbook type of linear-sequenced question-response adjacency pairs. In fact, there

are many recurrences of insertion sequences and adjacency pairs that have occurred earlier in the conversation. In adjacency pair 1 (line 1), E posed a query whether the person he was addressing is R, the REA. However, instead of answering the question, R posed another question (line 2), which opened up the second adjacency pair of question-response. In this second adjacency pair, the response is found in line 3, where E answered to confirm R’s question in line 2. When R accepted E’s answer, he moved on to answer E’s question (in line 1) by confirming that indeed it was him, R (line 4).

In this insertion sequence, E overlapped with R (line 3) as R had already presupposed that E recognized his name, and as such R must then be talking to E, making the question redundant. Therefore, R’s introduction of himself (RF) (line 4) overlapped with the ending part of E’s possible TRP. The second part of R’s utterance, ‘he [re]’ seemed to suggest that R was engaged in a telephone conversation more than he being involved in a face-to-face interaction. The preposition/ pronoun ‘here’ does not provide additional information or in any way contribute towards meaning in the conversation, thus E’s overlapping with an ‘oh’ (in line 5) suggested that E was in acceptance of R’s self-introduction.

After the initial introduction of self, the potential buyer E introduced his (future) sister-in-law first before introducing his fiancée. E appeared embarrassed at introducing his fiancée from the long pause after the backchannel ‘ah’ (lines 14–16) ‘and this is my ah (.9) ah *tunang*[-lah’ where another backchannel ‘ah’ after the pause indicated that E was not embarrassed but was actually unsure of the English word for ‘*tunang*’ (fiancée) (line 16) when he said

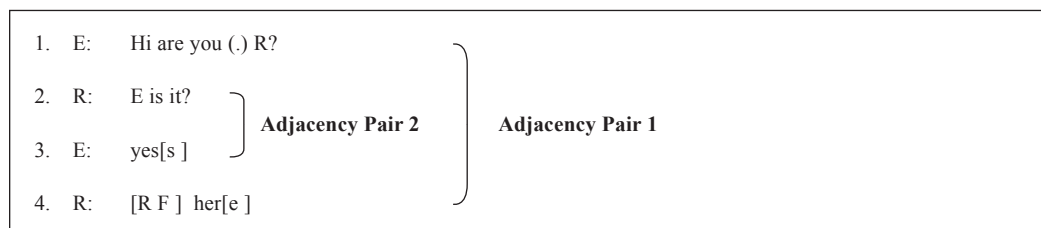


Fig. 1: Insertion sequence

'*tunang*'/[*lah*']. R recognized E's problem at translating the word and negotiated by offering to give the correct word in English (lines 17 -18).

R's repetitive 'oh, oh fiancée' suggested that the first 'oh' refers to the recognition of E's problem while the second 'oh' refers to R knowing the word and pronouncing the word fiancée for E showed a full co-operation in the negotiation of meaning, where R did not ridicule E's difficulty in finding the right word, but offered in a subtle way his repair strategy. In his response, E also showed co-operation in accepting R's offer of help (lines 19 – 20), where he introduced 'A' as 'my fiancée' as a form of acceptance and confirmation of R's suggestion. Another important feature of this show of camaraderie is the turn taken by A, who had waited patiently for her turn to say her greetings while the men E and R were negotiating meaning and building solidarity and camaraderie.

In both data, the interlocutors contributed towards the turn-by-turn construction of the sequence of negotiation while negotiating meaning. Even in this opening phase, it took both parties to co-operate and negotiate meaning before proceeding to the next phase using the strategies of repetition, clarification, confirmation, and backchannels.

#### *Phases 3 and 4 – Tactic –Counter-Tactic*

These phases exhibit the interplay of tactics, where Phase 3 shows how interlocutors identify and posit a negotiation tactic, while Phase 4 involves the counter-response to the negotiation tactic. Both these phases are closely linked and when one party identifies a tactic in Phase 3, the next phase is the response from the recipient. Table 3 summarizes these phases and lists the strategies used by the interlocutors.

Y, the potential buyer commented on how 'the top floor is better than the [ground]' (lines 371-372) when her talk overlapped towards the end by the REA, S's who provided with a backchannel 'yes, yes' (line 376), indicating his agreement albeit in a nonchalant way. S's response caught Y by surprise and she

volunteered a backchannel '[huh]' in line 377, which overlapped with S's 'yes'. S responded with yet another backchannel '[uh]' which preceded S's attempt to give a reason for the condition of the lower ground of the house, 'there's more wear and tear' (lines 379 – 380).

However, P decided to add some humour to S's attempt at giving a reason and overlapped at the word 'tear' by initiating his TCU and overlapped with the word 'you' (line 381) indicating that P was really not concerned about the reason for the condition of the house. In fact, P joked that perhaps S 'seldom comes up' (as shown in line 382) before he burst with a laugh. S overlapped with a backchannel denial 'not' at P's laugh and offered, '[not] like that- *lah* we come up and sleep only (.)' (lines 386 – 387), in order to justify S's previous comment about the reason for the wear and tear. The exchange shows a series of backchannels and overlaps that occurred in a rapid succession as the interlocutors co-operate in negotiating meaning.

In Data 2, the REA (R) explained about the locality of the property (line 47) when J interrupted at a possible TRP 'here-*lah*' (line 51). J's 'but' (line 52) acts as an interruption more than an overlap as R failed to continue his commentary on the property instead and moved to co-operate with J in a topic shift which dealt with the view from the property.

J commented 'on the good view from the property (lines 52-53) and when R was prompted to comment with J's 'yah?' (line 50) that required confirmation, R seemed to be caught off-guard as he struggled to give an appropriate response. Although R's response appeared spontaneous, the lengthening of the vowels, 'ye::s, (.) e::r (.) ok and the multiple timed pauses (.3) from lines 56 - 60 indicate that R was formulating his thoughts as he cautiously volunteered word after word to J's query.

As R proceeded to explain that 'although it's (the property) the fourth storey' (line 62), he briefly paused to get his words in order and offered 'but er (.) it's quite near to vicinities- [*lah*]' (lines 63 – 64). R's '*lah*' was interrupted by E's backchannel '[*wah*]' (line 65) to show his surprised discovery of the fact that the property



TABLE 3  
Summary of Phases 3 and 4 and turn-taking strategies

Data 1	Strategies	Data 2	Strategies
370	beautiful] in fact	47R:	ok, this this area
371Y:	[perfe]ct (.)	48	is quite er heavy
372	I notice that the top	49	traffic- <i>lah</i> I mean it's
373	floor is better	50	about 900 to (muffled)
374	(.) than the	51	reach around here-[ <i>lah</i>
375	[ground] one	52J:	[but
376S:	[yes yes] sure	53	you you've got quite a
377Y:	[huh]	54	good view from here
378S:	[uh]	55	yah?
379	there's more wear	56R:	ye:::s, er, ok
380	and te[ar]	57	(.3) considered (.3)its
381P:	[yo]u	58	one of the (.2) best
382	seldom come up?	59	unit around here-
383	(lau[ghs])	60	<i>lah</i> , top floor
384S:	[not] like that-	61	although it's the
385	<i>lah</i> we come	62	fourth storey but er(.)
386	up and sleep only (.)	63	it's quite near to
387	downstairs more	64	vicinities[ <i>lah</i> ]
388	thin[gs]	65E :	[wah!]
389Y:	[hmm]	66	Block 4, 4 <sup>th</sup> storey,
		67	er four- [four],
		68J:	[4 ]er?
		69E:	[Chinese]
		70	say 'si'uh 'si' I a bit
		71	<i>pantang[lah]</i>
		72R:	[Oh] is it? I
		73	thought Malays don't
		74	have anything?

**Legend**

P – Potential buyer, Indian male  
Y – Potential buyer, Indian female  
S – REA

E – Potential buyer, Malay male  
J – Potential buyer, Malay female  
A – Potential buyer, Malay female  
R – REA

**Transcript Convention**

[ – onset of overlap  
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(.9) – .9 seconds pause  
← {P1} – Phase 1 starts  
← {P2} – Phase 2 starts

is on 'Block 4, 4<sup>th</sup> storey' (line 66) and this is yet another fault-finding tactic that was used by E to discredit the house. E's backchannel 'er four- [four]' (line 67) emphasized the point that E was apprehensive about too many coincidental number fours appearing in the property viewed, fourth storey, fourth block. E was backed by J who also exclaimed '[four ] er?' (line 68) to show she too has a problem with that particular number.

Associating numbers with the property is a usual practice by the Chinese community who believe in the art and science of *feng shui*. How a number is pronounced in Mandarin or any Chinese dialect is the criteria for determining a 'good' number from a 'bad' number. In this case, the number four (4) is pronounced as 'si' (or pronounced as the letter 'c' in English) which means 'dead'. Therefore, this number is usually avoided as the house number and numbers that

total up to four is also to be avoided. This explains the reason why many housing estate projects omit the numbers 4, 13, and 44 as the house numbers replacing them with 3A, 12A, and 43A instead. As for Data 2 in the current study, E the potential buyer had raised the issue of number four being a problem to him.

E states that the '[Chinese] say 'si'uh 'si' I a bit *pantang[lah]*' in lines 69 – 71. In his TCU, E overlapped with the J's repetition of the number four and presented his reasons by code-switching first into Mandarin 'si' to imitate the pronunciation of the word which he assumed R understood since it was quite commonly used by Malaysians. This negotiation of meaning is the best example of co-operation between these unacquainted interlocutors as E did not offer to translate the meaning of 'si' for R or the ladies. In fact, E proceeded to code-switch into Malay with 'I a bit *pantang-lah*' (line 71) which meant superstitious. Again, E presupposed that the word *pantang* is commonly used among Malaysians and as such there was no attempt on E's part to explain himself.

R was definitely caught by surprise as he exclaimed '[Oh] is it?' (line 72) because he 'thought Malays don't have anything?' (line 73). When E suggested he was superstitious of the number four, R was seen to draw upon his past knowledge as an REA to offer a backchannel 'oh' first prior to issuing a confirmation marker 'is it?' Since R had only known the Chinese to be superstitious he wondered why E being Malay was concerned about numbers as the Malays generally do not believe in such things.

As discussed in Phases 3 and 4, there are many features of turn-taking that came into play and these include backchannels, overlaps and interruptions. While interruptions cause the prior interlocutor to abandon his speech, there is a show of solidarity and co-operation through the shared negotiation of meaning.

#### *Phase 6 – Making Decisions*

The last phase usually ends with the potential buyers making decisions. In this current study, both data revealed that the final phase is a phase

where the potential buyers postponed making a final decision.

In Data 1, S gave a final commentary on a particular feature of the property before P indicated that he was going to come to an end of viewing the property through his 'ok' (line 643) and proceeded to say that they 'will get back to you about this' (lines 644 – 645). S agreed with him and asked P to 'Let me know' (line 646). He went on to confirm if P (you) had any number (line 648) and further persuaded P to make a quick decision in 'one two days because the other person from (.) from Sarawak is really interested' (lines 649 – 655). S repeated the word 'from' after a brief untimed pause indicating that he either forgot the place of the origin of the other potential buyer or he was just making it up as a sales gimmick. P did not seem to be bothered about S's attempt at persuading him and just offered a backchannel 'yeah' (line 656) and assured S that 'we'll call you' and left. In this last phase, there is no longer any indication of overlaps or interruptions as one at a time turn was taken before the interlocutors left.

In Data 2, the final phase took a much longer time to end as the potential buyer moved back and forth in a circular sequence asking the REA to confirm the final price of the property and expressing his doubts and alternating between the two issues. In line 203, R was seen using the repetitive backchannel [yeah] yeah yeah' (line 203) as if to emphasize and confirm that 'as what we agreed, what you see is what you get (line 204 – 206). Then, E decided that he 'can't make an offer now' (lines 207 – 208) as he 'have to discuss with my fian[cée]' (lines 209 – 210), to which R agreed and as if to show that he understood the decision taken by E, R overlapped towards the tail end of E's TCU, as shown in line 211, '[can], can'.

R then sought to confirm whether E had 'my number, rite?' (line 212) and even before E had the opportunity to respond, R seemed to be in a hurry and provided another backchannel 'ok [ok]' (line 213), where E made an attempt at the tail-end of R's 'ok' to overlap and show that no E did not have R's card with a '[I] need your card' (lines 214 – 215), and this time E volunteered

TABLE 4  
Summary of Phase 6 and turn-taking strategies

Data 1	Strategies	Data 2	Strategies
638S: [( <i>muffled</i> )		203R: [yeah] yeah yeah,	
639 this type very		204 as what we agreed,	
640 popular and a lot		205 what you see is what	
641 of people go for this		206 you get	
642 type		207E: I can't make an	
643P: ok, we will get		208 offer now, I have	
← {P6}		209 to discuss with my	
644 back to you about		210 fian[ <i>cée</i> ]	
645 this		211R: [can] can, you	
646S: Let me		212 have my number rite,	
647 know, you have		213 ok [ok]	
648 my number, make		214E: [I] need your	
649 it in one two		215 card but, You all ok	
650 days because the		216 <i>tak, suka tak</i> . You	
651 other person from		217 <i>rasa macam mana</i>	
652 from Sarawak is		^^^^^^^^^^	
653 really interested.		222E: How much do you	
654P: yeah we'll call you		223 think the owner will	
		224 let go, sincerely	
		225 ah (.) since you	
		226 [have] been	
		227R: [as I say] <i>lah</i> , I am	
		228 just an agent but ah(.)	
		229 I will relay	
		23 whatever your	
		231 quotation (.) [to him ]	
		232E: [hmm]=	
		233R: [may] be if	
		234 you can give me a	
		235 good quotation(.)	
		236 actually the	
		237 owner is looking at	
		238 250,000 ringgit, ah so	
		239 (.) as you	
		^^^^^^^^^^	
		245E: let me discuss	
		246 ( <i>muffed</i> )	
		247R: ok, th[anks]	
		248E: [so the]n	
		249 how? ( <i>muffed</i> )	
		250J: you have the	
		251 number rite	
		252R: ok, see you all	

**Legend**

P – Potential buyer, Indian male  
Y – Potential buyer, Indian female  
S – REA

E – Potential buyer, Malay male  
J – Potential buyer, Malay female  
A – Potential buyer, Malay female  
R – REA

**Transcript Convention**

[ – onset of overlap  
] – end of overlap  
/ – rising intonation  
(.9) – .9 seconds pause  
← {P1} – Phase 1 starts  
← {P2} – Phase 2 starts

a backchannel 'but' indicating that he was not waiting for R's response but was interested to know how the ladies felt about the property and asked 'You all ok *tak, suka tak* (no, don't like). You *rasa macam mana* (how do you feel)' (lines 216 – 217). E's deliberate code-switch into Malay indicated that he was putting on an act of talking to the ladies in private although knowing well that R was within a hearing distance.

When R did not show any indication of being taunted, E proceeded to address R and asked 'How much do you think the owner will let go' (lines 222 – 224). E further sought to try and persuade R to relent by asking him to state 'sincerely (the amount thought fair by R)' before he stopped to think with a brief backchannel 'ah and pause (.)' to say that R had been in, since R has 'been either in the business or as an agent before R interrupts him to cut E's rambling short and states '[as I say] lah' (line 227), indicating that E had not got his point that the price was not negotiable since he is 'just an agent' (line 228).

However, R showed reluctance as to whether the owner would change his mind and so he put on a backchannel 'but ah' before pausing briefly. (line 228) to demonstrate his doubts. R was willing though to 'relay whatever your (E's) quotation (.) [to him]' the owner (lines 229 – 231) to which E as only a backchannel '[hmm]' which he overlapped with R's to him as given in line 232.

E did not appear to have correctly understood R's need for E to give a quotation and so negotiated the meaning of his prior utterance by overlapping on E's 'hmm'. R attempted to make his prior utterance clearer and more direct (lines 233 – 235) '[ may] be if you can give me a good quotation(.)' but changed his mind when E still did not offer to give a quotation. R then reaffirmed that 'actually the owner is looking at 250,000 ringgit' (236 – 239).

After a few more exchanges, E restated his earlier decision to 'let me discuss' (line 245) before R abruptly finished an overlap over E's muffled utterance 'ok, th[anks]' (line 247) as if waiting to take leave, but E did not stop as he went back to the ladies, and still in the presence

of R, he pursued by interrupting R's 'thanks' and asked '[so the]n how?' (lines 248 – 249). J did not take E's offer to respond to his question but sought to confirm whether E had 'the number rite' (lines 250 – 251). R was also not interested in continuing with the conversation and took on after J, by announcing 'ok, see you all' (line 252).

In brief, this last phase appeared to be filled with backchannels, repetition, overlaps and interruptions, as the interlocutors moved on to negotiate a closing of the phase. Whether it was an overlap or interruption, the conversation progressed as the interlocutors demonstrated co-operation throughout the process of the interaction.

## CONCLUSION

The sequential emergence of turn-taking and construction of the features of backchannels, repetitions, confirmation checks, and evaluation and clarification show that interlocutors seek to co-operate and negotiate meaning in an interaction. This study demonstrates an organized turn-by-turn co-construction of negotiated meanings that made up the entire process of negotiation in the context of the sale and purchase of a second-hand property.

The overlaps that appeared in the course of the interaction occurred at the TRPs but more frequently they also appeared as interruptions. The adjacency pair of question-response indicates clear turn management and organization, and by being aware of the nature of the questions and responses, interlocutors are able to strategise their utterances in negotiations in future interactions. In conclusion, this study has shown that there is planning, organisation, and order that is co-constructed by interlocutors and it is hoped that this study will prompt future research in other types of negotiations.

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