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A Study on Turn Design in Business Communication for Suggestion: A Conversation Analysis Approach with the Movie The Intern as a Case

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Abstract

The formulation of suggestions in business communication plays a crucial role in the entire business process. From the perspective of turn-taking design, this study conducts a conversation analysis of collected business communication corpora. First, it analyzes the linguistic resources in turn-taking design of business communication from four aspects: turn-taking, conversational repair, mutual understanding, and preference vs. non-preference organization. It then examines the non-verbal resources in turn-taking design, focusing on gestures and eye contact. Furthermore, it proposes the distinctive features of suggestion construction in business communication. Through corpus analysis and summarization, this study clarifies that turn-taking design in business communication is the result of the joint influence of linguistic and non-verbal factors, providing new insights into communicative skills for business interactions.

Keywords: Business Communication, Suggestion Making, Conversation Analysis, Turn-taking Design

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1 Introduction

Conversation is an indispensable linguistic phenomenon in human social activities. Conversation analysis primarily focuses on talk-in-interaction, while also examining non-linguistic forms of social interaction such as gaze direction, gestures, and body movements, as well as the connections between the linguistic and non-linguistic features of interaction (Yu Guodong, 2021). The significance of conversation analysis for business and management research is self-evident, as talk-in-interaction is ubiquitous in the daily operations of any organization and crucial for completing key business and management activities, including strategy formulation, planning, sales, interviews, meeting facilitation, negotiations, and presentations.

The act of making suggestions is an indispensable part of business communication, even playing a decisive role in its success or failure. This paper approaches the topic from the perspective of turn-taking design, analyzing the turn-taking designs in business communication conversations from both linguistic and non-linguistic resources perspectives. Through the study of suggestion-making in business communication and the classification of turn-taking design principles, this research aims to promote the smooth and efficient conduct of business communication, thereby facilitating win-win outcomes in business negotiations.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Conversation Analysis

The concept of 'conversation analysis' broadly encompasses the inquiry into people's interactive communication. In a narrow sense, it signifies a specific analytic tradition established by Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson (1977), which serves as the theoretical framework for this research. Rooted in sociology and informed by ethnomethodology, conversation analysis is characterized as "a naturalistic observational discipline that systematically addresses the minutiae of social actions with rigor, empirical evidence, and formal structure" (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973, p. 289).

Scholarly discussions on conversation analysis primarily address two key themes. The first theme focuses on the genesis of conversation analysis, which can be attributed to Sacks' 1974 scholarship, Goffman's (1983) investigations into interactional order, and Garfinkel's (1967) studies on ethnomethodology. The second theme involves the conversational-analytic frameworks of talk-in-interaction, comprising but not limited to turn-taking mechanisms, discourse overlap, interruption patterns, sequential organization, and repair systems.

2.2 Turn Taking Design

Turn-taking design refers to how speakers construct the current turn to perform a specific action, that is, which resources speakers choose to build the turn to accomplish the intended action. Meanwhile, listeners can infer the action performed in the turn through the resources selected by the speaker (Yu Guodong, 2021). Turn-taking design typically involves two aspects: first, what action the current turn aims to perform; second, how the action is executed through the turn, namely, which linguistic or non-linguistic resources the speaker employs. Linguistic resource selection involves vocabulary, syntax, pronunciation, intonation, etc., while non-linguistic resource selection involves gestures, eye contact, body movements, and other physical actions (Drew, 2005; Drew, 2013; Drew & Heritage, 1992; Yu Guodong, 2011).

3 Turn-taking Design for Suggestion-making in Business Communication

Through the collection and sorting of business communication corpora regarding suggestion-making in the movie The Intern, this paper mainly analyzes the data from two aspects: linguistic resources (turn-taking, conversational repair, mutual understanding, preference and non-preference organization) and non-linguistic resources (gestures and eye contact).

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3.1 Linguistic Resources

3.1.1 Turn-taking

Turn-taking serves as the resource and foundation for communicators to engage in talk-in-interaction, where they take turns, construct utterances, and conduct communication according to conversational sequences (Yu Guodong, 2021).

Example (1)

J: Okay. You guys have to remember the homepage has to read in a glance. Also, you have to get back like this if you wanna see what it looks like if you're over 35. Okay, so I can't read anything. But if I could, what do you want me to see? Five girls one shirt or check out the fit?

E: Well, both, but what I really want you to see is the shirt worn by five different body types.

J: Okay, then you gotta make me see that. Try making the photo grid bigger. I love that five—can make it more graphic. Yeah, that's cool.

E: Jules...

J: That's a great red. It is going to fly out of here.

E: I needed you to sign off on this like 2 hours ago.

J: I know, I know, but can you try?

E: Yep.

J: Mia, tell me the thing again.

M: Oh, 40% of our visitors don't go past the homepage, which isn't so bad.

J: Yeah, but we should fix that.

E: Okay, here we go.

J: I love it.

E: Great, and it's up.

J: Okay, thanks, everybody. Thank you.

In Example (1), Jules (J), as the company boss, proposes a suggestion to enlarge the image of female models wearing red shirts in the advertisement. However, Employee E interrupts J's turn to urge immediate approval for the work, demonstrating a strategic use of turn-taking mechanisms. This interaction reveals three key dimensions of linguistic resource design in business suggestion-making:

In business communication, the strategies of turn - transition are intricately intertwined with power dynamics. In the analyzed conversation snippet, Employee E interrupts Boss J's turn with the utterance "Jules...". This prosodic cut - off effectively conveys a sense of urgency. As Drew (2005) argued in his research on "interruption as a resource," subordinates in hierarchical communication contexts often utilize minimal linguistic tokens, such as name addresses, to seize the floor. By interrupting J and then shifting the conversation to a request for a signature, E transforms the discussion from a suggestion - oriented exchange into an action - demanding sequence. This process vividly demonstrates how turn - taking can redefine the goals of interaction, highlighting the significant role of turn - transition strategies within power - laden communication scenarios.

The reception of suggestions in business talk often exhibits patterns of preference organization. When Boss J initially suggests "Try making the photo grid bigger," Employee E responds with partial compliance, saying "Yep," but immediately follows it with a persistent request for approval. This interaction exemplifies the "non - preference organization" pattern proposed by Schegloff and Sacks (1973). In this pattern, E's agreement serves as a preface to a less preferred action—urging for a signature, which softens the potential

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challenge to authority. The overlap between J's "but can you try?" and E's "Yep" further illustrates how the timing of turn - taking coordinates competing actions. Such precise management of turn - taking moments allows different communicative intentions to interweave and be reconciled within the limited space of conversation, ensuring its smooth continuation.

The sequential embedding of suggestions is a crucial strategy in business communication. Boss J redirects the conversation to Mia and initiates a new turn by introducing the data "40% of our visitors don't go past the homepage." This strategic turn - shift serves a dual purpose. Firstly, in accordance with Goffman's (1983) principle of "interaction order," the introduction of empirical evidence lends credibility to subsequent suggestions, enhancing their persuasiveness. Secondly, the new turn creates a sequential context, making Employee E's subsequent response "Okay, here we go" not only a reaction to J's suggestion but also a response to the newly introduced data. The conversation concludes with "It's up," which confirms that well - designed turn - taking mechanisms can effectively drive communication towards collaborative problem - solving. This also aligns with Yu Guodong's (2021) argument that turn organization is a process of integrating linguistic and non - linguistic resources. For example, J's repeated praise acts as non - linguistic positive reinforcement, contributing significantly to the smooth progress of communication.

The force of suggestions in business communication is often manifested through linguistic markers. In the first turn, Boss J uses deontic modals such as "have to" and "gotta," which clearly encode authority, signifying the directive nature of a superior's speech. In contrast, Employee E's use of the modal "needed" in the past tense softens the intensity of the request, making the expression more euphemistic. This contrast in grammar, especially the differences in tense and modality selection, clearly demonstrates how syntactic structures function as important linguistic resources for negotiating power dynamics during turn transitions. Additionally, J's repair sequence "I know, I know" further exemplifies the conversational repair mechanisms studied by Drew and Heritage (1992). When faced with conflicting agendas, such self - correction behaviors help maintain the coherence of interaction, preventing the conversation from reaching an impasse due to differences in opinion and ensuring that communication can continue in a relatively harmonious atmosphere.

3.1.2 Conversational Repair

Conversational repair addresses issues of hearing, speaking, and understanding encountered by communicators during interaction. Based on the relationship between the repair initiator and the repair executor, conversational repair can be categorized into four types: self-initiated/self-repaired, self-initiated/other-repaired, other-initiated/self-repaired, and other-initiated/other-repaired (Yu Guodong, 2021).

Example (2)

> J: Hi, this is good, right? I like this arrangement. Uh, Becky, I want you to let Ben give you a hand, okay? And CC him all my emails. Did we get yesterday's numbers?
>
> B: Uh, yes, we did. I saw them here. Here you are.
>
> J: Thanks. And I need to go over the data and customer purchase patterns. Let Ben take a look at that too. Actually, let Ben take a look at that first. Don’t worry, Becky, backup is good.

In Example (2), the interaction between Jules, the boss, and Secretary Becky provides a rich illustration of self-initiated self-repair in the context of business communication. When instructing Becky regarding Ben's involvement in reviewing emails, Jules initially states "let Ben take a look at that too," positioning Ben's role as supplementary to Becky's. However, almost immediately, Jules modifies the instruction to "let Ben take a look at that first," a significant shift that reorders the task hierarchy. This self-correction aligns with Drew's (2013) conceptualization of repair as a means of "action reformulation." By using the discourse marker "actually" to signal the change, Jules indicates that the initial suggestion was a provisional thought, not a definitive directive. This strategic adjustment not only clarifies the priority of tasks but also showcases

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how speakers in professional settings leverage self-repair to refine the force and scope of their suggestions in real-time interaction.

Jules' self-repair as a leader embodies a complex interplay of strategic intentions deeply rooted in power dynamics. On one hand, by openly correcting herself, Jules projects an image of attentiveness to detail, reinforcing her authority through the display of competence. The act of refining her own suggestion—"I refine my own suggestions to ensure accuracy"—serves as a model for meticulousness within the workplace. On the other hand, Jules employs relational work to mitigate potential face threats. The reassuring comment "Don't worry, Becky, backup is good" softens the impact of the revised instruction, demonstrating an awareness of Becky's face needs. This approach starkly contrasts with other-initiated repair scenarios, where subordinates may be reluctant to correct superiors due to hierarchical constraints (Schegloff, 2007). Jules' choice of self-repair thus navigates the delicate balance between asserting authority and maintaining positive working relationships, highlighting how power structures shape repair strategies in business contexts.

The linguistic markers employed in Jules' repair sequence offer a nuanced view of the underlying communicative mechanisms. The discourse marker "actually" functions as a turn-holding device, alerting Becky to an impending correction and aligning with Drew and Heritage's (1992) findings on repair initiation cues. The substitution of "too" with "first" represents a targeted alteration in deontic modality, transforming the suggestion from an additive afterthought to a prioritized directive. This semantic shift is crucial for clarifying the intended action hierarchy. Finally, Jules' reassuring comment to Becky serves as a post-repair validation, closing the repair sequence and ensuring that the revised instruction is understood without ambiguity. This aligns with Yu Guodong's (2021) observation that self-repair in business talk often integrates prosodic elements, such as the pause before "actually," and pragmatic markers to maintain interactional smoothness.

Beyond its immediate communicative function, Jules' self-repair has far-reaching organizational implications. By prioritizing Ben's involvement, Jules subtly promotes cross-training, an essential strategy for developing a versatile workforce. This approach is embedded within the conversational repair itself, illustrating how everyday talk can encode organizational goals. Additionally, the explicit self-correction reinforces the norm of decision-making transparency, signaling that suggestions are subject to refinement based on situational requirements—a principle vital for fostering collaboration. Compared to scenarios where a subordinate might initiate the repair (e.g., "Do you mean first, Jules?"), Jules' self-initiated repair avoids challenging her own authority while still achieving the desired clarification. This choice optimizes both task efficiency and relational harmony, demonstrating the dual role of repair as a tool for both communicative correction and organizational management.

In conclusion, the interaction in Corpus (2) underscores the strategic nature of conversational repair in business suggestion-making. Through self-initiated self-repair, speakers like Jules can dynamically adjust the pragmatic force of their suggestions, navigate power dynamics, and coordinate interactional coherence using linguistic markers. This example highlights how repair mechanisms extend beyond mere error correction, serving as integral tools for fine-tuning managerial directives and maintaining effective organizational communication.

3.1.3 Intersubjectivity

Intersubjectivity refers to the mutual understanding between communicators regarding each other's discourse and actions, which can be manifested in the sequential structure of conversation (Yu Guodong, 2008; Schegloff, 2007). Intersubjectivity plays a decisive role in communicative interaction, as the accurate interpretation of communicators' intentions in business contexts often determines the success of business communication.

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Example (3)

J: I hope you accept my apology and come back to work for me. If you want. And I'm not just saying this because he's screwed up this morning, but I was thinking that I'd like to bring you up to my area. Next to Becky. I know you can handle more work, if you like more. I—I can't tell you how much I hate that. I jumped the gun and I made you...

B: I'm happy to come back.

J: Excellent. Can I give you a lift back to the office?

B: Sure.

In Example (3), the interaction between Jules, the boss, and Ben offers a compelling illustration of intersubjectivity in business communication. Jules initiates the conversation by apologizing to Ben for a misassigned transfer and extends a proposal for him to return to work. During Jules' hesitant and fragmented apology, characterized by statements such as "I—I can't tell you... I jumped the gun," Ben interrupts with a prompt acceptance: "I'm happy to come back." This seemingly abrupt interruption is, in fact, a nuanced communicative move that exemplifies intersubjectivity through multiple interconnected mechanisms.

The sequential organization of the conversation plays a crucial role in establishing intersubjective understanding. Ben's timely interruption is a testament to his acute sensitivity to the contextual cues embedded in Jules' discourse. As Schegloff (2007) posits, intersubjectivity emerges from "sequential implicativeness," and in this case, Ben adeptly interprets Jules' stuttering and self - blame as a tacit plea for reconciliation. By responding before Jules can fully articulate her apology, Ben effectively resolves the interactional tension that pervades the conversation. The overlap between Jules' self - recrimination and Ben's immediate acceptance functions as a form of "co - completion," a concept proposed by Yu Guodong (2008). This mechanism reinforces the shared understanding between the two parties without the need for explicit elaboration, highlighting the power of sequential coordination in achieving intersubjectivity.

Facework is another critical aspect of this interaction, intertwined with the dynamics of intersubjective repair. Jules' apology, laden with self - criticism, poses a threat to her own face. Ben's interruption serves a dual - purpose strategy in this regard. Drawing on Goffman's (1967) theory of face - saving, Ben's timely intervention cuts short Jules' self - blame, thereby preventing further erosion of her face. Simultaneously, Ben's immediate acceptance of the return offer signals his belief in the genuineness of Jules' proposal. This aligns with Drew's (1998) research on "pre - emptied responses," where subordinates employ interruption as a subtle means of managing power dynamics. By truncating the apology sequence, Ben avoids prolonging Jules' vulnerable position, demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of the hierarchical power structure at play.

The interaction is also rich with linguistic markers that facilitate intersubjective coordination. Ben's entry into the turn precisely during Jules' hesitation, marked by the elongated "I—," constitutes a form of prosodic convergence. This attunement to Jules' emotional tone serves to validate her sincerity, creating a sense of emotional resonance. In terms of deictic alignment, Jules' use of spatial deixis, such as "my area" and "next to Becky," constructs an inclusive work context. Ben's affirmative response effectively accepts this constructed spatial framework, reinforcing their shared spatial imagination. Additionally, the contrast between Jules' hedged statements, such as "if you want" and "if you like more," and Ben's unhedged acceptance, "I'm happy to," results in a modal alignment. This harmony in modality, as described by Heritage (1984), signals a mutual commitment between the two parties, further underscoring that intersubjectivity is a dynamic achievement, constructed through meticulous linguistic coordination.

The resolution of this interaction through intersubjective means has significant organizational implications. Firstly, by circumventing an extended apology, Ben and Jules minimize the potential downtime caused by the misassignment, adhering to the norms of business efficiency. Secondly, Ben's proactive acceptance and Jules' subsequent offer to provide a lift back to the office go beyond the immediate task at hand, serving as an investment in their professional relationship. This aligns with Holmes' (1995) assertion

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that business talk often integrates both task - oriented and relational goals. Finally, the interaction embodies a corporate norm that emphasizes the importance of promptly resolving interpersonal issues to preserve team coherence. This norm is realized not through explicit rules but through the intersubjective practices demonstrated by Ben and Jules, highlighting the role of everyday communication in upholding organizational culture.

In conclusion, Example (3) underscores that intersubjectivity in business suggestion - making is a carefully managed sequential practice. Through the coordination of turn - taking, the implementation of facework strategies, and the deployment of linguistic markers, communicators like Ben and Jules can achieve mutual understanding and navigate complex interpersonal dynamics. Ben's interruption, rather than being a disruption, emerges as a valuable intersubjective resource that transforms a potentially uncomfortable situation into a collaborative resolution. This example vividly illustrates the pivotal role that conversational structure plays in enabling effective business communication, where intersubjectivity serves as the linchpin for successful interaction in professional settings.

3.1.4 Preference and Non-preference Organization

Adjacency pairs vary in how the first part constrains the second. When multiple possible second parts exist and their social implications differ, the concept of preference becomes salient for both communicators and researchers. Preference analysis encompasses two dimensions: action-based preference and design-based preference (Sidnell, 2010: 86). Key features of preference organization, or actions that exhibit preference, include promptness, unqualified responses, and lack of justifications.

Example (4)

J: Okay. You guys have to remember the homepage has to be legible at a glance. Also, you have to view it like this if you want to see how it looks to someone over 35. Okay, I can't read anything. But if I could, what do you want me to notice? Five girls in one shirt or the fit details?

E: Well, both, but I really want you to focus on the shirt worn by five different body types.

J: Okay, then make sure I can see that clearly. Try enlarging the photo grid. I love the five-model concept—it makes the design more graphic. Yeah, that's great.

E: Jules...

J: That red color is amazing. It'll sell like hotcakes.

E: I needed your approval on this two hours ago.

J: I know, I know, but can you make the adjustments?

E: Yep.

Example (5)

C: There’s extensive research on this, and the results are truly remarkable. Imagine having an intern with a lifetime of experience instead of someone who spent the last four years partying.

J: Do they expect to get hired here eventually?

C: Darling, they’re all retired. They just want the experience. And I’d like one to work directly with you.

J: Wait, Cameron, no.

C: What?

J: First of all, I’m not comfortable around older people. You know how I am with my parents. This could be… Why do I have to do this?

C: Because you need to set the standard.

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J: I don't think this will work. But if I have to, how long is the minimum?

C: Six weeks, or we'll face legal issues.

J: We never discussed this before.

C: Yes, we did. Seriously.

In example (4), Employee E's succinct response of "yep" to Boss Jules' directive—"can you make the adjustments?"—serves as a prime example of action-based preference, as defined by Kendrick & Torreira (2014). This instantiation of preference organization unfolds through three interrelated linguistic and interactional dimensions. First, the immediacy of E's reply significantly reduces the temporal gap between J's request and the corresponding acknowledgment, adhering to Schegloff's (1968) principle of "next-turn relevance." Such promptness not only signals attentiveness but also conveys a sense of professional commitment to task execution. Second, the unqualified nature of "yep"—devoid of hedges like "I'll try" or conditional clauses—exemplifies Heritage's (1984) observation that preferred responses often eschew justifications, implying that compliance is assumed and requires no elaboration. Third, this response performs crucial relational work: by enacting a preferred action, E reinforces J's authority while positioning themselves as a reliable team member. This dual function—streamlining workflow through reduced negotiation and strengthening hierarchical bonds via deferential compliance—aligns with Goffman's (1971) insights into face management within institutional settings.

Conversely, Example (5) illuminates the mechanics of design-based non-preference organization through Jules' resistance to Cameron's proposal. J's response manifests three defining characteristics of non-preferred actions (Heritage, 1984). The interaction begins with a categorical refusal—"no"—followed by a series of objections, including "I'm not great with older people" and "Why do I have to?" This delayed acceptance disrupts the sequential flow, overtly signaling reluctance and deferring potential agreement until constrained by the ultimatum: "six weeks or we'll be sued." Additionally, J provides detailed justifications for opposition, citing personal discomfort and lack of prior consultation—strategies that align with Heritage's (1984) argument that non-preferred responses often include accounts to mitigate the face threat of disagreement. Finally, J's use of hedging—"I don't think this will work"—and conditional acceptance—"how long do I have to… minimum?"—stands in sharp contrast to E's unhedged "yep" in Example (4). These modal markers weaken commitment, reflecting a power struggle in which J seeks to negotiate terms despite C's authoritative stance.

The contrast between these examples underscores the strategic role of preference organization in business communication. In Example (4), preferred actions facilitate efficient decision-making, while Example (5) demonstrates how non-preferred responses invite negotiation, with communicative goals shaping this strategic choice—E prioritizes task execution, whereas J aims to challenge a directive. Power dynamics are equally salient: E's preferred response reinforces J's leadership, while J's non-preferred stance contests C's authority, echoing Drew's (1990) assertion that preference organization serves as a site for power enactment. Subordinates often deploy preferred actions to demonstrate compliance, while superiors may leverage non-preferred responses to assert autonomy. Culturally, these examples mirror distinct organizational norms: Example (4) reflects a hierarchical culture valuing prompt obedience, while Example (5) suggests a more permissive environment where objections are tolerated, albeit with consequences.

In essence, preference and non-preference organization emerge not as static linguistic phenomena but as dynamic strategies through which communicators navigate tasks, relationships, and power in professional settings. By deploying these resources, interlocutors can achieve specific interactional outcomes—from efficient task delegation to strategic resistance—thereby highlighting the pivotal role of turn design in shaping organizational communication. This dual capacity to structure both discourse and power relations underscores the integral function of preference organization in maintaining the delicate balance between efficiency and relational harmony in business contexts.

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3.2 Non-linguistic Resources

3.2.1 Gestures

As a crucial component of body language, gestures play an indispensable role in conversation analysis. In business communication, gestures convey emotions and ideas, and accurately interpreting their variations can enhance communicative effectiveness.

Example (6)

J: If you ask me, I think that you'd be much better off working on creative marketing. (taps the table with two index fingers) It's a little bit slower pace, maybe a little bit easier to grasp. If you requested to transfer, we can make that happen. (rests arms on the table, clasps hands)

B: If that's what you prefer.

J: You'll be happier. Believe me, I am not so fun to work for. (waves hand three times)

B: That's how I gather, but I can get along with anyone. And I'm here to learn about your world. Give help where I can, so...

J: So you don't want to transfer?

B: Not really, sir. I'm terribly sorry. Excuse me.

J: Okay. Well then it looks like you're stuck with me.

B: Great, I'm excited.

J: I will e-mail you when I have something for you to do. (opens laptop)

B: Or I could just stop by a few times a day, check in.

J: I'll e-mail you.

In example (6), Jules (J) strategically employs a sequence of distinct gestures to structure her suggestion for Ben (B) to transfer to the marketing department, offering a compelling demonstration of how non-linguistic resources integrate with verbal discourse in professional interactions. When proposing the transfer, J's act of tapping the table with two index fingers serves as a deictic emphasis, a physical gesture that anchors the suggestion in the immediate environment.

Following the suggestion, J assumes a posture of resting her arms on the table and clasping her hands, a physical configuration that Kendon (1990) identifies as a "relaxed postural closure"—a non-verbal cue signaling the completion of her turn. This gesture performs a tripartite function in the interaction: it explicitly yields conversational control to Ben, aligning with Schegloff's (1984) principles of non-verbal turn transition; it conveys a stance of anticipation, effectively pressuring Ben to respond promptly with its implicit message of "I await your reply"; and it reinforces J's authority through a dominant tabletop posture—arms spread, hands clasped—that contrasts subtly with Ben's likely deferential stance (inferred from contextual norms), echoing Goffman's (1979) analysis of body language in hierarchical dynamics. The clasped hands, in this sense, serve not only as a turn-yielding device but also as a non-verbal assertion of professional authority.

At the conversation's conclusion, J's act of opening her laptop exemplifies what Goodwin (1981) terms "object-coupled gesturing," where manipulating an artifact becomes a non-verbal adjacency pair to her verbal closure ("I will e-mail you"). This gesture strategically redefines the interactional context: by prioritizing computer work, J signals a shift from discussion to task execution, aligning with business efficiency norms. Simultaneously, it functions as an implicit rejection of Ben's counterproposal to "stop by a few times"—a non-verbal strategy that softens the face threat of refusal, as Brown & Levinson (1987) note, by avoiding explicit negation. Additionally, the laptop-opening gesture cues Ben to terminate the interaction, illustrating how non-linguistic resources like object manipulation manage conversational boundaries in professional settings, as Hopper (1992) has discussed.

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The sequential progression of gestures—tapping, clasping, opening—forms a cohesive multimodal package with J's speech, each movement reinforcing a specific conversational function. The tap synchronizes with the suggestion's key predicate, aiding Ben's cognitive processing of the proposal; hand-clasping humanizes J's authority, balancing firmness with approachability to foster relational harmony; and laptop-opening minimizes conversational drift, adhering to the task-oriented ethos of business communication. This integration of non-linguistic and linguistic resources supports Yu Guodong's (2021) argument that turn-taking design in professional talk is a cross-modal achievement, were bodily actions and speech co-construct communicative intent. Ben's prompt exit following J's final gesture indicates his successful decoding of these non-verbal cues, underscoring the necessity of gestural competence for effective business interaction.

In essence, this episode reveals that gestures in business suggestion-making are not ancillary to speech but rather strategic tools for emphasizing propositional content, managing turn transitions, negotiating power dynamics, and regulating interactional boundaries. J's gestural repertoire demonstrates how non-linguistic resources actively shape conversational meaning, illustrating the indispensable role of multimodal analysis in unpacking the complexities of professional communication. By integrating bodily actions with verbal discourse, communicators in business contexts can achieve finer-grained control over interactional outcomes, balancing task efficiency with relational maintenance through the nuanced deployment of non-verbal cues.

3.2.2 Eye Gaze

Eye gaze, as a subtler component of non-linguistic resources, conveys emotions in a more implicit manner, requiring sensitive interpretation to enhance business communication effectiveness.

Example (7)

J: I just wanted to say, (looks at the floor) I slept on it. I haven't called Townsend yet, but (blinks once and looks at Ben) I still feel like it's the right thing to do.

B: I didn't sleep so well myself.

J: Over this?

B: Remember the day I drove you to the warehouse, you gave me the wrong directions and all that.

J: Yeah, I remember. (stares at Ben with a smile)

B: Okay, well I stood in the back and watched you show the workers how to fold the box to close. I knew then why ATF was a success.

In example (7), Jules (J) demonstrates strategic use of eye gaze shifts while consulting Ben (B) about hiring a CEO, illustrating how ocular movements serve as nuanced non-linguistic resources in business suggestion-making. When J initially gazes at the floor while saying "I slept on it," this behavior aligns with Kendon's (1990) concept of gaze aversion, a non-verbal cue that signals psychological hesitation. Goodwin (1981) has noted that downward gaze in decision-making contexts often correlates with internal conflict, and here the gaze shift performs dual functions: it masks J's uncertainty to maintain professional composure while providing cognitive space for discursive preparation, as evidenced by her pause before mentioning "calling Townsend" (Yu Guodong, 2021). The contrast between this aversive gaze and subsequent direct eye contact highlights how ocular movements encode emotional transitions in business talk, much like prosodic shifts in verbal discourse.

J's blink followed by direct eye contact when stating "I still feel like it's the right thing to do" constitutes a strategic "blink-gaze package" that solicits intersubjective alignment. As Argyle & Cook (1976) have observed, the blink momentarily exposes vulnerability, while the subsequent gaze lock invites response. This behavior creates a "shared attentional frame" (Tomasello, 2003), pressuring Ben to acknowledge the suggestion in a manner analogous to a linguistic question. Drew (2013) has argued that such non-linguistic

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resources function as "implicit adjacency pairs," where gaze behaviors replace explicit requests for confirmation—a dynamic clear in J's non-verbal cueing.

During Ben's narrative, J's smiling stare exemplifies a "positive gaze complex" that integrates eye contact with facial expression to facilitate turn continuation. This non-verbal cluster reinforces Schegloff's (1984) principle of "continuation relevance" by signaling interest and approval, while also mitigating power distance through the strategic combination of dominance (direct gaze) and warmth (smile), a key strategy in hierarchical contexts (Goffman, 1971). The gaze fixation on Ben's face further aligns cognitive focus, guiding his attention to the relevance of his story for legitimizing J's proposal—an instance of "relational work" in business talk as defined by Holmes (1995).

The three-phase gaze trajectory—from aversion to blink-gaze to smile-gaze—forms a multimodal sequence that mirrors the rhetorical structure of J's suggestion. Kendon (2004) has emphasized that eye movements in professional settings are "orchestrated with talk," and here the sequence progresses from articulating doubt (gaze aversion) to asserting conviction (blink-gaze) to expanding dialogue (smile-gaze). Ben's responsive storytelling indicates successful decoding of these gaze cues, underscoring the vital role of ocular competence in negotiating suggestions. Taken together, these findings reveal that eye gaze in business communication serves as a dynamic resource for managing emotions, soliciting support, facilitating conversational flow, and negotiating power relations—all of which highlight the necessity of multimodal analysis for understanding professional interactional competence.

4 Distinctive Features of Suggestion Construction in Business Communication

In the preceding sections, we analyzed the turn-taking design for suggestion-making in business communication from the perspective of formal classification, examining linguistic and non-linguistic resources through corpora from the movie. This analysis has deepened our understanding of suggestion-making in business contexts. Next, we summarize the characteristics of suggestion construction to further illuminate the design of suggestive turns in business communication.

4.1 Directivity

The "advice-seeking-advice-giving" sequence represents a special form of question-answer sequence. One distinctive feature of suggestion turn construction is proposing an action for the addressee to perform in the future (Yu Guodong, 2021).

Example (8)

J: Maybe check the delivery cost on those boots. Yeah, that's all.

B: Hi. I took a look at the data on purchase patterns. Should I come back later?

J: No, no, come on in. That was fast.

B: Well, thanks to Beck's help. It seems the most expensive advertising channel is actually attracting customers who spend the least, while the channels you invest in the least are adding enormous value. Some market segments currently seen as low-value actually have the highest spending potential. That's what I've found so far.

J: Oh, Ben, can you deal with that for me? Maybe come up with a better plan. I mean, if you have the time, I'd appreciate it.

B: Yeah.

In Example (8), Jules (J) illustrates the task-directive nature of business suggestions by urging Ben (B) to "come up with a better plan," an interaction that unpacks three interrelated dimensions of directivity in suggestion construction. Linguistically, J employs a strategic blend of deontic modality and action-oriented syntax to balance authority with politeness. The modal verb "can" in "can you deal with that" softens the directive into a request, while the hedging adverb "maybe" in "maybe come up with" mitigates face threat,

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aligning with Brown & Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness strategies. This grammatical choice reflects Drew's (2013) concept of "mitigated directivity," where superiors use modal markers to navigate power dynamics. The shift from J's initial imperative ("check the delivery cost") to the interrogative-proposal hybrid in her follow-up turn demonstrates how syntax adapts to the interlocutor's competence—Ben's rapid data analysis elicits a more collaborative tone, as noted by Yu Guodong (2021), who argues that business suggestions are "linguistic actions oriented toward future tasks" with grammatical forms encoding both directive force and interpersonal tact.

The suggestion unfolds in a three-stage sequential structure that exemplifies Schegloff's (1984) principle of conditional relevance. Ben's report on inefficient advertising channels first establishes a factual basis for J's suggestion, followed by J's pre-suggestion question ("can you deal with that") that prepares Ben for the task assignment. The hedged clause ("if you have the time") then solicits Ben's voluntary commitment, transforming the directive into a collaborative agreement. This staged progression aligns with Goffman's (1971) view of communication as a ritualized process, where each turn strategically builds on the prior to achieve interactional closure. The sequential organization underscores that directivity in business talk is not a monologic act but a dynamically negotiated accomplishment.

J's suggestion embodies a delicate balance between authority enforcement and employee empowerment. By framing the task as "deal with that for me," J reinforces her role as decision-maker, yet hedges like "maybe" and praise ("that was fast") mitigate face threat, reflecting Holmes' (1995) concept of "relational work." This pragmatic tension is further evident in the contrast between J's initial terse command and her nuanced follow-up, which adapts to Ben's demonstrated competence. As Kendrick & Torreira (2014) note, directivity in professional settings is context-sensitive, with communicators adjusting their linguistic style to interlocutors' responses.

Organizationally, this interaction serves as a managerial tool for optimizing efficiency, delegating skills, and maintaining relational harmony. By anchoring the suggestion in operational data, J ensures task relevance, while assigning the planning task to Ben leverages his analytical expertise, aligning with principles of task specialization. The hedged suggestion format allows Ben to accept the task without losing face, fostering a cooperative work environment. As Streeck (2009) argues, such directivity in business suggestion-making is not merely communicative but a strategic mechanism for coordinating tasks, distributing power, and upholding organizational culture.

In sum, Example (8) demonstrates that directivity in business suggestion construction is a multimodal phenomenon shaped by context-sensitive linguistic forms, sequentially staged interactions, and power-relational negotiations. J's suggestion exemplifies how professional communicators convert information into actionable plans through directivity, highlighting its role as a foundational element of effective business communication.

4.2 Beneficiary Orientation

That the hearer benefits is one of the distinctive features of suggestion turn construction (Yu Guodong, 2021).

Example (9)

J: I want to figure out a way for friends to shop together online. Make it less of a lone thing. Email that idea, will you?

B: Yeah, I like that. Is now a good time to call your mom back?

J: Dude, I'm on a bike.

Qualitative Analysis (Expanded Version):

In Example (9), Jules (J) instructs Becky (B) to email her an idea for online group shopping, an interaction that vividly exemplifies the beneficiary-oriented feature of business suggestions. This exchange reveals

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how beneficiary orientation in suggestion construction is realized through a complex interplay of linguistic strategies, sequential organization, power dynamics, and organizational logic. Linguistically, J employs a dual approach to frame the request as benefiting others while subtly advancing her own interests. The proposal to make online shopping "less of a lone thing" positions the idea as addressing a user experience problem, invoking Brown & Levinson's (1987) concept of "positive face work" by presenting the request as contributing to a shared goal. Simultaneously, the tag question "Email that idea, will you?" softens the directive into a polite request, blending deontic modality with an appeal to collaboration— a hybrid form common in business talk that allows superiors to maintain authority while appearing cooperative, as noted by Drew (2013). This linguistic contrast between altruistic framing and practical benefit demonstrates how beneficiary orientation is discursively constructed through strategic language use, in line with Yu Guodong's (2021) argument about the discursive nature of business communication.

The suggestion unfolds in a three-stage sequence that reinforces its beneficiary orientation, exemplifying Schegloff's (1984) principle of "sequential implicativeness." J first defines the issue as a user-centric problem ("lonely shopping"), creating a normative expectation for a solution. The directive to email the idea is then presented not as a unilateral task but as a collaborative step toward addressing this problem, framing the action as a shared endeavor. Becky's acceptance ("I like that") confirms her alignment with the proposed benefit, transforming the directive into a collective project. Notably, J avoids explicit mention of her own benefit (acquiring the idea), instead relying on interactional staging to construct the suggestion as mutually advantageous. This sequential organization highlights how beneficiary orientation in business talk is not a static attribute but a dynamically achieved interactional accomplishment.

J's suggestion embodies a strategic balance between authority and rapport, reflecting the pragmatics of hierarchical communication. The directive ("Email that idea") asserts J's role as decision-maker, while the tag question ("will you?") softens its force, aligning with Goffman's (1971) theory of face management. By framing the request as contributing to a user-centric goal, J positions Becky as a valued collaborator rather than a subordinate, engaging in what Holmes (1995) terms "relational work" to foster positive workplace relations. The contrast between J's directive and Becky's supportive response ("I like that") illustrates how beneficiary orientation facilitates compliance by appealing to shared values— such as improving user experience— rather than relying on hierarchical obligation. This strategy aligns with Kendrick & Torreira's (2014) research on "cooperative turn-taking," where suggestions framed as beneficial elicit more willing engagement.

Organizationally, this interaction serves multiple strategic purposes that extend beyond mere communication. By soliciting Becky's input, J engages in idea crowdsourcing, a common strategy in creative industries to harness organizational intelligence (Streeck, 2009). Presenting the task as contributing to a meaningful goal— enhancing user experience— also empowers Becky by fostering a sense of agency, aligning with management theories of intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, the beneficiary frame balances task efficiency with relational harmony, reducing the risk of perceived exploitation in hierarchical exchanges. As Goodwin (1981) has argued, such communicative strategies serve as managerial tools for optimizing collaboration, innovation, and workplace morale.

In summary, Example (9) demonstrates that beneficiary orientation in business suggestion construction is a multifaceted phenomenon achieved through altruistic linguistic framing, sequentially staged collaborative meaning-making, and strategic power-relational balancing. J's suggestion exemplifies how professional communicators use beneficiary orientation to convert directives into shared goals, highlighting its role in enabling effective and harmonious business interaction. By integrating linguistic form, interactional sequence, and organizational context, this analysis underscores the vital role of beneficiary orientation as both a communicative strategy and a managerial resource in professional settings.

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4.3 Epistemic Asymmetry

Compared to the advisee, the adviser assumes a K+ epistemic stance regarding the matter at hand, meaning there exists epistemic asymmetry between communicators (Heritage & Sefi, 1992).

Example (10)

J: I just wanted to say, I slept on it. I haven't called Townsend yet, but I still feel like it's the right thing to do.

B: I didn't sleep so well myself.

J: Over this?

B: Remember the day I drove you to the warehouse, you gave me the wrong directions and all that?

J: Yeah, I remember.

B: Okay, well I stood in the back and watched you show the workers how to fold the box to close. I knew then why ATF was a success.

In Example (10), the dialogue between Ben (B), a senior intern with extensive professional experience, and Jules (J), a young executive steering a startup, provides a rich illustration of epistemic asymmetry in business communication. When advising J on the decision to hire a CEO, Ben's K+ epistemic stance (Heritage & Sefi, 1992) becomes evident through an intricate interplay of conversational mechanisms, revealing how knowledge disparities shape professional interactions.

Ben strategically deploys linguistic resources to assert his epistemic authority. He recounts a past incident at the warehouse using the past tense, stating "I stood" and "I watched." This narrative choice grounds his knowledge claim in direct observation, aligning with Heritage's (2012) research on how narratives can establish epistemic stances. By vividly detailing how J demonstrated leadership in folding boxes for the workers, Ben constructs an empirically verifiable account, contrasting sharply with J's more subjective statement "I feel like it's right." Additionally, Ben uses phrases like "I knew then" with past-tense modals, distancing his insights from mere momentary opinions and framing them as timeless truths. This aligns with Wilkinson & Kitzinger's (2006) concept of "epistemic ownership," where tense is used to claim authoritative knowledge. The juxtaposition of J's hedged, affect-laden expression and Ben's assertive epistemic declarations starkly instantiates the K+ vs. K- epistemic divide.

The conversation unfolds in a carefully sequenced manner that reinforces the epistemic hierarchy between the two interlocutors. J initiates the exchange with a subjective judgment, admitting "I slept on it," which signals her relatively uncertain (K-) position on the matter. Instead of offering direct advice, Ben responds with a story, a strategy Schegloff (1996) describes as "indirect epistemic assertion." By delaying the actual advice and building his narrative, Ben accumulates authority before making his point. His concluding statement, "I knew then why ATF was a success," reframes J's initially subjective notion of the "right thing" into an objective outcome of her leadership, effectively advising her to trust her instincts. This sequence aligns with Drew's (2018) research on how storytelling can upgrade the epistemic status of advice, demonstrating that epistemic asymmetry in business talk is dynamically constructed through turn-taking strategies rather than being a fixed state.

In the hierarchical context of their relationship, Ben's K+ stance reflects a delicate negotiation of power. As a subordinate, he avoids directly contradicting J, instead packaging his advice within a nostalgic narrative—a strategy of "face-saving deference" as described by Goffman (1955). This approach positions him as a seasoned observer offering wisdom rather than a subordinate challenging authority. J's response, marked by acknowledgment of the incident and subsequent silence, signals her accommodation of Ben's epistemic authority. This interaction exemplifies how power dynamics influence epistemic negotiation, as noted by

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Holmes (1995). Unlike more symmetric epistemic exchanges where advice is given straightforwardly, this interaction underscores how factors such as age and experience mediate the display of knowledge in professional settings.

This exchange has significant organizational implications. Ben's narrative acts as a vehicle for transferring institutional memory, encoding valuable insights about leadership efficacy that J, as a young executive, may lack. This aligns with Streeck's (2009) research on knowledge transmission through workplace conversations. By accepting Ben's epistemic authority, J subtly rebalances their relationship, elevating Ben from the role of an intern to that of a mentor. Moreover, Ben's K+ stance lends legitimacy to J's decision-making process, transforming her intuitive judgment into an evidence-based choice that carries more weight within the organization. These functions collectively demonstrate that epistemic asymmetry in business suggestion-making serves as a critical mechanism for managing organizational knowledge, building relationships, and validating decisions.

In conclusion, Example (10) showcases how epistemic asymmetry in business communication is manifested through narrative-based knowledge claims, sequentially staged displays of authority, and discursive strategies attuned to power dynamics. Ben's K+ stance exemplifies how experienced communicators can influence decision-making while maintaining relational harmony, highlighting the central role of epistemic dynamics in shaping professional interactions. This analysis underscores the importance of understanding these dynamics for effective communication and knowledge management within organizational settings.

5 Conclusion

This study adopts a turn-taking design framework to conduct conversation analysis on business communication corpora involving suggestion-making in the movie The Intern. By systematically categorizing and examining linguistic resources—including turn-taking mechanisms, conversational repair, intersubjectivity, and preference organization—and non-linguistic resources such as gestures and eye gaze, the research illuminates how suggestions are constructed in professional contexts. For instance, in Example (1), the employee's strategic interruption during the boss's turn exemplifies how turn-transition strategies redefine interactional goals in hierarchical settings, while Example (6) demonstrates how table-tapping gestures reinforce the emphasis of suggestions, aligning with Kendon's (2004) research on multimodal communication.

Through corpus analysis, the study identifies three distinctive features of suggestion construction in business talk: directivity, beneficiary orientation, and epistemic asymmetry. Directivity, as seen in Example (8), is realized through deontic modals (e.g., "can you") and sequential task framing, reflecting organizational norms of efficiency. Beneficiary orientation in Example (9) employs altruistic linguistic framing ("make it less of a lone thing") to transform directives into collaborative goals, while Example (10) illustrates epistemic asymmetry where the senior intern's K+ knowledge stance (Heritage & Sefi, 1992) is asserted through narrative grounding ("I watched you show workers..."), redefining mentorship dynamics.

The analysis confirms that turn-taking design serves as a dual mechanism in business communication: it enables speakers to articulate intentions efficiently (e.g., through repair strategies in Example 2) and allows listeners to decode implicit meanings promptly (e.g., via eye gaze shifts in Example 7). This dual function ensures communicative fluency and facilitates (maximization of interests) by aligning suggestions with organizational objectives. Drawing on conversation analysis, the study not only uncovers the sequential mechanisms of turn-transition—such as how preference organization in Example (4) streamlines task delegation—but also offers novel insights for professional communication skills, such as using smile-gaze combinations (Example 7) to enhance intersubjective understanding.

Notably, the research acknowledges limitations arising from its reliance on cinematic corpora. The restricted movie duration constrained the comprehensiveness of business communication data, potentially oversimplifying real-world complexities like multi-party negotiations or written correspondence. However, the integration of linguistic and non-linguistic resources represents a theoretical innovation, bridging tra-

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ditional conversation analysis with multimodal research. Future directions will focus on translating these findings into practical applications—for example, developing training modules that teach professionals to leverage turn-taking strategies (e.g., hedged directives in Example 8) and non-linguistic cues for more effective suggestion-making in corporate settings. This study thus paves the way for interdisciplinary research that connects conversational micro-mechanisms with organizational macro-goals.

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