

**PREFERRED AND DISPREFERRED SECOND PARTS OF  
QUESTION-ANSWER ADJACENCY PAIRS**

*The present article is devoted to the study of adjacency pairs as units of conversation organization in modern English. The choice of the topic is conditioned by the rising interest to the linguistic studies of conversation organization. Thus, the purpose of the research has been the examination of the function of adjacency pairs as conversational units. The aim of the study was to discover how adjacency pairs function in and assist to the organization of conversation. In addition the analysis of semantics and pragmatics of adjacency pairs with preferred and dispreferred second parts was carried out.*

**Key words:** *pragmatics, discourse analysis, adjacency pairs, general questions, special questions, disjunctive questions, rhetorical questions, dispreferred responses, preferred responses*

People are not entirely at liberty as to what they are saying during a conversational exchange; their utterances are constrained in various ways by the context, most notably the utterances of other interactants. Thomas Holtgraves brings an example to illustrate the above mentioned. He mainly claims that if Bob makes a request of Andy, then Andy's subsequent turn at talk is constrained. The second interlocutor cannot perform the act of greeting the first one. If he does, he will indicate a lack of understanding, a refusal to comply with the request, etc. through his utterance. Thus, Holtgraves states that the significance of Andy's action, as part of a jointly produced interaction, is constrained by Bob's prior action. According to him, the smallest structural unit exhibiting this quality is termed as adjacency pair. It is worth noting that adjacency pairs were paid much attention in early analytical writings, and they are still crucial nowadays due to their fundamental importance in structuring talk /Holtgraves, 2008: 93/.

According to Schegloff and Sacks, adjacency pairs have the following general features.

1. They consist of two utterances, a first-pair part and a second-pair part.
2. The two utterances are spoken by different speakers.
3. The utterances are paired so that a first-pair part must precede the second-pair part.
4. The first-pair part constrains what can occur as a second-pair part.
5. Given the first-pair part, the second-pair part becomes conditionally relevant /Schegloff, Sacks, 1973/.

Common types of adjacency pairs are question-answer, apology-minimization, offer-acceptance, greeting-greeting, summons-answer, request-promise, and so on. These minimal units obviously regulate people's talk. This simply means that people return greetings, answer questions, accept offers, and so on. But the concept, and what it reveals about talk, extends far beyond this simple superficial description. Holtgraves

claims that first of all the emphasis is on how people display their understanding of one another's talk and how they ground their conversational contributions. This understanding is observed not through an assessment of the interactants' internal states, interpretations, emotional reactions, and so on, but understanding is to be seen in the talk itself, and this view becomes quite clear with adjacency pairs /Holtgraves, 2008: 93/.

The occurrence of an answering response to a question displays the second interactant's understanding of what was accomplished with the first speaker's utterance. If an answer is not forthcoming, the second speaker, through a failure to answer, displays a lack of understanding of the first speaker's utterance. It is this emphasis on the structural and sequential regularities as a reflection of understanding that is the hallmark of this approach. It's worthwhile to note that the second-pair part of an adjacency pair is not immediately followed by the first-pair part. This is because embedded insertion sequences or side sequences, can occur between the first- and second-pair parts. These sequences involve issues raised by the first-pair part and can themselves be ordered as adjacency pairs, /Schegloff, Jefferson, 1972/.

Preference organization lays in the basis of the division of adjacency pairs into those with preferred second parts and those with dispreferred second parts.

It should be mentioned that Holtgraves counts the second-pair part something of an issue. This is because the range of utterances that can serve as a second-pair part is quite large and they might also be unlimited. But there is an interesting feature of adjacency pairs that goes some way toward resolving this issue. It's noteworthy that not all second-pair parts are of equal status. Holtgraves states that some second-pair parts are preferred over others, e.g. agreements are preferred over disagreements, acceptances over refusals, answers over no answers, and so on. It is vital to add that Holtgraves considers dispreferred turns to be marked (in the linguistic sense) in some way, such as when they are delayed. In addition he claims that preferred turns are unmarked ones. The validity of this concept stems in part from the fact that the manner in which dispreferred seconds are marked is remarkably constant overall adjacency pairs. These markings have been documented for disagreements, blamings, rejections, and many other actions as well. Holtgraves then states that the preferred-dispreferred construct appears to be a very general one /Holtgraves, 2008: 96/.

Speaking about the types of dispreferred second parts it is important to note that in question-answer adjacency pairs the questions can be happily followed by partial answers, rejection of the presupposition of the question, statements of ignorance, denials of the relevance of the question and so on.

### ***General Questions with Preferred Second Parts***

In linguistics general or *yes-no* questions, formally known as polar questions are questions that expect a "yes" or "no" answer. In English such question can be formed in both positive and negative forms.

The answer "yes" asserts a positive answer, and the answer "no" asserts a negative one irrespective of the form of the question. But in fact simple "yes" or "no" word sentence answers to *yes-no* questions can be ambiguous in English. For example, a "yes" response to the question "*Don't I always pay half?*" could have either "*Yes, you don't always pay half*" or "*Yes, you do always pay half*" answer depending on

whether the respondent is replying with the truth-value of the situation, or is replying to the polarity used in the question.

*Franklin: "Actually, I think it's cruel to keep them in the city. I have never seen that boy to be on time. We are going to see Cocteau's 'Beauty and the Beast' and it's the one film there you really should get on time. I mean if u don't, the whole charm of it is gone. Have you seen it?"*

*Gianni: "No."*

*(Salinger, "Just before the war with Eskimos", p. 5)*

*Gianni: "Did you work in the airplane factory too?"*

*Franklin: "God, yes. For years and years and years. Let's not talk about it, please."*

*(Salinger, "Just before the war with Eskimos", p. 4)*

Both in the first and in the second dialogues we have question-answer adjacency pairs, the first parts of which are questions, and the second parts are expected answers, i.e. preferred, unmarked seconds. In the first example Franklin is interested in whether the girl watched the film or not. Here we can speak about Franklin's expectations about the answer. As judging from the nature of the general question, either yes or no was expected. His expectations are fully justified. In the first examples both, positive and negative answers are preferred second-pair parts, thus the answer to question-answer adjacency pairs could easily be each one of them.

In the second example Gianni asks for a piece of information about Franklin's work-place. She gets a preferred second-pair part to the question. Taking the background knowledge into account it is interesting to note the girl definitely expects a positive rather than a negative answer. In the example mentioned above we have a positive answer to the general question, which is considered to be a preferred second part to a question-answer adjacency pair.

From the point of view of presupposition that underlies general questions they can be considered in the following way. As these questions require "Yes" or "No" as an answer, this means that the presupposition contains two possible variants of proposition proper.

In the *yes/no* type it is only the polarity that is in question. The speaker asks for confirmation or denial of the clause content, to be expressed by yes or no. And as we already know, this reply is a preferred second to a question. But "yes" could also be a preferred second part, as *any*-forms expect either a negative or a neutral response. However, sometimes such minimal replies sound rather curt. A feature of spoken English is the use of elliptical responses such as *Yes, it is*, *No, we don't*, and sometimes they sound more polite. In dialogues the answers *Yes or No* are generally used, but to be on the safe side other variations can be utilized.

*Zurito: "Is it the nocturnal tomorrow?"*

*Manuel: "That's it."*

*(E. Hemingway, "The Undefeated", p. 6)*

*Macomber: "Can't we send beaters?"*

*Wilson: "Of course we can."*

*(E. Hemingway, "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber", p. 12)*

In the last two examples we have a general question, which is followed by an elliptical response. One of the most interesting characteristic features of this response is that they already contain the information which is necessary for the hearer, but they do not mention it once more. In other words, these kinds of responses are closely connected with Grice's maxim of quantity, i.e. *do not make your contribution more informative than is required*, and with the maxim of manner, i.e. *be brief*. Thus, in the last two examples Manuel's and Wilson's contributions are not more informative than is required. Here we have two examples of question-answer adjacency pairs that receive their expected next acts, i.e. their preferred second-pair part.

Sometimes general questions may be used in negative-interrogative forms. Negative questions are always conductive. Negative orientation is complicated by an element of surprise, disbelief. The implication is that the speaker had originally hoped for a positive response, but new evidence suggests that the response will be negative. In written style this type of questions are rare, instead they can be found in oral speech.

*Nick: "Don't you want me to go and see the police?"*

*Ole Anderson: "No."*

*(E. Hemingway, "The killers", p. 7)*

*The policeman: "Haven't you heard from your friend since you left?"*

*Bob: "Well, yes."*

*(O. Henry, "After Twenty Years", p. 1)*

The first sentence *don't you want me to go and see the police means surely you want me to go and see the police, don't you? I would have thought that you want to*. In fact such questions have a mixture of positive and negative bias as we have in the second example. This combination of a positive and a negative attitude may be distinguished as the OLD EXPECTATION (positive) and NEW EXPECTATION (negative). Because the old expectation tends to be identified with the speaker's hope or wishes, such as in the second example, negatively oriented questions often express disappointment or annoyance, such as in the first case.

#### ***General Questions with dispreferred second parts***

Within the general questions, we have analyzed examples which contain dispreferred second parts as well. It's noteworthy that they are followed by certain characteristic feature.

*Noah: Hey Allie, you want some cotton candy?*

*Allie: Umm, well, I don't think that is of any good.*

*(Movie, "The Notebook", 2004)*

This is the scenario taken from a well-known film, “The notebook”. In the scene the boy wanted to persuade the girl to go out with him, to attract her attention. In fact he did his best dancing, jumping, trying to converse with the young lady, but she seemed heartless. She wanted to know nothing about him, let alone going out. In the example, we witness a denial, rejection of the offer, made by the boy. She refused the offer of the boy by not taking the cotton candy. The speech act of refusal is used in the example which is a dispreferred second part followed by the use of the markers of dispreferred second parts, like *Umm*. In fact, here we have an elliptical general question, instead of asking *Do you want some cotton candy?*, the boy gives an elliptical answer, i.e. *you want some cotton candy?*

*Noah: Now, will you go out with me?*

*Allie: Uh, hmmm, .....you know I have already told you that I am not into you, and kinda I can't..no..I can but....u know...*

*(Movie, “The Notebook”, 2004)*

This is an example of a general question with a dispreferred second, which is followed by various forms of hesitations, most notably by an account why the girl doesn't want to go out. The boy asks her to go out for the third time, but as we see the girl does not give a preferred answer. So it makes the boy go into extremes, to make her go out with him and to get the preferred positive answer from the girl.

#### ***Special Questions with Preferred Second Parts***

Special questions or *wh*-questions are built up on the same interrogative pattern as general questions. The difference is that an interrogative word precedes the auxiliary or semi-auxiliary verb (the structural part of the predicate). But unlike general questions, special questions are spoken with a falling intonation. In comparison with general questions special questions are not limited, because any number of answers can be given, as long as they give information required by the *wh*-word (*what, who (m), whose, when, why, how, where etc.*) *Wh*-interrogatives contain an element of missing information which is embodied in the *wh*-word. What the speaker is seeking in this type of interrogative is the identity of that element. The rest is presupposed, that is, taken as given.

As we already know special questions are unlimited because any linguistic form can be given as an answer.

*Retana: “Who’s there?”*

*Manuel: “Me, Manolo.”*

*“What do you want?” asked Renata.*

*“I want to work,” Manuel said.*

*(E. Hemingway, “The Undeclared”, p. 1)*

In this dialogue we have a question-answer adjacency pair, the first part of which, i.e. the question, is answered by a preferred, expected second. The presupposition, or the background assumption of the first question is that there was someone outdoors,

and the background assumption of the second question is that the person named Manuel wants something, in this case work.

*"Who's there?" said someone in the office.*

*"Me, Manolo," Manuel said.*

*(E. Hemingway, "The Undefeated", p. 1)*

*Harry: "Where did we stay in Paris?"*

*The woman: "At the Crillon. You know that."*

*(E. Hemingway, "The snows of Kilimanjaro", p. 5)*

In the examples given above, we have special questions with their preferred answers. In the first question the presupposition is that there was a knock at the door and Renata presupposed that there was someone behind the door. The answer is an informative preferred second to the first-pair part of the question-answer adjacency pair. The second-pair can be analyzed in the same way, Harry asks for a piece of information about the place where they had been before, and the woman gives the preferred informative answer.

In the answer mentioned above, like in answers to general questions, part of the information already contained in the preceding special question is generally dropped in the response where the interrogative word is normally replaced by new information. In other words, the answer can be elliptical.

#### ***Special Questions with Dispreferred Second Parts***

We already know that special or *wh*-questions are not limited unlike general questions. They can receive any possible answer depending on the *wh*-word. As it was mentioned the answers may be happily followed by a partial answer, rejections of the presupposition of the question, statements of ignorance, and denials of the relevance of the question and so on.

*The boy: "About how long will it be before I die?"*

*The father: "You aren't going to die."*

*(E. Hemingway, "A Day's Wait", p. 2)*

*Whose novillos?" Manuel asked.*

*"I don't know." Renata answered.*

*(E. Hemingway, "The Undefeated", p. 5)*

There is a rejection of the presupposition of the question in the first examples. The presupposition is that the boy presupposes that he is going to die because of his temperature, and asks a special question to learn the exact time he dies. The answer to this question is an evident rejection of the presupposition of the question. The boy's father rejects the assumption that he is going to die, which is the presupposition of the question asked by the boy. So it is clear that we deal with a dispreferred second-pair to the first question.

There may be statements of ignorance as an answer to the question as in the second example. It contains a statement of ignorance as an answer. Manuel wants to

know whose novillos he must kill. By asking the question he presupposes that he has to kill someone's novillos, but gets a statement of ignorance as a second part to the question. This is considered to be a dispreferred part as it again doesn't provide information that the question requires.

### ***Disjunctive (Tag) Questions with Preferred Second Parts***

Maximum conduciveness is expressed by a tag question appended to a statement. The tag question has a form of a yes-no question consisting of merely an operator and a subject pronoun, the choice of operator and pronoun depending on the statement. The nuclear tone of the tag occurs on the operator and is either rising or falling. For the most common types of tag questions, the tag question is negative if the statement is positive and vice versa.

*Al: "You're a pretty bright boy, aren't you?"*

*George: "Sure."*

*(E. Hemingway, "The Killers", p. 2)*

*Helen: "You won't talk to me like that again, will you? Promise me?"*

*Harry: "No."*

*(E. Hemingway, "The snows of Kilimanjaro", p. 9)*

Tag questions added to the end of a statement ask for a conformation to the truth of the statement. The answer expected is Yes if the statement is positive, and No if the statement is negative.

In the first example the girl makes a statement, and then asks for confirmation or denial, the boy confirms with an elliptical positive answer. Here question-answer adjacency pairs receive expected answers. In this type of questions there is also a concept of uncertainty that is why it is quite evident from the example that the girl is not sure whether Harry will talk to her like that again, so she asks him and then makes him promise not to talk to her like that again.

*Macomber's wife: "Well, that's what you're out here for, isn't it?"*

*Francis Macomber: "Yes."*

*Macomber's wife: "You're not afraid, are you?"*

*Francis Macomber: "Of course not."*

*(E. Hemingway, "The Short, Happy Life of Francis Macomber", p. 8)*

The question-answer adjacency pairs given above contain the expected answers. The first question may be interpreted in the following way: *I assume that is what you are out here, am I right?* Macomber's wife gets a positive preferred answer to her question. The assumption of the second question is the following: *"I assume that you are not afraid. Am I right?"* And again there is a question of confirmation of the truth of the statement, and a preferred positive second-pair part to the first-pair part.

### ***Tag Questions with Dispreferred Second Parts***

As we have already mentioned, tag questions added to the end of a

statement ask for a conformation to the truth of the statement. In the case of dispreferred second parts they will not have yes/no as an answer, they will have other forms that will be considered dispreferred second parts instead.

*Mary Jane: "How're her eyes now? I mean they're not any worse or anything, are they?"*

*Eloise: "God! Not that I know of."*

*(J. Salinger, "Uncle Wiggly in Connecticut", p. 2)*

The above mentioned example is a disjunctive question with a dispreferred second part. In the given example the dispreferred second part contains a statement of ignorance, i.e. instead of answering, *yes they are*, or *no, they are not*, Eloise gives a dispreferred answer to the question. From the point of view of presupposition it is evident that as the main part of the disjunctive question is negative, and the following tag is positive, it is clear that the speaker expected a negative, or at least a preferred second. But the expectations were not justified.

*Selena: "I always bring the tennis balls, don't I?"*

*Gianni: "Your father makes them or something."*

*(J. Salinger, "Just Before the War with Eskimos", p. 1)*

In this example it is quite clear that the answer is dispreferred. The tag question in the given example comes to assert the truth of the statement of the question. But if we analyze the example from a different perspective it will have the following interpretation: *yes, you bring, because your father makes them, if he didn't you wouldn't bring*. The answer does not in fact state *Yes, you do* or *No, you do not*. By this type of answer the speaker indicates that there is another aspect of the story which he/she is aware of.

*Helen: "You don't have to destroy me. Do you? I'm only a middle-aged woman who loves you and wants to do what you want to do. I've been destroyed two or three times already. You wouldn't want to destroy me again, would you?"*

*Harry: "I'd like to destroy you a few times in bed."*

*(E. Hemingway, "The Snows of Kilimanjaro", p. 5)*

In the aforementioned example there is a statement of ignorance contrary to the presupposition of the statement, i.e. from the context and from the woman's further explanation it is obvious that the woman didn't mean *being destroyed in bed*, she just meant something about her life. So it is obvious that the answer is dispreferred second part to the question, the man evidently ignored the presupposition of the statement of the question asked.

### ***Rhetorical Questions with Preferred Second Parts***

The rhetorical question is a special syntactical stylistic device the essence of which consists in reshaping the grammatical meaning of the interrogative sentence. In other words, the question is no longer a question but a statement expressed in the form of an interrogative sentence. The rhetorical question is usually defined as any question



asked for a purpose other than to obtain the information the question asks. For example, "Why are you so stupid?" is likely to be a statement regarding one's opinion of the person addressed rather than a genuine request to know. Similarly, when someone responds to a tragic event by saying, "Why me, God?!" it is more likely to be an accusation or an expression of feeling than a realistic request for information. A rhetorical question describes a question often based on rhetoric that does not necessarily require an answer. In fact, it is often a way of making a tentative statement but phrasing it in the form of a question. Frequently, a rhetorical question is a tool people use in debate to avoid making an outright declaration, but at the same time still being able to make a point. If called out on the point later, or shown that it was not accurate, the speaker can then claim it was only a question. Let us consider an example taken from Obama's speech addressed to the tragedy in Tucson.

*How can we honor the fallen? How can we be true to their memory?*

*(<http://abcnews.go.com>)*

Here the questions are considered to be rhetorical with a preferred second, as there is no verbal or non-verbal reply to the question.

I. Galperin states "According to Prof. Popov the rhetorical question is equal to a categorical pronouncement plus an exclamation. Galperin agrees saying that if we compare a pronouncement expressed as a statement with the same pronouncement expressed as a rhetorical question by means of transformational analysis, we will find ourselves compelled to assert that the interrogative form makes the pronouncement still more categorical, in that it excludes any interpretation beyond that contained in the rhetorical question". From the examples given above, we can see that rhetorical questions are generally structurally embodied in complex sentences with the subordinate clause containing the pronouncement.

*We reflect on the past. Did we spend enough time with an aging parent, we wonder. Did we express our gratitude for all the sacrifices they made for us? Did we tell a spouse just how desperately we loved them, not just once in awhile but every single day?*

*(<http://abcnews.go.com>)*

The example taken from Obama's speech, was addressed to console the people who suffered the tragedy in Tucson, who lost relatives, friends during that tragedy, he expresses a very optimistic view to the issue, saying that it is time to value every single minute of life, to value anything that is possible, as they cannot bring back what has been lost. All the questions asked by him are rhetorical questions, as in fact they do not require answers back. In the example the questions are not answered, thus the example is a rhetorical question with its preferred, expected "second part".

### ***Rhetorical Questions with Dispreferred Second Parts***

We have already mentioned that as a preferred answer to rhetorical questions there is no answer. But sometimes people do answer the rhetorical questions, and by this means it becomes a rhetorical question with a dispreferred answer.

*Now, what did they get in return? Declining wages, less than one-fourth as many new jobs as in the previous eight years, smaller health care and pension benefits, rising poverty, and the biggest increase in income inequality since the 1920s.*

*(AUDIENCE BOOS)*

*American families by the millions are struggling with soaring health care costs and declining coverage.*

*I will never forget the parents of children with autism and other serious conditions who told me on the campaign trail that they couldn't afford health care and couldn't qualify their children for Medicaid unless they quit work and starved or got a divorce.*

*Are these the family values the Republicans are so proud of?*

*What about the military families pushed to the breaking point by multiple, multiple deployments? What about the assault on science and the defense of torture? What about the war on unions and the unlimited favors for the well-connected?*

*(AUDIENCE BOOS)*

*And what about Katrina and cronyism?*

*(AUDIENCE BOOS)*

*([http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/27/us/politics/27text-clinton.html?pagewanted=print&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/27/us/politics/27text-clinton.html?pagewanted=print&_r=0))*

This example is taken from Bill Clinton's speech. Rhetorical questions in his speech get reaction from the audience, which is booing. Dictionaries define booing as an act of showing displeasure for someone or something, by loudly yelling "boo" (and holding the "oo" sound) or making other noises of disparagement, such as hissing. This is a rather special example because strictly speaking this is not a conversation proper. However we can say that making a public speech Bill Clinton gets into interaction with the audience. The audience reacts to the rhetorical question made by him showing displeasure, and by this act they produce a dispreferred second to the rhetorical question.

To conclude, the function of adjacency pairs in conversation organization is of utmost importance. Adjacency pairs play a significant role in the dialogue and conversation organization. From the analysis of the examples taken from various conversational settings we may sum up saying that when we have a preferred second part the dialogue or conversation is going on without any delays, hesitations, i.e. it goes on smoothly. On the contrary, when there is a dispreferred second part, there follows a delay, hesitation, and appeal for understanding, which are considered to be one of the most interesting features of dispreferred seconds. These seconds express doubt; they are performed after a preface. Another compelling feature which was observed from the analysis of the examples was that dispreferred seconds give an account why the preferred second cannot be performed.

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**Ա. ԱԼՈՅԱՆ** – *Հարց-պատասխան հարակից գույգեր՝ նախընտրելի և ոչ նախընտրելի պատասխանով*. – Հոդվածը նվիրված է հարակից գույգերի վերլուծությանը ժամանակակից անգլերենի համատեքստում: Խոսքի փոխկապակցվածությունն ապահովող կառուցվածքային միավորները կոչվում են հարակից գույգեր: Զննարկվել են հարակից գույգերին տրվող նախընտրելի և ոչ նախընտրելի պատասխանները: Ուսումնասիրության նպատակն է վերլուծել հարակից գույգերի գործառույթը որպես հաղորդակցման միավորներ: Հաղորդակցումը համալիր երևույթ է և դրա բաղկացուցիչ յուրաքանչյուր խոսքային միավոր հսկայական դեր ունի խոսակցության հետագա ընթացքի վրա: Խոսքի բարեհաջող շարունակությունը կախված է հաղորդակցման միավորներից, որոնք խիստ փոխկապակցված են:

**Բանալի բառեր**. պրագմատիկա, դիսկուրսի վերլուծություն, հարակից գույգեր, ընդհանուր հարցեր, հատուկ հարցեր, անջատական հարցեր, նախընտրելի պատասխաններ, ոչ նախընտրելի պատասխաններ

**Ա. АЛОЯН** – *Вопросно-ответные речевые единства с предпочтительным и непредпочтительным ответным элементом*. – Статья посвящена анализу речевых единств в современном английском языке. Структурные единицы, которые обеспечивают взаимосвязанность речи, называются речевыми единствами. Обсуждены предпочтительные и не предпочтительные ответы к речевым единствам. Целью исследования является анализ функции речевых пар как единиц коммуникации. Коммуникация – это сложное явление, и каждая составляющая словесная единица может сыграть большую роль в дальнейшем развитии диалога. Успешное продолжение речи зависит от коммуникационных единиц, которые тесно взаимосвязаны.

**Ключевые слова**: прагматика, дискурсивный анализ, речевые единства, общие вопросы, специальные вопросы, разделительные вопросы, риторические вопросы, предпочтительные ответы, непредпочтительные ответы