

Pragmatic Analysis of Conversational Closings in *Friends*

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Reference Data:

Saito, Y. (2013). Pragmatic analysis of conversational closings in *Friends*. In N. Sonda & A. Krause (Eds.), *JALT2012 Conference Proceedings*. Tokyo: JALT.

In this paper I discuss the results of conversation closings of an American drama *Friends* compared with those in ELT textbooks. Understanding how to begin and end a conversation is important for successful communication in English. Lack of knowledge about how to end a conversation may lead to communication breakdown. Knowledge about rituals of closing a conversation is important. In my previous textbook analysis, I found that most of the ELT textbooks I examined did not deal with conversation closings at all or dealt with conversation closings in a limited manner (Saito, 2013). It has often been suggested that situational comedies and movies can offer more authentic samples of English conversation. Therefore, in this paper, I ask if *Friends* offers better samples of conversation closings than those found in ELT textbooks.

本論文ではELTの教科書に比べアメリカのドラマ“フレンズ”がどのように会話の終わりを扱っているかを検証する。英語のコミュニケーションにおいては会話の始めと同様、会話の終わり方を理解することが重要である。会話の終わり方についての知識の欠如は、コミュニケーションの断絶につながる可能性がある。英語でコミュニケーションする上で、会話の終わり方についての知識は重要である。私の以前の教科書の分析では、ELTの教科書のほとんどは限定的に会話の終わり方を扱っているか、もしくは全く扱っていないことがわかった。映画やドラマの方がより実際の英語の会話に近いサンプルを提供するとしばしば言われている。したがって、本論文では、会話の終わり方がアメリカのドラマ“フレンズ”ではどのように扱われているかを検証し、またその会話の終わり方のサンプルがELTテキストと比較してよりよいサンプルを提供しているかどうかを検証する。

B EING ABLE to close a conversation appropriately depending on the context is as important as being able to open a conversation. The importance of being able to close a conversation is included in lower levels of the Common European Framework of References of Languages (CEFR), which is the reference of languages designed to provide a transparent, coherent, and comprehensive basis for the elaboration of language syllabi and curriculum guidelines, the design of teaching and learning materials, and the assessment of foreign language proficiency (Council of Europe, 2001). In the CEFR, A1, the lowest level, and A2, the second lowest level, are categorized as Basic User. A1-level learners can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases; and A2-level learners can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, and employment. Regarding conversation closings,



A1-level learners can use basic greetings and leave-taking expressions and A2-level learners can establish social contact—greetings and farewells, introductions, and giving thanks. As these levels of the CEFR show, learners are expected to be able to close a conversation at an early stage of learning.

Learners of English, however, are often unable to end a conversation appropriately (Bardovi-Harlig, Hartford, Mahan-Taylor, Morgan, & Reynolds, 1991). Learners tend to say “bye” too soon, too late, or not at all, which will possibly bear negative interactional consequences (Wong, 2011). Learners often cannot understand the message to end a conversation as flagged by another speaker saying, *It was nice talking to you* or *Let’s get together some time* and often try to continue the conversation in spite of the message sent. Closing a conversation is not merely the first pair part *goodbye* and the second pair part *goodbye* of one adjacency pair, but it is more complicated and elaborated. Adjacency pairs are sequences of two utterances that are adjacent, produced by different speakers, and ordered as the first pair part and the second pair part (Levinson, 1983; Psathas, 1994).

In conversations, closings are often ritualized and more complex, with different steps than merely one realization of adjacency pairs. Major steps in closing a conversation are (a) shutdowns, (b) preclosings, and (c) terminal exchanges (Bardovi-Harlig et al., 1991; Wong & Waring, 2010). In shutdowns, conversation partners indirectly let each other know they have no more business to talk about without saying *goodbye* directly, and the conversation content here largely reflects the main purpose of the exchange (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010). In preclosings, the conversation partners confirm their understanding of each other’s intentions to end the conversation and preclosings are often signaled lexically with items such as *OK*, *alright*, *well*, *so*, *anyway*, *yes*, and *yeah*. In terminal exchanges, the conversational partners exchange their leave-taking by saying *so long*, *bye* (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010). Shutdowns were further divided by Wong and

Waring (2010) into the following categories: (a) arrangement, or participants’ making or restating plans to contact one another or get together (*I’ll see you in the morning*); (b) appreciation, or participants’ expressing or repeating thanks to one another (*I appreciate it*); (c) solicitude, or participants’ expressing concerns, well wishes, regards to third parties, holiday greetings (*Have a happy Thanksgiving*); (d) reason-for the call, or the caller’s restating why he or she called (*I just called to ask . . .*); (e) back-reference, or participants’ talking about something discussed earlier in the conversation (*So what did the baby say?*); (f) in-conversation object, or participants’ using utterances such as *mm hmm*, *um*, or *yeah* to display their availability for further talk; (g) topic-initial elicitor, or participants’ soliciting a new but none-specific topic for discussion (*Anything else?*); (h) announced closing, or participants’ overtly stating that the conversation should close or giving a reason for ending the conversation (*I’ll let you go*); and (i) moral or lesson, or participants’ using a moral or lesson to summarize the topic so far (*Things always work out for the best*).

One of the reasons why the chances to learn conversation closings are limited is that English textbooks often deal with conversation openings in the first units, but they do not place the same emphasis on conversation closings. ELT materials should be expected to offer enough pragmatic information including conversation closings. However, instructional materials often lack pragmatic information for learners to acquire pragmatic competence (Vellenga, 2004). In previous research based on the hypothesis that ELT textbooks do not offer enough information about conversation closings, I analyzed conversation closings in ELT textbooks (Saito, 2013), using the category of preclosing, shutdowns, and terminal exchange. Among the 19 textbooks examined in the previous study, only nine dealt with conversation closings. In most of the textbooks that dealt with conversation closings, steps of conversation closings and types of shutdowns were limited. In some of the examples, only expressions of terminal exchange such as *goodbye* and *see you*

were introduced and dialogues in which conversation closings are actually carried out were not introduced.

Inadequate pragmatic information in ELT textbooks has been pointed out by other researchers, too (see Boxer & Pickering, 1995; Jiang, 2006; Usó-Juan, 2008). Some researchers have assumed that films have language more similar to that of real life compared with textbooks (Kite & Tatsuki, 2005). Situational comedies as well as films may offer better language examples than textbooks. Eslami (2010) mentioned that situational comedies can be used as a rich source of speech act data. Washburn (2001) also stated that sitcoms offer rich, varied, and contextualized models and pragmatic language use among various characters in different settings, unlike most textbooks. Bacelar Da Silvia (2003), using example of refusals to invitations in *Friends*, investigated whether explicit instruction can be facilitative for L2 pragmatic development and observed the positive effect of explicit instruction on acquiring pragmatic ability.

Friends aired on NBC from 1994 to 2004, received a number of awards and nominations, and was considered one of the most popular television shows in the United States and around the world during the period when it was aired (Quaglio, 2009). There are six main characters, young adults living in New York who are very different and unique. Quaglio compared conversations in *Friends* to natural conversation from perspectives of linguistic study. Reflecting on the results, he held that though the scripted language of *Friends* is not the same as natural conversation, there are some shared linguistic features between *Friends* and natural conversation. For this reason, the adoption of *Friends* for this study, from among other situational comedies, can be considered appropriate.

Study Purposes

Based on the hypothesis that conversation closings in *Friends* will offer more authentic conversation closings than those in EFL textbooks, the purposes of this study are as follows:

1. to investigate whether conversation closings are included in EFL textbooks;
2. to investigate what steps of shutdown, preclosing, and terminal exchange are introduced in conversational closings; and
3. to identify the differences between conversation closings in *Friends* and conversational closings in the ELT textbooks.

Method

Materials

Using scripts and DVDs of *Friends* (from episode 1 of season 1 to episode 24 of season 2), conversations including the terminal exchange of *bye*, which was introduced in Bardovi-Haling et al.'s (1991) article as a terminal exchange, were extracted. Scripts were obtained from <http://www.livesinbox.com/friends/scripts.shtml>

Procedures

First, the episodes were analyzed to find whether they included terminal exchanges with *bye*. Next, conversation closings including *bye* were analyzed in terms of what steps of conversation closings and what types of shutdowns were introduced. The steps of conversation closings used in this study were preclosings, shutdowns, and terminal exchanges (see Bardovi-Harlig et al., 1991). Shutdowns were categorized into the following types, based on Wong and Waring (2010): arrangement, appreciation, solicitude, reason-for-the call, back-reference, in-conversation

object, topic-initial elicitor, announced closing, and moral or lesson. Wong and Warning (2010) did not have a category for utterances such as *It was nice talking to you* and *It was nice meeting you* because their study dealt with telephone conversations; however, comments such as *It was nice talking to you* can be heard in face to face conversation; thus, the category comments on conversation was added.

Results

Table 1 shows the result of conversation closings. In total, there were 14 conversation closings including *bye*. In these 14 examples, a total of 99 conversation closing types including 27 preclosing signals, 36 shutdowns, and 36 terminal exchanges, were observed. As for terminal exchanges, there were from 1 to 7 terminal exchanges in 13 examples. In the example from episode

20 of season 2, the number of preclosings was 7 and the number of terminal exchanges was 10. Five participants took part in this conversation. The conversation closing was stopped in the middle after the terminal exchanges because one participant started talking about something irrelevant, and then the conversation closing was resumed. This is why the conversation closings included many preclosings and terminal exchanges. Another example from episode 12 of season 2 included 5 preclosings and 5 terminal exchanges in a three-way conversation.

Example 1 from *Friends* episode 10, season 2

Ross: OK, well, um, have a nice evening.
 [preclosing preclosing solicitude]
 Rachel: Um, Russ, you ready?
 Russ: Yeah.

Table 1. Conversation Closings in *Friends*

Conversation closing type	Episode / season														
	9/1	1/2	4/2	10/2	10/2	12/2	12/2	18/2	20/2	23/2	23/2	23/2	24/2	24/2	
Preclosing signal	1	1	1	1	2	3	5	2	7	1	1	1	1		
Shutdowns	Arrangement			2	1				3	2			1	1	
	Appreciation	1										1			
	Solicitude					1	2		1	1			2	1	
	Reason-for-the-call										1				
	Back reference							1				1			
	In-conversation object														
	Topic-initial elicitor				1										
	Announce closing	1	1		1				1	3	1		3		
	Moral or lesson						1								
	Comment on conversation												1		
Terminal exchange	1	1	1	3	3	1	5	3	10	2	2	1	1	2	

Rachel: Bye.
[terminal exchange]

Monica: Bye.
[terminal exchange]

Phoebe: Bye.
[terminal exchange]

In this conversation closing, Ross starts with preclosings *OK* and *well* and continues a solicitude *have a nice evening*. Here Ross tries to imply the intention of closing the conversation indirectly without saying terminal exchanges directly; the use of *um* also conveys his hesitation of saying *bye* directly. This implication conveys to Rachel, who vaguely understands his intention and confirms him by saying *Um, Russ, you ready?* After the reply *Yeah*, Rachel says *Bye* as a terminal exchange and two other participants, Monica and Phoebe, also say *Bye* respectively to Ross. This conversation closing consists of 6 turns by 4 speakers. In this example, the use of the preclosing conveys the first speaker's hesitation to close the conversation.

Example 2 from *New English Upgrade*

A:	Well,	better go.	See you later.
	[preclosing	announced closing	terminal exchange]
B:	OK.	Take care.	Bye.
	[preclosings	solicitude	terminal exchange]

Example 2 is a conversation closing in one of the ELT textbooks, *New English Upgrade* (Gershon & Mares, 2008), from my previous research (Saito, 2013). In this example, the first speaker uses announced closing *better go*, and the second speaker uses solicitude *Take care*. Composed of only two turns by two speak-

ers, no remark is made by the second speaker until after the first speaker's terminal exchange. After the first speaker's preclosing, shutdown, and terminal exchange, the second speaker's preclosing, shutdown, and terminal exchange follow. In Example 1 from *Friends*, the solicitude *have a nice evening* replaced an announced closing.

Example 3 from *Friends* episode 23, season 2

Joey:	You and Milton have to join us on the boat. Karen'll pack up a lunch, you'll bring the kids, we'll make a day of it.	
	[arrangement]	
Jeannie:	Oh, that sounds lovely.	We're gonna have to set that up.
		[arrangement]
	Oh,	I better get back.
	[preclosing	announced closing]
	Hope the baby feels better.	
	[solicitude]	
Joey:	Oh, thanks, thanks.	Bye bye Jeannie.
		[terminal exchange]
Jeannie:	Bye bye Joey.	
	[terminal exchange]	

This conversation closing in Example 3 starts from arrangement, in which Joey makes a plan to get together. Then, Jeannie replies by saying *Oh, that's lovely* and agrees to the arrangement by saying *We're gonna have to set that up*. Although *oh* was the first reply, it is probably part of the reply rather than a preclosing signal. Jeannie continued by saying *Oh*, again, this time as a preclosing signal, and *I better get back*, which is an announced closing. In this turn, a preclosing signal, an announced closing,

ing, and solicitude were used. In the next turn by Joey, where appreciation and terminal exchange were used, *Oh* is most likely part of appreciation rather than a preclosing. In the last turn, Jeannie uses a reciprocal terminal exchange. This example, which includes seven conversation closing types (one preclosing, two arrangements, one announced closing, one solicitude, and two terminal exchanges with four turns by two speakers) is more complex than most of the conversation closings in the ELT textbooks in my previous research (Saito, 2013).

Example 4 is a conversation closing in one of the ELT textbooks, *Get Real* (Buckingham, 2007), which consists of only two turns. It includes one shutdown (arrangement), one preclosing, and one terminal exchange. The first speaker makes no reply to the terminal exchange.

Example 4 from *Get Real*

- A: Let's meet at seven on Saturday morning
[arrangement]
- B: OK. See you then.
[preclosing terminal exchange]

Discussion

There were 14 conversations that included *bye* in the first two seasons of *Friends*. Overall, the conversation closings had more turns and types of shutdown than those in the ELT textbooks and were, therefore, more complex. Unlike many examples in ELT textbooks with no preclosings (Saito, 2013), all examples from *Friends*, except one, included preclosings; some included many preclosings. The closings without any preclosings in ELT textbooks might perhaps seem too abrupt and straightforward.

Although the number was limited, a variety of conversation

closings with different types of shutdowns were found in the *Friends* examples; among them were many announced closings, arrangements, and solicitudes. Among the shutdowns in my previous study of ELT textbooks (Saito, 2013), arrangements were the most often used, although the number of announced closings and solicitudes here was also limited. The conversation closings including solicitudes from the *Friends* examples seem to have the effect of showing concern to other participants, as in Example 3.

About one third of the examples from *Friends* included one terminal exchange in the conversation closings. Many of the ELT textbooks in the previous study included only one terminal exchange and I observed that the examples with only one terminal exchange seemed to end halfway (Saito, 2013). However, it was of note that some of the examples from *Friends* also included only one terminal exchange. This may be because most of the conversations in *Friends* are between or among friends, which may result in reflecting informality. Another reason may be that since this is a situational comedy, extended closing sequences may have been avoided. In that respect, conversation closings in *Friends* may not always reflect conversation closings in natural settings.

The number of the participants was varied in the examples of conversation closings from *Friends* and sometimes the number of the participants was five, which may have resulted in bigger numbers of preclosings and terminal exchanges. However, in most of the ELT textbooks, there are only two participants in the conversation closings, and in some of the examples, only expressions of terminal exchange, such as *goodbye* and *see you* were introduced; dialogues in which conversation closings are carried out are not present.

The number of preclosings, shutdowns, and terminal exchanges in most of the ELT textbooks examined in my previous study (Saito, 2013) was smaller than that in the examples from

Friends. The conversation closings in most of the ELT textbooks for this study are more basic than those in *Friends*.

Although different types of conversation closings were observed in the episodes of *Friends* in this study, contexts such as the participants, the relationships between and among the participants, and the settings were not analyzed. More detailed analysis as to contexts in which conversation closings are carried out will need to be conducted. Another limitation of this study is that the use of conversation closings from *Friends* might have restricted the types of conversation closings available because the conversations in this situation comedy tend to take place at home between and among friends. Also, as Quaglio (2007) suggested, the scripted language of *Friends* is not always the same as natural conversation, and *Friends* may miss some features that can be observed in natural conversation, such as overlaps and interruptions. For more detailed analysis of conversation closings in natural occurring data, conversation closings in other media such as spoken corpora may need to be investigated.

Conclusion

Understanding how to close a conversation is important for successful communication in English. However, for learners of English, closing a conversation can be difficult. In this study, reflecting the results of my previous study of ELT textbooks (Saito, 2013), conversation closings in *Friends* were analyzed in terms of what steps in conversation closings and what types of shutdowns were used. The conversation closings in *Friends* were compared with the conversation closings in the ELT textbooks. Although the ways of dealing with conversation closings varied depending on the textbook, conversation closings in the ELT textbooks were relatively simple compared to those in *Friends*. Television dialogues can have a potential for pedagogical purpose (Quaglio, 2007). In addition, DVDs of *Friends* can be

obtained easily, which will be helpful for pedagogical purposes. When using ELT textbooks, which do not offer enough information about conversation closings, introducing conversation closings from *Friends* as additional resources will help students become aware of and acquire different conversation closings in various contexts. The use of situation comedies with visuals and audio may also help learners understand gestures and facial expressions in closing conversations, which is yet another advantage of situation comedies.

Bio Data

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