

THE TURN-TAKING SYSTEM OF BUYING AND SELLING CONVERSATION IN SICILY: ANALYSIS OF SHOP AND MARKET TALK

Barbara M.G. SETTINERI

Abstract

Buying and selling conversation occurs only in specific contexts (mainly shops and markets), deals with a main topic (the action of selling and buying a product), and is carried out by speakers who are assigned two precise roles: 'shopkeeper' and 'customer'. This paper seeks to examine to what extent the context in which buying and selling transactions in Sicily are carried out affects the structure of turn-taking.

1. Introduction

The turn-taking model taken for the analysis of customer-seller talk in Sicilian shops and markets is that devised by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974). This model not only regulates the interaction between two or more participants in a conversation, but also operates within different kinds of social activities. This means that the order, number and application of turn-taking techniques vary according to the context of negotiation. Moreover, in conversations between, for example, friends, family members, teachers and pupils, shopkeepers and customers, etc. the order and allocation of turns is not fixed in advance, while within other speech-exchange systems (e.g., debates, interviews, lectures, etc.) turns are pre-allocated and often limited to only one speaker.

The aim of the present study is to demonstrate how the turn-taking structure of buying and selling conversation in Sicily varies according to three basic factors:

1. the place of the transaction (i.e., market or shop);
2. the 'biographies of interlocutors, e.g., specific trade or profession, geographical and class origins, educational standard, interrelationship, etc.' (Mitchell 1975: 168);
3. the quality and price of the items for sale.

So far little attention has been given to the study of shop talk: the most outstanding works on the subject have been carried out by Mitchell (1975), Ventola (1987), and Lamoreux (1988-9). As far as I know, no research has been done on Sicilian buying and selling transactions.

2. Data

The data analysed in this study are extracts of conversations between customers and sellers, recorded in shops and markets of the north-east area of Sicily for a total of 150 minutes. In the present study the expressions *shop* and *market* will be used to indicate respectively mid-expensive/expensive shops, and open-air markets.

The kinds of shops and markets selected for the collection of the data are:

Shops

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| - perfume shops | - clothes shops |
| - curtain and carpet shops | - glassware and china shops |

Market

- clothes market

- kitchenware market

In order to prevent any possible interference to the natural flow of conversation, the informants' consent to use the data has been asked only after the recording of each transaction. As the tape-recorder was properly disguised, none of the informants selected for the research actually realised that they were being recorded until the moment they were told. On the whole, the informants showed a positive reaction and a good degree of co-operation. However, in two cases, I was forced to leave out the data collected as the informants (shopkeepers in both cases) disapproved of the procedure adopted.

3. Informants

An equal number of male and female informants were chosen among the shopkeepers; as for the customers, the informants were exclusively female. In the first group the age of the informants ranges between 18 and 67, and for the second group between 20 to 28. The shopkeepers' group includes two subgroups, one of informants who are professional shopkeepers, and the other of informants who are only part-time shopkeepers, and have a different occupation (e.g., student, nurse, housewife, teacher, etc.). The customers' group, on the other hand, mainly includes university students. The educational background is the same (i.e., standard level of education) for all the informants in the customers' group, whereas it varies for the informants in the shopkeepers' group, where we can see a contrast between:

1. shopkeepers who possess an average knowledge of *Standard Italian* (or rather *Neo-Standard Italian*¹) and aim at talking in a polite, and somehow formal way;
2. market sellers who frequently alternate the use of *Popular Italian*² with the more prominent use of *Sicilian dialect*.

4. Research procedure

The analysis of the data will be preceded by a brief introduction on speech interaction in Italian shops at the macro-level: section 5.0 will provide a general account of the different phases (initial, central and closing) characterising shop-talk. Sections 5.1, 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4 will then focus on the way turn-taking structure varies in shops and markets. As mentioned earlier, the analytic framework of this paper is provided by Sacks *et al.*'s (1974) work on turn-taking. Accordingly, the analysis of shop and market transactions in Sicily will focus on both Turn-Constructional Units - or TCUs - (i.e. sentence, clause, phrase and lexical item) and the conversationalists' turn-allocation rules (i.e. 1a. 'current speaker selects next'; 1b. 'listener self selects; 1c. 'current speaker continues', cf. Sacks *et al.* 1974: 704).

For each of the following points, I will carry out, when possible, a comparative

¹ *Neo-Standard Italian* is a kind of *Standard Italian* which developed in the early Sixties. It differs from *Standard Italian* in its being more colloquial and in displaying a simpler syntactic structure (e.g., the conditional *vorrei* 'I'd like' is replaced by the imperfect *volevo* 'I wanted').

² *Popular Italian* refers to a kind of extremely colloquial type of Italian, spoken by people who mainly use dialect in everyday life.

analysis between the two contexts (i.e. shops and markets) where buying and selling talk occurs:

1. *Turn-constructural component*: What are the kinds of unit-types more frequently employed in the two contexts? When and why are they mainly used? (5.1)
2. *Turn-allocational techniques*: How do the context and the number of participants affect the choice of the allocational rules? Which technique is more frequently used in shops and market talk, and how does turn length vary? (5.2)
3. *Gaps, pauses and lapses*: Distinction between 'pre- or post-turn silences' (switching pauses), 'within-turn silence' (hesitation pauses) and 'conversational gaps' (McLaughlin 1984:111 ff.) (5.3)
4. *Simultaneous talk*: What is the role of overlaps and back-channel utterances in the turn-taking system of buying and selling interaction? (5.4)

5. Analysis of the data

Sicilian buying and selling interaction consists of three main phases - *initial phase*, *central phase*, *closing phase*:

1. The *opening phase* usually consists of greetings (e.g. *ciao* 'hello' and *buongiorno* 'good morning') and aims at defining the roles of the participants (customer-shopkeeper), establishing the relationships between them (e.g. do they already know each other or is it the first time they meet?), and showing the way participants set up the turn-taking sequence.
2. The *central phase* is characterised by three sections: (a) shopkeeper's offer to help the customer; (b) customer's request of a particular item; (c) shopkeeper's display of the requested object).
3. The *closing phase* (which may or may not be characterised by pre-closing sequences like *va bene* 'all right') marks the speaker's agreement to end the conversation, and usually consists of leave-taking greetings (e.g. *arrivederci* 'goodbye'). This standard phase sequence is often subject to modification: depending on the number of customers the shopkeepers have to attend to, the first and last phases are sometimes omitted.

Having discussed the basic structure of Sicilian buying-and-selling talk, we will now turn to the analysis of the data.

5.1 Turn-constructural component

One of the 'grossly apparent facts' listed by Sacks *et al.* (1974: 720) states that participants can identify and project the 'points of possible unit completion... before their occurrence', and therefore get ready to take the floor at the possible *Transition-Relevance Place* (henceforth *TRP*). This means that turns are not allocated randomly, but occur 'discretely in the course of a turn' on the basis of the unit-type employed (i.e. sentence, clause, phrase or single word). In the following sections, I will examine how shop talk and market conversation are affected by the use of single-word and single-phrase turns (5.1.1) and clausal and sentential turns (5.1.2).

5.1.1. Single-word and single phrase-turns

From the analysis of the data it emerges that in Sicilian shops customers and shopkeepers make a relatively limited use of 'single-word turns', and the lexical construction mainly employed are yes/no replies (e.g. *si* and *no*), words indicating sizes and prices, adverbs (e.g. *davvero?* 'really?', *certo!* 'sure!'), and conjunctions (e.g. *oppure* 'or else'). Here are a few examples:

Shop

(1) - *Curtain and carpet shop*

Customer: Come colore mi serviva un blu scuro.

Shopkeeper: Blu scuro tipo così? (1.5) [customer nodding] Più scuro di questo?

Customer: **Sì.**

Shopkeeper: È difficile. Sotto che è? [pointing at another material] Nero?

Customer: **Sì.**

Customer: As for the colour, I needed a dark blue.

Shopkeeper: Dark blue like this? (1.5) [customer nodding] Darker than this?

Customer: **Yes.**

Shopkeeper: It's difficult. What colour is the one below? [pointing at another material] Black?

Customer: **Yes.**

(2) - *Clothes shop*

Customer: Volevo qualcosa. Siccome devo partecipare a un matrimonio. Però non ho idea. Volevo farmi un'idea di qualcosa di carino, giovanile, non molto classico.

Shopkeeper: Sì. Lei è una taglia=

Customer: = **Quarantasei.**=

Shopkeeper: = **Quarantasei.**

Customer: I wanted something, as I have to go to a wedding. But I have no idea.

I wanted to get an idea about something nice, youthful, not too classic.

Shopkeeper: Yes. You are a size=

Customer: = **Forty-six.**=

Shopkeeper: = **Forty-six.**

In example (1) the shopkeeper is trying to find out what colour of material the customer is looking for. The two following turns performed by the customer are brief, but very clear: both the customer's choice of a single word ('*sì*') and the intonation function as hints for the shopkeeper to detect the TRP, and consequently start his turn.

Example (2) shows a different use of single-word turns: the shopkeeper's first turn ('*Sì. Lei è una taglia*') and the customer's single-word turn ('*Quarantasei*') actually form a complete clause. This is clearly a case of 'minimal joint project' (Clark and Bly 1995: 392) where a request is followed by the uptake of the request: the shopkeeper asks a precise question and the customer promptly answers her back with a single, yet fully explanatory word. However, the shopkeeper somehow feels that her first turn has been left incomplete: hence the immediate repetition of the word '*quarantasei*' following the customer's turn.

A type of repetition pattern is also employed in the case of single-phrase turns:

(3) - *Perfume shop*

Customer: Oppure, oltre alla trousse? Qualche altra idea?

Shopkeeper: **Una bella borsa!**
(1.0)

Customer: **Una bella borsa.**

Customer: What else, besides the make-up case? Any other ideas?

Shopkeeper: **A nice handbag!**
(1.0)

Customer: **A nice handbag.**

In this example, it is the customer who repeats the phrase already characterising the shopkeeper's turn. However, the repetition is not aimed at completing a previous turn as in (2), but it shows that the customer is thinking loudly and evaluating the possibility of buying a handbag or not. In (3) as well as in examples (1) and (2), speakers are able to project the possible TRP through the syntactic and intonational properties of the unit-type employed.

In the market context, on the other hand, it is possible to note that single-word turns recur more frequently. Market sellers' turns, in particular, are characterised by the constant repetition of words and short phrases, aimed at attracting the customers' attention. The major characteristic of market conversation is the fast production of different lexical constructions within the same turn. Although the turn-constructive unit completion point could be easily detected by any interlocutor, the sellers' turns are not addressed to a customer in particular. Moreover, they do not form part of a minimal joint project, as - in the majority of cases - they are performed only in order to transmit information about the prices of the items for sale. The various types of word- and phrase-turns typical of market conversation are shown in examples (4) to (7) below:

Market

Single-word turns and turns consisting of a series of single words

(4) - *Clothes market*

Seller: **Diecimila!**

Seller: **Ten thousand!**

(5) - *Clothes market*

Seller A: *Avanti donne!*

Seller B: **>>Seimila! Ottomila! Dumila! Dumila! Seimila!<<<**

Seller A: *Come on women!*

Seller B: **>>Six thousand! Eight thousand! Two thousand! Two thousand! Six thousand!<<<**

Single-phrase turns and turns consisting of more than one phrase

(6) - *Clothes market*

Seller A: **Dumila o' pa'! >>O' pa'! O' pa'!<<<**

Seller B: **A tremila, signora! Tremila!**

Seller A: **Two thousand for a pair! >>For a pair! For a pair!<<<**

Seller B: **Three thousand, madam! Three thousand.**

(7) - *Clothes market*

Seller A: *Chi bbella robba!* Guardate che c'è qua! **Regali! Regali! Regali!** *Chi bella robba! I 'cchiù belli.*

Seller B: **Grigio perla! Grigio perla!**

Seller A: *What beautiful things!* Look what we've got here! **Presents! Presents! Presents!** *What beautiful things! The most beautiful!*

Seller B: **Pearl grey! Pearl grey!**

When customers take turns in order to request the item they want to buy, the verbal exchange with the market sellers usually contains at least one or more single-word turns (e.g. *come?* 'what?', *quanto?* 'how much?', etc.), which recur whenever the speaker cannot hear because of the noise or when one of the two participants is busy and cannot answer right away (e.g., when the seller is serving other customers):

(8) - *Clothes market*

Seller: [shouting] Forza! I regali per i bambini! Prego!

Customer: Una emme elle.

Seller: **Come?**

Customer: Emme elle [ML or Medium/Large] (xxx)

Seller: [shouting] Come on! Presents for the children! Help yourselves!

Customer: An ML [Medium/Large].

Seller: **What?**

Customer: ML (xxx)

In the above example, the seller's single-word turn ('*Come?*') is interpreted by the customer as such mainly because of the intonation: as Sacks *et al.* (1974: 721-22) point out, 'discriminations between *what* as one-word question and as the start of a sentential (or clausal or phrasal) construction are made not syntactically, but intonationally'.

5.1.2. Clausal and sentential turns

As regards sentential and clausal constructions, they seem to be widely used both in shops and markets:

Shop

(9) - *Glassware and china shop*

Shopkeeper: **Questo genere di bicchieri giornalieri, ad esempio, che sono per sei. Sono da bibita, acqua, e vino (xxx) oppure questo Genere così. (0.5) Oppure potremmo andare su qualche olieria (.) di questi (.) qualche vassoietto di questo qua, tête à tête.**

Customer: Tipo qualche piatto centro-tavola?

Shopkeeper: **This kind of daily glasses, for example, which are for six. They are for soft drinks, water, and wine (xxx). Or this kind. Or we could go for one of these oil cruets, one of these small trays, tête à tête.**

Customer: Something like a plate for the centre of the table.

Market

(10) - *Clothes market*

- Customer: Qui quant'è?
 Shopkeeper: *A sula rrobba custa diecimila. S'ave a fari (xxx) e ci veni trenta.*
 Customer: *Una (.) E l'autra una?* [pointing at a shoulder-strap].
-
- Customer: How much is it?
 Shopkeeper: *The single item costs ten thousand. If you have to do (xxx) and you'll pay thirty.*
 Customer: *One (.) And the other?* [pointing at a shoulder-strap].

In example (9) the customer is able to detect the unit completion thanks mainly to the intonation. As the shopkeeper's turn consists of a series of clauses linked by the use of the conjunction *oppure* 'or', it could potentially be extended to a few more clauses: however, the customer promptly takes the next turn as she understands, from the falling pitch, that the shopkeeper has ended her turn. Moreover, the unit is syntactically complete. In the second example (10), following the customer's first turn (i.e. a question), the shopkeeper starts a turn consisting of a series of clauses (some of which are impossible to understand because of overlaps). The TRP is then identified by the customer because the last unit is syntactically complete, and it also gives the final information requested by the customer.

5.2. Turn-allocation techniques

Clark and Bly (1995: 387) claim that 'turns emerge from co-ordinating on contributions and joint projects': in other words, participants in a conversation are expected to avoid speaking at the same time or creating long gaps, and - more importantly - they must perform turns which are semantically related. The use of adjacency pairs (i.e., paired utterances divided into first-pair and second-pair parts, which are produced by two different speakers according to a fixed order: e.g., question/answer, greetings/greetings, etc.) is very frequent within shop talk.

The data shows that, whilst in shop interaction the use of greetings-and-goodbyes adjacency pairs is extremely important, in market conversation it is virtually non-existent. More precisely, in market transactions the seller is involved in a number of activities (e.g., shouting to attract people's attention, dealing with many customers at a time, keeping an eye on the goods, etc.) and can only have brief verbal exchanges with the customers.

5.2.1. Next-speaker selection

Market sellers usually address the whole group of customers by using either plural nouns (11 and 12) and singular collective nouns (13) or by using 'attention getters' like *forza!*, *dai!* 'come on!', *guarda!* 'look!' etc.:

Market

- (11) - *Clothes market*
 Seller: Diecimila lire, **donne!**
-
- Seller: Ten thousand liras, **women!**
- (12) - *Clothes market*
 Seller: Tremila lire, oh! Duemila! *Trimila! Fimmini!*
-

Seller: Three thousand, oh! Two thousand! *Three thousand! Females!*

(13) - *Clothes market*

Seller: Avanti! Andiamo! Quidicimila! **Signora!**

Seller: Come on! Come on! Five thousand! **Madam!**

When market sellers want to address someone in particular, they do so by referring to some of his/her physical attributes. In (14) for example, the seller identifies a customer by the colour of her hair:

(14) - *Clothes market*

Seller: Mamma mia! **Signura russa! Signura russa!** Questa è un'altra cosa, eh? Solamente diecimila lire!

Seller: Mamma mia! **Red lady! Red lady!** This is another thing, uhm? Only ten-thousand lire!

The data show that market sellers are not really interested in selecting a possible next speaker: instead, they often produce long monologues containing hypothetical turn-exchanges with their customers:

(15) - *Clothes market*

Seller: E invece no! Ve lo dovete fare gridare! *Uno ave a nescere pacciu* per invogliarvi a comprare la merce più (xxx), quella di negozio! Non è merce di mercato questa qui! (0.5) Mi state facendo fare vita amara! (1.5) È tutta merce firmata. Guardatela! **Dice: 'Chista a vittì ieri 'ntu negoziu! Che ci fa 'o meccatu?'** (1.5) **Eeh!** I vestiti da cerimonia ventimila lire, poi tutto quindici. Giubbottini vecchi: questo è quindici! Quindici e ventimila lire! **Dice: 'Bah!'** (.) **Dice: 'Così minuscoli?'**. **Eeh! Non vendiamo a peso! Vendiamo a qualità, e vendiamo per fare soddi!** (2.5) **Qua ci fate dei furti perché non è merce da quidicimilalire!**

Seller: And instead no! You force me to shout it out! *One must get mad* to tempt you to buy the items more (xxx), those for shop sale! These are not items for market sale! (0.5) You're giving me a hard time! (1.5) It's all fashion stock! Look! **She says: 'I saw this in the shop yesterday! What's it doing at the market?'** (1.5) **Eeh!** Formal suits twenty thousand, all the rest fifteen! Fifteen and twenty thousand lire! **He says: 'Uhm!'** (.) **She says: 'So small!'**. **Eeh! We don't sell by weight! We sell by quality! To make money!** (2.5) **Here you steal from us because the value of these goods is more than fifteen thousand lire!**

When market seller-customer turn-exchanges do occur, the communication may not be straightforward:

(16) - *Clothes market*

Seller: Diecimilalire!

Customer: *U (xxx) mu pozzu pigghiari?*

Seller: Forza 'che mi sevvunu soldi! **Certu che su po' pigghiari!**

Seller: Ten thousand liras!

Customer: **Can I take the (xxx)?**

Seller: Come on 'cause I need money! **Of course you can!**

In the first part of his second turn, the seller ignores the fact that the customer has selected him as next speaker, and continues addressing the crowd. When he finally answers the customer's question, he does it quickly and nervously.

Unlike market conversation, shop talk is characterised by longer turn-exchanges, as it takes place in a close environment, and the interlocutors are rarely more than two or three: in this context, greetings are necessary to establish a relaxed atmosphere for the transaction. In Sicilian shops, the production of verbal greetings adjacency pairs by both customer and shopkeeper is often replaced either by non-verbal greetings (e.g., nodding, smiling, etc.) or by the production of only the first-pair part only:

Shop

(17) - *Clothes shop*

Customer: **Buonasera.**

Shopkeeper: [nodding].

Customer: **Good evening.**

Shopkeeper: [nodding].

The post-greetings sequence in shop conversation marks the beginning of the actual buying and selling transaction. Note that it is usually the customer who takes the first turn by making a request:

(18) - *Curtain and carpet shop*

Customer: Salve!

Shopkeeper: Ciao! Non ti avevo riconosciuto!

Customer: Come va?

Shopkeeper: Tutto a posto.

Customer: **Volevo, desideravo vedere un taffetà di seta**

Customer: Hello!

Shopkeeper: Hi! I hadn't recognise you!

Customer: Is everything all right?

Shopkeeper: Yes, it is.

Customer: **I wanted, I'd like to see a silk taffeta.**

In (18) the greetings adjacency pair is followed by another adjacency pair ('*come va?*' - '*tutto a posto*') showing that shopkeeper and customer already know each other. However, in other cases there is a violation of the paired sequence:

(19) - *Perfume shop*

Customer: **'Sera!**

Shopkeeper: **Prego!**

Customer: Volevo un profumo. Non so se *Tresor* o forse qualcosa di un pò meno dolce (.)
Mi fa sentire qualcosa?

Customer: **Evening!**

Shopkeeper: **Can I help you?**

Customer: I wanted a perfume. I'm not sure if *Tresor* or something less sweet (.) Could you show me something?

In (19), the shopkeeper does not respond to the customer's salutation, but directly

jumps to the next stage (i.e. asking what the customer is interested in buying).

Unlike greetings, goodbyes adjacency pairs seem to be produced at the end of the buying and selling transaction, and preceded by pre-sequences as in example (20):

(20) - *Perfume shop*

Customer:	Va bene. Eventualmente ripasso.		
Shopkeeper:	Va bene.		Pre-sequence
Customer:	Ti ringrazio.		
Shopkeeper:	Di niente!		
Customer:	Buonasera.		
Shopkeeper:	Arrivederci.		
<hr/>			
Customer:	O.K. In case I'll come back.		
Shopkeeper:	OK.		Pre-sequence
Customer:	Thank you.		
Shopkeeper:	You're welcome!		
Customer:	Good evening.		
Shopkeeper:	Goodbye.		

5.2.2 Self-selection

Sacks *et al.* (1974:719) point out that 'a self-selector aiming for an earliest start (...) has the problem that his earliest start must begin with a unit-type's beginning - one which, given its projectability, will need to reflect some degree of planning for the turn's talk, and will itself project that planfulness'.

As we have already observed, in the shop context, the conversation usually occurs between two people: this means that the hearer does not have to compete with other participants but the speaker. The self-selection technique usually occurs under the form of interruption with possible overlap:

Shop

(21) - *Hat shop*

Customer:	Ecco, io cercavo (.) devo andare a un matrimonio e avevo bisogno di un cappello, però pensavo, cioè, sono qua per farmi un'idea principalmente.
Shopkeeper:	Ma allora aspetti! Quand'è il matrimonio?
<hr/>	
Customer:	Well, I was looking for (.) I have to attend to a wedding and I needed a hat, but I was thinking, I mean, I'm here mainly to get an idea.
Shopkeeper:	But wait then! When is the wedding?

In this example, the shopkeeper self-selects interrupting the customer. The use of 'pre-starts' such as the appositional *ma* ('but') helps self-selection in two ways: 1) it does not force the speaker to have a specific plan as he starts talking; 2) it allows a clear analysis of the sentence even in cases of initial overlaps.

In the market context, customers usually self-select when they feel the need to ask information or pay for an item (see for example the customer's turn in (16)).

5.2.3. Current speaker continuation

In shop as well as in market conversation, there are frequent cases of 'current speaker continues' technique:

Shop

(22) - *Curtain and carpet shop*

Shopkeeper: E allora dobbiamo provare qualche altra (9.0)

Poliestere. (2.5)

Deve essere tutta seta?

Customer: Possibilmente. Sennò vediamo.

Shopkeeper: Vediamo (.) puntiamo sull'altra. (11.0)

Ti faccio vedere qualcosa in altezza al (xxx) (7.5)

È una mano un pò più morbida rispetto a quella. (3.5)

Anche questa è seta (.) C'è il colore (xxx) un colore brutto. Blu.

-
- Shopkeeper: Then we must try some other. (9.0)
Polyester. (2.5)
Does it have to be all silk?
- Customer: Possibly. But let's see.
- Shopkeeper: Let's see (.) Let's consider another one. (11.0)
I'll show you something by its height at (xxx) (7.5)
It's a softer kind of material compared to that one. (3.5)
This one is silk too (.) There's the colour (xxx) an ugly colour. Blue.

Note that this technique recurs more frequently in shopkeepers' turns: in (22), the shopkeeper is looking for the colour of material that the customer has requested. His second turn actually contains four turns, separated by pauses of different length: as the customer does not self-select, the shopkeeper continues to speak. Similar cases are observable in the market context (see example (15)).

5.3 Gaps, pauses and lapses

According to the Sacks *et al.* model, 'parties' treatment of silence is contingent on its placement', i.e. silence is classified according to its occurrence within the turn-taking structure. There are three main types of silence: lapses, gaps and pauses. A *lapse* is a silence which starts at and extends after the TRP; it occurs when none of the three main allocational rules is applied. In these cases, the conversation ends or is suspended for a while. A *gap* or more precisely a *switching pause*, on the other hand, is a short silence occurring at the TRP just after the current speaker has ended his turn and before the next speaker begins another turn.

In both Sicilian shops and markets, lapses are very rare: even when the conversation seems to 'fade', speaker and hearer keep communicating through non-verbal channels (e.g. showing, watching, and evaluating the items for sale). However, in the shop context lapses occur especially when customers perform *minimal responses*, i.e. acknowledgements (*um hmm, ho capito* 'I see'), very brief responses (*sì, sì ma* 'yes but', etc.), signs of impatience (*va bene!* 'OK!'), *magari ci penso* 'I'll think about it') showing his/her increasing disinterest and anticipating the end of the talk exchange. Switching pauses, instead, occur frequently in both shop and market conversation:

Shop

- (23) - *Perfume shop*
- Shopkeeper: 'Fiorilù' di 'Pupa'? [indicating a perfume]
(1.3)
- Customer: Questo mi sa che è dolce.
(1.0)
- Shopkeeper: Non è molto, proprio (0.5)
-
- Shopkeeper: 'Fiorilù' by 'Pupa'? [indicating a perfume]
(1.3)
- Customer: I think this is sweet.
(1.0)
- Shopkeeper: It's not very, really (0.5)

As we can see in the above example, switching pauses always occur at the TRP, and

they usually last less than two seconds: they represent the time that a listener needs in order to detect the TRP and consequently take the floor. Let us consider the following extract from market conversation:

Market

(24) - *Clothes market*

Customer: *A quantu i vindi i pantaluni?* (1.5)

Seller: *Centuvintimila lire c'a giacca.* (0.3)

Customer: *C'a giacca puru?*

Customer: *How much are the trousers?* (1.5)

Seller: *One hundred and twenty with the jacket.* (0.3)

Customer: *With the jacket, too?*

Here, the switching pause occurring at the first TRP (1.5 seconds) is longer than the switching pause occurring at the second TRP (0.3 seconds). This difference in length is due to the fact that, after the customer's first turn, the seller needs time to understand which are the trousers that the woman is referring to; once he has identified the object of the question he can then build his own turn. The second gap, instead, is very short, as the customer's reaction of surprise on hearing that the price includes both trousers and jacket is immediate.

Some scholars make a distinction between gap and switching pause, by claiming that the latter 'is attributable to the person selected as next speaker' (Nofsinger 1991: 95). However, the data under analysis show that switching pauses belong to both the current and next speaker's turns. Therefore, as McLaughlin (1984: 114) claims, 'it seems appropriate to treat switching pauses as a dyadic phenomenon'.

Pauses also include the so-called *hesitation pauses*, which occur within a speaker's turn. Hesitation pauses characterise speakers' turn in both shop and market conversation as we can see from the following examples:

Shop

(25) - *Perfume shop*

Customer: [after seeing a few items] Qualcosa di più particolare?

Shopkeeper: Ehm (3.0) qualcosa tipo (1.5) un... (.) una, un... (2.0) (xxx) un set da barba, un'agenda. Ci sono anche quelle in pelle (.) molto carine (.) sono sulle cento (.) sono in vera pelle (xxx) (7.0) [showing some diaries]. Questa è centoquidici perché è in vero pitone.

Customer: [after seeing a few items] Something more particular?

Shopkeeper: Ehm (3.0) something like (1.5) a...(.) a, a... (2.0) (xxx) a set for shaving, a diary. We've also got some leather ones (.) very nice (.) they cost about one hundred [liras] (.) they are real leather (xxx) (7.0). [showing some diaries] This costs one hundred fifteen because it's in real python.

Market

(26) - *Clothes market*

Seller: Guardate la merce! Dice 'Guarda..' (9.5) Approfittatene tutti (.) come quelli di- *Sintiti, sintiti, sintiti!* (1.5) Dai! (1.5) L'occasione, l'eleganza per i bambini da zero a trent'anni qui da noi. Dai!

Seller: Look at the stock! He says: 'Look...' (9.5) Make the most of it, all of you (.) like the ones of- *Listen, listen, listen!* (1.5) Come on! (1.5) Bargains, elegance, fashion for zero to thirty-year-old children here at our place. Come on!

Although both (25) and (26) provide examples of pauses within the same turn, it is possible to notice a considerable difference. In shop conversation, hesitation pauses occur either when the shopkeeper has to think of the various kinds of items that might interest the customer or when he stops talking in order to take out an item and show it to the customer. In market conversation, on the other hand, pauses are more likely to occur in sellers' monologues, the actual communication between individual customers and sellers being limited to extremely short exchanges.

5.4 Simultaneous talk

Sacks *et al.* (1974: 706) point out that participants in a conversation rarely speak at the same time, and that when overlaps do occur they last only for a few seconds. Overlaps, however, do not represent a real violation of the turn-taking structure, as they usually occur at or just before the TRP. A more serious obstacle to the regular sequence of turns is represented instead by interruptions, which occur far from the TRP and prevent the current speaker from developing his turn.

Overlaps are a constant characteristic of any kind of buying and selling conversation (both in shops and in markets). However, in shops their occurrence is limited because usually only two participants are involved, while in markets the number of overlaps is consistent as conversation is characterised by multi-party short exchanges. The data show that overlaps occur mainly when the hearer has already understood what the speaker wants to say before the TRP. More rarely, the cause of overlaps is the hearer's misreading of the turn completion point:

Shop

(27) - *Perfume shop*

Shopkeeper: I cerchietti. Questi (.) a giorni dovrebbero arrivare dei cerchietti. (1.5) Nuovi.
(3.5) Questo è bello. (1.5)

Customer: ||-**Si, infatti. Infatti.***

Shopkeeper: ||-**Si usano moltissimo.*** È un bel cerchietto.

Shopkeeper: The head bands. These (.) In a few days we're expecting some head bands to be delivered. (1.5) New. (3.5) This is a nice hair band. (1.5)

Customer: ||-**Yes, indeed. Indeed.***

Shopkeeper: ||-**They are very fashionable*** It's a very nice hair band.

Market

(28) - *Clothes market*

Customer: *Dannu una o dui pari? Una sula 'nn'avi //spallina?**

Seller: *// Una ve* ne tocca a testa. Picchi*

*c'ha // levastu?**

Customer: *// Una* nn'avi spallina?*

Customer: *He you got one or two pairs? Have you got only one // shoulder-strap?**

Seller: *//Only one* each.*

Why have you *//removed it?**
 Customer: *// One?** Is that all you've got?

In (27), the shopkeeper's first turn is followed by a very short gap (1.5 seconds), which is obviously interpreted in different ways by the two participants. In fact, after her last remark (*'Questo è bello'*) the shopkeeper stops talking and then decides to continue as she has not received any cues about the customer's intention to take the floor. On the other hand, the customer interprets the gap following the shopkeeper's turn as a clear sign of TRP, and she decides to take the floor. As a result, the two participants' turns overlap.

In the market context, instead, overlaps are usually caused by lack of patience or impoliteness. In (28), for example, the seller starts his turn before the end of the customer's turn: his intervention is very rapid and unclear. Therefore the customer reformulates the initial question three syllables before the TRP.

The length and articulation of buying and selling conversations in shops naturally creates the ground for interruptions. Two kinds of interruption are observable in Sicilian shops: *forced interruption* (i.e., Speaker A is forced to yield the floor after the intrusion of Speaker B) and *attempted interruption* (i.e., Speaker B fails in attempting to take the floor from Speaker A):

Shops

(29) - *Curtain and carpet shop*

Customer: Non è questo blu, ma *// diciamo**-
 Shopkeeper: *// Non abbiamo** un campioncino del tessuto?
 Customer: No.

Customer: It's not this kind of blue, but *// let's say**-
 Shopkeeper: *// Haven't we got** a sample of the material?
 Customer: No.

This is a case of forced interruption. The customer is trying to explain what kind of colour she is looking for, but she is suddenly interrupted by the shopkeeper intervention and cannot retake the floor. Thus her next turn, far from being a continuation or the first, is the answer to the shopkeeper's question. Let us now consider an example of attempted interruption:

(30) - *Curtain and carpet shop*

Shopkeeper: *||-Queste qua**
 Customer: *||-Vabbè**
 Shopkeeper: **le puoi tenere in considerazione.** *// Per il resto è difficile trovare**
 Customer: *// (xxx) però è troppo leggero**
 Shopkeeper: **questo tipo così.**

Shopkeeper: *||-These here**
 Customer: *||-OK.**
 Shopkeeper: **you can take them into consideration.***//As for the rest it is difficult to find**
 Customer: *// (xxx) but it's too light**
 Shopkeeper: **this kind.**

In extract (30), the customer's attempt to interrupt the shopkeeper fails: as a matter of

fact, each of the shopkeeper's turns represents a logical continuation of the previous one. Despite the customer's two interruptions, the shopkeeper thus manages to end his turn.

Finally, as regards back-channel utterances such as *mmhm*, *sì* 'yes', *eh*, etc., they are almost exclusive features of shop conversation. The data show that only in a few cases do back-channel utterances function as turns; in the majority of the cases, they indicate that the hearer is carefully listening to the speaker, without interrupting.

6. Discussion

The analysis of the data collected in Sicilian shops and markets, seems to support the claim that buying and selling transactions display some differences in the turn-taking structure according to the context in which they are carried out. Shop and market conversation can be classified as follows:

1. Shop talk is characterised by long, *multiple sentence-* and/or *clause-turns*, and by *single-phrase* turns. *Single-word* turns are instead rarely used. Market conversation, on the other hand, displays a wide use of *single-word* turns and turns consisting of long sequences of word-units.
2. As regards the *current speaker selects next* technique, the data show that while in shops the initial selection of the next speaker occurs by means of greetings adjacency pairs, in markets greetings are not usually performed, and sellers address the whole group of their customers, expecting potential speakers to self-select. If someone (either seller or customer) makes a next speaker selection in the market context, the turn sequence following it may result as unclear and disconnected. Often market sellers tend to reproduce possible verbal interactions with the customers within monologues which function both as 'attention getters' and 'silence fillers'. In shop conversation, on the other hand, when a speaker selects the next speaker (as in the case of a customer asking for a particular product, or the shopkeeper offering his help) the turn-sequence is fairly smooth. As for *self-selection*, while in shops it is characterised by interruptions within long turn-exchanges, in markets it is observable when a customer wants to attract the seller's attention. Finally, the *current speaker continues* technique is typical of both shop and market conversation, and seems to be a distinctive feature of shopkeeper and seller's turns.
3. While *lapses* are an almost exclusive (but rare) characteristic of shop conversation, *hesitation* and *switching pauses* occur both in market and in shop talk. The presence of *hesitation pauses* is either due to embarrassment, indecision, or - as in the case of market conversation - to the seller's engagements in other kinds of activities. *Switching pauses* (or *gaps*), on the other hand, are necessary for the hearer to make sure that the current speaker has completed his turn, before taking the floor (the reaction time varies according to the topic of conversation, but not to the context).
4. *Overlaps* occur more frequently in market conversation, where many verbal interactions take place at the same time, due to the high number of people. In shops, on the other hand, where conversations (usually) occur between two speakers only, overlaps are less frequent. However, as the turns in shop talk can reach a considerable length, *interruptions* (either forced or attempted) are likely to occur more often than in the market context.

One should not forget, however, that turn-taking structure is also affected by the participants' social and educational status. The data analysed in this paper show that in shops participants tend to speak a kind of grammatically correct Italian with occasional colloquial expressions, whereas in markets, sellers make almost exclusive use of Sicilian dialect, and most customers either speak Popular Italian or Sicilian dialect. This, together with the cheap quality of the items for sale, creates an atmosphere of informality.

7. Conclusion

In his study of market and shop transactions in Cyrenaica (Libya), Mitchell (1975: 169) emphasises that 'some activities, of which buying and selling is an example, are conducted with a great deal of talk'. The data collected in Sicily shows, however, that market conversation and shop talk do not involve the same amount of talk due to a number of reasons.

First of all, the physical setting (close and relatively small in shops, wide and in the open air in markets) affects the way participants take turns. Moreover, in shops the interaction occurs between two people, and it usually consists of a regular sequence of turns, often characterised by interruptions. In markets, on the other hand, we do not find long buying-and-selling exchanges as each market seller has to deal with at least ten or more customers at a time, and it is therefore impossible for him to give attention to only one customer for more than a few seconds. As a result, the turn-taking sequence in market conversation appears to be often discontinuous, with frequent overlaps and repetitions. However, one should not forget the role played by the social and educational background and the quality of the items for sale in determining the different alternation of turn in shop and market conversational exchanges.

In the final analysis, beyond the obvious similarities between them (they are both related to the activity of buying and selling), shop talk and market conversation in Sicily display several dissimilarities in the organisation of turn-taking, mainly because of the different contexts in which they occur.

References

- Clark, H.H. and Bly, B. (1995). Pragmatics and discourse. In Miller, J.L. and P.D. Eimas (eds.) *Speech, Language and Communication*. San Diego: Academic Press, pp. 307-410.
- Lamoreux, E.(1988-9). Rhetoric and conversation in service encounters. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*. **22**. 93-114.
- McLaughlin, M.L.(1984). *Conversation: How Talk is Organised*. London: Sage Publications.
- Mitchell, T.F.(1975). The language of buying and selling in Cyrenaica. In Mitchell, T.F. (ed.) *Principles of Firthian Linguistics*. London: Longman, pp. 167-199.
- Nofsinger, R.E.(1991). *Everyday Conversation*. London: Sage Publications.
- Sacks, H., Schegloff, E.A. and Jefferson, G. (1974). A simplest systematics for the organisation of turn-taking for conversation. *Language* **52**. 361-382.
- Ventola, E. (1987). *The Structure of Social Interaction*. London: Frances Pinter.

Barbara Settineri

Department of Linguistics and Phonetics

University of Leeds

Leeds

LS2 9JT

lnpbmgs@leeds.ac.uk

Transcription conventions

.	Full stops mark turn-unit completion and are characterised by a falling intonation
,	Commas mark rhythm intervals within an utterance and are characterised by a rising intonation
!	Exclamation marks signal surprise or animated tone
(.)	Short pause
(1.5)	Length of pause expressed in seconds
//	Start of overlap
*	End of overlap
-	Simultaneous initial turn
= =	Latched sentences
>> <<	Quick production of talk
(xxx)	Uncertain transcription
<i>Sintiti</i>	Italicised words/phrases are in Sicilian dialect
Certo	Data relevant to the point being discussed are in bold character