



## Conversation Analysis: Text Analysis of R. K. Narayan's Short Story "Fellow-Feeling"

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### Abstract:

Discourse analysis is a primarily linguistic study examining the use of language by its native population whose major concern is investigating language functions along with its forms, produced both orally and in writing. A major area of study in the analysis of discourse is conversation analysis. Conversation analysis looks at ordinary everyday spoken discourse and aims to understand, from a fine-grained analysis of the conversation, how people manage their interactions. It also looks at how social relations are developed through the use of spoken discourse. The aim of this paper is to explain Conversation Analysis of R. K. Narayan's short story Fellow-Feeling based on the model of Halliday and Hasan (1976). It also focuses the necessity of cohesion in the linguistic analysis of a text. The study has identified that the most grammatical and lexical devices used are references, conjunctions and synonyms etc.

**Key Words:** Conversation Analysis, Discourse Analysis, Grammatical and Lexical Cohesion, Linguistic Analysis, Spoken Discourse.

### Introduction:

Sociolinguistics is the study of aspects of societies, including cultural norms, the way language is used, and the effects of language use on society. Language is an important portion of identity and culture within many speech communities; also associated with members self-esteem; within these communities. Discourse Analysis examines patterns of language across texts and considers the relationship between language and the social and cultural contexts in which it is used. It examines how the use of language is influenced by relationships between participants as well as the effects the use of language has upon social identities and relations. In Conversation Analysis, talk is seen as a vehicle for action. Participants attend talk not for its propositional content, nor as a simple medium of information transfer, but because they care about the actions getting done through talk (eg: asking, requesting, complaining, noticing, and so on), and

the real life consequences of those actions (Scheggloff, 1995).

### Literature Review:

Various research studies have been carried out in the area of discourse analysis. In discourse analysis, spoken discourse plays an important role in the study of conversation analysis. Some of the reviews focused on identification of speech events through question/answer technique in D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, identification of cohesive devices in a contrastive study of written English and written Telugu.

From the review of the research we can see that not much has been done by way of analysis of dialogues in literary texts. In particular, short stories constitute a rich source for conversations in socio - cultural contexts. One can get much insight into 'language in use' from the interaction of the characters. Hence the short story "Fellow-Feeling" by R.K. Narayan has been chosen for textual analysis to observe to what extent they reveal or do not reveal features normally associated with Conversation Analysis.

### Methodology:

This paper focuses on features of conversations in Indian short stories and from the selected short story eight conversation pieces have been selected. Conversational features have been identified such as language, background knowledge, socio-cultural background, cohesion, lexical cohesion, grammatical cohesion, turn taking, adjacency pairs etc.

### Analysis of "Fellow-Feeling":

R.K.Narayan is adept in using conversational discourse. He employed it extensively in his novels and, more so, in his stories. In this story "Fellow-Feeling," there are two interesting characters namely Rajam Iyer and the newcomer. We are here concerned with the conversational content of the story and the clue it provides to understanding the psychology of the characters. The important conversations in this story are between Rajam Iyer, a Brahmin and the



newcomer, a non-Brahmin. The conversations in this story present a look into the temperaments of the two characters.

### Conversation I

The setting of the conversation takes place in a railway compartment. The speakers are Rajam Iyer and the newcomer. The encounter between Rajam Iyer and the newcomer is quite accidental in

- |               |   |   |
|---------------|---|---|
| 1. Rajam Iyer | : | What is all this?   |
| 2. Newcomer   | : | What is what?   |
| 3. Rajam Iyer | : | Moderate your style a bit?  |
| 4. Newcomer   | : | You moderate yours first.<br>Pause  |
| 5. Rajam Iyer | : | My man, this sort of thing will never do.<br>Just try and be more courteous, it is your duty. |
| 6. Newcomer   | : | You mind your business.   |
| 7. Rajam Iyer | : | No  |

In the 1st utterance, Rajam Iyer gets a little impatient and asks him what all this was in a hard tone. Here 'all this' refers back to the newcomer delivering home-truths, which passed by easy stages from impudence to impertinence and finally to ribaldry. This can be interpreted only by reference to the immediate context of situation. This is an Exophoric reference, where the reference is made to the context of situation. Here 'this' is used as a 'near demonstrative' reference.

In the 2nd utterance, the newcomer is obviously aggressive and taunts him in a similar way with "what is what?" Even then Rajam Iyer keeps his cool and only advises him to moderate his style a bit. In the 3rd and 4th utterances, Rajam Iyer talks in a little elite manner. The newcomer does not relish being told to moderate his style and simply flings back Rajam Iyer's advice at him. In the 3rd utterance, 'Moderate your style' anaphorically refers to the growling by the newcomer. Here 'your' is a personal reference. This is an utterance by Mr. Rajam Iyer, who is giving reply to the newcomer. Both are talking about how to behave in a railway compartment among the passengers.

In the 4th utterance 'you moderate yours first', 'you' and 'your' function as personal

reference. This is an utterance by the newcomer and the turns are taken one after the other. They are continuously talking about one topic. After the 4th utterance there is a pause between the two speakers. Mr. Rajam Iyer takes a pause after the utterance of the newcomer, and takes time to speak the next utterance; perhaps he was thinking of a change in strategy — to appeal to the reasonable side of the other man. Thus in the 5th utterance Iyer says, "My man, this sort of thing will never do". This is an example of message adjustment. In this utterance, 'This sort of thing' refers back to his quarrelsomeness. This is anaphoric reference.

In 5th utterance 'My' is a personal reference while 'this' has singular near demonstrative reference. In the same dialogue 'it' refers to 'courteous' in the same line. 'And' is used as a conjunction and 'your' refers back to the newcomer and works as personal reference.

In the whole conversation, conversational turns take place one after another. Speakers wait till the other has finished talking before they answer or contribute to the conversation. Adjacency pairs are not seen since this is not a polite conversation.

### Conversation II

In the second conversation, the newcomer assumed a tone of mock humility.

- |               |   |  |
|---------------|---|--|
| 1. Newcomer:  | : | Shall I take the dust from your feet, O Holy Brahmin? O Brahmin, Brahmin. Your days are over, my dear sir, learn that. I should like to see you trying a bit of bossing on us. |
| 2. Rajam Iyer | : | Whose master is who?   |
| 3. Newcomer:  | : | The cost of mutton has gone up out of all proportion. It is nearly double what it used to be.  |
| 4. Rajam Iyer | : | Is it?   |





5. Newcomer : Yes and Why? Because Brahmins have begun to eat meat and they pay high prices to get it secretly.

In the 1st utterance, when the newcomer has no relevant answer to give for Rajam Iyer's mild protest and warning, the newcomer diverges from the topic and starts a broadside against Brahmins and Brahmanism. The newcomer appears to be very resourceful to have hit upon a topic which rankles the Brahmin. He speaks in an intimidating tone: "Don't think you can bully us as you have been bullying us all these years". In fact there was no bullying as such indulged in by Rajam Iyer. Still continuing his anti-Brahmin stance, he warns Rajam Iyer, "Don't think you can bully us". When one has no relevant argument to put forward, one naturally resorts to sneering, jeering and mocking and that is what exactly the newcomer does. He says "Oh holy Brahmin, shall I take the dust from your feet?" This kind of resort to mockery in such a situation is an example of taking the offensive. The newcomer does not stop at simple accusation. He tries to prove that Rajam Iyer is a hypocrite, a liar, a timid fellow and above all an exploiter.

In the 1st utterance 'your feet' cataphorically refers forward in the text to 'O Holy Brahmin? O Brahmin, Brahmin'. Here repetition of lexical item is used by the newcomer as 'O Holy Brahmin? O Brahmin, Brahmin'. 'Your', 'my dear sir', 'you' anaphorically refers back to the Brahmin, 'Rajam Iyer'. Here 'I' and 'us' have personal reference to the speaker, 'the newcomer'. In the 2nd utterance, Rajam Iyer at a certain point in the conversation goes philosophical saying "whose master is who?" He probably wants to deflect the newcomer's offence.

In the 3rd utterance, the newcomer brings in something of no obvious relevance and again takes to tactics of divergence. He accuses Rajam Iyer of meat - eating. In the 3rd utterance 'it' anaphorically refers back to 'the cost of mutton'.

'It' is used as a neuter in personal reference. The speaker was talking about the bossiness of the Brahmins in the past, but in the present utterance the newcomer inserts the new topic, 'the cost of mutton' as an insertion sequence. After the 2nd utterance of Rajam Iyer, the newcomer inserts the new topic in the next utterance.

In the 5th utterance, the newcomer tries to establish the fact that it is only due to hypocritical Brahmins eating meat surreptitiously that the price of meat has gone up out of all proportion. It is because of Brahmins eating meat, that poor people like him had to pay double the price.

In the 4th and 5th utterances, there is ellipsis of the idea in the 3rd utterance about the doubling of the cost of mutton. In this sequence we can observe the Yes / No ellipsis. There is a question / answer sequence between the two speakers. In the 5th utterance 'they' refer back to Brahmins, and 'it' anaphorically refers to 'meat'. 'Because' shows the reason, i.e. the Brahmins buy meat secretly for high prices, the connective 'and' is used as conjunction to constitute a cohesive bond between the two clauses.

The conversation here between Rajam Iyer and the newcomer is a very good example of language. Here the newcomer advances arguments against Brahmins which any Non-Brahmin would have done during the Dravidian movements in Tamilnadu. These arguments are not personal arguments. They are commonly heard in the society of the day. This conversation reveals how the social stereotypes affect the conversation. In this conversation in the sequence 1st - 5th utterances, when the newcomer is mocking Rajam Iyer, he answers philosophically 'whose master is who'? And the newcomer shifts the topic to the cost of mutton going up out of all proportion. Here we can see topic shift in conversational structure.

### Conversation III

Apparently enjoying himself, the newcomer continues to say that he has seen Pukkah Brahmins carrying fish under their arms wrapped up in a towel. They will answer that it is a plantain if anybody asks. This is the context of the 3rd conversation.

1. Newcomer : Hey Brahmin, what did you have for your meal this morning?
2. Rajam Iyer : "Who? I?", "Why do you want to know?"
3. Newcomer : Look sirs, why is he afraid to tell us what he ate this morning? Mayn't a man ask another what he had for his morning meal?
4. Rajam Iyer : Oh, by all means. I had rice, ghee, curds, brinjal soup, fried beans."
5. Newcomer : Oh, is that all?
6. Rajam Iyer : Yes.
7. Newcomer : Is that all?
8. Rajam Iyer : Yes, how many times do you want me to repeat it?
9. Newcomer : No offence, no offence.
10. Rajam Iyer : Do you mean to say I am lying?



11. Newcomer : Yes.

In 1- 9 utterances, Rajam Iyer goes calm in the face of insulting accusations recalling an age old proverb 'If you threw a stone into a gutter, it would only spurt filth in your face', and the newcomer sharpens his attack and takes it to intolerable levels. This is what any man does when the other side remains calm in consonance with derived wisdom. Here we have a glimpse into psychology as to what an aggressive person does when a sensible man remains silent for reasons of decency.

In the 1st utterance, 'you' and 'yours' anaphorically refer back to 'Brahmin', and 'this' works as a near demonstrative reference. 'Meal' is referred forward (in the following text) cataphorically as rice, ghee, curds, brinjal soup, fried beans. In the 3rd utterance 'sirs' refers to the passengers.

In the 5th utterance the newcomer disbelievingly asks if that was the only meal to

which question, Rajam Iyer replies 'yes'. This is a yes/no ellipsis (the whole clause) sequence. The sequence in the 5th and the 6th utterances is the same sequence in the 7th and the 8th utterances, which means, it is a repetition. And we can observe the Yes / No ellipsis (a whole clause) as a clausal ellipsis, in a question / answer sequence.

In the 9th utterance, the phrase 'no offence, no offence' is used as same word reiteration in lexical cohesion. In the 10th and the 11th utterances, when Rajam Iyer asks "Do you mean to say I am lying?" the newcomer unhesitatingly replies 'Yes'. In these utterances 'you' has a second person personal reference and 'I' has a first personal reference. 'You' refers back to newcomer as an anaphoric reference while 'I am' refers to Rajam Iyer. This sequence represents clausal ellipsis where we use yes/no question answer sequence.

#### Conversation IV

The newcomer accuses Iyer of lying about what he asked for meal saying that he had omitted fish from the list. The argumentative conversation which started with a series of growls in a railway compartment has now changed to talk of culinary excellences which, according to the newcomer, any Brahmin has to learn from a Non-Brahmin home for preparing excellent soup with fish.

1. Newcomer: Hundreds of Brahmins have smacked their lips over the dhal soup prepared in my house. I am a leper if there is a lie in anything I say.
2. Rajam Iyer : You are, you are a rabid leper.
3. Newcomer : Whom do you call a leper!
4. Rajam Iyer : You!
5. Newcomer : I? You call me a leper?
6. Rajam Iyer : No. I call you a rabid leper.
7. Newcomer : You call me rabid? "Me".
8. Rajam Iyer : You are a filthy brute. You must be handed over to the police.
9. Newcomer : Bah! As if I didn't know what these police were.
10. Rajam Iyer : Yes.
11. Rajam Iyer: You will see more of them yet in your miserable life, if you don't get beaten to death like the street mongrel you are'.

In the 1st utterance, the newcomer to substantiate his charge, cooks up a story against Rajam Iyer and asks him to take lessons from his wife in preparing fish soup which is as good as dhal soup. He further claims, to Rajam Iyer's utter annoyance, that hundreds of Brahmins have smacked their lips over the dhal soup prepared in his house.

In the 1st utterance, the demonstrative reference 'their' anaphorically refers back to 'hundreds of Brahmins'. 'I', 'my' has a personal reference. Here 'my', 'I' refer to the newcomer. 'There' is used as a far demonstrative reference and also anaphorically refers back to the sentence 'hundreds of Brahmins have smacked their lips over the dhal soup prepared in his house'.

In the 2nd utterance, Rajam Iyer loses his temper altogether, he goes off balance and uses very harsh language against the newcomer saying he was a rabid leper. It was the last straw on the camel's back. Educated or uneducated, Brahman or Non-Brahman, whoever it is, when drawn into nasty situations, starts using abusive language.

In the 1st utterance, the newcomer swears to gain credibility for his absurd statements. The newcomer says "I am a leper if there is a lie in anything I say". The idea of 'leper' is taken up by Iyer and hurled back, in the 2nd utterance: "you are, you are a rabid leper", says Rajam Iyer grinding his teeth. This can be seen as a repetition in the same utterance as a lexical cohesion.

In the 3rd utterance we have a question uttered as an exclamation which indicates that the





newcomer is outraged at being called a leper. In utterance 5, he again asks furiously “you call me a leper?” Iyer answers in the 6th utterance, “No, I call you a rabid leper”. The newcomer repeats the word ‘rabid’ in utterance 7 “you call me rabid” with emphasis on ‘me’. On the surface of it, these utterances appear to be examples of the strategies of asking for repetition and asking for clarification. But in the context of an ongoing verbal duel, we have to consider them as spontaneous repetition of previous utterances said in a menacing manner.

Utterance 8 sees a shift from the idea of ‘rabid leper’ to that of ‘filthy brute’ as the newcomer is referred to by Iyer, and that he deserved to be handed over to the police.

#### Conversation V

The altercation between Iyer and the newcomer in the third class train compartment soon takes on the nature of verbal abuse and name-calling.

1. Newcomer : What do you say?      What do you say, you vile humbug?
2. Rajam Iyer : Shut up.
3. Newcomer : You shut up.
4. Rajam Iyer : Do you know to whom you are talking?
5. Newcomer : What do I care who the son of a mongrel is?
6. Rajam Iyer : I will thrash you with my slippers.
7. Newcomer : I will pulp you down with an old rotten sandal.
8. Rajam Iyer : I will kick you.
9. Newcomer : Will you? Come on, let us see.

In the 1st utterance the newcomer shouts menacingly, ‘what do you say?’ twice calling Iyer ‘a vile humbug’. In the 2nd and 3rd utterances, there is an exchange of ‘shut up’ which is used as reiteration. In the 4th utterance, Iyer pompously says, ‘Do you know to whom you are talking?’ which is not really a question. ‘Whom’ cataphorically refers forward to ‘the son of mongrel’. In the 5th utterance wherein the newcomer retorts, “What do I care who the son of a mongrel is?” The word ‘street mongrel’ used by Iyer to refer to the newcomer is repeated by the latter to refer to the former.

In the 6th utterance, Rajam Iyer too uses filthy language, “I will thrash you with my slippers”. In turn, in the 7th utterance, the newcomer retorts, “I will pulp you down with an old rotten sandal”. A situation has risen where there is no knowing where and how things would end up between Rajam Iyer and the newcomer.

“I will kick you” said Rajam Iyer.

1. Newcomer : Why do you stand as if your mouth was stopped with mud?
2. Rajam Iyer : Shut up.
3. Newcomer : Your honour said that you would kick me.
4. Rajam Iyer : Won’t I kick you?
5. Newcomer : Try.
6. Rajam Iyer : No, I will do something worse.

Interestingly, contrary to his earlier tendency for repetition, the newcomer now responds to the idea of the ‘police’ and not to being called a ‘filthy brute’.

In the 8<sup>th</sup> -10<sup>th</sup> utterances, Rajam Iyer loses his composure and rants against the newcomer calling him ‘a rabid leper’, ‘a filthy brute’ ‘street mongrel’, ‘beaten to death’, ‘foul mouth’ and one who deserves to be in prison. In the 11th utterance, Rajam Iyer even calls him a street mongrel with a foul mouth. The argument between the two soon ends up in abuse and name-calling. Each behaves and shouts menacingly at the other.

“Will you?” howled the newcomer.

“Come on let us see”.

At this point in the quarrel, we can see the similarity of abusive language of both the characters. The abuse now acquires a physical nature with words like ‘thrash’, ‘pulp you down’, and ‘kick you’.

The context for the next conversation is when both the participants rose to their feet to kick each other. As they stand facing each other on the floor of the compartment, Iyer is seized by a sense of inferiority because the newcomer was taller than him.

#### Conversation VI

In this conversation, the newcomer taunts Iyer that instead of kicking him, he is standing as if his mouth is stopped by mud but Iyer only replies ‘Shut up’. Out of the corner of his eye he noted that the other passengers were waiting eagerly to see how the issue would be settled and were not in the least disposed to intervene.



7. Newcomer : Do it.  
 8. Rajam Iyer : Wait a minute, I think I had better give you a chance.  
 9. Newcomer : What chance?  
 10. Rajam Iyer : It would be unfair if I did it without giving you a chance.  
 11. Newcomer : Did what?  
 12. Rajam Iyer : You stand there and it will be over in a fraction of second.  
 13. Newcomer : Fraction of second? What will you do?  
 14. Rajam Iyer : Oh nothing very complicated, nothing very complicated.  
 15. Newcomer : What do you say?  
 16. Rajam Iyer : And it will all be over before you say 'Sri Rama'.  
 17. Newcomer : I don't believe it.  
 18. Rajam Iyer : Well and good. Don't believe it, "I never do it except under extreme provocation.  
 19. Newcomer: Do you think I am an infant?  
 20. Rajam Iyer : I implore you, my man, not to believe me. Have you heard of a thing called jujitsu? Well, this is a simple trick in jujitsu perhaps known to half a dozen persons in the whole of South India.

We can see that Iyer is having second thoughts about getting physical since he feels overpowered by the newcomer. The newcomer mockingly reminds him that he was going to kick him. In a blustering manner Iyer asks 'Won't I kick you?' to which the newcomer replies "Try". On the point of hitting him, Iyer stops and changes his strategy. It is clear that he is trying to unsettle his physically stronger opponent. Using the element of surprise as a weapon, Iyer hints at causing something untoward happening to the newcomer. He uses words like 'give you a chance', 'over in a fraction of a second', 'nothing complicated' etc. His tactics seem to be paying off since his opponent is reduced to only repeating his words.

Rajam Iyer's use of the term 'Jujitsu' was something of Greek and Latin for the newcomer but at the same time he was driven into submission by Rajam Iyer's description of a man who is subjected to 'Jujitsu'. The newcomer appears to have been subdued. Perhaps unable to imagine his face disfigured by the trick Jujitsu, but at the same time reluctant to surrender, he reminds Iyer that he said he would kick him. Iyer asks him a rhetorical question "isn't this worse?" (i.e. worse than kicking) involving ellipsis.

In 8<sup>th</sup> -10<sup>th</sup> utterances, 'chance, is used as 'same word'. In 12<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> utterances 'fraction of second' and 'nothing very complicated' are used as same word in reiteration.

The story ends with the newcomer getting down at Jalarpet, the next station even as Iyer was thinking of leaving the compartment himself. Iyer asks sarcastically whether he should keep the seat for him but the newcomer replies that Jalarpet was his destination.

#### Findings:

In the conversations presented above, the conversational turns take place one after another.

Speakers wait till the other has finished talking before they answer or contribute to the conversation. In casual conversations there may not be proper adjacency pairs, especially in a quarrel. In the story "Fellow-Feeling" we frequently come across conversations in which the speakers use monosyllabic or disyllabic words. Generally speaking, when a speaker is subject to uncontrollable emotion, he often speaks in monosyllables or disyllables. The emotion may relate either to job or anger or abuse or appreciation. Most strategies belong to this category. Rajam Iyer and the newcomer had a brush with each other in the railway compartment. There are serious verbal attacks. Rajam Iyer calls him 'Leper', 'Rabid Leper' for that matter, and again calls him 'a brute'. He goes out of control and orders him to 'Shut Up'. When Rajam Iyer appears to be ready to kick him, the newcomer challenges him to 'try'. We find such shorter expressions like 'Do it', 'Do go', 'Stand still' etc. These expressions, though short, are very sharp and pointed.

In conversations, lexical cohesion plays a vital role. Reiteration is one form of the cohesion which can be observed in these dialogues. The address 'O Holy Brahmin? O Brahmin, Brahmin', and 'Is that all? Is that all?' are examples of repetition contributing to cohesion. In the 5th conversation, 7th – 9th utterances, 'Leper... rabid leper...filthy brute' are used as superordinate reiteration. 'Trash, pulp, slippers, rotten sandal, kick' are words used as near synonyms of abusive language.

In this short story, the lexical cohesion is used in three ways. They are same word, synonym or near synonym, and superordinate. Cohesion is used to refer backward (anaphorically), and forward (cataphorically) to make the text cohere.



Conjunctions are used to connect the text as 'and', 'but', 'because'. Elliptical reference is also used.

**Conclusion:**

The analysis reveals how the language of the characters/participants is influenced by the social context, the social roles, age, status or power, and social attitudes at a given time.

The conversations in this story provide us a peep into the temperaments of the two characters. Rajam Iyer is educated, accustomed to courteous behavior and gets impatient when courtesy and decency are flouted. As against it he has a bit of Brahminic ego and pride which surface in his talk

with the newcomer. He is no doubt a conservative but he wants to make a virtue of his conservatism. Otherwise there is no point in exhibiting his sandhyavandanam book. Rajam Iyer is no model of a real Brahmin. He is wily and a trickster, who with the use of an uncanny term like 'Jujitsu', brings the newcomer almost down to his knees. As mentioned earlier, the newcomer is a bully with meek people and when confronted by Iyer, turns his ire at the Brahmin identity. The newcomer with his rugged shape and talk tries for a showdown with Rajam Iyer. The conversation and the language these two characters use is in keeping with their social roles and background.

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