



From Small Talk to Core Topics: Discourse Markers and Topic Transition in Facebook and X Posts

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-04-07 Revised: 2026-05-19 Accepted: 2026-09-20 Keywords: <i>Small Talk; Discourse Markers; Topic Transition; Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA); Asynchronous Communication; Digital Discourse</i> DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i2.11712 Corresponding Author: Muhammad Dzaky Naufal dzakyn20@gmail.com Ilmu Budaya dan Komunikasi, Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto, Banyumas, Jawa Tengah	<i>This exploratory, micro-analytic study examines how speakers move from small talk to substantive topics within single, stand-alone posts on Facebook and X (formerly Twitter). Discourse markers and small talk are well-researched in spoken interaction, but their transitional functions in asynchronous digital posts remain underexplored. Using Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) together with selected Conversation Analysis concepts adapted for single-post data, the study analyzes a small purposive sample of four public posts, two from Facebook and two from X, collected between January and March 2026, each selected for exhibiting a clear shift from relational to informational content. Each post is examined across three structural stages: relational opening, transitional device, and core topic. All four posts display this organization, though the transitional strategies range from elaborate, multi-level openings to single-word compressions; one post accomplishes the shift without any explicit discourse marker, relying instead on footing shifts and graphic elements such as punctuation, emoji, and capitalization. These findings suggest that, within this small dataset, digital posts can draw on textual and graphic resources as well as lexical markers to accomplish topic transition, offering a preliminary, exploratory account of how CMDA and selected CA concepts can describe intra-post topic organization.</i>

1. Introduction

Daily conversations rarely open with the substantial message: before asking a question, raising a problem, or stating an opinion, people typically begin with something of lesser importance—a greeting, an acknowledgment, a small comment—that organizes the interaction and sustains social ties. This is small talk: talk that precedes the actual information and establishes a social tie rather than exchanging information (Coupland, 2000). Malinowski (1923) first argued that language often serves to build connections rather than convey meaning. Jakobson (1960) similarly held that language's relational function is a prerequisite for establishing a channel of communication — both recognizing that communicative interaction starts from social action, not from the message itself.

This phenomenon is especially consequential in digital communication, where writing-based, asynchronous exchanges on sites such as Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) occur across vast networks of strangers and acquaintances. The traditional resources of face-to-face management—facial expression, vocal tone, body language, eye contact—are not directly available; platforms may offer partial substitutes such as images, GIFs, video, voice notes, or reaction icons, but in the text-only, stand-alone posts examined here these substitutes are largely unavailable, so participants rely on text and typography alone to demonstrate engagement and communicative intent (Herring, 2019; Walther, 1996).

One under-researched dimension of this problem concerns the shift from small talk to more substantial topics within a single online posting: users often open with greetings or other relational expressions before moving to the real reason for posting—a query, an offer, a news item. The main resources for accomplishing this shift are discourse markers such as *btw*, *anyway*, *so*, and *speaking of which*, which mark boundaries between discourse phases and signal shifts in communicative intent (Fraser, 1999; Schiffrin, 1987); well studied in spoken discourse, their role in effecting this shift within single digital posts remains unstudied.

This gap deserves analysis from CA concepts, though these require careful adaptation. In canonical CA, a pre-sequence is a preparatory move answered by a co-participant's response before the main action, and a TRP marks a point of possible speaker transition within an ongoing turn-taking system (Schegloff, 2007; Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974); a stand-alone post offers neither, so applying these terms here extends their original scope rather than applying them directly. Accordingly, the present study treats a post's relational opening as functionally analogous to a pre-sequence (alternately, a pre-main-action segment), and the point where a post shifts from relational to informational content as analogous to a TRP (alternately, a topic-boundary point or intra-post transition point) — realized not through falling intonation or speaker change, as in spoken TRPs, but through discourse markers, paragraph breaks, or terminal punctuation patterns.

This transition also involves a shift in footing—the alignment a participant

takes up toward the interaction (Goffman, 1981): a poster moving from greeting to informational message shifts footing from social participant to information provider, which helps explain why certain markers appear where they do within a post.

Previous work on the subject matter has generated considerable knowledge. Research within CMDA has shown how typographic, graphic, and linguistic means contribute to meaning-making in digital discourse (Herring, 2019; Meredith et al., 2021), and conversation-analytic research has examined how sequential organization is adapted across digital platforms, including mobile messaging and social media (Jucker, 2021; Koivisto, Vepsäläinen, & Virtanen, 2023). Discourse markers serve a range of functions in both oral and written discourse (Fraser, 1999; Schiffrin, 1987), and small talk has been linked to relationship maintenance (Coupland, 2000; Tagg, 2015), with recent work specifying the speech-act mechanisms of phatic interaction (House & Kádár, 2022). Work on stand-alone social media posts specifically remains sparse: analyzing 484 Facebook status updates, Sarjanoja, Isomursu, and Häkkinen (2013) show that ostensibly trivial, small-talk-like posts nonetheless perform real relationship-maintenance work, though without examining how such openings transition into substantive topics within the same post — a combination largely absent from prior work, which has concentrated on mobile messaging and other quasi-synchronous formats.

Where an explicit marker is absent, transition may instead rest on textual strategies—typography, punctuation, syntactic fragmentation, emoji—which CMDA treats as potentially meaningful semiotic resources rather than stylistic noise (Herring, 2007; 2019).

Bringing together CMDA, the CA concepts introduced above, and footing, the paper explores how speakers structure this move within one post on Facebook and X. In view of the above, the research questions that follow are worth consideration:

RQ1: Which discourse markers and/or what transitional devices are used for making the switch from small talk to core topics in Facebook and X posts?

RQ2: What textual/typographic devices do speakers use to facilitate such transition in situations of lacking physical presence?

RQ3: How do speakers apply underlying organizational strategies to successfully accomplish the topic switch in individual social media posts?

The paper argues that this transition is neither coincidental nor loosely conventional, but follows a patterned, recurrent design drawing on linguistic and typographical resources suited to communication between one and many; whether this reflects conscious planning or a habitual convention of digital writing is not something the present data can establish. Analyzing this accomplishment can illuminate how meaning is organized in a sphere of social interaction now central to everyday life.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive approach to analyze naturally

occurring digital texts, utilizing Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) (Herring, 2007; 2019) as the primary methodological framework to examine the interplay of linguistic, graphical, and typographical features in asynchronous communication. In addition to the CMDA framework, three concepts from Conversation Analysis are integrated: pre-sequence, explaining what actions are taken to prepare co-participants before raising the main point; Transition Relevance Place, describing the position in a sequence where it is appropriate to make a transition into another phase of interaction (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974); and footing, describing the attitude of the speaker towards the participants of interaction, reflected in an utterance (Goffman, 1981). Since the data consist solely of isolated posts in asynchronous communication rather than dialogic exchanges, the concepts from CA were adapted to analyze single-turn digital utterances.

Data selection involved a contextual analysis of public posts on Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) within the time frame of January-March 2026. Candidate posts were located through manual browsing of public Facebook groups and open X timelines, supplemented by topical keyword searches (e.g., terms related to everyday requests for help or advice); no hashtag search was used, and the researchers had no prior membership in or relationship with the specific groups or accounts from which the posts were drawn, beyond being able to view them as members of the general public. A post was treated as public if it was visible without requiring group membership, a follow, or any other access permission, and if it remained visible at the time of writing; because some public posts may nonetheless remain searchable by their original wording even after usernames are removed, the excerpts reproduced in this article were checked against this risk, and posts judged to be easily re-identifiable through a direct text search were excluded from the final selection rather than merely paraphrased, so that all four posts retained here are reported close to verbatim. Rather than merely extracting textual data, the contextual environment of these platforms—specifically their affordances for public, asynchronous communication—was examined to ensure the posts were suitable for the study's framework. These two mediums were selected because their distinct yet comparable structural patterns offer preliminary insights into how users navigate social interaction without physical co-presence. Finally, to ethically isolate the communicative context from real-world identities, all usernames and personal identification information were stripped away prior to analysis, adhering to the ethical guidelines of internet-based research (Markham & Buchanan, 2012).

Purposive sampling was employed to select four posts, two from Facebook and two from X. Given the very small size of this sample, the study is best understood as an exploratory, pilot-scale analysis rather than as a basis for generalizable claims about either platform: within the CMDA and CA traditions, small, carefully selected samples of this kind are more commonly used to establish

the plausibility and analytical richness of a pattern than to demonstrate that the pattern is representative of a wider population (Herring, 2019; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Meredith, 2019; Meredith & Stokoe, 2014). Accordingly, no claim of platform representativeness is made. The inclusion criteria applied were: (1) small talk used as an introductory phase of communication; (2) use of a discourse marker or an alternative resource performing an equivalent function; and (3) a clear transition to the core topic within the same post. Because the three-phase structure reported in the Results section was itself built into these selection criteria, its recurrence across the four posts should be read as a demonstration that posts meeting the criteria display a richly describable internal organization, rather than as independent evidence that a three-phase structure is typical of Facebook and X posts more generally; posts that did not exhibit such a transition were, by definition, excluded before analysis began. To help guard against purely idiosyncratic interpretation, the segmentation of each post into phases and the analytic labels applied to them were discussed iteratively between the two authors until agreement was reached; no formal second-coder reliability statistic was calculated, a limitation discussed further in the Discussion.

The analysis consisted of four steps. In the first step, each post was divided into its three main components: small talk phase, transitional phase, and topic phase. The second step involved the examination of the small talk phase for identification of its interactional purpose using the concepts of pre-sequence and footing. The third step involved the evaluation of the transitional phase at the transition relevance place. This was done to see how it controlled the inter-phase boundaries in reference to Fraser (1999) and Herring (2019). The fourth step involved the comparison of the posts for any patterns that emerged from this comparison. Iterative analysis was carried out on all four posts, and some observations noted as well (Herring, 2019; Meredith, 2019).

3. Results

This section presents the findings from the qualitative analysis of four selected posts from Facebook and X, structurally organized around the three components identified in each post: the relational opening (small talk phase), the transitional device at the Transition Relevance Place (TRP), and the core informational topic. While all four posts share this three-phase structure, users employ markedly different linguistic, textual, and typographic strategies—ranging from elaborate relational grounding to urgent typographic compression—to accomplish the topic shift without face-to-face cues. Throughout the analysis below, three levels of claim are kept analytically distinct: the observed textual or typographic form, the interactional function inferred for that form, and the broader theoretical interpretation offered on that basis; readers should treat the latter two as increasingly interpretive rather than as direct readings of the text. Table 1 summarizes the four data points before the detailed phase-by-phase analysis.

Table 1. Comparative overview of the four data points

Data	Platform	Relational Opening	Transitional Resource	Core Topic	Footling Shift
Data 1	Facebook	Three-layer pre-sequence: greeting + emoji, self-presentation, engagement question	“anyway”	Hedged request for digital-coupon tips	Vulnerable community member
Data 2	X	“Hi guys!” (two-word greeting)	“Important!” + “so” (double signal)	Unhedged, urgent request for advice	Urgent collective appeal
Data 3	X	“hi” (single word)	“so” (near-simultaneous)	Unhedged, direct question	In-group peer
Data 4	Facebook	“Hey guys.” (address term)	None explicit; ambiguous full stop + affect	Unhedged, direct statement of problem	Casual address → frustrated complainant
Total	2 Facebook, 2 X	— (not summable; each opening is qualitatively distinct)	3 explicit marker, 1 none	1 hedged, 3 unhedged	3 4 distinct (not summable)

1. Elaborate Pre-sequence Transition

In this type of transition, the shift from small talk to the core topic is highly structural and deliberately prolonged, as users compensate for the absence of face-to-face cues by constructing an extensive relational foundation before introducing their main agenda. The first data point illustrating this pattern was extracted from a public Facebook group dedicated to couponing. User A posted the following:

'Hi everyone 😊. I'm not new to couponing but I am new to digital coupons. Years ago I used The Grocery Game and did quite well. Do y'all remember that? Anyway, just curious if y'all have any tips for a digital newbie like me. Thanks'

The post's structural transition is analyzed below through its three constituent phases:

Phase 1: Small Talk

This post's defining feature is the interactional labor invested before the actual request: an intricate pre-sequence (Schegloff, 2007) built on three levels — (1) a greeting ("Hi everyone") with a smiling emoji supplying graphic warmth in place of vocal tone; (2) self-presentation ("I'm not new to couponing but I am new to digital coupons") establishing credibility while signaling humility; and (3) an engagement question ("Do y'all remember that?") inviting the audience into a shared interactive space. Through these layers, the speaker constructs a footing (Goffman, 1981) as a relatable, vulnerable community member rather than a demanding outsider, softening the ground for the request that follows.

Phase 2: Transitional Device

It is only after this elaborate social foundation is laid that the discourse marker *anyway* is deployed. In this context, *anyway* serves as a definitive Transition Relevance Place (TRP) where the social stage is completed (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974; Fraser, 1999). Lacking vocal intonation to signal a change in topic, the speaker uses *anyway* as a sharp, visual boundary marker (Herring, 2019) that closes the extended relational phase and pivots the text toward its informational core.

Phase 3: Core Topic

The core issue—a request for digital couponing tips—follows immediately, still framed to preserve the polite footing established earlier: "just curious" and "if y'all have any tips" soften it into an indirect inquiry, while "y'all" sustains the inclusive footing from Phase 1. The closing "Thanks!" mirrors the opening "Hi everyone", framing the request within a coherent, polite social envelope (Meredith, 2019).

2. Urgency-driven Double Transitional Signal

Unlike the elaborate pre-sequence in Data 1, this type of transition compresses the relational opening to its barest minimum while compensating with heightened urgency operating simultaneously on typographic and linguistic levels, distributed across capitalization, punctuation, and an explicit discourse marker acting in tandem. The second data point illustrating this pattern was extracted from a discussion on X, written by User B:

'Hi guys! Important! So my friend was hospitalized, she does not have any family or too many friends. She's usually very responsive but she hasn't said anything in about 18hrs. They don't allow visits but idk if anyone else is seeing her. Should I go down & check if she's ok?'

The post's structural transition is analyzed below through its three constituent phases:

Phase 1: Small Talk

Though the post opens with only two words, "Hi guys!," it still fulfills the basic pre-sequence function of initiating social engagement before the topic is broached (Schegloff, 2007) — reduced here, unlike Data 1's multi-layered opening, to a single generic address term. The plural "guys" performs a footing function (Goffman, 1981), casting the post as an appeal to the group's collective membership rather than to any one individual; this compression need not indicate reduced social investment so much as the urgency of what follows, though that remains an interpretive inference rather than something the text confirms directly.

Phase 2: Transitional Device

The urgency marker "Important!" serves as the first signal of a shift away from casual address, immediately recalibrating the footing of the post (Goffman, 1981). Working together, "Important!" and the discourse marker *so* create a double transitional signifier—one typographic, one linguistic. Capitalizing "Important!" follows standard orthography rather than being a deliberate choice; the genuinely marked move is syntactic: the speaker isolates "Important!" as a free-standing one-word sentence rather than embedding it as a modifier (e.g., "this is important"), a fragmentation that substitutes for the vocal stress unavailable in text-based communication (Herring, 2019). The discourse marker *so* then primes recipients for the information that follows (Fraser, 1999), together producing a sharper, more emphatic Transition Relevance Place than the one observed in Data 1.

Phase 3: Core Topic

The core topic is a narrative recounting a friend's hospitalization and her uncharacteristic silence over eighteen hours, culminating in a direct request for advice: "Should I go down & check if she's ok?" Unlike the hedged request in Data 1, this request carries no equivalent of "just curious" to lessen its imposition. The absence of hedging is itself meaningful: the gravity of the situation overrides conventional politeness work, indicating that the urgent footing established earlier is sustained through to the post's conclusion (Meredith, 2019).

3. Compressed Three-phase Structure

Representing the opposite extreme from the patterns above, this type of transition demonstrates maximal structural economy by compressing all three phases—small talk, transition, and topic—into a single, unbroken sentence, leaving virtually no interval between the relational opening and the substantive request. The third data point illustrating this compressed pattern was sourced from an openly available discussion on X by user C.

'hi so does anyone know how to get rid of fabric softener stains on white clothes'

The post's structural transition is analyzed below through its three constituent phases:

Phase 1: Small Talk

The single word “hi” constitutes the entirety of the relational opening, representing the pre-sequence in its most radically minimal form (Schegloff, 2007). While omitting an elaborated greeting could read as abrupt in face-to-face interaction, within the fast-paced environment of X this brevity operates as a recognized communicative norm. The unceremonious, lowercase greeting establishes a footing of in-group communal membership (Goffman, 1981): the speaker positions themselves as an already-established participant, bypassing the social groundwork observed in Data 1.

Phase 2: Transitional Device

The discourse marker *so* follows immediately, producing a Transition Relevance Place that occurs almost simultaneously with the onset of the relational phase itself (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974; Fraser, 1999). Unlike *anyway* in Data 1, which closes an extended social phase, *so* here performs its boundary-marking function with virtually no relational material to close, underscoring how the same category of discourse marker can be stretched to very different structural effect depending on the length of the phase that precedes it. In this maximally compressed context, *so* is sufficient on its own precisely because the minimal relational opening requires no elaborate closure—the marker's transitional function is activated by the structural position it occupies rather than by the weight of the social groundwork it has to seal.

Phase 3: Core Topic

The core topic is contained in the clause “does anyone know how to get rid of fabric softener stains on white clothes,” where the surrounding frame does anyone know how to... packages the content as an information-seeking question rather than a direct command, a minimal politeness strategy achieved through interrogative syntax alone, without further hedges or mitigation. This direct, informative tone is at least consistent with a reading in which the speaker treats the community primarily as a practical resource, though on the basis of one short post alone this cannot be concluded with confidence (Herring, 2019; Meredith, 2019).

4. Implicit Transition through Affective Intensity

Diverging from the three preceding patterns, this final post is accomplished entirely without an explicit discourse marker; the boundary between the relational and informational phases appears instead to be signaled through typographic punctuation and a rising emotional register. Since only this one post lacks an explicit marker, it is presented here as an illustrative possibility rather than evidence of a robust or generalizable pattern. The fourth data point was taken from a public gaming group on Facebook, and reads as follows:

‘Hey guys. I got logged out of my 360 and for the life of me I can get logged into my account on it. Do you guys know how I can log back into my account on it? I've tried somethings I found online and I can't get

anything to work so far. Stupid frustrating that they made it this ridiculous.'

The post's structural transition is analyzed below through its three constituent phases:

Phase 1: Small Talk

The speaker opens with "Hey guys"—an informal address term that, like the opening in Data 3, precedes the topic with minimal elaboration (Schegloff, 2007). From Goffman's (1981) perspective, this casual form of address constructs a footing of in-group membership appropriate to the informal register of a gaming forum, positioning the speaker as a familiar rather than unfamiliar presence. Unlike Data 3, however, where an explicit discourse marker (so) bridges the greeting and the request, here the small-talk phase ends without any comparable lexical bridge—the very next sentence moves directly into the topic, leaving the work of signaling that shift entirely to the typographic and affective resources discussed below.

Phase 2: Transitional Device

Unlike the preceding three data points, no explicit discourse marker is deployed here. The clearest candidate boundary signal is typographic: the full stop following "Hey guys" produces a visual pause that could correspond to a prosodic break at a phase transition (Herring, 2019), though it may equally be ordinary sentence punctuation. The escalating emotional intensity culminating in "Stupid frustrating that they made it this ridiculous" does signal a footing shift (Goffman, 1981) from casual address to complaint, but arrives at the very end of the post, after the core topic is already introduced — so it likely intensifies the complaint retrospectively rather than marking the boundary itself, leaving the full stop the more direct, if still ambiguous, candidate for the transition point.

Phase 3: Core Topic

The core topic concerns a technical problem—being unable to log back into a gaming account—framed as a direct statement of difficulty rather than a hedged request, unlike the heavily mitigated request in Data 1. The frustration expressed throughout ("Stupid frustrating...") sustains the topic's urgency: by maintaining this affective footing, the speaker shifts the interactional focus from a polite request to a shared grievance against an external system (Goffman, 1981). This escalation, occurring mainly after rather than at the boundary itself, appears to reinforce rather than establish the shift from casual address to complaint; within a gaming forum's own norms, such directness may not read as impolite, though this remains an interpretive reading rather than something confirmed by audience response (Herring, 2019; Meredith, 2019).

Taken together, the four data points reveal a clear continuum in how the three-phase structure is realized. Data 1 constructs the most elaborate relational opening—three layers of greeting, self-positioning, and engagement question—before "anyway" pivots to a softened, mitigated request. Data 2 is intermediate: a

two-word greeting followed by a doubly marked transition (“Important!” plus “so”) opening onto an unmitigated, urgent request. Data 3 compresses further: a single-word greeting and an almost simultaneous “so” culminate in a direct, hedge-free question. Data 4 sits at the opposite extreme from Data 1: a minimal address term followed by no explicit discourse marker, the transition instead accomplished through punctuation and escalating affective intensity.

Read across the four posts, two broader patterns emerge. First, the dominant resource shifts in emphasis from linguistic elaboration plus an emoji (Data 1), to combined typographic and linguistic emphasis (Data 2), to structural economy (Data 3), to affective intensity plus punctuation (Data 4)—suggesting asynchronous platforms offer multiple, non-mutually-exclusive substitutes for the prosodic and gestural cues unavailable in face-to-face talk. Second, this shift tracks a decline in what is operationalized here as relational investment—the length of the relational opening together with the degree of hedging carried into the request: high in Data 1, low-to-moderate in Data 2, and minimal in Data 3 and Data 4. These patterns are consistent with the idea that the elaborateness of the small-talk phase is calibrated to the social stakes and urgency of the request that follows, though with only four posts this should be treated as a tentative, hypothesis-generating observation rather than an established pattern.

4. Discussion

Below follows an analysis of the three research questions through the interpretation of the results presented in the Results section, taking into account the theoretical foundation of CMDA together with the CA concepts introduced above. It is worth reiterating here that pre-sequence, Transition Relevance Place, and footing are applied throughout this Discussion in an adapted rather than canonical sense: the data consist of single, non-negotiable posts rather than sequential turns, and the interpretive labels used below should be read with that adaptation in mind rather than as a claim that these posts instantiate turn-taking interaction in the classical CA sense. This three-phase pattern is observed in all four posts analyzed, though it should be recalled that the sampling criteria required each selected post to exhibit exactly this kind of transition; the recurrence of the pattern is therefore best read as a demonstration of the plausibility of the CMDA/CA lens applied to posts already chosen for this property, rather than as independent confirmation that the pattern is typical of Facebook and X posts more generally. Given the very small, purposively selected sample, the discussion below is offered as an exploratory account intended to generate hypotheses for further research rather than as a basis for generalizable claims.

1. Discourse Markers and Transitional Resources

With regard to RQ1, the results reveal both consistency and principled variation in the transitional resources deployed at the Transition Relevance Place across the four posts. Three of the four posts employ an explicit discourse marker, consistent

with Fraser's (1999) account of discourse markers as boundary-managing elements: anyway in Data 1 closes the elaborate three-tier relational phase and pivots the footing from solidarity to information-seeking; so in Data 3 marks the briefest possible transition, its boundary-marking function activated by structural position alone given the near-absence of relational material to close. Data 2, however, demonstrates that a single discourse marker is not always the primary transitional resource: so is preceded by the syntactically isolated utterance "Important!", which—through its status as a free-standing one-word sentence reinforced by an exclamation mark—functions not as a discourse marker per se but as a typographic and syntactic device that primes the audience for the urgency of what follows (Herring, 2019). Together, these two resources produce a double transitional signal that is sharper and more emphatic than either resource alone. Data 4 demonstrates that boundary management does not require any explicit discourse marker at all: when affective footing sufficiently signals urgency, the transition is accomplished through emotional escalation and typographic punctuation alone.

2. Textual and Typographic Resources in Asynchronous Posts

Concerning RQ2, the research results indicate that speakers make use of linguistic and typographic resources in quite distinct manners to deal with the transition without the help of the embodied cues associated with face-to-face interaction. Since the lack of prosody and gestures in asynchronous digital communication makes it necessary for speakers to shift the interactional burden of marking phase transitions to other textual and typographic means, there emerge qualitative distinctions in transitional techniques depending on the characteristics of particular posts. Thus, in Data 1, the transition is marked predominantly by linguistic expansion, as the relational phase is formed by several layers of text prior to anyway marking the typographic boundary; a smiling emoji embedded within the opening greeting supplements this linguistic strategy with a graphic marker of warmth. This is the clearest case in the dataset of a genuinely multimodal resource combination; the term should nonetheless be used cautiously here, since three of the four posts (Data 2–4) remain predominantly textual, relying on typography, syntax, and punctuation rather than on distinct semiotic modes such as images or emoji. In Data 2, the transition is achieved through syntactic fragmentation—specifically, the isolation of "Important!" as a free-standing one-word sentence—and the exclamation mark that follows it, both of which substitute for the vocal stress and urgent facial expression unavailable in text-based communication (Herring, 2019); crucially, the capitalization of "Important!" is a product of standard English orthography rather than a deliberate typographic choice, meaning the genuinely marked resource here is syntactic rather than orthographic. Data 3 is focused predominantly on structural efficiency, whereby the transition is achieved through the juxtaposition of a single-word greeting with an immediately following discourse marker, so that the TRP coincides almost simultaneously with

the onset of the relational phase itself. In Data 4, the transition may be accomplished through typographic punctuation and affective intensity, though as noted in the Results, the full stop following "Hey guys" is also plausibly read as ordinary sentence punctuation, and the escalating emotional register—culminating in "Stupid frustrating that they made it this ridiculous"—occurs mostly after, rather than at, the point of transition; both resources are therefore better described as plausible rather than definitive markers of the footing shift from casual address to complaint (Herring, 2019; Goffman, 1981). Alternative, non-transitional explanations are worth keeping in view throughout: punctuation choices, sentence fragmentation, and directness of phrasing can also simply reflect a writer's general style or platform conventions rather than a deliberate boundary-marking strategy, and the analysis above should be read as identifying plausible interactional functions for these forms rather than as establishing writer intent.

3. Sequential Organization of the Three-phase Structure

As far as RQ3 is concerned, results show that the speakers use one type of transitional sequence consisting of three stages irrespective of whether one stage is developed more extensively or compactly compared to other stages. First, speakers use different amounts of time for their relational stage depending on the nature of the particular conversation. For instance, Data 1 consists of three stages of elaborated small talk aimed at creating a positive atmosphere between speakers; Data 2 consists of merely two words used as greetings followed by an urgency marker; Data 3 consists of only one word; while Data 4 includes just an address term. Nevertheless, the structure of all data samples is common and consists of the following stages: a small talk at first to establish the relational foundation; then, a transitional stage (either explicit or implicit depending on using special transition markers or simply boundary management at the Transition Relevance Place); finally, a topic stage containing informational content. This process may be treated as an application of Coupland's (2000) theory of small talk as relational work in Internet posts, though whether this reflects a deliberate strategy on speakers' part or a more habitual pattern of digital writing cannot be determined from text data alone. Viewed through the lens of Conversation Analysis, the three-phase structure is also consistent with Schegloff's (2007) account of pre-sequences as preparatory moves that establish the communicative frame before the main action, bearing in mind that this consistency partly reflects the sampling criteria used to select the posts rather than an independent test of Schegloff's account: in asynchronous digital posts, the pre-sequence and the core topic necessarily co-exist within a single, non-negotiable turn, and the structural sequencing of relational-before-informational is at least preserved across the four data points examined here. Similarly, the variation in footing across the four posts—from vulnerable community member in Data 1, to urgent collective appeal in Data 2, to in-group peer in Data 3, to frustrated complaint-maker in Data 4—illustrates one way Goffman's (1981) concept of footing might extend to single-turn digital utterances

rather than to the extended face-to-face interactions for which it was originally formulated, though a single small dataset cannot establish how far this extension generalizes.

These findings resonate with, and offer a modest extension of, prior conversation-analytic work on digital interaction. Jucker (2021) and Koivisto, Vepsäläinen, and Virtanen (2023) show that basic sequential organization is adapted, rather than simply transplanted, when interaction moves from spoken to digital, quasi-synchronous settings such as mobile messaging; the present analysis suggests a comparable adaptation may occur even in fully asynchronous, single-turn posts, where a functional analogue of sequential organization — the relational-opening-then-topic pattern — persists despite the complete absence of a responding co-participant. Where Meredith and Stokoe (2014) and Meredith (2019) examine how CA concepts such as repair operate in Facebook chat exchanges that retain a turn-by-turn structure, the four posts analyzed here differ in lacking any such exchange altogether, which is consistent with the adapted use of pre-sequence and TRP argued for in the Introduction rather than a straightforward replication of findings from more dialogic digital settings.

Regarding platform affordances, the dataset includes only two posts from each of Facebook and X, which is not sufficient to support claims about systematic differences between the two platforms. The apparent similarities and differences observed across the four posts — for instance, in length or in the use of typographic emphasis — are treated here as properties of these particular posts rather than as platform-level tendencies; a dataset large enough to compare platforms systematically would be needed to test whether platform affordances shape topic-transition strategies in a stable way.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The dataset comprises only four posts, selected through purposive, criterion-driven sampling in which the presence of a three-phase transition was itself an inclusion criterion; the analysis therefore demonstrates that the CMDA/CA framework can describe such posts in detail, rather than establishing how common this structure is among Facebook and X posts generally. The dataset also does not include any reply sequences, so claims about how other participants might respond to or ratify a given transition remain speculative. No interviews were conducted with the original posters, meaning that claims about intentionality, strategy, or communicative awareness are inferences from textual form rather than confirmed accounts of speaker intent. Similarly, no audience-response data (e.g., comments, reactions, engagement metrics) were collected, so the study cannot speak to whether these transitions were interactionally effective for actual readers. These limitations point toward directions for future research, including studies with larger and more systematically sampled datasets, the inclusion of reply sequences, and, where ethically feasible, participant interviews or audience-response data.

With these limitations in mind, the theoretical contribution of this study is

best framed not as a confirmation of CA concepts in a new domain, but as an exploratory demonstration of how CMDA can borrow selected CA concepts to describe intra-post topic organization, while recognizing that single-post structures are not equivalent to turn-by-turn conversation.

5. Conclusion

The study examines the movement from small talk into the core topic of conversation as expressed in a single post on Facebook and X. The examination of four purposively selected posts illustrates a recurring three-stage pattern in the data analyzed: small talk, transition at the Transition Relevance Place, and the main topic, realized differently depending on context. Data 1 exemplifies a sophisticated three-level relational pre-sequence ending with *anyway* that also serves as the beginning of the information pre-sequence.

Data 2 employs a double transitional signal: the syntactically isolated utterance “Important!”—functioning as a typographic and syntactic device through its status as a free-standing one-word sentence—combined with the discourse marker *so*, together producing a sharper and more emphatic transition than either resource alone could accomplish. Data 3 involves using one transitional phrase, *so*, immediately after the minimal small talk marked by the single lowercase word *hi*. In Data 4, no explicit transitional marker is used; a full stop and an escalating emotional register may play a comparable role, though, as discussed above, this reading remains interpretive.

Overall, these patterns are consistent with the process being a patterned, recurrent communicative practice rather than a series of unrelated, chance occurrences, though the present data cannot establish whether this pattern reflects conscious strategy on the part of individual users. Furthermore, the study offers an exploratory demonstration of how CMDA can borrow selected CA concepts—pre-sequence, Transition Relevance Place, and footing—to describe the microstructure of individual digital acts, while recognizing that single-post structures are not equivalent to turn-by-turn conversation.

There are some aspects of the study that have to be noted. First, there are four posts included in the analysis and taken from two platforms, and while sufficient for conducting an in-depth analysis, the sample size is too limited to ensure that the results are generalizable. Secondly, although the dataset is evenly distributed—two posts from Facebook and two from X—this platform balance does not compensate for the limited overall sample size. Future research should therefore include a larger number of examples in order to investigate whether the three-stage approach discussed above is a universal principle or if it differs among various socio-linguistic settings. Moreover, the inclusion of responses could help understand how participants orient themselves towards the change from small talk to discussion of a topic.

6. References

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