6

Conversation Analysis

In his very first transcribed lecture, given in fall 1964, Sacks begins with data from his Ph.D. dissertation on telephone conversations collected at an emergency psychiatric hospital. In the following two extracts, A is a member of staff at the hospital and B can either be somebody calling about themselves or calling about somebody else.

6.1 [*LC*1: 3]
A: Hello
B: Hello

6.2 [*LC*1: 3]
A: This is Mr Smith may I help you
B: Yes, this is Mr Brown

Sacks makes two initial observations about these extracts. First, B seems to tailor his utterance to the format provided by A's first turn. So, in 6.1, we get an exchange of 'hellos' and, in 6.2, an exchange of names. Or, as Sacks puts it, we might say that there is a 'procedural rule' where 'a person who speaks first in a telephone conversation can choose their form of address, and ... thereby choose the form of address the other uses' (*LC*1: 4).

Sacks's second observation is that each part or turn of the exchange occurs as part of a pair (Hello–Hello). Each pair of turns may be called a 'unit' in which the first turn constitutes a 'slot' for the second and sets up an expectation about what this slot may

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properly contain. Given this expectation, A is usually able to extract B's name (as in 6.2) without ever having to ask for it directly. The beauty of this, as Sacks points out, is that it avoids a problem that a direct question might create. For instance, if you ask someone their name, they may properly ask 'Why?', and in this way require that you offer a proper warrant for asking (*LC*1: 4–5). By contrast, providing a slot for a name cannot be made accountable. So to answer a phone with your name has a function in institutions where obtaining callers' names is important (*LC*1: 5–6)

Of course, the fact that something may properly happen once a slot has been created, does not mean that it *will* happen. Take this further example cited by Sacks:

6.3 [*LC*1: 3]
A: This is Mr Smith may I help you
B: I can't hear you.
A: This is Mr <u>Smith</u>.
B: Smith.

Sacks's two procedural rules do not mean that speakers are automatons. What seems to happen in 6.3 is that B's reply 'I can't hear you' means that the slot for the other party to give their name is missed. This does not mean that their name is 'absent' but rather that the place where it might go is closed. As Sacks puts it: 'It is not simply that the caller ignores what they properly ought to do, but something rather more exquisite. That is, they have ways of providing that the place where the return name fits is never opened' (*LC*1: 7).

Sacks returns to the issue of 'place' or conversational 'slot' in his spring 1966 lectures. Slots are places where certain second activities may properly occur after a particular first activity. But how do you demonstrate this? Is 'slot' simply an analyst's category invoked only to explain what the analyst sees? Sacks answers these questions by showing that members themselves routinely attend to the issue of whether a slot is properly used. One good example of this is the way in which all of us are able to recognize the 'absence' of proper uses of slots. For instance, where someone does not return our 'hello' (and they clearly heard it), we have no problem in seeing that something is absent (*LC*1: 308). Indeed, we may properly recount this incident to someone else as an example of a 'snub'.

This example of an 'absent' greeting can be readily seen because returned greetings are part of a category of 'paired objects' which include not only 'greetings' but, for instance, questions-and-answers (*LC*1: 308–9). When the first part of such a paired object has been completed, any pause by the second party is seen as *their* pause, that is, their responsibility. This is because such a first part is hearable as an 'utterance completer' where, once provided, it is the other party's turn to speak and to speak in a way that properly attends to the first part (*LC*1: 311).

Such proper attention means that it will be hearably 'odd' if we reply 'hello' to a recognizable question. However, this does not mean we are bound to act in the expected way, or even that a non-expected reply will always be heard as 'odd' (see my discussion of 'insertion sequences' below).

So far, we have been assuming that there are only two speakers. As Sacks points out, this simplifies matters considerably since two-party conversations usually have the structure A-B-A-B as above. However, it is not the case that multi-party conversations necessarily or even usually take the form A-B-C-A-B-C (*LC*1: 309–10).

This raises the issue of how the next speaker gets to speak at a possible turn-transition point in a situation where there are others who might speak. One option is for the present speaker to choose the next speaker (*LC*1: 527) by, for instance, asking a question with her gaze turned towards a particular person. A second possibility is that using someone's name will be heard by them as involving their possible nomination as next speaker as in the following extract:

6.4 [*LC*1: 665]
Dan: Well, Roger uh
Roger: Hm?
Dan: – introduced a kind of topic when he uh ...

Even though, as it turns out, Roger is not specifically being selected as next speaker (as we see in Dan's use of 'he' to refer to Roger), 'the very use of the name "Roger" seems to involve him in seeing that he has been selected' (*LC*1: 665).

A third possibility is that the next speaker self-selects. However, as Sacks notes, it is a bit more complicated than this. First, the next speaker may only properly speak after an 'utterance completer' (like a question) or at some other recognizable possible turn-transition point (for example, a silence after a topic is possibly

completed). Second, where more than one speaker then talks and, therefore, you get overlapping talk, the apparent rule here is: 'first starter goes' (*LC*1: 527).

However, as Sacks points out, this does *not* mean that the second starter, having allowed the first starter to speak, then gets the next turn as of right. Given that the present speaker can choose the next speaker, there is no reason why the late starter will necessarily get to speak at the next available turn-transition point (*LC*1: 527).

All this means that people in a multi-party conversation who want to speak next have to listen out for when a turn is completed in order to try to get the next turn for themselves. Moreover, the possibility that you may be named by the present speaker means that even those with nothing to say have to listen at all times in case they don't respond properly (or at all).

In this way, Sacks invites us to see that utterances which are apparently meaningless, like Roger's 'Hm?' (6.4), or obvious (like the exchange of 'hellos' in 6.1), can be seen as 'social objects' (*LC*1: 10). Such objects get used to construct a range of activities which include, as here, recognizing that it is your turn to speak and/or to do a greeting. In this respect, as Sacks puts it in his earliest transcribed lecture: 'we can go about beginning to collect the alternative methods that persons use in going about doing whatever they have to do' (*LC*1: 11).

However, as I pointed out in chapter 4, we should not take Sacks's use of terms like 'methods' (or, elsewhere, 'apparatus') to imply that he is assuming that conversation follows some 'rational' plan. First, like Garfinkel, Sacks is not referring to conscious strategies but to members' everyday methods – their 'ethnomethods'. This means, second, that we don't need to worry about how quickly people are able to do things. As Sacks said:

> Don't worry about how fast they're thinking. First of all, don't worry whether they are 'thinking'. Just try to come to terms with how it is that the thing comes off. Because you'll find that they can do these things. Just take any other area of natural science and see, for example, how fast molecules do things. And they don't have very good brains. (*LC*1: 11)

Conversational Sequencing: Some Basics

To look at how people 'do these things' requires empirical investigation of how people actually talk together. Such investigation

shows that one person's talk does not necessarily correspond to a sentence. It may be much shorter ('Hm?' in 6.4) or contain several sentences. This means that members do not limit themselves to grammatical notions like 'sentences' when they talk.

However, as Sacks recognized, no empirical study can or should ever be theory-free. So, for instance, Sacks replaces the concept of the 'sentence' with the concept of an 'utterance' (*LC*1: 647) which, as we have seen, is hearably terminated by some 'utterance completer'. As it turns out, the idea of 'hearability' is very important. For Sacks searched for a theory which members demonstrably employed without ever necessarily thinking about it. As he put it: 'I have a bunch of stuff and I want to try to see whether an order for it exists. *Not that I want to try to order it*, but I want to see whether there's *some order* to it' (*LC*1: 622).

In this search for (a member's) order, Sacks looked for (a member's) 'unit'. As he told his students: 'We want to construct some unit which will permit us to study actual activities. Can we construct "the conversation" as such a unit? Can we in the first place make of it a "unit" – a *natural* unit and an *analytic* unit at the same time?'(*LC*1: 95, emphasis added).

Such a 'unit' has to be an analyst's construction of a member's unit (that is, a 'natural' unit). Given that, Sacks asks himself what we (and members) need to construct such a unit. The answer that Sacks provides is deceptively simple. We need just two things. First, we need rules of sequencing in conversation through which single utterances 'turn out to be handleable' (*LC*1: 622). Second, we need to understand the objects handled by these rules (*LC*1: 95).

Sacks offered this general definition of what he meant by 'the sequential analysis of conversation'. It means 'that the parts which are occurring one after the other, or are in some before and after relationship, have some organization as between them' (1987: 54).

We saw some aspects of these before and after relationships in Sacks's analysis of the extracts above. Some 'grossly apparent' general features of the sequential organization of conversation (*LC*2: 32) are set out by Sacks in a number of lectures (such as *LC*1: 95–9; *LC*1: 621–3; *LC*2: 32–43; *LC*2: 223–6). For ease of reference, I have listed these features in a box.

Two initial points need to be made about the list. First, in Sacks's early writing, turn-taking issues were not fully separated

Some features of the sequential organization of conversation

1 People talk one at a time.
2 Speaker change recurs.
3 Sequences that are two utterances long and are adjacently placed may be 'paired' activities.
4 Activities can be required to occur at 'appropriate' places.
5 Certain activities are 'chained'.

from issues relating to the sequencing of actions. Drawing upon this work, the list addresses both turn-taking *and* sequencing. Later in this chapter, I focus more specifically on turn-taking.

The second point is that the list refers to features of conversation which are not always necessarily present in any empirical instance. However, their absence will be attended to and made accountable. Moreover, their power is shown by the way they are invariant whatever the number of co-conversationalists, their age, gender, occupation or political preference. For instance, as Sacks puts it:

> it's not particularly a feature of, e.g., male conversation or female conversation or female–male conversation that one party talks at a time and speaker change recurs. They hold across types of conversations – arguments, business talks, whatever else. They hold across the parts of a conversation – beginnings, middles, ends. They hold across topics. (*LC*2: 34)

Sacks's comment suggests the force (and boldness) of his claim about these 'formal features of conversation'. Quite explicitly, social scientists are being asked to put on one side their theories about how what people do is shaped by social structures (such as class or politics) or by non-conversational interpersonal processes (from 'role distance' to 'cognitive dissonance' and 'distorted communication').

Given the boldness of this claim, you will be in a better position to judge what Sacks is saying if I now fill in a little of the detail that he provides for each of the five elements listed in the box.

1 People talk one at a time

We have already come across the argument that people monitor a present speaker's utterance to find a point at which it may have terminated. As we saw, if it turns out that there is overlap between the talk of two or more speakers, either because the initial speaker continues or because other speakers' talk overlaps, then the rule is that the first speaker is allowed to continue. So, despite speaker change, one-party-at-a-time is preserved (*LC*2: 32).

Moreover, the fact that overlaps don't occur all the time suggests that speakers display (and listeners hear) features which indicate that a current turn is about to end so that the other party can hear that it is their turn to speak (*LC*2: 33). Where there is no obvious marker such as a greeting (such as 'hello'), listeners may, for instance, inspect a pause to see whether it is:

- a pause within a turn (the current speaker's pause);
- a pause between turns (a possible turn-transition point);
- 'their' pause (because they have been nominated as next speaker).

2 Speaker change recurs

Given that people attend to the rule that, as far as possible, they should only speak one at a time, how does speaker change occur? Clearly, what Sacks calls 'coordinative work' is required to locate appropriate 'completion-transition points' (*LC*2: 33). Such work is most transparent in the turn-taking organization found in many traditional classrooms. Here, when a teacher has asked a question, students simply raise their hands and the teacher selects one of them to be next speaker (see Mehan 1979).

In less structured conversations, there are three possible ways of coordinating speaker change:

1 Current speaker can select next speaker. For instance, in a multi-party conversation, the current speaker can name someone else (*LC*2: 40). As we have seen, this carries the implication that 'the obligation to listen is built into conversation' (*LC*2: 41).
2 Current speaker can select a next action. For instance, by asking

a question, current speaker selects an answer as the next action (*LC*2: 42).

3 Second speakers can self-select themselves and the action they will do (*LC*2: 42). However, as Sacks adds, what a second speaker says will be related in some way to the previous talk (see the discussion below, pp. 117-18, of 'tying').

Moreover, these three ways of organizing speaker change are 'ordered' in a sequence (*LC*2: 40). So (2) only applies if (1) does not occur. And (3) can happen only if (1) and (2) are absent.

3 Adjacency pairs

As returned greetings show, consecutive activities may be grouped in pairs. This constrains what the next speaker may do but it also constrains the initiator of the first part of the pair. So, for instance, if you want to receive a greeting, you may have to offer one yourself first (*LC*1: 673).

Not only greetings but also such adjacent activities as questions-and-answers and summons-and-responses are also paired. This has two consequences. First, the two parts are 'relatively ordered' (*LC*2: 521). This means that 'given a first, a second should be done' and what should be done is 'specified by the pair organization' (*LC*2: 191). Second, if the indicated second is not done it will be 'seen to be absent' (*LC*2: 191) and a repeat of the first will be offered. For instance, Sacks suggests that quite young children who say 'hi' to someone and then get no reply will usually only go about their business after they have repeated their first 'hi' and obtained a 'hi' in return (*LC*1: 98).

The organization of these kinds of two consecutive utterances provides the concept of 'adjacency pairs' – sequences that are two utterances long and are adjacently placed (greeting–greeting, question–answer, summons–answer). As we have seen, adjacency pairs are 'relatively ordered' because one always goes before the other. They are also 'discriminatively related' in that the first part defines (or discriminates between) appropriate second parts (*LC*2: 521).

Adjacency pairs can now be seen as a powerful way of organizing a relationship between a current utterance and a prior and a next utterance. Indeed, by constituting a next position which admits only one utterance type (*LC*2: 555), Sacks suggests that 'the

adjacency relationship between utterances is the most powerful device for relating utterances' (*LC*2: 554)

The power of this device is suggested by two examples relating to the 'summons–answer' adjacency pair. As Cuff and Payne point out, 'the recipient of summons feels impelled to answer.' As they note, one unfortunate consequence of this is that in Northern Ireland, when their front doorbell rings and, thereby, constitutes a 'summons', 'persons still open the door and get shot – despite their knowledge that such things happen' (1979: 151).

The second example arises in Sacks's discussion of a child's question: 'You know what, Mommy?' (*LC*1: 256–7, 263–4). As he points out, the child's use of 'Mommy' establishes another summons–answer sequence, where a proper answer to the summons is for Mommy to say 'What?' This allows the child to say what it wanted to at the start, but as an obligation (because questions must produce answers). Consequently, this utterance is a powerful way in which children enter into conversations despite their usually restricted rights to speak.

However, Sacks warns us to avoid the assumption that adjacency pairs, like summons–answer, necessarily work in a mechanical way. For instance, he notes that questions can sometimes be properly followed by further questions, as in 6.5:

6.5 [*LC*2: 529]

1 A: Can I borrow your car?
2 B: When?
3 A: This afternoon
4 B: For how long?
5 A: A couple of hours
6 B: Okay.

Here B provides the second part of the question–answer pair in line 6 not in line 2. Citing Schegloff (1972), Sacks calls lines 2–5 an 'insertion sequence' (*LC*2: 528). Such sequences are permissible in question–answer pairs on the understanding that B will provide the answer when A has finished (*LC*2: 529). However, Sacks suggests that in greetings, unlike other adjacency pairs, insertion sequences are unusual (*LC*2: 189).

To summarize: 'An adjacency pair first pair part can go *anywhere* in conversation, *except* directly after a first pair part, *unless* the first pair part is the first pair part for an insertion sequence' (*LC*2: 534). Moreover, since adjacency pair first pair parts can go anywhere,

we see, once more, that people have to listen at all times – this time in case they are called upon to do a second pair part (*LC*2: 536). Indeed, we should not assume that adjacency pairs only consist of two utterances. Not only may there be insertion sequences but sometimes chains of adjacency pairs may be constructed.

As an instance of such a chain, Sacks notes how we often say things like 'What are you doing tonight?' where our companion knows that an answer like 'Nothing in particular' is pretty certain to lead to a further adjacency pair of 'invitation–response'. In this way, the first question–answer pair serves to 'pre-signal "invitation to come"' (*LC*2: 529).

4 *Activities occur at 'appropriate' places*

If Sacks emphasizes that objects like adjacency pairs are not used mechanically, it is because all the 'objects' and 'rules' that he describes owe their status to how they are recognized and used by members. Take the example of the utterance 'hello'. Sacks points out that 'hello' need not always be heard as a 'greeting'. For instance, saying 'hello' in the middle of a phone conversation will probably be heard not as a greeting but as checking out that the other person is still on the line. It follows that members distinguish 'greeting places' from 'greeting items' (*LC*1: 97).

The placement of particular activities at a particular place in a sequence, as we have seen, allows members to identify what is absent from a particular 'place'. So, for instance, where a 'joke' is recognizably completed, the non-appearance of laughter or some appropriate substitute (such as 'I've heard that one before') will be heard to be 'absent'.

Moreover, one joke can lead to another since doing any activity may allow another party to do the same (*LC*1: 99–100). So one way in which activities occur at 'appropriate' places is as a repeat of a first activity by another speaker. Of course, this applies not just to jokes but also to activities like inquiries about someone's health and also to announcements and invitations.

5 *Certain activities are 'chained'*

As we have seen, questions and answers are an example of an adjacency pair. In two-party conversations, this suggests the

following rule: 'If one party asks a question, when the question is complete, the other party properly speaks and properly offers an answer to the question, and says no more than that' (*LC*1: 264). Moreover, once a recognizable 'answer' has been provided, the person who asked the question has what Sacks calls 'a reserved right to speak' (*LC*1: 264). Since this right *can* be used to ask a further question, we can have an indefinitely long chain of the form: Q-A-Q-A-Q etc. (*LC*1: 49, 102, 264).

Sacks illustrates this 'chaining rule' through a classic Yiddish joke. A young man (A) finds himself on a train sitting next to an older man (B). This conversation then ensues:

6.6 [*LC*1, 49–50, modified]
A: Can you tell me the time?
B: No.
A: What do you mean no?
B: If I tell you the time we will have to get into a conversation. You'll ask me where I'm going. It will turn out we're going to the same place. I'll have to ask you for dinner. I have a young marriageable daughter, and I don't want my daughter to marry someone who doesn't wear a watch.

B's wariness about answering a question shows the power of the 'chaining rule' and explain why, in other circumstances, as we saw in chapter 1, questions can be effective 'pick-up devices' (*LC*1: 49). The chaining rule operates most commonly in particular kinds of professional–client settings such as doctor–patient consultations (Heath 1986), counselling interviews (Peräkylä and Silverman 1991b; Peräkylä 1995) and job selection interviews (Button 1992), where long strings of talk may be organized in the Q-A-Q-A format.

However, as we have seen, Sacks is very aware of the dangers of a purely mechanistic reading of anything he calls a rule. This leads to three notes of caution. First, obviously, because questioners can ask a further question, this does not mean that they will actually do so. Second, as we saw in 6.5, adjacency need not mean that the answer will be produced in the very next turn. Finally, relatedly, when questions produce further questions, this can sometimes turn the chaining rule around. So, as in the case of 'You know what Mommy?', children set up a situation where they revert to an answering role as a result of the predictable 'Mommy's' response of 'What?'

Moreover, Sacks notes that we should not rush to the assumption that the conversation analyst can straightforwardly identify

'questions' and 'answers'. Certainly, what is a question can usually be readily identified by a particular grammatical form and intonation. But to establish whether an object is an 'answer' we have to examine closely how speakers treat it (*LC*1: 49). We see this most clearly in the way in which psychiatrists and family therapists treat any response from a silence to a minimal utterance (like 'mm') to an extensive reply as properly (or not) an 'answer' (Peräkylä 1995: 287–328).

Moreover, once a sequence of questions has started, Sacks notes that subsequent turns by the initial questioner are likely to be heard as questions as well unless they have a very clear non-question form. In this situation: 'the characteristic of a question is to be found by its occurrence in a list that is hearable as being "a list of questions"'; in this case 'it would be difficult to warrant an argument which counted [questions] as singly independent objects' (*LC*1: 373).

Once more, Sacks elegantly makes a more general point. Categories should not, as in most social science, be regarded as 'singly independent objects'. Instead, even the most apparently obvious categories, such as 'questions' and 'answers', should be viewed as accomplishments of members' local, sequential interpretation.

In the next two sections of the chapter, I will illustrate this point in relation to two issues to which Sacks gave a great deal of attention: telephone calls and storytelling.

Telephone Calls

As already noted, Sacks used data from telephone conversations in his Ph.D. dissertation. As we saw in chapter 5, this data showed how counsellors and clients might analyse a person's situation as meaning that they had 'no one to turn to'.

One of the nice things about telephone conversations is that (at least before the advent of video links) they provide an opportunity for people to make sense of each other's talk without recourse to visual cues because non-verbal forms of communication – apart from the telephone bell – are absent. Somehow, despite the absence of such cues, speakers manage an orderly sequence in which both parties know when to speak. This meant that Sacks could happily use telephone calls to address the sequential organization of conversation without needing to make reference to anything apart from purely audio material.

I discuss below the four basic questions that Sacks raised about the organization of telephone conversations, namely:

1 Who speaks first?
2 Why is 'answerer' not necessarily 'called'?
3 Who introduces first topic?
4 How is the closing of the call organized?

1 *Who speaks first?*

In certain environments, like law courts and committees, there are rules about who may speak first. However, in 'ordinary' conversations, at least in Western societies, there is no general rule to say who speaks first. But telephone conversations are an exception. As Sacks notes: 'there is a rule for telephone conversation which is *"Answerer speaks first"*' (LC2: 542).

Sacks illustrates this point in his fall 1967 lectures (*LC*1: 631–2) by reference to a paper by Emanuel Schegloff then awaiting publication. Here Schegloff had argued, like Sacks, that 'a first rule of telephone conversations which might be called "a distribution rule for first utterances" is: *the answerer speaks first*' (1968, see Gumperz and Hymes 1972: 351, original emphasis).

Schegloff's study is based on data drawn from the first five seconds of around 500 telephone calls to and from an American police station. He begins by noting that the basic rule for two-party conversation, that one party speaks at a time (that is, providing for a sequence A-B-A-B where A and B are the parties), 'does not provide for the allocation of the roles "a" and "b"' (p. 350). In telephone calls, the issue of who speaks first is resolved by the 'distribution rule' above.

In order to see the force of the 'distribution rule', consider the confusion that occurs when a call is made and the phone is picked up, but nothing is said by the receiver of the call. Schegloff cites an anecdote by a woman who adopted this strategy of silence after she began receiving obscene telephone calls. Her friends were constantly irritated by this practice, thus indicating the force of the rule 'the answerer speaks first'. Moreover, her tactic was successful. As Schegloff notes: 'However obscene her caller might be, he would not talk until she had said "hello", thereby obeying the requirements of the distribution rule' (p. 355).

On examining his material further, Schegloff discovered only

one case (out of 500) which did not fit the rule 'answerer speaks first'. Using 'deviant case analysis' (see chapter 4), he reworked all his data to find rules which would account for this apparently deviant case. He concluded that this could be done by seeing the distribution rule as 'a derivative of more general rules'(p. 356).

Schegloff argued that a person who responds to a telephone bell with 'hello' is responding to a *summons*. A summons is any attention-getting device (a telephone bell, a term of address – John? – or a gesture, like a tap on the shoulder or raising your hand). Like the other adjacency pairs discussed earlier, a summons tends to constrain the form of the next turn (that is, it suggests that it will be an 'answer').

Schegloff is now able to explain his deviant case as follows: summons (phone rings) – no answer; further summons (caller says 'Hello'). The normal form of a telephone call is: summons (phone rings) – answer (recipient says 'Hello'). In the deviant case, the absence of an answer is treated as the absence of a reply to a summons. So the caller's use of 'Hello' replaces the summons of the telephone bell. The failure of the summoned person to speak first is heard as an uncompleted SA sequence. Consequently, the caller's speaking first makes sense because further interaction is conditional upon the successful completion of the SA sequence.

2 *Why is 'answerer' not necessarily 'called'?*

As we all know, when we make a call we sometimes get a wrong number or find that the person who answers the phone is not the person we called. This obvious point explains why 'answerer' is not necessarily 'called'. Sacks shows how these unremarkable circumstances are associated with further features that make telephone calls different from most face-to-face conversations. This is the example he uses:

6.7 [*LC*2: 546–7]

1	Lana:	Hello:,
2	Gene:	I:s, Maggie there.
3	Lana:	'hh Uh who is calling,
4	Gene:	Uh this's Gene:. Novaki.
5		(0.3)
6	Lana:	Uh just a mom'nt,

The feature of this call that Sacks emphasizes is to be found in the absence of a greeting in line 2. To see this feature, notice that Lana says 'hello' in line 1. Now 'hellos' are usually greetings and greetings are adjacency pairs. So why does not Gene return Lana's greeting in line 2?

An initial answer to this question is that, in telephone calls, the identities of caller and called cannot be certainly known prior to a greeting. For this reason, callers may scan a 'hello' to see if they are talking to the one they called, using a 'voice-recognition test' (*LC2*: 161, 546). As Sacks points out, this 'raises a possible exception to the "return a greeting with a greeting" rule in the case of telephone conversations. Caller need not do a greeting return if answerer is not equivalent to called' (*LC2*: 543).

However, we should not assume that Lana's 'hello' is hearable as a 'greeting'. Schegloff's earlier analysis suggests that in the context of a first turn of a telephone conversation, Lana's 'hello' is not heard as a first-placed greeting but as a response to the summons of the telephone bell, that is, as a second-placed object. For these reasons, a failure to return 'hello' at the start of a telephone call need not be a recognizable 'absence'.

Even if 'answerer' turns out not to be 'called', this does not mean that she has no obligations. As Sacks notes, answerers do not normally answer questions like 'Is Maggie there?' by saying 'no' and hanging up. Equally, when callers get asked their name, as happens here, they have to select a name which will appropriately identify them ('Gene Novaki', 'Gene', 'Mr Novaki', 'the gardener', etc.). As Sacks notes, Gene's hesitation at the start of line 4 can be seen to arise because of the selection that needs to be made, not because Gene does not know his name (*LC2*: 547).

3 *Who introduces first topic?*

Although answerers are expected to speak first, it is callers who are expected to provide the first topic. Answerers, after all, do not normally know who is making the call, whereas callers can usually identify answerers and answerers will assume that callers have initiated a call in order to raise a topic.

So first topics are usually raised by the caller, as in lines 4–5 of this instance:

6.8 [*LC2*: 158]

1 Jeanette: Hello,

2 Estelle: Jeanette,
3 Jeanette: Yeah,
4 Estelle: Well I just thought I'd–re–better report to you
5 what's happen' at Bullocks toda::y?

However, Sacks shows that the issue of 'first topic' is also responsive to at least three other issues. In the case of telling bad news, a caller may want to avoid a 'how are you?' sequence which might well elicit a response of 'fine'. They may therefore use the called's name immediately after the called person says 'hello'. When they get a 'yeah', they can go into first topic without a long greeting exchange (*LC*2: 159–60).

Secondly, callers are attentive to the way in which first topics are heard as special or important. So when you say you are 'calling for no reason', you can postpone first topic indefinitely by showing that you do not have a 'first topic' item (*LC*2: 165).

Finally, it sometimes happens that someone calls you and you have a piece of news that constitutes a 'reason for a call' but you have neglected to call. How do we handle our failed obligation in these circumstances and get round the rule that says 'caller raises first topic'? One solution is to convert ourselves from answerers to hypothetical callers. We can do this by using some formula like: 'Oh, I've been trying to reach you.' Having reallocated our roles, we are now free to introduce the first topic (*LC*2: 163, 552).

4 How is the closing of the call organized?

Having talked about a first (and other) topic(s), how do telephone calls reach their end? More technically, how do the speakers arrive at a point 'where one speaker's completion will not occasion another speaker's talk, and that will not be heard as some speaker's silence' (Schegloff and Sacks 1974: 237).

Clearly, we can see that end happen by the parties exchanging 'goodbyes' where completion of the pair demonstrates that last speaker has understood what the prior turn was aimed at and goes along with it (p. 240). But 'goodbye' is only a 'terminator' which follows *earlier* closing work. So how does a speaker find out where to put that first 'goodbye' (*LC*2: 364)?

One solution is provided where another speaker has just said 'okay.' or 'we-ell.' with a downward intonation. Such utterances may be heard to convey a 'pre-closing' invitation and may be used by any speaker in any conversation (Schegloff and Sacks 1974: 246).

However, in telephone calls, rights and obligations are rather different. Sometimes the called person may say something that will be heard as a pre-closing invitation (such as 'this is costing you a lot of money' (p. 250). But, in principle, having initiated the call, Sacks suggests that it is caller's business to invite a close (*LC2*: 364). This can get done by referring to the interests of the called party ('well I'll letchu go') or by reference to previous activities cited by the called party at the beginning of the conversation (watching TV, eating, having people over) (Schegloff and Sacks 1974: 250). The called person's prior mention of such activities gives the caller a 'ticket' (*LC2*: 364) which can be saved up and later used to show that the proposal to close is actually being done in the interests of the called person.

This account of pre-closing invitations nicely underlines Sacks's insistence that conversation depends upon cooperatively organized, sequential work. 'Pre-closing' involves reference to the needs of the other. And what is proposed is only an 'invitation', which can be declined. Of course, this is not to deny that telephone speakers may sometimes put the phone down on each other. But it is to note how strongly this will be heard as a 'breach' which requires later explanations and apologies.

Sales calls may be thought to be an exception to hearing a breach in an abruptly put-down phone. However, I remember the salesman who called me back after such an incident and, no doubt appealing to the absence of a proper pre-closing invitation, told me that I had 'no right' to do that! Moreover, note that even the exasperated recipient of an unwanted call will usually preface putting down the phone by an announcement ('I'm going to put the phone down now') which, while suggesting that when the phone line goes down this is deliberate rather than accidental, also may allow the other party to say 'wait just one moment.'

Storytelling

At first sight, storytelling might be thought to be the work of one party – the teller. However, just like telephone conversations, the telling of a story requires collaboration. Given the mechanisms for the exchange of turns, cooperation between teller and recipient is required if a story is to be extended through various possible completion points.

For instance, to tell a story may involve a 'preface' (*LC2*: 10,

18–19) which both provides for the multi-turn nature of the talk and allows its recipient to know when it is to be completed. But equally the recipient will need to offer minimal 'response tokens' (such as 'mm') which serve to indicate that they are listening but are passing their turn and inviting the other to continue (see the discussion of response tokens below).

Sacks's account of the cooperative organization of storytelling is discussed below in relation to four issues:

1 obtaining and retaining the 'floor';
2 'tying' mechanisms;
3 using 'response tokens' (like 'mm mm');
4 'heckling' stories.

1 Obtaining and retaining the 'floor'

There are various mechanisms through which persons obtain the right to speak. For instance, children may use the question 'you know what, Mommy?', and anybody may claim a speaking right by saying something such as 'your clothes are on fire' which, by drawing attention to some matter of presumed immediate importance to the hearer, may constitute a 'ticket' to speak (*LC*1: 256–7, 263–5).

However, because stories go on over more than a single turn of talk, they create particular issues in retaining the 'floor'. Indeed, 'floor' considerations are central to the identification of a story as 'an attempt to control the floor over an extended series of utterances' (*LC*2: 18). If you want to tell a long story, involving multi-unit turns, you face problems (*LC*1: 682). In particular, you want people just to *listen* without attending to how they can be next speaker, given that the built-in motivation for hearers – that they may be next speaker – is missing (*LC*1: 683–4). Given the various mechanisms for speaker transition (*LC*2: 223–6 and pp. 104–5 above), how then do you produce a multi-utterance turn?

As Sacks tells us, the storyteller's problem is how to get selected as speaker after next. Like the child's 'You know what?', a story is 'an attempt to control a third slot in talk, from a first' (*LC*2: 18). One way of doing this is to ask a question such as 'You want to hear a joke?' or 'You know what happened to me last night?' Another way is to make an announcement like 'Something terrible happened to me today' or 'I heard a good joke' (*LC*1: 680–1).

Utterances like these serve two functions. First, they are heard as prefaces (*LC*2: 19) which alert their hearer to an upcoming story. Second, such prefaces, like the child's question, are routinely received by 'what?' As in that case, the first speaker retains the floor by being *required* to continue (*LC*2: 226).

Any response to such a preface (even 'big deal' to an announcement) will do as a take-off point, as Sacks shows in the following example:

6.9 [*LC*1: 681]

A: I was at the police station this morning.
B: Big deal.
A: 'Big deal' yeah. Somebody stole all my radio equipment outta my car.

This example shows how 'newsworthiness' is a consideration in storytelling both through how A constructs his announcement (as potentially newsworthy) and how 'Big deal' works to deny that. Nevertheless, A can still continue by demonstrating other aspects which make his story newsworthy. However, when hearers say either that they already know that or that you already told them, you no longer have a story to tell unless you offer an alternative preface announcing a story that will be heard to be 'tellable' (*LC*2: 13).

Such announcements have a function for hearers as well as tellers of stories. In particular, they allow hearers to work out the completion point of the story (*LC*1: 682) and, therefore, the appropriate place for an appreciation. For instance, as Sacks notes: '"I have something terrible to tell you"... [serves] not just to arouse interest but to instruct hearers to use that term to monitor the story – when they've heard something that ['terrible'] could name, the story will be over' (*LC*2: 228). With the prior guidance of the story preface (something 'terrible' or 'funny'), a hearer can both work out when the story has ended and do an appreciation of it in the very terms provided by the teller (*LC*2: 11).

Sometimes these terms can be very finely shaded. For instance, if you want your story to be treated lightly but not as a joke, how do you convey this to the hearer? One way to do this is to laugh while telling your story. Note the laughter by Portia in the following extract:

6.10 [*LC*2: 275]

Agnes: I bet it's a dream, with the swimming pool enclosed huh?
Portia: Oh God, we hehh! we swam in the nude Sunday night until about two o'clock.

Sacks suggests that Portia's laughter conveys that she took these reported events 'lightly'. Placed here, it thus serves to inform Agnes in advance how Portia took the reported event. For instance, without it, Agnes might have laughed afterwards and, if Portia had joined in, Agnes would not have known if Portia really felt the event was funny or was just doing an appreciation of Agnes's response.

Laughter thus can work as a way of attuning someone to know how to hear someone's story. As an attuning device, laughter is, then, one of the 'ways for the teller ... to guide the recipient in figuring out what's happening and also in figuring out things about the teller's participation' (*LC*2: 275).

2 *'Tying' mechanisms*

We have just seen how 'appreciations' claim an understanding of a story. 'Oh really' or 'I know just what you mean' work in this way. However, a far stronger kind of appreciation is displayed when the hearer uses the topics or characters of a first story to construct a further story. Such 'second stories' *exhibit* an understanding of a first story which is only *claimed* by responses like 'I see' (*LC*2: 6–8, 252).

Of course, this kind of exhibited understanding also allows a hearer to tell her own story. Sacks refers to 'second stories' as an instance of the kind of 'tying' mechanisms through which, in multi-party conversations, next speaker can self-select by 'tying' her utterance to a previous turn. Examples of such tying include the use of:

- a pronoun (such as 'they') tied to persons named in a prior turn (*LC*1: 717);
- 'that' to refer to a prior topic (*LC*1: 372);
- 'anyway' to tie talk to an earlier topic not present in the previous turn (*LC*2: 567–8);
- 'I still say though' – marking that I talked before, that someone else disagreed and that, despite that, I am reasserting my position (*LC*2: 557).

In all these cases, Sacks shows us how movement between topics in conversation is rarely abrupt but involves stepwise transitions. As he puts it:

> It's a general feature for topical organization in conversation that the best way to move from topic to topic is not by a topic close followed by a topic beginning, but by what we call a *stepwise* move. Such a move involves connecting what we've just been talking about to what we're now talking about, although they are different. (*LC*2: 566)

This stepwise transition of topics underlines a wider point. 'Tying' rules are just one instance of how conversation is sequentially organized and a context is locally produced. So a first speaker creates a context for a second. And a second speaker renews that context by providing a reading of the first turn and projecting a meaning for the next speaker's turn (*LC*1: 372).

Such sequential organization provides for a highly complex 'indefinite nesting of a conversation' out of 'very simple pairs of rules' (*LC*1: 372). It also means that anything a speaker says will be monitored for how it displays some understanding of a prior turn. As Sacks says about second and later turns: 'you can't but show that in fact you did understand, i.e. you can't but tie an utterance, and thereby show that you understood the last (or that you didn't understand [it])' (*LC*1: 720).

In this respect, tying – or 'positioning' (*LC*2: 557) – is not just something done by a present speaker but by all hearers. So tying shows how members attend to 'order at all points'. No wonder that Sacks remarks that 'that's an absolutely fabulous machinery' (*LC*1: 720).

3 Using 'response tokens'

Because speakers are dealing with a 'machinery' that is intersubjective, any attempt to explain or describe an utterance in psychological terms becomes, for Sacks, a 'lay' rather than an 'analytic' enterprise. A case in point is an utterance like 'uh' or 'uh huh'. Here, rather than try to read the speaker's mind, conversation analysis wants to ask: what sequential function does such a turn serve? To answer this question we are forced to examine how any conversation unfolds.

To understand this machinery further we might distinguish between how 'uh' and 'uh huh' are often used. One function that 'uh' can have is to get the floor in a multi-party conversation. So you say 'uh' close to or precisely on the end of an utterance. Then, if a silence follows, you've got the floor. As Sacks puts it: 'One doesn't ... produce "uh" because one is hesitating with what one

has to say, but . . . to get the floor so as to be able to say what one isn't prepared to say [straight off]' (*LC*2: 497).

By contrast to 'uh', 'mm' and 'uh huh' are part of a class of 'response tokens' that display particular understanding of a prior turn. Response tokens are not, however, just used to stake a claim for the floor. They can also signal that someone is saying: 'The story is not yet over. I know that' (*LC*2: 9). In this way, the previous speaker is informed that they can continue with whatever they were talking about (*LC*2: 410). Indeed, in this case, by declining a possible turn, response tokens can *require* a speaker to produce more, even when they are not claiming an extension of their turn – think of 'mm mm' or 'uh huh' used by counsellors and the like (*LC*2: 410–11).

Above all, as Sacks notes, response tokens can be subtly recipient designed by anticipating a possible pause and ensuring no gap and no overlap between speakers. In this way, utterances like 'mm' show that someone is listening and has identified a possible completion point, that is, a unit like a clause, a phrase or an intonation sequence. As Sacks notes, such units serve as 'grammatical stopping points within larger units' (*LC*1: 746).

Response tokens are, then, obviously non-trivial, tying terms. But the understanding they show is more ambiguous than, say, laughter or 'He did?' Hence the recipient of a response token needs to look at the token producer's next utterance to see the analysis of their utterance that 'uh huh' is doing. At the same time, a response token can 'go wrong' when the previous utterance has projected another sort of response (such as laughter, 'Oh', etc.) (*LC*1: 747).

4 *'Heckling' stories*

The foregoing shows how storytellers need some response to establish and to sustain their claim to the floor. So anything that the storyteller says is available as a resource for hearers. As Sacks shows in the extract below, speakers can, if they want, use a story's announcement to 'heckle':

6.11 [*LC*2: 284]

Ken: I mean I'm thinking about what someday I'm going to be, and stuff like // that

Roger: heh Wh(hh)en I grow up! heh hhh hheh hhh hh

Roger's response to Ken's attempted storytelling listens 'to what's being said in a way other than the teller intends' (*LC*2: 286). In this respect, it is similar to B's 'big deal' in response to A's story announcement on p. 116 above. Now Ken, like A, will have to redesign his turn if he wants to continue his topic.

However, storytellers like Ken and A know that heckling is always a possibility. As a consequence, Sacks says that this implies that perhaps tellers 'design their stories so as not to invite heckling, or to be in some way invulnerable to heckling as a possibility' (*LC*2: 287). Sacks does not give any examples of this, but story announcements with embedded statements like 'this sounds crazy but ...' or 'you may have heard this one before' seem good instances of an anti-heckling device.

Of course, heckling is not the only option for a hearer who doesn't see the point of a story. Very commonly, hearers hold off asking a teller what something means, expecting to find out later. This is not to satisfy some abstract ethical principle like 'fair play' or rule of good taste such as 'politeness'. Rather, in conversation, we do not always expect to find out what things mean right at the start. Sacks calls this 'a delay-interpretation rule for a hearer ... [which] wasn't an operation of interpreting the thing as the words come out, but one in which there would be some storage' (*LC*2: 315).

However, as we have seen, if a storyteller *can* provide an acceptable announcement of how her story is to be heard (say, as something 'serious', as a joke), so much the better for all parties.

Some Implications

Sacks's analysis of both storytelling and telephone calls reveals the mutual monitoring of each other's turns which is basic to the sequential organization of conversation. This organization shows the inadequacies of an analyst's attempt to treat any utterance as an expression of someone's thoughts. By contrast, in hearing how what they have just said is heard, speakers discover from recipients' responses what they were taken to have intended to mean.

In notes attached to the transcripts of his lectures, Sacks sometimes remarked on how he had simplified some of what he had said for his student audience. His systematic statement of these issues is to be found in a later joint paper (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974). A brief presentation of this paper will serve as a summary of the significance of the foregoing.

The concepts and examples we have been discussing derive their import from the sequential organization of conversation to be found in the structure of turn-taking. The character of any turn is thus only to be understood from its presence in a series of turns:

> Turns display gross organizational features that reflect their occurrence in a series. They regularly have a three-part structure: one which addresses the relation of a turn to a prior, one involved with what is occupying the turn, and one which addresses the relation of the turn to a succeeding one. (p. 722)

Earlier in this chapter, we encountered examples of each part of this three-part structure:

1 How the speaker makes a turn relate to a previous turn (for instance by response tokens or by an appreciation).
2 What the turn interactionally accomplishes (for instance, as a story, serious or light, or as a joke).
3 How the turn relates to a succeeding turn (for instance, as the first part of an adjacency pair such as a question, request, summons, etc.).

In conclusion, Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson note three *consequences* of their model of turn-taking:

1 *Needing to listen* The turn-taking system provides an 'intrinsic motivation' for listening to all utterances in a conversation. Interest or politeness alone is not sufficient to explain such attention. Rather, every participant must listen to and analyse each utterance in case she or he is selected as next speaker.
2 *Understanding* Turn-taking organization controls some of the ways in which utterances are understood. So, for instance, it allows 'How are you?', as a first turn, to be usually understood not as an enquiry but as a greeting.
3 *Displaying understanding* When someone offers the 'appropriate' form of reply (such as an answer to a question, or an apology to a complaint), she or he displays an understanding of the interactional force of the first utterance. The turn-taking system is thus the means whereby actors display to one another that they are engaged in *social* action responsive to the needs of others.

Before I offer a conclusion to this chapter, I want to emphasize the social or intersubjective character of the turn-taking system

through a brief discussion of two further features of conversational organization: 'repair' and 'preference organization'.

Repair

In our earlier discussion of storytelling, we saw how the topical orientation of conversation linked to what Sacks calls 'tying' (or 'positioning') structures (*LC*1: 540). Such structures mean that 'Speakers specifically *place* almost all of their utterances ... they put them into such a position as has what's just been happening provide an obvious explanation for why this was said now' (*LC*2: 352, emphasis added).

Through such positioning, they can, if necessary, introduce an utterance as 'off-topic' (for instance, through saying 'by the way'). In this way, they tie their talk to a previous turn precisely by showing that they appreciate that they are now going to talk about something different.

But how does a second speaker demonstrate that they have not understood or even heard a first turn? Sacks describes 'a local cleansing' mechanism to be used in such cases (*LC*2: 560). This mechanism puts a 'remedial question' like 'why? how? what? where? when?' immediately after what is heard as a problematic turn. Indeed, unless such an attempted 'repair' is placed in the very next position, then the speaker may take it that what he or she said 'was heard, and was clear' (*LC*2: 352).

'Repair mechanisms' will be used in other circumstances than 'misunderstandings'. For instance, where more than one party is speaking at a time, a speaker may stop speaking before a normally possible completion point of a turn. Again, when turn transfer does not occur at the appropriate place, the current speaker may repair the failure of the sequence by speaking again. Finally, where repairs by other than the current speaker are required (for instance because another party has been misidentified), the next speaker typically waits until the completion of a turn. Thus the turn-taking system's allocation of rights to a turn is respected even when a repair is found necessary.

Turn-taking and repair can now be seen to be embedded in each other:

> The compatibility of the model of turn-taking with the facts of repair is thus of a dual character: the turn-taking system lends itself to, and

> incorporates devices for, repair of its troubles; and the turn-taking system is a basic organizational device for the repair of any other troubles in conversation. The turn-taking system and the organization of repair are thus 'made for each other' in a double sense. (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974: 723)

Preference Organization

This turn-taking system also means that first turns can be constructed so as to imply 'preferred' kinds of second turns. Thus Sacks notes that questioners can create preferred answers – for instance, by asking a question like 'so you're quite happy now?' which embeds an expectation that the answer will probably be 'yes'.

For this very reason, basic books on survey research advise against designing questions which imply an expected answer. However, Sacks is not concerned with remedying what we do but understanding the complexity of our communication. On that track, he observes that preferred answers, because they meet this inferred expectation, are short, while dispreferred ones add an account. So preferred answers take on a form which Sacks describes as 'Yes–period'. And dispreferred answers are of a 'No–plus' form, that is, they provide an account (*LC*2: 414). This means that 'if a question is built in such a way as to exhibit a preference as between "yes" and "no" . . . then the answerers will pick that choice' (Sacks 1987: 57) and will delay any other elements.

In the following example, Sacks notes how A builds up a preference for a 'yes' answer:

6.12 [Sacks 1987: 57]
A: And it– apparently left her quite permanently damaged (I suppose).
B: Apparently. Uh he is still hopeful.

Note here how B spots this preference by initially agreeing – although skilfully couching that initial agreement by using A's term 'apparently'. This foreshadows the delayed disagreement ('he is still hopeful').

In the next extract, A's use of 'really' establishes that a 'no' answer is expected:

6.13 [Sacks 1987: 57]
A: Well is this really whatchu wanted?

B: Uh . . . not originally? No. But it's uh . . . promotion? en it's very interesting.

Note here how B's turn meets this expectation by its initial agreement ('Uh . . . not originally?'). As in the previous extract, B delays the disagreement components of his turn.

As well as such delays, Sacks notes that we find 'well' prefaces, warrants and 'excepts' in dispreferred turns, as in these two examples:

6.14 [Sacks 1987: 63]
A: You are afraid of your father
B: Oh yes. Definitely. I–I am. To a certain extent.

6.15 [Sacks 1987: 63]
A: 'N they haven't heard a word huh?
B: Not a word, uh-uh. Not– Not a word. Not at all. Except – Neville's mother got a call

Two further points need to be made about this organization of preference. First, because it derives from a turn-taking system based on the continual display of mutual understanding, all speakers have a vested interest in avoiding conversational 'troubles'. So not only do answerers show that they understand the preference embedded in a question, but questioners, who monitor an upcoming disagreement, reformulate their question in the direction of possible agreement (1987: 65).

The second point is that we must not confuse conversational preference with any kind of psychological preference. So preference organization does not relate to what people want but to what the logic of the turn-taking system implies. As Sacks puts it: 'it is not that "people try to do it" . . . [rather] there is an *apparatus* that has them being able to do that' (p. 65).

Conclusion

I believe that Sacks was properly amazed by the beauty of the conversational apparatus he had unearthed. In conclusion, I will suggest three aspects of the way in which he helps us to think about this apparatus: as an 'economy' of 'omnipresent' and 'observable' objects.

An economy

As we saw in the preceding section, Sacks drags us away from our temptation to see conversation as an inner process concerned with the communication of thoughts. This anti-psychologistic thrust is seen in his use of the term 'apparatus' to describe the turn-taking system (see chapter 4).

However, Sacks and his colleagues also used the metaphor of an 'economy' to describe this system: 'For socially organized activities, the presence of "turns" suggests an economy, with turns for something being valued – and with means for allocating them, which affect their relative distribution, as in economies' (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974: 696).

This concept of an economy powerfully directs us away from our temptation to treat conversation as a trivial outpouring of our individual experiences. Instead, like goods and services, turns-at-talk depend on a system for their distribution. Moreover, such turns have a value, seen in the potential 'profits' of obtaining the floor, and potential 'losses' (for example, of remembering what you wanted to say) in failing to get a turn at a particular point. In this way, the metaphor of 'economy' reminds us of the power and factual status of the turn-taking system.

Omnipresence

The power of omnipresence is reflected in the way in which speakers attend to the conversational rules we have discussed in all social contexts. Even the apparent boundaries of different cultures seem to matter little in this regard. We see this in a joint paper that Sacks wrote with the anthropologist, Michael Moerman. Moerman and Sacks (1971) note basic similarities between Thai and American-English speakers. In Thai, just as much as in American English, one speaker talks at a time with no gaps or overlaps. Equally, in both 'cultures' this is accomplished by speakers noticing and correcting violations, collaboratively locating transition points, collaboratively locating next speaker and listening for completions, turn transitions, insults, etc. As these authors put it, in both Thai and American English:

> participants must continually, there and then – without recourse to follow-up tests, mutual examination of memoirs, surprise quizzes and

> other ways of checking on understanding – demonstrate to one another that they understood or failed to understand the talk they are party to. (Moerman and Sacks 1971: 10).

As in Sacks's lectures, this paper reminds us that we should not be surprised about how quickly people can do all these things: 'The instant availability of elaborate rules of grammar shows that our naive notion of how little the human brain can do quickly is wrong' (p. 11). However, this 'instant availability' and omnipresence should not be taken to mean that conversational rules are coercive. Instead, as Sacks notes, such rules achieve their relevance by being attended to and used:

> Somebody once said to me that they found people who violated the A-B-A-B rules, as if that ought to be something enormously shocking ... That is, as if, in fact, A-B-A-B would characterize any two-party conversation as a natural law, rather than it was something that persons attended to and used in various ways, and something that could tell people that, and *when*, it's their turn to speak. (*LC*1: 524)

Observability

I have repeatedly stressed, both here and in chapter 4, Sacks's claim to reveal members' observable activities rather than to build a self-enclosed system of rules and categories. This means that the 'orderliness' he describes is an orderliness which members rely upon and use: 'insofar as the materials we worked with exhibited orderliness, they did so not only to us, indeed not in the first place for us, but for the co-participants who had produced them' (Schegloff and Sacks 1974: 234).

The upshot of this is that 'problems' have to be observable problems for members in order to be interesting for analysts. But the 'ready observability' to which Sacks refers below implies something deep and profound:

> omnipresence and ready observability need not imply *banality*, and, therefore, silence. Nor should they only set off a search for exceptions or variation. Rather, we need to see that with some such mundane occurrences we are picking up things which are *so overwhelmingly true* that if we are to understand that sector of the world, they are something we will have to come to terms with. (1987: 56, emphasis added)

'Coming to terms with' this omnipresence gives us our research task. For Schegloff and Sacks, we must seek to achieve nothing less

than 'a naturalistic observational discipline that could deal with the details of social action(s) rigorously, empirically and formally' (1974: 233). As I try to show in chapter 8, since Sacks's death in 1975, conversation analysis has become that discipline.