CHAPTER TWO

Researching Psychic Practitioners: Conversation Analysis
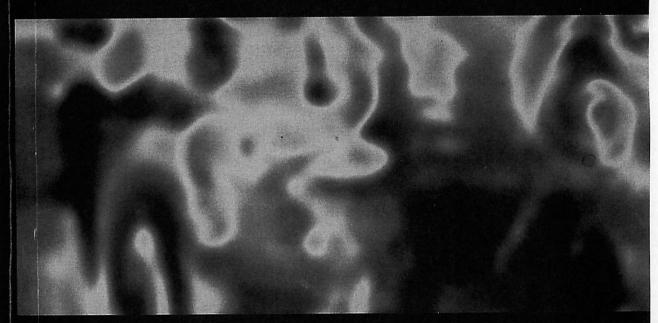
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Introduction

Conversation analysis (or CA) is a method for the analysis of naturally occurring interaction. Its key assumption is that language use is a site for social action: people do things to each other when they talk. Moreover, the way in which utterances are designed will be informed by, and thereby display the relevance of, the speakers' **communicative competencies**: procedures, methods, maxims and practices for producing mutually intelligible interaction which are available to them by virtue of their membership of a natural language speaking community. Finally, and perhaps most important, it is assumed that these tacit communicative resources are manifest in robust and oriented-to patterns in interaction, which can be identified and explored as the sites in which particular kinds of interpersonal activities are accomplished.

What I want to do in this chapter is to unpack this paragraph. Consequently, the early parts of this chapter will focus on the methodology of CA, and some of the assumptions which inform that method. (Unfortunately, then, there will not be much space devoted to a review of the findings from conversation analytic studies. However, a list of introductory accounts and seminal papers is provided at the end of the chapter.) To illustrate many points in the discussion, I will be using data from a corpus of recordings of members of the public having consultations with psychic practitioners, such as mediums, clairvoyants, astrologers, tarot card readers, and so on. This kind of material has been selected for several reasons. First, interaction between psychic practitioners and their clients exhibits some clear and recurrent patterns; this facilitates attempts to illustrate aspects of the focus of a conversation analytic approach. Second, psychic-sitter interaction allows me to raise some of the key issues in the study of what is known as **institutional interaction**. As will become apparent, CA does not only study conversational interaction, but can be used to investigate talk which happens in workplace settings, in which participants orient to the relevance of a limited set of work-related discursive tasks. Finally, psychic practitioners claim to have paranormal powers. This is a controversial claim, and considerable effort has been expended in trying to discover whether or not their claimed powers are genuine. However, CA's approach is markedly different in that it is agnostic as to the truth or falsity of what people are saying. By looking at the kind of data in which most people would be initially interested in *what* was said

Discourse as Data

A GUIDE FOR ANALYSIS

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we are in a better position to appreciate CA's distinctive concern with *how* talk is produced.

1   What is conversation analysis?

What is now known as conversation analysis emerged from Harvey Sacks' utterly distinctive analyses of the organization of everyday language use, which were then developed in collaboration with his colleagues, Emmanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson in the 1960s.

What Sacks was trying to do was develop a new method of sociology in which the analytic observations were grounded in detailed analysis of actual instances of human behaviour; not idealizations of behaviour, or laboratory-produced exemplars of human conduct, nor introspectively-grounded intuition about social action, nor ethnographic field notes of events, and so on. It was this concern that led him to study language use. His concern to develop a sociology based on analysis of real life events meant he needed to have data which were some kind of record of those real life events, and which would facilitate repeated inspection. And the availability of recording technology ensured that it was easy to record talk. Moreover, recordings of real life interaction allow the analyst to transcribe in whatever detail he or she requires, and permit repeated listening and analysis.

In one of his lectures Sacks said:

> It was not from any large interest or from some theoretical formulation of what should be studied that I started with tape recorded conversation, but simply because I could get my hands on it and I could study it again and again, and also, consequentially, because others could look at what I had studied and make of it what they could, if, for example, they wanted to be able to disagree with me.
>
> (Sacks, cited in Atkinson and Heritage, 1984: 26)

So Sacks started to examine conversation because it was the most convenient form of human behaviour with the recordings of which he could try to develop his new method of doing sociology.

There is another benefit from studying actual instances of human behaviour. If a native speaker of English had to sit down and try to describe what happens in conversational interaction, they would certainly not be able to capture its complexity, or its orderliness: the importance of silences of less then a third of a second; the way speakers are able to exchange turns at talk with minimal gaps or overlap between consecutive speakers; the range of exquisitely subtle methods participants use to identify and deal with troubles or errors in interaction; the significance of false starts to words, restarts, minor corrections and the other range of odd noises and non-lexical sounds people produce in conversational interaction. But whereas intuition fails the analyst, recordings of actual events, and detailed transcripts of them, permits capture of the detail of participants' conduct. The analyst is relieved of the near impossible task of trying to imagine what goes on during the interaction: the analyst can actually find

out by careful listening to the tape, and investigation of the subsequent transcript. (Transcription will be discussed in Section 2.)

Conversation analysis began with a question. Sacks had been working on a corpus of recorded telephone calls to the Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Center. He had observed that, in the majority of cases, if the Center's personnel gave their names at the beginning of the conversation, the callers would give their names in reply. Sacks came to notice, however, that in one call the caller (B) seemed to be having trouble with the agent's name.

Extract 1

A: this is Mr. Smith, may I help you

B: I can't hear you

A: This is Mr <u>Smith</u>

B: Smith

<div align="right">(Sacks, 1992, vol.1: 3)</div>

Sacks also observed that for the rest of the conversation the caller remained reluctant to disclose his identity. This was not unusual, as the Center's staff frequently experienced difficulties in getting callers to identify themselves. The issue Sacks began to explore was 'where, in the course of the conversation could you tell that somebody would not give their name?' (1992, vol. 1: 3). It was this problem, and this sequence, which led to Sacks' unique approach to the study of conversation. In a memoir of Sacks, Schegloff recalls that:

> It was during a long talking walk during the late winter of 1964 that Sacks mentioned to me a 'wild' possibility that had occurred to him. He had previously told me about a recurrent and much discussed practical problem faced by those who answered phone calls to the Suicide Prevention Center – the problem of getting the caller to give their names ... On the one hand, Sacks noted, it appears that if the name is not forthcoming at the start it may prove problematic to get. On the other hand, overt requests for it may be resisted. Then he remarked: is it possible that the caller's declared problem in hearing is a methodical way of avoiding giving one's name in response to the other's having done so. *Could talk be organized at that level of detail? And in so designed a manner?*

> <div align="right">(Schegloff, 1992: xvi–xvii, emphasis added)</div>

With this question, Sacks raised the possibility of investigating utterances as objects which speakers use to get things done in the course of their interactions with others. That is, an utterance as simple as 'I can't hear you' might be analysed to reveal how it is being employed to achieve a specific task in the course of the conversation. Sacks' subsequent analysis reveals that by 'not hearing', the caller is able to establish a series of turns in the conversation which ensures that it is increasingly unlikely that the member of the Center's staff will be able to obtain the caller's name without actually requesting it. In this case, then, the caller's expression of an apparent

hearing difficulty is a method by which he could accomplish the activity of 'not giving a name' without explicitly refusing to do so.

Sacks' subsequent detailed inspection of transcripts of recorded conversations began with the assumption that lengthy utterances, phrases, clauses, or even single words were used methodically in everyday interaction. They were studied as objects that were being used to do things. The goal of analysis, then, was to investigate the nature of these objects – how they were designed, where in interaction they occurred – and to describe the underlying organization of the way they were used: in short, to investigate how a speaker came to use these words, in this way and on this occasion.

This leads us to a key assumption of conversation analysis. Sacks' interest in the methodic properties of speakers' utterances should not be taken to imply that he wanted to describe *psychological* reasoning processes. Neither does it imply that this form of analysis proposes that speakers *intentionally* use these words to achieve certain effects. Sacks' work, and subsequent CA research, has focused on **talk-in-interaction** as a domain of social activity that is inherently ordered and not reducible to the personality, character, mood, and so on, of the people doing the talking. While not denying that people have intentions, motives or interests, CA does not treat interaction as a mere externalization of these inner cognitive processes. However, Sacks was aware that his mode of analysis could be taken to imply that he was engaged in an attempt to model or describe the psychological processes which underpinned competence in language use. At the end of his first lecture on conversational organization, he observed that when confronted with a detailed analysis of the social organization of interaction, one might:

> ... figure that they [the speakers] couldn't have thought that fast. I want to suggest to you that you have to forget that completely. Don't worry about how fast they're thinking. First of all, don't worry about whether they're 'thinking'. Just come to terms with how it is that [the detail of talk] comes off. Because you'll find that they can do these things ... Look to see how it is that persons go about producing what they do produce.

(Sack, 1992, vol.1: 11)

Interaction, then, is viewed as a domain of activity in its own right, and not as an expression of psychological idiosyncrasies and dispositions. Moreover, there has been a rejection of *a priori* theorizing about the significance of conversation *per se*, or particular activities in interaction. That is, the analyst does not begin analysis with a series of pre-established and theory-led questions or issues to be explored in the data. So conversation analysts won't approach data to examine, for example, how power is mobilized in interaction; or how gender differences influence conduct. One argument for this is, broadly, that the world is already interpreted by the participants themselves. It is important to investigate *their* interpretations of what is happening in the interaction rather than to impose somewhat arbitrarily a set of assumptions and relevancies, which might in fact, have no bearing on

the details of participants' actual conduct. This is an issue we will return to later in this section.

In the following section we will explore further Sacks' recommendation to 'Look to see how it is that persons go about producing what they do produce'.

In his earliest lectures Sacks was interested in the way that certain conversational actions seemed to go together: for example, greetings, such as 'hello' – 'hello' seem to form a 'natural' pair. And there seems something equally right about the way that questions will be followed by answers, and the way that invitations will be followed by acceptances (or rejections), and so on. To account for the recurrent structural properties of the organization of these kinds of paired units, Sacks proposed the concept of the **adjacency pair**. Heritage (1984: 246) provides the following formulation.

An adjacency pair is a sequence of two utterances which are:

- adjacent
- produced by different speakers
- ordered as a first part and second part
- typed, so that a first part requires a particular second (or range of second parts).

So, for example, an invitation would be the first part of an invitation–response pair.

This may seem to be an overly complex account of fairly trivial everyday events. However, the concept is important because it points to the **normative** character of paired actions: a first speaker's production of the first part of a pair projects a slot into which the second speaker *should* produce the appropriate second part. That is, the second part of a pair is made **conditionally relevant** by the production of a first part (Schegloff, 1972).

There are various kinds of evidence for this. For example, if a first part has been produced, and the appropriate next has not been produced, first speakers will pursue the second part, thus demonstrating their tacit understanding that it is accountably missing. In the following extract, the child has asked her mother a question. After a gap of over a second, the mother has not answered, and the child speaks again.

Extract 2

Child:	Have to cut the:se Mummy
	(1.3)
Child:	Won't we Mummy
	(1.5)
Child:	Won't we
Mother:	Yes

(Atkinson and Drew, 1979: 52)

Note how the child provides increasingly truncated versions of the initial question. This indicates that the child is not proceeding on the understanding that her mother did not hear her (for that would entail a repeat of the whole question), but on the assumption that Mother has heard but has not answered. The child's next two utterances thus constitute increasingly focused prompts to her mother to produce the now conditionally relevant appropriate second part. In this sense, the child's understanding of the normative properties of paired actions informs her (tacit) analysis of the absence of her mother's response and her subsequent utterances. The normative properties of paired action sequences thus provide a valuable resource for speakers by which to make sense of what is happening in interaction, and what would be an appropriate turn to produce next. (See Heritage, 1984: 247–53, for a more detailed discussion of the evidence for the normative basis of paired actions.)

The discussion of adjacency pairs illustrates CA's fundamental concern with **sequential analysis**. It is not interested in single utterances, but it is centrally concerned to explore how utterances are designed to tie with, or 'fit' to, prior utterances, and how an utterance has significant implications for what kinds of utterances should come next. In short, CA explores how utterances cohere together to become identifiable sequences of conversational actions which have regular properties. It is for this reason that we refer to paired action *sequences*.

However, there is something quite interesting about certain kinds of paired action sequences. If a question is asked, it is apparent that what should come next should be an answer, or some reason why an answer can't be provided. Some first parts of pairs, however, could be followed by one of two second parts: for example, an invitation can be followed by an acceptance or a refusal. Similarly, offers can be accepted or declined. It is noticeable, however, that these kinds of possible second parts are not equivalent in that they are produced in very different ways. Consider the following extracts.

Extract 3

1   **Jo**:   T's- tsuh a beautiful day out isn't it?

2   **Lee**: Yeh it's jus' gorgeous.

<div align="right">(Pomerantz, 1984: 59)</div>

Extract 4

1   **A**:   Why don't you come up and see

2   me some ⌈times

3   **B**:   ⌊I would like to

<div align="right">(Atkinson and Drew, 1979: 58)</div>

In Extract 3 the first speaker offers an assessment, which could be met either by agreement or disagreement. Here the speaker agrees and does so

quickly, without any delay after the end of the first speaker's turn. And in Extract 4, the first speaker produces an invitation which is accepted before the first turn is completed. However, consider the following extract in which an offer is declined.

Extract 5

1	**B**:	Uh if you'd care to come over and
2		visit a little while this morning
3		I'll give you a cup of coffee
4	**A**:	hehh Well that's awfully sweet of you,
5		I don't think I can make it this morning
6		hh uhm I'm running an ad in the paper and and uh I
7		have to stay near the phone.

(Atkinson and Drew, 1979: 58)

Even from an initial glance it is obvious that the action of declining an invitation is accomplished in a markedly different way to acceptance. First, in contrast to the immediate or even 'early' agreement or acceptance in the previous extracts, the refusal is not produced immediately, but delayed slightly by the out breath "(hehh)", which is in Line 4. The speaker then says "well" (a word which is routinely used at the beginning of refusals) followed by an appreciation of the offer: 'that's awfully sweet of you'. The rejection itself is very different from the agreement and acceptance, which were unequivocally positive. The rejection "I don't think I can make it this morning" is not as definite: the "I don't think" somehow qualifies and thereby softens the force of the rejection. Finally, in Lines 6 and 7 there is a clear account as to why the speaker can't accept the offer: the fact that she has to stay by the phone is offered as the excuse for the refusal.

These different ways of accomplishing acceptances and rejections are not specific to these two cases, nor to these two sets of speakers. In fact, Extract 5 illustrates a very consistent pattern which occurs when invitations or offers are declined or rejected. The same components appear in the declining turn in the following extract, and in the same order.

Extract 6

(S's wife has just slipped a disc.)

H:	And we were wondering if there's anything we can do to help
S:	⌈ Well at's
H:	⌊ I mean can we do any shopping for her or
	something like tha:t?
	(0.7) **Delay**

S:	Well	**Preface**
	that's most kind Heatherton	**Appreciation**
	At the moment no:.	**Mitigated rejection**
	because we've still got	**Account**
	the boys at home.	

(Heritage corpus data, ref. Her: 0II:2:4:ST)

In CA the terms **preferred** and **dispreferred** are used to capture the systematic differences in the ways that alternative second parts are designed. The format of agreements, acceptance, and so on is called the preferred action turn shape and the term for the format of disagreements, rejections and refusals is called the dispreferred action turn shape (Pomerantz, 1984: 64).

It is important to note, however, that the concept of preference, as it is used in CA, does not refer to the psychological motives or intentions of individuals. Rather, the terms preferred and dispreferred allow the characterization of the different structural features of the ways in which alternative but non-equivalent second parts may be produced.

At first, it may appear that conversation analysis aims to produce no more than a rather gross kind of subjective interpretation of the materials being examined. For example, in Extract 2, there may be other ways of interpreting why the child said what she did. On what basis, then, can conversation analysts claim any priority for their analyses? Does the reader have to take the analyst's interpretations on trust? No, because analytic claims are always grounded in detailed explication of the details of interaction; moreover, they are warranted by reference to the participants' tacit understanding of, or orientation to, the normative underpinning which demonstrably informs their conduct. The phrase '**demonstrably informs**' is crucial to conversation analysis research, and leads to a discussion of another central methodological point.

It is important to emphasize that the goal of conversation analysis is not to furnish an academic or 'outsider's' reading of some conversational sequence, but to describe the organized interpretations that *people themselves* employ in the moment-by-moment course of conversation. Thus the analytic claims about the child's utterances in Extract 2 were based upon her understanding of what was happening at that moment *as it was revealed in the kind of turn she went on to produce*. That is, if she had analysed the situation and concluded that the mother hadn't heard the question, there would have been little point in providing a shorter version, and she would have gone on to produce a different kind of utterance. That she provided a truncated version of the question demonstrates that she had interpreted the absence of talk after her question as a slot for which an appropriate action – in this case, an answer – should be produced.

The focus of analysis, then, is the understanding of 'what-is-going-on-right-here-right-now' which speakers themselves have, and which are

revealed – and thereby, demonstrable – in the design of subsequent utterances.

To explain this key methodological principle, consider the following extract, which comes from an exchange between a mother and her son about a Parent Teachers Association meeting.

Extract 7

1	**Mother**:	Do you know who's going to that meeting?
2	**Russ**:	Who?
3	**Mother**:	I don't know!
4	**Russ**:	Oh, probably Mr Murphy and Dad said Mrs
5		Timpte an' some of the teachers

(Terasaki, 1976: 45)

In this extract Mother's question "Do you know who's going to that meeting?" can be interpreted in two ways: as a genuine *request* for information about who is attending the meeting, or as a *pre-announcement* of some news concerning the people who will be attending the meeting. In the examination of this exchange, the analyst can identify which of these interpretations Russ makes by looking at the next turn after Mother's question. He returns the floor to his mother with a question, thereby displaying that he treats her utterance as a pre-announcement. Mother's next turn displays that on this occasion Russ's inference was incorrect.

The kinds of interpretative and reasoning procedures that CA seeks to identify are thus displayed in the trajectory of language use, which is organized on a turn-by-turn basis. It is for this reason that conversation analysts place great emphasis upon the examination of *sequences* of interaction, rather than, say, the detailed analysis of utterances which have been extracted from the sequential context in which they occurred. The methodological import of this is stressed by Sacks *et al.*:

> ... while understandings of other turns' talk are displays to co-participants, they are available as well to professional analysts who are thereby afforded a proof criterion (and search procedure) for the analysis of what a turns' talk is occupied with. Since it is the parties' understandings of prior turns' talk that is relevant to their construction of next turns, it is *their* understandings that are wanted for analysis. The display of those understandings in the talk of subsequent turns afforded both a resource for the analysis of prior turns and a proof procedure for professional analysis of prior turns – resources that are intrinsic to the data themselves.

(Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1978: 45 [1974], original emphasis)

Summary

It would be useful to summarize the discussion so far.

- CA emerged from the pioneering work of Sacks and his colleagues Schegloff and Jefferson.
- CA is a method for analysing the way people talk which treats language as action: it is interested in the way utterances can be designed to do things.
- It sets out to identify and describe the properties of action sequences: patterns of interaction with robust and consistent properties.
- It examines how speakers' conduct displays a sensitivity to the normative dimensions of action sequences.
- Contributions to interaction are taken to be shaped by the immediate context of the preceding utterance; and insofar as an utterance is followed by another, it shapes the context for the subsequent turn(s).
- It focuses on people's own analysis as revealed in the turn-by-turn unfolding of conversation.
- Empirical work must be done on naturally occurring data: intuition will not reveal the details of talk, nor the significance of specific features.
- Interaction is viewed as a domain of activity in its own right: not an expression of psychological idiosyncrasies and dispositions.
- CA is data driven, not theory led.

Activity 1

So far we've talked about CA but we haven't discussed how to go about doing it. This is, in part, because it is hard to identify a specific set of procedures which can be followed: unlike the set methods for conducting certain kinds of statistical analyses, there is no 'recipe' for doing conversation analysis. Moreover, there are variations in the ways different analysts proceed. Paul ten Have's (1999) introduction to conversation analysis has a useful account of some of the techniques used by analysts. What is common to all CA research, however, is the application of what Schenkein (1978b: 1ff) has called a 'conversation analytic mentality': a way of looking at data in such a way as to begin to develop an appreciation of the organized practices which inform interaction. And the first step in developing an analytic mentality is to begin to look at data carefully, and to try to produce as formal a description as is possible of what is going on.

Below is a collection of data fragments. Work through each one, noting anything that seems interesting or significant. Make as many notes or observations as you can, but remember that you only have the data in front of you. Your observations cannot stray into speculation about the speaker's personality, what you think they intended or 'what they really meant'. Stick to what's there and describe it. Once you've done that, try to find things in common between the fragments. And also look to see what is different.

An analogy might be to imagine that you are a mechanic from an alien civilization, deposited on earth to study modes of personal motor transport. You are presented with several kinds of motorized vehicle (car, motorbike, jeep, coach, van, etc.), and your task is to find out how they are made, what parts they have, how those parts work and what parts the cars have in common. The first thing you're likely to do is strip down each one, getting a good idea of how it is put together, what part does what, and how. Once you've done that, you're in a position then to identify parts in common, and what parts are different, and why they may be different and how they will affect the running of the vehicle. Bear in mind that the personality of the owners, where they were born, how they voted, their gender, their sexual orientation, whether or not they like animals, and so on, is entirely irrelevant to the way the vehicle is put together, and what it is put together to do.

Ideally, to attempt this activity, you would have access to the transcript and the tape; unfortunately, due to the constraints imposed by the format of the written text, transcriptions will have to suffice.

Extract 8

Sydney: While you've been talking to me I mended two

nightshirts a pillow case enna pair'v pants

Extract 9

Maybelle: I think if you exercise it an' work at it

'n studied it you do become clairvoyant.

Extract 10

(The overlapping bracket indicates where the next speaker's utterance begins in relation to the ongoing turn.)

Matt: The good actors are all dyin' out.

Tony: They're all- they're all

dyin out ⌈yeah.

Matt: ⌊Tyrone Po:wuh. Clark Gable, Gary Cooper,

Tony: Now all of 'em are dyin.

Extract 11

(UK General Election, 1983)

Thatcher: There's no government anywhere that is tackling

the problem with more vigour, imagination and

determination than this Conservative government

Audience: Hear hear ((*begins to applaud*))

Extract 12

Heather: And they had like a concession stand at a fair
                 where you can buy coke and popcorn and that type of
                 thing.

Extract 13

Rudd: Oh they come from Jamaica en South Africa 'n,
                 all over the place

Discussion

Hopefully you will have noticed the following features (there may be other
interesting properties but for the purposes of this exercise we'll focus the
discussion on a limited range of features.)

In each case, the speaker makes a list of things, be they items of clothing
being repaired, or famous-but-dead actors, or positive attributes of the
(then) UK government.

- In Extracts 8 to 11 the speakers use three items with which to build the
  list. To give them a technical name, they are **three part lists**.

- Extracts 10 and 11 are different because they show some form of
  interaction between the respective parties to the interaction. In
  Extract 10 there are two people talking to each other; in Extract 11 we
  see some interaction between a platform speaker at a political party
  conference and the audience in the form of verbal expressions of
  approval 'Hear, hear' and clapping. What is interesting is that these
  responses seem very neatly co-ordinated to start right at the point where
  the prior turn ends. In Extract 10 Tony's utterance "Now all of 'em are
  dyin" is placed precisely at the point that Matt's prior utterance ends
  (we know it ends because there is no indication that he is going on to
  provide any further names). And in Extract 11 the audience's response,
  both vocal and physical, seems to be pitched right at the end of the
  point the politician was making. How did the audience and Tony know
  when to start? How did they know when the respective speakers were
  going to stop?

- Extracts 12 and 13 provide some clues here. Note that in both these
  cases, the speakers use only two items in their lists. They then produce
  "and that type of thing" and "'n all over the place" where an appropriate
  third item would come. Items like "and that type of thing", "'n all over
  the place", and so on, are ways of making sure the list in progress is
  realized as a list of three when, for whatever reason the speaker can't
  come up with an appropriate third item. They are 'generalized list
  completers'.

Extracts 12 and 13 are important because they tell us something very interesting about three part lists. By using general phrases such as 'and all that', these speakers seem to be displaying their tacit understanding that lists *should* have three parts, and are complete only upon the provision of the third part. It is as though there is a normative principle underlying people's actions which runs something like: 'if doing a list in conversation, try to do it in three parts'. This normative principle is a powerful organizing feature of interaction: it is noticeable that if a speaker is producing a list, and seems to be having difficulty finding a third item, co-participants may offer candidate third items, displaying their orientation that someone else's list should have three parts.

The upshot, then, is that when you hear someone building a list, you can draw on your culturally available tacit knowledge to project when it should end: at the end of the third item. This is a valuable resource in organizing turn taking: hearers monitor on-going utterances to anticipate those moments in interaction where a change of speaker might be legitimately initiated. Tacit knowledge that lists should have three components allows co-participants to anticipate when turn transfer may be attempted. This is what happens in Extract 10: Tony is able to anticipate precisely where Matt's list will end, and where turn transfer may occur. Similarly, in Extract 11 the audience can hear that the speaker is making a list and can thereby project when a collective display of affiliation will be appropriately positioned to ensure there is no collision of applause and the speaker still talking.

(The data used in this section come from Jefferson's, 1990, study of the interactional features of listing, with the exception of Extract 11, which comes from Atkinson's, 1984, study of political rhetoric.)

2 Transcription

Conversation analysis begins with the assumption that no interactional events can be simply dismissed as unimportant or irrelevant, however trivial they appear: false starts to words, minor gaps between words and turns, and even the simple act of drawing breath can have real consequences for the way in which interaction unfolds. Consequently, it is necessary to try to capture the detail of interaction in transcripts of data recordings; and this means not only transcribing what was said, but the way it was said, and making sure that things that might seem messy, 'accidental', or ungrammatical are recorded in the transcript and not filtered out in some form of tidying up process.

Gail Jefferson has devised a system of transcribing which uses symbols available on conventional typewriter and computer keyboards. It is particularly useful for capturing aspects of speech production and the temporal positioning of utterances relative to each other. Although initially used only by conversation analysts, it is now being adopted by some researchers in other fields, such as discourse analysis in social psychology (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). The main symbols are explained below and it would be sensible to familiarize yourself with these before going on further.

Transcription symbols

(.5)	The number in brackets indicates a time gap in tenths of a second.
(.)	A dot enclosed in a bracket indicates a pause in the talk of less than two tenths of a second.
.hh	A dot before an 'h' indicates speaker in-breath; the more 'h's, the longer the in-breath.
hh	An 'h' indicates an out-breath; the more 'h's, the longer the out-breath.
(( ))	A description enclosed in a double bracket indicates a non-verbal activity, for example *((banging sound))*.
-	A dash indicates the sharp cut-off of the prior word or sound.
:	Colons indicate that the speaker has stretched the preceding sound or letter. The more colons the greater the extent of the stretching.
( )	Empty parentheses indicate the presence of an unclear fragment on the tape.
(guess)	The words within a single bracket indicate the transcriber's best guess at an unclear fragment.
.	A full stop indicates a stopping fall in tone. It does not necessarily indicate the end of a sentence.
,	A comma indicates a continuing intonation.
?	A question mark indicates a rising inflection. It does not necessarily indicate a question.
Under	Underlined fragments indicate speaker emphasis.
↑↓	Pointed arrows indicate a marked falling or rising intonational shift. They are placed immediately before the onset of the shift.
CAPITALS	With the exception of proper nouns, capital letters indicate a section of speech noticeably louder than that surrounding it.
° °	Degree signs are used to indicate that the talk they encompass is spoken noticeably quieter than the surrounding talk.
> <	'More than' and 'less than' signs indicate that the talk they encompass was produced noticeably quicker than the surrounding talk.
=	The 'equals' sign indicates contiguous utterances.
[ ]	Square brackets between adjacent lines of concurrent speech indicate the onset and end of a spate of overlapping talk.
[[	A double left-hand bracket indicates that speakers start a turn simultaneously.

A more detailed description of these transcription symbols can be found in Atkinson and Heritage, 1984: ix–xvi.

To illustrate why a detailed transcript is so important, consider the two following extracts. They are two different transcriptions of the same section of a recording of a medium providing a sitting for a client. The first was done by a trained audio-typist using standard forms of punctuation. She provides this service to colleagues at the University of Surrey, and she is regarded as an accomplished and accurate typist. Consequently, the first version is probably similar in form and level of detail to the kinds of transcripts social scientists use in research which employs ethnographic or qualitative interviewing techniques.

Extract 14

('P' is the medium, 'S' is the client or sitter.)

```
1    P:  So keep it, maybe you'll know it. Good. Trouble with
2        ankles. Your ankles have been bothering you or feet,
3        or someone's feet been bothering them please?
4    S:  No
5    P:  Who has had trouble with feet or ankles?
6    S:  A friend of mine, but
7    P:  Hang on. Did she talk to you about a sprained ankle or
8        some ankle problem or getting new shoes ... , or trouble
9        with her feet.
10   S:  A friend of mine had some problem.
11   P:  He's telling me this.
```

Now consider the same data transcribed using conversation analytic conventions.

Extract 15

```
1    P:  so keep it, may ⌈be you (will) know it.=
2    S:             ⌊allright
3    P:  =good.
4        (1.5)
5    P:  mm hm, mm hm
6        (2)
7    P:  ((blows air over lips))
8        (2.2)
9    P:  mm hm mm
10       (2)   ((M whispering))
11   P:  trouble with ankles. (.) Your ankles have been
```

```
12          bothering, you or feet,

13          (0.2)

14    P:    someone's feet been bothering them (.) please?

15    S:    n:o::,=

16    P:    =who's- who's had trouble with feet.

17          (0.2)

18    P:    or ankles.

19          (1)

20    S:    ah(m) friend of mi:ne but

21          (.)

22    P:    di ⌈d she ⌉ (.) ⌈talk to yo⌉u about hh °hold on° h

23    S:       ⌊(but) ⌋    ⌊(na(r):h: ⌋

24    P:    did she talk >t'y'about< sp- (.) a sprained ankle

25          or some (s't've) ankle trouble or getting new

26          shoes for a

27          (.)

28    P:    (fw ⌈( )⌉

29    S:         ⌊ a* ⌋(.) friend of mine had some problem,

30    P:    he's telling me this.
```

The revised transcript probably looks daunting and cluttered. This is a normal first reaction, but once you are used to the meaning of the symbols, transcripts do become easier to read.

But let's consider some of the differences. The medium claims to be receiving messages from the spirit world and relaying that information to the sitter. In this section his first utterance constitutes a closing remark to a discussion of the relevance of a message from the spirits offered prior to the start of this section. He then moves onto the topic of "someone having trouble with feet or ankles". Note that in Extract 15 it is apparent that prior to the production of this message, the medium does a variety of things: he produces utterances which are responses to the spirit voices he claims he can hear (for example the acknowledgement token 'mm hm' in Lines 5 and 9); he whispers something so quietly it is impossible to detect what he is saying; and he blows air over his lips, making a faint 'raspberry' noise, as if to demonstrate 'focusing' or 'concentrating'. All of this detail is lost in the standard transcript which simply provides the words that are said. Moreover, this detail could be significant: for example, the possibility of exploring the performative aspects of medium-sitter interaction would be severely hindered by a simple rendering of the words.

Conversation analysts take great care in transcribing sections of overlapping talk: moments when more than one participant is speaking at the same time. In the revised transcript, there are three instances of overlap,

in Lines 1 and 2, 22 and 23, and 28 and 29. In the second case, the medium seems to be having some difficulty: he has offered a message from the spirits concerning a foot problem but the sitter seems less than enthusiastic about accepting this information. She has volunteered that a friend of hers has had some problem but in Lines 20 and 23 is clearly going on to register some doubt that this is what the spirits are referring to. Her second "but" comes in overlap with the medium's "did she". They both stop and then resume at the same moment. In overlap with the medium's "talk to you" the sitter produces an emphatic version of no: "na(r):h:". Her overlapping talk is not even recorded in the standard transcript. However, it may have some significance, because immediately afterwards the medium curtails the utterance he was making ("talk to you about ...") and then says, "hold on". So, we can begin to get a sense that his abandonment of that utterance happened fairly swiftly after the sitter's drawn out and definitive no, and this in turn suggests that it was generated out of his hearing a negative response from the sitter.

Moreover, the "hold on" (incorrectly reproduced in the standard transcript as 'hang on') is said very quietly, and almost whispered. This *sotto voce* production is consistent with other utterances in which the medium is apparently listening and responding to the spirits. This quietly spoken "hold on", then, marks the medium's temporary disengagement from the interaction with the sitter to attend to the spirits. Again, a simple rendering of the words would not capture the performative aspect of the medium's utterances.

By capturing the precise moments at which overlap occurred, we begin to raise some interesting analytic issues. For example, what can we say about the way in which the medium's invocation of the spirits, and thereby, momentary disengagement from the sitter, seems to happen in the immediate vicinity of the sitter's apparent rejection of an attempt to find the relevance of his message?

There are many other features of the revised transcript which could be discussed: the importance of timing periods of absence of talk; the significance of elongated or stressed words, and so on. However, this section has simply tried to demonstrate the kinds of information which are yielded by close attention to the detail of what actually happens in interaction.

It is important to stress that the comparison between the two transcripts should not be taken to imply inefficiency on the part of the audio typist. She was simply providing the kind of transcript which she has produced for social scientists, and researchers in other fields, on many previous occasions. The comparison was designed to highlight the level of detailed information (and features of possible analytic interest) lost in conventional transcription practices.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that CA is not simply the study of transcripts: it seeks to make sense of those events of which the transcription is a representation. The transcript is merely an aid (albeit a valuable one) in the analysis of the events recorded on tape.

Activity 2

Record some naturally occurring interaction: a conversation between friends, or perhaps a radio or television news interview. Using the system developed by Gail Jefferson, try to transcribe a five-minute segment in as much detail as possible. One method would be, first, to produce a very rough transcript, consisting only of the words that were said, and then to go through the tape again, and on each successive listening, address different features of speech production: overlapping talk, then stress and emphasis, then sound stretching, and so on.

3   Getting started: developing analytic themes

In the rest of this chapter we will begin to see what kinds of lines of inquiry emerge from the application of a conversation analytic mentality to a particular set of data: recordings of one-to-one sittings between psychic practitioners, such as mediums, clairvoyants, psychics, palmists, tarot card readers, and so on, and their clients.

The data for this research come from various sources including 27 taped sessions of psychic practitioners conducting sittings with individual clients. The recordings were made by the psychics themselves as part of the fee for the sitting. The sittings were conducted either at 'psychic fayres' or at the psychics' homes, in various locations in the UK. The sitters were either students who volunteered to go to a medium and provide me with the tape, or people who have volunteered copies of tapes of sittings which occurred either prior to, or in the absence of any knowledge about, this research. In addition to these recordings, I recorded some data from a BBC documentary about mediums, and received video and cassette tapes from a private research foundation in the United States; a colleague also provided me with transcribed fragments taken from a tape of Doris Stokes, the famous English medium, performing at a theatre in London.

What is interesting about these kinds of interactions is that if psychic practitioners are to maintain their claim to have special powers, it is necessary that they produce a convincing demonstration when they are consulted by members of the public. Their status as authentic mediums and psychics rests upon some form of display of knowledge and its acceptance by the sitter as evidence of paranormal powers. However, any information, claim or description which is offered in a sitting or at a meeting as evidence of psychic powers, and the acceptance (or rejection) of that information, is negotiated verbally. What, then, is the nature of communication between psychic practitioners and their clients? And what is the organization of utterances in which evidential information is offered and accepted?

In order to develop some analytic themes consider the following extract. This is a transcript of part of a sitting between a clairvoyant and a young woman. During this sitting, the clairvoyant is using tarot cards to discern aspects of the sitter's present and future life. Immediately prior to this extract, she has just informed the sitter of an impending new relationship,

and is describing some of the physical characteristics of the person with whom it is claimed the sitter will become involved. In this and subsequent extracts, the psychic practitioner is designated by the letter 'P', and the sitter by the letter 'S'. (All names have been changed to preserve the anonymity of the participants.)

Extract 16 (K/CC)

```
1      P:  =y- I feel th't you go for eyes, you >know what I

2          mean,<=you like people ⌈with nice eyes as well. .h and

3      S:                          ⌊yea:h,

4      P:  there's also travel, for you,

5          (.)

6      S:  m ⌈m hm⌉

7      P:    ⌊.h  ⌋ and there's also ↑ money for you as we:ll:? .h

8          an' are y' changing a ca:r,

9          (0.4)

10     S:  No ⌈:.

11     P:     ⌊ and is your da:d, (0.2) 's your dad ehm, (0.8)

12         generous?

13         (1)

14     S:  ca:n be.=

15     P:  =okay, .h well I feel ja- your dad is showing you

16         generosity, h but I would say to you. (0.3) there's

17         going to be somebody else very generous

18         around' juh.h and I feel th't your job's to do with

19         communicating?

20         (0.2)

21     S:  I'm a s⌈tudent⌉ a⌈ctually    ⌉

22     P:         ⌊okay? ⌋  ⌊awright,⌋ so (.) >ehm< (0.3) there's

23         learning and studying? ⌈hh and are you going to be

24     S:                         ⌊mm:.

25     P:  any sort of a communicator when you finished studying?,

26         (.)

27     S:  n::Not really I do(h-) ⌈ah do:n't reall⌉y know

28     P:                         ⌊an' and travel?⌋

29     S:  what I'm I'm go(n)- (.) (plan these)
```

```
30          travel ⌈s with- f' when've (.)        ⌉
31    P:          ⌊okay well that will be:⌋eh ⌈:m:
32    S:                                         ⌊finished
33    P:    that will be that then. ⌈travel? .h ahr: because
34    S:                            ⌊yeah
35    P:    feel that this country you've had enough
36          of it fo⌈r  a while        ⌉and the ⌉ studying and
37    S:            ⌊(k)hh hu ye(hh)ah⌋   ( )  ⌋
38    P:    learning is saying that you haven't got the knowledge
39          at the moment, but you're go(n)- you're doing it.
40    S:    y⌈e:ah ⌉
41    P:     ⌊.h w⌋ho works at computers sally.
42          (1)
43    S:    Ehrm::
44          (0.6)
45    S:    I can't think of anybody actually
46    P:    °mm°?
47          (0.2)
48    P:    somebody could be gon' >on a course of< studying
49          with eh:m
50          (0.5)
51    P:    ahr::(m)
52          (0.2)
53    P:    computers?
54          (0.3)
54    S:    > Oh(r) ⌈we-well ah mean< we use computers
56    P:           ⌊y'know
57    S:    on the cou⌈rse
58    P:              ⌊do you?
59    S:    ⌈⌈yeah.
60    P:    ⌊⌊OKa:y,(.) maybe that's what it be .h
```

It is apparent that this kind of exchange has some interesting and distinctive features which set it apart from what we might intuitively understand as routine conversational interaction. For example, one party seems to be able to direct the focus of the interaction: the sitter does not

actually raise a topic herself in this exchange. Moreover, it seems that the psychic is able to decide when it is appropriate to initiate new topics. It is also important to remember that the psychic is consulting tarot cards laid out in front of her; and at various points in the sitting (although not in this extract), these are discussed, remarked upon, alluded to, invoked and so on. How can CA help us analyse interaction that so clearly departs from what we might understand ordinary conversation to be?

The first point to keep in mind is that, despite its name, CA is the study of talk-in-interaction *per se*, not some narrowly defined understanding of 'conversation'. More relevant, though, is the considerable body of research on the organization of talk-in-interaction in a variety of institutional or work related settings: in court rooms, in doctors' surgeries, in calls to emergency services, in talk-radio programmes and in television news interviews.

CA studies of these forms of interaction have proceeded on the assumption that what makes **institutional talk** distinctive is the way in which its organization departs from those recurrent practices found in mundane conversational interaction. In this sense, ordinary conversation is treated as having a foundational or 'bedrock' status with respect to forms of interaction in work settings.

Heritage (1997) has identified some of the key features which demarcate institutional talk from ordinary conversation.

- Participants in institutional interaction are normally concerned with specific sets of tasks and goals which are clearly connected to the 'business' of the institution; moreover, these goals are tied to identities relevant to that institution: for example, doctors provide information about medical problems, and teachers teach.

- It is understood that there are constraints on what kinds of participation are normatively appropriate: for example, it is not expected that a patient offers medical advice to the doctor, nor tell jokes, or engage in a lengthy monologue about local geography.

- The practical tasks or business of the institution will shape the kinds of inferences about and understanding of on-going interaction.

Collectively these features constitute what Heritage and Greatbatch call a 'fingerprint' of the patterns in interaction in each institutional setting (1991: 95–6). What properties might constitute part of the fingerprint of interaction between psychics and sitters?

In this relatively short extract, the clairvoyant introduces various topics: changing a car, travelling, the generosity of the sitter's father, and somebody working with computers. Some of these topics are hearably tied to, or potentially touched off from, issues raised in earlier sections of the exchange. For example, the possibility of travel raised in Line 28 seems transparently tied to the sitter's minimal acceptance of the clairvoyant's earlier statement that "there's also travel, for you" in Line 4. Other topics seem disjunctive to on-going topical threads. For example, "who works at

computers sally" in Line 41 does not appear to be related to any prior topic in this extract, or indeed, to any topic introduced in the entire sitting prior to the section transcribed here. (Although there is no record of what was said prior to the onset of the recording of the session.)

A routine feature of this extract, and indeed, the discourse between psychic practitioners and sitters more generally, is the clairvoyant's use of questions to initiate topics which then become, even if only momentarily, the focus for both participants. Moreover, these questions refer to aspects of the sitter's current circumstances, or their future plans, information which should not be available to a stranger such as the psychic. And, in the extent to which they can establish that these references to ostensibly private matters are correct or accurate, psychic practitioners provide evidence for and, by implication, demonstrations of, their access to paranormal sources of information.

These topic initiating utterances, then, seem to be a routine feature of this sitting, and clearly connected to one of the key 'work' tasks of the psychic practitioner: convincing displays of parapsychological abilities. It would be appropriate to work through one instance, and the subsequent interaction, in some detail. The following exchanges occur later in the same sitting.

Extract 17 (K/CC)

(The psychic has just been saying how the sitter is restricted because she has to complete her course of academic study.)

```
1     S: yeah th ⌈at's true        ⌉
2     P:         ⌊and who's⌋ got debts,
3        (0.3)
4     P: somebody got=
5     S: =me: hh
6        (.)
7     S: huh huh ⌈hah ha .HHhh ⌈hih hih heh
8     P:         ⌊HA           ⌊I've got some debts
9        accumulat⌈ing so in other words you're
10    S:          ⌊hhh >(ch)hu yeah<
11    P: looking ⌈for pennies from heaven⌉ t'fall
12    S:         ⌊hhhh(.)ih yeah hih hi   ⌋
13    P: outta the sky::,
```

The following points come from my preliminary consideration of this extract. They are simply an example of the kind of analytic considerations or 'noticing' which might be produced on first inspection of a piece of data. Read through them while consulting the data extract.

- The psychic's utterance in Line 2 initiates a new topic.

- This utterance is designed as a question.

- There are no specific details: no names are mentioned, and there is no characterization of the kind of debt: accumulated non-payment of mortgage, bank loan, business loan, personal loan, etc. Moreover, this is to hear "debts" as a reference to financial obligations, but it could be interpreted to refer to an obligation to repay non-monetary favours: we could owe a debt to parents or friends for support or practical assistance. It is not clear to what exactly the utterance refers.

- It is designed in such a way as to imply or propose that the recipient does indeed know someone who has debts. This in turn implies that the psychic has some knowledge about the sitter's life.

- There is a short gap after the initial question.

- The next person to speak after the gap is the psychic. Her next utterance appears to be the initial part of a slight reformulation of the prior utterance.

- The difference between the first and projected second version is that there is a shift from "who's got debts" to "somebody got" (debts). The first version appears more confident because it implies there is somebody, known to the sitter, who fits that description, whereas the second version simply addresses the possibility that someone known to the sitter has got debts. There is, then, a scaling down of implied certainty.

- The psychic's 'weaker' version can be seen to be generated from her analysis of the significance of the 0.3 second gap. That she has revised her initial utterance suggests that she treats the gap not as something insignificant, but as indicating the absence of the sitter's next turn. The subtly revised second version displays her inference that the sitter's difficulty was connected to the stronger or more certain version of her initial turn.

- Before the psychic can complete the second version the sitter provides a short answer: "me", and then begins to laugh.

- The psychic participates with the laughter but only briefly: her "HA" (Line 8) has the character of recognition of the humour generated by the sitter's self-identification as the person with debts, and subsequent laughter, rather than her own spontaneous laughter.

- The sitter's bout of laughter has two phases. After the first four 'bubbles' of laughter she draws breath, as people do after such an expressive activity as laughing. At this point the psychic begins to speak, but ends up talking in overlap with the continued laughter of the sitter.

- The psychic's next turn is "I've got some debts accumulating so in other words you're looking for pennies from heaven t'fall". This accomplishes a number of things. First, it provides an account for how the psychic

knew that someone had debts: "I've got" (that someone has debts) characterizes that information as being observable or 'read off' from the arrangement of the tarot cards. Second, this establishes a paranormal source for the information that the sitter knew someone with debts. Third, it extends the nature of the initial topic: someone with debts is now elaborated into got "some debts accumulating". Fourth, it extends the topic of debt but in a way which is fitted to the answer the sitter gave: it is the sitter, who by virtue of her financial circumstances, who is characterized as "looking for pennies from heaven t'fall". It is noticeable that in this turn the psychic is clear in her identification of the person who has the debts.

These observations range over a variety of features which could be pursued in more detail. They are by no means exhaustive, however, and we could investigate others: Why is the psychic's question prefaced by "and"? Why does the sitter delay her utterance which reveals she has debts? Is there any indication that the sitter demonstrates an understanding that the self-identification might be an inappropriate or unexpected action to fill that slot? What is the laughter doing here? Could it be fitted to her identification of herself as the referent of the psychic's question? And why does the psychic use a variant of the idiomatic phrase "pennies from heaven" in this slot? However, for the purposes of this chapter, we will focus on the broader structural features of the sequence.

The structure of Extract 17 can be characterized as:

1   A question from the medium which a) initiates a topic and b) can be heard as proposing that the sitter does indeed know someone with debts.

2   The sitter's utterance which, given that it reveals that she does indeed know someone with debts, stands as a confirmation.

3   The psychic's second turn a) demonstrates that the information alluded to in the first turn was derived from a paranormal source and b) addresses that topic in such a way as to take account of the information the sitter has just provided.

These are interesting observations insofar as they address one of the key 'tasks' related to psychic–sitter interaction: providing demonstrations of parapsychological abilities. Moreover, these turns seem to form a unit:

• question implying knowledge of sitter

• confirmation/acceptance

• attribution of now established knowledge of sitter from a paranormal source; this attribution is produced at the start of the psychic's second turn.

It is at this stage that it is necessary to return to the data corpus to search for other sequences which seem to have similar properties. It is only when such a collection is available that the analyst can begin to make stronger claims about the sequence being investigated. This does not

mean, however, that conversation analytic claims rest on showing that an interactional phenomena has occurred ten, twenty or a hundred times in a corpus of data. It is not the case that CA seeks some form of statistical or numerical measures by which to validate its analytic claims. In this, CA differs significantly in its approach to that adopted in most social science disciplines, in which a corpus of data is collected and examined with a view to identifying trends and patterns in those data as a way of making statistical statements about a wider population. In CA, a collection of data is taken to be a series of (candidate) instances of a specific phenomenon, each of which is considered to be worthy of detailed analysis to discover how its features were interactionally produced by the participants. The objective is to identify the recurrent organizational properties exhibited by the instances in the collection. Consequently, it is useful to have a collection of instances taken from a range of sources and settings. In my study of the three turn sequence identified in Section 2, I used instances taken from face-to-face readings in the United Kingdom and the United States. For my work on mediums, as noted earlier, I have drawn from recordings taken from a televised documentary about mediums; and have also been able to consult transcripts of a famous British medium providing demonstrations of mediumship to an audience of several hundred in a theatre.

In building a collection of instances which may have the same properties as the target data, it is not necessary to look for identical matches: a loose criterion by which to select other sequences for closer study would suffice. In examining the corpus of psychic-sitter interactions, I looked for instances of psychic practitioner's questions which were followed by some form of positive response. As you work through your collection, it is highly likely that close inspection will reveal that many cases in fact exhibit markedly different organizational features. However – hopefully – you will be able to assemble a collection of cases which seem to share many key features. It is at this point that you should try to provide the most formal account of the sequential organization exhibited in these extracts.

While it is certainly the case that a collection of instances of a phenomenon does permit the analyst to demonstrate its recurrence over a series of interactional episodes, CA's key task is to show how participants' orientation to the properties of that sequence inform their conduct. One consequence of this analytic task is that it is extremely important to examine cases in which there seems to be clear deviation form the established pattern. This will be discussed in more detail in Section 4.

Activity 3

The purpose of this exercise is to sharpen your analytic and descriptive skills. Look at the three extracts which follow; work through each one in as much detail as possible, and focus on describing the structure of the interaction as it is built up over successive turns.

Extract 18 (JREF B)

```
1    P:   So spirit wants me to do a scan on your bo:dy, talk
2         about your health, so I'm going to do that okay? I'm
3         going to do this for your health (0.8) Let's see
4         what's going on with you. .hh number one thing is your
5         > mother in spirit please?<
6         (0.2)
7    S:   Yes
8    P:   > 'cause I have (n-m) y'r mother standing right over
9         here, hh and she said I WANna TAlk to HEr and I want
10        to speak to her because hh your mother has very
11        lou::d when she comes through. .h she speaks with a in
12        a very lou:d way a very uhm (.) y'understand
13        very ⌈she has to be
14   S:        ⌊ye:s:.
15   P:   heard, .h and like this would not happen today
16        without her coming through for you. D'y'⌈un'erstand?
17   S:                                           ⌊'kay
18   S:   Ye:s.
```

Extract 19 (EV)

```
1    P:   >'ave you 'ad< (.) bit >(o')< trouble with your
2         back as well.
3         (0.2)
4    S:   yes a little bi⌈t
5    P:              ⌊he says ah'd best send
6         her a bit of sympathy down so you understand it,
7         hh⌈h
8    S:     ⌊ye⌈s
9    P:        ⌊coz y'know .h y'try to bottle things up and
10        you don't always let people get close to you in
11        that sense do you
12   S:   no.
13   P:   he says she can be quite stubborn at times y'know
14        (.)
```

15   **P**: is that true

16   **S**: °yes°

17   **P**: an' he knows cz .h you are <u>fussy</u> about the

18   bungalow aren't

19   you ⌈girl

20   **S**:   ⌊yes I am

21   **P**: bless her he says

Extract 20 (CD/DR)

1   **P**: .h ↑y'ever though(t) o(f) .h did you want to go

2   into a caring pro↓fession early on, when >y'w's uh(t)<

3   y'know when you were ch<u>oo</u>sing which way you were

4   gonna go.

5   (.)

6   **S**: yeah I wanted to: go into child care

7   actuall⌈y when I   ⌉

8   **P**:   ⌊MMMmm:::⌋::.=

9   **S**: =when I left school

10   **P**: That's right yeah >well< .h (.) 'm being shown

11   that>but (t)-< .h it's (0.2) it's not your way ye(t)

12   actually but i(t) y'y may be caring for (t-)ch- children

13   or whatever later on okay?

Discussion

We will consider each extract in order. Extract 18 begins with a section from a medium's description of how the sitting will proceed. After this initial preamble, he produces a question about the sitter's mother. This has an interesting design in that it could be heard as a genuine question about the sitter's mother; that is, it may be equivalent to "has your mother passed on or is she still living?"; or it could be heard as a question which seeks confirmation of information already known to the medium. The sitter's minimal response does not disambiguate the prior turn, in that a simple "yes" could be 'a telling' or 'a confirmation'. The medium's next turn, however, reveals that he is in contact with the spirit of the sitter's mother. This retrospectively characterizes his first turn as a 'question seeking confirmation of information already at hand'. Moreover, it can now be inferred that the knowledge that the sitter's mother has died is now revealed to have come from a paranormal source: the spirit of the mother in communication with the medium. There are then, strong

similarities in the structure of this sequence to that derived from analysis of Extract 17.

Extract 19 provides three further examples of the sequential unit outlined above. There are three questions, each of which can be heard as displaying some kind of intimate knowledge about the sitter: that she has back trouble, that she can be withdrawn, and that she is house-proud. To each of these questions the sitter provides minimal positive responses. And in each occasion the medium then goes on to report what the spirit of the sitter's husband has said to him, thereby making it inferable that it was the spirit who provided the information about the sitter.

The sequence in Extract 20, however, shows a slight deviation in that although the sitter does respond positively to the psychic's question, she does not do so with a minimal response. After an initial "yeah" she goes on to elaborate upon what she infers the psychic to be referring to in his question about 'wanting to go into a caring profession'. The sitter thus treats this slot in the exchange as a place in which it is appropriate to provide an elaborated confirmation. Moreover, the psychic begins to produce an elongated and unusually loud agreement token while the sitter is talking. She cuts off her turn and then produces the completion latched on to the end of the psychic's "mm". Finally, in previous extracts the psychics have attributed the now confirmed knowledge to a paranormal source. The psychic does this in Extract 20 by saying that he is "being shown" (the information provided by the sitter). However, in the other cases of this sequence we have considered, it seems that psychics produce this attribution as early as possible in their second turn: in this case, that action is delayed, coming after "that's right year >well<.h". This means, then, that this extract does not match the structure found in previous extracts. However, it should not be discarded as analytically uninteresting, as deviations from the emerging pattern can be highly informative.

Having identified this sequence as potentially interesting, and certainly observable in a number of data extracts, a next analytic step is to produce a more formal description of its properties. We can say that it is a three turn series of utterances, in which a claim about the sitter is proposed, accepted by the sitter, and which is then characterized as originating from a paranormal source. This sequence can be described schematically as:

T1 Psychic: a question embodying a claim about, or knowledge of, the sitter, their circumstances, etc.

T2 Sitter: minimal confirmation/acceptance

T3 Psychic: demonstration that the information embodied in the question has come from a paranormal source

4   Methodological digression

Note that the characterization of the sequence shown above does not rely on the specific details of what was actually said, but the actions accomplished by turn design, and the organization of the ways in which people take turns talking together. This sets CA apart from many other social scientific studies which use recorded data, in which it is customary

for the analyst to focus on thematic issues which are revealed in the *content* of peoples' talk. We can illustrate the importance of this by considering the following extracts.

Extract 21 (LL/RC)

(Discussing holidays; tape unclear)

P: .hhh was your mum very short.

       (1)

S: she was ye⌈ah

P: ⌊mm yeah

S: °yeah°

P: she's giving you a lovely cuddle

       (.)

P: (k)H⌈Hh HUh HUh huh hah ha hh and (are they birthdaying)

S: ⌊(k)ohhh huh huh hu

P: in m<u>ay</u>

Extract 22

P: she's so: h<u>a</u>ppy,

       (0.7)

S: good.

P: and so happy to s<u>ee</u>: (.) everybody, and she brings me the

       beau:tiful colour of violets, (0.2) that lovely soft colour of violets,

       (0.5) which is lovely (.) and it's beautifully peaceful (0.3) and uh

       (1.2)

P: and then (.) she just said don't ↑<u>e</u>ver be afr<u>ai</u>:d, (0.4) don't ↑<u>e</u>ver

       be afr<u>ai</u>:d, (0.2) there's nothing to be afraid of. (0.7) an(g)uh:,

       (3.3)

P: (ptch) oh it's l<u>o</u>:vely, (0.2) she just leaned forward and put a scarf

       round your neck and turned your collar up huh huH HUH HAH

       HAH HAh(n) nn.HHH which is a wa(hh)y o(h)f sa(hu)ying, .hh (.)

       .h I look after you((ch)huh) (ch)hih huh=

S: =Yeah.

P: .h (ch)Hhu(n) sure she would've always been concerned ↑are

       you w<u>a</u>rm enough,

       (w'y-) .hh hu(n)

In many conventional sociological studies these two extracts might be interpreted as showing two instances of the same phenomenon: the psychic practitioner's report of the spirit's displays of physical attention to the sitter. Moreover, it is likely this feature would be interpreted in terms of conventional sociological concerns: for example, it might be deemed significant that in both cases it is a female spirit being physically affectionate, and this in turn might be taken to show how expectations of gendered patterns of caring behaviour are transposed upon or reflected in depictions of the spirit world. However reasonable such interpretations might be, there is a danger that they obscure investigation of the details of the ways in which such descriptions are produced, and the interactional or inferential significance they may have for the participants themselves. For example, it is clear that, at a sequential level, these two extracts display very different interactional phenomena. Extract 21 displays the success sequence outlined earlier; and the medium's depiction of the spirit's activity constitutes the third turn. And we have an understanding of the kind of action the medium's description of the spirit is doing: insofar as it displays that the spirit is visible to the medium, it is both an account for how she knew about the physical characteristics of the sitter's mother and a demonstration of paranormal abilities. However, the depiction of the spirit's caring behaviour in Extract 22 is markedly different: it does not occupy the same kind of sequential position; its significance is then explicitly formulated by the medium as "a wa(hh)y o(h)f sa(hu)ying, .hh (.) .h I look after you"; and, most important, insofar as the sitters' next utterances differ, it may be the case that *they* are treating the prior turns as performing very different kinds of activities. And this is crucial, because in the first instance these utterances were produced by people for each other in real life situations. Analysis of the significance of these turns, or indeed, any naturally occurring interaction, should prioritize participants' own interpretations of the moment-by-moment unfolding of interaction by examining how those interpretations inform the design and placement of subsequent turns.

5   Demonstrating participants' orientation to a sequence

Having arrived at an account of the recurrent properties of a sequence, it is now important to demonstrate that this pattern is interactionally produced: to show how participants' orientation to the requirements of that sequence inform their activities, and in so doing, 'bring off' or realize that sequence collaboratively. There are two investigative strategies. First, we can inspect the corpus for instances in which the oriented-to **design of an utterance** is revealed in some aspect of the speaker's turn. Second, we can analyse how **deviations** from the sequence are addressed in subsequent turns.

5.1 Identifying the design features of an utterance

In the success sequence, the psychic's first turn is designed to embody a claim about, or propose some information relevant to, the sitter.

Overwhelmingly, this turn is produced as a question. But is there any evidence that participants actively work to make sure it comes off in a question format?

Consider the following two extracts.

Extract 23 (CD/DR)

P: .h ↑y'ever though(t) o(f) .h did you want to go into a caring pro↓fession

early <u>on</u>, when >y'w's uh(t)< y'know when you were ch<u>oo</u>sing which way

you were gonna go.

Extract 24 (GR/RC)

P: er:m: (0.2) I also think that uhm:(.) .h are there three of you th't're

very cl<u>o</u>se,

In both cases the speakers perform self repair on the design of their utterance while they are in production. In Extract 23 the psychic's ".h ↑y'ever though(t) o(f)" has the character of the start of a turn in which advice is given. This projected turn is terminated and the utterance then develops into a question about the sitter's early career aspirations. In Extract 24 we see the speaker produces another self-repair of the on-going utterance. The initial components of her turn project a 'telling' or a statement (albeit modulated by "I also think") which is discontinued and replaced by a question. While the object of repair is ambiguous, in that it could be a repair on the format of the utterance or the topic, the shape of the eventually completed turn provides evidence as to the psychic's orientation to the appropriateness of a question format.

So, in addition to the fact that the first turn in a success sequence is usually a question, or has a questioning character, these two extracts provide instances of the speakers terminating on-going utterances which do not have the character of questions, and then producing utterances which do. Why might psychics and mediums orient to the appropriateness of a question format for a turn in which they exhibit, for confirmation or disconfirmation, a knowledge claim about the sitter?

Consider this: the authority of the psychic's claim to have special powers would be compromised were he or she to endorse proposals about the sitter which subsequently transpire to be false. Any knowledge claim proposed by the psychic, therefore, cannot be confirmed as an instance of, for example, the agency of the spirit world, or the use of special parapsychological faculties, until it is accepted by the sitter.

What seems to be significant in Extracts 23 and 24 is that the projected turn formats which are abandoned may be heard as expressing the psychic's commitment to or endorsement of the knowledge of the sitter which is being proposed. A statement that X (a state of affairs) is relevant to Y (the sitter) implies that, at least, the medium believes it to be true. It is a positive proposal. A question which addresses the same relationship or

set of relevancies, however, makes the same proposal in a modulated form. And perhaps most significantly, the information being proposed is not heard as being endorsed by the medium, an inference which is available from the statement format. Similarly, an utterance which advises a course of action may be deemed to reflect or express the speaker's endorsement of that advice. In both cases, then, we find that self-repair is carried out on utterances whose projected shape might, if completed, facilitate the recipient's inference that the psychic is endorsing the accuracy or validity of the proposed knowledge claim prior to its confirmation by the sitter.

We can locate further evidence of an orientation to the features of the sequence in the design of the sitter's acceptance/confirmation turn. As we have already noted, these tend to have two features. They are produced quickly after the psychic's question, and they take a minimal form.

Extract 25 (K/CC)

P: and are you going to the states,

         (.)

S: yeah.

Extract 26 (29/EV)

P: can you understand a <u>gen</u>tleman with cancer,

S: yes

Extract 27 (J/BJ)

P: is your brother quite <u>sen</u>sitive?

S: yes

Extract 28 (VP RS 13)

P: was this cancer that he passe⌈d with⌉ please?
S: ⌊y:es, ⌋

Although it is hard to make a case that turns have a distinct design procedure from the absence of certain turn components, there is a sense in which sitters' minimal turns withhold any further comment. For example, apparently accurate claims by the psychics are not treated by sitters as the basis of puzzlement, nor as a warrant for displays of surprise. But there is another feature: minimal turns allow the sitters to return the floor to the psychic as soon as possible. Thus minimal positive responses facilitate the speedy onset of that place in the sequence where psychics can demonstrate that the now-accepted claim about the sitter came from a paranormal source. Minimal acceptance/confirmation turns are thus not only constitutive of the sequence, but they also display the sitter's understanding

of the turn-by-turn progression of the sequence, and a sensitivity to the significance of the kinds of action undertaken in the third turn.

5.2 Analysing deviant cases

An important step in building a conversation analytic account of an interactional phenomena is to examine cases in which there seems to have been some departure from the established pattern, and investigating how participants' utterances display their understanding of the significance of that departure. 'If someone displays in their conduct that they are "noticing" the absence of a certain type of turn from a co-participant, then that demonstrates their own orientation to the relevance of the sequence that the analyst is aiming to describe' (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998: 98).

To illustrate this, look at this fragment again, in which a question is not followed by an answer.

Extract 29

Child: Have to cut the:se Mummy

(1.3)

Child: Won't we Mummy

(1.5)

Child: Won't we

Mother: Yes

It is clear that the child's second and third versions of the initial question display that she has 'noticed' the absence of the mother's answer. Moreover, her repeated attempts to solicit an answer display her orientation to the normative expectation that an answer should follow a question. Thus what seems on first inspection to provide evidence which undermines claims about the properties of paired action sequences (for example, that second parts should follow first parts), actually displays the participant's orientation to the normative relevance of those properties.

Let's consider a form of deviant case from the psychic-sitter corpus: occasions in which a sitter accepts or confirms the claim made in the prior turn, but does not use a minimal turn format.

Extract 30 ((B)H/RC)

P: are you fi:nding that >y'got to have< check ups and it's getting you down

(1.8)

S: yea:h ah've got my ⌈( )⌉

P: ⌊yeah.⌋ yeah >we(ll) ah know<

'cos I've got the medical: (0.2) feel arou:nd

you .hhh erhm:

In this extract the psychic's question displays that she knows something about the sitter's ill health. The sitter's next turn begins with a simple "yeah" but it is apparent that she is departing from the established pattern in that with "ah've got my" she embarks on what appears to be some kind of report of medical or health related events. It is noticeable, however, that the psychic does not wait for an appropriate place at which to start her next turn, but cuts across the sitter's on-going turn, which is then terminated before reaching any recognizable completion. The psychic's turn is initially composed of "yeah" repeated, and it is only when she is clear of co-occurring talk from the sitter does she, first, explicitly claim already to be in receipt knowledge of the sitter's problems, and second, attribute that knowledge to a paranormal source: "cos I've got the medical: (0.2) feel arou:nd you". It may appear that P's second turn in this sequence is an interruption. However, to describe this turn as interruptive would be to implicitly ascribe some significance or meaning to the participants' conduct prior to detailed examination, a practice which is strenuously resisted in CA. Moreover, in a series of studies, Gail Jefferson has shown that many forms of overlapping talk, which may intuitively seem like a violation of turn taking conventions, display a number of orderly interactional properties which mitigate against the use of term 'interruption' (Jefferson, 1983; 1986).

In the following case the psychic proposes that earlier in her life the sitter may have considered a career in what is characterized broadly as a caring profession. The sitter treats this as correct, but instead of a minimal acceptance, she states specifically which kind of caring profession she had intended to enter.

Extract 31

P: .h ↑y'ever though(t) o(f) .h did you want to go

into a caring pro↓fession early <u>on</u>, when >y'w's uh(t)<

y'know when you were ch<u>oo</u>sing which way you were

gonna go.

(.)

S: yeah I wanted to: go into child care actuall⌈y when I ⌉

P: ⌊MMMmm:::⌋:::.=

S: =when I left school

P: That's right yeah >well< .h (.) 'm being shown

that>but (t)-< .h it's (0.2) it's not your w<u>a</u>y ye(t)

actually but i(t) y'y may be caring for (t-)ch- children

or whatever later on okay?

Something intriguingly similar seems to be happening in this extract. The sitter does not provide a one-word acceptance/confirmation, but embarks on an extended turn in which it is apparent that she is disclosing factual information. And while the psychic's long agreement marker in Extract 31 anticipates the onset of a place where turn transfer could legitimately occur (at the end of "actually"), it has the same consequence in that the sitter terminates her utterance (albeit temporarily in this case), and the end of the psychic's overlapping agreement marker occurs in the clear. The main difference here is that the sitter completes her turn exactly at the point where psychic's "mmm" finishes. And, as in the previous extract, when the psychic eventually gets the chance to produce the third turn in this sequence, the demonstration of knowledge obtained from a paranormal source is delayed by the inclusion of "That's right yeah", an item designed to underline that the psychic was already in receipt of the information the sitter has just revealed.

In both cases, then, the sitters' departure from the established pattern of second turns is followed by the psychics' departure from the established pattern of third turns: instead of moving immediately to attribute the now accepted information to a paranormal source, the sitter's disclosure (or projected disclosure) of information is met with an item that is produced while the sitter is speaking, and not necessarily in the vicinity of places where turn transfer may legitimately be initiated. Thus there is good evidence that the overlapping utterances initiated by the psychics demonstrate an orientation to a requirement to start the third turn as soon as possible.

But why should this be? We can suggest an answer to this if we consider what kind of deviant second turns the sitters were producing. In both cases they were providing factual information. This can be a delicate issue for a psychic. In Extract 31, for example, in his next turn, the psychic is placed in the position of having to claim that information which has just been explicitly disclosed by the sitter has also been revealed to him through a paranormal source. Moreover, insofar as the sitter has elaborated upon the kinds of work indexed by "caring profession", it is now apparent that the paranormal source has provided less detailed information than the sitter. This diminishes the potential effectiveness of the third turn as a site in which a psychic can build a claim to possess powers of extra-sensory perception. Indeed, the psychic's next turn begins with agreement with information which has just been made publicly available in the sitting; this constitutes, at best, a weak demonstration of his claimed powers. And his subsequent prediction about the sitter's *future* involvement with child care – "it's not your way ye(t) actually but i(t) y'y may be caring for (t-)ch- children or whatever later on" – seems transparently to originate from her disclosure that she had *wanted* to work in this area, a formulation from which it can be inferred that she had not yet done so.

The psychics' post-acceptance turn is crucial in the production of valid demonstrations of special powers, as it is here that they establish the paranormal source of their claim about the sitter. There is, then, a premium on arriving at the third turn in the sequence as soon as

possible (an understanding displayed also in the minimal form of the established second turn); and, moreover, to ensure that a very human source (the sitter) does not explicitly offer detailed information prior to the psychic's attribution of his or her knowledge to a paranormal source. The ways in which psychics may address precisely this kind of departure from the established sequence display their sensitivity to the significance of the third turn. Moreover, the inferential significance of the third turn thus provides a motivation, intrinsic to the properties of the sequence itself, for psychics' attempts to curtail those sitters' turns which can be heard to depart from the established pattern to provide factual information.

So far we have only considered extracts in which the 'deviance' of the case rests in the extension of one turn in a success sequence. In this final section we will make some remarks on activities which follow the occurrence of much more marked deviation: occasions when the sitter simply does not accept or confirm the relevance or accuracy of the information proposed in the psychic's question.

One strategy available to the psychic is to abandon that topic, and produce another question which proposes new information about the sitter.

Extract 32 (K/CC)

```
8      P:  an' are y' changing a ca:r,

9          (0.4)

10     S:  No ⌈ :.
              |
11     P:    ⌊ and is your da:d, (0.2) 's your dad ehm, (0.8)

12         generous?

13         (1)

14     S:  ca:n be.=

15     P:  =okay, .h well I feel ja- your dad is showing you

16         generosity,
```

The psychic's embodied proposal in Line 8 is unequivocally rejected by the sitter in Line 10. However, even as the sitter is saying "no" the psychic asks another question on an entirely unrelated topic. The success sequence projected by the turn initiating the topic of "changing a car" is abandoned, and the psychic produces another candidate first turn. Thus the opportunity to realize a successful sequence is recycled.

Alternatively, psychics can maintain the validity of the original proposal by broadening or extending some parameter(s) of the information displayed in the question, thereby increasing the likelihood that the sitter will be able to accept the now revised claim.

Extract 33 (K/CC)

```
41    P:  - .h w-ho works at computers sally.
42        (1)
43    S:  Ehrm::
44        (0.6)
45    S:  I can't think of anybody actually
46    P:  °mm° ?
47        (0.2)
48    P:  somebody could be gon' >on a course of< studying
49        with eh:m
50        (0.5)
51    P:  ahr::(m)
52        (0.2)
53    P:  computers?
54        (0.3)
54    S:  >Oh(r) ⌈we-well ah mean< we use computers
56    P:        ⌊y'know
57    S:  on the cou⌈rse
58    P:            ⌊do you?
59    S:  ⌈⌈yeah.
60    P:  ⌊⌊OKa:y,(.) maybe that's what it be .h
```

In Extract 33 it is proposed that the sitter knows someone who works with computers. When the sitter does not accept this, the psychic revises the proposal to include people who might be going on a course studying with computers, a reformulation which, given the prevalence of computers in schools and in further and higher education, is clearly designed to facilitate a positive response while at the same time maintaining the relevance of the proposal. And indeed, this expansion does generate some form of recognition in that the sitter announces that she has contact with computers on her own course. And while this turn is not as positive as other forms of sitter acceptance, the sitter's disclosure that she has dealings with computers is then characterized by the psychic as what the tarot cards were referring to.

If a sitter rejects or disconfirms a proposal by the psychic, there is no rationale for even attempting to establish that the information contained in that proposal was obtained from a paranormal source: the sequential basis of a claim to possess special powers of cognition cannot be developed. The psychic's activities in Extracts 32 and 33 reveal two methods by which psychics can respond to an initial negative response, both of which demonstrate an understanding of the significance of the third turn. In

Extract 32 the psychic simply abandoned the topical line proposed in the first turn, and initiates the first turn of another sequence with a different topic, thus recycling the possibility of a successful sequence. In Extract 33 the psychic expands the parameters of the initial claim thus providing the sitter with a wider field of possibilities in which to locate the relevance of the psychic's proposal. While this strategy may not result in the kind of 'ideal' third turn as we have seen in many other extracts, it does mean that the sequence concerned with this topic can be completed with some form of success.

Activity 4

Recall that earlier in the chapter, we discussed how sitters' positive acceptance/confirmation turns are produced immediately after the initial question or with little delay. Now examine the following extracts. Focus on what happens after the psychic's question, and the design of the sitter's subsequent turns.

Extract 34 (K/CC)

P: -.h w-ho works at computers sally.

   (1)

S: Ehrm::

   (0.6)

S: I can't think of anybody actually

Extract 35 (JREF 1)

P: is there a wedding coming up?

   (1.0)

S: not- not to my knowledge

Extract 36 (DS 14)

P: And who lived at number seventeen?

   (1.5)

S: I don't know Doris.

Extract 37 (DS)

P: Who's Peter?

   (0.8)

P: Peter living.

Extract 38 (DS)

P: Who's Bill?

      (1.0)

P: Spirit side?

Extract 39 (DS)

P: Erm, there's a Sarah also, yes?

      (0.7)

P: Going back?

Discussion

The first thing to note is that after the psychic's initial utterance, the sitter does not produce a minimal acceptance; instead, there is a gap. In every case the gap is around one second in length. In her study of gaps and silences in everyday interaction, Jefferson (1989) suggests there is a standard metric of approximately one second. Her analysis of instances of silences falling within a 0.8 to 1.2 second boundary reveals that speakers orient to this critical period as a 'tolerance interval' which marks the acceptable length of absence of talk in conversational interaction. After silences of duration between approximately 0.8 to 1.2 seconds, speakers can be observed to begin talking so as to terminate the silence. This suggests that silences which extend to nearly a second are likely to be treated as a sign of 'trouble' in the conversation.

That norm for conversational interaction seems to be in operation in these data. In Extracts 34, 35 and 36, after the gap threatens to extend into or indeed beyond the tolerance boundary, the sitters eventually disclose that they can not accept the psychic's implied claim. You might also want to look at the way in which these rejections are designed: note the way in which the rejection is modulated or softened by reference to the sitter's 'lack of knowledge'. This preserves the possibility that the psychic may be correct, in that the sitters portray themselves as not (yet) aware of the information proposed in the prior turn.

So, there is a tacit convention that the absence of the sitter's response which extends to approximately one second after the initial question may indicate that the sitter is having trouble accepting the proposed claim. This provides psychics with a resource to anticipate and even address what that problem might be. In Extracts 37, 38 and 39 there is a gap after the psychics' questions. But the next person to speak is the psychic; and in each case, an amendment to the original claim is offered, thus addressing what the source of the trouble might be, and thereby increasing the chance of a positive sitter response.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to illustrate CA's central focus on the discovery and explication of sequences of utterances: patterned ways of talking together in which participants engage in a circumscribed set of interactional and inferential activities.

This entails close examination of the ways turns in sequences are designed; and, relatedly, how the design features of utterances can reveal the participants' understanding of the normative properties of sequences: that certain activities are appropriately placed in specific positions – expectations which are further exposed for analysis in the design of activities which address marked departures from established sequential patterns.

But what does a CA approach offer us with respect to understanding psychic-sitter interaction? To answer that, it is useful to consider alternative perspectives on the language used by psychic practitioners. Sceptics have claimed that the apparent success of psychics can be explained by reference to what are called 'cold reading' strategies (Hyman, 1981). Cold reading is simply a set of techniques of character assessment by which we may gain information about someone: subtle inspection of the sitter's appearance, their tone of voice, observation of facial and other physical responses, and so on. A common theme in cold reading literature is that mediums will ask questions to obtain information which can then be recycled, in some suitably amended form, as evidence of spirit contact. According to this perspective, then, psychics use questions to get information. Intuitively, that seems a reasonable claim. But when we consider the sequential and interactional use of questions, a different answer emerges. In the data we have looked at, we have identified a sequence which is invariably initiated by a question; these questions, however, are not motivated by the need to elicit information, but are designed to initiate a short sequence of utterances which return the floor to the psychic with minimal sitter participation. And there is empirical evidence for this account: if sitters provide more than a minimal acceptance, psychics begin to talk in overlap with them, eventually curtailing that turn. We can understand this because of the significance of the third turn *in this interactional sequence*: it is in this sequential location that the psychics can attribute the now-accepted information as coming from a paranormal source. Yet this does not commit us to a sceptical position on the genuineness or otherwise of the powers claimed by psychics. Regardless of the origin of the proposed knowledge, the way in which such claims are presented to the sitters, accepted and subsequently ratified as emanating from a paranormal source, is socially organized and collaboratively produced. It is this level of organization and interactional collaboration which CA can disclose.

Harvey Sacks, the founder of CA, was tragically killed in a car accident in 1975, but the discipline he established has flourished. Conversation analysts have gone on to provide detailed accounts of a range of interactional phenomena; for example, the ways in which turn taking is organized; how overlapping talk is managed; how difficulties and errors in

conversation are identified and addressed; the relationship of posture and body movement to verbal activities; how an understanding of grammar is relevant to the interactions between speakers; and how talk in work or institutional settings embodies or instantiates aspects of that institution's 'character', 'culture', 'goals', and so on. Running right through these studies is a concern to identify the sequential and normative basis of verbal activities.

Moreover, the findings and methods of CA are beginning to have impacts in related social science disciplines. For example, the emergence of discursive psychology in the United Kingdom in the 1990s has been strongly influenced by conversation analytic studies of interaction; researchers in artificial intelligence concerned with the design of interactive, speech-based computer systems have tried to draw from the findings of conversation analytic studies of ordinary interaction; and speech therapists have found that CA's focus on the detail of interaction can be a valuable resource in understanding the ways in which speech disorders impact upon everyday conversational activity.

But perhaps CA's primary contribution is to identify that talk-in-interaction is a domain of activity in its own right. In its systematic focus on the detail of actual verbal interaction, it stands in stark contrast to conventional sociological approaches, which tend to treat language use simply as a screen onto which more traditional sociological concerns can be inscribed: gender, status, power, and so on. Moreover, conversation analysts do not assume that the procedures which are displayed in naturally occurring talk have to answer to, and are thereby less significant than, underlying and supposedly determinant cognitive realities.

CA has not only generated a substantial and cumulative body of findings about the nature of interaction, but it has developed as a distinctive sociological method for the analysis of social activities. This may have far reaching consequences. Insofar as language use infuses all those aspects of society that may be regarded as the key concerns of sociology, the scope of CA's analytic remit may be immense. It is the medium through which parents socialize their children; institutional norms are transmitted through a variety of forms of discourse; family life is resonant with jokes, complaints, and arguments; face-to-face or telephone interaction drives the smooth running of business institutions and other places of work; the education of young people is, in part, dependent upon the ability of teachers to enthuse, discipline, persuade, or cajole their students; ordinary language use is perhaps *the* site in which our social identities may be established, negotiated and warranted; and legal declarations are administered in courtroom trials which involve the verbal interrogation of witnesses and defendants for the benefit of an overhearing jury. Conversation analysts have already begun to investigate the use of language in interaction in various kinds of specialized or institutional settings, and in so doing have generated a new range of empirical questions. In this, CA has the potential to transform and invigorate the traditional concerns of a range of social science disciplines.

Further Reading

It is important to note that this chapter has not attempted to provide a full account of the basic findings from conversation analytic studies of everyday interaction. There is, then, no account of the turn-taking system in mundane conversation; nor has there been a report of the various methods to identify and deal with various troubles or problems in conversation, such as misunderstandings, mis-hearings, slips of the tongue, and so on. Introductory discussion of these (and other) key aspects of the organization of conversational interaction can be found in Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998), ten Have (1999) and Levinson (1983). The seminal paper in turn-taking was written by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) (which is reproduced in Schenkein, 1978a). Key papers on repair are Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977), and Schegloff (1979; 1992b).

General introduction to CA can be found in Heritage (1984), Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998), ten Have (1999), or Psathas (1995). While all these texts provide good introductions to key conversation analytic findings (among other things), it is important to stress that there is no substitute for reading primary sources. In this respect, ten Have provides a useful list of classic or key studies at the end of each chapter.

Collections of key CA studies can be found in Atkinson and Heritage (1984), Button, Drew and Heritage (1986), Boden and Zimmerman (1991), Button and Lee (1987), Drew and Heritage (1992), Psathas (1979), Schenkein (1978a) and Sudnow (1972).

However, the first port of call for anyone interested in conversation analysis should be the lectures of Harvey Sacks (published as Sacks, 1992). Schegloff's (1992a) introductions to the lectures are a fascinating account of the intellectual context in which Sacks' ideas and work began to take shape. Silverman (1998) provides an accessible introduction to Sacks' work.

Acknowledgements

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