

Transcripts

Language

In this part of the book, we have so far examined three sources of data in field research: observations, texts and interviews. Despite the different uses that can be made of each kind of data, all share a common feature – their focus on language.

The linguistic character of field data is most obvious in the case of texts and interviews. Even if our aim is to search for the supposedly non-linguistic, social ‘realities’ purportedly present in such data (e.g. social class, gender, power), our raw material is inevitably the words written in documents or spoken by interview respondents. Moreover, while observational data should properly include descriptions of non-verbal aspects of social interaction (what Stimson: 1986 calls ‘the sociology of space and place’), much of what we observe in formal and informal settings will inevitably consist of conversations.

An analysis of why linguistic phenomena are so important lies beyond the scope of this book. However, we can make a few relevant observations:

1 Twentieth-century thought has resisted earlier assumptions that words are simply a transparent medium to ‘reality’. From the linguist Saussure (1974), as we saw in Chapter 4, we learn that signs derive meaning from their relation to other signs. From the philosopher Wittgenstein, we understand that the meaning of a word largely derives from its *use*. Consequently, as Wittgenstein puts it:

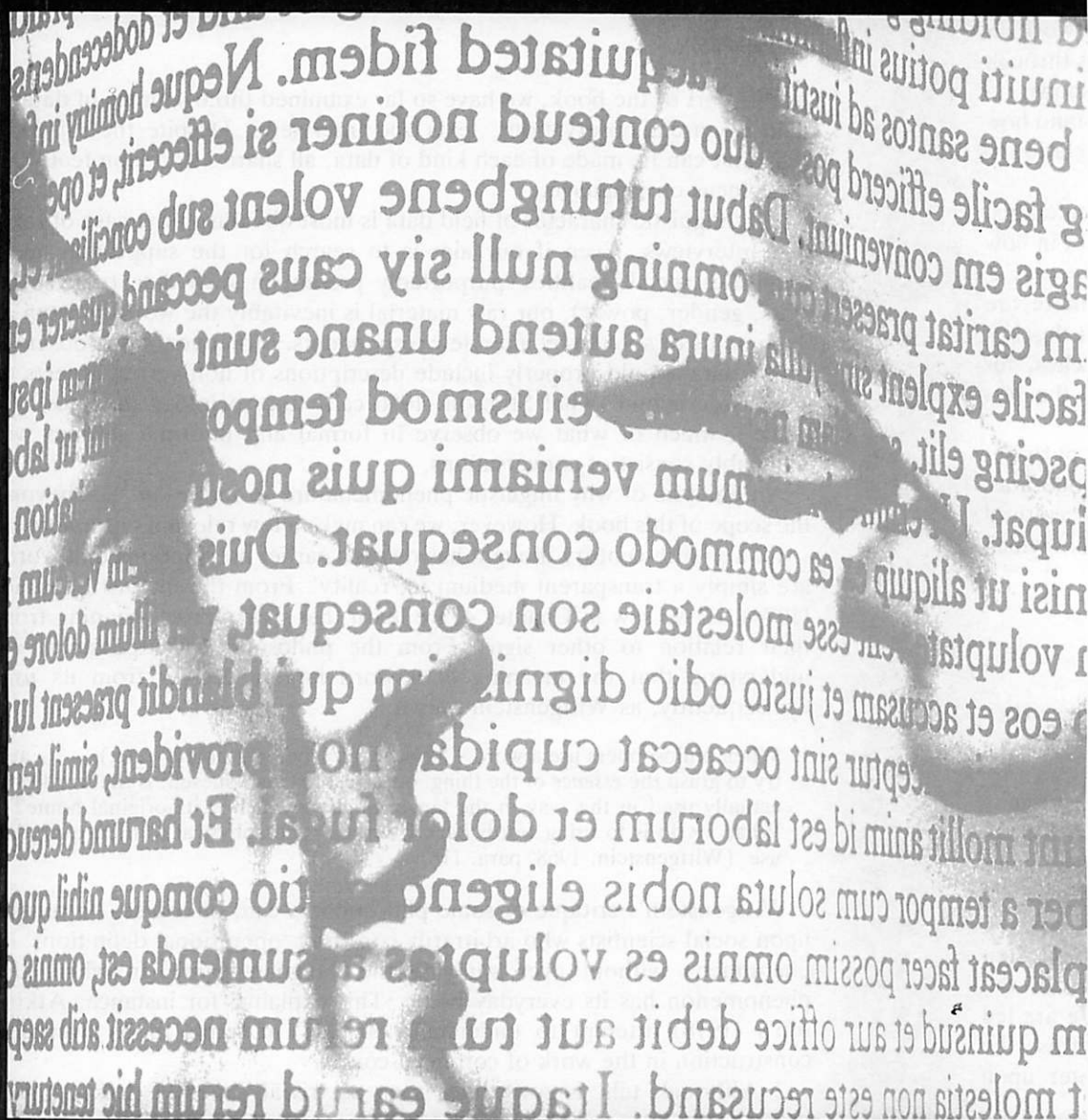
When philosophers use a word – ‘knowledge’, ‘being’, ‘object’ (etc.) . . . – and try to grasp the *essence* of the thing, one must first ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home? – What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use. (Wittgenstein: 1968, para. 116)

Wittgenstein’s critique of some philosophers can, of course, be turned upon social scientists who arbitrarily construct ‘operational definitions’ of phenomena without ever studying the ‘language-game’ in which the phenomenon has its everyday home. This explains, for instance, Atkinson’s (1978) attempt to understand ‘suicide’ in terms of its everyday construction in the work of coroners’ courts.

2 Although talk is sometimes seen as trivial (‘merely’ talk), it has increasingly become recognised as the primary medium through which social interaction takes place. In households and in more ‘public’ settings,

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families and friends assemble their activities through talk. At work, we converse with one another and have our activities placed on dossiers and files. As Heritage argues: 'the social world is a pervasively conversational one in which an overwhelming proportion of the world's business is conducted through the medium of spoken interaction' (Heritage: 1984, 239). Indeed, as Heritage notes, 'the world's business' includes such basic features as the child's entry into the social world through learning how to converse with its mother.

3 If our concern is with more 'formal' or institutional settings, it may not seem immediately apparent why we need to know about how 'informal' or mundane conversation is organised. However, as we shall see, a strong case has been made out that 'institutional' talk operates through the modified use of patterns deriving from ordinary conversation (Heritage: 1984, 239–240). Moreover, attempts to analyse such talk which fail to problematise these patterns will inevitably be based on the analyst's own taken-for-granted knowledge about how to understand ordinary conversation.

Transcripts

Even if we concede the centrality of language (and, more specifically, conversation) to social life, why should we give priority to recording and transcribing talk? Given the usefulness of other kinds of data derived, say, from observations and interviews, what is the special value of transcripts of tape-recordings of conversation?

One way to start to answer this question is to develop the arguments for using 'naturally occurring' data, first discussed in Chapter 2. Conversely, in interviews, as Heritage puts it: 'the verbal formulations of subjects are treated as an appropriate substitute for the observation of actual behaviour' (Heritage: 1984, 236).

The temptation is then to treat respondents' formulations in terms of their one-to-one relationship with a pre-existing social world (i.e. as 'true' or 'false'). One way round this, as we have seen, is to treat interview accounts as 'narratives' and, like Baker and Baruch, to focus on their linguistic structure. An alternative is to concentrate on how 'interviews' depend upon the modified use of certain properties of everyday conversation.

A basic sequence of actions in a recognisable interview is a series of questions and answers (Silverman: 1973). After a question, as Sacks puts it, 'the other party properly speaks, and properly offers an answer to the question and says no more than that' (Sacks: 1972, 230). However, after the answer has been given, the questioner can speak again and *can* choose to ask a further question. This chaining rule can provide 'for the occurrence of an indefinitely long conversation of the form Q–A–Q–A–Q–A . . .' (*ibid*).

Although question-answer sequences do arise in mundane conversation, they seem to provide a defining characteristic of interview talk. The chaining rule gives a great deal of space to the interviewer to shape the flow of topics, while interviewees depend upon being granted a right to ask questions themselves (Silverman: 1973).

Hughes has noted this asymmetry of interactional rights, based on a question-answer format. In medical consultations:

The asking of a question in itself constrains the patient to give an answer on the same topic. Having heard the answer to the question as the end of the patient's utterance, the doctor is free to interrupt and the turn to initiate continually comes back to him. To introduce a new point he simply moves on to the next question without necessary recourse to certain practices common in everyday conversations. (Hughes: 1982, 369)

The reader will have noticed that such work involves a shift of interest *away* from using the interview as a means of obtaining data about a pre-existing social world and *towards* a focus on the organisation of 'interview-talk' itself. Moreover, since interview-talk is only a sub-set of various kinds of talk-in-interaction, it has no special status as a *tool* of social research.

However, can the same be said about observation? After all, unlike the research interview, observational data are precisely of value because they focus on naturally occurring activities. What do we lose if we base our analysis purely on such data?

The first thing to bear in mind is that, to become data, observations have to be recorded in some way, e.g. through fieldnotes or pre-coded schedules. However sophisticated such recording devices may be, they cannot offer the detail found in transcripts of recorded talk.

Detailed transcripts of conversation overcome the tendency of transcribers to 'tidy up' the 'messy' features of natural conversation. Sacks *et al* (1974) offer an Appendix which provides a detailed description of the notation they use and the interested reader is recommended to study it. An alternative source is Atkinson and Heritage (1984). In Table 6.1 I provide a simplified set of transcription symbols.

However, it should not be assumed that the preparation of transcripts is simply a technical detail prior to the main business of the analysis. As Atkinson and Heritage (1984) point out, the production and use of transcripts are essentially 'research activities'. They involve close, repeated listenings to recordings which often reveal previously unnoted recurring features of the organisation of talk. The convenience of transcripts for presentational purposes is no more than an added bonus.

As an example, the reader might examine Extract 6.1 below, drawn from Heritage (1984) and based on transcribing conventions, listed in Table 6.1, which report such features as pauses (in parts of a second) and overlapping talk:

Table 6.1: *Simplified Transcription Symbols*

[C2: quite a [while Mo: [yea	Left brackets indicate the point at which a current speaker's talk is overlapped by another's talk
=	W: that I'm aware of = C: = Yes. Would you confirm that?	Equal signs, one at the end of a line and one at the beginning, indicate no gap between the two lines
(.4)	Yes (.2) yeah	Numbers in parentheses indicate elapsed time in silence in tenths of a second
(.)	to get (.) treatment	A dot in parentheses indicates a tiny gap, probably no more than one-tenth of a second
_____	What's <i>up</i> ?	Underscoring indicates some form of stress, via pitch and/or amplitude
::	O:kay?	Colons indicate prolongation of the immediately prior sound. The length of the row of colons indicates the length of the prolongation
WORD	I've got ENOUGH TO WORRY ABOUT	Capitals, except at the beginnings of lines, indicate especially loud sounds relative to the surrounding talk
.hhhh	I feel that (.2) .hh	A row of h's prefixed by a dot indicates an inbreath; without a dot, an outbreath. The length of the row of h's indicates the length of the in- or outbreath
()	future risks and () and life ()	Empty parentheses indicate the transcriber's inability to hear what was said
(word)	Would you see (there) anything positive	Parenthesised words are possible hearings
(())	confirms that ((continues))	Double parentheses contain author's descriptions rather than transcriptions
. , ?	What do you think?	Indicate speaker's intonation

Extract 6.1

(S's wife has just slipped a disc)

- 1 H: And we were wondering if there's anything we can do to
2 help
3 S: [Well 'at's
4 H: [I mean can we do any shopping for her or something
5 like tha:t?
6 (0.7)
7 S: Well that's *most ki:nd* Heatherton .hhh At the moment
8 no:.. because we've still got two bo:ys at home

Heritage (1984, 237) has noted the gains of working with such transcripts. His observations can be summarised as follows:

- 1 It is very difficult for the ethnographer working with fieldnotes to record such detail.

- 2 The tape-recording and the transcript allow both analyst and reader to return to the extract either to develop the analysis or to check it out in detail.
- 3 What may appear, at first hearing, to be interactionally 'obvious' can subsequently (via a transcript) be seen to be based on precise mechanisms skilfully used by the participants, for instance, how S delays his refusal of H's offer.

Exercise 6.1

This is a task designed to help you familiarise yourself with the transcription conventions used in conversation analysis. As a consequence, you should start to understand the logic of transcribing this way and be able to ask questions about how the speakers are organising their talk.

You are asked to tape-record no more than five minutes of talk in the public domain. One possibility is a radio call-in programme.

Avoid using scripted drama productions, as these may not contain recurrent features of natural interaction (such as overlap or repair). Do not try to record a television extract, as the visual material will complicate both transcription and analysis.

Now go through the following steps:

- 1 Attempt to transcribe your tape using the conventions in Table 6.1. Try to allocate turns to identified speakers where possible but don't worry if you can't identify a particular speaker (put ? at the start of a line in such cases).
- 2 Encourage a friend to attempt the same task independently of you. Now compare transcripts and re-listen to the tape-recording to improve your transcript.
- 3 Using this chapter as a guide, attempt to identify in your transcript any features in the organisation of the talk (e.g. adjacency pairs, chaining rule, preference organisation, interview format, etc.)

It is worth concluding here with Heritage's summary of the advantages of transcripts:

the use of recorded data is an essential corrective to the limitations of intuition and recollection. In enabling repeated and detailed examination of the events of interaction, the use of recordings extends the range and precision of the observations which can be made. It permits other researchers to have direct access to the data about which claims are being made, thus making analysis subject to detailed public scrutiny and helping to minimise the influence of personal preconceptions or analytical biases. Finally, it may be noted that because the data are available in 'raw' form, they can be re-used in a variety of investigations and can be re-examined in the context of new findings. (Heritage: 1984, 238)

The detailed transcription symbols in Extract 6.1 derive from the approach called *conversation analysis* (CA). CA is based on an attempt to describe people's methods for producing orderly social interaction. In turn, CA emerged out of Garfinkel's (1967) programme for *ethnomethodology* and its analysis of 'folk' ('ethno') methods. Sacks' MCD analysis, discussed in Chapter 5, derives from this programme.

As we shall see, CA's concern with the *sequential* organisation of talk means that it needs precise transcriptions of such (commonsensically) trivial matters as overlapping talk and length of pauses. As Sacks once put it:

What we need to do . . . is to watch conversations . . . I don't say that we should rely on our recollection for conversation, because it's very bad . . . One can invent new sentences and feel comfortable with them (as happens in philosophy and linguistics). One cannot invent new sequences of conversation and feel happy with them. You may be able to take 'a question and answer', but if we have to extend it very far, then the issue of whether somebody would really say that, after, say, the fifth utterance, is one which we could not confidently argue. One doesn't have a strong intuition for sequencing in conversation. (1992b, 5)

CA has established itself as the leading approach in this area and most of this chapter will be devoted to it. However, CA is not the only way to work with transcripts.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis (DA) describes a heterogeneous range of social science research based on the analysis of recorded talk. It shares with CA a common intellectual ancestor in the Oxford philosopher J.L. Austin.

In *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin (1962) showed that many utterances do not simply describe a state of affairs but perform an action. For instance:

Help
I thee wed

In both cases, the speakers are not heard to describe the state of their mind nor to picture reality but to perform some action ('asking for help', 'getting married'). Uttering such 'performatives', as Austin calls them, commits speakers to their consequences. For instance, when people come to give you help and find nothing amiss, it is no defence to say that you were not calling for assistance but simply singing a song. Alternatively, Austin points out, you will not escape a charge of bigamy by saying that you had all kinds of mental reservations when you uttered 'I thee wed' for the second time.

Like nearly all linguistic philosophers, Austin worked with *invented* examples, relying on his native intuition. Social scientists prefer to understand the complexities of naturally occurring talk. What they take from Austin is his concern with the activities performed in talk.

Because DA is so heterogeneous, it is difficult to arrive at a clear definition of it. Like CA, following Austin, it seeks to analyse the activities present in talk. Unlike CA, DA possesses the following three features:

- 1 It is concerned with a far broader range of activities, often related to more conventional social science concerns (e.g. gender relations, social control, etc.).
- 2 It does not always use analysis of ordinary conversation as a baseline for understanding talk in institutional settings.
- 3 DA works with far less precise transcripts than CA.

In order to show both the possibilities and limits of DA, I will use two examples. It should be understood that these examples are illustrative rather than representative of such work. Readers interested in further examples might consult the journal *Discourse and Society*.

Constituting Motherhood

Extract 6.2 is drawn from the clinics for young diabetics which I have discussed elsewhere (Silverman: 1987). Here is the start of a consultation between a mother of a diabetic child aged 16 and her paediatrician. It takes place when her daughter is in another room having her blood taken and the mother has asked specially if she can see the doctor. This extract comes a little way into the consultation.

Extract 6.2

(D = Doctor; M = Mother of June, aged 16)

M: She's going through a very languid stage () she won't do anything unless you push her

D: so you're finding you're having to push her quite a lot?

M: mm no well I don't (.) I just leave her now

Now what I have done is to analyse this kind of case and other examples in terms of what I call a *charge-rebuttal* sequence. It seems to me there is evidence, in what the mother says, to suggest that she is hearing what the doctor is saying as a charge against her parenting. Notice how she withdraws from her initial depiction about 'pushing' her daughter when the doctor, through repeating it, makes it accountable.

Now why would she want to withdraw from this depiction? I think the charge available in the doctor's question involves a depiction of her as what is hearable as a 'nagging' mother. (It is interesting that only women can nag!) When the doctor topicalises 'pushing', the mother withdraws into an account which suggests that she respects her daughter's autonomy.

Shortly after, June's mother produces another worry about how her daughter is coping with her diabetes. This time her concern is her daughter's diet:

Extract 6.3

- M: I don't think she's really sticking to her diet (.). I don't know the effects this will have on her (.). It's bound to alter her sugar if she's not got the right insulin isn't it? I mean I know what she eats at home but [outside
- D: [so there's no real consistency to her diet? It's sort [of
- M: [no well I keep it as consistent as I can at home

Now look at what the doctor says this time. What he makes topical here is not that the mother may be illegitimately nagging her child. Instead, he produces a hearable charge against her responsibility towards the child (there 'is no real consistency to her diet').

In response, the mother now uses the very thing she denied earlier. She is appealing to a discourse of parental responsibility in order to rebut what she hears as the charge of 'irresponsibility' in what the doctor is saying.

This reveals a number of things. It goes back to the issue that people are cleverer than they can say in so many words. The mother is skilfully operating with two discourses that logically are quite contradictory. You can't on the one hand say 'I watch everything my child does' and at the same time 'I leave my child to do anything she wants to do'. However, by using each discourse when situationally appropriate, the mother is able to detect and rebut possible traps in the way the doctor is responding to what she is saying.

There is both a methodological and a practical interest in all this. The naturally occurring material reveals that this mother is not *intrinsically* 'nagging' or 'irresponsible'. Instead, both are depictions which are *locally* available and *locally* resisted. Conversely, if we had interviewed mothers, the temptation would have been to search for idealised conceptions of their role.

The reader will note that the gain of this analysis is that, like many DA studies, it addresses a conventional social science topic (conceptions of gender and motherhood). Moreover, it seems to have an immediate practical application. For instance, doctors were interested to learn about the double-binds present in their attention to the autonomy of their young patients. Likewise, parents' groups (largely mothers) of diabetic children found it very helpful to go through material of this kind. It brought out the way in which things they may feel personally guilty about in their relationships with their teenage children are not something that relates to their individual failings. Instead, such problems arise in our culture in the double-binds built into the parent-adolescent relationship.

However, the analysis does not bring out how this talk in an institutional setting (a medical clinic) derives from and departs from ordinary conversation. Consequently, it lays itself open to the charge of basing its analysis upon taken-for-granted knowledge about the basic structures of talk (e.g. how charges or accusations are hearable by conversationalists). The same arguments can be made about my second example of DA.

Exercise 6.2

Below is a later extract drawn from the consultation presented in Extracts 6.2 and 6.3:

(D = Doctor, M = Mother)

- 1 D: It sounds as if generally you're having a difficult time
- 2 M: Her temper is vile
- 3 D: She with you and you with her
- 4 M: Yes. And her control of the diabetes is gone, her temper
- 5 then takes control of her

Using the analysis already given of Extracts 6.2 and 6.3, consider the following:

- 1 How is D's interpretation in line 3 of M's utterance in line 2 hearable as a charge?
- 2 How does M's utterance in lines 4–5 respond to D's interpretation? Is it hearable as a rebuttal?
- 3 Can we learn anything from this extract about:
 - (a) M's attitude to her daughter
 - (b) cultural assumptions about motherhood?

What Teachers Do

The dialogue in Extract 6.4 is drawn from a classroom (from a study by Edwards and Mercer: 1987, reported by Billig *et al.*: 1988, 51–52). A teacher is introducing a group of 9-year-olds to the concept of pendulums. She is telling them a story about Galileo, attempting to elicit from them his use of his pulse to time the swings of incense burners in church:

Extract 6.4

(T = Teacher; () = untimed pauses; *had* = vocal emphasis; concurrent behaviour is recorded to the right)

T: Now he didn't have a watch () T swinging her pendant
 but he *had* on *him* something
 that was a very good
 timekeeper that he could
 to hand straight away ()

T snaps her fingers on
 'straight away' and looks
 invitingly at pupils

*You've** got it. *I've* got it
 What is it? () What could we
 use to count beats? What
 have *you* got? ()

* T points

T beats hand on table
 slowly, look around group
 of pupils, who smile and
 shrug

You can feel it *here*

T puts finger on her
wrist pulse

Pupils: Pulse

(in near unison)

T: A pulse. Everybody see if
you can find it

All imitate T, feeling for
their wrist pulses

This extract is unusual in transcribing body movements as well as talk. CA uses a more complex system of transcription for gaze and body movements (see Heath: 1988, Peräkylä and Silverman: 1991a). The simple transcription used here shows how T's words are linked to her actions. Through both talk and gesture, T gets her pupils to produce the information she is seeking. The process is described by Billig *et al* as 'cued elicitation' (1988, 52).

Research like this is helpful in understanding the basic structures of classroom interaction which are presumed in normative accounts of teaching practice. It is highly likely that student teachers' complaints about the lack of relevance of educational theories in the classroom would be satisfied by concentrating teacher-education on such naturally-occurring examples.

However, as with the earlier analysis of mother-doctor interaction, no attempt is made to locate the activity described ('cued elicitation') in the context of practices observable in everyday talk. Elsewhere, for instance, Mehan (1979) has shown how the structure of classroom 'lessons' is a modified version of a question-answer 'chaining' procedure (Q-A-Q-A, etc.) found in ordinary conversation. The modification occurs through an additional element, teacher evaluation of the pupil's answer, so that the classroom sequence becomes Q-A-E-Q-A-E, etc.

However, it should not be assumed that DA is simply a worthless project. Undoubtedly, as we shall see, CA gains by mobilising information about the structures of ordinary conversation in the context of very detailed transcripts. However, DA-based research studies do provide important insights into institutional talk based on pressing sociological and practical concerns (like doctor-patient and teacher-pupil communication). Equally, like CA, it can be attentive to the sequential embeddedness of talk - as, for instance, in Extract 6.2, when the mother's changes of tack are interpreted in terms of the doctor's glosses on what she has just said.

Moreover, we cannot assume that transcripts which do not record such details as length of pauses (as in Extract 6.4) are necessarily imperfect. There cannot be a *perfect* transcript of a tape-recording. Everything depends upon what you are trying to do in the analysis, as well as upon practical considerations involving time and resources.

Conversation Analysis

I will begin by summarising Heritage's (1984, 241–244) account of three fundamental assumptions of CA:

The structural organisation of talk: Talk exhibits stable, organised patterns, demonstrably oriented to by the participants. These patterns 'stand independently of the psychological or other characteristics of particular speakers' (241). This has two important implications. First, the structural organisation of talk is to be treated as on a par with the structural organisation of any social institution, i.e. as a 'social fact', in Durkheim's terms. Second, it follows that it is illegitimate and unnecessary to explain that organisation by appealing to the presumed psychological or other characteristics of particular speakers.

Sequential organisation: 'A speaker's action is *context-shaped* in that its contribution to an on-going sequence of actions cannot adequately be understood except by reference to its context . . . in which it participates' (242). However, this context is addressed by CA largely in terms of the preceding sequence of talk: 'in this sense, the context of a next action is repeatedly renewed with every current action' (*ibid*).

The empirical grounding of analysis: The first two properties need to be identified in precise analyses of detailed transcripts. It is therefore necessary to avoid premature theory-construction and the 'idealisation' of research materials which use only general, non-detailed characterisations.

Heritage sums up these assumptions as follows:

Specifically, analysis is strongly 'data-driven' – developed from phenomena which are in various ways evidenced in the data of interaction. Correspondingly, there is a strong bias against *a priori* speculation about the orientations and motives of speakers and in favour of detailed examination of conversationalists' actual actions. Thus the empirical conduct of speakers is treated as the central resource out of which analysis may develop. (1984, 243)

In practice, Heritage adds, this means that it must be demonstrated that the regularities described 'are produced and oriented to by the participants as normatively oriented-to grounds for inference and action' (244). Further, deviant cases, in which such regularities are absent, must be identified and analysed (see Chapter 7 for a further discussion of the role of deviant case analysis in relation to the validity of field research).

Lest it seem that CA is an esoteric kind of enterprise, it will be helpful, using the early work of Harvey Sacks, to show the links between CA and the analysis of descriptions that we have already discussed in Chapter 4.

Sacks: The Sequential Organisation of Talk

Although we might assume that analysis of 'descriptions' is concerned with 'content', while the sequencing of talk addresses 'forms', this assumption is

mistaken. As his address of his data shows, Sacks' contribution to our understanding of description is not intended to stand apart from his account of the sequential organisation of talk. For instance 'recipient-design' is, for members, both a descriptive and sequential consideration.

Underlying both sets of concerns is a desire to unearth the apparatus or machinery that would reproduce whatever members do. As Sacks himself puts it:

The kind of phenomena we are dealing with are always transcriptions of actual occurrences, in their actual sequence. And I take it our business is to try to construct the *machinery* that would produce those occurrences. That is, we find and name some objects, and find and name some rules for using those objects, where the rules for using those objects will produce those objects. (1992b, 113, my emphasis)

Among these objects, fundamental to conversation analysis, are: people talk one at a time; speaker change recurs at completion transition points while preserving one-party-at-a-time; current speaker can select next speaker or next speaker can self-select; current speaker can select a next action (e.g. an answer) (1992, Fall: 1968, Lecture 3).

Sacks notes how the obligation to *listen* is built into conversation since you may be selected as next speaker and, for instance, may need to produce the second part of an adjacency-pair. However, the requirements of recipient-design mean that a speaker may try to avoid 'springing' certain kinds of first parts, like invitations and requests, upon another. Thus, before giving an invitation, they can produce a 'pre-sequence' (cf. Schegloff: 1980) which 'can pre-signal "invitation to come" . . . Instead of saying "Would you like to come over to dinner tonight?" they can say "What are you doing tonight?" where the answer to that controls whether they're going to do the invitation' (1992b, 529).

The exchange of turns implies that co-operative work is required if a turn is to be extended through various possible completion points. For instance, to tell a story may involve a 'preface' (1992b, 10 and 18-19) which both provides for the multi-turn nature of the talk and allows its recipient to know when it is to be completed. But equally the recipient will need to offer minimal 'response-tokens' (such as 'mm') which serve to indicate that one is listening but passes one's turn and invites the other to continue. Moreover, as Sacks notes, response tokens can be subtly recipient-designed by anticipating a possible pause and ensuring no gap, no overlap between speakers. Equally, by declining a possible turn, response-tokens can require a speaker to produce more, even when they are not claiming an extension of their turn - think of 'mm mm's used by counsellors and the like (see Sacks 1992b, May 24, 1971).

However, not every story is equally tellable. Sacks notes how people work up a story to make it tellable. For instance, 'newsworthiness' is a consideration in story-telling. Hence hearers can cut you off by saying either that they already know that or that you already told them. Moreover, much will depend on the frequency of contact that is main-

tained. What has just happened is more tellable where the parties have frequent contact. So we have the paradox, noted by Sacks, that one has more to tell to someone one speaks to every day than to someone one hasn't talked to for some months (1992a, 16). Further features of story-telling are found in Sacks' discussion of the organisation of telephone calls. For instance, where 'bad news' is to be broken, a speaker will want to avoid a 'how are you?' sequence which might well elicit a response of 'fine'. Similarly, if someone calls you and you have a piece of news that constitutes a 'reason for a call', then you may want to get round the rule that says: 'caller raises first topic'. So, for instance, you may make yourself into the putative caller by saying something like: 'Wow! I was just about to call you' (1992b, 166).

Story-telling is not the only activity in which parties attune their talk to one another. Other attuning devices, noted by Sacks, include 'passwords', which for some group serve as 'correct' answers to a recognisable 'challenge' (1992b, 116), proverbs, which affirm social solidarity and usually work as pre-closing invitations (1992a, 24–25) and correction–invitation devices through which candidate answers are offered which the hearer is invited to correct (1992a, 22) – see the discussion below of Maynard (1991).

Having set out some basic issues in CA, I now will examine some of the features so far discovered in talk. I begin with an early paper by Schegloff and Sacks (1974).

Conversational Openings

Schegloff and Sacks' study is based on data drawn from the first five seconds of around 500 telephone calls to and from an American police station. They begin by noting that the basic rule for two-party conversation, that one party speaks at a time (i.e. providing for a sequence a-b-a-b-a-b where a and b are the parties), 'does not provide for the allocation of the roles "a" and "b"' (1974, 350). Telephone calls offer interesting data in this regard because non-verbal forms of communication – apart from the telephone bell – are absent. Somehow, despite the absence of visual cues, speakers manage an orderly sequence in which both parties know when to speak. How? 'A first rule of telephone conversations which might be called "a distribution rule for first utterances" is: *the answerer speaks first*' (*ibid*, 351, original emphasis). In order to see the force of the 'distribution rule', consider the confusion that occurs when a call is made and the phone is picked up, but nothing is said by the receiver of the call. Schegloff cites an anecdote by a woman who adopted this strategy of silence after she began receiving obscene telephone calls. Her friends were constantly irritated by this practice, thus indicating the force of the rule 'the answerer speaks first'. Moreover, her tactic was successful: 'However obscene her caller might be, he would not talk until she had said "hello", thereby obeying the requirements of the distribution rule' (*ibid*, 355).

Although answerers are expected to speak first, it is callers who are expected to provide the first topic. Answerers, after all, do not normally know who is making the call, whereas callers can usually identify answerers and answerers will assume that callers have initiated a call in order to raise a topic – hence the embarrassment we feel when somebody we have neglected to call calls us instead. Here we may convert ourselves from answerers to hypothetical callers by using some formula like: ‘Oh, I’d been trying to reach you.’ Having reallocated our roles, we are now free to introduce the first topic.

On examining their material further, Schegloff and Sacks discovered only one case (out of 500) which did not fit the rule: answerer speaks first. Using the method of analytic induction (see Chapter 7, pp. 160–162), they reworked all their data to find rules which would account for this apparently deviant case. They concluded that this could be done by seeing the distribution rule as ‘a derivative of more general rules’ (*ibid*: 356).

The person who responds to a telephone bell is not really answering a *question*, but responding to a *summons*. A summons is any attention-getting device (a telephone bell, a term of address – ‘John?’ – or a gesture, like a tap on the shoulder or raising your hand). A summons tends to produce answers. Schegloff suggests that summons–answer (SA) sequences have the following features which they share with a number of other linked turns (e.g. questions–answers, greetings) classed as ‘adjacency pairs’:

Non-terminality: They are preambles to some further activity; they cannot properly stand as final exchanges. Consequently, the summoner is obliged to talk again when the summoned completes the SA sequence.

Conditional relevance: Further interaction is conditional upon the successful completion of the SA sequence.

Obligations to answer: Answers to a summons have the character of questions (e.g. What? Yes? Hello?). This means that, as in question–answer (QA) sequences, the summoner must produce the answer to the question (s)he has elicited. Furthermore, the person who has asked the question is obliged to listen to the answer (s)he has obligated the other to produce. Each subsequent nod or ‘uh huh’ recommits the speaker to attend to the utterances that follow. Through this ‘chaining’, ‘provision is made by an SA sequence not only for the coordinated entry in a conversation but also for its continued orderliness’ (*ibid*, 378–379).

However, in referring to ‘obligations’, it should not be thought that participants have no choice in the matter. The kinds of rules discussed here operate by being oriented to by the participants. This means that rules can be broken but the rule-break can be made accountable.

Schegloff and Sacks are now able to explain their deviant case as follows: Summons (phone rings) – no answer; further summons (caller says

'Hello'). The normal form of a telephone call is: Summons (phone rings) – answer (recipient says 'Hello'). In the deviant case, the absence of an answer is treated as the absence of a reply to a summons. So the caller's use of 'Hello' replaces the summons of the telephone bell. The failure of the summoned person to speak first is heard as an uncompleted SA sequence. Consequently, the caller's speaking first makes sense within the 'conditional relevance' of SA sequences.

The power of these observations is suggested by two examples. The first is mentioned by Cuff and Payne (1979): 'The recipient of summons feels impelled to answer. (We note that in Northern Ireland, persons still open the door and get shot – despite their knowledge that such things happen)' (1979, 151).

The second example arises in Schegloff and Sacks' discussion of a child's utterance, first discussed by Sacks (1974): 'You know what, Mommy?' This establishes an SA sequence, where a proper answer to the summons is 'What?' This allows the child to say what it wanted to at the start, but as an obligation (because questions must produce answers). Consequently, this utterance is a powerful way in which children enter into conversations despite their usually restricted rights to speak.

Exercise 6.3

Examine Extracts 6.5 and 6.6 below (drawn from Atkinson and Drew: 1979, 52, and discussed in Heritage: 1984, 248–249):

Extract 6.5

- 1 A: Is there something bothering you or not?
- 2 (1.0)
- 3 A: Yes or no
- 4 (1.5)
- 5 A: Eh?
- 6 B: No.

Extract 6.6

- 1 Ch: Have to cut these Mummy.
- 2 (1.3)
- 3 Ch: Won't we Mummy
- 4 (1.5)
- 5 Ch: Won't we
- 6 M: Yes

- 1 Why does Heritage argue that these extracts demonstrate that 'questioners attend to the fact that their questions are framed within normative expectations which have sequential implications' (1984, 249)? Use the concept of 'adjacency pairs' in your answer.
- 2 What are the consequences of Ch. (in Extract 6.6) naming the person to whom his utterance is addressed? Why might children often engage in such naming? Use the concept of 'summons–answer'.

An Aside: Communication or Ritual?

Goffman (1981) argues that any inspection of naturally-occurring conversation should suggest that more is going on than an attempt at mutual understanding in the framework of a communication system. For instance, when one asks a stranger for the time, one has to guard against 'the potentially offensive consequence of encroaching on another with a demand' (*ibid*, 16). Consequently, a complex sequence is often enacted involving a 'remedy' (for a demand), 'relief' for potential offence, 'appreciation' for the service rendered and 'minimisation' of the effort involved. Hence:

- (i) A: 'Do you have the time?' (remedy)
- (ii) B: 'Sure. It's five o'clock' (relief)
- (iii) A: 'Thanks' (appreciation)
- (iv) B: '(Gesture) 'T's okay' (minimisation) (*ibid*)

Although the exchange can be reduced to a question-answer sequence (QA) (utterances (i) and (ii)) which allows the questioner to speak again, this conceals the essentially ritual practices within which QAs are enacted.

In what Goffman calls 'ritual interchanges', speakers not only convey information but attend to the 'social acceptance' of what they are conveying. Social acceptance involves whether what is being said is compatible with recipients' views of the speaker and of themselves. Goffman's 'ritual frame' thus allows analysts to account for what occurs in talk as a response to both communication and ritual constraints. Further, it encourages a move away from empty formalism to a recognition of cultural variety: 'Observe that although system constraints might be conceived of as pancultural, ritual concerns are patently dependent on cultural definition and can be expected to vary quite markedly from society to society' (Goffman: 1981, 17).

However, such cultural variance does not mean that we cannot generalise. Instead, Goffman claims to be offering a way of identifying those characteristics of social situations which have particular implications for the management of talk. For instance, restaurants and used car lots offer what Goffman calls different 'strategic environments'. The car salesman, unlike the waiter, will want to establish a selling relationship which allows for an extended period of salesmanship. Consequently, customer enquiries will not tend to produce the kind of truncated responses found in the restaurant.

Again, as Mehan (1979) points out, in classrooms conversational exchange will follow a different logic – usually of the form:

- teacher: question
- pupil: answer
- teacher: evaluation

Goffman insists that the constraints in these different settings are ritual and institutional (i.e. oriented to certain context-related tasks) and not simply conversational. For instance, an utterance by a pupil is not simply 'a turn at

talk' but a display of an obligation 'to participate in this testing process' (*ibid*, 54).

Sacks was influenced by Goffman, who had been involved with his dissertation at Berkeley (not always constructively). Particularly in Sacks' early lectures, we see his interest in Goffman's (1961b) work on ritual and ceremonial orders. However, Sacks wants to understand 'ceremony' by reference to the sequential analysis of conversations. For instance, we know that the proper return to 'how are you feeling?' is 'fine'. This means that if you want to treat it as a question about your feelings you have to request permission (e.g. 'It's a long story' where the next party may say 'That's alright, I have time'). This means that 'everyone has to lie' because people attend to 'the procedural location of their answers' and, in part, produce answers by reference to 'the various uses that the answer may have for next actions that may be done' (565). Thus Goffman's (1981) attempt to separate 'ritual' and 'system' requirements would have been a nonstarter for Sacks.

We will see the relevance of this argument in my discussion of 'institutional talk' below. Before we leave Goffman, however, we should recognise a fruitful point that he makes.

As Goffman often emphasises, we need an understanding of both talk and non-verbal behaviour. CA's implicit recognition of this argument is shown by its early concentration on telephone conversations where (apart from the telephone bell) non-verbal communication is notably absent and so does not 'interfere' with an analysis of purely verbal sequencing rules. More recently, workers in this tradition, like Heath, have begun the difficult task of constructing an apparatus to describe the relationship between speech and body movements. Using the apparatus, Heath (1988) has shown how, in medical consultations, patients may encourage the doctor to re-establish eye-contact or to view a part of their body by means of both hesitations and physical gestures, such as hand movements. Similarly, Peräkylä and Silverman (1991b) demonstrate how the complex practice of 'family therapy' can depend on the organisation of gaze through which the addressee of a question is defined (see also Goodwin: 1981).

While the notation is at present far less developed than that used in the analysis of talk, such work offers an encouraging indication that the thrust of Goffman's argument is well taken by CA.

The Structure of Turn-taking

Schegloff's early work led to a systematic statement by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) of the structure of turn-taking. While Schegloff is concerned with the interactional consequences of initial turns at talk, these writers set out to provide a more general model of the sequencing of conversations. Turns, they argue, have three aspects. These involve:

- 1 How the speaker makes a turn relate to a previous turn (e.g. 'Yes', 'But', 'Uh huh').

- 2 What the turn interactionally accomplishes.
- 3 How the turn relates to a succeeding turn (e.g. by a question, request, summons, etc.).

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

The compatibility of the model of turn-taking with the facts of repair is thus of a dual character: the turn-taking system lends itself to, and incorporates devices for, repair of its troubles; and the turn-taking system is a basic organisational device for the repair of any other troubles in conversation. The turn-taking system and the organisation of repair are thus 'made for each other' in a double sense. (Sacks *et al.*: 1974, 723)

The authors conclude by stating three consequences of their model which are of general interest:

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

Thus CA is an empirically-oriented research activity, grounded in a basic theory of social action and generating significant implications from an analysis of previously unnoticed interactional forms.

As Heritage (1984) points out, this should not lead us to an over-mechanical view of conversation: 'conversation is not an endless series of interlocking adjacency pairs in which sharply constrained options confront the next speaker' (261).

Instead, the phenomenon of adjacency works according to two non-mechanistic assumptions:

- 1 An assumption that an utterance which is placed immediately after another one is to be understood as produced in response to or in relation to the preceding utterance.
- 2 This means that, if a speaker wishes some contribution to be heard as *unrelated* to an immediately prior utterance, he or she must do something special to lift assumption 1 – for instance by the use of a prefix (like ‘by the way’) designed to show that what follows is unrelated to the immediately prior turn at talk.

As Atkinson and Heritage put it, ‘For conversational analysts, therefore, it is sequences and turns-within-sequences, rather than isolated utterances or sentences, which are the primary units of analysis’ (Atkinson and Heritage: 1984, 3).

Institutional Talk

So far, we have been examining ordinary, or casual, conversation. However, much talk occurs in institutional settings. What contribution can CA make to the analysis of such settings?

As we saw in Chapter 3, observational data can contribute a great deal to understanding how institutions function. However, a problem of such ethnographic work is that its observations may be based upon a taken-for-granted version of the setting in question. For instance, Strong’s (1979a) powerful analysis of the ‘ceremonial order’ of doctor–parent consultations undoubtedly depends, in part, upon our readiness to read his data-extracts in the context of our shared knowledge of what medical consultations look like.

Consequently, ethnographic work can only take us so far. It is able to show us how people respond to particular settings. It is unable to answer basic questions about how people are constituting that setting through their talk.

As Maynard and Clayman (1991) argue:

Conversation analysts . . . [are] concerned that using terms such as ‘doctor’s office’, ‘courtroom’, ‘police department’, ‘school room’, and the like, to characterise settings . . . can obscure much of what occurs within those settings . . . For this reason, conversation analysts rarely rely on ethnographic data and instead examine if and how interactants themselves reveal an orientation to institutional or other contexts. (406–407)

In the course of his published lectures, Sacks (1992a and 1992b) occasionally ponders what might specifically distinguish ‘institutional’ talk. For instance, using Schegloff (1968), he notes how a caller has to engage in considerable work to transform the directions of a called-defined ‘business call’ (1992b, 200–201). He also notes that a candidate-feature of

institutional talk is the absence of 'second stories'. For instance: 'it is absolutely not the business of a psychiatrist, having had some experience reported to him, to say "My mother was just like that, too"' (1992b, 259).

However, in these lectures there is no systematic attention to institutional talk, although a crucial direction for its analysis was later provided in Sacks *et al* (1974) via the argument that ordinary conversation always provides a baseline from which any departures are organised. As Maynard and Clayman (1991) argue, subsequent work has gone on to examine how particular sequence types found in conversation 'become specialised, simplified, reduced, or otherwise structurally adapted for institutional purposes' (1991, 407).

CA uses the practices found in ordinary conversation as a baseline from which to analyse institutional talk. It can then examine how particular sequence types found in conversation 'become specialised, simplified, reduced, or otherwise structurally adapted for institutional purposes' (*ibid*, 407).

I now move to give examples of CA-inspired studies of institutional talk in three settings – paediatric clinics, courtrooms and counselling interviews.

Maynard: Perspective-Display Sequences in Clinics

Using data from paediatric settings, Maynard (1991) neatly demonstrates the previous point about the adaptation of ordinary conversational practices in institutional talk. One such practice is to elicit an opinion from someone else before making one's own statement. Maynard gives this example:

Extract 6.7

- 1 Bob: Have you ever heard anything about wire wheels?
 - 2 Al: They can be a real pain. They you know they go outta line
 - 3 and—
 - 4 Bob: Yeah the— if ya get a flat you hafta take it to a
 - 5 special place ta get the flat repaired.
 - 6 Al: Uh— why's that?
- (Maynard: 1991, 459)

Notice how Bob's report (lines 4–5) is preceded by an earlier sequence. At lines 1–3, Bob asks Al a question on the same topic and receives an answer. Why not launch straight into his report?

Maynard suggests a number of functions of this 'pre-sequence':

- 1 It allows Bob to monitor Al's opinions and knowledge on the topic before delivering his own views.
- 2 Bob can then modify his statement to take account of Al's opinions or even delay further such a statement by asking further questions of Al (using the 'chaining' rule).
- 3 Because Bob aligns himself with Al's proffered 'complaint' (about wire wheels), his statement is given in an 'hospitable environment' which implicates Al.

- 4 This means that it will be difficult (although not impossible) for Al subsequently to dispute Bob's statement.

Maynard calls such sequences a *perspective-display series* (or PDS). The PDS is 'a device by which one party can produce a report or opinion after first soliciting a recipient's perspective' (*ibid*, 464). Typically, a PDS will have three parts:

- a question from A
- an answer by B
- a statement by A.

However, 'the PDS can be expanded through use of the probe, a secondary query that prefigures the asker's subsequent report and occasions a more precise display of recipient's position' (*ibid*).

In the paediatric clinic for children referred for developmental difficulties, the use of PDS by doctors is common. Extract 6.8 below is one such example:

Extract 6.8

- 1 Dr E: What do you see? as— as his difficulty.
 2 Mrs C: Mainly his uhm— the fact that he doesn't understand
 3 everything and also the fact that his speech is very
 4 hard to understand what he's saying, lots of time
 5 Dr E: Right
 6 Dr E: Do you have any ideas WHY it is? are you— do you?
 7 Mrs C: No
 8 Dr E: Okay I think you know I think we BASICALLY in some
 9 ways agree with you, insofar as we think that D's
 10 MAIN problem, you know, DOES involve you know
 11 LANGUage.
 12 Mrs C: Mm hmm
 (Maynard: 1991, 468)

The basic three-part structure of the PDS works here as follows:

- 1 Question (line 1).
- 2 Answer (lines 2–4).
- 3 Statement (lines 8–11).

Notice, however, how Dr E expands the PDS at line 6 by asking a further question.

As Maynard points out, doctors are expected to deliver diagnoses. Often, however, when the diagnosis is bad, they may expect some resistance from their patients. This may be particularly true of paediatrics where mothers are accorded special knowledge and competence in assessing their child's condition. The function of the PDS in such an institutional context is that it seeks to align the mother to the upcoming diagnosis. Notice how Dr E's statement in lines 8–11 begins by expressing agreement with Mrs C's perspective but then reformulates it from 'speech' to 'language'. Mrs C has now been implicated in what will turn out to be the announcement of bad news.

Of course, as Maynard notes, things do not always work out so easily for the doctor. Sometimes parents display perspectives which are out of line with the forthcoming announcement, e.g. by saying that they are quite happy with their child's progress. In such circumstances, Maynard shows how the doctor typically pursues a statement from the parent which acknowledges *some* problem (e.g. a problem perceived by the child's teacher) and then delivers his diagnosis in terms of that.

Maynard concludes that the PDS has a special function in circumstances requiring *caution*. In ordinary conversations, this may explain why it is seen most frequently in conversations between strangers or acquaintances where the person about to deliver an opinion is unlikely to know about the other person's views. In the paediatric setting discussed, the functions of the PDS are obvious:

By adducing a display of their recipients' knowledge or beliefs, clinicians can potentially deliver the news in a hospitable conversational environment, confirm the parents' understanding, coimplicate their perspective in the news delivery, and thereby present assessments in a publicly affirmative and nonconflicting manner. (Maynard: 1991, 484)

Maynard's work shows how medical encounters may, in part, involve the use of mechanisms, like the PDS, which occur in ordinary conversation. By using such conversation as a baseline, CA allows us to identify what is distinctive about institutional discourses.

In addition, a distinctive contribution of CA is to ask questions about the *functions* of any recurrent social process. So Maynard examines how his PDS sequences work in the context of the delivery of bad news. It also follows that his work achieves considerably more than out-of-context ideological critiques of medical practice which tend to cast doctors as mere tyrants or spokespersons for capitalist interests (see Waitzkin: 1979).

Atkinson: Pre-Allocated Turns in Courtrooms

Maynard's study of paediatric clinics largely deals with two-party conversations. What special features of talk may be found in institutional settings, like courtrooms, where multi-party talk is common?

Atkinson (1982) suggests that, in all multi-party conversations, practical solutions must be found to the problem of achieving and attaining shared attentiveness to turns at talk. The turn-taking system may be less effective for five reasons:

- 1 In a large group, there will be less opportunity for everybody to have a turn.
- 2 Any current speaker will find it more difficult to monitor the attentiveness of all recipients.
- 3 Without shared monitoring, more than one concurrent conversation is likely to occur.
- 4 Monitoring is limited by physical distance from the speaker, the

Exercise 6.4

Extract 6.9 is taken from Maynard's data in a clinic dealing with children referred for developmental disabilities:

Extract 6.9

- 1 Dr E: How's B doing?
 2 Mrs M: Well he's doing uh pretty good you know especially
 3 in the school. I explained the teacher what you told
 4 me that he might be sent into a special class maybe,
 5 that I wasn't sure. And HE says you know I asks his
 6 opinion an' he says that was doing pretty good in
 7 the school, that he was responding you know in uhm
 8 everything that he tells them. Now he thinks that
 9 he's not gonna need to be sent to another
 10 Dr E: He doesn't think that he's gonna need to be sent
 11 Mrs M: Yeah that he was catching on a little bit uh more
 12 you know like I said I— I— I— KNOW that he needs
 13 a— you know I was 'splaining to her that I'm you
 14 know that I know for sure that he needs some special
 15 class or something
 16 Dr E: Wu' whatta you think his PROblem is
 17 Mrs M: Speech
 18 Dr E: Yeah, yeah his main problem is a— you know a
 19 LANguage problem
 20 Mrs M: Yeah language

- 1 Identify the perspective-display series found here.
- 2 Account for the delay in Dr E's delivery of the diagnosis statement (it is not given until lines 18–19).
- 3 Given the course that the conversation takes, what are the likely conversational conditions for Mrs M agreeing with the doctor's diagnosis in line 20?

direction in which (s)he is looking and the presence of obstacles, whether people or objects.

- 5 Limited opportunities for speaking may diminish the chance of understanding checks where difficulties of interpretation may arise (*ibid*, *passim*, 99–101).

How may these problems be overcome? Sacks *et al* (1974) offer a general solution. Instead of one turn-allocation at a time, as in natural conversation, all turns may be *pre-allocated* (as in debates) or chairpersons may pre-allocate turns and have the right to talk first (as in meetings). This suggests, for them, a continuum or 'linear array' of turn-taking systems:

The linear array is one in which one polar type (exemplified by conversation) involves 'one-turn-at-a-time' allocation, i.e. the use of local allocational means; the other pole (exemplified by debate) involves pre-allocation of all turns; and

medial types (exemplified by meetings) involve various mixes of pre-allocation and allocational means. (1974, 729)

Atkinson takes up the pre-allocation of turns as a solution to the interactional problems of multi-party conversations. Using his study of courtroom procedures (Atkinson and Drew: 1979), he adds a further three solutions:

- 1 *Turn-type pre-allocation*: the pre-allocation of specific *types* of turns to different participants in a particular sequence (e.g. proposing and seconding, praying and responding).
- 2 *Turn mediation*: allocating special rights to decide the speaker and the topic to a particular person (e.g. a chairperson or judge).
- 3 '*Situated particulars*': this (my term not Atkinson's) refers to his discussion of how the organisation of seating or the wearing of special garments may indicate specific speakers and their rights. Alternatively, speakers may claim the floor by standing up to speak.

Peräkylä and Silverman: Formats in HIV Counselling

All interactions within institutional contexts, however, do not show the qualities of strict turn and turn-type pre-allocation. Heritage and Greatbatch (1989, 51–52) emphasise that in a number of less-formal forms of institutional interaction (occurring in e.g. medical, social service and business environments) turn-taking procedures are either conversational or 'quasi conversational'. As a result of this, there is room for considerable negotiation and stylistic variation. Consequently, they argue, the 'institutional' character of these interactions may be more difficult to tackle, especially if we expected it to be pervasively present in the participants' action.

In a current study of video- and audio-taped counselling session with persons coming for an HIV antibody test or diagnosed as HIV seropositive, we have begun to view the flow of events in a counselling session as a chain of shifts between a small number of simple sets of locally managed conversational roles of questioner, answerer, speaker and recipient. We call the sets of these roles *communication formats*.

Two communication formats, or sets of alignments, appear in HIV counselling sessions:

- 1 *Interview*.
- 2 *Information delivery*.

In the *interview* (hereafter IW) format the counsellor (hereafter C) and the patient (hereafter P) are aligned as questioner and answerer. Typical examples of the IW format are the following:

Extract 6.10

C: has your partner ever used a condom with you?

(1.2)

P: no:

(1.2)

C: do yer know what a condom looks like?

P: no ()

C: have you perhaps (1.0) a condom shown to you (.) at school or:

P: no

The basic structure of IW appears to be a very simple chain of questions and answers. The chain draws upon two conversational rules which have been laid bare in the early work of Sacks and his followers. First, until P has provided an answer, it would be difficult for C to ask a further question without making the absence of an answer accountable. This is because question-answer sequences are 'adjacency pairs', coupled activities in which the first part creates a strong moral expectation for the second to appear (Schegloff and Sacks: 1974). Second, a completed answer (particularly in a two-party conversation) gives the floor back to the questioner, who is thus free to ask a further question (Sacks: 1974).

In Extract 6.10, P does not produce an answer immediately after C's questions. P pauses for 1.2 sec before producing an answer to C's initial question. C, however, cannot produce further questions (or other kind of talk) before P has answered. As the question creates a constraint for P to answer, the continuation of the conversation is dependent on P. And concurrently, by confining him/herself to answering, P displays an understanding that the participants are in interview (IW) format.

In *information delivery* (hereafter ID) format, the P's contribution is not essential, for the C holds the floor. The C has the role of the speaker and the P confines him/herself to reciprocity. We see this asymmetric division of labour particularly clearly in the following excerpt, where C tells the patient about the services the clinic can offer to infected people.

Extract 6.11

C: *This clinic is:*

(1.0)

C: geared up (.) to: (.3) give as much *help* and *support* to that pe:rson, (.) and that pe:rson's friends (.) family: (.2) *lovers*

(1.2)

C: erm: (.2) as possible (.3) during (.3) *especially* during these first three months when?

(.6)

C: erm:

(.8)

C: the (trouble) is (.) is (.2) ba:d () and the *anxiety* is great.

(.2)

C: .hhhh (.2) we: have: *three* health advisers of whom I'm one,

(.9)

C: a clinical psychologist (.) whose job (.2) is: (.2) to *deal* with the anxiety:

(.3)

C: .hh and support groups

(.7)

C: to: help the families: (.4) erm: (.2) and the ((continues))

In ordinary conversations, if one party takes a long turn, stretching

beyond the ordinary boundaries of turns of talk (called 'turn construction units' by Sacks *et al* 1974), he or she must engage in specific activities in order to secure holding the floor. One such is a 'story preface', an announcement for the co-participants about an interest of the current speaker to produce an extended turn of talk. The co-participants, correspondingly, are expected to display their agreement in the production of a long stretch of talk by producing 'continuers'. These are small response tokens usually taking the form of 'hm mm', 'yes', or the like which appear close to the potential slots of change in speakership. The continuers do the work of passing an opportunity to produce a full turn of talk, thus giving 'permission' for the current speaker to continue.

In Extract 6.11, we don't see any provisions for C's long turn. C does not produce any equivalent of a 'story preface' but simply begins her account of the clinical services at line 1. Neither does P pass the opportunity to get the floor by producing continuers; she is, instead, silently receiving the information.

However, this does not mean that P is not required to do any interactional work during the ID. First, as in any conversation, the silent party is expected to show reciprocity by directing her gaze towards the speaker. Second, although the provisions typical for multi-unit turns in ordinary conversations are not necessarily needed, they nevertheless occur often in the counselling sessions.

Heritage and Greatbatch (1989) argue that the asymmetries often found in patterns of activities in 'non-formal' institutional encounters are apparently not the product of turn-taking procedures that are normatively sanctionable.

This seems to be what we have here. The stability of the interview (IW) format depends largely on the character of question-answer sequences discussed earlier. The strong obligation of the P to produce an answer to a question asked by the C, and the right of the questioner to ask a further question secure the maintenance of the format in most cases. The IW format seems also to be unproblematically set up in most cases: as soon as C holds the floor (which is the case at the outset of any consultation and at any stage of an ID sequence), a shift into IW can be made through simply asking a question.

In these features helping to maintain the IW format, there is then apparently nothing particularly institutionally determined. The adjacent relation between a question and an answer, and the 'chaining rule' are both devices originating in mundane conversation.

The information delivery (ID) format is equally stable. As noted earlier, the extended turns of talk by the C do not necessarily require such provisions as accompany long turns in an ordinary conversation. Devices sanctioning the production of multi-unit turns and continuers from the recipient are, however, usually used.

As a whole, then, the stability and persistence of the IW and ID formats seem not to be a result of particular institutionally shaped turn-taking

procedures related to setting up and maintaining these two formats. They trade off the procedures of mundane conversation.

The focussed character of HIV counselling thus explains why the two professionally-structured formats predominate in our transcripts. Clearly, each, in its own way, is functional for the achievement of the task at hand. However, the fact that either format may be used as a home-base suggests that we need to examine the more specific functions each serves.

The interview format has the major advantage that, because of the nature of question-answer adjacency pairs, Ps are required to speak. This means that Cs can tailor the information they give to the P's expressed needs, thereby probably maximising its impact and, incidentally, avoiding the boredom of repetitively providing identical information packages to all Ps.

In comparison with the interview, the information delivery format is far less complicated for the C. The C is less dependent on the P's contribution to the conversation because only reciprocity and little talk are required from the P. This has two advantages for the hard-pressed C. First, the C can deliver pre-designed information packages without much reflection. Second, a similar range of issues can be covered within a shorter period of time, particularly because the greater dependency of the interview format upon the P's contribution makes it more liable to the kind of communication difficulties we saw in Extract 6.10. This is not an irrelevant consideration given the pressures on Cs in many counselling centres.

The concept of 'communication formats' allows us to describe the local management of the turn-taking machinery. By considering sequential explanations of the stability of each format and contextual explanations of their functionality, we are able to describe and analyse counselling interviews in ways which are sensitive to the local organisation of communication but avoid reducing it to 'culture' or to the structure of adjacent turns-at-talk. The method allows the precise description of the special characteristics of counselling as a structure of communication in ways which are relevant to both sociologists and practitioners.

Summary

Sociologists concerned with describing the organisation of interaction have, until recently, been faced with two diverging options. They can focus either on local cultures or on the sequential order of conversation. Ethnography's emphasis on context underpins the first option; conversation analysis's concern with a context-free yet context-sensitive structure of turn-taking provides the rationale for the second. Analysis of transcripts of AIDS counselling suggests a middle way.

Table 6.2 below summarises the examples that we have been considering.

Table 6.2: *Institutional Talk – Some Examples*

Institution	Author	Structures of talk	Function
Clinic	Maynard (1991)	Question–answer–diagnosis (PDS)	Aligning parent to the diagnosis
Courtroom	Atkinson and Drew (1979)	Turn and turn-type pre-allocation	Selecting next speaker
Counselling	Peräkylä and Silverman (1991a)	Communication formats	Stability; eliciting patient's view (IW); speed (ID)

By focussing on the turn-by-turn organisation of talk, CA has shown the distinctive turn-taking systems that organise institutional settings. It has also suggested the functions of these systems in each institutional context.

Conclusion

In this conclusion, I return to my theme of the basic simplicity of the assumptions underlying the analysis of naturally occurring talk. Sacks' lectures are a wonderful resource for appreciating this simplicity. Not only do they use riveting examples but they also include exchanges between Sacks and his students.

In an answer to a student's question which asked how you can use conversational data to address a traditional sociological problem, Sacks says: 'The first rule is to learn to be interested in what it is you've got. I take it that what you want to do is pose those problems that the data bears' (1992b, 471).

Schegloff sums up the two most crucial things which Sacks left us when 'posing those problems that the data bears':

- 1 A methodology: 'A most remarkable, inventive and productive account of how to study human sociality' (1992b, xii).
- 2 A topic: 'the distinctive and utterly critical recognition . . . that . . . talk can be examined in its own right, and not merely as a screen on which are projected other processes' (xviii).

Sacks aims for a cumulative science of conversation, offering 'stable accounts of human behaviour [through] producing accounts of the methods and procedures for producing it' (xxx). As Schegloff puts it, the task then is driven by the observation of actual talk with actual outcomes. The question one poses is simply: how was this outcome accomplished?

The method is also straightforward: 'begin with some observations, then find the problem for which these observations could serve as . . . the solution' (1992b, xlviii).

Like Socrates, Sacks' aim was, in some sense, to remind us about things we already know. As Sacks remarks:

I take it that lots of the results I offer, people can see for themselves. And they needn't be afraid to. And they needn't figure that the results are wrong because they can see them . . . As if we found a new plant. It may have been a plant in your garden, but now you see its different than something else. And you can look at it to see how it's different, and whether it's different in the way that somebody has said. (1992b, 488)

Despite the battery of concepts contained in this chapter, Sacks' remark shows that the analysis of conversations does not require exceptional skills.

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