

# TOPICAL AND SEQUENTIAL BACKLINKING IN A FRENCH RADIO PHONE-IN PROGRAM: TURN SHAPES AND SEQUENTIAL PLACEMENTS<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Drawing on a corpus of French radio phone-in confidential chats, this paper deals with the resources that participants recurrently employ to get back to a prior course of action following age-inquiry sequences. It might be expected that the age sequence occurs predominantly during the initial, opening part of the phone-call, as part of the caller's identification sequence. Although such occurrences can be found, the age sequence is produced overwhelmingly after the introduction of the reason for call or after a pre-announcement of it. The way in which participants link back to the activity preceding the age sequence is related to the sequential placement of the age sequence as well as to the 'authorship' of its initiation and termination. Backlinking turns may therefore be analyzed with respect to their pragmatic effects (as doing restart, continuation, disjunction etc.) and with regard to the syntax and the linguistic units that speakers employ to achieve these effects.

**Keywords:** Conversation Analysis, backlinking, topic management, sequentiality, radio phone-in programs, French.

## 1. Introduction

One central precept of conversation analytic research relies on the observation that participants display through each speaking turn their way of interpreting the immediately prior turns, projecting at the same time the shape of the following turns (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974: 728). Therefore, the sequential implicativeness (Schegloff & Sacks 1973: 296, Jefferson 1978) of turns-at-talk is recurrently observable in adjacently positioned turns. On occasion, participants may produce turns which are not oriented to the immediately preceding turn, but to a spate of talk that has occurred earlier in the conversation. This phenomenon – that Schegloff (1996: 69) has outlined as a *backlinking* practice – has been described by Local (2004) as a resource by which participants are *back-connecting* to a prior conversational activity. More precisely, in Local's (2004) survey the back-connecting practice is understood to be a resource that a speaker employs in order to display that the turn-at-hand is not (topically) related to the immediate preceding turn, but to an utterance delivered earlier in the interaction by the same speaker. Drawing on French conversational data from a radio phone-in show, we will illustrate one recurrent device (*et (alors)* 'and (then)') that speakers use to display a backlinking turn, which from our point of view can cohere not only with a prior turn of

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<sup>1</sup> We would like to thank Gareth Walker for making insightful suggestions on an earlier version of the paper.

the same speaker, but also with a preceding turn of the interlocutor.<sup>2</sup> One sequential environment in which backlinking turns are recurrent is the turn following what we have termed the *age sequence*: this short sequence is most often initiated by the host of the show and is then shaped as a first pair part inquiring the caller about his or her age. The age sequence contributes to the accomplishment of one crucial task of the participants, i.e. the constitution of the caller's identity. In the vast majority of the recorded conversations the callers' identities rely on three parameters (besides the callers' names) that are treated as relevant for the conversation in which the participants are engaged, namely the profession, the place of residence and the age.<sup>3</sup> The inquiry about the age could thus be seen as an agenda-based questioning.<sup>4</sup> In fact, it occurs in the vast majority of the conversations between the host and the callers. After the age sequence has come to an end, the participants usually produce a link back to the previously discussed topic. We will show that participants exhibit and treat the backlinking turn subsequent to the age sequence either as *strong* or *weak* and that this treatment correlates with the presence of *alors* 'so, then' within the turn. Finally, we will differentiate between two kinds of backlinking turns: one operating on a topical level, the other being used to link back to a prior sequence of the interaction.

We have recorded 25 radio phone-in shows (*Allô Macha* and *Bonsoir Macha*) that were broadcasted by two French radio stations and hosted by Macha Béranger. Their scope is to give to the callers the possibility to speak about their problems of everyday life, going from difficulties in finding a partner to calls for help by suicidal persons.<sup>5</sup>

The kind of backlinking activity we are interested in can be illustrated by the following example.<sup>6</sup> The caller (Colette) is suffering from obesity and this has been the main topic of the conversation since the beginning of the phone call. After a while, the host (Roselyne) interrupts momentarily the development of the topic by initiating the age sequence:

(1) (Hintermann LC1997)

1 Colette [...] ça fait très longtemps que: j'essaie de tout faire  
 2 mais bon (il) y a: (il) y a vraiment . ça va un moment  
 3 mais au bout d'un moment je- je peux plus je: . je

<sup>2</sup> For the sake of brevity, this paper will only focus on *et (alors)*, although other units (such as *donc* 'thus, so') can also be used as backlinking devices.

<sup>3</sup> Descriptive features of identity – like the name and the location of the caller – have been termed *call-relevant categories* by Fitzgerald & Housley 2002. In the type of program we are analyzing, the professional status of the callers is equally treated as a call-relevant category.

<sup>4</sup> Whereas Heritage & Sorjonen (1994) have shown that in English conversation agenda-based questions are frequently *and*-prefaced, this does not hold true for our data. When initiated by the host producing an interrogative first pair part, the age sequence is overwhelmingly designed without an initial *et* 'and'.

<sup>5</sup> The very last show of *Allô Macha* went on air on June, 30th, 2006 on *France Inter*. Macha Béranger is now hosting this program on another French radio station (*MFM*) under a slightly different name, *Bonsoir Macha*. Additionally, example 1 is taken from another corpus which has been collected by Chantal Hintermann (University of Zurich, 2000) and which includes recordings from different similar radio phone-ins, such as *La Ligne de Coeur* (broadcasted by the Swiss radio station *RSR La première* and hosted by Roselyne Fayard).

<sup>6</sup> Each excerpt is followed by an English translation. The transcription conventions can be found at the end of this paper.

4                   *deviens méchante tout ça et pis bon (il) y a des*  
5                   *personnes qui disent mais il faut arrêter il faut*  
6                   *trouver une autre solution*  
7   Roselyne   *quel âge avez-vous colette*  
8   Colette     *j'ai vingt-quatre ans*  
9                   (0.2)  
10   Roselyne   *et qu'est-ce que vous avez fait jusqu'à maintenant*  
11                (0.2)  
12   Colette     *[ben j'ai:*  
13   Roselyne   *[comme type de::^euhm d'action . pour maigrir*  
14   Colette     *moi j'ai tout essayé des régimes euh: . de tout vraiment*  
15                *tout tout tout en . (alors) manger herbalife en mettant*  
16                *de l'eau dan::s*  
17   Roselyne   *ouais*  
18   Colette     *l'eau dans une poudre*

(1') (Hintermann LC1997)

1   Colette     [...] i've been trying to do everything for a long  
2                time but well (there) i:s (there) is really . it works  
3                for a while but after a while i- i can't i: . i get  
4                bad all that and well (there) are some people who  
5                say but you have to stop you have to  
6                find another solution  
7   Roselyne   how old are you colette  
8   Colette     i'm twenty-four years old  
9                (0.2)  
10   Roselyne   and what have you done so far  
11               (0.2)  
12   Colette     [well i ha:ve  
13   Roselyne   [as a kind of u::hm action . for losing weight  
14   Colette     i've tried everything diets er: . everything really  
15                everything everything everything . (so) eating  
16                herbalife putting water in::  
17   Roselyne   yeah  
18   Colette     water in a powder

Colette is engaged in a description of the moods she experiences when she is going on a diet and informs Roselyne that she has been trying to loose weight for a long time without any success so far (lines 1-6). At line 7, Roselyne does not carry on with developing the topic, but instead initiates the age sequence by a first pair part soliciting the caller's age. In the subsequent turn, Colette completes the adjacency pair by delivering her age (line 8). It is only after Colette's age has been delivered (line 8) that Roselyne produces a turn that links back to the prior topic (lines 10-13), by asking Colette what kind of diets she went on. Consequently, Colette aligns herself with the topical backlinking (lines 12-18). Thus, the sequential pattern that underlies this fragment can be described as follows:

1. Host:       age inquiry (line 7)
2. Caller:     age delivery (line 8)
3. Host:       backlinking turn (lines 10-13)
4. Caller:     acceptance of the backlinking turn (lines 12-18)

The phenomenon we are interested in occurs in the turn subsequent to the caller's age delivery: at lines 10-13 Roselyne returns to the diet topic that the caller was developing before the interruption by the age sequence, thus producing a backlinking turn.

Roselyne's turn is indeed shaped in a way that signals a link back to the prior topic: a) on a lexical level, by recycling the verb *faire* 'to do' that had been employed previously ("j'essaie de tout faire", l. 1; "et qu'est-ce que vous avez fait", l. 10); b) on a syntactic level, by using a construction that recalls what has been termed a *right dislocation*,<sup>7</sup> which has been described as a resource that French speaking conversationalists can employ to reintroduce a topic that has been temporarily out of focus (Ashby 1988, Horlacher & Müller 2005); c) on an interactional level, by opening her turn by a prefacing "et" 'and', which occurs frequently at the beginning of backlinking turns.

## 2. Tying turns to previous talk

The interactional resources that participants exploit to get back to preceding chunks of talk has been diversely dealt with in previous work. In her seminal paper on *side sequences*, Jefferson (1972) has described a recurrent phenomenon consisting in a temporary interruption of an on-going activity. Following such a break in talk, speakers have to accomplish recognizably their getting back to the previous activity. Jefferson (1972: 316) describes this phenomenon as a pattern consisting of three parts, namely an *on-going sequence*, a *side-sequence* and a *return to on-going sequence*. After a side sequence has come to an end, conversationalists have to employ particular interactional resources by which they exhibit that the turn in progress is not tied to the immediately preceding turn, but to another than the previous turn. Jefferson identifies two ways of tying back to the main activity, one marking the link back as doing continuation, the other as doing resumption; she then specifies that "[...] 'resumption' marks that there is a problem in accomplishing a 'return' while 'continuation' is specifically directed, for example, to 'covering up' the problem" (Jefferson 1972: 319).

The notion of *resumption* has also been adopted by Mazeland & Huiskes (2001: 141) in their analysis of Dutch *maar* 'but' in turn-initial position, that can be used for "tying with an earlier line of talk" and which the authors term *resumption marker* or *sequential conjunction*.<sup>8</sup> The accomplishment of the backlinking – by which a same speaker gets back to the narration he was engaged in before the upcoming of an interruption – is thus seen as a task which is performed by the very beginning of the turn. This view is sustained by Schegloff (1996: 69) who observes that "backlinking to the (or to some) prior turn [...] appears to be the initial job of a turn".

A turn-initial device that English speaking conversationalists use for "getting back to prior talk" has been described by Local (2004). In his analysis of *and-uh(m)*, the author shows how speakers manage to return to a previous course of action by producing a turn whose first words are *and-uh(m)* and how they signal at the same time that they are

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<sup>7</sup> Lambrecht (2001: 1050) defines a *dislocation* as a "sentence construction in which a referential constituent which could function as an argument or adjunct within a predicate-argument structure occurs instead outside the boundaries of the clause containing the predicate, either to its left [...] or to its right [...]". Note that in French right dislocations the dislocated constituent is frequently preceded by *comme* 'as' (Lambrecht 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Drawing on Jefferson's (1972) analysis, Mazeland & Huiskes (2001: 147) state that "resumptions accomplish non-obvious returns to a line of interaction that was abandoned because something else came inbetween. By using *maar* as the turn's first term, the speaker signals the non-incidental, not-unproblematic character of this type of return".

continuing a previous activity.<sup>9</sup> In this sense, the (continuative) *and-uh(m)* device seems to have different sequential consequences than the Dutch (resumptive) *maar*. Although Local (2004: 377) points out that back-connecting can be described as a tie to a previously suspended course of action, the examples he analyzes show primarily a topical link. However, as the analysis of our data will show, backlinking is not necessarily accomplished on a topical level: participants may also link back to a prior sequence of the interaction without taking up a prior topic.<sup>10</sup>

These observations lead us to a cautious approach of the backlinking devices, that may be able to display a *sequential* link or (additionally) a *topical* link. As Schegloff (1990) has shown, the concepts of *topic* and *sequence* are not equivalent, the *topic* being predominantly used to refer in some way to the content of a turn, whereas the notion of *sequence* has to do with the orderliness of the interactional exchange. In Jefferson's (1972: 304) words "the term 'sequence' refers to events that occur as a 'serial unit' which belong together and follow one after another". The author proposes thus a description that focuses on the *event* constituted by subsequent speaking. As such the term *sequence* has been described in opposition to or concomitantly with other notions, like *topic* (Schegloff 1990),<sup>11</sup> *course of action* (Heritage & Sorjonen 1994)<sup>12</sup> or *episode* (Korolija & Linell 1996).<sup>13</sup> Researchers refer to concepts like these to explain how participants manage to accomplish coherence in and through interaction. For Schegloff (1990) coherence is achieved primarily through the sequential organisation of the interaction, rather than through topical ties – a view which is based on the observation that topics may be transformed, launched, come to an end, etc., within a sequence that starts, e.g., with a request and ends with a reply. Heritage & Sorjonen (1994) attribute as well a major significance to the sequentiality, analysing coherence in terms of the aptitude of conversationalists to depart from and to return to a course of action. Focussing on *and*-prefaced questions, they observe that "*and*-prefacing can be used in and of itself to reinvolve a line or agenda of questions, and to re-engage a course of action across what it reciprocally formulates as a departure from a line, or course of action, across varying lengths of such departures" (Heritage & Sorjonen 1994: 19). Korolija & Linell (1996: 810) propose instead an explicitly topic-based account of a backlinking practice, when they observe that "reinitiation (renewal) of, or return to, a prior, nonadjacent topic in the same discourse" occurs naturally in interaction.

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<sup>9</sup> Local (2004: 395) argues that in this particular sequential location *and-uh(m)* "is a resource available to speakers to propose a return to a prior action which continues (rather than restarts or recapitulates) that prior action".

<sup>10</sup> Not focussing exactly on backlinking practices, Couper-Kuhlen (2004: 366) has also shown that speakers can construe a turn as doing continuation and at the same time introduce a new topic with it.

<sup>11</sup> Schegloff (1990: 55) observes that "topic (whatever defined) may change within the boundaries of a still ongoing sequence without subverting the coherence or structural integrity of that sequence", arguing hence that the sequential ties are a basic means for achieving coherence.

<sup>12</sup> "[...] it is relevant to distinguish the concept of *sequence*, e.g. an unexpanded or expanded adjacency pair, from the *course of action* that is constituted and undertaken in and through a series of them. We employ the term *activity* [...] to characterize the work that is achieved across a sequence or series of sequences as a unit or course of action - meaning by this a relatively sustained topically coherent and/or goal-coherent course of action" (Heritage & Sorjonen 1994: 4).

<sup>13</sup> Episodes "[...] are discursive events or action sequences, each delimited from prior and subsequent discourse and internally bound together by a coherent topical trajectory and/or a common activity" (Korolija & Linell 1996: 800).

The research on how the participants manage to tie a turn in progress to a nonadjacent preceding spate of talk sketched above has mainly focussed on two aspects: the description of the backlinking action in terms of *resumption* (Jefferson 1972, Mazeland & Huiskes 2001), *continuation* (Jefferson 1972, Local 2004) or *reinitiation* (Korolija & Linell 1996)<sup>14</sup> and the use of particular backlinking devices (dutch *maar*, Mazeland & Huiskes 2001; *and*-prefaced questions, Heritage & Sorjonen 1996; *and-uh(m)*, Local 2004).<sup>15</sup> Besides the description of a backlinking device that French conversationalists employ recurrently, our main concern in the remainder of this paper will consist in showing that participants can use the same device to exhibit a *sequential* backlinking or, additionally, a *topical* tie back to a previous spate of talk. From our point of view, the backlinking need not to be done by the same speaker. Therefore, we will describe the different sequential environments in which the age sequence and the subsequent backlinking occur, before proceeding further with the analysis of some occurrences in which the host of the radio-show initiates the backlinking turn.

### 3. The sequential environment of backlinking turns

We have shown above that in our data backlinking turns are recurrent at one particular sequential position, i. e. following what we have called the *age sequence*. The inquiry about or announcement of the caller's age can itself occur at different moments of the conversation: it can appear at the very beginning of the phone call, namely during the opening sequence – i.e. when the caller introduces herself or himself. In this case, the age sequence comes about *before* the first topic (or reason for call). Most often, however, the age sequence is produced later in the interaction, i.e. *after* the first topic has been introduced. When occurring in these 'late' sequential positions, the age sequence is treated as sequentially (and often also topically)<sup>16</sup> disconnected with the on-going talk and is therefore recurrently followed by a backlinking turn, which can be performed by either participant.<sup>17</sup> This holds also true for the age sequence: it can be initiated by the caller announcing his or her age or by the host, e.g. formulating an interrogative first pair part. Consequently, we can consider the four following patterns:

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<sup>14</sup> As for Heritage & Sorjonen (1994), the authors use different verbal descriptions for characterizing the phenomenon they are interested in, e. g. *re-establishing agendas*, *resuming*, *reinvoking* and *re-engaging*. With reference to the practice of tying turns that Sacks called *skip-connecting*, we may also note his description of *re-beginnings* (Sacks 1992, II: 348-353).

<sup>15</sup> A variety of practices which are employed to link back to prior parts of the conversation have actually been described, such as the misplacement marker *by the way* (Schegloff & Sacks 1973) or discourse markers like *anyway* (Ferrara 1997).

<sup>16</sup> Although the participants treat the announcement of the caller's age most often as an information that contributes to construct the caller's identity, they may also exhibit the topical relevance of the age with regard to the reason for call. For instance, one may contact the radio show to announce that he or she is in search of a job or a relationship: announcing one's age is thus of topical relevance.

<sup>17</sup> When occurring in a 'late' position, the age sequence may function as a *pivotal utterance* (Jefferson 1984: 203) or a *pivot* (cf. Holt & Drew 2005), allowing a topical reorientation of the ongoing conversation, more than leading to a backlinking turn. Finally, the age sequence can also serve as a pre-sequence to the introduction of a new topic.

	Initiation of the age sequence	Backlinking turn
a)	host	host
b)	host	caller
c)	caller	host
d)	caller	caller

- a) Both the age sequence and the backlinking turn are initiated by the host (the most frequent case);
- b) the age sequence is initiated by the host, whereas the caller produces the backlinking turn;
- c) the age sequence is initiated by the caller, the backlinking is produced by the host (the least frequent pattern);
- d) both the age sequence and the return to prior talk are initiated by the caller.

As pattern a) has already been illustrated through excerpt 1, we will now provide brief examples for the remaining of the above-mentioned patterns in order to give an initial sense of the phenomenon we are interested in. Subsequently (from section 4 onwards), we will present a precise analysis of the sequential and topical aspects of pattern a).

The following example illustrates an occurrence of pattern b) in which the age sequence is initiated by the host, whereas the caller produces the backlinking turn:

(2) (De Stefani & Horlacher AM052006)

1 Macha ((smack)) *on est quand même- y a des milliers de gen:s*  
2 *qu'ont des choses- . des maladies gra:ves des choses*  
3 *terribles 'h qui se battent tous les jours pour tenir debout/*  
4 *['h::*  
5 Gisèle [oui je s[ais\  
6 Macha [*et vous vous êtes debout/ et vous voulez*  
7 *parti:r\  
8 (0.2)*  
9 Gisèle *'h:: ouais mais je- je- je tiens pas debout je- j-*  
10 *j'ai- (aussi) [l'impression (qu'un j-)*  
11 Macha [*'h:: oui mais y a toujours une solution*  
12 *quelque part vous avez quel âge gisèle\  
13 Gisèle ((smack)) *ch- je vais- v- euh f:- non pf:: dans (un bout)*  
14 *je vais avoir quarante-deux ans bientôt\  
15 Macha *oh c'est une jeune- vous êtes une jeune/ . [femme\  
16 Gisèle [*'h:: ouais*  
17 *je suis jeune mais j'ai un lourd passé\  
18 Macha [*je suis- je&  
19 Gisèle [*((smack)) d'accord&  
20 Macha *&suis xxxxxx*  
21 *&vot- rien n'est facile à oublier/ et (de-) ce que vous*  
22 *avez vécu est certainement extrêmement difficile\  
23 *mais . qu'est-ce qui pourrait faire aujourd'hui que ça*  
24 *aille mieux\  
*par exemple\  
*'h: vous appelez ce soir/ ..*  
*pour tend- pour qu'on vous tende la main**********

(2') (De Stefani & Horlacher AM052006)

1 Macha ((smack)) *we are nevertheless- there are thousands of people*  
2 *who have things- . serious diseases terrible things*

3 'h who fight everyday to keep standing/  
4 ['h::  
5 Gisèle [yeah I k[noʷ\  
6 Macha [and you you are standing/ and you want to  
7 go:\  
8 (0.2)  
9 Gisèle 'h::: yeah but i- i- i'm not standing i- i-  
10 i have- (also) [the impression (that one d-)  
11 Macha ['h::: yes but there is always a solution  
12 somewhere how old are you gisèle\  
13 Gisèle ((smack)) ch- i'm going to- v- uhm f:- no pf:: in (a while)  
14 i'm going to be forty-two soon\  
15 Macha oh it's a young- you are a young/ . [woman\  
16 Gisèle [h'::: yeah  
17 i'm young but i have a heavy past\ [i'm- i&  
18 Macha [((smack)) alright&  
19 Gisèle &am xxxxxx  
20 Macha &you- nothing's easy to forge:t/ and (from-) what you  
21 have been going through is extremely difficult for sure\  
22 'h::: but . what could happen today so that things went  
23 better\ for example\ 'h: you call tonight/ .. to ho-  
24 so that someone holds out his hand for you

Before the excerpt reproduced above, Gisèle explained that she has had a heavy past relating it to her husband's death and to financial and health problems. She desperately announced to the host and the audience that she was tired of living and that she was seriously thinking of committing suicide. The interaction has been going on for more than 15 minutes when Macha interrupts Gisèle at lines 11-12 by saying that there is always a solution and then inquiring the caller about her age. Gisèle delivers her age at lines 13-14 in a way by which she indicates that she was not expecting this type of question at this point of the conversation. The several self-repairs and restarts at line 13 show that she treats the question as not appropriate.<sup>18</sup> At line 15 Macha extends the age sequence by assessing the caller's age: "vous êtes une jeune/ . femme\" / 'you are a young/ . woman'. Gisèle first agrees with this assessment ("ouais je suis jeune" / 'yeah i'm young') before introducing a sort of disagreement in the second part of the turn ("mais j'ai un lourd passé\" / 'but i have a heavy past'), returning thus to the previous topic of the conversation. In doing the backlinking, Gisèle opens her turn as a disagreement which is prefaced by an agreement component ("oui...mais"; cf. Pomerantz 1975: 66-68, Sacks 1987).

Note also that the age sequence can be seen to function as a pivot<sup>19</sup> in this spate of talk: if the interaction was oriented towards Gisèle's past from the beginning of the phone call until the age inquiry, the discussion after the age sequence is more forwards looking. The reason for call has indeed been transformed from "vous voulez parti:r" / 'you want to go:' (ll. 6-7) into "vous appelez ce soir/ .. pour tend- pour qu'on vous tende

<sup>18</sup> The host might be using here the age sequence as a resource for introducing evidence against Gisèle's plans to commit suicide. Gisèle's announcement of her age is in fact followed by Macha's categorization of the caller as 'a young/ . woman' (l. 15), a category which implies that, under normal circumstances, the caller has a large part of her life still in front of her. From this point of view, Macha's initiation of the age sequence provides her with the possibility to interrupt momentarily Gisèle's accounting of the suicide as a valid option to solve her problems.

<sup>19</sup> The term *pivot* is explained in footnote 17.

la main" / 'you call tonight/ .. to ho- so that someone holds out his hand for you ' (ll. 23-24).

Let us turn now to pattern c) – in which the age sequence is initiated by the caller, whereas the host produces the backlinking turn – with the only occurrence we have retrieved from our corpus:

(3) (De Stefani & Horlacher AM2412006)

1 Nicole [et pis qu'est-ce que je voulais dire 'h  
2 [alors eu:h voilà je suis veuve joyeuse/  
3 Macha [((laughs))  
4 (0.3)  
5 Nicole 'h [et si je peux trouver un compagon je ne:: refuserai&  
6 Macha [veuve joyeuse\  
7 Nicole &pas\  
8 (0.4)  
9 Nicole 'h j'ai soixante-cinq ans\  
10 (0.2)  
11 Macha oui/=  
12 Nicole =et toutes mes dents\  
13 (0.4)

((both participants are joking about the way the caller introduced her age))

29 Macha xx [xx xxx  
30 Nicole [ben::: oui il faut/=  
31 Macha =là vous appelez pour des confitures et finalement c'est  
32 pour trouver un: mari hein/ [((laughs))  
33 Nicole [((laughs))  
34 Macha 'h:: . le prétexte était bon:/ [((laughs))  
35 Nicole [((laughs))  
36 Macha 'h bon ben écoutez 'h <c'est pas [bête>((laughing)) h'  
37 Nicole non mais s- même si c'est une bes- une^euh 'h: eu:::h si  
38 c'est euhm^un petit copain comme [ça euh  
39 Macha [ouais\ . une amitié\  
40 Nicole ça me dérange pas hein/  
41 Macha d'accord\

(3') (De Stefani & Horlacher AM2412006)

1 Nicole [and what else did I want to say 'h  
2 [so er: ok i'm a merry widow/  
3 Macha [((laughs))  
4 (0.3)  
5 Nicole 'h [and if i could find a partner I wo::n't&  
6 Macha [a merry widow\  
7 Nicole &say no\  
8 (0.4)  
9 Nicole 'h i'm sixty-five years old\  
10 (0.2)  
11 Macha yes/=  
12 Nicole =and have all my teeth\  
13 (0.4)

((both participants are joking about the way the caller introduced her age))

29 Macha xx [xx xxx  
30 Nicole [so::: yes you have to/=  
31 Macha =there you call for jams and finally it is  
32 to find a: husband huh/ [((laughs))

33 Nicole [(laughs))  
 34 Macha 'h:: . the excuse was goo:d/ [(laughs))  
 35 Nicole [(laughs))  
 36 Macha 'h so listen 'h <it's not [silly>((laughing)) h'  
 37 Nicole no but s- even if it's a bes- a er 'h: er::: if  
 38 it's uhm a boyfriend like [that er  
 39 Macha [yeah\ . a companionship\  
 40 Nicole it doesn't refrain me huh/  
 41 Macha alright\

The reason for the call that has been developed in the fairly long conversation preceding this sequence has been about Nicole producing and selling homemade jams. At the end of the interaction, she engages in a topical reorientation by saying that she is looking for companionship (ll. 5-7). Macha does not take up this new topic, nor produce any recipient token or continuer. The host does not self-select after the end of the caller's turn, as the pause at line 8 makes visible. Consequently, Nicole engages in further talk by announcing her age (l. 9). On a topical level, Nicole's age delivery is not only part of the caller's identification, as in the previous examples, it is actually relevant to her second reason for call (i.e. finding a partner). As we can see in the subsequent turns, even if there is a topical relatedness between the age announcement and the second reason for call, the age sequence leads to a temporary suspension of the topical development. After Macha's "oui=" / 'yes/= ' (l. 12) by which she prompts her interlocutor to go on talking, Nicole extends her previous turn by adding an increment<sup>20</sup> to the age sequence ("=et toutes mes dents\ / '=and have all my teeth', l. 12). Following this expansion, both participants engage in laughter and comment the content of the turn expansion for several turns, which we have omitted for the sake of brevity.

At lines 31-32 we can see how Macha returns first to the caller's former reason for call "pour des confitures" / 'for jams' (l. 31) and subsequently reintroduces her second reason for call "trouver un: mari" / 'find a: husband' (l. 32). This turn closes the sequence that the participants have constituted around the laughable "=et toutes mes dents\ / '=and have all my teeth' (l. 12) and at the same time connects back to the topic of finding a husband. At lines 37-38 the caller ratifies the backlinking and goes on describing more accurately the type of relation she is in search of.

Age inquiries are frequently initiated by the callers when they are somehow relevant to the topic of the conversation in progress. This holds also true for the following excerpt, which shows an occurrence of pattern d): the age sequence as well as the return to prior talk are both initiated by the caller:

(4) (De Stefani & Horlacher AM25012006)

1 Victor 'h: oui eu::h macha voilà je: vous appelle parce que:  
 2 comment dirais-je: 'h: j'ai passé y a quelque temps .  
 3 'h:=  
 4 Macha =oui/

<sup>20</sup> Schegloff (2001: 11) defines an increment as "further talk [...] fashioned not as a new TCU, but as a continuation of the preceding TCU, [...] by making it grammatically fitted to, or symbiotic with that prior TCU, in particular, to its end". In the same way, Walker (2004: 147) has described this kind of extension as "a grammatically fitted continuation of a turn at talk following the reaching of a point of possible syntactic, pragmatic, and prosodic completion".

5 Victor eu:h y a deux mois j'ai passé une annonce matrimoniale\  
6 (0.4)  
7 Macha oui[:/  
8 Victor [hein . 'h: euh j'ai soixante ans/=

9 Macha =((smack)) oui/=

10 Victor =et comment dirais-je j'ai: j'ai reçu euh 'h:: euh après  
11 cette annonce j'ai reçu quarante-cinq réponses\  
12 (0.4)  
13 Macha oui:/'

(4') (De Stefani & Horlacher AM25012006)

1 Victor 'h: yes er:: macha ok i: call you tonight because:  
2 how shall i sa:y 'h: i placed some time ago .  
3 'h:=

4 Macha =yes/  
5 Victor er: two months ago i placed a matrimonial ad\  
6 (0.4)  
7 Macha yes[:/  
8 Victor [huh . 'h: er i'm sixty years old/=

9 Macha =((smack)) yes/=

10 Victor =and how shall i say i: i got er 'h:: er after placing  
11 this ad i got forty-five replies\  
12 (0.4)  
13 Macha yes:/'

Victor tells the host that he has placed a matrimonial ad two months ago, projecting thus a narrative activity. After Macha's continuer ("oui:/" / 'yes:', l. 7), the caller moves briefly out of the narration by introducing his age (l. 8). In his subsequent turn (ll. 10-11), Victor takes up the narrative activity again and goes on developing the reason for call by explaining that he received more than forty-five replies to his ad. In this extract the age sequence is relevant to the topic of the ongoing talk. By announcing his age, the caller delivers background information that he presents as being relevant for the further topical development. Although there seems to be topical continuation, the turn at lines 10-11 operates as a backlinking device: after the insertion of the age announcement, Victor can be seen to get back to the main course of activity, i. e. the narration of his experiences with the matrimonial ad. In other words, he is taking up a preceding (narration) sequence, which he had briefly put on hold by delivering his age. Therefore, we recognize in this excerpt an occurrence of a *sequential backlinking*.

**4. Getting back to the reason for call: a strong form of backlinking**

For the purposes of this article, we are going to focus exclusively on excerpts that correspond to pattern a), where the host initiates the age sequence as well as the backlinking turn. We will focus first on those examples in which the participants display their orientation towards the fact that they are taking up a prior course of action. This is accomplished, in part, through the lexical devices *et* 'and' at turn-beginning and *alors* 'so, then' occurring later in the turn. These backlinking turns – which recall the *resumptive* type of tying devices (Jefferson 1972, Mazeland & Huiskes 2001) – are operating a *strong* form of backlinking.

In the following excerpt, the age inquiry is realized *after* the reason for call has been mentioned by the caller:

(5) (De Stefani & Horlacher AM26012006)

1 Marie           voilà je patrique- je pratique la voile autant que  
2 possible/ 'h[: eu:h mais pas assez vraiment pas assez à&  
3 Macha                   [oui:/  
4 Marie           mon goût et voilà donc je voulais proposer: eu::h mes  
5 services pour eu::h 'h pour des navigation:s je sais  
6 qu'il y a des personnes qu'ont des: des bateaux et qui  
7 son:t seules [pour           [naviguer/  
8 Macha                           [((smack)) [vous êtes skipper alors\  
9                   (0.2)  
10 Marie           'h non just[ement j'ai pas- <j:'ai pas ces&  
11 Macha                           [((laughs))  
12 Marie           &compétences-lâ>((laughing)) eu:h malheureusement c'est  
13 pa[:s xxx  
14 Macha                           [((smack)) vous avez quel âge marie  
15 Marie           'h j'ai quarante ans/  
16 Macha           oui:/  
17                   (0.3)  
18 Macha           'h: et [qu'est-ce que vous pouvez proposer alors comme&  
19 Marie                           [eu::h  
20 Macha           &services sur un bateau\  
21                   (0.3)  
22 Marie           alors\ s-^soit accompagner: eu:::h j'ai (eu) on va dire  
23 que j'ai les compétences d'être^euh équipière  
24                   (0.3)  
25 Macha           oui:/

(5') (De Stefani & Horlacher AM26012006)

1 Marie           so i pactrise- i practise sailing as much as  
2 possible/ 'h[: er: but not enough really not enough for&  
3 Macha                           [ye:s/  
4 Marie           &my ta:ste and that's it so i wanted to  
5 offer: er:: my services for er:: 'h for sailing:s i know  
6 that there are people who have boats and who  
7 ar:e alone [for           [sailing/  
8 Macha                           [((smack)) [you are a skipper then\  
9                   (0.2)  
10 Marie           'h no precis[ely i don't have- <i:'don't have those&  
11 Macha                           [((laughs))  
12 Marie           &skills>((laughing)) er: unfortunately it's  
13 no[:t xxx  
14 Macha                           [((smack)) how old are you marie  
15 Marie           'h i am forty years old/  
16 Macha           ye:s/  
17                   (0.3)  
18 Macha           'h: and [what can you offer then as&  
19 Marie                           [er::  
20 Macha           &services on a boat\  
21                   (0.3)  
22 Marie           well\ ei-^either to accompany: er::: i have (had) let's say  
23 i have the skills to be er a crew member  
24                   (0.3)  
25 Macha           ye:s/

We can see at the beginning of this excerpt (ll. 1-7) how Marie introduces her reason for call and how both participants contribute to the construction of the caller's identity, which is visible, for instance, in Macha's attempt to categorize the caller as a "skipper" (l. 7). The age sequence (ll. 14-16) participates in the constitution of the caller's identity, even if the age inquiry does not seem to be directly relevant for the topic of the

conversation, which consists in Marie's offering of navigation services for people who do not want to travel on their own.<sup>21</sup> This can be shown by observing the way in which the age inquiry is treated: Macha produces the first part of the age sequence at line 14 and Marie completes it with the subsequent turn at line 15. Macha's "oui:" / 'ye:s' at line 16 ratifies the caller's announcing of the age and at the same time provides an opportunity space for further talk. Marie does not self-select as next speaker, so that the pause occurring at line 17 makes the lack of uptake visible. Consequently, at lines 18-20 Macha produces a turn that links back to the topic discussed before the emergence of the age sequence: "h: et qu'est-ce que vous pouvez proposer alors comme services sur un bateau" / "h: and what can you offer then as services on a boat".

How is this backlinking achieved? As the analysis will show, the backlinking is accomplished through a combination of sequential, lexical, syntactic and interactional resources. First, note that at lines 18-20 Macha uses the same interactional resource that she employed at lines 14 to open the age sequence, i.e. a first pair part projecting an answer turn by the caller. In this way, Macha presents her turn at lines 18-20 as a continuation of the activity in which she shows to be engaged in at lines 8 and 14 and which could be described as *doing asking*. At the same time she provides Marie with the opportunity to complete the new adjacency part by a second pair part, projecting thus further talk. Second, Macha inserts in her backlinking turn lexical units that Marie had employed in her turns preceding the age sequence, namely "proposer" / 'offer', "services" / 'services' and "bateau" / 'boat', providing lexical evidence for the backlinking. Third, the syntactic shape of Macha's turn supplies further traces of her resuming the prior topic: the turn starts with an audible inbreath followed by "et" / 'and'. The turn is then continued with a syntactic shape which reminds the form that has been described as a right dislocation (Ashby 1988, Geluykens 1994, Lambrecht 2001, 2004, Horlacher & Müller 2005). It is noteworthy that the main clause of the turn ("qu'est-ce que vous pouvez proposer/" / 'what can you offer/') is separated by the discourse marker "alors" / 'so, then' from the mention of the constituent ("comme services sur un bateau" / 'as services on a boat'). For French conversation, we have thus a syntactic pattern which can be represented as follows: (*inbreath*) *et xxx alors xxx*. Backlinking is thus not only syntactically marked at the beginning of the turn (as Schegloff 1996 noted for English), but also within the turn, namely by the presence of "alors" / 'so, then'. Although we regard such turns as composed of one TCU beginning with (*inbreath*) + *et*, it has to be noted that the description of the backlinking device merely in terms of the TCU beginning would be incomplete, precisely because the *alors* occurring within the turn is equally relevant for the phenomenon we are describing here. Fourth, the overlap occurring at lines 18-19 provides a unit (*and er::*) which comes close to the one that Local (2004) has described as a backlinking device in English

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<sup>21</sup> The objection could be made that the caller's age is relevant to the topic of the conversation, in so far as young or elderly listeners might not be willing to sail with a forty-year-old woman. However, the participants visibly treat the age announcement here as background information. As we will see in excerpts 6 and 7, when the age is topically relevant, the speakers can be seen to exhibit this relevance. In these extracts, Macha actually marks the initiation of the age sequences either using a discourse marker by which she launches the treatment of the caller's advice request ("h . alors vous avez quel âge jérôme" / "h . so how old are you jérôme", ex. 6, l. 11), or by exhibiting the fact that she is missing a key information – precisely the caller's age – which is relevant for the treatment of his request ("=vous avez quel âge/ je connais pas votre âge" / 'how old are you/ i don't know your age' ex. 7, l. 76).

conversation (*and-uh(m)*) and which, in this excerpt, is produced collaboratively by both participants. Fifth, backlinking seems not to be accomplished by one participant only: Macha's backlinking at lines 18-20 has to be accepted by her co-conversationalist. Marie does so at line 22 where she opens her turn using "alors\" / 'well\". This provides further evidence for the relevance of *alors* in French backlinking turns.

### 5. When the age sequence is topically relevant: a weak form of backlinking

Let us turn now to an example in which the age sequence is topically relevant for the reason for call that the participants are developing. In this case, the backlinking is syntactically marked as *weak* and can be compared to the *continuative* (Jefferson 1972, Local 2004) type of turn tying. This correlates with the presence of *et* at the beginning of the turn, whereas there is no *alors* occurring later in the turn.

In the following excerpt, the age sequence emerges also after the reason for call has already been introduced. Jérôme is calling because he is in search of a job:

#### (6) (De Stefani & Horlacher AM25012006)

1 Jérôme *et eu:::h^u:n de mes amis très chers m'a dit que: ben je*  
 2 *pouvais v- je pouvais vous contacter/ pour eu:h pour*  
 3 *passer: euh pour passer un message/ . 'h:: eu::h ben*  
 4 *comme quoi je suis à la recherche d'un emploi dans les:*  
 5 *'h au sein des ressources humaines/*  
 6 (0.5)  
 7 Macha *'h . oui:/*  
 8 Jérôme *et que si: si: euh si jamais eu:h on- on pouvait*  
 9 *m'entendre/ et entendre^eu:h 'h entendre ma demande/ et*  
 10 *ben on [peu:t*  
 11 Macha *[ 'h . alors vous avez quel âge jérôme*  
 12 Jérôme *'h j'ai quarante-cinq ans\*  
 13 (0.3)  
 14 Macha *oui/*  
 15 (0.4)  
 16 Jérôme *voilà\*  
 17 (0.2)  
 18 Jérôme *'h=*  
 19 Macha *=et vous avez une formation dans (le:s r-) en ressources*  
 20 *humaines/*  
 21 (0.2)  
 22 Jérôme *ah oui oui oui j'ai- j'ai travaillé: euh j'ai travaillé*  
 23 *pendant vingt an:s eu::h dans une: grande- grande*  
 24 *entreprise/ 'h[:*  
 25 Macha *[oui/=*

#### (6') (De Stefani & Horlacher AM25012006)

1 Jérôme *and er::: o:ne of my dearest friends told me tha:t well i*  
 2 *could call y- i could contact you/ to er: to ma:ke er to*  
 3 *make an announcement/ . 'h:: er:: well*  
 4 *like i'm looking for a job in the:*  
 5 *'h in the field of human resources/*  
 6 (0.5)  
 7 Macha *'h . ye:s/*  
 8 Jérôme *and that if: if: er if eve:r er: someone- someone could*  
 9 *hear me/ and hear er: 'h hear my request/*  
 10 *well we [ca:n*  
 11 Macha *[ 'h . so how old are you jérôme*  
 12 Jérôme *'h i am forty-five years old\*

13 (0.3)  
 14 Macha yes/  
 15 (0.4)  
 16 Jérôme that's it\  
 17 (0.2)  
 18 Jérôme 'h=  
 19 Macha =and you are trained in (the: r-) in human  
 20 resources/  
 21 (0.2)  
 22 Jérôme oh yes yes yes i- i've been er i've had been working  
 23 for twenty yea:rs er:: in a: big- big  
 24 company/ 'h[:  
 25 Macha [yes/=

As in the previous excerpt, the age inquiry (l. 11) is delivered after the exposition of the reason for call (ll. 1-10). Macha initiates her turn using the discourse marker "alors" / 'so' which at the same time introduces the age inquiry and configures the turn as the beginning of the 'treatment' of Jérôme's advice request. As in example 5, the age inquiry is accomplished within a sequence in which the caller's (professional) identity is constituted. But unlike the previous example, the age inquiry here is not just participating in the caller's identification. It is an issue that is relevant for the topic that the participants are discussing (Jérôme's job search). From this point of view, the age inquiry is not off-topic.

Jérôme's age delivery ("h j'ai quarante-cinq ans" / "h i am forty-five years old\') can be found at line 12, which is followed by a short pause and by Macha's ratification at line 14 ("oui/" / 'yes/'). As in the preceding example, a pause follows the ratification, after which Jérôme self-selects and produces the discourse marker "voilà" / 'that's it' (l. 16), which permits him to take the turn without developing the topic.<sup>22</sup> Jérôme appears thus to be oriented towards the fact that it is Macha who should take the turn. It seems that if the host asks for the caller's age, then a second question of the host is expectable. Macha formulates consequently a second first pair part (latching with a short inbreath of Jérôme's) which operates also as a backlinking turn: "=et vous avez une formation dans (le:s r-) en ressources humaines/" / '=and you are trained in (the: r-) in human resources/', ll. 19-20. Only some of the characteristics described for the *strong* form of backlinking are observable in this case. First, the interactional resource employed by Macha shows her again as *doing questioning*. Second, Macha recycles again lexical units that had been introduced by the caller, i.e. the words "ressources humaines" / 'human resources'. Third, she begins her turn with "et" / 'and' – but without inserting in her turn the unit *alors*. The absence of *alors* in this backlinking turn can be accounted for by observing that in this example there is some topical coherence between the reason for call and the age sequence, whereas in example 5 the age sequence appears to be inserted into the main conversational activity without any topical tie. Therefore, in excerpt 5 Macha produces a *stronger* backlinking device (*et xxx alors*), whereas in the present example the *weaker* version (*et*) is sufficient to link back to the main topic of talk. A look at Jérôme's acceptance of the backlinking (ll. 22-24) provides us with further evidence for the relevance of the age sequence for the conversation topic. Jérôme actually orients to it when he says that he has been working for twenty years in a large company, referring thus to his lived temporality to construe the identity relevant for the interaction he is engaged in. The topical relevance of the age sequence is also visible in the first words of

<sup>22</sup> In French conversation, the unit *voilà* is therefore typically used in pre-closing sequences.

Jérôme's turn ("ah oui oui oui" / 'oh yes yes yes', l. 22) that display a continuation rather than a resumption of the previous talk.

## 6. Sequential and topical features of backlinking turns

In all of the following examples, we will see that the link back to a prior spate of talk must not necessarily take up a preceding topic again. In fact, the *et* (*xxx alors*) device can also link back to a previous sequence of the conversation. Therefore, we have to differentiate between two kinds of backlinking: one topical, the other sequential.

The following conversation takes place soon after the beginning of the conversation between Christian and Macha, the caller having just told the host of the show that his girlfriend has left him a few months ago:

### (7) (De Stefani & Horlacher BM10012007)

1 Macha 'h:: alors de quoi voulez vou:s que- quel genre  
2 d'annonce voulez-vous passer christian\  
3 (0.6)  
4 Christian 'h ben: oui ben disons que: 'h j'ai la vie qui m'a pas  
5 fait de cadeau/ quoi\  
6 (0.4)  
7 Macha oui:/'

((Christian goes on relating his past experiences for about 5 minutes))

53 Macha 'h:: d[onc vous avez-  
54 Christian [mai:s malheureusement c'est que: 'h:: au bout de  
55 plusieurs année:s euh:: ben: la machine a cassé/ quoi\  
56 (0.5)  
57 Macha ((smack)) 'h:  
58 (0.2)  
59 Christian et[::  
60 Macha [x  
61 (0.2)  
62 Christian je me suis retrouvé:^euh:: en maladie quoi  
63 (0.4)  
64 Macha d'accord\  
65 (0.4)  
66 Macha et[: vous ne travaillez plus depuis combien de temps&  
67 Christian [(c'était)  
68 Macha &euh: christian/  
69 (0.6)  
70 Christian ben: depuis quatre-vingt-six\  
71 (0.4)  
72 Macha ah d'accord\  
73 (0.4)  
74 Macha 'h=  
75 Christian =oui oui=  
76 Macha =vous avez quel âge/ je connais pas votre âge\  
77 (0.2)  
78 Christian cinquante-trois ans/  
79 Macha cinquante-trois ans\  
80 (0.3)  
81 Christian oui  
82 Macha 'h: .. et que cherchez-vous alors maintenant\  
83 (0.6)  
84 Christian 'h ben oui/ ben si: 'h si vous voulez euh:: bon ben  
85 (euh) . quand je me suis retrouvé en maladie^euh\ 'h .  
86 bon ben quan::d . quand elle s'est rendue compte  
87 qu'elle allait plus avoir ce qu'elle avait l'habitude

88                   d'avoir/ ... eh ben::^on: m'a jeté dehors/ quoi\ je me  
89                   suis retrouvé seul/ 'h:

(7') (De Stefani & Horlacher BM10012007)

1   Macha       'h:: so about what do you: want wha- what kind  
2               of message do you want to pass christian\  
3               (0.6)  
4   Christian   'h we:ll yes well let's say tha:t 'h life didn't  
5               spare me/ yeah\  
6               (0.4)  
7   Macha       ye:s/

((Christian goes on relating his past experiences for about 5 minutes))

53   Macha       'h:: s[o you have-  
54   Christian   [bu:t unfortunately the thing is that 'h:: at the end  
55               of several yea:rs er:: the machine broke/ yeah\  
56               (0.5)  
57   Macha       ((smack)) 'h:  
58               (0.2)  
59   Christian   a[::nd  
60   Macha       [x  
61               (0.2)  
62   Christian   i found myse:lf er:: sick again yeah  
63               (0.4)  
64   Macha       alright\  
65               (0.4)  
66   Macha       a[::nd how long have you been without work&  
67   Christian   [(it was)  
68   Macha       &er: christian/  
69               (0.6)  
70   Christian   we:ll since eighty-six\  
71               (0.4)  
72   Macha       oh alright\  
73               (0.4)  
74   Macha       'h=  
75   Christian   =yes yes=  
76   Macha       =how old are you/ i don't know your age\  
77               (0.2)  
78   Christian   fifty-three years old/  
79   Macha       fifty-three years old\  
80               (0.3)  
81   Christian   yes  
82   Macha       'h: .. and what are you then looking for now\  
83               (0.6)  
84   Christian   'h well yes/ well i:f 'h if you like er:: well  
85               (er) . when i found myself sick again er\ 'h .  
86               well whe::n . when she realized that  
87               she was not going to have what she was used to  
88               having/ ... eh we::ll she: threw me out/ yeah\ i  
89               found myself alone/ 'h:

At lines 1-2 of the excerpt Macha produces a first pair part oriented to the introduction of the reason for call, the aim of the show being to offer some kind of help to the caller.<sup>23</sup> The completion of the adjacency pair is not accomplished immediately: after the pause intervening at line 3, Christian engages in a description of his life (ll. 4-5) that will go on for several minutes (omitted in the transcription), without providing an answer to Macha's question. Instead, he tells Macha that due to his poor health he has

<sup>23</sup> In this sense, Macha's turn at lines 1-2 can be described as a *topic initial elicitor* (Button & Casey 1984).

not been able to make a career and to offer a decent life to his girlfriend. The description of his past experiences comes to a possible end at line 62 with the Christian saying "je me suis retrouvé: ^euh::: en maladie quoi" / 'i found myse:lf er:: sick again yeah' which is followed by a pause and by Macha's ratification "d'accord" / 'alright', l. 64.

At lines 66-68, Macha self-selects asking Christian how long he has been without work. She orients thus the topical development of the conversation towards the temporal aspects of Christian's description. At line 70 the caller delivers his answer mentioning the last year he has been working ("ben: depuis quatre-vingt-six" / 'we:ll since eighty-six'), rather than formulating a lapse of time. Macha learns now that the caller has not been working for the last twenty years and marks her news receipt at line 72 ("ah d'accord" / 'oh alright') with a change-of-state token (Heritage 1984). Following a short pause (l. 73) Macha self-selects with an audible inbreath (l. 74) and initiates the age sequence shortly after: "=vous avez quel âge/ je connais pas votre âge" / 'how old are you/ i don't know your age' (l. 76). Note that the first TCU – the interrogative part of the turn – is followed by an account about Macha asking her question at this moment of the conversation. Actually, the age sequence is produced quite late in the interaction (after about 5 minutes from the beginning). In the preceding talk Christian had used other temporal expressions relating to his age (such as "quand j'étais jeune" / 'when i was young', not reproduced here), which were treated as appropriate to the narrative activity in which Christian was engaged describing his past life. The caller delivers his age at line 78 ("cinquante-trois ans" / 'fifty-three years old'), obtaining a ratification by the host in the following turn (l. 79). Although the announcement of the caller's age comes about fairly late in the conversation, it is not off-topic, as it contributes to a more detailed description of the caller's situation through the development of the topic's temporal aspects. The subsequent pause (l. 80) and the brief "oui" / 'yes' of the caller (l. 81) show that Christian is not going to comment further his age. Consequently, Macha takes the floor again and produces another first pair part: "h: .. et que cherchez-vous alors maintenant" / "h: .. and what are you then looking for now" (l. 82).<sup>24</sup> Whereas this turn is produced in topical continuity with the preceding talk, it operates a sequential backlinking to a prior spate of talk that had occurred at the very beginning of the conversation. As we have seen, the request that Macha had produced at lines 1-2 has not been followed by a clear answer of the caller. Despite the long description of his life that Christian has produced until now, Macha has not obtained any answer to her initial question "quel genre d'annonce voulez-vous passer christian" / 'what kind of message do you want to pass christian' (ll. 1-3). Macha's first pair part at line 82 reestablishes the relevance of accomplishing one of the caller's tasks, i. e. to announce the kind of help he is expecting from his participation in the radio show. Macha's turn can be seen to connect back to a first pair part (ll. 1-2) that has not been completed by the caller: therefore, it operates a *sequential* backlinking.<sup>25</sup> Note that on a syntactic level, Macha's turn is shaped as a strong form of backlinking through the use of the *et xxx alors* format.

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<sup>24</sup> As we have observed in the excerpts 5 and 6 the age sequence is frequently followed by a second first pair part of the host. The initiation of the age sequence by the host seems therefore to project the relevance of a second questioning. Additionally, in excerpt 7 Macha produces a first pair part just before initiating the age sequence, namely at lines 66-68.

<sup>25</sup> If the conversation so far has focused on the description the caller's past experiences, the interrogative first pair part that Macha formulates at line 82 is more forward-looking. As in excerpt 2, the backlinking turn functions thus as a topical pivot.

As the pause occurring at line 83 indicates, Christian does not take the floor immediately, and when he does (l. 84-89) he goes on depicting his life circumstances, continuing the narrative activity in which he was engaged before the upcoming of the age sequence. He does not answer Macha's question about what he is "looking for now" and misaligns thus with Macha's projection. The dispreferred character of his turn is visible through the numerous pre's (Schegloff 1980) that Christian produces at lines 84-85 before properly starting the turn ("h ben oui/ ben si: 'h si vous voulez euh:: bon ben (euh)" / "h well yes/ well i:f 'h if you like er: well (er)'). We observe thus in this excerpt an occurrence of a sequential backlinking which is not ratified by the caller, who takes up his previous course of action, consisting in the narration of his past experiences.

We have illustrated with this excerpt a case of backlinking which – rather than operating topically – strongly displays a link back to a previous sequence in the interaction. This is not a single case as the analysis of the following excerpt will show.

In example 8a we observe an age sequence, which emerges about two minutes after the beginning of the conversation. The caller has already introduced his reason for the call, saying that he has just recovered from a break up and that he would like to make new female acquaintances:

(8a) (De Stefani & Horlacher AM07052004)

1 Kara 'h . voilà alors- .. bon ... je: j- c'est drôle ce soir  
 2 je m'étais dit tiens (j'allais; je vais) essayer de vous  
 3 appeler\  
 4 (0.2)  
 5 Kara 'h: j'avais déjà essayé une ou deux fois/ et puis ce  
 6 soir c'est le bon soir ((laughs))  
 7 Macha [(et ce soir) ça marche\ voilà\  
 8 ((laughs)) 'h: alors\ . kara\ vous avez quel âge\  
 9 Kara 'h: . moi j'ai trente-trois ans\  
 10 Macha trente-trois ans et que faites-vous déjà  
 11 Kara 'h:: alors moi je travaille- je fais un métier qui est  
 12 pas loin du vôtre . puisque je travaille dans le: son  
 13 (0.5)  
 14 Macha ((smack)) ah alors le son  
 15 (0.2)  
 16 Kara 'h: et puis je donne un peu de vie aux dessins animés\  
 17 (0.4)  
 18 Macha ah: mais c'est bien ça:=

(8a') (De Stefani & Horlacher AM07052004)

1 Kara 'h . that's it so- .. well ... i: i- it's funny tonight  
 2 i said to myself look (i was going to; I'm going to) try to  
 3 call you\  
 4 (0.2)  
 5 Kara 'h: i had already tried once or twice/ and then  
 6 tonight it's the right nigh[t ((laughs))  
 7 Macha [(and tonight) it works\ that's it\  
 8 ((laughs))'h: so\ . kara\ how old are you\  
 9 Kara 'h: . i am thirty-three years old\  
 10 Macha thirty-three and what do you do for a start  
 11 Kara 'h:: so i work- i do a job which is  
 12 not far from yours . since i work with sound  
 13 (0.5)  
 14 Macha ((smack)) ah with sound then  
 15 (0.2)  
 16 Kara 'h: and so i give some life to cartoons\  
 17

17 (0.4)  
 18 Macha ah: but tha:t's good=

In this excerpt the host's age inquiry at line 8 contributes to the constitution of the caller's identity and is topically relevant to the reason for the call – as in excerpt 6. The age sequence comes about after the introduction of the reason for call, which at this point of the conversation has already been outlined by the participants: Kara calls to make female acquaintances (not reproduced here). At lines 1-6 Kara ends the description of his reason for call ("voilà" / 'that's it', l. 1) and starts to talk about the fact that he has been able to get through to Macha on the radio phone-in show, categorizing this event as "drôle" / 'funny' (l. 1). Comments like these are usually to be found at the very beginning of the radio phone-in conversation, before the introduction of the reason for call. Therefore, Kara can be seen here to 'redo opening': this observation accounts for the emergence of the age sequence at this moment of the conversation. After acknowledging Kara's turn at line 7 ("(et ce soir) ça marche\ voilà" / '(and tonight) it works\ that's it'), Macha initiates the age sequence at line 8. She opens her turn with a hearable inbreath followed by the discourse marker "alors" and by a micropause: "'h: alors\ . kara\ vous avez quel âge\" / 'h: so\ . kara\ how old are you'. As in excerpt 6, Macha indicates the beginning of the 'treatment' of the caller's advice request. Consequently, Kara completes the adjacency pair at line 9 through the announcement of his age: "'h: . moi j'ai trente-trois ans\" / 'h: . I am thirty-three years old', which obtains Macha's ratification (l. 10). Immediately following her ratification, Macha formulates a second first pair part: "et que faites-vous déjà" / 'and what do you do for a start' (l. 10). Retrospectively, we observe thus that once again – as in excerpts 5, 6 and 7 – the initiation of the age sequence by the host seems to project the relevance of a second first pair part occurring after the end of the age sequence. Kara completes the adjacency pair in a preferred way (ll. 11-12) delivering the requested information.

Following the description of Kara's profession ("sound engineer", as Macha will categorize it later), the participants go on depicting in detail this activity and assessing it positively, eventually redefining the participation framework by referring to the sound engineer actually present in the studio. About forty seconds after the age sequence has occurred, the conversation continues as follows:

(8b) (De Stefani & Horlacher AM07052004)

1 Macha *donc^euh vous êtes ingénieur du son\*  
 2 (0.4)  
 3 Kara *voilà c'est ça*  
 4 Macha *et bien c'est un très beau métier\ . [kara\*  
 5 Kara *[(oui)*  
 6 Macha *'h: donc trente-trois ans et vous avez envie de faire*  
 7 *quoi\ alors de sor[tir de[: de:*  
 8 Kara *[ 'h: [ 'h:: ben . voilà oui- -fin moi*  
 9 *je suis j: euh: j'ai découvert que: j'avai:s .. pas mal*  
 10 *envie de danser/ ces derniers temps/*

(8b') (De Stefani & Horlacher AM07052004)

1 Macha *so er you are a sound engineer\*  
 2 (0.4)  
 3 Kara *yes that's it*

4 Macha well it's a very nice job\ . [kara\  
5 Kara [(yes)  
6 Macha 'h: so thirty-three years old and you feel like doing  
7 what\ then like go[ing out li[:ke li:ke  
8 Kara ['h: ['h:: well . that's it yes- well  
9 i am i: er: i have discovered tha:t i ha:d .. a good  
10 mind to dance/ lately/

After the talk about Kara's profession has been closed at lines 1-3, Macha formulates a positive assessment (l. 4) obtaining Kara's agreement (l. 5). At line 6 Macha produces a turn in which she does a topical backlinking to the reason for call. To do so, she relates explicitly to the age sequence that we have analyzed in excerpt 8a: the first part of her turn ("h: donc trente-trois ans" / "h: so thirty-three years old", l. 6) operates as a sequential backlinking to a preceding phase of the interaction, namely the age sequence. The discourse marker "donc" / 'so' and the reformulation of the caller's age configure this turn as a 'sequential restart', in the sense that Macha is displaying here to be ratifying the caller's age announcement again. The second TCU is produced without any intervening pause: ("et vous avez envie de faire quoi\ alors de sortir de: de:" / 'and you feel like doing what\ then like going out li:ke li:ke', ll. 6-7). Its interactional, lexical and syntactic properties are however very similar to the backlinking turn we have analysed in example 5. First, Macha uses again an interrogative first pair part – this being the regular continuation occurring after the ratification of the age inquiry. Second, Macha reemploys a lexical unit that Kara had introduced when exposing his reason for call (before the emergence of ex. 8a), namely "sortir" / 'going out'. Third, the turn's syntactic shape is not only characterized through its beginning with "et" and the occurrence of "alors" within the turn, but also through the precise placement of "alors": it appears after the completion of the interrogative unit ("et vous avez envie de faire quoi\ / 'and you feel like doing what\') and before the mention of the element that is presented as a filler of the interrogative slot "quoi" / 'what'.<sup>26</sup> Forth, Kara ratifies the backlinking in the opening of his subsequent turn ("h: ben . voilà oui-" / "h: well . that's it yes-'). We can observe that Macha's turn at lines 6-7 links back on previous talk on two different levels, one sequential (to the preceding age sequence), the other topical (to the reason for the call introduced before the first occurrence of the age sequence). Furthermore, the different backlinking tasks are marked through the use of distinct discourse markers: the sequential tie is signalled by "donc", whereas the topical linking is done through "et xxx alors". Finally, this example permits us to show that participants treat the age sequence actually as a resource for introducing a backlinking device: evidence for this is given by Macha's repeating of her previous age ratification at line 6.

## 7. Concluding remarks

The analysis of a radio phone-in show has permitted us to illustrate a recurrent phenomenon in this kind of interaction. Following what we have termed the *age sequence* the speakers recurrently employ a backlinking turn, which points back to a prior topic or to a prior sequence of the interaction. Focusing on the cases in which the

<sup>26</sup> Both in excerpts 5 and 8b, following the "alors" in the backlinking turn we observe some kind of 'completion' of the interrogative first pair part by the host.

host initiates the age sequence as well as the link back to previous talk, we have shown that backlinking is not accomplished unilaterally: it is an interactional achievement which is accomplished by the formulation of a backlinking turn and by the co-participants ratification of the backlinking. On a structural level, we have observed that backlinking is not merely done through turn beginnings (as Schegloff 1996 sustains). The analysis of data drawn from French telephone conversation has shown that the link back is not always accomplished through turn beginnings alone, but also through lexical units occurring later in the turn. We have identified a recurrent syntactic format of backlinking turns, consisting in an initial *et* which is followed by *alors* in the subsequent part of the turn. We have proposed to distinguish this *strong* (resumptive) form of backlinking from its *weak* (continuative) counterpart in which only the initial *et* occurs. The connection back to a previous spate of talk can relate primarily either to the topical development of the interaction or to its sequential organization, or to both. Backlinking allows thus to point to previous talk by displaying a sequential link, or – additionally – a topical tie. These different kinds of linkage support Schegloff's (1990) distinction between the concepts of *topic* and *sequence*. This point is central to our argument as it accounts for the possibility for participants to achieve coherence not only on a topical level (in the sense of maintaining referential continuity) but also through the sequential organization of the interaction.

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/	rising intonation
\	falling intonation
.	short pause
..	medium pause
...	long pause
(1.5)	timed pause in seconds and tenths of seconds
[	beginning of overlap
]	end of overlap
xxx	inaudible segment
((cough))	transcriber's comments
<>	start and end of a segment to which a transcriber's comment applies
( )	dubious hearing
&	latching

=	contiguous utterances
<u>v</u> ideo	stress
EXtra	increased volume
:	stretching of prior syllable
par-	cut-off
^	liaison
'h	inbreath
h'	outbreath