



Aspects of Oral Communication

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JOHN HERITAGE

Conversation Analysis: Methodological Aspects

1. Introduction

It is now thirty years since Harvey Sacks (1992 [1964–72]) presented the first lectures on what has come to be known as 'conversation analysis' (CA) at UCLA and over twenty five years since the field's first paper (Schegloff 1968) was published. The intervening years have witnessed an accelerating growth in the study of discourse generally and in the use of CA approaches to talk-in-interaction in particular. Published CA papers now number well into the thousands and the diversity of topics to which they are addressed continues to broaden while coverage of established topic areas deepens. A variety of distinctive styles of CA research have begun to emerge. The present chapter reviews CA's theoretical assumptions and the evolving methodological directives they mandate: it will not review specific studies except as exemplars of particular theoretical or methodological issues.¹

2. Theoretical Background

In coming to an appreciation of CA, it is important to begin with the recognition that the field is sociological in origin and that it emerged not as an attempt to come to terms with language, meaning or communication but rather as an approach to the study of social action. The proximate point of departure for CA was Harold Garfinkel's (1967) decisive critique of the Parsonian approach to social action that had dominated anglophone sociology during the middle of this century (Parsons 1937, 1951).² In brief, this theory asserted that social

¹ A number of published papers provide overviews of CA and of the ethnomethodological perspective from which it emerged – in English: Atkinson and Drew 1979 (Ch. 2); Clayman and Maynard 1991; Goodwin and Heritage 1990; Heritage 1984b (Ch. 8), 1987, 1989; Levinson 1983 (Ch. 6); Maynard and Clayman 1991; Zimmerman 1988; German: Bergmann 1981, 1988; French: Gülich 1991, Bange 1992. Methodological discussions of CA procedure include Goodwin 1981 (Ch. 2) and, for transcription, Jefferson 1983, 1985; for general procedures ten Have 1990; for the logic of analysis Wootton 1989 and some methodological limitations Heritage 1990/1, Schegloff 1993, Drew 1991 and Levinson 1989. For an overview of Sacks' originating insights, see Schegloff's two Introductions (Schegloff 1992a and b) to Sacks 1992.

² For further discussion of Garfinkel's response to Parsons see Garfinkel 1952, 1988; Heritage 1984b, 1987; Hilbert 1992.

action is to be understood as the causal product of internalized moral norms and rules that are engaged by relevant social contexts and function as drivers of conduct. In this analysis, the co-ordination of action is possible by virtue of the fact that the actors share a common body of norms and rules which are engaged by a shared recognition of their joint social situation. This common recognition is, in turn, engendered by a shared system of determinate cultural representations and symbols that provide for agreement among the actors about the nature of the objects, events and actions that make up any common setting of action or *umwelt*.

This view of action was essentially 'motivational'. In concentrating on social norms as drivers of action, the theory lost sight of, or otherwise disattended, the ways in which social actions are produced by knowledgeable agents who achieve shared understandings and who guide and justify their actions to one another through the use of situated commonsense reasoning.³ Further the theory was static. It employed a "bucket" theory of context (Heritage 1987) which assumed that the circumstances of the actors are unaltered by their actions. Finally, the theory employed a pre-Wittgensteinian conception of cultural representations that tacitly assumed a correspondence function between sign and referent and a determinate one at that.

In a brilliant sequence of experiments and other forms of empirical demonstration, Garfinkel anatomized the deficiencies of this perspective. Drawing on Schütz's (1962, 1964, 1966) analysis of the typified and approximate character of commonsense knowledge and representations, his experiments demonstrated that the actors' presuppositional use of this 'imperfect' knowledge together with a range of background assumptions is essential to the maintenance of shared understandings of objects, actions and events and that these understandings, which are infused with moral reasoning, are constructively achieved and sustained on a moment to moment basis. In turn, this conception of situated knowledge and mutual understanding as dynamic and constantly updated undermined any possibility that the 'context of situation' in which action occurs can be understood as independent from the component actions with which actors unavoidably constitute and reconstitute it. Finally, Garfinkel comprehensively undermined conceptions of language and symbolization premised on the assumed primacy of representational functions.⁴ Instead he stressed the multiplex relevancies and the inherent reflexivity and contextuality of all sign functions.⁵ Above all, he insisted that because the production of signs is unavoidably

³ Garfinkel's turn that asserted the socially and theoretically foundational character of the actors' analyses of their circumstances against views of action that treated motivational issues as primary is contained in his Ph. D. dissertation (Garfinkel 1952) supervised by Parsons. See Heritage (1984 b: Chs. 2-5) for discussion.

⁴ See also Garfinkel and Sacks (1970) and Heritage (1984 b, Chapter 6) for some explication.

⁵ *Studies in Ethnomethodology* can be read as a compressed almanac of sign functions and uses. Sacks' lectures (1992) expand these concerns with extraordinarily nuanced evocations of the purposes, epistemologies and social relations that may be implicated in particular lexical formulations.

embedded in courses of real worldly action, social actors will necessarily interpret them as elements of the actions that they partially constitute. Correspondingly, the interpretive analysis of sign functions is properly and unavoidably 'emic' in character.

The upshot of Garfinkel's researches was that every aspect of shared understandings of the social world depends on a multiplicity of tacit *methods of reasoning*. These methods are procedural in character, they are socially shared and they are ceaselessly used during every waking moment to recognize ordinary social objects and events. A shared social world, with its immense variegation of social objects and events is jointly constructed and recognized through, and thus ultimately rests on, a shared base of procedures of practical reasoning that operationalize and particularize socially distributed corpora of inexact knowledge.⁶

In addition to functioning as a base for understanding actions, these procedures also function as a resource for the production of actions. Actors tacitly draw on them so as to produce actions that will be *accountable* – that is, recognizable-describable – in context. Thus, shared methods of reasoning are publicly available on the surface of social life because the results of their application are inscribed in social action and interaction. As Garfinkel (1967: 1) put it: 'the activities whereby members produce and manage the settings of organized everyday affairs are identical with members' procedures for making these settings account-able.'

3. *Conversation Analysis: Basic Assumptions*

CA emerged from these fundamental initiatives essentially as the study of methods of conversational action. Nourished by Goffman's (1964, 1967, 1971, 1983) conception of the 'interaction order' as an autonomous domain of investigation, conversational interaction began to be conceptualized as a social institution in its own right whose normative organization and empirical regularities could be addressed using the sorts of basic observational techniques that a naturalist

⁶ As Garfinkel put it:

'Shared agreement' refers to various social methods for accomplishing the member's recognition that something was said-according-to-a-rule and not the demonstrable matching of substantive matters. The appropriate image of a common understanding is therefore an operation rather than a common intersection of overlapping sets. (1967: 30)

And:

Not a method of understanding, but immensely various methods of understanding are the professional sociologist's proper and hitherto unstudied and critical phenomena. (1967: 31)

Schegloff (1992 d: 1299) similarly writes:

... intersubjectivity is not a matter of a generalized intersection of beliefs or knowledge, or procedures for generating them. Nor does it arise as 'a problem of intersubjectivity.' Rather particular aspects of particular bits of conduct that compose the warp and weft of ordinary social life provide occasions and resources for understanding.

might use in studying animals or plants (Sacks 1984).⁷ As it has emerged, the field has consolidated around a number of basic theoretical and methodological assumptions.

3.1 *The Primacy of ordinary conversation*

A basic CA assumption is that 'ordinary conversation' between peers represents a fundamental domain for analysis and that the analysis of ordinary conversation represents a basic resource for the extension of CA into other 'non-conversational' domains. This assumption was not a guiding principle of CA research from the outset. Indeed in his lectures, Sacks (cf. Sacks 1984) did not portray the decision to study conversation in these terms. However by the time that the work on turn-taking (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974) was completed, it had become apparent that ordinary conversation differs in systematic ways from, for example, interaction in the law courts or news interviews and the conceptualization of these differences has developed substantially in recent years (Drew and Heritage 1992 a).

There is every reason to view ordinary conversation as the fundamental domain of interaction and indeed as a primordial form of human sociality (Schegloff 1992 d). It is the predominant form of human interaction in the social world and the primary medium of communication to which the child is exposed and through which socialization proceeds. It thus antedates the development of other, more specialized, forms of 'institutional' interaction both phylogenetically in the life of society and ontogenetically in the life of the individual. Moreover the practices of ordinary conversation appear to have a "bedrock" or default status.⁸ They are not conventional and historically mutable nor generally subject to discursive justification (by reference, for example, to equity or efficiency) in ways that practices of communication in legal, medical, pedagogical and other

⁷ The development of Goffman's conception of the interaction order is well surveyed by Kendon (1988). While Goffman is justly regarded as an important influence on the emergence of CA, this influence has been far from decisive. Part of the reason for this is that he did not significantly problematize issues of the construction and recognition of action, preferring instead to pursue a neo-Durkheimian (Collins 1980, 1988) focus on the moral order underlying interaction and its translation into individual motivation through the medium of 'face' (Schegloff 1988). In this way, Goffman reproduced the Parsonian preoccupation with issues of motivation and morality at the expense of issues concerning the recognizability of action – the very theme on which Garfinkel originally broke with Parsons.

⁸ The distinction between "practices of" and "practices in" ordinary conversation originates with Schegloff (unpublished lectures, UCLA). He uses the term "practices in" conversation to refer to actions which participants direct to, for, with or at one another. Most of these actions are vernacularly nameable – for example, questioning, complaining, challenging etc. – but not exclusively so. The term can also be employed to characterize such activities as referring, listing or inviting recognition. He employs the term "practices of" conversation, by contrast, to refer to the underlying structural organizational properties of these activities.

institutions manifestly are.⁹ Research is increasingly showing that communicative conduct in more specialized social institutions embodies task- or role oriented specializations and particularizations that generally involve a narrowing of the range of conduct that is generically found in ordinary conversation (see below). The latter thus embodies a diversity and range of combinations of interactional practices that is unmatched elsewhere in the social world. Communicative conduct in institutional environments, by contrast, embodies socially imposed and often irksome departures from that range (Atkinson 1982).

3.2 *The use of naturally occurring recorded data in CA*

CA is comprehensively insistent on the use of recordings of naturally occurring data as the empirical basis for analysis. This outlook was first articulated in Sacks' lectures (Sacks 1984, 1992 [1964–72]) where he stressed the value of recordings as a resource that could be analyzed and re-analyzed. Moreover, Sacks argued, naturally occurring data represent an infinitely richer resource for analysis than the products of imagination or invention – especially when the latter labor against the constraint, not faced by empirically occurring data, that others may deny their validity as possible events in the real world (ibid.).

These comments made their appearance in an intellectual context in which invented data were the stock in trade of Chomskian linguistics and of philosophical perspectives such as speech act theory (Searle 1969, 1979) which adopted a similar stance towards linguistic data. CA continues to stress that the use of recorded data is central to recovering the detail of interactional organization and that all forms of non-recorded data – from memorized observations to all forms of on-the-spot coding¹⁰ – will inevitably compromise the linguistic and contextual detail that is essential for successful analysis. The empirical advances that CA has made rest squarely on the use of recorded data together with the availability of data transcripts that permit others to check the validity of the claims being made.¹¹

The parallel insistence on naturally occurring data is similarly motivated. While experimental situations and role-play data can be recorded, there are

⁹ To adopt Garfinkel's (1967) terminology, from the lay user's point of view, the practices of ordinary conversation, in contrast to the practices of the courtroom or the news interview, are "specifically uninteresting" and "not matters for competent remarks".

¹⁰ For example, the commonly employed Balesian categories (Bales 1950).

¹¹ Here some important caveats need to be made. Recorded data are essential to the practice of analysis. CA studies are not properly founded on transcripts alone, no matter how well those transcripts have been prepared. Transcription is valuable as a support for memory and as a means for the quick recovery of data segments. And of course it is essential for the dissemination of findings in a print medium. However transcription is at best an approximation to the recorded data – just as the latter is an approximation to the interaction itself as a lived reality for the participants. For all these reasons, transcription is a communicative convenience and not an analytic substitute for recorded data – see Heritage and Atkinson (1984) and Jefferson (1983, 1985) for some further discussion.

reasons for regarding each of them as less than fully desirable. Experimental and related circumstances in which the participants are 'set up' for some activity often yield data that are only partially usable. Often the circumstances of the interaction limit the uses of the data and the applicability of findings from them (Schegloff 1987, 1991). Similarly role-plays, as those who have compared them with "real life" interactions will know, are often compromised in terms of the range and authenticity of the conduct that emerges within them, not least because the empirical consequentiality and moral accountability that is associated with "real" interactions is attenuated in the role-play context.

Given these considerations, CA has approached the world of social interaction in the same spirit as the naturalist. The aim has been, as far as possible, to obtain data of interactional practices in the natural contexts in which those practices occur. The resulting materials can be analyzed and reanalyzed in the context of new research questions and of growing knowledge and can be employed as cumulative data corpora in processes of comparison that accumulate over time.

3.3 *The structural analysis of conversational practices*

Fundamental to the inception of CA is the notion that social interaction is informed by institutionalized structural organizations of practices to which participants are normatively oriented. This assumption, perhaps more than any other, reflects the sociological origins of the field. Associated with this assumption is the notion that these organizations of practices – as the conditions on which the achievement of mutually intelligible and concerted interaction depends – are fundamentally independent of the motivational, psychological or sociological characteristics of the participants. Rather than being dependant on these characteristics, conversational practices are the medium through which these sociological and psychological characteristics manifest themselves.

It is this structural assumption which informs, in fact mandates, the basic CA imperative to isolate organizations of practices in talk without reference to the sociological or psychological characteristics of the participants. For example, a structured set of turn-taking procedures is presupposed in the recognition of an 'interruption'. Moreover, both the turn-taking procedures and the associated recognizability of interruptive departures from them are anterior to, and independent of, empirical distributions of interruptions as between males and females or between powerful and powerless individuals (Kollock, Blumstein and Schwartz 1985; West and Zimmerman 1983; Zimmerman and West 1975). It is thus only *after* the structural features of, for example, turn-taking and interruption have been determined that it is meaningful to search for the ways in which sociological factors such as gender, class, ethnicity, etc. or psychological dispositions such as extroversion or a disposition to "passive-aggressive" conduct, may be manifested – whether causally or expressively – in interactional conduct.¹²

¹² It may be added that it may be through the particular ways in which they implement conversational practices that persons are recognizable as having particular personalities or dispositions.

CA searches for structural organizations of interactional practices in a particular way. Rather than starting with a set of theoretical specifications of 'structure' or 'action' (cf. Parsons 1937) or with an *a priori* theoretical specifications of 'particular actions' (for example, Searle's [1969] speech act specifications)¹³ or with a theory of the motivation of action such as the theory of 'face' (Goffman 1955, 1959, 1971; Brown and Levinson 1987), CA has avoided premature and idealized theory construction in favor of the empirical identification of diverse structures of practices. The shift is one from an idealized and conceptually simplified model – 'the structure' of action (Parsons 1937) to a particularized and multiplex one – 'structures' of action (Atkinson and Heritage 1984). It is the accumulation of empirical findings about the multiplex practices organizing social action that forms an ever expanding background against which further empirical advances have been made.

This analytic outlook has been held by some to be hostile to the development of theory in the study of communication and social action but this is very far from the case. Many CA insights and observations are profoundly compatible with the viewpoints developed in connection which, for example, Gricean implicature (Grice 1975) or politeness theory and have contributed much to their empirical specification.¹⁴ Notwithstanding these commonalities however, CA has sought to avoid comparatively restrictive theoretical agendas in favor of a basic freedom of theoretical manoeuvre. It has thus developed a less concise, but more multivalent and multidimensional, perspective on the task of conceptualizing conversational action.¹⁵

4. *The structural analysis of action in ordinary conversation*

4.1 *Conceptual Background*

From its inception, CA has been occupied with the analysis of the sequential organization of interaction. Underlying this notion are a number of fundamental

As Gail Jefferson has informally observed (pers. comm.) "personality" might be said to consist of a selected set of speaker's practices."

¹³ See Schegloff (1992a) for a discussion of the differences in the approach to conversational actions taken by Searle and Sacks respectively.

¹⁴ See Brown and Levinson (1987) and Holmstrom (1992) for recent overviews.

¹⁵ This stance can be traced to be the very earliest work in ethnomethodology and conversation analysis which sought to forestall premature and preemptive theoretical generalization. Of this period, Schegloff (1992a: lix) writes:

Not that it was easy. Sacks often complained about how hard the work was, and that it did not seem to get easier ... The problem was, he observed, the need to see 'around the corner,' to penetrate through the blinders of the implacable familiarity of the mundane materials with which we worked, and the commonsense models and expectations derived from a social science which had never addressed itself to the simple observational tasks of a naturalistic discipline in which such models ought to have been grounded in the first place. It may be added that the accumulation of CA findings since that time have made it rather easier for Sacks' successors to overcome the "implacable familiarity" of conversational materials so as to address within them varieties of somewhat technical domains of inquiry.

ideas. First, in doing some current action, speakers normally project (empirically) and require (normatively) the relevance of a 'next' or range of possible 'next' actions to be done by a subsequent speaker (Schegloff 1972). Second, in constructing a turn at talk, speakers normally address themselves to preceding talk and, most commonly, the immediately preceding talk (Sacks 1987 [1973], 1992 [1964–72]; Schegloff and Sacks 1973; Schegloff 1984). Speakers design their talk in ways that exploit this basic positioning (Schegloff 1984; see Quasthoff, this volume, for the ontogenetic dimension of this basic positioning), thereby exposing the fundamental role of this sequential contextuality in their utterances.¹⁶ Third, by the production of next actions, speakers show an understanding of a prior action and do so at a multiplicity of levels – for example, by an 'acceptance', an actor can show an understanding that the prior turn was possibly complete, that it was addressed to them, that it was an action of a particular type (e.g., an invitation) and so on.¹⁷ These understandings are (tacitly) confirmed or can become the objects of repair at any third turn in an on-going sequence (Schegloff 1992d).

CA starts from the presumption that all three of these features – the grasp of a 'next' action that a current projects, the production of that next action, and its interpretation by the previous speaker – are the products of a common set of socially shared and structured procedures. CA analyses are thus simultaneously analyses of action, context management and intersubjectivity because all three of these features are simultaneously, if tacitly, the objects of the actors' actions. Finally, the procedures that inform these activities are normative in that actors can be held morally accountable both for departures from their use and for the inferences which their use, or departures from their use, may engender.

4.2 Methodology

4.2.1 Overview¹⁸

In developing analyses of the many particular procedures that inform these processes, CA has primarily engaged with its empirical subject matter using

procedures of analytic induction. As competent language users, analysts develop more or less conceptually informed 'hunches' about the uses and organizational properties of particular conversational practices. At this point, the work normally begins with an inductive search for instances of the practice under investigation using as wide a range of data as possible.

The objective of this search is normally a 'pattern' of behavior, rather than a uniform or invariant sequence of actions. This pattern will normally comprise a variety of cases including 'marginal' and 'deviant' cases. There are a number of reasons for this broad search for pattern. First, CA studies conversational practices which are primarily normative in character. These practices involve expectable and/or proper linkages between actions. CA does not adopt the stance prevalent in some forms of discourse analysis (Sinclair and Coulthard 1974, Coulthard 1977, 1981) that determinate and obligatory rules of interactional sequencing provide for 'well formed' discourse. Such a view is at odds with the very possibility of conversational implicature (Grice 1975; Levinson 1983; Taylor and Cameron 1987). Moreover, since the 'meaning' of an action arises both from its "illocutionary" characteristics as an action and from the extent to which it conforms which, or departs from, the "perlocutionary" expectations that are established for the slot in which it occurs, this rule governed approach to discourse represents an impoverished approach to conversational action and to the 'meanings' that sequential organization subtexts. It cannot, therefore, be an analytically coherent framework for research. Accordingly, CA searches for a pattern involving a 'spread' of cases that may subsequently be found to embody systematic internal differentiation.

The second reason for including a wide range of cases in the original inductive search is more straightforward: marginal cases may serve as a resource with which to define the nature, scope and limits of conversational practices, while deviant cases often serve to demonstrate the normativity of those practices [Heritage 1984b: 241–260].

Once possessed of a set of cases that appear to embody a conversational practice or procedure, the detailed work of specifying the scope and limits of the practice begins. A major component of this involves 'deviant case' analysis'. This involves examining cases where the general pattern is departed from and examining whether, and in what ways, the participants orient to such departures. Used in this way, deviant case analysis is an important resource for determining whether the basic pattern simply embodies an empirical regularity that happens to occur, or whether it involves something that is oriented to as a normative interactional procedure.

This simple 'pattern and deviant case' analysis has generated some of the strongest results in conversation analysis: results that deal with central topics such as turn-taking, sequence organization, repair etc., but also with the organization of gaze (Goodwin 1981 and this volume), gesture (Goodwin 1986; Goodwin and Goodwin 1986), aspects of the production of speech (Local 1992a, 1992b, Local and Kelly 1986, 1990) and conduct in institutional settings (Heritage and Greatbatch 1991).

¹⁶ Since each next turn at talk is context shaped in this way while simultaneously providing a new context for a next utterance in the sequence (see also Hausendorf & Quasthoff, this volume), conversational interaction involves the creation of a dynamic *context-shaped, context-renewing* set of situational contingencies (Heritage 1984b). This is very different from the 'bucket' theory of context alluded to above. The dynamic conception of context that is embodied in these basic CA assumptions has a further lineage in the field of interactional research associated with such figures as Birdwhistell, McQuown, Scheflen, Kendon and others. See Kendon (1979; 1982 and 1990: 15–50) for a lucid exposition of these figures who, together with others, Kendon discusses under Scheflen's (1963) rubric of 'context analysis.' See Goodwin and Duranti (1992) for a valuable discussion of a still larger range of influences and considerations in the treatment of 'context'.

¹⁷ See Heritage (1984b: 254–264) and Schegloff (1992d: 1299–1300) for brief exemplifications of this core, but immensely complicated, topic.

¹⁸ This summary compresses themes dealt with in more detail in Heritage (1984b: 241–65, 1988).

4.2.2 An Illustration

Following is a brief consideration of some of the research activities involved here, based on a published study of the particle 'oh' (Heritage 1984a).¹⁹

Heritage's study began with two basic observations. First that 'oh' is often produced in utterances where a speaker does a 'noticing' or a 'remembering' of something. Second, the particle is often produced as a receipt object after answers to questions, or repairs. Heritage argued that the relation between the two sets of cases lay in the "semantics" of 'oh' which, he suggested, proposes a change of subjective state of knowledge information, orientation or awareness. The example below illustrates the kind of observations that were central here.

- (HG: II: 25)
- N: a → .hhh Dz he 'av 'iz own apart [mint?] .hhhh Yeah, =
 H: b →
 N: c → =Oh,
 (1.0)
 N: a → How didju git 'iz number,
 (i)
 H: b → I(h) (i) c(h)alled information'n San
 b → Fr'nasc (b) uhl
 N: c → Oh: : : .
 (i)
 N: Very clever, hh=
 H: =Thank you [I: .hh-hhhhhhh hh=
 N: a → W'ts 'iz last name,
 H: b → Uh: : Freedland. .hhhh
 N: c → [Oh: ;,
 H: [(r) Freedland.=
 N: d → =Nice Jewish boy?
 (i)
 H: e → O:f course, =
 N: f → =v [course,
 H: [h-hh-hh]hnh .hhhh=
 N: =Nice Jewish boy who doesn't like tih write letters?

Here are four sequences in which 'information' is requested and supplied. In the first three, the information is received by 'oh'. Insofar as a question indicates that its producer is 'uninformed' and the answer may be said to provide

¹⁹ For related discussions of CA practice see Heritage (1984b: 245–253) for an exemplification of adjacency pair analysis and Heritage (1988) for a discussion of the analysis of accounts. Wootton (1989) has also illustrated his discussion of CA methodology with Heritage's (1984a) paper on 'oh', as has ten Have (1991). More recently, Local (1992b) has elaborated on aspects of the phenetic production of 'oh' in ordinary conversation.

information, then 'oh' as a 'change of state' token functions to reconfirm the relationship between the questioner and answerer as one that has involved a transmission of information. Further it implicates (1) that the questioner accepts – at least provisionally – the information given and (2) that the answer has satisfied the 'information gap' that was projected by the question. Note here, for example, that the answerer does not elaborate her answer after any of the 'oh' receipts and that in the first two sequences a brief gap opens up before the questioner resumes talking. So the basic pattern – with these implications – is Q-A-'oh'.

This example also contains a 'deviant case' – the fourth sequence (arrowed d–f). Here the questioner in the preceding three sequences (N) produces a query intoned utterance ("Nice Jewish boy?") but receipts the response to that utterance, not with 'oh' but with "v course". Here, it is clear that she is not acknowledging H's response concerning the ethnic identity of her boyfriend as 'information' but as something already knowable or inferable (from his family name). Through her "v course," receipt, she reflexively formulates her previous question intoned utterance as a 'confident inference' rather than as a request for information. Examining her informant's (H's) turn (arrowed 'e'), it is apparent that H treated the utterance in the same way. In fact, N's final "v course," echoes H's "O:f course."

Here then we have a procedure for receiving information and a deviant case that begins to provide a sense of the scope of what 'receiving information' consists of. The search now begins for the range of contexts which 'oh' is used in this way: how 'informed' – for example "surprised" – does the questioner have to be? What other sequences of information transmission is the particle routinely involved in? What about cases where the 'oh' is accompanied by an assessment, or a 'really'. What about 'deviant cases' where the 'oh' prefaces something like "that's right" which asserts that the questioner knew the information already. What about the contexts in which "yes" is used instead of "oh" to receipt an answer to a question (see Heritage 1984a for some discussion of all these contingencies). Exploration of these alternatives and others not detailed here further specifies and particularizes the practices of conversation in which the particle is implicated and of its specific work in the context of those practices.²⁰

Moving from the use of 'oh' in a range of conversational sequences to its broader significance in the construction of social contexts and social relations, a further set of possibilities suggest themselves. There are a range of contexts in which, as in apocryphal stories about the late J. Edgar Hoover, questioners nearly always withhold 'oh'-receipts to answers to their questions. These include, most notably, news interviews (Heritage 1984b, 1985, Greatbatch 1988, Heritage and Greatbatch 1991), medical encounters (Frankel 1984, 1990, ten Have

²⁰ See, for example, Heritage (1990) for a consideration of 'oh' as a preface to responses to questions.

1991), courtroom interactions (Atkinson 1982, 1992, Atkinson and Drew 1979, Drew 1992) and classroom interaction (Heritage 1984b, Drew and Heritage 1992a). In all of these settings, aspects of the activities that are being accomplished in and through questions make the questioners' 'oh'-receipts of questions inappropriate. Correspondingly, the absence of 'oh'-receipts to answers to questions in these settings is one of a wide variety of the elements of conversational practice that is either eliminated or re-specified in such contexts and this contributes to the constitution of each of them as a particular form of institutional talk (see below).

4.2.3 *The role of statistics in the analysis of conversational practices*

It will have been apparent from the above discussion that quantitative assessments of the incidence of 'oh' played a minimal role in Heritage's analysis of its uses as a conversational practice. While the paper made general assertions of the form that Q-A-'oh' is a commonly occurring sequence and that 'oh' is a common repair receipt by the producer of a 'next turn repair initiator' (NTRI),²¹ no attempt was made to quantify these assertions.

The main arguments for deferring statistical treatments of conversational data have recently been made by Schegloff (1993, see also Dubois and Sankoff 1992). To summarize his discussion, even the simplest forms of quantitative measures (such as percentages) require analytically defensible specifications of the denominator, the numerator and the domain from which they are taken. Schegloff describes the denominator in terms of "environments of possible relevant occurrence" of some conversational event – in the context of Heritage's study, it would be all the contexts in which 'oh' could relevantly be uttered. The numerator would, of course, be all the cases in which 'oh', or some version of 'oh' appeared. The domain might have been all the speech data in hand, or all the speech data from some vernacularly characterized context such as news interviews, medical encounters, or from 'ordinary conversation'. With this background, it is possible to review some of the difficulties that could inhibit the attempt to quantify the Heritage study.

(1) *The denominator.* The denominator poses two significant difficulties. First, it will be apparent that Heritage's study of 'oh' was, in essence, an exploration of the denominator – the main contexts in which 'oh' might relevantly occur – and that part of the role of the deviant and marginal cases in this analysis is to gain some approximation of the scope and limits of the denominator. In this fundamental sense, the purpose of the paper was to develop a grasp of the denominator that is a precondition for any coherent statistical analysis. Devoid of that ground work, any subsequent statistical analysis would have been meaningless.

The second difficulty is more intractable for it concerns the reflexive, context-constituting character of conversational actions. It can be illustrated by con-

sidering the fourth sequence above. It is quite difficult to determine whether the utterance "Nice Jewish boy?" should be included in the denominator or not. It is clear that the "questioners'" receipt of the "answer" treats the utterance as not having been a real request for information but rather a "confident inference" or "comment". So on these grounds we would seem to have to *rule out* this sequence from our denominator. But it is just possible that the utterance may have been a "real question" and that the questioner, hearing her respondent's "O:f course", 'revised' her response (and, by inference, her stance to the family name) from "oh" to "v course". If the latter were true, then we should have to *include* the sequence in the denominator. Here we are caught on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand the presence or absence of the particle 'oh' seems to be analytic to the inclusion (or not) of the sequence in the denominator. On the other hand we would have to have access to the speaker's intentions (assuming they were available to her in the first place [Heritage 1990/1]) in order to include the sequence in the denominator on a basis independent of the empirical occurrence of 'oh'.²² But since 'intentions' are expressed (or concealed) in and through the operation of conversational procedures, the circle seems entirely closed.

(2) *The numerator.* To establish a defensible numerator, decisions have to be made on such matters as the following: Which intonations of 'oh' are to be counted for statistical purposes (cf. Local 1992b)? What combinations of 'oh' with other turn components, such as assessments, newsmarks etc. are to be permitted as instances of the occurrence of 'oh' and so on. Most difficult of all, is the fundamental question: what is the full range of alternative actions that might be undertaken in place of the production of 'oh' and how are *they* related to the denominator (Schegloff 1993). Once again, a sketch of some of these alternatives was part of the task of the paper. That sketch was far from complete in a paper which was, after all, a first cut at quite a complex problem. But a complete analysis of the range of possibilities is essential for a fully developed statistical treatment of the phenomenon.

(3) *The domain.* The Heritage paper more or less explicitly defined the research domain as 'ordinary conversation'. As it turned out, this was a happy choice because in many other domains – new interviews, for example – the production of 'oh' is almost completely absent. To illustrate the domain problem, I draw on two related studies of 'oh'. The first, by Schiffrin (1987) and based on data from sociolinguistic interviews, asserts that 'oh' is more likely to be used to receipt an answer to a question, when the answer runs contrary to the expectations encoded into the question's design and the questioner might therefore be held to be "surprised". Although Heritage did not attempt to quantify this issue, his assertion was, to the contrary, that 'oh' receipts are used even when the

²² Similar problems arise in relation to Q-A sequences which involve topic nominations (Heritage 1984a; Burton and Casey 1984, 1985).

²¹ For a discussion of 'next turn repair initiators', see Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977).

respondent confirms a statement formatted request for information and is not at all "surprised" (Heritage 1984a: 307–312). The puzzle here, as Schegloff (1993) observes, is the difficulty of determining whether Schiffrin and Heritage are talking about the same domain of interaction – in which case there is a disagreement in results that needs to be resolved, or whether their data come from different domains (Heritage's from 'ordinary conversation' and Schiffrin from the 'sociolinguistic interview'). There is reason to believe that, in the interview context, 'oh' receipts are more restricted in their occurrence by the participants' orientations to their social roles. To the extent that Schiffrin's findings can be confidently replicated for that context (and Heritage's for his) an interesting result pointing to the differential role of 'oh' in the two contexts could be obtained. In either case, a clear view of the domain in question needs to be arrived at.

But there are problems even at this level of resolution and here I draw on a second study by ten Have (1991) who worked on the incidence of 'oh' in the medical encounter. He found that, contrary to expectations, there are incidences of 'oh's produced by doctors in response to patients' answers to their questions. However, his examination of the sequences in which they occurred suggests that they were mainly during the pre-consultation "conversational" sections of these encounters, or special in some way, for example, being playfully addressed to children. Returning to Schiffrin's study, one could ask whether the 'oh's to "less surprising" answers emerged during sequences that were "more conversational" and "less interview" than others. Here again, the production of 'oh' may be reflexive in the evocation of the 'conversational' and 'non-conversational' domains, leading us back towards some of the problems that emerged in the discussion of the denominator. In any event, the determination of the 'domain' is a far less simple task than might be imagined.

The purpose of these remarks is not to argue that statistical analysis of conversational materials is impossible, but rather to assert that such analysis should be treated with caution and that it is likely to be more successful in relation to well defined elements of talk and with respect only to a relatively limited range of goals (cf. Heritage and Roth 1991).

Here, by contrast, are some constructive uses for statistics in the analysis of conversational materials.

(1) As a means of isolating 'interesting phenomena'. While CA works mainly with the interpretive 'microscope', interesting phenomena can turn up through the statistical 'telescope'. For example, in a recent study of laughter, Glenn (1989) observes that while the persons initiating laughter in two-party conversation are normally current speakers, in multiparty conversation persons other than the current speaker usually initiate laughter and, further, that the next person to join the laughter may also normally be someone other than the current speaker. Speakers did not join in until after a second person had joined the laughter. As this stands, it is a regularity that invites explication in terms of the

different practices of two-party and multi-party talk.²³ Or again, in a technical demonstration of a computer program for working which conversational materials, Lerner and Schegloff (pers. comm.) ran a cross-tabulation linking repair initiation by males on female talk with the content of the repair and found a larger than expected number of cases where the object of the repair initiation was an unusual color term. Here might be an empirical lead on the claim by Lakoff (1975) and others that women use more unusual color terms than men. And still more intriguingly, it opens up an opportunity to explore the possibility that these repair initiations are a vehicle through which males can assert a masculine identity and thereby "do gender" in interaction (West and Zimmerman 1987).²⁴

(2) As a means of consolidating intuitions in areas which are well defined, but where the existence of a practice is difficult to secure without a large number of cases. For example, Jefferson (1989) found it useful to build a quantitative case for the claim that the period of one second is a "standard maximum" period of silence in ordinary conversation. Ford and Thompson (1991) used statistical techniques to determine the relative contributions of syntax, intonation and action analysis as resources for the projection of turn completion. Jefferson's (1984) argument that whereas the acknowledgment token "mm hm" projects 'passive reciprocity', "yes" adumbrates that it's producer will shortly actively seek to assume speakership has found useful statistical support in a paper by Drummond and Hopper (1993). Or again, where interactional conduct is mediated by collective behavior processes (Atkinson 1984; Clayman 1993), findings may be secured by statistical means. For example, Atkinson's proposals about the role of utterance design in soliciting applause were effectively statistically supported in a large scale quantitative study (Heritage and Greatbatch 1986).

(3) There are cases in which independent findings about a conversational practice can have indirect statistical support. For example, Lindström's (1994) analysis of the design of callers' initial utterances in Swedish telephone call openings isolated a particular turn design as embodying a claim to intimacy. This analysis found useful indirect support in quantitative evidence that clearly showed that the use of the practice was mainly confined to telephone calls involving family members and friends.

(4) Finally, in almost all cases where a claim is made that the use or outcome of a particular interactional practice is tied to particular social or psychological categories, such as gender, status etc., statistical support will be necessary. In such cases, however, the difficulties of quantitative analysis described above may

²³ Gene Lerner (personal communication), who drew this example to my attention observes that "This certainly suggests but does not confirm (prior to investigation) some sort of structural (possibly gaze and addressed v. non-addressed recipient based) organization."

²⁴ Feirstein's (1982) satire of contemporary North American norms of masculinity can be read as an empirical compendium of lexical items which could attract the use of repair as a means for assertions of gender identity.

effectively limit the range of statistical analyses of this type that can be performed at the present time and it is only in very well defined areas, such as turn-taking, that the effort has been made to some effect (Kollock, Blumstein and Schwartz 1985; West and Zimmerman 1983; Zimmerman and West 1975).

Before leaving this topic, a final *caveat* is in order. The central focus of CA is to describe the conversational practices that are the conditions of intelligible, coordinated action in the social world. These practices can only be approached from an 'emic' perspective: they are explicated interpretively and 'from within'. Quantitative studies have not, so far, matched the kinds of compelling evidence for the features and uses of conversational practices that have emerged from 'case by case' analysis of singular exhibits of interactional conduct. It does not, at the present time, appear likely that they will do so in the future. For quantitative studies inexorably draw the analyst into an 'external' view of the data of interaction, draining away the conduct-evidenced local intelligibility of particular situated actions which is the ultimate source of security that the object under investigation is not a theoretical or statistical artifact.

In sum, statistical treatments of evidence for conversational procedures have yet to prove to be central or significant as resources for analysis. Significant methodological problems inhibit their implementation at the present time. They are likely to prove valuable in 'sensitizing' analysts to interesting problem areas, in the analysis of 'grey area' conversational procedures of the type noted in (2) above and they are essential in 'applied' or 'sociolinguistic' CA analyses that link the implementation or output of particular procedures to sociological and other categories of person or setting description. For their implementation to be fully effective and reliable, however, we require more detailed knowledge of the properties of conversational practices than is presently available for more than a handful of procedures.

5. The analysis of 'institutional' interaction²⁵

5.1 Conceptual Background

During the past fifteen years, a significant and growing corpus of studies – initiated independently in Britain and the U. S. and now also carried forward in a number of European countries – has begun to focus on interaction in 'institutional' settings where more or less official or formal task- or role-based activities are undertaken. Doctor-patient interaction, courtroom trials, job interviews, classroom lessons (see Hausendorf & Quasthoff, this volume) news interviews and emergency calls to the police are clear examples of interaction of this type.

The initial approach to the analysis of institutional interaction has embodied a strongly comparative dimension. The rationale for this approach is relatively straightforward. Following the initiative of Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974:

²⁵ This section is derived, in part, from the substantial "Introduction" to Drew and Heritage (1992a).

729–31), the practices underlying the management of ordinary conversation are treated as primary and as collectively constituting a fundamental matrix through which social interaction is organized. One way, then, in which the 'institutional' nature of interaction in institutional settings may manifest itself is in a range of differences from ordinary conversation. Guided by this notion, a considerable body of research has focused on variations in the use of specific conversational practices and variations from such practices as, at least in part, constituting the 'institutional' character of specific forms of institutional interaction. These variations, it has been suggested, should provide for the recognizability – both for participants and for professional analysts – of such distinctively non-conversational events as an 'interview', a cross-examination', or a 'lesson'.

Significant methodological difficulties arise in analyzing 'institutional' interaction. The most important concerns the maintenance of empirical and methodological control over the temptation to attribute features of the interaction to its 'context' in an *ad hoc* way (Schegloff 1992c; Wilson 1991). Schegloff's (1992c) proposal on this point is that, if it is to be claimed that some interaction has a specifically 'institutional' character, then the relevance and procedural consequentiality of the institutional context and its associated roles, tasks and identities must be shown to inhabit the details of the participants' conduct. This means that in addition to the normal CA tasks of analyzing the conduct of the participants and the underlying organization of their activities, that conduct and its organization must additionally be demonstrated to embody orientations which are specifically institutional or which are, at the least, responsive to constraints which are institutional in character or origin. This additional task is by no means a straightforward one. Although it is easy enough, on an intuitive basis, to identify a variety of ways in which activities seem to be 'done differently' in institutional settings, it is much more difficult to specify these differences precisely and to demonstrate their underlying institutional moorings.

These difficulties are compounded by the fact that, as noted above, CA works with a dynamic conception of social context which is treated as both the project and product of the participants' own actions and therefore as inherently locally produced and transformable at any moment (Heritage 1984b: 280–90). Given this outlook, analysts who wish to depict the distinctively 'institutional' character of some stretch of talk cannot be satisfied with showing that institutional talk exhibits aggregates and/or distributions of actions that are distinctive from ordinary conversation (for example, aggregates of questions and answers that are asymmetrically distributed between the incumbents of particular roles). They must rather demonstrate that the participants constructed their conduct over its course – turn by turn – so as to progressively constitute and hence jointly and collaboratively realize the occasion of their talk, together with their own social roles in it, as having some distinctively institutional character.

5.2 Distinctive practices of institutional talk

CA studies of talk in institutional settings have focused on interactional practices that are in various ways distinctive to particular institutional settings. Several of

the more prominent of these have focused on turn-taking practices that clearly differ from those in conversation and which are perceivedly 'formal' in character. Following Sacks et al. (1974) initiative, interactions in courtrooms (Atkinson and Drew 1979), classrooms (McHoul 1978) and news interviews (Greatbatch 1988) have been shown to exhibit systematically distinctive forms of turn-taking which powerfully structure many aspects of conduct in these settings. These studies of turn-taking are significant because turn-taking procedures are fundamental and generic aspects of the organization of interaction which are recurrently implemented. The generic nature of turn-taking is important here for two reasons.

(1) Insofar as the participants in an institutional setting such as a courtroom pervasively organize their turn-taking in a distinctive way that is fitted to the roles and tasks of the setting, it can be shown that they are also pervasively oriented to this 'institutional' context and its associated tasks and roles. In short, findings about turn-taking procedures can pervasively show, 'from within' the talk and not merely by external correlation, that the parties are oriented to a specific institutional setting, thereby resolving what Schegloff (1992c) terms the 'problem of relevance'.

(2) The pervasive character of distinctive turn-taking procedures is normally associated with other systematic differences from the practices of ordinary conversation, for example, particular 'footings', efforts to maintain a 'neutralistic' posture in circumstances of conflict and so on (Atkinson 1982, 1992; Atkinson and Drew 1979; Clayman 1988, 1992; Greatbatch 1986, 1992; Heritage 1985; Heritage and Greatbatch 1991).

These systematic differences in turn-taking procedures have been found in highly institutionalized and 'formal' settings of interaction that often involve large numbers of co-present persons or, at least 'overhearers'. Institutionalized turn-taking procedures commonly involve specific reductions of the range of options and opportunities for action that are characteristic in conversation and they often involve specializations and respecifications of the interactional functions of the activities that remain. The ensemble of these variations from conversational practice may contribute to a unique 'fingerprint' for each institutional form of interaction – the 'fingerprint' being comprised of a set of interactional practices differentiating each form both from other institutional forms and from the baseline of mundane conversational interaction itself (Drew and Heritage 1992a).

In a variety of less formal forms of institutional interaction – commonly occurring in medical, psychiatric, social service, business and related environments – patterns of interaction exhibit considerably less uniformity. Although they may show aggregate asymmetries in the patterning of activities between role incumbents (e.g., as between doctors and patients in the asking, and answering, of questions in private consultations [Byrne and Long 1976; West 1984; Frankel 1990]), these asymmetries are apparently not the products of turn-taking procedures that are normatively sanctionable. These interactions, for the most part, take place in private rather than public contexts. There is room within

them for considerable negotiation and/or stylistic variation as to how they will come to be managed (Byrne and Long 1976; Heritage and Sefi 1992). In many cases, although the talk in these settings is clearly institutional in that official task-based or role-based activities occur at least some of time, turn-taking procedures are either conversational or 'quasi-conversational'. When considered in turn-taking terms at least, the boundaries between these forms of institutional talk and ordinary conversation can appear permeable and uncertain.

These characteristics have the following methodological consequence. It is unlikely that a single recursive procedure (such as is found in special turn-taking procedures) can be found that would pinpoint the participants' turn-by-turn instantiation of institutional role-based identities at a single stroke. Accordingly, the participants' orientation to the institutional task- or role-based character of their walk will have to be located in a complex of non-recursive interactional practices that may vary in their form and frequency. Systematic aspects of the organization of sequences (and of turn design within sequences) having to do with such matters as the opening and closing of encounters, with the ways in which information is requested, delivered and received, with the design of referring expressions, etc. are now beginning to emerge as facets of the ways in which the 'institutionality' of such encounters are managed (Atkinson, 1992; Bergmann 1992; Boden 1994; Heath 1986, 1992; Maynard 1991, 1992; Whalen and Zimmerman 1987, 1990; Whalen, Zimmerman and Whalen 1988; see also Hausendorf & Quasthoff, this volume). Other studies have developed on the management of activities – such as the physical examination in a medical consultation – that are specific to particular kinds of institutional encounters (Heath 1986, 1989).

5.3 *Methodological aspects of the study of institutional talk*

In reviewing methodological issues that continue to emerge in relation to the study of institutional talk, it is worth maintaining a number of distinctions. First certain practices, such as the turn-taking practices reviewed above, are specific to particular institutional contexts and can be analyzed using the basic CA techniques of pattern and deviant case analysis discussed above. Other practices, however, have a somewhat less specific relationship to particular types of institutional setting. For example, a range of departures from basic forms of US telephone conversational openings (Schegloff 1968, 1986) are shared by a variety of openings to 'institutional' telephone calls (Whalen and Zimmerman 1987, Bergmann 1993). Again, highly specific practices of ordinary conversation – for example, particular features of question design – are also found in institutional talk but often occur in greater concentration, or they are overwhelmingly produced by one of the participants, or they are the objects of different kinds of inferences than are found in everyday interaction (Drew and Heritage 1992a). Here the tasks of finding and securing the relevance and procedural consequentiality (Schegloff 1992c) of these practices can be more complex and circuitous than has often proved to be the case for ordinary conversation.

There is apparently no single 'royal road' to the analysis of institutional interactions because they vary widely across different institutional tasks and settings. However it appears that quantitative procedures will necessarily play a larger role in this field, if only because the relationship between particular social identities and the implementation and outcomes of particular social practices is more significant in this type of research. While the strictures on the use of quantitative methods mentioned above remain in place in institutional domains, there is an undeniable incentive here to advance the analysis of conversational procedures as a precondition for the development of better focused analytic tools in this endeavor.

Conclusion

In this necessarily brief overview, I have tried to summarize some of the main theoretical and methodological precepts that are currently central to the practice of CA. The field resists easy summary because it is not premised on easily formulated theoretical generalizations, nor does its practice rest on methodological guidelines which can be packaged in the straightforward fashion that is often thought desirable in social science. Rather, the field consists of a growing set of self-embedding findings that constitute the theoretical background for new empirical initiatives. The latter, in turn, continue to provide new resources for the development of methodologically sound research practices. In this dynamic interplay between findings, theory and methodology lies the real strength of CA as a growing and diversifying empirical initiative in the study of oral communication.

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