

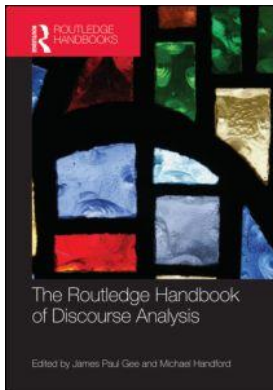
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Conversation analysis

Steven E. Clayman and Virginia Teas Gill

Introduction

Conversation analysis is an approach to the study of human interaction in society. Its name might be taken to imply a concern with informal and purely sociable talk, but the approach encompasses interactions of all sorts, ranging from informal to formal, from sociable to task-focused, and from face-to-face to synchronous technologically mediated interactions such as telephone talk and videoconferences. Although conversation analysis is wide-ranging in scope, the focus on the organization of conduct *within interaction* distinguishes this field from other forms of discourse analysis concerned with narratives, speeches, or texts. Conversation analysis is also distinguished by a methodology that exploits the affordances provided by recorded interaction as a form of data.

Conversation analysis (or CA) was developed by Harvey Sacks in collaboration with Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson. It emerged within sociology at a time—the 1960s—when that discipline was dominated by abstract theorizing and a concern with large-scale structural phenomena. Against the sociological mainstream, certain intellectual cross-currents had begun to address the specifics of social conduct in everyday life. Erving Goffman was exploring what he would later call “the interaction order” (1983): the domain of direct interaction between people. Goffman argued that this domain is a type of social institution in its own right, one that intersects with other, more familiar societal institutions but has its own organizational principles, motivational imperatives, and norms of conduct. In a related but distinct development, Harold Garfinkel (1967) was examining the procedures of commonsense reasoning that people use to make sense of one another and the circumstances in which they are embedded. Garfinkel challenged the mainstream view that social conduct is regulated by internalized norms, arguing instead that organized conduct emerges through the use of commonsense reasoning practices. These practices inform how actors implement norms in specific situations, and more generally how they produce actions and render them intelligible.

CA can be understood as a partial synthesis of these ideas concerning the institution of interaction, norms of interactional conduct, and the methods of reasoning implicated in the production and recognition of action. The research enterprise that emerged from this synthesis has generated a substantial and cumulative body of empirical findings. Some researchers work with data drawn primarily from ordinary conversation and seek to describe general interactional practices and systems of practice such as turn-taking, the sequencing of action, the repair of misunderstandings, the relationship between vocal and nonvocal behaviors, and so on (e.g. Atkinson and Heritage, 1984; Lerner, 2004; Schegloff, 2007). Others focus on data drawn from institutional settings—doctors’ offices, courts of law, newsrooms—with the aim of exploring how generic practices of talk get mobilized and adapted for specific institutional tasks (Boden and

Zimmerman, 1991; Drew and Heritage, 1992b; Heritage and Maynard, 2006; Heritage and Clayman, 2010) and how speaking practices affect bureaucratic and professional outcomes (Maynard, 1984; Boyd, 1998; Clayman and Reisner, 1998; Heritage and Stivers, 1999; Gill, 2005; Stivers, 2007). Still others have addressed the relationship between interaction and racial and gender identities (e.g. West and Zimmerman, 1983; M. Goodwin, 1990; Kitzinger, 2005; Lerner and Whitehead, 2009; Speer and Stokoe, 2010); cultural difference and historical change (Houtkoop-Steenstra, 1991; Lindström 1994; Clayman *et al.*, 2006); and the conduct of social scientific inquiry itself (Maynard *et al.*, 2002; Drew *et al.*, 2006).

The productivity of CA hinges in part on its distinctive methodology, which differs from both the ethnographic methods employed by Goffman and the demonstrations favored by Garfinkel. The aim of this paper is to provide a brief introduction to the methods of conversation analysis.¹

Generating data: recording and transcribing

Conversation analysts work almost exclusively with naturally occurring interaction as it has been captured in audio and videorecordings and rendered into detailed transcripts.

Naturally occurring Interaction

Conversation analysts avoid role-playing and experimentally induced interactions, as well as hypothetical and invented examples. Past research has demonstrated that such data yield oversimplified and misleading representations of interactional processes. Specimens of actual interaction can generate astonishing discoveries, which, in Sacks' (1984: 25) words, "we could not, by imagination, assert were there."

What constitutes "natural" interaction is, however, by no means straightforward. Because of the "observer's paradox" (Labov, 1972), a researcher can never know whether an interaction unfolded as it would have, had it not been externally observed (ten Have, 1999). Indeed, the recording equipment itself may become a topic of conversation for participants (ten Have, 1999: 49).

However, such observer effects are less significant than they might seem at first glance. Sensitivity to being observed is a commonplace and "natural" feature of interaction. As Goodwin (1981: 44) notes, "participants never behave as if they were unobserved; it is clear that they organize their behavior in terms of the observation it will receive from their coparticipants." Moreover, these effects tend to be limited to the surface content of the talk, leaving its underlying interactional structure intact. Thus, while the participants may refer to the presence of the recording machine, they will do so via processes—ways of taking turns, building actions, and organizing them into sequences—that are not markedly different from the rest of their talk (ten Have, 1999). In any case, hyper-consciousness about the recording machine tends to be short-lived, receding into the background as the participants become enmeshed in the practical concerns of their daily lives.

A note on sampling

Unlike many fields, CA addresses a domain of phenomena whose components are not yet fully known or understood. Sacks (1984: 21) called this domain "the methods people use in doing social life." Until these methods are formally described—until their identifying features are catalogued and their local environments of occurrence are charted—it is premature to ask how prevalent they

are within some larger population or how they are distributed in relation to exogenous psychological or sociological variables.

Because the objective of CA is to describe the endogenous organization of interactional phenomena rather than to determine their distribution, the issue of sampling is approached rather differently here from other fields. Conversation analysts typically follow the “naturalist’s strategy” of gathering specimens of phenomena from as many settings of interaction as possible, for the purposes of systematic analysis and comparison (Heritage, 1988: 131; ten Have, 1999: 51).

As sources of data, not all settings are created equal. Ordinary conversation appears to represent the richest and most varied source of interactional practices, while interactions in bureaucratic, occupational, and other institutional contexts tend to contain a narrower range of practices, which are specialized or adapted for those contexts (Drew and Heritage, 1992a). It is thus important to bear in mind the social context from which data are drawn. For researchers interested in institutional forms of talk, it is often useful to use ordinary conversation as a comparative frame of reference (Schegloff, 1987).

While the naturalist’s strategy remains primary within CA, quantitative extensions and applications have become increasingly common in recent years (e.g. Clayman *et al.*, 2006; Heritage *et al.*, 2007; Stivers, 2007). Although not embraced by all within the field, this is a natural development. Once interactional practices have been thoroughly explicated, this can provide a foundation for the development of validated measures and for analyses of frequency and association.

Audio and video recording

The decision to study conversation was originally a practical one for Harvey Sacks, whose main concern as a sociologist was to formally describe and analyze actual, real-time social events with a degree of rigor (Sacks, 1984). The availability of audio recording technology in the early 1960s made it possible to capture and preserve a particular type of social event, namely conversational interaction. Given the centrality of interaction in the life of society, Sacks’ ostensibly practical decision turned out to be fortunate.

Audio recordings have now been augmented with video, which captures both vocal and nonvocal behaviors. But recordings still offer the same basic service as they did for Sacks in the 1960s: access to social interaction at a level of detail that approaches what is available to the participants themselves, and the capacity for repeated examination. The importance of recordings in CA can be likened to that of slow-motion “instant replay” during televised sporting events (Atkinson, 1984). While spectators in the stands may have only a vague grasp of the fleeting events within a particular play, television viewers can—by virtue of instant replay—achieve a more precise understanding of the specific sequence of behaviors that led to the play’s outcome.

Transcribing data

Transcripts serve both analytical and presentational functions. For the purposes of analysis, when used in conjunction with the recording itself, a good transcript helps the researcher get a stronger purchase on the organization of interactional practices. Transcript excerpts, together with video “framegrabs,” also serve as a resource in publications and presentations. They enable readers to assess independently the validity of analytic claims by reference to the key empirical instances on which they are based.

Gail Jefferson developed the transcription system commonly used within CA (see Appendix). This system balances two objectives: (1) preserving the details of talk as it was actually produced, while (2) remaining simple enough to yield transcripts that are accessible to a general audience.

Thus a full phonological system was avoided in favor of one that uses standard orthography, supplemented with additional symbols to capture features such as overlapping speech, silences, various forms of emphasis, and so on. Over the years, other investigators have built upon Jefferson's system, most notably Goodwin (1981), who developed transcription symbols to represent nonvocal activities such as gaze and gesture.

Audio transcribing has traditionally been done with the aid of a transcribing machine, by using a foot pedal to start, stop, and rewind a cassette tape. If the original data are on videotape, they can be inspected later to add aspects of nonvocal behavior. More recently, technological advances have made it possible to digitize and store data files on CD, DVD, or hard drive. A computer can now serve as a transcribing machine, with software programs enabling the researcher to transcribe in a word-processing program while simultaneously watching the video. Some programs can also time silences. The future of data is undoubtedly digital, a medium that is more compact, accessible, and durable than analog tapes.

The level of detail in a CA transcript may initially strike non-CA researchers as excessive. However, since the objective is to understand how interactants build mutually intelligible courses of action, any detail that is available to the interactants is potentially relevant for the researcher. For instance, Jefferson (1985) demonstrates the importance of seemingly trivial details surrounding the articulation of laughter. In the following excerpt, Louise laughs during the utterance "playing with his organ" (line 7). This transcript simply notes the laughter in line 8 rather than transcribing it beat by beat.

- (1)
- | | | |
|----|---------|---|
| 1 | Ken: | And he came home and decided he was gonna play with |
| 2 | | his orchids from then on in. |
| 3 | Roger: | With his <u>what</u> ? |
| 4 | Louise: | heh heh heh heh |
| 5 | Ken: | With his orchids. [He has an orchid- |
| 6 | Roger: | [Oh heh hehheh |
| 7 | Louise: | → Playing with his organ yeah I thought the same thing! |
| 8 | | ((spoken through laughter)) |
| 9 | Ken: | Because he's got a great big [glass house- |
| 10 | Roger: | [I can see him playing with |
| 11 | | his organ ((laughing)). |

(Jefferson, 1985: 28, simplified transcript)

Such simplification obscures the way Louise employs laughter as a resource. In the more detailed transcript below, it becomes apparent that Louise precisely places her laughter in the key phrase "PLAYN(h)W(h)IZ Q(h)R'N" (line 8), stopping abruptly when she moves on to the next utterance ("ya:h I thought the same"). Roger subsequently laughs in a strikingly similar way (line 14).

- (2)
- | | | |
|---|---------|---|
| 1 | Ken: | An'e came <u>h</u> om'n decided'e wz gonna play with iz o:rchids. |
| 2 | | from then on i:n. |
| 3 | Roger: | With iz <u>what</u> ? |
| 4 | Louise: | mh hih <u>h</u> ih [huh |
| 5 | Ken: | [With iz <u>o</u> rchids.= |
| 6 | Ken: | =Ee[z got an <u>o</u> rch[id- |
| 7 | Roger: | [Oh:. [hehh[hah.he:h] <u>h</u> eh |
| 8 | Louise: | → [heh huh. <u>h</u> h]PLAYN(h)W(h)IZ <u>Q</u> (h)R'N |
| 9 | | ya:h <u>I</u> thought the[same |

given practice, the analyst can then explicate what it might be “doing” or accomplishing. This typically involves examining where it is placed in the stream of interaction and how it operates within that local context, focusing on the actions that immediately preceded it and the responses it attracts.

For example, Sacks ([1966] (1992): 256–257) observed that, when children speak to adults, they commonly begin by asking a question such as “You know what, Daddy?” Anyone who has been around children for any length of time will be familiar with this recurrent feature of children’s talk. What is accomplished with this practice? One clue can be gleaned from the response it elicits. Adults typically respond to the “You know what” question with another question—namely “What?” This type of response not only invites the child to speak again and say what motivated the original question, but by so doing it simultaneously aligns the adult as one who is prepared to listen to the ensuing talk. Thus the child’s original query sets in motion a chain of events that culminates in the child gaining a ratified speaking “slot” and an attentive recipient. When children use this practice, they may be addressing certain basic interactional problems, such as their diminished rights to talk and adults’ preoccupation with other matters.

Heritage (1998) took a similar tack when analyzing a particular way of designing answers to questions. Heritage initially observed that some answers to questions are prefaced with “oh,” as in line 6 of the following example, taken from a radio interview with Sir Harold Acton, a noted British aesthete.

- (3)
- | | | |
|----|--------|--|
| 1 | Act: | ...h h h h and some of thuh- (0.3) some of my <u>st</u> udents |
| 2 | | trans <u>l</u> ated Eliot <u>i</u> nto Ch <u>i</u> ne::se. I think thuh <u>v</u> ery |
| 3 | | first. |
| 4 | | (0.2) |
| 5 | Har: | Did you learn to speak (.) Ch <u>i</u> ne[:se. |
| 6 | Act: → | [.hh Oh yes. |
| 7 | | (0.7) |
| 8 | Act: | .h h h h You <u>c</u> a::n’t live in thuh country without speaking |
| 9 | | thuh lang[ua]ge it’s impossible .h h h h h = |
| 10 | Har: | [Not no: cour:se. |

(Heritage, 1998: 294)

This practice, far from being random or insignificant, turns out to be socially meaningful and consequential. By prefacing an answer with “oh,” the answerer implies that the prior question “came from left field” and is thus of questionable relevance. In this particular case, the ongoing discussion concerns Acton’s experience teaching modern poetry at Beijing University, and it is in the context of this discussion that he is asked (at line 5) if he learned to speak Chinese. He treats the answer to the question as obvious or self-evident. He expresses this explicitly at lines 8–9, but he also does so implicitly in his initial response to the question (line 6) via the oh-prefaced affirmative answer.

With this pathway into the data, an initial noticing is “pursued by asking what—if anything—such a practice of talking has as its outcome” (Schegloff, 1996: 172). Not every observed practice will turn out to have a systematic import, but many core findings of CA have their origins in unmotivated noticings of just this sort.

Begin with a vernacular action

Another pathway into the data is to focus on a particular type of action that is already part of the vernacular culture—asking questions, giving advice, delivering news, and so on. Here the analytic challenge is to transcend what is already intuitively known about the action in question. This can

be accomplished by exploring specific ways that a given action is designed and implemented, focusing again on the sequential environments in which speakers deploy each form and on the responses they receive.

For example, using announcements of news as a starting point, Maynard (2003) has uncovered a range of practices associated specifically with the telling of bad news in both everyday and clinical settings, while also demonstrating that they operate as solutions to specific problems associated with this difficult interpersonal task. One set of practices involves forecasting the news in advance of its delivery. Maynard demonstrates that forecasting, by providing some advance warning of what is to come, maximizes the likelihood that recipients will be prepared to register and accept the news. In a similar vein, studies have explored various methods for designing requests (Curl and Drew, 2008), presenting medical symptoms (Halkowski, 2006), and offering explanations for illness to doctors (Gill, 1998; Gill and Maynard, 2006). In each case, the analyst explores how participants deploy and respond to familiar actions and their varying forms.

Grounding an analysis

Once a possible phenomenon has been located, how should analysis proceed? In the broad tradition of interpretive social science, CA seeks analyses that are grounded in the understandings and orientations of the participants themselves. Within interaction, the understandings that matter most are those that participants display, act on, and thus render consequential for the interaction's subsequent development (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973).

The response as an analytic resource

One central resource for tapping into such understandings is embodied in how recipients respond to the phenomenon in question. Consider that interaction ordinarily unfolds as a series of contributions or “moves,” each move being normally addressed to, and to some extent conditioned by, the move that preceded it. Given this, each move will normally display that speaker's understanding of what came before (Sacks *et al.*, 1974). Interactants themselves rely on such retrospective displays of understanding to ascertain whether and how they were understood, and this “architecture for intersubjectivity” (Heritage, 1984b) is also a resource for analysts.

To illustrate, consider the utterance: “Somebody just vandalized my car.” As Whalen and Zimmerman (1987) have observed, while the lexical meaning of this utterance is transparent, the type of action that it implements—what it is “doing” from the standpoint of the participants—cannot be determined by considering the utterance in isolation. It could be a straightforward *announcement of news*, with no agenda other than that of conveying information to an uninformed recipient. If this were the case, one would expect it to generate an initial response along the lines of “Oh” or “Oh really” or “My goodness”—that is, a response that attends to it as new and perhaps surprising information (Jefferson and Lee, 1981; Heritage, 1984a). Alternatively, this item of news could be a vehicle for *requesting help* or assistance of some sort, in which case one would expect a response that either accepts or rejects the request, or at least proceeds in that direction. In actuality, the utterance was produced by a caller to a 911 emergency service, and it was responded to as follows (arrowed below).

- (4)
- | | | |
|---|-------------|--|
| 1 | Dispatcher: | Midcity Emergency |
| 2 | Caller: | Um yeah (.) somebody jus' vandalized my car, |
| 3 | Dispatcher: | → What's your address. |
| 4 | Caller: | Sixteen seventy Redland Road. |

(Whalen and Zimmerman, 1987: 174)

Notice that the dispatcher's response in line 3—a question about the caller's address—is a purely instrumental query and a necessary prerequisite for sending assistance. It clearly treats the prior utterance as a request for help rather than a news announcement, an interpretation that is routine in the institutional environment of a 911 helpline (Whalen and Zimmerman, 1987). The general point is that recipients' own understandings are displayed publicly in their responses, and are thus available as an analytic resource.

Responses can also be informative in more subtle ways. Beyond revealing participant understandings of the type of action produced previously, they can also shed light on its valence. For instance, news announcements may be understood by recipients as either good or bad, and this too is displayed through subsequent talk (Maynard, 1997). Thus the following birth announcement is received not only as news ("Oh"), but specifically as good news ("how lovely").

(5)

- 1 Carrie: I: thought you'd like to know I've got a little gran'daughter
 2 Leslie: → thlk Oh: how lovely.

(Maynard, 1997: 111)

In other cases the valence of a given news announcement may be unclear to the recipient, resulting in a more cautious mode of receipt. Contrast the birth announcement sequence above with a similar announcement in the next example. This time the announcement generates an initial response ("Oh my goodness" at line 2) that registers it as surprising, but specifically avoids evaluating the news in an explicit way.

(6)

- 1 Andi: hhhh! Bob and I are going to have a baby.
 2 Betty: → Oh my goodness hhow- (1.0)
 3 did you have a reversal- he have a reversal?
 4 Andi: Yea:h.
 .
 .
 .
 5 Andi: It was [very successful,][very quickly] hh::h.hhh
 6 Betty: → [OH I'M SO] [HAPPY.]

(Maynard, 1997: 116, simplified)

In this case the announcement is being issued by the expectant mother (Andi) whose husband (Bob) had previously undergone a vasectomy, raising the spectre of an unplanned pregnancy. Moreover, the recipient of the news (Betty) is aware of this fact, as evidenced by her subsequent query about a reversal (line 3). Only when subsequent talk reveals that the husband's vasectomy had indeed been reversed and that the pregnancy was fully planned does Betty receipt it unequivocally as good news ("Oh I'm so happy," line 6).

At a still more subtle level, responses can shed light on the import of momentary silences in interaction (Davidson, 1984; Pomerantz, 1984). In the next example, C invites B and a third party to stay with him at the beach (line 1). This invitation makes relevant a response that either accepts or declines the invitation, but what initially follows is silence (line 2). A silence at this juncture is ordinarily understood as "belonging" to the recipient of the invitation (Sacks *et al.*, 1974) and it could, in principle, arise for a number of reasons. B may have a problem hearing or understanding the invitation, or B may have heard/understood the invitation but is having some problem with accepting it. The difficulty, in short, could be either in the intelligibility or in the acceptability of the invitation.

- (7)
- 1 C: Well you can both sta:y.
 2 (0.4)
 3 C: → [Got plenty a' roo:m, hh[hh
 4 B: [Oh I- [Oh(h)o(h)o,
 5 (.)
 6 B: Please don't tempt me,

(Davidson, 1984: 105, simplified)

C's response to the silence (line 3) clearly treats it as indicating the latter type of problem. Instead of repeating or reformulating the invitation—the usual way of handling a problem of intelligibility (Schegloff *et al.*, 1977)—C offers an argument for accepting it. This move presupposes the invitation's intelligibility and displays C's understanding that B is reluctant to accept. Moreover, the substance of C's argument displays his inference regarding the reason for B's reluctance (concern about insufficient room and the inconvenience this might entail)—a reason that he counters in an effort to nudge her toward an acceptance.

At varying levels of detail, then, successive contributions to interaction shed light on how the participants understand preceding events. Of course, it is possible for a respondent to misunderstand what a speaker originally intended, and such misunderstandings may come to light through subsequent repair efforts (Schegloff, 1992). More often, subsequent talk implicitly confirms previously displayed understandings. In any event, the sequential organization of interaction provides a running index of the participants' own mutual understandings and is thus a key methodological resource.

Deployment as an analytic resource

The response to an utterance is an extremely useful resource, particularly when analyzing utterances that *initiate* sequences (e.g. news announcements, requests, invitations). However, it is not always a sufficient basis upon which to build an analysis. Responses may be less than transparent, and at times designedly opaque in the understandings they exhibit. Fortunately, other analytic resources are available that center not on the *recipient* but on the *producer* of the talk in question. Examining in detail how speakers recurrently deploy a given practice—in particular sequential environments and in particular positions within the speaker's own turn, and in conjunction with other practices—can provide important clues about that practice's meaning and import.

To illustrate, consider the various bits of talk that are used to receipt prior talk—items such as *mm hm*, *yeah*, *oh*, and *okay*. These were long assumed to comprise an undifferentiated set of “acknowledgment tokens” or “backchannel” communications. However, it has been demonstrated, largely on the basis of the selective manner in which these tokens are deployed, that each performs a somewhat distinct interactional function (Heritage, 1984a; Jefferson, 1984; Beach, 1993). The contrast between *mm hm* and *yeah* provides a useful case in point (Jefferson, 1984). In the following excerpt, notice how B deploys these receipt tokens (arrowed) in the course of M's extended telling.

- (8)
- 1 M: and she's been very thrifty.
 2 B: → Mm hm,
 3 M: .hhhhh So: (.) I said it- it a:dds up to one thing
 4 money somepla:ce
 5 B: → M hm,
 6 M: .hhhh=

- 7 B: → Mm [hm,
 8 M: [But ish (.) she tn- transacts all her business in
 9 Lo:s Angeles you know and people like this are so secretive
 10 it's a(m) really it's almost a mental state
 11 B: → Yeah .hh Well .hh uh:m (0.9) y- there's something wrong too
 12 if she doesn't pay her bills

(Jefferson, 1984: 205)

Although B uses both forms of receipt, she deploys them in different ways. One point of difference is the prior sequential environment: the *mm hm* tokens (lines 2, 5, and 7) appear in the midst of M's extended telling as it unfolds, while the *yeah* token (line 11) appears at the completion of the telling. Correspondingly, there are differences in what B does next. Each *mm hm* token stands alone within B's turn at talk, while B follows the *yeah* token with further talk that responds more substantially to M's telling. Accordingly, these tokens embody different interactional stances, *mm hm* displaying "passive reciprocity" and *yeah* displaying "incipient speakership" (Jefferson, 1984). This conclusion is based on the systematic manner in which they are deployed.

The distinct functions of such tokens are further revealed when the tokens are used in sequentially incongruous ways. Thus, when speaker G finishes an extended telling and explicitly marks it as complete ("So that's the story," line 10, below), B receipts the story with "*Mm hm*" (line 11).

- (9)
- 1 G: I'd li:ke to have the mirrors. But if she wants them? (.)
 2 .hh why that's: I-th-tha:t's fi::ne.
 3 B: Mm hm,
 4 G: If she's going to use them you kno:w.
 5 B: Mm [hm,
 6 G: [h h h h h I'm not going to uh, h h maybe queer the deal
 7 just by wanting this that and the othe[r (you know),
 8 B: [NO:.
 9 (0.2)
 10 G: .h h h h s:So: uhm, h (.) tha:t's the story.
 11 B: → Mm hm,
 12 (0.2)
 13 G: An:d uh (0.6) uhm, h h h (1.0) .h h h h u-Then I have a ma:n
 14 coming Tue:sday...

(Jefferson, 1984: 209)

This display of passive reciprocity appears strikingly misfitted to such an obvious story completion. And yet it seems to have been produced and understood as embodying just such a passive stance—subsequently, B falls silent and offers no further talk (line 12), whereas G searches for and eventually finds something further to say (lines 13–14). Here, then, an interactant exploits the passivity of "*mm hm*" as a resource for resisting the speakership role, which in turn prompts the prior speaker to continue.

The analytic resources sketched here are based on the insight that the import of a given practice is observable in the manner in which it is deployed and responded to. By exploiting these resources, the researcher moves beyond speculation to generate analytic claims that are grounded in the displayed understandings and orientations of the interactional participants themselves.

Working through collections

The primary objective of CA is to elucidate the methods people use to build interaction together. Although analysis often begins by examining a single fragment of talk, this is normally the first step in a deeper analysis, which transcends that particular fragment and sheds light on practices that operate across a range of participants and social contexts. As Sacks has observed:

Thus it is not any particular conversation, as an object, that we are primarily interested in. Our aim is to get into a position to transform ... our view of “what happened,” from a matter of a particular interaction done by particular people, to a matter of interactions as products of a machinery. We are trying to find the machinery. In order to do so we have to get access to its products.

(Sacks, 1984: 26–27)

This requires the systematic analysis of numerous cases. Working with collections can flesh out and enrich an analysis initially arrived at through a single case, illuminating such matters as the practice’s various forms, the boundaries that separate it from related practices, and its scope and normativity.

When building a collection of candidate instances of a given phenomenon, it is useful to begin by casting a wide net. One should include what appear to be clear cases of the phenomenon in question, cases in which the phenomenon is present in an atypical form, and also what appear to be outright negative or “deviant” cases. Analyzing such cases rather than dismissing them as random error almost always yields a richer and more powerful analysis.

Once a collection is assembled, analysis proceeds on a case-by-case basis, with the aim of developing a comprehensive account that encompasses all relevant instances in the collection. The process is roughly analogous to analytic induction (Katz, 1983), although in CA the objective is not causal explanation but an analysis that will encompass a practice’s varying occurrences across a range of interactional contexts and exigencies.

Central to this process is the analysis of problematic or deviant cases. Some such cases are shown, upon analysis, to result from interactants’ orientation to the same considerations that produce the “regular” cases. We’ve already seen an illustration of this in the discussion of excerpt 9 above, in which an *mm hm* token was placed in an unusual sequential environment, but was nonetheless shown to function much like other such tokens as a display of passive reciprocity. Cases of this sort are, in effect, exceptions that prove the rule.

In other instances, deviant cases can prompt the researcher to revise the initial analysis in favor of a more general formulation, one that encompasses both the regular cases and the anomalous departure. Perhaps the clearest example of this process can be found in Schegloff’s (1968) analysis of telephone call openings. In a corpus of 500 telephone calls, Schegloff found that a straightforward rule—“answerer speaks first”—adequately described all but one of the call openings. In that one unusual case, the caller speaks first (line 3):

- (10)
- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | ((ring)) |
| 2 | ((receiver is lifted, and there is a one-second silence)) |
| 3 | Caller: Hello. |
| 4 | Answerer: American Red Cross. |
| 5 | Caller: Hello, this is police headquarters.... |

(Schegloff, 1968: 1079)

Rather than ignoring this instance or explaining it away in an ad hoc fashion, Schegloff returned to the drawing board and developed a more general analysis, which accounted for all 500 cases and

revealed the organization of (what would later be termed) adjacency pairs (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973). Schegloff realized that the ringing of the telephone launches a special kind of adjacency pair sequence, namely a summons–answer sequence. The rule “answerer speaks first” actually reflects the more general principle that, once a summons (here, a ringing phone) has been issued, an appropriate response is due. The deviant case also can be explained by reference to summons–answer sequences. The ring (line 1 above) was followed by silence (line 2), during which the caller heard the relevant response to be absent. Caller then spoke first (line 3) as a way of renewing the summons, soliciting the missing response, and thereby completing the incomplete sequence. The end result is a more analytically powerful account, which encompasses both regular and atypical cases.

Finally, some deviant cases may, upon analysis, turn out to fall beyond the parameters of the phenomenon being investigated. Such cases are not genuinely “deviant” at all, and clarifying how this is so furthers understanding of the core phenomenon and its boundaries. For instance, consider how personal troubles are discussed in conversation (Jefferson and Lee, 1981; Jefferson, 1988). When speakers disclose their troubles, recipients commonly respond with affiliative displays of understanding. However, in contrast to this typical pattern, recipients may instead offer advice and thereby transform the situation from a “troubles–telling” to a “service encounter.” This line of analysis, unlike the previous one, does not result in a single analytic formulation encompassing “regular” and “deviant” cases. Rather it recognizes *differences* between cases and the phenomena they instantiate.

Discussion

CA addresses a domain of phenomena, the endogenous organization of talk-in-interaction, in a manner that has proven to be both illuminating and productive. Much has been learned about the basic objects that comprise this domain.

Progress on this front has made it possible for researchers to use CA methods and findings to address questions extending beyond the organization of interaction per se, including questions about how this domain intersects with, and can illuminate, other aspects of the social world. As we noted at the beginning of this chapter, some researchers have examined the impact of interactional practices on bureaucratic and professional decision-making in medical, legal, educational, journalistic, and other contexts. Others have done comparative analyses of interactional practices to elucidate large-scale cultural differences and processes of historical change. Some of this work involves formal quantification, correlating interactional practices with other variables of interest. The utility of CA in this context is that it identifies previously unknown practices, establishes and validates their meaning and import, and thus provides a solid foundation for analyses of frequency and association.

As progress is made in these various applied areas, it is important to bear in mind that such work would not be possible without the basic research on which it rests. Talk in interaction remains a rich and compelling phenomenon in its own right, one in which human agency is exercised, intersubjectivity is achieved, and contexts of the social world are brought to life. Notwithstanding what has already been accomplished, much remains to be discovered about how human interaction actually works.

Transcription conventions

- [] Square brackets show beginning and ending of overlapping talk
- (0.5) Numbers in parentheses are silences timed to tenths of a second
- (.) Period in parentheses is a very brief silence (less than .1 sec.)

- ((quiet)) Transcribers' comments are enclosed in double parentheses
() Empty parentheses denote indecipherable utterance
(text) Text within parentheses is transcriber's "best guess" as to a speaker's utterance
. Period indicates downward intonation, not necessarily the end of a sentence
? Question mark indicates upward intonation, not necessarily a question
, Commas indicate slightly rising or "continuing" intonation
: Colon(s) indicate that a sound is stretched. The more colons, the longer the sound
.hh h's with preceding period indicate audible inbreath; the more h's, the longer the inbreath
hh h's with no preceding period indicate audible outbreath; the more h's, the longer the outbreath
(h) Parenthesized "h" indicates plosiveness, often associated with laughter, crying, breathlessness, etc.
>word< Enclosed talk is spoken more quickly than surrounding talk
WORD Upper case indicates greater loudness than surrounding talk
°Yes° Words inside degree signs are spoken softly or whispered
every Underlines indicate sounds that are stressed
Yes:: Colons indicate stretching of the preceding sound
n- Dash indicates a cut-off of the preceding sound
= Equal sign indicates utterances before and after have no intervening silence.

(Adapted from Jefferson, 1974)

Further reading

ten Have, P. (1999) *Doing Conversation Analysis: A Practical Guide*. London: Sage.
Provides a comprehensive discussion of the methodology of CA.

Heritage, J. (1984b) *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Surveys the theoretical background to CA in the work of Harold Garfinkel and provides a useful overview of some of the main areas of research.

Schegloff, E. A. (2007) *Sequence Organization in Interaction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Offers a focused analysis of a central feature of interactional organization.

John Heritage and Steven Clayman's *Talk in Action* (2010).

Surveys research on interaction in a variety of institutional settings.

Note

1 For a much more elaborated discussion of CA methods, see ten Have (1999).

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