

Chapter 7

Conversation analysis

Paul Drew

Researchers across a range of cognate disciplines – anthropology, sociology, communication, linguistics, sociolinguistics and pragmatics, as well as psychology – have in recent years increasingly turned to the perspective and methods of conversation analysis (CA). They have done so in order to investigate a wide variety of topics, some of which intersect with, or lie within, various fields of psychology. The sheer breadth and richness of these topics begin to give some idea of the adaptability of CA to a great variety of research sites. These topics include medical interaction, especially interactions between patients and doctors and other health-care professionals (Drew et al., 2001; Heath, 1986; Heritage and Maynard, forthcoming; Heritage and Sefi, 1992); child-adult interaction, and the development of mind (Wootton, 1997); news media, such as news interviews, political speaking and debate (Atkinson, 1984; Clayman, 1995; Clayman and Heritage, 2002); paranormal experiences (Woodfitt, 1989); delusions and hallucinations (Palmer, 2000); speech disorders relating to aphasia, autism and cerebral palsy (Goodwin, 1995); sexual identity (Kitzinger, 2000); calls to the emergency services (Zimmerman, 1992); counselling of various kinds, including family systems therapy applied to HIV/AIDS counselling (Peakylä, 1995; Silverman, 1997); and divorce mediation (Greatbatch and Dingwall, 1997). Underpinning the diversity of research in such ‘applied’ areas as these, however, is the programme of CA research into the basic processes of ordinary social interaction, with which this chapter will be concerned.

The origins of CA intersect more closely with psychology – at least with topics which have seemed intrinsically psychological in character – than its perhaps generally appreciated. Having first trained in the law, and then undertaken graduate study at the University of Berkeley, Harvey Sacks (1935–1975) began to develop CA in the course of his investigations at the Centre for the Scientific Study of Suicide, in Los Angeles, 1963/64. Here he was interested initially in psychiatric and psychodynamic theorizing. But staff at the centre were recording suicide counselling telephone calls handled by a suicide prevention centre, in an attempt to understand more fully the problems which callers were facing and thereby to devise means of

counselling callers effectively. It was these recordings which provided the stimulus for what was to become CA. Drawn by his interests both in the ethnomethodological concern with members’ methods of practical reasoning (arising from his association with Harold Garfinkel), and in the study of interaction (he was taught at Berkeley by Erving Goffman), Sacks began to investigate how callers’ accounts of their troubles were produced in the course of their conversations with Suicide Prevention Centre (SPC) counsellors. This led him, without any diminished sensitivity to the plight of persons calling the SPC, to explore the more generic ‘machines’ of conversational turn-taking, and of the sequential patterns or structures associated with the management of activities in conversation. (For a definitive account of the origins of Sacks’s work in CA, its subsequent development and the range of issues it spawned, see Schegloff, 1992a; Edwards, 1995, provides a clear and important review not only of Sacks’s work, but also of the differences between his interactional approach and psychological perspectives, especially in cognitive psychology.) Through the collection of a broader corpus of interactions, including group therapy sessions and mundane telephone conversations, and in collaboration with Gail Jefferson (1938– ) and Emanuel Schegloff (1937– ), Sacks began to show that:

talk can be examined as an object in its own right, and not merely as a screen on which are projected other processes, whether Baltesian system problems or Schutzian interpretative strategies or Garfinkelian commonsense methods. The talk itself was the action, and previously unsuspected details were critical resources in what was getting done in and by the talk; and all this in naturally occurring events, in no way manipulated to allow the study of them. (Schegloff, 1992a: xviii)

At the heart of this is the recognition that ‘talk is action, not communication’ (Edwards, 1995: 579). Talk is not merely a medium, for instance, to communicate thoughts, information or knowledge: in conversation as in all forms of interaction, people are doing things in talk (Austin, 1962). They are engaged in social activities with one another – and what is beginning to emerge is a quite comprehensive picture of how people engage in social actions in talk-in-interaction. Sacks focused on such matters as the organization of turn-taking; overlapping talk; repair; topic initiation and closing; greetings, questions, invitations, requests, etc. and their associated sequences (adjacency pairs); agreement and disagreement; storytelling; and the integration of speech with non-vocal activities. Subsequent research in CA over the past 40 years has shown how these and other technical aspects of talk-in-interaction are the structured, socially organized resources – or methods – whereby participants perform and coordinate activities through talking together. Thus, they are the technical bedrock on which people build

their social lives, or in other words construct their sense of sociality with one another.

Essentially, CA is a naturalistic, observation-based science of actual (verbal and non-verbal) behaviour which uses audio and video recordings of naturally occurring interactions as the basic form of data (Heritage, 1984). CA is distinctive in its approach in the following kinds of ways.

First, in its focus on how participants understand and respond to one another in their turns at talk, CA explores the social and interactional underpinnings of intersubjectivity – the maintenance of common, shared and even 'collective' understandings between social actors.

Second, CA develops empirically Goffman's insight that social interaction embodies a distinct moral and institutional order that can be treated like other social institutions, such as the family, economy, religion, etc. By the *interaction order*, Goffman (1983) meant the institutional order of interaction; and CA explores the practices that make up this institution, as a topic in its own right.

Third, conversational organizations underlie social action (Atkinson and Heritage, 1984); CA offers a methodology, based on analysing sequences in which actions are produced and embedded, for investigating how we accomplish social actions.

Fourth, it is evident that the performance by one participant of certain kinds of actions – for instance, a greeting, question, invitation, etc. – sets up certain expectations concerning what the other, the recipient, should do in response. That is, recipients may be expected to return a greeting, answer the question, accept or decline the invitation, and so on. Thus, such pairs of actions, called in CA *adjacency pairs*, are normative frameworks within which certain actions should properly or accountably be done: the normative character of action, and the associated accountability of acting in accordance with normative expectations, are vitally germane to the moral order of social life, including ascriptions of deviance.

Fifth and last, CA relates talk to social context. CA's approach to context is distinctive, partly because the most proximate context for any turn at talk is regarded as being the (action) sequence of which it is a part – in particular, the immediately prior turn. CA also takes the position that the 'context' of an interaction cannot be exhaustively defined by the analyst a priori; rather, participants display in the 'design' of their turns at talk (this will be explained later) their sense of relevant context – including mutual knowledge, what each knows about the other, the setting, relevant biographical information, their relevant identities or relationships, and so on.

Underlying the methodology of CA is the attempt to capture and document the back-and-forth, or *processual*, character of interaction. The analytic aim is to show how conversational and other interactions are managed and constructed in real time, through the processes of production and comprehension employed by participants in coordinating their activities

when talking with one another. This involves focusing on the turn-by-turn evolution of conversations from one speaker's turn, to the next speaker's, and so on. Each participant in a dyadic (two-person) conversation (to take the simplest model) constructs or designs a turn to be understood by the other in a particular way – for instance, as performing some particular action. The other constructs an appropriate response, the other's understanding of the prior turn being manifest in that response. Hence, the first speaker may review the recipient's response to check whether the other has 'correctly' understood his or her first turn; and if the first speaker finds from that response that the other appears not to have understood his or her utterance/action correctly, that speaker may initiate repair to remedy the other's understanding (Schegloff, 1992b). The first speaker then produces a response, or a relevant next action, to the other's prior turn – and so the conversation proceeds, each turn being sequentially connected to its prior turn, but simultaneously moving the conversation forward by forming the immediate context for the other speaker's next action in the sequence (this is the 'context-shaped and context-renewing' character of conversational turns/actions described by Heritage [1984: 242]).

In broad terms, the objective of CA's methodological approach is to attempt to document and explicate how participants arrived at understandings of one another's actions during the back-and-forth interaction between them, and how they construct their turns so as to be suitably responsive to prior turns. In this way, conversation can be regarded as a *co-construction* between participants. CA's methodology is naturalistic and largely qualitative, and is characterized by four key features.

First, research is based on the study of naturally occurring data (audio or video recordings). These recordings are usually transcribed in considerable detail, though the precise level and type of detail (such as whether certain phonetic and prosodic features of production are included) will depend on the researcher's particular focus.

Second, phenomena in the data are generally not coded. The reason for this is that tokens which have the appearance of being 'the same' or equivalent phenomena may turn out, on closer inspection, to have a different interactional salience, and hence not to be equivalent. For example, repetitions might be coded in the same category, and hence regarded as undifferentiated phenomena. But different prosodic realizations of repeats (Couper-Kuhlen, 1996) or the sequential circumstances in which something is being repeated, and specifically what object is being repeated (Schegloff, 1996), can all crucially influence the activity being conducted through a repeat. Coding tokens on the basis of certain manifest similarities runs the risk of collecting, in the same category, objects which in reality have a quite different interactional significance.

Third, CA's methodology is generally not quantitative. This is not a rigid precept, but rather a corollary of the risks attendant on coding –

following from which, it is clear that quantifying the occurrence of a certain object is likely to result in the truly interactional properties of that object being overlooked. Those interactional properties can be uncovered only by thorough qualitative analysis, particularly of the sequential properties of that object, and how variations in speech production are related to their different sequential implicative (on reasons for being cautious about, or avoiding, quantification, see Schegloff, 1993).

Fourth, CA's methods attempt to document and explicate how participants arrived at understandings of one another's actions during the back-and-forth interaction between them, and how in turn they constructed their turns so as to be suitably responsive to prior turns. Therefore, CA focuses especially on those features of talk which are salient to participants' analyses of one another's turns at talk, in the progressive unfolding of interactions. But all this is pretty abstract. It is time to give a more concrete, practical picture of CA's methodology.

### The Data Used in CA

I mentioned that the data which researchers in CA use are always recordings of naturally occurring interactions: data are not gathered through simulated, through experimental or quasi-experimental tasks, and are not fabricated. Nor, generally, are interviews treated as data, although, for certain analytic purposes or enterprises, some interviews may be considered as naturally occurring interactions. There is no easy guide to making recordings in the field, the difficulties of which include access (and the ethical standards of obtaining consent), technical aspects and attendant frustrations. (I once videotaped an open-plan architects' office in the north of England over one week: some of the best action was lost as data, as it turned out that for two days the sound had not been recorded; loose connections can drive you crazy! But see Goodwin [1993] on technical aspects of recording.) And one can learn only from experience how to handle the personal relationships and expectations which can develop from extended involvement with those whom one is recording.

Once recordings have been obtained, the next step is to transcribe (all or some portions of) the data collected. Later, in the next section, I will begin to introduce CA's approach to analysing data by focusing on a brief extract from a telephone call between Emma (all names are pseudonyms) and a friend, Nancy, whom she has called. This extract begins about eleven minutes into the call when, after they have talked for some time about a class which Nancy is taking (as a mature student, in middle age) at a local university, Emma abruptly changes the topic. To give you some idea of what we try to put into and convey through our transcripts, Box 7.1 by contrast, shows a simple transcription of what the participants say to one another.

### Box 7.1 Simple transcription

- (1) [NB:ll:2-9l]  
 Emma: ... some of that stuff hits you pretty hard  
 Nancy: Yes  
 Emma: And then you think well do you want to be part of it What are you doing?  
 Nancy: What am I doing?  
 Emma: Cleaning?  
 Nancy: I'm ironing would you believe that  
 Emma: Oh bless his heart.  
 In fact I started ironing and I somehow or another ironing just kind of leaves me cold  
 Emma: Yes  
 Nancy: You know  
 Emma: Want to come down have a bite of lunch with me?  
 Nancy: It's just  
 Emma: I've got some beer and stuff  
 Nancy: Well you're real sweet hon  
 Emma: Or do you have something else  
 Nancy: Let I No I have to call Roul's mother. . . .

This is the kind of transcript which might be produced by Hansard, as a record of Parliamentary debate, or by court stenographers as they write down what's said during a trial. It records, in standard orthography, the words which were spoken – or rather, as they should have been spoken. But it does not record what was actually said. It does not, for instance, record the difference between words which were fully articulated, and those which were 'shortened' or run together (for instance, Emma does not say *bite of* in the thirteenth line: she runs them together, as *baita*). Nor does it record the way in which things were said, the pacing, intonation and emphasis in their talk. Finally, it does not capture anything about the relationship between one person's turn at talk, and the next: in order to represent these and other aspects of talk, CA has developed a transcription system which aims to capture faithfully features of speech which are salient to the interaction between participants, including – as well as characteristics of speech delivery (such as emphasis, loudness/softness, pitch changes, sound stretching and curtailment, etc.) – aspects of the relationship between turns at talk. This relationship includes whether, and when, one speaker talks in overlap with another, and whether there is a pause between one speaker's turn and the next (see Atkinson and Heritage, 1984: ix–xvi; Jefferson, 1985: ten Have, 1999: ch. 5). To capture these features, we use the symbols shown in Box 7.2.

## Box 7.2 Transcription symbols

**The Relative Timing of Utterances**

Intervals either within or between turns are shown thus (0.7)  
 A discernible pause which is too short to be timed mechanically is shown as a micro-pause (.)

Overlaps between utterances are indicated by square brackets, the point of overlap onset being marked with a single left-hand bracket

Contiguous utterances, where there is no discernible interval between turns, are linked by an equals sign. Also used to indicate very rapid move from one unit in a turn to the next

**Characteristics of Speech Delivery**

Various aspects of speech delivery are captured in these transcripts by punctuation symbols (which, therefore, are not used to mark conventional grammatical units) and other forms of notation, as follows:

A period (full stop) indicates a falling intonation

A comma indicates a continuing intonation

A question mark indicates a rising inflection (not necessarily a question)

The stretching of a sound is indicated by colors, the number of which correspond to the length of the stretching

.h indicates inhalation, the length of which is indicated by the number of h's

h. indicates out breath, the length of which is indicated by the number of h's

(th) Audible aspirators are indicated in the speech in which they occur (including in laughter)

°° Degree signs indicate word(s) spoken very softly or quietly

Sound stress is shown by underlining, those words or parts of a word which are emphasized being underlined

sup>

Particularly emphatic speech, usually with raised pitch, is shown by capital letters

Marked changes in pitch are shown by *i* for changes to a higher pitch, and *↓* for a fall in pitch

If what is said is unclear or uncertain, that is placed in parentheses

Using these symbols to transcribe the same extract results in something which, although formidably difficult to comprehend at first sight, captures a considerable amount of detail which may be relevant to our analysis of the interaction between them. It is important to note in this respect that our transcriptions are 'preanalytic', in the sense that they are made before the researcher has any particular idea about what phenomena, patterns or features in the data that might be investigated. Indeed, the purpose of the transcript, used in conjunction with the recording, is that it should be a resource in developing observations and hypotheses about phenomena. The following is what the extract from the conversation between Emma and Nancy looks like transcribed in these symbols (this has been extended to include a little more of their conversation than was shown in Box 7.1). Try not to be put off by the detail, which, to begin with, will look like a mess: if you read it through a couple of times, you'll quickly begin to follow it.

- (2) [NB:ll:2:9]
- 1 Emm: ..... solme a° solme a° that stuff his yuh pretty hard=
- 2 Nan: [°y:ah° ]
- 3 Emm: =°n then: °yuh think we'll d°yuu wanna be°
- 4 (0.7)
- 5 Nan: hhhhhhhhh
- 6 Emm: [↑PARK:↑ of ut:w;Wuddiyuh ↑DOIn.
- 7 (0.9)
- 8 Nan: What'm I dofin?
- 9 Emm: [Cleaning?°
- 10 Nan: =hh.hh f'm ironing wouldju believe thhat.
- 11 Emm: Oh: bless his [heer: ]
- 12 Nan: [m f. a. :ct l: i:ie I start'd ironing en l: d.
- 13 E: (.) Somehow er another ah'mning is kind of leave me:
- 14 co:ld]
- 15 Emm: [°e:lah,
- 16 (.)
- 17 Nan: [yhknow, ]
- 18 Emm: [Wanna c°rn] do°wn 'av [a bah:ta] ju:rnch wjith me?°
- 19 Nan: [°t's js ] ( )°
- 20 Emm: =Ah gut s'm beer'n stuff,
- 21 (0.3)
- 22 Nan: [Wei yer ril sweet hon: uhm
- 23 (.)
- 24 Emm: [Or d°y] ou'äv] sup'n [eise ° ( )°
- 25 Nan: [l. e t- ] I : ] hu. [n:No: i haf to: uh callo Roui's mother,h
- 26 I told'er l:°d cal'er this morning I [gotta letter ] from'er en
- 27 Emm: [°(th hnh)°]
- 28 Nan: .hhhhhh Änd uhm

- 29 (1.0)  
 30 Nan: .tch u-So: she in the letter she said if you can why (?)  
 31 yiknow call me Saturday morning en I jst haven't. h  
 32 |.hhhh|  
 33 Emm: [°Mm h]m:°=  
 34 Nan: =T's like takin a beating.  
 35 (0.2)  
 36 Nan: kh[h]h [hnh hnh] hnh  
 37 Emm: [°M m : : ; °] [No one heard a word hab,  
 38 Nan: >Not a word.<  
 39 (0.2)  
 40 Nan: Hah ah,  
 41 (0.2)  
 42 Nan: m[Not () not a word.h  
 43 ()  
 44 Nan: Not et all, except Roul's mother gotta call. hhhhh (0.3) °1  
 45 think it wuss:: (0.3) th' Monday er the Tuesday after  
 46 Mother's Day.

This telephone conversation is, of course, like any other, quite unique – in terms of time and place, and its having been held by these two participants, with whatever relationship and history they have with each other, and in whatever circumstances the call happened to be made. Notice that we can begin to see something of their relationship in Nancy's referring to 'Roul's mother', thereby assuming that Emma will recognize whom she is referring to when she names her ex-husband. Furthermore, it is evident that Emma already knows something about the circumstances associated with the difficulties Nancy is having with her ex-husband, when in response to Nancy's reference in line 34 to 'takin a beating', she (Emma) asks in line 37, 'No one heard a word hah'. And finally, in lines 18–20, Emma invites Nancy over for lunch ('Wanna c'm down 'av a bah:ta lunch with me? Ah gut s'm beer'n stui:ff?); presumably, there are not many people Emma could or would call mid-morning to invite over for an informal lunch that same day (that Roul is Nancy's ex-husband and that it is 11.15 am emerge later in the call). Thus, details in their conversation reveal something of their relationship and the uniqueness of what they know about each other.

### Some First Steps in Analysing the Data

But against this (ethnographic) uniqueness, we can make out some familiar things in the data, things that we recognize to be happening in other conversations. Foremost among these is perhaps what seems central to this

extract, and that is Emma's invitation. There are various ways to begin to approach data for the first time (see Pommerantz and Febr, 1996, for a useful and more extended outline than can be provided here). But an initial – and quite essential – starting point is to consider the ways in which participants are not 'just talking', but are engaged in social activities. Whenever we are examining talk in conversation, we look to see what activity or activities the participants are engaged in – what are they doing? Here the activity being managed or conducted in this sequence is Emma's invitation. The *social character* of such an action or activity cannot be too strongly emphasized. People's engagement in the social world consists, in large part, of performing and responding to such activities. So again, when we study conversation, we are studying not language idling, but language employed in the service of doing things in the social world. And we are focusing on the social organization of these activities being conducted in conversation.

In referring to the *management* of Emma's invitation, I mean to suggest that we can see that Emma manages the interaction in such a way as to give herself the opportunity to make the invitation. Looking at what occurs immediately before, it is clear that Emma's invitation in lines 18–20 follows her having inquired about what Nancy was doing (line 6). It appears that Nancy's response – indicating that she *started* doing something (line 12) but might rather not continue it (*ironing just kind of leaves me cold*, lines 13–14) – encourages Emma to make her invitation. Now, we cannot be sure whether Emma asked what Nancy was doing with the intention of finding out whether she was free, and, if so, to invite her; or whether, having asked an innocent question, perhaps about their daily chores, and finding that Nancy was at a loose end, Emma decided at that point (that is, after Nancy's response) to invite her. This illustrates the difficulty in trying to interpret participants' cognitive or other psychological states, on the basis of verbal conduct. In short, we cannot know whether her inquiry in line 6 was 'innocent', and therefore that the invitation was interactionally generated by Nancy's response; or whether she made the inquiry specifically in order to set up the invitation she had already planned (and that, indeed, she might have made the call with the purpose of inviting Nancy over for lunch). All that we can say at this stage is that invitations, and similar actions such as requests, are regularly preceded by just such inquiries. Here are two quite clear cases, in which an initial inquiry receives an 'encouraging' response, after which the first speaker makes the invitation which the recipient might well have been able to anticipate.

- (3) JG:CN:11  
 1 A: Watcha doin'  
 2 B: Nothin'  
 3 A: Wanna drink?

- (4) [Gell(b):8:14]  
 1 John: So who'r the boyfriends for the week.  
 2 (0.2)  
 3 Mary: k-hhbbh-Oh: go:d e-yih this one'n that one yihknow, I jist,  
 4 yihknow keep busy en go out when I wanna go out John it's  
 5 nothing hhh I don't have anybody serious on the string.  
 6 John: So in other words you'd go out if i:: askedhe out one a' these  
 7 times.  
 8 Mary: Yeah! Why not.

Such inquiries as are made in the opening lines in extracts (3) and (4) are termed *pre-invitations*: they are designed to set up, as it were, the invitation which they presage – by finding out whether, if the invitation were made, it is likely to be accepted.

Whether or not Emma had in mind, when making her inquiry, to invite Nancy (and hence whether her inquiry in line 6 was designed as a pre-invitation), we can see that the invitation did not come out of the blue. It was preceded by, and arose out of, an interactional sequence (lines 6–17) from which Emma could discern that Nancy might be free to come for lunch. Another aspect of the management of her invitation is the way in which it is constructed or designed as a casual, spontaneous idea. This is conveyed, not only in the timing of the invitation (only an hour or so beforehand), but also in using phrases like 'come down' and 'bite of lunch'. The sociability being proposed is not portrayed as a luncheon party, an occasion to which others have been invited, or for which one should dress up, or an RSVP do: rather, it is an impromptu affair, on finding that Nancy might welcome some diversion from her chores. So the *kind* of invitation it is, and the concomitant expectations and obligations which might attach to the recipient of such an invitation, are manifest in the specific *design* of the turn in which the invitation is made.

1. Look to see what activity or activities the participants are engaged in. Therefore, having outlined a first step in analysing data:
2. We can add the second and third steps.  
 Consider the sequence leading up to the initiation of an action, to see how the activity in question may have arisen out of that sequence (and even whether a speaker appears to have laid the ground for the upcoming action).
3. Examine in detail the design (the specific words and phrases used, including prosodic and intonational features) of the turn in which the action is initiated.

That latter point concerning turn design can be developed in the context of a fourth step:

4. Consider how the recipient responds to the 'first' speaker's turn/action.

In this respect, we can notice a number of features of Nancy's response. First, she does not answer immediately: there is a 0.3-second delay (line 21) before she begins to speak.

- (5) [From (2)]  
 18 Emn: [Wanna c'm] do:wn 'av [a bahra]l lunch wjth me?=  
 19 Nan: [°t's is] ( ) °]  
 20 Emn: =Ah gut s'm becr'n stu:ff.  
 21 (0.3)  
 22 Nan: [Wul yer ril sweet hon: uhm  
 23 ( )  
 24 Emn: [Or d'yi] out'av] sup'n else ° ( ) °  
 25 Nan: [i: e t-1 | : ] hu.

Bearing in mind the first analytic step, to consider what action a speaker is doing in a turn (or sequence), we can notice here that when she does respond, Nancy does an *appreciation* of the invitation (line 22, 'Wul yer ril sweet hon: uhm:'). She could, of course, simply have accepted Emma's invitation, with something like 'Oh, that'd be lovely', which would have simultaneously both *appreciated* and *accepted* the invitation. Here, though, Nancy appreciates the invitation without (at least yet) accepting. Two further observations about Nancy's turn/appreciation in line 22: it is prefaced with 'Wul' (that is, *Well*); and then she hesitates before continuing, as indicated by 'uhm' and the slight (micro) pause (line 23) before she begins with 'Let' (line 25).

Of course, having invited Nancy over for lunch, Emma is listening for whether Nancy will accept. It is quite plain from her turn in line 24, 'Or d'yi out'av sup'n else', that already Emma anticipates that Nancy might have some difficulty in accepting: having *something else to do* is a standard reason to decline an invitation.

A way to think about Emma's anticipating Nancy's difficulty/possible declining is that Emma *analyses* what Nancy has said. This again is fundamental to our investigations of conversation: we are focusing on the *analyses which participants make of each other's talk and conduct* – on how they understand what the other means or is doing. Looking at what it is that has led Emma to anticipate that Nancy might be going to decline, we can see that the only basis Emma has so far for making this analysis is the delay before Nancy speaks (in line 21), her appreciating the invitation without yet accepting it, and Nancy beginning her turn with 'Well'. Taken together, these three features indicate to Emma that Nancy might, after all, not be free to come over for lunch.



1. Identify what activity or actions the participants are engaged in.

Here Emma has invited Nancy for lunch, so that we have an *invitation* sequence, in which Nancy's response should be to accept or decline the invitation.

2. Consider the sequence leading up to the initiation of an action, to see how the activity in question may have arisen out of that sequence (and even whether a speaker appears to have laid the ground for the upcoming action).

We saw that Emma's inquiry *may* have been a pre-invitation inquiry, designed to determine whether Nancy might be free to come for lunch. But we cannot be sure: her inquiry may have been 'innocent'. Nevertheless, she does make the invitation in an environment – after Nancy's less than enthusiastic report about a chore she would rather not be doing – which encourages her to believe that Nancy might be free/willing to take a break and come for lunch.

3. Examine in detail the design (the specific words and phrases used) of each of the participants' turns.

For instance, Emma designs her invitation so as to indicate that it is an *improptu*, casual affair – which is a way of formulating the kind of occasion being proposed (which may have further implications as regards the recipient's 'commitment' or obligations).

4. Consider how the recipient responds to the 'first' speaker's turn/action.

This involves a combination of the first and third steps, applied to the next turn. Emma's invitation has set up an expectation concerning what Nancy will do next (that is, what action her next turn will constitute): she can be expected either to *accept* the invitation (preferably), or *decline* it. Instead, what she does is to *appreciate* the invitation. That, coupled with two other aspects of the design of Nancy's turn – her delay before starting to speak, and prefacing her appreciation with the disjunctive *Well* – are all indications of her trouble in accepting; and are the basis on which Emma anticipates that Nancy might be going to decline.

In summary, we are looking at the data for the ways in which, through their turns at talk, participants manage activities. Our focus is on social conduct, and how conduct is constructed through precisely what participants say – through the *design* of their turns. Turn design involves speakers selecting from alternative possible ways of saying something. For instance,

selecting the prelatory *Well* in line 22 gives Nancy's appreciation its declination-implicative character: without *Well*, and without the delay which precedes her response, the 'same' appreciation would prestage acceptance. Finally, it is fundamental to CA's approach that we are investigating the ways in which speakers themselves, during the conversation, understand and analyse what the other is doing/meaning: so we focus on participants' analyses of one another's conduct.

In addition to these four analytic steps, another has been taken in what until now has been rather an implicit manner. The observations about the construction of turns at talk, and understandings of responses to them, have supposed that what we are observing in this conversation are not features which are idiosyncratic to these speakers. I suggested that while this conversation was unique, in terms of its occurrence (time, place, participants and circumstances), nevertheless, what goes on in the talk, the activities the speakers are engaged in, and how they manage those activities are familiar – by which I was implying that these features of the data are *common* to a speech community, and are *systematic* properties of talk-in-interaction. The intelligibility of social action in conversation arises from participants employing intersubjective, common or shared forms and patterns of language. Recall that at two points during these preliminary observations, I have introduced extracts from other conversations in which the same feature or pattern is evident. Extracts (3) and (4) are examples of inquiries which were plainly *pre-invitations*. Though the specific words and content of each are different, and the nature of the invitation is different in each case, the inquiries themselves serve the same function in terms of the sequence: the questions are asked in the service of an upcoming invitation, to see whether, if the invitation were made, it is likely to be accepted. And subsequently another extract (6) was shown to illustrate that a *Well*-prefaced [appreciation] was used in cases where the speaker is declining an invitation. It is evident that these observations draw on our knowledge about what occurs in other similar sequences of actions (here, invitation sequences) in other conversations between other participants. Hence, we are beginning to build a case for there being *patterns* in talk, and that these patterns are systematic, in so far as they arise from certain general contingencies which people face when interacting with one another. But in order to explore and demonstrate this, we need to build *collections* of instances. This is the final and quite essential stage in the development of an analysis of a conversational phenomenon – so let us see what a collection can look like.

### Systematic Patterns in Conversation (I): Collections

The aim of CA research is to investigate and uncover the *socially organized practices* through which people make themselves understood, and through



which they manage social activities in talk. We can begin to see in the preliminary account of extract (2) that participants design their talk in ways which are organized (for instance, the combination of a delay in answering, together with prefacing an appreciation with *Well!*) and shared (Emma anticipates from this that Nancy may be going to decline her invitation). These are not idiosyncrasies belonging to individuals, nor are these practices associated with the particular personalities of speakers. CA research aims to identify the shared organizations which are manifest in *patterns* of talk. Patterns only become apparent when one collects instances – as many instances as can be found – of a phenomenon, and examine these for the properties that cases have in common. Therefore, CA's methodology connects together 1) identifying a possible phenomenon, 2) making a collection, and 3) discerning the sequential pattern associated with the phenomenon. In order to illustrate how these are interconnected, and what a central role *collections* play in CA's methodology, I will take up something which happens to occur in the extract we have been considering in which Emma invites Nancy over for lunch. This is not directly related to the invitation itself, but arises from Nancy's account of having to call her mother-in-law. That is, the phenomenon I will examine is quite incidental to the invitation-response which we have been looking at so far: it is something which initially caught my eye as curious, as in some respect puzzling.

Recall that Emma takes up the topic of the difficulties Nancy has been having with her ex-husband (parenthetically, managing thereby to consolidate the move away from an explicit or formal rejection of her offer).

- (8) [from (2)]  
 25 Nan: n:No: I haf to: uh callo Roul's mother, h I told'er I'd call'er  
 26 this morning I [gotta letter] from'er en  
 27 Emm: [°(U)h huh-]°  
 28 Nan: .hhhhhh And uhm  
 29 (1.0)  
 30 Nan: .ich u-.So: she in the letter she said if you can why ( )  
 31 yibknow call me Saturday morning en I jst haven't, h  
 32 [.hhhhh]  
 33 Emm: [°Mam h:m:°=  
 34 Nan: =°T's like takin a beating.  
 35 (0.2)  
 36 Nan: kh|fh Thnhh hnh|hnh- [nh  
 37 Emm: [°M m: : ; °] [No one heard a word hab,  
 38 Nan: >Not a word,<  
 39 (0.2)  
 40 Nan: Hah ah,  
 41 (0.2)

- 42 Nan: n:No: ( ) not a word,  
 43 ( )  
 44 Nan: Not e all, except Roul's mother gotta call .hhhhhh (0.3) °I  
 45 think it wuss: (0.3) th'Monde er the Tuesday after  
 46 Mother's Day.

It is evident that Emma knows something of the situation involving Nancy's ex-husband, when she asks 'No one heard a word hab,' (line 37). Nancy confirms this, in a fairly strong fashion. Nancy adds three further confirmations (lines 40, 42 and at the start of 44). Notice that what Nancy repeats and confirms is a quite categorical version, 'no one' and 'not a word', both indicating the completeness of her ex-husband's lack of communication. However, in line 44, she proceeds to qualify that, when she says 'except Roul's mother gotta call' (she then proceeds to tell what happened during this telephone call). Having initially claimed that no one had heard from him, Nancy changes her story! This, then, is what I found puzzling – how is it that Nancy comes up with what are apparently inconsistent or contradictory versions?

Now, one might attribute the change in her account, and the inconsistency which results, to some kind of personal or psychological factor, such as a disposition to hyperbole, or that she forgot for the moment, or that her initial version sprang from her being bitter about her ex-husband. Such attributions would treat her 'inconsistency' as generated by factors associated with the individual and her psychology, in the circumstances she finds herself in. But once I had noticed Nancy's shift from *not a word* to *except Roul's mother got a call* in this extract, I began to find many similar instances, in which a speaker initially claims a strong, categorical or dramatic version, but then qualifies that in some way which backs down from the strength or literalness of the initial version. And, of course, once one begins to find a number of cases, the phenomenon – the production of 'inconsistency' – begins to look less like a psychological attribute, and more like something which, for some reason (or, to deal with some contingency), is being systematically generated in interaction. Here are some of the other instances which I collected.

- (9) [Hot 289:1–2]  
 1 Sar: 1-> O:h yes ( ) well we've done all the peaks.  
 2 (0.4)  
 3 Les: Oh yes  
 4 (0.5)  
 5 Sar: A:h  
 6 (0.5)  
 7 Sar: 2-> We couldn't do two because you need ropes and that

- (10) [Holt:2:15:4-5]
- 1 Les: Only one is outstandingly clever wuh-an' the other- hh  
 2 1-> an-'Rebecca didn't get t'college,<sup>o</sup>  
 3 (0.4)  
 4 Joy: Didn't she;  
 5 Les: 2-> Well she got in the end she scraped into a bsh- business  
 6 management,

- (11) [Drew:St:98:1] (Sandra's friends are going out that evening to a disco/night club; she has said she isn't going)
- 1 Sar: I don't know hh hh hu hu hh hh I dunno it's not really me  
 2 Bec: M-w:th  
 3 Sar: 1-> ( ) like it hh I've never been to one yet,  
 4 Bec: You HÄven't.  
 5 Sar: No  
 6 Bec: Not even t'Ziggy's  
 7 Sar: 2-> Nope ( ) I've bin twi- no ( ) a bin twice at home to: a place  
 8 called Turdes which is really rubbish and then I've been  
 9 once to a place in ( ) Stamford called em: ( ) Cystalis ( )  
 10 which is o:okay: <-n- Ojivers' sorry Ojivers ( ) which is  
 11 okay: ( ) but nothing special,

- (12) [NB:JV:13:18]
- 1 Emm: 1-> I haven't had a piece a'meat.  
 2 (1.0)  
 3 Emm: 2-> Over et Bill's I had tacos Mondce might little bitta  
 meat the\*re. B't not much.

In example (9), Sarah initially claims to have 'done' *all the peaks*, and then reveals that they did not do them all. In (10), Lesley first says that one of their friend's daughters did not get into college, but subsequently concedes that she did. Sandra first claims in (11) that she has *never been to one* (a disco/nightclub), but then mentions some to which she has been. And in (12), Emma first reports that she has not had a piece of meat recently, but then 'admits' to having eaten tacos a few nights before.

So, in each instance, there appears to be a discrepancy or inconsistency between the speaker's initial and subsequent versions – just as there was between Nancy's initially claiming that no one had heard from Roul, and her later statement that his mother heard from him a day or two after Mother's Day. In their subsequent versions, speakers seem to back down from their initial claims, revealing those to have been in some fashion incorrect, overstated, too strong and the like.

Here then is a phenomenon – a sequential pattern in which a speaker first claims something, and then retracts or qualifies that claim. We can

collect cases of this phenomenon in whatever data we happen to be working with: you can listen for this, and find instances in data that you may collect – the phenomenon is not restricted to telephone calls, or conversations between friends, or even to 'ordinary conversation'. When we put together a collection of cases, we can begin to look for features they may have in common. This is the next analytic step.

### Systematic Patterns in Conversation (II): Identifying Common Features in a Collection

We have now a corpus of five instances in which a speaker claims something and subsequently retracts that claim – our original case in (2)/(8), together with extracts (9)–(12) (though these are just a few of the many cases I have collected of this phenomenon). The next step is to examine the corpus, in order to determine whether instances have any features in common. In effect, this involves two of the analytic steps outlined earlier, namely, looking closely at how turns are designed, and considering how each participant responds to the other. Pulling these together, we can discern a number of features which these fragments have in common.

First, the initial versions are very strongly stated, categorical or dramatic – generally through descriptors which are extreme versions (Edwards, 2000; Pomerantz, 1986). Thus, in (9), Sarah claims to have done *all the peaks*; in (11), Sandra claims that she's *never been to one yet*; and, in (12), Emma claims that she *hasn't had a piece of meat* – each of which is an extreme version (and, in [10], Lesley claims categorically that Rebecca *didn't get to college*).

Second, the recipients avoid endorsing these initial versions. Indeed, in various ways, they display some (incipient) scepticism – either through initially not responding (silence), as in examples (9), (10) and (12); through only minimal acknowledgements (example (9)); or through interrogative elliptical repeats, such as Joyce's *Didn't she*, in (10) or Becky's *You haven't* in (11).

Third, the subsequent versions, in which the speakers appear to back down from the original claims, are characterized by explicitly contrasting elements when compared with the original versions. The sense of retraction is manifest, in part, through a direct contrast between the two versions – a contrast which is achieved through some lexical repetition. So *we've done all* in (9) becomes *we couldn't do two*; note the repetition of both the pronoun and the verb; in (10), (*Rebecca*) *didn't get* becomes *she got*; having claimed that *I've never been*, Sandra concedes *I've been*, in (11); and, in (12), *I haven't had* is changed to *I had*. The contrast exhibited through such repetition, and in extracts 9–12 through the simple switch between positive and negative forms (for example, *I've never been* becomes *I've been*), highlights the

speakers' *retraction* of their initial claims. They begin by claiming something to be the case, and then retract their original claim.

Nevertheless, fourth, the retractions are constructed so as to preserve some consistency with the initial versions, and hence the essential correctness of those first versions. They seem to back down from its strength, though not from the core truth of what is claimed or reported. I will outline this in just two cases.

- (13) (expanded form of (9) [Holt 289:1–2])
- 1 Les: .hhh but there's some beautiful walks aren't there:|re  
 2 Sar: |Oh yes (.)  
 3 well we've done all the peaks.  
 4 (0.4)  
 5 Les: Oh yes  
 6 (0.5)  
 7 Sar: A:h  
 8 (0.5)  
 9 Sar: --> We couldn't do two because you need ropes and that  
 10 Les: Yeh:s.  
 11 Sar: --> [It's a climbers spot

Sarah and her family are just back from a holiday on a Scottish island, which Lesley has said is her daughter's favourite stamping ground. They are talking about walking (see line 1), in the context of which Sarah claims to have done all the peaks. In her subsequent version (lines 9 and 11), Sarah retracts that: they did not do two. However, she constructs this as their being *unable* to do two, explaining that they could not do two peaks because climbing gear is needed to get up them; they are not for walkers. She thereby constructs as *exceptions* the two peaks (note the specific enumeration of how many peaks, that being a small number – rather than that there were *some* they could not do) which they *could* not (rather than did not) do, thereby retaining her original claim as essentially true – they did all the peaks which *could* have been walked.

In example (10), there are more elaborate components through which the subsequent version is constructed so as to be consistent with the claim Lesley originally makes that *Rebecca didn't get to college*.

- From (10)
- 1 Les: NO::! no they're not. Only: one is outstandingly clever  
 2 with- an- the other. |hn an- Rebecca didn't get 't college.  
 3 (0.4)  
 4 Joy: Didn't [she;  
 5 Les: --> Well she got in the end she scraped into a bui- business  
 6 --> management,

there are three components especially which 'reduce the distance' between this and her original claim. First, *she got in the end* portrays her as having had to search for a college to take her, and/or as having been accepted only at the last minute. This is consistent with, indeed merges into, the second component – *she scraped into* – depicting her as only just being sufficiently qualified to gain entry, and therefore as being in that sense among the last to be accepted. These components together portray her as having considerable difficulty in getting a place in college. The final component, *into business management*, depicts her, moreover, as only having been able to get a place to study that discipline: only having scraped into *business management* portrays that discipline as being in the academic bargain basement. The ways in which subsequent versions are designed to be exceptions to, and thereby essentially consistent with, the initial versions are, of course, quite explicit in the case with which we began, Nancy's claim 'Not et all, except Roul's mother gotta call'.

### Systematic Patterns in Conversation (III): an Analytic Account of the Phenomenon

So far we have identified a pattern in which speakers make a strong claim about something, but subsequently – in the face of the other's implicit scepticism (even if that is expressed only through failure to respond) – back down from that claim: however, their retractions are designed so as to preserve the essential correctness of their original versions (through constructing the subsequent versions as exceptions of one kind or another). Then, the question is, what are we to make of this pattern? Do speakers just routinely lie, and retract when they are 'caught out' by their recipients' disbelief? This is the final stage in analysing a conversational phenomenon or pattern – providing an account for the pattern. It is not easy to be prescriptive about how or where one seeks such an account: but, broadly, it involves trying to identify the contingency which the pattern systematically handles, or to which it offers a solution. Very often, this will involve another of the analytic steps outlined earlier, which is to consider *where and how* the object or pattern in question arose.

If we look at the sequence immediately prior to the over-strong 'incorrect' versions, it is plain that the initial versions are being 'exaggerated' in order to fit with the sequential environments in which they are produced, and the actions being done in those environments. For example, in (10), Lesley is disagreeing with Joyce, initially with Joyce's assessment that their friend is *clever mentally*: this is shown here in (14), line 1 (they have been talking previously about how clever she is with her hands, making her family's clothes and so on).