Conversation Analysis

AN INTRODUCTION

Jack Sidnell

Conversation Analysis

Language in Society

Launched in 1980, *Language in Society* is now
established as probably the premiere series in
the broad field of sociolinguistics, dialectology
and variation studies. The series includes
both textbooks and monographs by Ralph
Fasold, Suzanne Romaine, Peter Trudgill,
Lesley Milroy, Michael Stubbs, and other
leading researchers.

Conversation Analysis

AN INTRODUCTION

Jack Sidnell

Contents

The truth is, the science of Nature has been already too long made only a work of the brain and the fancy: It is now high time that it should return to the plainness and soundness of observations on material and obvious things.

<div align="right">

Robert Hooke (1635–1703)
Micrographia, 1665

</div>

Acknowledgements

Although I am listed as the sole author of this book it would not have been possible to write it without contributions of various kinds from many other people. I first encountered CA as a graduate student in the writings of Chuck and Candy Goodwin. Their work initiated me to the discipline of close observation and formed the basis for my continued study of social interaction. Later, while I was a visiting professor at UCLA, Candy encouraged me to take Manny Schegloff's classes. His influence has been massive and there is evidence of it on every page of this book. Chuck, Candy and Manny are not only towering scholars of social interaction: they are also wonderful people who have been incredibly generous with their time. Thanks here is small recompense for all that I have taken from them.

I had the good fortune of attending the Advanced Summer Institutes in the summers of 2002, 2003 and 2005. During this time I learned much not only from the instructors – John Heritage, Gene Lerner, and Manny Schegloff – but also from my student peers. Some of the analyses presented in this book developed out of discussions that took place at these institutes, others have their beginnings in notes I took during Manny's classes or in data sessions at UCLA. My own academic generation (broadly defined) is rich with brilliant conversation analysts – in classes and data sessions I have learned especially from Becky Barnes, Ignasi Clemente, Rod Gardner, Makoto Hayashi, Trine Heinemann, Mardi Kidwell, Celia Kitzinger, Chris Koenig, Irene Koshik, Anna Lindström, Harrie Mazeland, Lorenza Mondada, Geoff Raymond, Jeff Robinson, Federico Rossano, Marja-Leena Sorjonen, Tanya Stivers, Erik Vinkhuyzen, Sue Wilkinson, and many others. To all, many, many thanks.

Tanya Stivers, my collaborator on many projects, provided insight, encouragement and support. She read the entire manuscript and provided comments and suggestions that improved it immensely. She also arranged a meeting and data session with Gail Jefferson – an event that significantly shaped my own conception of what conversation analysis is all about.

Federico Rossano has been a source of inspiration since we first met in 2003. One shortcoming of the present work is that it does not adequately take into account his cutting-edge work on interaction and visible conduct. Federico's unstinting friendship and constant good humor (not to mention his love for and appreciation of good food) have seen me through many difficult times and made the good ones that much more enjoyable.

I am grateful to many other CAsts for comments on parts of this book: thanks especially to Ceci Ford and Anna Lindstrom who used an earlier version in their courses. Thanks also go to all the Toronto-area CAsts with whom I've enjoyed many lively discussions and energetic data sessions – Jeffrey Aguinaldo, Pam Hudak, Clare MacMartin, Tanya Romaniuk, Linda Wood.

A very special thanks to the many students who have read chapters from the book or participated in lectures upon which they were based. I must single out Norie Romano especially who transcribed many of the conversations I present.

At Wiley-Blackwell, I'd like to thank Glynis Baguley, Kelly Basner, Julia Kirk and especially Danielle Descoteaux.

Finally, I thank my beautiful and loving wife and our two daughters Sula and Ginger for providing the supportive and joyful environment within which it was possible to write this book. More importantly, I thank them for their conversation . . . the nuances of which never cease to amaze me.

The book is dedicated to the memory of a great conversationalist: Phyllis "Dee" Greene (1941–2007), my mother-in-law and dear friend.

Transcription Conventions

I.   Temporal and sequential relationships

Overlapping or simultaneous talk is indicated in a variety of ways.

[
[Separate left square brackets, one above the other on two successive lines with utterances by different speakers, indicate a point of overlap onset, whether at the start of an utterance or later.

]
] Separate right square brackets, one above the other on two successive lines with utterances by different speakers, indicate a point at which two overlapping utterances both end or where one ends while the other continues, or simultaneous moments in overlaps which continue.

= Equal signs ordinarily come in pairs, one at the end of a line, and another at the start of the next line or one shortly thereafter. They are used to indicate two things:

(1) If the two lines connected by the equal signs are by the same speaker, then there was a single, continuous utterance with no break or pause, which was broken up in order to accommodate the placement of overlapping talk.

(2) If the lines connected by two equal signs are by different speakers, then the second followed the first with no discernible silence between them, or was "latched" to it.

(0.5) Numbers in parentheses indicate silence, represented in tenths of a second; what is given here in the left margin indicates 0.5 seconds of silence. Silences may be marked either within an utterance or between utterances.

(.) A dot in parentheses indicates a "micropause", hearable, but not readily measurable without instrumentation; ordinarily less than 0.2 of a second.

II.   Aspects of speech delivery, including aspects of intonation

The punctuation marks are not used grammatically, but to indicate intonation. The
. period indicates a falling, or final, intonation contour, not necessarily the end of a
? sentence. Similarly, a question mark indicates rising intonation, not necessarily a
, question, and a comma indicates "continuing" intonation, not necessarily a clause
¿ boundary. The inverted question mark is used to indicate a rise stronger than a comma but weaker than a question mark.

:: Colons are used to indicate the prolongation or stretching of the sound just preceding them. The more colons, the longer the stretching. On the other hand, graphically stretching a word on the page by inserting blank spaces between the

	letters does not necessarily indicate how it was pronounced; it is used to allow alignment with overlapping talk.
-	A hyphen after a word or part of a word indicates a cut-off or self-interruption, often done with a glottal or dental stop.
<u>word</u>	Underlining is used to indicate some form of stress or emphasis, by either increased loudness or higher pitch. The more underlining, the greater the emphasis.
<u>wo</u>rd	Therefore, underlining sometimes is placed under the first letter or two of a word, rather than under the letters which are actually raised in pitch or volume.
WOrd	Especially loud talk may be indicated by upper case; again, the louder, the more letters in upper case. And in extreme cases, upper case may be underlined.
°	The degree sign indicates that the talk following it is markedly quiet or soft.
°word°	When there are two degree signs, the talk between them is markedly softer than the talk around it.
	Combinations of underlining and colons are used to indicate intonation contours:
<u> </u>:	If the letter(s) preceding a colon is (are) underlined, then there is an "inflected" falling intonation contour on the vowel (you can hear the pitch turn downward).
<u>:</u>	If a colon is itself underlined, then there is an inflected rising intonation contour.
↑ or ^ ↓	The up and down arrows mark sharper rises or falls in pitch than would be indicated by combinations of colons and underlining, or they may mark a whole shift, or resetting, of the pitch register at which the talk is being produced.
> < < >	The combination of "more than" and "less than" symbols indicates that the talk between them is compressed or rushed. Used in the reverse order, they can indicate that a stretch of talk is markedly slowed or drawn out. The "less than" symbol by itself indicates that the immediately following talk is "jump-started", i.e. sounds like it starts with a rush.
hhh (hh) °hh °hh	Hearable aspiration is shown where it occurs in the talk by the letter *h* – the more *h*'s, the more aspiration. The aspiration may represent breathing, laughter, etc. If it occurs inside the boundaries of a word, it may be enclosed in parentheses in order to set it apart from the sounds of the word. If the aspiration is an inhalation, it is shown with a dot before it (usually a raised dot) or a raised degree symbol.

III.   Other markings

(( ))	Double parentheses are used to mark the transcriber's descriptions of events, rather than representations of them: ((cough)), ((sniff)), ((telephone rings)), ((footsteps)), ((whispered)), ((pause)), and the like.
(word)	When all or part of an utterance is in parentheses, or the speaker identification is, this indicates uncertainty on the transcriber's part, but represents a likely possibility.
( )	Empty parentheses indicate that something is being said, but no hearing (or, in some cases, speaker identification) can be achieved.

1

Talk

Talk is at the heart of human social life. It is through talk that we engage with one another in a distinctively human way and, in doing so, create what Erving Goffman (1957) once described as a "communion of reciprocally sustained involvement." We use talk to argue, to complain, to woo, to plead, to commemorate, to denigrate, to justify, to entertain and so on. Clearly, if we didn't talk we would not have the lives we do.

This book offers an introduction to "conversation analysis" (CA): an approach within the social sciences that aims to describe, analyze and understand talk as a basic and constitutive feature of human social life. CA is a well-developed tradition with a distinctive set of methods and analytic procedures as well as a large body of established findings. In this book I aim to introduce this tradition by guiding readers through a series of topics including turn-taking, action formation, sequence organization and so on. In this introductory chapter I attempt to give some of the flavor of the approach by examining a few fragments of conversation, sketching out in broad brush strokes some basic ways in which they are organized. My goal is essentially twofold. First, and most importantly, I hope to convey at least some of the immediacy of conversation analysis – the fact that what is most important for conversation analysis is not the theories it produces or even the methods it employs but rather the work of grappling with some small bit of the world in order to get an analytic handle on how it works. Secondly, I want to make a point about the way that conversational practices fit together in highly intricate ways. In the interests of clarity I have divided this book into chapters each of which focuses on some particular domain of conversational organization. In point of fact, of course, these different domains of organization are fundamentally interconnected. This interconnectedness creates something of a problem for a book like this one. It means that if we start off talking about the way turns at talk are distributed we soon find it necessary to make reference to the ways in which troubles can be fixed and this then requires some discussion of the way sequences of actions hang together. As Schegloff (2005: 472) suggests, it seems as though one can't do anything unless one knows everything! Where then to begin? We have to start somewhere and since the book in its entirety is an attempt to come to terms with the interconnectedness of practices in talk-in-interaction, here I just want to jump into the water. My aim for now, then, is simply to show that, in conversation as in talk-in-interaction more generally, one thing truly is connected to a bunch of other things.

Intersecting Machineries

And so, to that end, here is a bit of conversation. To understand it, you'll need to know that Ann and her husband Jeff had been entertaining two old friends and their young child. The friends had stayed overnight, for breakfast and into the early afternoon. After some rather extended goodbyes, the couple left and Ann and Jeff came back into the house. The following exchange then occurred:

```
(1)  Visit – FN
01   Ann:   That was fun,
02          (0.4)
03   Jeff:  mm
04   Ann:   ish.
```

This short fragment may seem at first glance unremarkable but, as I hope to show in the following pages, it illustrates many important features of conversation. It also exemplifies the principle of interconnectedness that I've already alluded to. Another way to put it is to say that, if we take any bit of talk, such as that presented in the example above, we find that it is the product of several "organizations" which operate concurrently and intersect in the utterance, thereby giving it a highly specific, indeed unique, character. At this point, a term like "organizations" may seem a bit obscure, but what I mean is actually pretty straightforward. Basically there is an organized set of practices involved in first getting and, secondly, constructing a turn, another such organized set of practices involved in producing a sequence of actions, another set of practices involved in the initiation and execution of repair and so on. Harvey Sacks who, along with Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson, invented the approach to social interaction now called "conversation analysis", sometimes used the metaphor of machines or machinery to describe this.

> In a way, our aim is . . . to get into a position to transform, in what I figure is almost a literal, physical sense, our view of what happened here as some interaction that could be treated as the thing we're studying, to interactions being spewed out by machinery, the machinery being what we're trying to find; where, in order to find it we've got to get a whole bunch of its products. (Sacks 1995, v. 2:169)

The machinery metaphor is quite revealing. What we get from it is a picture of speakers and hearers more or less totally caught up in and by the socially organized activities in which they are engaged. This is a highly decentralized or distributed view of human action that places the emphasis not on the internal cognitive representations of individuals or on their "external" attributes (doctor, woman, etc.) but on the structures of activity within which they are embedded.

It will be useful to keep this metaphor of machineries in mind as we move into the analyses of this chapter. Our inclination as ordinary members of society and as language users is to think of talk in a much more individualistic, indeed, atomistic way. Here's a fairly pervasive view of the way that talk works: The words that I produce express thoughts which exist inside my mind or brain. These thoughts-put-into-words are sent, via speech, to a hearer who uses the words to reconstruct the original thoughts. Those thoughts or ideas are thus transferred, by means of language, from a speaker to a hearer. Although this is not the place

to discuss this commonplace view of language and communication I mention it here so as to draw a contrast with the view Sacks proposes when he speaks of "machineries".[1]

If we think about this little fragment in these terms, that is, as the product of multiple, simultaneously operative and relevant organizations of practice, or "machineries" for short, we can get a lot of analytic leverage on what may at first seem somewhat opaque.

Let's start by noting that there is an organization relating to occasions or encounters taken as wholes. For a given occasion, there are specific places within it at which point particular actions are relevantly done. An obvious example is that greetings are properly done at the beginning of an encounter rather than at its conclusion. Similarly, introductions between participants who do not know one another are relevant at the outset of an exchange. If I meet a friend on the street and do not fairly immediately introduce her to the person with whom I'm walking, I may well apologize for this – saying something like "Oh, I'm so sorry this is Jeff" – where the apology is specifically responsive to the fact that the introduction has not been done earlier. When an action is done outside of its proper place in conversation it is typically marked as such (with "misplacement markers" like "by the way . . ." and so on). Now I think most people will agree that one of the things people regularly do when their guests leave is to discuss "how it went". Notice then that Ann's utterance can be heard as initiating just such a discussion. It does this by making a first move in such a discussion, specifically by positively evaluating or assessing the event. Of course, an utterance like this not only assesses (or evaluates) what has just taken place; it also, in doing so, marks its completion. This utterance does that in part by explicitly characterizing the event as past with "was". So, to begin with, we can see this utterance as coming in a particular place within the overall structural organization of an occasion – at its completion.

Let's now consider this fragment in terms of turns-at-talk. This first thing to notice is that there is something about "That was fun" that makes it recognizable as a possibly complete turn, whereas the same is not true for "that was", or "that", or "that was fu" etc. In English, turns can be constructed out of a sharply restricted set of grammatically defined units – words, phrases, clauses and sentences. In the example we are looking at the turn is composed of just one such "sentential" unit (even with "ish" added) but in other examples we will see turns composed of multiple units. In characterizing the turn as "possibly" complete we are not hedging our bets but rather attempting to describe the talk from the point of view of the participants. Jeff may anticipate that the turn will end with "fun" but he can't be sure that it will; as it turns out this is both a possible completion and the actual completion of the turn, but as we'll see it's quite possible to have a *possible* completion which is not the *actual* completion (indeed, the addition of "-ish" here extends the turn, retrospectively casting the turn as *not* complete at the end of "fun").

Now, the possible completion of a turn makes transition to a next speaker relevant in a way it is not during the course of that unit's production. So we call such places "transition relevance places" and we'll see, in chapter 3, that speaker transition is organized by reference to such places. The point is, of course, that when Ann finishes her utterance – "That was fun" – she may relevantly expect Jeff to say something by virtue of the way turn-taking in conversation is organized. So we have two more organizations – the organized sets of practices involved in both the construction and the distribution of turns – implicated in the production of this fragment of conversation.

We noticed that the completion of "That was fun" is a place for Jeff to speak. If he had spoken there what might he have said? Although the range of things that Jeff *could* have said is surely infinite, some things are obviously more relevant and hence more likely than

others. One obvious possibility is "yeah, it was" or just "yeah". Either such utterance would be a "response" to "That was fun" and would show itself to be a response by virtue of its composition. A response like this would then give us a paired set of actions – two utterances tied together in an essential way as first action and its response. In chapter 4 we will see that actions are typically organized into sequences of action and that the most basic such sequence is one composed of just two utterances – a first pair part and a second pair part – which form together an "adjacency pair". The utterances which compose an adjacency pair are organized by a relation of "conditional relevance" such that the occurrence of a first member of the pair makes the second relevant, so that if it is not produced it may be found, by the participants, to be missing (where any number of things did not happen but were nevertheless not "missing" in the same way).

"Yeah, it was" is more than just a response; it is a specific kind of response: an agreement. We will see that responses to assessments and other sequence-initiating actions (what we will call "first pair parts" like questions, requests, invitations and so on) can be divided into preferred and dispreferred types. We must postpone a detailed discussion of this issue until later (chapter 5). For now I will simply assert that, after an assessment such as "that was fun," agreement is the preferred response. Any other kind of response in this context may be understood, by the participants, not just for *what it is* but for *what it is not*, that is, as something specifically alternative to agreement with the initial assessment. Where agreement is relevant, a kind of "with me or against me" principle operates such that anything other than agreement is tantamount to *dis*agreement. We will see that even delay in responding to an assessment like "That was fun" can suggest that what is being withheld – what is *not* being said – is disagreement.

In fact, this example provides some evidence for that claim. So here, when Ann's assessment meets first with delay and subsequently with "<u>mm</u>", Ann is prompted to modify her original assessment to make it easier for Jeff to agree with if, indeed, he did not agree with its original formulation. So the organization of assessment sequences and the general patterns of preference can tip Ann off here. From Jeff's delay in responding and from the character of the response he eventually does produce, Ann can infer that he does not agree with her original assessment. She can then modify it in such a way that disagreement is avoided. So we have two more organizations implicated in this fragment of talk – the organization of actions (like assessments and agreements) into sequences and the general patterns of preference (here for agreement).

Ann has produced an utterance, and brought it to completion. Jeff's response is delayed and when it is eventually produced it is noncommittal: does Jeff agree or not with the assessment "That was fun"? At this point Ann does not produce an entirely new utterance; rather she modifies what she has already said. As noted already, this appears to be prompted by a lack of appropriate uptake by Jeff. We can see this addition of "-ish" to Ann's utterance as a form of self-repair. With this she not only modifies what she has said, she responds to problems with her original utterance which Jeff's delay in responding implies. As we will see in chapter 7, there is a preference in conversation for troubles, problems of speaking, errors and so on to be fixed or remedied by *the speaker of the trouble* rather some other participant. In this example we see that, though Jeff does not fully agree with the assessment "fun" and might perhaps be more willing to describe the visit as "fun-ish", he does not correct Ann. Rather, he delays his response, and in this way allows Ann a chance to repair, modify or correct her own talk. There is another way in which repair is involved here. One of the things a turn's recipient can always do at the possible completion of some bit of talk

addressed to them is to initiate repair with something like "what?" or "it was what?" or "that was what?" or, again, "that *was* fun?" or "that was *fun*?" etc. Because this is an ever-present possibility, the fact that it is *not* done can be taken to imply that the talk was understood. So by the fact that Jeff does not initiate repair of Ann's turn, Ann may infer that Jeff (believes he) understood what she has said and that a lack of understanding therefore does not explain his delay in responding. So we have another organization of practices – the organization of repair – implicated in this short fragment of consideration.

Although there is much more we could say about this fragment the larger point should by now be clear: Any utterance can be seen as the unique product of a number of intersecting machineries or organizations of practice. This is an alternative then to the common-sense, "individualist" view, that sees the utterance as the product of a single, isolated individual speaker. It is also an alternative to the "externalist" view which sees the utterance as the product of intersecting, *external* forces such as the speaker's (or the recipient's) gender, ethnic background, age, class or whatever else.

So far we have seen that this exchange involves practices for taking and constructing turns, building sequences of actions, repairing troubles and for speaking in ways fitted to the occasion. There is one more organization of practices that should be mentioned here – those involved in selecting the particular words used to construct the turn. Now you might think that people don't select words at all; they just use the words that are appropriate for what they are talking about – they simply "call a spade a spade". The problem with this view is that for anything that one talks about, multiple ways are available to describe or refer to it. We can ask, for instance, why Ann says "that" in "that was fun" instead of "Having Evan, Jenny and Reg" or "The last twenty-four hours" or whatever else. This brings us to a central principle of conversation which Sacks and his colleagues termed "recipient design": "the multitude of respects in which the talk by a party in a conversation is constructed or designed in ways which display an orientation and sensitivity to the particular other(s) who are the co-participants" (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974: 727). This is an obvious yet absolutely crucial point, that speakers design their talk in such a way as to make it appropriate and relevant for the persons they are addressing. Recipient design encompasses a vast range of phenomena – everything from the banal fact that a speaker will increase the volume of her talk to address a recipient at the back of the room to the subtle nuances of word selection which reflect what the speaker assumes the recipient knows. So with an expression like "that" in "that was fun" the speaker clearly presumes that the recipient will know what she means to refer to in using it. If Ann had said this to someone who phoned after her guests had left, that person might respond with "what was fun?" since they would have no idea what "that" was meant to refer to. This allows us to see the way "that" in "That was fun" was specifically selected for Jeff.

Think also about the way you would refer to the same person in talking to different recipients. With one recipient that person is "Dee", with another "your Mom", with another "Ms Greene" and with another "Nana" and so on. Why? Apparently, we select the name by which we presume our recipient knows the person to whom we want to refer. The name we use then is specifically designed for the particular recipient – it is recipient-designed.

I have concluded the discussion of the talk between Jeff and Ann with a consideration of recipient design for a reason. When we talk of "machineries" of turn-taking, of action sequencing or of repair it's easy to get the sense of these abstract "organizations" operating independently of the real persons engaged in talking to one another. And, of course, there's a sense in which that's absolutely correct. Indeed, that is, surely, just the point that Sacks wanted

to drive home with the metaphor of "machines". However, a focus on these context-free organizations or systems, these intersecting machineries, obviously does not tell the whole story since, as Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) note, whatever happens in conversation happens at some particular time, in some particular place, with some particular group of persons, after some particular thing has just taken place. In short, anything that happens in conversation happens within some particular, ultimately unique, context. As it turns out, although the structures that organize conversation are context-free in certain basic and crucial respects, they are at the same time capable of extraordinary context-sensitivity. We've had a glimpse at this in our consideration of recipient design here – enough, I hope, to suggest that CA involves tacking back and forth between the general and context-free on the one hand and the particular and context-sensitive on the other.

Historical Origins of Conversation Analysis

CA emerged in the 1960s through the collaboration of Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson. Although CA can be seen as a fresh start within the social and human sciences, it drew inspiration from two important sociologists, Erving Goffman and Harold Garfinkel.[2] Goffman's highly original and innovative move was to direct sociological attention to "situations" – the ordinary and extraordinary ways in which people interact with one another in the course of everyday life. Through a series of analyses Goffman attempted to show that these situations, and especially what he would describe as focused encounters, could be studied as in some ways orderly systems of self-sustaining activity. In a card game, for example, each participant pays attention so that she knows whose turn it is, what has been played, what point the players have reached in the hand and in the game and so on. If one of the players becomes distracted and misses a turn or delays in taking it, others may complain that she is not paying attention, so there are built-in mechanisms for addressing problems that arise as the activity is taking place. Of course, what applies to a card-game applies equally well to conversation:

> We must see . . . that a conversation has a life of its own and makes demands on its own behalf. It is a little social system with its own boundary-maintaining tendencies; it is a little patch of commitment and loyalty with its own heroes and its own villains. (Goffman 1957: 47)

Goffman insisted that the organization of human interaction, what he would come to call the "interaction order" (1983), constituted its own social institution. Moreover, according to Goffman, face-to-face, co-present interaction is the basis for all other social institutions that sociologists and others study. Hospitals, asylums, courts of law, households and so on can be seen as environments for various forms of social interaction. What is particularly remarkable about Goffman is that at the time he was writing virtually no one in sociology or anthropology paid any attention to social interaction. A few psychologists, particularly those associated with Roger G. Barker (e.g. Barker & Wright 1951, Barker 1963), whom, by the way, Sacks had read, had begun to treat the "stream of behavior" as a topic of analysis. A number of linguists (e.g. Pittenger 1960, McQuown 1971) had also advocated a study of language as it

was actually spoken. And there were murmurs within Anthropology too from people such as Gregory Bateson (e.g. Bateson & Mead 1942, Bateson 1956, 1972), who was interested in gesture and the body as well as the differences and similarities between animal and human communication. But many of these approaches were reductive in the sense that the authors were concerned to show how talk – or speech, or behavior – was organized by reference to something else, such as individual psychology. Others were concerned with talk only in so far as it was relevant to some larger theory. In contrast, in his most lucid moments, Goffman was very clear on the point that interaction had properties specific to it and had to be studied on its own terms. He noted, in "The Neglected Situation" (1972) and elsewhere, that this work had hardly begun. In one of his earliest published papers, Goffman (1957) described the various ways in which participants in interaction can become alienated from it. There he remarked (1957: 47):

> I want to consider the ways in which the individual can become alienated from a conversational encounter, the uneasiness that arises with this, and the consequence of this alienation and uneasiness upon the interaction. Since alienation can occur in regard to any imaginable talk, we may be able to learn from it something about the generic properties of spoken interaction.

In other words, Goffman was interested in "psychological" phenomena such as "alienation" and "uneasiness" precisely for the light that they might throw upon the organization of human interaction. What Goffman showed in addition to the various ways in which a person can become alienated in this special sense was that, to run smoothly, interaction demands a kind of unselfconsciousness. Interaction works best when the participants are engaged without being over-involved or otherwise distracted. "Conjoint spontaneous involvement is a *unio mystico*, a socialized trance" (Goffman 1957: 47). If you sit there trying to count the number of Mondays from August until Christmas you are more or less guaranteed to lose the gist of what a speaker is saying and, moreover, to fail to behave in ways appropriate to a recipient (see Bavelas, Coates & Johnson 2000). Moreover, the speaker will almost certainly notice it and orient to that failure as evidence that you are not *really* listening. Inversely, if a speaker becomes over-involved in what they are saying, the manner in which they are saying it can come to distract the recipient from what is actually being said.

To summarize, Goffman thought of face-to-face interaction as simultaneously its own institution and the foundation of everything else in society. This "interaction order", as he called it, is itself a moral ordering: a complex web of standards, expectations, rules and proscriptions to which people orient in their attempts to show deference, adopt a demeanor appropriate to a given situation, avoid embarrassing themselves and others and so on. According to Goffman, face-to-face interaction is an incredibly delicate thing. To maintain the fiction of ease (and to fend off the looming potential for interactional "uneasiness") each participant must dutifully do her part by attending to the right things at the right moments and conveying just the right degree of involvement. In his studies, Goffman attempted to describe different aspects of this balancing act by which we engage in a "reciprocally sustained communion of involvement".

In a more or less independent but parallel movement, in the late 1950s and early 1960s Harold Garfinkel was developing a critique of mainstream sociological thinking that was to develop into ethnomethodology (see Garfinkel 1974). Garfinkel had studied with Talcott

Parsons in the social relations program at Harvard but was deeply influenced by the phenomenology of Alfred Schutz and Edmund Husserl. Parsons was concerned with what he described, in a monumental study, as the "structure of social action", and developed a model in which, to put it very crudely, actors employed means to achieve ends within particular circumstances (Parsons 1937; see Heritage 1984b). For Parsons, social order is a result of socialization and the internalization of norms. If it weren't for the fact that people internalized norms, the argument goes, they would simply do whatever they needed to further their own ends and satisfy their own interests. Garfinkel challenged this conventional wisdom not by arguing with the model of human nature it implies but by suggesting that, to the extent that social life is regulated by such norms, this rests upon a foundation of practical reasoning. People, Garfinkel suggested, must determine what norms, precedents, traditions and so on apply to any given situation. This being so, an explanation of human conduct that involves citing the rules or norms being followed is obviously inadequate since the question remains as to how it was decided that *these* were the relevant rules or norms to follow! Moreover, how did the people involved decide how decisions were to be made in the first place? The underlying substratum of practical reasoning, argued Garfinkel, had all but escaped sociological notice despite the fact that it seemed to constitute the very precondition of society in the first place.

Followed through to its logical conclusion, practical reasoning always seems to result in infinite regress, since you end up having to say that behind each rule or norm is another that governs its application, and so on and so on (infinitely). Language presents a special case of just this kind of thing. For instance, if people frequently mean more than they say, which of course they do (e.g. "I'm not happy", "Well! That was interesting"), how are we able to determine what they mean in any given case? On this view, the meaning of any utterance can seem radically indeterminate. Garfinkel, however, noted that in fact, in the course of their everyday activities, ordinary members of society do not *typically* encounter problems of radical indeterminacy. The reason for this is twofold. First, the meaning of an utterance normally appears indeterminate only when that utterance is removed from the context of use within which it was produced (so if we know that "Well! That was interesting" was said by one friend to another after a chance meeting with a mutual acquaintance from work, what it means becomes obvious). And of course, ordinary persons encounter words within these rich contexts of use that provide for their intelligibility. Second, in the course of their ordinary activities, members of society adopt an attitude toward everyday life that seems to largely circumvent potential problems of indeterminacy. For instance, unless given reason not to, people generally assume that things are as they seem. They trust, that is, in ordinary appearances.

Drawing on Schutz and other phenomenologists, Garfinkel argued that everyday activities are made possible by a range of "background expectancies". Garfinkel tested what happens when these basic assumptions and expectancies of everyday life are challenged. For instance, in one experiment, students were asked to "spend from fifteen minutes to an hour in their homes imagining that they were boarders and acting out this assumption. They were instructed to conduct themselves in circumspect and polite fashion. They were to avoid getting personal, to use formal address, to speak only when spoken to" (Garfinkel 1967: 47). The results were dramatic. The student experimenters reported that family members were "stupefied" and "vigorously sought to make the strange actions intelligible and to restore the situation to normal appearances." Moreover, there was an obvious moral dimension to the family members' reactions:

Reports were filled with accounts of astonishment, bewilderment, shock, anxiety, embarrass-
ment and anger, and with charges by various family members that the student was mean, incon-
siderate, nasty or impolite. Family members demanded explanations: What's the matter? What
has got into you? Did you get fired? Are you sick? What are you being so superior about? Why
are you mad? Are you out of your mind or just stupid? One student acutely embarrassed his
mother in front of her friend by asking if she minded if he had a snack from the refrigerator.
"Mind if you have a little snack? You've been eating little snacks around here for years with-
out asking me. What's gotten into you?" One mother, infuriated when her daughter spoke to
her only when she was spoken to, began to shriek in angry denunciation of the daughter for her
disrespect and insubordination and refused to be calmed by the student's sister. A father berated
his daughter for being insufficiently concerned for the welfare of others and for acting like a
spoiled child. (Garfinkel 1967: 47–8)

Not surprisingly, students found it hard to sustain the pretence and reported feelings of relief
at being able, at the conclusion of the experiment, to slip back into "normal" patterns of
behavior.[3]

By the early to mid-1960s Harvey Sacks was deeply immersed in themes that Garfinkel
and Goffman had developed. It is common, and not entirely inaccurate, to say that conver-
sation analysis emerged as a synthesis of these two currents: It was the study of practical
reasoning (à la Garfinkel) applied to the special and particular topic of social interaction
(à la Goffman). There are at least two problems with this view. First, while certainly
influenced by both Garfinkel and Goffman, Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson also had their
own distinctive approach and early CA cannot be reduced to either the influence or the
confluence of these two seminal thinkers. Although some of his early work shows the clear
influence of either Garfinkel (see Sacks 1963, 1967, Garfinkel and Sacks 1970) or Goffman
(see Sacks 1972), by the late 1960s Sacks was clearly doing something quite distinctive.
Schegloff's "Sequencing in conversational openings" (1968) remains to this day a model
of CA method and analysis and bears little resemblance to the studies of Goffman and
Garfinkel. Second, in addition to Goffman and Garfinkel there were a number of slightly
less prominent but nevertheless important influences on the development of CA. Let me
take up this last point before returning to the issue of the way in which Sacks, Schegloff and
Jefferson's vision departed from that of Goffman and Garfinkel.

Reading Harvey Sacks's lectures one is immediately struck by the enormous range of work
in the social sciences and humanities that he engaged with at a serious level. Obviously,
I can't review that range of work in its entirety here and so instead I'll just mention a
few streams running through the lectures. First, the anthropological stream: At one point,
Sacks describes Evans-Pritchard's (1937) *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*
as "one of the greatest books in the social sciences" (1995a: 34). What was it that Sacks
saw in this work seemingly so different from his own? In this book, Evans-Pritchard set
about describing the Azande's use of various oracles in their everyday lives. Basically, when
misfortune befalls an Azande he or she figures that its cause is witchcraft, and in fact
Evans-Pritchard tells us these people have no concept of luck or chance. So, if a granary
collapses one looks for the ultimate cause not in the termites that are known to inhabit the
supporting posts of the structure but rather in the malevolence and general ill will of a neigh-
bor or a kinsman.[4] Of course, any Azande is well aware that termites can weaken the strength
of supporting beams, but then, how did the termites get there in the first place? And what
caused the granary to collapse at the particular moment when someone was sleeping under
it? The details of Evans-Pritchard's fascinating study need not concern us here. We should

ask, instead, what Sacks saw in it relevant to the analysis of conversation. Sacks discusses the Azande example in relation to calls to a suicide prevention line. There he suggests that suicide is "a device for discovering if anybody cares", and he notes that among the Azande the oracle "is a device which is routinely employable for checking out how it is that others attend to your ill- or well-being" (1995a: 35). Beyond this rather surprising parallel, Evans-Pritchard's study resonates with conversation analysis in a more general sense. First, it is obviously based on close and detailed observation of what people do in their ordinary lives. Evans-Pritchard is a master of artful and subtle observation – just the kind of skill Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson sought to cultivate in examining conversational materials. Second, Evans-Pritchard takes what looks like clearly irrational and bizarre behavior and, by putting it into an appropriate interpretive context, shows that it is perfectly rational and logically sound. There is a parallel again with CA, which has always been concerned to illustrate the underlying rationality and logic of ordinary human practice, refusing to ironicize them by comparing them to some standard imported from another setting (e.g. scientific procedures).

By the 1960s there were of course a number of other quite relevant things happening in anthropology. First, there were various attempts to tap into the "cognitive revolution" which, spurred on by Noam Chomsky's work in *Aspects of a Theory of Syntax* (1965) and *Syntactic Structures* (1957), was already in full swing within linguistics. In anthropology, this included such approaches as ethnoscience (from which Garfinkel had borrowed the name "ethno-methodology") and componential analysis (see Garfinkel 1974, D'Andrade 1995). The formal analytic character of this work appealed to Sacks and likely influenced his thinking about categories and what he would term "membership categorization devices". Also within anthropology at this time there was an emerging awareness of the importance of studying language use as part of the social and cultural world. People like Dell Hymes and John Gumperz – later to become important if short-lived advocates of CA – were developing an approach known as the ethnography of speaking which involved describing the particular ways in which people used language as part of a distinctive cultural repertoire in, for instance, marriage requests and rituals, in prayer and so on (see Gumperz and Hymes 1964, 1972, Bauman and Sherzer 1974). In short, from its earliest days, conversation analysis had always had a rather intimate, though at times fraught, connection with anthropology (see Sidnell 2008). This is seen not only in the emphasis on close observation of everyday activities but also in a common concern for the role language plays in the organization of those activities.

Another current in both Sacks's lectures and Schegloff's earliest writings was Sigmund Freud and the theory and practice of psychoanalysis more generally (see for example Schegloff 1963, Sacks 1995a). With his clear emphasis on the deep and hidden recesses of the human mind, Freud would seem on the surface an unlikely source of inspiration for an approach that takes seriously the public and fundamentally interactional character of human conduct and talk in particular. But this gross contrast obscures important points of convergence. For one thing, Freud was, like Evans–Pritchard, an extremely astute observer of human behavior. Indeed one could argue that Freud's greatest contribution was simply in getting people to see the importance of things that initially seemed utterly inconsequential, things that slip our notice most of the time. In fact, Freud starts the famous *Introductory Lectures* with an extended argument about the relevance of examining apparently small things (Freud 1975). For Freud, what needed defending was the study of apparently trivial slips of the tongue and apparently unintentional occurrences of arriving late or forgetting one's hat, all of which he grouped together under the term "parapraxes".[5] Freud of course argued that such things were far from random. Rather they were expressions of a hitherto little-understood domain

of mental life: the unconscious. In a remarkably similar way, Sacks found himself defending his own studies of "small" phenomena. He writes (Sacks 1984a: 24, see also 1995a: 26–31): "It is possible that the detailed study of small phenomena may give an enormous understanding of the way humans do things and the kinds of objects they use to construct and order their affairs."[6]

Of course CA is neither anthropology nor Freudian psychoanalysis. The only point I want to make here is that it emerged in dialogue with a range of perspectives within the social and human sciences. While the influence of Goffman and Garfinkel was obviously pivotal, the intellectual milieu within which CA emerged was a complex and multifaceted one that included themes from sociology, anthropology, linguistics, philosophy and other disciplines (see Schegloff 1995: xiv–xv for a useful description of this environment).

Sacks's First Lectures on Conversation

In 1963 Garfinkel invited Sacks to UCLA to work on a project with a suicide-prevention program. This work was important because it brought to Sacks's attention the possibilities of working with recordings, and it also forced him to deal for the first time with some basic features of talk-in-interaction. The first lecture in Sacks's collected lectures is titled "Rules of Conversational Sequence". He begins with three examples of telephone openings to the suicide-prevention line:

(2)   From Sacks, "Rules of Conversation Sequence"
    A: Hello
    B: Hello

(3)   From Sacks, "Rules of Conversation Sequence"
    A: This is Mr. Smith may I help you
    B: Yes, this is Mr. Brown

(4)   From Sacks, "Rules of Conversation Sequence"
    A: This is Mr. Smith may I help you
    B: I can't hear you
    A: This is Mr. <u>Smith</u>.
    B: Sm<u>i</u>th

Sacks notes that a fundamental problem the call-takers faced had to do with getting callers to give their name. He reports that one of his earliest findings, on reviewing the tapes, was that if the staff member opened with "This is Mr. Smith may I help you" any answer *other* than "Yes, this is Mr. Brown" meant that the staff member would have serious trouble getting the caller to give his or her name.

This led to an important discovery. It's obvious that the first and second turn in each of the first two exchanges constitutes some kind of unit (an "adjacency pair"). But beyond this Sacks noticed that there was a "fit" between the two parts, so that if the first person says "hello" then so does the second, if the first person says "this is Mr. Smith" then the second tends to say "this is Mr. Brown", etc. This is important enough but it also leads to another, equally significant, observation. Namely, if there is a tendency to fit the form of the

return to the form of the initiating action in any of these greeting ("hello") or introduction ("This is Mr. Smith") pairs, then there exists a way of getting someone's name without asking for it. Rather than saying "what is your name?" one can say "This is Mr. Smith", and this will establish the relevance of the other giving his or her name. So Sacks was making an observation about the multiple ways of doing an action. That, Sacks goes on to note, is important also for the following reason. If the staff member asks "Would you give me your name?" the caller can reply "Why?" or "What for?" That is, the caller can ask the staff member to provide a reason for asking for the name. In this book, and in CA more generally, we tend to talk about "accounts" rather than "reasons", and in this first lecture Sacks (1995a: 4) notes "what one does with 'Why?' is to propose about some action that it is an 'accountable action'. That is to say, 'Why?' is a way of asking for an account." Sacks goes on to suggest that accounts "control activities".[7] What he means by that, I think, is that a person can be asked why they are doing an action and if they can't come up with a reason they may have to abandon it. The important point here is that "This is Mr. Smith, may I help you?" may be a way of getting the other person to provide her name, but it is not an accountable action in that respect; one cannot say in response "Why do you want my name?" because the name was never asked for.

What about the third example? Sacks would later describe turns like "I can't hear you" as initiating repair, but in this early lecture he notes only that turns such as "your name is what?" and question-intoned repeats like "My helplessness?" are "occasionally usable" (see chapter 7). He explains: "That is to say, there doesn't have to be a particular sort of thing preceding it; it can come at any place in a conversation." Moreover, with "I can't hear you", Sacks notes, the caller essentially skips a turn and, thus, the position in which giving the name is relevant never occurs. Of course, it's not as if this is a device for avoiding giving one's name: on the contrary, the primary use of repair is fixing problems of speaking, hearing and understanding. The point is that it can be used that way in part because there are very few, if any, restrictions on where it can go in a sequence.

Understanding in Conversation

Intersubjectivity – joint or shared understanding between persons – is typically explained in terms of convergent knowledge of the world. On this view, the world exhibits objective characteristics and, to the extent that different persons apply identical and valid procedures for generating knowledge of the world, they will converge in their knowledge and understanding of their circumstances (Heritage 1984: 26). In the social sciences, a related solution to the problem of intersubjectivity invokes the notion of a common culture as the resource through which "the individual's grasp of reality is mediated" (Schegloff 1992a).[8] In contrast, conversation analysts have developed a rather different account. In talk-in-interaction each utterance displays a hearing or analysis of a preceding one and, thus, the very organization of talk provides a means by which intersubjective understanding can not only be continually demonstrated but also checked and, where found wanting, repaired. Consider then the following case from the opening of a telephone call between two friends:

(5) Deb and Dick – Telephone opening.
01   Deb: Hello:(hh)?
02   Dick: Good morning=

03   Deb: =Hi:, how are ya.
04   Dick: Not too bad. How are you?
05   Deb: I'm fi::ne.

Here, then, Deb's response to Dick's "How are you?" in line 05 displays a number of basic understandings of that turn (Schegloff 1992a). By starting to talk at this moment (and not a few milliseconds earlier) Deb shows an understanding that Dick's turn was possibly finished. By producing an answer, Deb shows that she has heard the previous turn to be a question. By answering with a description of her personal state, Deb shows that she has heard the question to be a wh-question (involving a question word like "who," "where," "how" etc.) rather than a yes–no interrogative. By responding with "fine" rather than "terrible", or "absolutely fabulous", Deb shows an understanding of what this question is doing in this environment (a routine opening inquiry, not meant to be taken literally) and so on.

The turn-by-turn organization of talk provides then for a continuously updated context of intersubjective understanding, accomplished *en passant* in the course of other activities (see chapter 4). These publicly displayed understandings are provisional and contingent and thus susceptible to being found wanting, problematic, partial or simply incorrect. Where a first speaker finds the understanding displayed by a second speaker's turn inadequate they have recourse to a mechanism for correcting it – an organized set of practices of repair (see chapter 7).

This suggests that in conversation understandings emerge in the course of interaction and are revisable in light of what subsequently happens. With this in mind, consider the following case. Here three 4-year-olds are playing with blocks. Erika has created a tower-like structure and when Jude accidentally bumps the table she produces the turn in line 01:

(6)   KIDS_02_02_06(1of2)JKT1.mov 10:55
01   Erika: Ju::de: yer makin' (me) knock it dow:n.
02   (0.4)
03   be more careful next time.
04   Jude: I: wi:ll:. I we:ll, I will, I will.
05   Tina: He sounds like a (actin) hhh
06   kinda like (ss) (0.2) ba:(h):by,
07   (0.8)
08   Jude: Ba::by?
09   (0.4)
10   Tina: he he ha ha oh .hhhh
11   Jude: sshhh.
12   (0.2)
13   You sound like a baby (to Adult)

This fragment begins, then, with Erika complaining that, by shaking the table, Jude is making her knock down the structure she is building. She enjoins him to "be more careful next time" to which he responds with "I: wi:ll:. I we:ll, I will, I will." Now although in saying this Jude acquiesces and accepts responsibility for "not being careful", the manner in which he says it – with multiple repetition and a whining intonation – conveys also that he is treating the complaint as less than completely serious.

Tina picks up on the somewhat peculiar way Jude says this in her talk at lines 05–06, remarking that Jude "sounds like – kinda like a baby". You can imagine, I think, how children of this age might respond to being called a "baby" or to having their behavior characterized as "like a baby". At four years, these children have really only just stopped being

"babies". Moreover, though they are no longer infants, much of their behavior is in fact quite "baby-like". As such, Tina's turn at lines 05–06, which she produces with considerable hesitation, is hearable, I think, as a rather grave insult. Notice though that she allows a hint of laughter to infiltrate the word "baby". Gail Jefferson (1979) showed that such inserted laugh tokens are often treated as invitations to laugh by their recipients and so this might be seen as blunting the possible insult of "baby". However, that analysis is complicated here by the fact that Tina has addressed her remark not to Jude but to Erika. Thus the invitation to laugh may be treated as an invitation to laugh *at* Jude rather than *with* him (see Glenn 2003). Jude may hear in this then not only an insult but, in addition, a hint of ridicule.

Notice then, that when Jude questions the characterization "baby" by repeating this word with rising intonation, Tina withdraws the seriousness of the insult with laughter, treating her own talk and perhaps also Jude's at line 04 as a joke. Unlike the earlier laugh token, because of its position in a sequence initiated by Jude's questioning repeat this bout of laughter is clearly appreciative rather than ridiculing. Notice also that in line 13 Jude repeats this bit of talk but now directs it at the only adult in the room, in this way making its status as a joke unequivocal.

The point here is that the meaning, sense, and import of Tina's talk at lines 05–06 emerges over the course of this short interaction. Jude's "baby" marks this part of Tina's talk as potentially problematic and Tina's subsequent laughter retrospectively casts a possible insult as a joke.

We've seen then that talk-in-interaction provides an apparently unique methodological lever in the form of next utterances: in responding to a previous utterance a recipient necessarily displays a hearing or understanding of that utterance. Participants of course use those displayed understandings to see if and how they were understood, and we analysts can use them too. So in our last example, we can see that Jude, in answering with "I will . . .", hears Erika's "be more careful next time" as a request, Tina hears Jude's "I will . . ." as something other than a straightforward acceptance of that request, and so on. The analyst then can draw on the methods of the participants themselves and in so doing largely avoid the otherwise very real problems of indeterminacy and interpretation that afflict other approaches to language and discourse.

Conversation and Intrigue

In the examples discussed up to this point, I've stressed the importance of practical reasoning in the achievement and maintenance of understanding. This is an important underlying theme in conversation analysis and of course some degree of mutual understanding, or at least the presumption of such, is prerequisite to anything else that gets done in and through conversation. But there's more to social interaction than understanding.

In his analyses, Goffman tended to emphasize the way in which participants position themselves in relation to one another (see for instance Goffman 1956). Goffman often talked about this in terms of "face" (see Goffman 1955). Everybody presents a face to the world, a face that they want to have accepted and publicly ratified by others. According to Goffman social interaction is organized in such a way as to allow for the maintenance of face. This is a kind of group collusion in which each person must play his or her part. We treat one another, says Goffman, as ritual, sacred objects by carefully showing respect for the various "territories of the self".

Conversation analysts do not accept all these ideas about face nor do they embrace Goffman's methods. Some of the disagreement about these and other ideas came out in an exchange between Goffman and Schegloff. Late in his career, Goffman (1976) wrote a thinly veiled critique of conversation analysis called "Replies and Responses", and Schegloff (1988a) later responded in an effort to correct a number of misunderstandings. The exchange as a whole highlights many important differences between these two approaches. So while CA does not adopt a Goffmanian approach towards the individual that revolves around face-needs and the self as a "ritual object", it does attend to the very real ways in which people negotiate who-we-are-to-one-another in conversation and other forms of interaction (see for instance Heritage and Raymond 2005). Despite the fact that of the three co-founders of CA, Jefferson was the only one who didn't study with Goffman, she is known for highlighting this aspect of social interaction in her analyses. Indeed, Jefferson is reported as saying that she was always more drawn to the "intrigue" than to the "system" of conversation.

With this in mind then let's turn to consider one more fragment of conversation. Here two friends – 12-year-old girls – are talking on the phone. It's the day before Halloween and Betty has called Sue. The call begins with a report by Betty about what a group of girls at Betty's current, and Sue's former, school intend to dress up as for Halloween. The two girls converge on a strongly negative evaluation of these girls and their costume choices before a younger sibling, who is watching television in the same room she is talking on the phone, distracts Betty. The instruction to "watch smart guy" in line 108 is apparently addressed to this sibling. After a confusion on this score is cleared up, Betty returns to the topic of Halloween remarking "=>°no<, but I wan-I wanna go trick er treating with you=but like (.) yeah."

```
(7)   YYZ: Halloween
108   Betty:        watch smart guy.
109                 (2.0)
110   Sue:          are you talkin' to m:e?
111                 (1.0)
112   Betty:        yeah
113   Sue:          oh::haha.HHH I'm like who the hell is she talking to? .hh
114                 anyway ummm::=
115   Betty:   →    =>°no<, but I wan-I wanna go trick or treating with you=but
116                 like (.) yeah.
117   Sue:          .hhh(hhh) yeah bu-are=yu- wait are you going with like
118                 Sarah Maxine an' st(hhh)uff hhh
119   Betty:        no.
120   Sue:          No::?
121   Betty:        n::o=
122   Sue:          =>okay well let's go together then<.
123   Betty:        mmm Kay=
124   Sue:          =kay (0.2) °just– [
125   Betty:                         [okay so let's go around like (0.2) OUR,
126                 neighbourhood?
127   Sue:          yeah. co[me down he::re
128   Betty:               [°mmm k]
129                 (1.0)
130   Sue:          .hhh 'cause I don't wanna- [
131   Betty:                                  [So h:ow's everybody
132                 doing::? >at your house.
```

The turn at line 115 is transcribed with various symbols used to indicate some of the details of the way in which it was said and many of these will be unfamiliar to some readers at this point. Let's just note that Betty initially ends the turn with "but like" and subsequently recompletes it with "yeah". As I'll discuss in more detail in chapter 4, a very basic kind of question we can ask about a turn in conversation is simply, "What is the speaker doing in saying this and in saying it in this way?" So what is Betty doing here? There are various ways we could answer that question. For one thing she's resuming a topic that was interrupted by the talk at lines 108–13. Betty might also be reasonably described as saying "what she wants", which is to go trick or treating with Sue. If we consider *the way* she says this, we can go on to note that although she's saying what she wants to do, with "but like (.) yeah" she seems to be suggesting that what she wants may not be possible. So what, in the end, is she doing here? Recall Sacks's discussion of call-takers trying to get callers' names by saying "This is Mr. Smith" rather than by saying "What is your name?" The point there was that there are various ways in which speakers can achieve their goals in conversation. Similarly, here we can ask why Betty does what she does in this way rather than some other possible way. For instance, why doesn't Betty just ask Sue "Do you want to go trick or treating with me?" Let's look in more detail at this bit of talk.

```
(8)    YYZ: Halloween (DETAIL)
115    Betty:   =>°no<, but I wan-I wanna go trick or treating with you=but
116             like (.) yeah.
117    Sue:     .hhh(hhh) yeah bu-are=yu- wait are you going with like
118             Sarah Maxine an' st(hhh)uff hhh
119    Betty:   no.
120    Sue:     No::?
121    Betty:   n::o=
122    Sue:     =>okay well let's go together then<.
```

So, starting with the obvious, one of the things Sue and Betty seem to be doing here is working out a plan to go "trick or treating" together. What's interesting is that they do this without either of them issuing an explicit invitation or anything of that sort. What Betty does rather is simply to reinvoke the topic after a bit of a break by saying that she wants to go with Sue. Notice though what she does at the *end* of her turn. Now it might seem like this "but like (.) yeah." is pretty inconsequential stuff, just rambling or mumbling inarticulateness. "What, after all, does this mean?", one might ask. But asking what this bit of the turn "means" gets the question wrong. We should ask instead what it *does*. In that respect, we will see at various points in this book that turn endings are important because, as Sacks (1987 [1973]) pointed out, turn endings establish what kind of a response is most immediately relevant for a recipient.

So what kind of thing does Betty leave for Sue to respond to? Betty actually completed the turn with "but like", she then added "yeah" after that. Sue then could have responded to the "but like" part, but by holding off on her response she ends up giving Betty another chance to speak, and Betty takes this opportunity to produce "yeah."

By ending the turn with "but like" Betty seems to anticipate a possible obstacle – a reason why these two can't go trick or treating together. We can imagine then various ways in which she might have finished this off, for instance "but like you're not going around here", "but like I have to go with Sarah, Maxine and stuff . . .", "but like it's too late to get it organized" and so on. The point is that by leaving the obstacle she has anticipated unarticulated,

Betty invites Sue to guess at what it might be that she has in mind. This puts Sue in an interesting position. If there's a reason why she can't go with Betty or if she doesn't want to go with Betty she can simply go along with the anticipated obstacle, filling in the blanks as it were. But if there's no problem or obstacle on *her* end, Sue can show that, and this is precisely what she does. That is, she talks in a way that shows she thought they were prevented from going together by the fact that Betty already had plans with others. Now there's a lot more we could say about this, but we are now at the point where we need to cover some basic points before we can go much further. The larger point, however, should be clear enough even from this preliminary analysis: Sue and Betty manage to make their plans without either having to "go out on a limb" interactionally by issuing an explicit invitation which might have been rejected. The anticipated, but apparently fictional, obstacle is a very delicate and rather ingenious way of coming together on this issue without risk to either party.

Conclusion

In this chapter I've tried to introduce some principles of CA through exemplification rather than argument or description. Rather than engage in a detailed discussion of findings or methods, I've focused on a few bits of conversation in the hope of conveying the conversation-analytic approach. This way of going about introducing the field itself embodies a central principle: at its core CA is about close observation of the world. In the actual practice of doing CA such close observation is coupled with a method for collecting, organizing and analyzing patterns across instances; it is to this set of methods that we turn in the next chapter. To conclude the current discussion we should take note of the ways the CA approach differs from other approaches to language and social interaction.

One alternative, associated with anthropology, is to examine talk and interaction in relation to culture. One can ask how, in the details of some interaction, participants embody, enact, challenge, or resist basic cultural themes, which is to say ideas and values around and through which some particular group of people can be seen to identify themselves. While an analysis of this kind can be revealing and make a significant contribution to a theory of culture it typically does little to illuminate the details of the way interaction itself is organized. For this reason perhaps, much work in anthropology, and especially linguistic anthropology, incorporates ideas from conversation analysis in order to develop an account of interaction, combining the structural analysis of talk with in-depth ethnography. Some recent work along these lines has considered the organization of repair (Sidnell 2008) and making reference to persons (see Levinson 2007, Enfield and Stivers 2007).

Another alternative is to examine interaction for what it can say about individual psychology. There are of course many variants of such an approach. Consider for the moment one possible psychological account of the hitches, pauses, restarts and so on that characterize Sue's talk at lines 117–18.

```
(9)    YYZ: Halloween (DETAIL)
115  Betty:   =>°no<, but I wan-I wanna go trick or treating with you=but
116           like (.) yeah.
117  Sue:     .hhh(hhh) yeah bu-are=yu- wait are you going with like
118           Sarah Maxine an' st(hhh)uff hhh
```

One kind of psychological account might take these perturbations in the talk as evidence that Sue was nervous, unsure, or perhaps even insecure. This is a psychological account in so far as it seeks to explain aspects of the talk in relation to the state of mind of the speaker. A more sophisticated version, a cognitively based one, might attempt to explain the talk by reference to processing limitations or production issues (see e.g. Levelt 1989). From the perspective adopted in this book, however, such accounts are beside the point. Rather than asking what is going on in the speaker's head (or mind, or brain) we should be asking (as we have) what is being accomplished in interaction by speaking in just this way. We've already started to do this for Betty's "but like (.) yeah" and in later chapters we will sketch an interactional explanation for other features of talk that are often understood as reflecting the speaker's mental state. Of course we do not deny that there are important and interesting things happening in terms of individual psychology and within the minds/brains of individuals. We only refuse to let such potentially interesting things distract us from the task of analyzing interaction on its own terms *as interaction*.

A final contrasting approach is a – broadly speaking – "sociological" and "correlative" one in which the emphasis is on "external" characteristics of the participants and the world in which they live, for example their social class, gender, and race. Again, that the world is so structured is uncontroversial, though it's not at all certain how that structure should itself be understood. Indeed the social world is multiply structured according to many different axes of differentiation. Moreover, there is a situational dimension to this multiplicity such that in one context a speaker's gender is made relevant and in another her age, race or class or even her height is what's most important. This then raises an important issue, one that Sacks discussed in a number of his lectures: in any society persons are categorized in at least two ways. The anthropological literature suggests for instance that in all societies persons are categorized, minimally, in terms of gender (e.g. male vs. female) and age (e.g. infant, child, adult, elder). Of course, many more category sets are used in any society for which adequate documentation is available but, for the sake of argument, we only need to posit two category sets. For once we recognize that more than one categorization is possible (i.e. a person is always *both* an X and a Y – e.g. a child and a male) it becomes reasonable to question any explanation in terms of one or the other. That is, although a woman may be speaking, she may not be speaking *as* a woman. Rather, she may be speaking as an adult, a mother, a doctor, a vegetarian, a Belgian, a dog-lover and so on and so on. I take up some of these issues in chapter 12 but for now let's just note that while talk may be correlated in various ways with the external characteristics of the speaker, the recipient or any other participant, discovering such correlations tells us little about the way that talk is organized in the first place. This brings us back to Goffman, who wrote, in "The Neglected Situation":

> Your social situation is not your country cousin. It can be argued that social situations, at least in our society, constitute a reality *sui generis* as He [Durkheim] used to say, and therefore need and warrant analysis in their own right, much like that accorded other basic forms of social organization.

Notes

1   See Reddy (1979), Volosinov (1973).
2   It's a bit problematic to call Goffman a sociologist plain and simple since, though he clearly was one, he was other things as well. Goffman was trained in large part by anthropologists