

Foreword: Sequential Organization of Conversational Activities

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IN THE CALL FOR PAPERS for this special issue (*WJSC*, Winter, 1988), and throughout subsequent discussions with interested researchers, we gave priority to manuscripts adhering to the following guidelines. First, we encouraged empirical examinations of the interactional organization of conversational activities, particularly studies examining the detailed character of participants' achieved orientations to social encounters. This priority emerged not only from an assessment of growing interest among communication scholars in the study of interaction-as-achievement, but also from the original commission for the special issue: To examine actual instances and episodes of what communicators *do*, i.e. how speakers and hearers routinely use, rely upon, and shape language to accomplish daily activities. Studies based upon individuals' perceptions, interpretations, attitudes, and related self-report data were thus not suited to the special issue, unless participants themselves were found to display these phenomena as practical reasoning in the course of ordinary interaction. This position by no means denies the existence of mental processes, but rather gives priority to the examination of what speakers and hearers noticeably provide and make available to one another conversationally. We asked authors to attend primarily to the collaborative production of communication processes, especially the ways participants appear to "orient to" the contingencies of interaction.

Toward this end, a second priority for the special issue involved the collection, transcription, and analysis of audio and/or video recordings of interaction. In order to make claims about the moment-by-moment operations of communicative activities, we reasoned, it is necessary for authors to provide evidence in the form of carefully produced transcriptions of data (see Appendix to this Foreword for explanations of transcription conventions). Generated directly from recordings, these transcriptions are designed to maintain the integrity of the vocal and prosodic features of the interaction, and are offered to readers for their critical inspection. The use of single and multiple instances of transcribed interaction to support research claims is designed to forestall unmerited idealizations or typifications of social organization. Researchers are held analytically accountable to the constituent features of the talk itself. Through repeated listenings to and viewings of the data, analysts seek to locate and recognize a "phenomenon" of everyday communication. In this search for recurring patterns evidencing order in social life, the ongoing task is to adequately re-present participants' methods for getting

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interaction done. The goal is, through illustration and analysis, to account for interactional patterns (practices, techniques, devices) in a manner that is understandable to readers, including those not familiar with the analytic method or the detailed features of the phenomenon being investigated. Conclusions are subjected to constant comparisons with data collected from a variety of interactional events. Through these methods, researchers pursue findings worthy of generalizable and perhaps even universal status across relationships, occasions, and cultures displaying diverse interactional orientations.

Each of the articles in this special issue adheres to these guidelines and priorities. The activities examined—perspective-display sequences, collaborative storytelling, shared laughter, interruptions, delayed completions, phone openings, phone calls to a Poison Control Center, and allusions to shared knowledge—are phenomena participants co-produce in everyday interaction. Taken as a whole, these studies reflect a basic commitment to ethnomethodological and conversational analytic techniques for discovering how speakers and hearers routinely create and resolve interactional problems.

Though such an approach is increasingly central to the communication discipline, it is important to locate this special issue within a broader network of interdisciplinary theory and research. A series of special issues have been organized around the general theme of "language

and social interaction," for example, and the present collection of studies might appropriately be framed as a continuation of these edited contributions (cf., *Sociology*, 1978: 12; Zimmerman and West, 1980:50, *Sociological Inquiry*; Frankel, 1984:7, *Discourse Processes*; Button, Drew, and Heritage, 1986:9, *Human Studies*; Maynard, 1987:50, *Social Psychology Quarterly*; Maynard, 1988: 35, *Social Problems*).

The papers in this issue by Maynard, Mandelbaum, and Glenn examine various ways in which relationships and social identities are interactionally constructed and negotiated. Maynard locates an inherently cautious and at times delicate maneuver employed by interactants who, as an alternative to offering an opinion directly, query or invite recipient's opinion prior to producing a report or assessment. These three-part "perspective-display sequences" are shown to occasion matters of affiliation (e.g., agreement, disagreement) between recipient's and asker's positions, and appear strategically adaptable to relationships and situations where cautiousness is warranted. In Mandelbaum's analysis of storytelling as an interactionally constituted event, interpersonal outcomes (e.g., "making fun" or "rescuing the about-to-become butt") are co-authored by tellers and story recipients. Just as tellers may recount past events as "objective" facts, so do recipients collaborate in redirecting the account and thus altering the meaning the event comes to have. Exactly what a storytelling is "about" is demonstrated through a case study of a video-taped dinner involving five interactants, where teller's focus is shifted by recipients' elicitations. Glenn uses data drawn

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from two-party and multi-party settings to investigate how "who laughs first" is influenced by conversational activities within which shared laughter is embedded (e.g., teasing, story, and joke-telling). While current speakers have routinely been found to provide the first laugh in conversations involving two parties, Glenn notes that someone other than current speaker generally laughs first in multi-party interactions. This study frames laughter as an activity fundamental to social gatherings and explains how laughter is a detailed achievement, particularly when multi-party configurations provide variations in talk that may not be possible or apparent in two-party conversations.

Both Drummond and Lerner focus on problematic issues involving conversational interruptions, overlaps, and two key issues of speaker change in turn-taking: "turn constructional units" and "transition relevant places." Drummond conceptually and empirically identifies inconsistencies across interdisciplinary studies of "interruption." He works through several transcribed instances, to provide evidence that "interruption" may be an idealized construct, given that no stable message forms adhere to such a label. Drummond reminds readers of the dangers of premature codings of social interaction, discusses ongoing research on speech onset and resolution, and elaborates several empirically justifiable relationships between overlap and conversational "dominance." Lerner first explains how speakers on occasion begin "out of turn" near possible completion points, and then describes procedures whereby speakers may delay portions of an utterance following onset of talk by another participant and perhaps cancel the relevance or actions projected by such overlap. When Delayed Completions occur, they may be heard to be "syntactically fitted continuations" of speaker's own-though noticeably unfinished-prior utterance, linked across the talk of the intervening participant. Devices such as Delayed Completions orient to prior overlaps as "interruptive" while also providing a means for both resolving prior and initiating subsequent overlap.

Hopper extends prior research on phone call openings, and offers data indicating that divergences from adjacent sequential slots -summonsanswer, identification/recognition, greetings, and initial inquiries/ responses-are frequent and marked in unique ways. He describes numerous action types which reveal, in their improvised shape of organization and sequential ambiguity, that "something is up" or notquite-ordinary. Hopper draws implications for the achieved character of phone beginnings, cultural universals, and contrasts between telephone and face-to-face openings.

The final two articles provide alternative approaches to the study of "social context," yet both stress how interaction organizes (and is organized by) the nature and scope of participants' identities. Frankel analyzes data collected in a regional Poison Control Center to display the textual (and thus social) construction of "record keeping" within a clinical and bureaucratic setting-"in real interactional time." He notes

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routine and emergent problems (e.g., with questions, answers, and delivering diagnostic news) as incoming phone calls get managed and information gets entered onto a pre-coded Data Collection Form. Frankel rejects an original hypothesis-that timeliness of response was

determined by urgency of a phone call -and identifies institutional needs for continuity and completeness as priorities. In this way, he illustrates the potential for ethnomethodological methods and findings to resolve practical, everyday problems. Finally, by not taking for granted that participants rely upon "shared knowledge" to achieve context, Nofsinger examines how a sense of orderliness (e.g., agreement and mutual appreciation) in conversation may exist, even though specific items of shared knowledge remain unarticulated. He describes how participants access background understandings to project a contrast, display specific relevance, initiate a repair, or ratify another's proposal. Nofsinger's descriptions identify utterance design and placement as key elements for achieving context in knowledgeable though allusive ways.

In the Epilogue, Pomerantz offers an exercise for translating "sequence-focused" descriptions of conversational activities to descriptions emphasizing "interactants' world as culturally shaped." This translation is offered as a resource for seeing connections that may have otherwise gone unnoticed, and for enhancing dialogue with colleagues. By translating an instance of "preference for agreement," Pomerantz shows how different aspects of the phenomenon may get explicated. She also notes that, regardless of the approach taken by researchers, the overriding goal is to produce technical descriptions mirroring how interactants achieve and thus organize social occasions.

Conversational activities are comprised of a seemingly endless array of interesting, though often puzzlingly complex arrangements and configurations. These studies illustrate the rationale and methods for discovering how certain activities are recognizable and subject to inquiry. A myriad of possibilities remain, and will become the agenda for future collections of this kind.

This special issue could not have taken shape without a unique opportunity provided by John Stewart (Editor, *WJSC*), the timely cooperation and quality contributions of both referees and authors, and resources provided by the Department of Speech Communication, San Diego State University. These efforts were much appreciated. Special thanks to Doug Maynard for helpful editorial suggestions, and Anita Pomerantz for brainstormings along-the-way.

Wayne A. Beach
 Guest Editor
 San Diego State University

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TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

The transcription system employed for data segments is an adaptation of Gail Jefferson's work [see J. M. Atkinson and J. Heritage (Eds.), *Structures of Social Action: Studies in Conversation Analysis*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1984, pp. ix-xvi]. Symbols are employed to provide vocalic and prosodic details (e.g., pauses, word stretch and emphasis, intonation, aspiration, etc.) so as to preserve the integrity of recorded interaction. The orthography is designed to capture how words sound, but not at the expense of making the transcript unreadable. Abbreviated information, provided prior to transcribed segments, index location and original source from which data were drawn.

<i>Symbol</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Function</i>
1. []	Brackets	Indicate beginnings and endings of overlapping utterances.
2. =	Equal signs	Latching of contiguous utterances, with no interval or overlap.
3. (1.2)	Timed Pause	Intervals occurring within and between same or different speaker's utterance, in tenths of a second.
4. (.)	Micropause	Brief pause of less than (0.2).
5. ::	Colon(s)	Prior sound, syllable, or word is prolonged or stretched. More colons indicate longer prolongation.
6. .	Period	Falling vocal pitch or intonation. Punctuation marks do <i>not</i> reflect grammatical status (e.g., end of sentence or question).
7. ?	Question Mark	Rising vocal pitch or intonation.
8. ,	Comma	A continuing intonation, with slight upward or downward contour.
9. II	Arrows	Marked rising and falling shifts in intonation.
10. ° °	Degree Signs	A passage of talk noticeably softer than surrounding utterances.
11. !	Exclamation	Animated speech tone
12. -	Hyphen	Halting, abrupt cut off of sound, syllable, or word.
13. <i>bold</i>	Italics	Vocalic stress or emphasis or Underline

14. OKAY	CAPS	Extreme loudness compared with surrounding talk.
15. > <	Greater than/	Portions of an utterance delivered at a noticeably
< >	Less than	quicker (> <) or slower (< >) pace. Signs
16. hhh	H's	Audible outbreaths, possibly laughter. The more
hhh		h's, the longer the aspiration. Aspirations with
ye{hh}s		superscripted period indicate audible inbreaths.
		H's within parentheses mark within-speech aspira-
		tions, possibly laughter.
17. ((noise))	Scenic details	Transcriber's comments (e.g., gestures, non-speech
		sounds).
18. ()	Parentheses	Transcriber is in doubt as to word, syllable, or sound. Empty parentheses indicate indecipherable
		passage.

*90Western Journal of Speech Communication*SymbolNameFunction19. ptLip SmackOften preceding an inbreath.20.
hahLaugh syllableRelative closed or open position of laughter.hehhoh21. \$Smile voice.Laughing talk between markers.