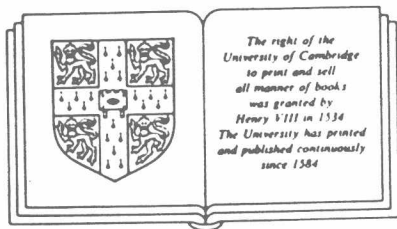# Structures of Social Action

Studies in Conversation Analysis

Edited by J. Maxwell Atkinson *and* John Heritage

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Preface

This book is the result of a collaboration that began when, as co-convenors of the Sociology of Language Study Group of the British Sociological Association, we organized the Social Science Research Council/British Sociological Association International Conference on Practical Reasoning and Discourse Processes, which was held 2–6 July 1979 at St. Hugh's College, Oxford. All the contributors to the present book, with the exception of the late Harvey Sacks, were among those who participated at the conference, and earlier versions of Chapters 5, 8 and 14 were originally presented there. Although the book is not a full collection of the proceedings, it is the result of a cooperative endeavor that began at the Oxford conference.

In acknowledging our debt to all those who helped to make the conference a memorable intellectual experience, we would like to record our thanks to the Sociology and Social Administration Committee of the (British) Social Science Research Council (SSRC) for the award of a grant that made it possible. Our gratitude to SSRC also extends beyond this grant to a longer-term appreciation of the active and constructive part it has played in facilitating the development of conversation analytic research in Britain. For it may be noted that no fewer than eight of the twelve contributors to this book have, at one time or another, had the benefit of financial support from SSRC, as research students, as recipients of project grants, or as members of its research staff. It is never easy to establish new approaches to social science research, especially if the concerns of those approaches are perceived as being "pure" or "fundamental," rather than "applied" or "policy-oriented." Where the number of active researchers is relatively small, funding even on quite a modest scale can have a major impact on the extent to which it is possible to develop such work. Conversation analysis in Britain has benefited greatly from the flexibility and responsiveness of SSRC funding policies,

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and we hope very much that this book will add to the growing evidence that such investments are beginning to pay dividends.

Of the many colleagues whose assistance made this book possible, we are grateful to Emanuel Schegloff, who, in his capacity as literary executor, gave us the necessary permissions to include two previously unpublished pieces by Harvey Sacks. We also thank Gail Jefferson, who selected and edited the original transcripts of his lectures. Her comments, together with those of Anita Pomerantz, on earlier drafts of our introduction were also much appreciated, though we have probably taken less notice of them than we should have done. The fact that Gail Jefferson contributed two original papers is only the most visible evidence of a commitment to the present project that was undertaken more seriously and generously than editors can reasonably expect.

Neither the original Oxford conference nor this book would have become a reality without the help of Noël Blatchford of the Centre for Socio-Legal Studies, who, among other things, carried out the onerous task of preparing camera-ready copy of the transcripts. We are also grateful to Sue Allen-Mills of Cambridge University Press for her patience, advice, and general support during the various stages leading up to publication.

J. Maxwell Atkinson
John Heritage

Transcript notation

The transcript notation used in this book, and in conversation analytic research more generally, has been developed by Gail Jefferson. It is a system that continues to evolve in response to current research interests, and for some of the chapters included in the present collection it has been necessary to incorporate symbols for representing various non-vocal activities, such as gaze, gestures, and applause.

Previous experience suggests that it is useful to group symbols with reference to the phenomena they represent.

1. Simultaneous utterances

Utterances starting simultaneously are linked together with either double or single left-hand brackets:

```
||      Tom:     [[I used to smoke a lot when I was young
        Bob:     [[I used to smoke Camels
```

2. Overlapping utterances

When overlapping utterances do not start simultaneously, the point at which an ongoing utterance is joined by another is marked with a single left-hand bracket, linking an ongoing with an overlapping utterance at the point where overlap begins:

```
|       Tom:     I used to smoke [a lot
        Bob:                     [He thinks he's real tough
```

The point where overlapping utterances stop overlapping is marked with a single right-hand bracket:

```
|       Tom:     I used to smoke [a lot] more than this
        Bob:                     [I see]
```

3. Contiguous utterances

When there is no interval between adjacent utterances, the second being latched immediately to the first (without overlapping it), the utterances are linked together with equal signs:

```
        Tom:    I used to smoke a lot=
=
        Bob:    =He thinks he's real tough
```

The equal signs are also used to link different parts of a single speaker's utterance when those parts constitute a continuous flow of speech that has been carried over to another line, by transcript design, to accommodate an intervening interruption:

```
Tom:    I used to smoke a lot more than this=
Bob:                      You used to smoke
Tom:    =but I never inhaled the smoke
```

Sometimes more than one speaker latches directly onto a just-completed utterance, and a case of this sort is marked with a combination of equal signs and double left-hand brackets:

```
        Tom:    I used to smoke a lot=
=||     Bob:    =|| He thinks he's tough
        Ann:       So did I
```

When overlapping utterances end simultaneously and are latched onto by a subsequent utterance, the link is marked by a single right-handed bracket and equal signs:

```
        Tom:    I used to smoke  a lot =
|=      Bob:                     I see
        Ann:    =So did I
```

4. Intervals within and between utterances

When intervals in the stream of talk occur, they are timed in tenths of a second and inserted within parentheses, either within an utterance:

```
(0.0)  Lil:    When I was (0.6) oh nine or ten
```

or between utterances:

```
Hal:    Step right up
        (1.3)
```

```
Hal:    I said step right up
        (0.8)
Joe:    Are you talking to me
```

A short untimed pause within an utterance is indicated by a dash:

```
–       Dee:   Umm – my mother will be right in
```

Untimed intervals heard between utterances are described within double parentheses and inserted where they occur:

```
((pause)) Rex: Are you ready to order
               ((pause))
          Pam: Yes thank you we are
```

5. Characteristics of speech delivery

In these transcripts, punctuation is used to mark not conventional grammatical units but, rather, attempts to capture characteristics of speech delivery. For example, a colon indicates an extension of the sound or syllable it follows:

```
co:lon    Ron:   What ha:ppened to you
```

and more colons prolong the stretch:

```
co::lons  Mae:   I ju::ss can't come
          Tim:   I'm so::: sorry re:::ally I am
```

The other punctuation marks are used as follows:

```
.         A period indicates a stopping fall in tone,
          not necessarily the end of a sentence.

,         A comma indicates a continuing intonation,
          not necessarily between clauses of sentences.

?         A question mark indicates a rising inflection,
          not necessarily a question.

?         A combined question mark/comma indicates a rising
          intonation weaker than that indicated by a
          question mark.

!         An exclamation point indicates an animated
          tone, not necessarily an exclamation.
```

–   A single dash indicates a halting, abrupt
               cutoff, or, when multiple dashes hyphenate
               the syllables of a word or connect strings
               of words, the stream of talk so marked has
               a stammering quality.

Marked rising and falling shifts in intonation are indicated by upward
and falling pointing arrows immediately prior to the rise or fall:

↓ ↑   Thatcher: I am however (0.2) very ↓fortunate
                  (0.4) in having (0.6) a ↑mar:vlous
                  dep↓uty

Emphasis is indicated by underlining:

Ann: It happens to be mine

Capital letters are used to indicate an utterance, or part thereof, that is
spoken much louder than the surrounding talk:

Announcer: an the winner: ↓iz:s (1.4) RACHEL ROBERTS
               for Y↑ANKS

A degree sign is used to indicate a passage of talk which is quieter than
the surrounding talk:

o o   M: ˙hhhh (.)°Um::°'Ow is yih mother
               by: th'wa:y˙h

Audible aspirations (hhh) and inhalations (˙hhh) are inserted in the
speech where they occur:

hhh   Pam: An thi(hh)s is for you hhh
˙hhh   Don: ˙hhhh O(hh) tha(h)nk you rea(hh)lly

A 'gh' placed within a word indicates gutturalness:

gh   J: Ohgh(h)h hhuh huh huh ˙huh

A subscribed dot is used as a "hardener." In this capacity it can indicate,
for example, an especially dentalized "t":

dot   J: Was it ↑la:s' night.

Double parentheses are used to enclose a description of some phe-
nomenon with which the transcriptionist does not want to wrestle.

These can be vocalizations that are not, for example, spelled gracefully or recognizably:

```
((    ))      Tom:    I used to ((cough)) smoke a lot
              Bob:    ((sniff)) He thinks he's tough
              Ann:    ((snorts))
```

or other details of the conversational scene:

```
              Jan:    This is just delicious
                      ((telephone rings))
              Kim:    I'll get it
```

or various characterizations of the talk:

```
              Ron:    ((in falsetto)) I can do it now
              Max:    ((whispered)) He'll never do it
```

When part of an utterance is delivered at a pace quicker than the surrounding talk, it is indicated by being enclosed between "less than" signs:

```
>< Steel:    the Guar:dian newspaper looked through >the
             manifestoes< la:st ↑week
```

6. Transcriptionist doubt

In addition to the timings of intervals and inserted aspirations and inhalations, items enclosed within single parentheses are in doubt, as in:

```
(    )        Ted:    I ('spose I'm not)
              (Ben):  We all (t-              )
```

Here "spose I'm not," the identity of the second speaker, and "t-" represent different varieties of transcriptionist doubt.

Sometimes multiple possibilities are indicated:

```
              Ted:    I(spoke to Mark)
                       ('spose I'm not)
              Ben:    We all try to figure a (tough angle   ) for
                                             (stuffing girl)
```

When single parentheses are empty, no hearing could be achieved for

the string of talk or item in question:

```
   Todd:   My (           ) catching
(     ):   In the highest (                   )
```

Here the middle of Todd's utterance, the speaker of the subsequent utterance, and the end of the subsequent utterance could not be recovered.

7. Gaze direction

The gaze of the speaker is marked above an utterance, and that of the addressee below it. A line indicates that the party marked is gazing toward the other. The absence of a line indicates lack of gaze. Dots mark the transition movement from nongaze to gaze, and the point where the gaze reaches the other is marked with an X:

```
Beth:    . . . .┌X_____
         Terry- └Jerry's fa┌scinated with elephants
Don:              . . . . . └X_____
```

Here Beth moves her gaze toward Don while saying "Terry"; Don's gaze shifts toward and reaches hers just after she starts to say "fascinated."

If gaze arrives within a pause each tenth of a second within the pause is marked with a dash:

```
Ann:                       . . .┌X_____
         Well (--- ┌-) We coulda used └a liddle, marijuana.=
Beth:              └X_____
```

Here Beth's gaze reaches Ann three-tenths of a second after she has said "Well-," and one-tenth of a second before she continues with "We coulda used. . . ."

Commas are used to indicate the dropping of gaze:

```
Ann:     _____
         Karen has this new hou:se. en it's got all this
Beth:    _____ , , ,
```

Here Beth's gaze starts to drop away as Ann begins to say "new."

Movements like head nodding are marked at points in the talk where they occur:

```
Ann:    _____
          Karen has this new hou:se. en it's got all this
Beth:   _____   , , ,              ((Nod))
```

Here Beth, who is no longer gazing at Ann, nods as the latter says "got."

Asterisks are used in a more ad hoc fashion to indicate particular phenomena discussed in the text. In the following fragment, for example, Goodwin uses them to indicate the position where Beth puts food in her mouth:

```
Ann:    _____
          =like- (0.2) ssilvery:: g-go:ld wwa:⌈llpaper.
Beth:                       *******  . . ⌊X_____
```

8. Applause

Strings of X's are used to indicate applause, with lower- and uppercase letters marking quiet and loud applause respectively:

```
Audience:    xxXXXXXXXXXXXXxxx
```

Here applause amplitude increases and then decreases.

An isolated single clap is indicated by dashes on each side of the x:

```
Audience:    -x-
```

Spasmodic or hesitant clapping is indicated by a chain punctuated by dashes:

```
Audience:    -x-x-x
```

A line broken by numbers in parentheses indicates the duration of applause from the point of onset (or prior object) to the nearest tenth of a second. The number of X's does *not* indicate applause duration except where it overlaps with talk, as in the second of the following examples:

```
Speaker:    I beg >to support the m↓otion<=
            ⊢————————(8.0)————————————⊣
Audience:   =x-xxXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXxxxx-x
```

```
Speaker:    THIS ↓WEEK  ⌜SO > THAT YOU CAN STILL MAKE⌝=
Audience:              ⌊xx–XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX⌋

Speaker:    =⌈⌈YER MINDS UP<
Audience:   =⌊⌊XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX ((edited cut))
```

9. Other transcript symbols

The left-hand margin of the transcript is sometimes used to point to a feature of interest to the analyst at the time the fragment is introduced in the text. Lines in the transcript where the phenomenon of interest occurs are frequently indicated by arrows in the left-hand margin. For example, if the analyst had been involved in a discussion of continuations and introduced the following fragment:

```
  Don:    I like that blue one very much
→ Sam:    And I'll bet your wife would like it
  Don:    If I had the money I'd get one for her
→ Sam:    And one for your mother too I'll bet
```

the arrows in the margin would call attention to Sam's utterances as instances of continuations.

Horizontal ellipses indicate that an utterance is being reported only in part, with additional speech coming before, in the middle of, or after the reported fragment, depending on the location of the ellipses. Thus, in the following example, the parts of Don's utterance between "said" and "y'know" are omitted:

```
Don:  But I said . . . y'know
```

Vertical ellipses indicate that intervening turns at talking have been omitted from the fragment:

```
Bob:   Well I always say give it your all

         .
         .
         .
Bob:   And I always say give it everything
```

Codes that identify fragments being quoted designate parts of the chapter authors' own tape collections.

Contents

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1. Introduction

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The present collection adds to a growing range of studies that report on recent research into naturally occurring social action and interaction undertaken from a conversation analytic perspective. Foreshadowed by the investigative initiatives of Harold Garfinkel and Erving Goffman into the organization of everyday conduct, this perspective was extensively articulated in Harvey Sacks's privately circulated lectures and developed into a distinctive research literature in association with his collaborators, Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson.

The central goal of conversation analytic research is the description and explication of the competences that ordinary speakers use and rely on in participating in intelligible, socially organized interaction. At its most basic, this objective is one of describing the procedures by which conversationalists produce their own behavior and understand and deal with the behavior of others. A basic assumption throughout is Garfinkel's (1967:1) proposal that these activities – producing conduct and understanding and dealing with it – are accomplished as the accountable products of common sets of procedures.

This objective and its underlying assumption provide a basic means of analysis. Specifically, analysis can be generated out of matters observable in the data of interaction. The analyst is thus not required to speculate upon what the interactants hypothetically or imaginarily understood, or the procedures or constraints to which they could conceivably have been oriented. Instead, analysis can emerge from observation of the conduct of the participants. Schegloff and Sacks have summarized the assumptions that guide this form of research, and the analytic resource thus provided:

> We have proceeded under the assumption (an assumption borne out by our research) that in so far as the materials we worked with exhibited orderliness, they did so not only to us, indeed not in the first place for us, but for the co-participants who had produced

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