## Conversational Discourse

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# Psycholinguistics

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Introduction

A woman collides on a sidewalk with a stranger:

(1) a. Woman to man: Oh, I'm sorry.
   b. Man to woman: I still say he's wrong about that. Jim.
      Anyway, honey, it's Tuesday.

What can you make of this imaginary encounter? The grammar of each sentence is acceptable. The woman's speech is an apology for the collision. Her "Oh," marks surprise, appropriate to an accident. But the man's speech is bizarre. He doesn't respond to the apology or make one himself. "Jim," and "honey," are address terms respectively to a man, and to a woman or child, so they are incoherent together to an adult woman. The address terms imply familiarity, but these are strangers. His topics do not follow either from the context or from any introduction of theme, so the topical sequence is incoherent. "Anyway," indicates recovery from a distraction, but there was no prior topic. "Still," is a third-turn form, which refers back to something the speaker said on an earlier turn or earlier encounter, yet there was none. "He" and "that" have no antecedents, so the reference is lost. Thus the conversation doesn't seem coherent, cooperative, or even interactive.

Linguists often ask listeners or readers to make sense, or to make judgments, about isolated invented sentences. As listeners in such tasks, we must invent contexts to try to make sense. This is to say that in our understanding of speech, as well as in our creation of speech, we bring our knowledge of the participants and of what is going on.

The analysis of utterance production begins with observing a talk in context rather than an isolated sentence, for sentences are an outcome of the talk situation, and both their structure and their meaning are changed by the purposes of talk. In this chapter we will examine what we mean by context, what the dimensions are by which discourse is structured, and how these affect the text.

In example (1) we have identified the events in the context, the relation of the participants to address terms, the turn structure, topic sequence, action (apology), and cohesion of pronouns with antecedents and appropriateness of markers with context as all affecting the listener's judgment. These domains are discussed below.

When people are engaged in talk, commonly they have a sense of a joint "activity" they are in, whether it is a baseball game or a conversation at a party. They alternate or collaborate in talking, or remain as audience, establishing a participation structure. Within the activity which sets up the talk, they have goals with respect to ideas and action, which we refer to below as the ideational and action levels. These may be shared or not; participants also contribute separately to defining the larger activity context, allowing situational shifts. The outcome is a text. The structure of the joint text is closely knit by structural knowledge, style, and also by aesthetic skill. The syntactic and lexical features of these texts are what psycholinguists who examine production often study.

Context

When a person comes to say something, even to a stranger, what we hear is not a random set of grammatical utterances. What is likely to occur can in part be known by shared context. Context, which is known before speech occurs, affects strongly what is likely to be said, how it is said, and how it is understood. At a baseball game you do not expect the umpire to shout recipes. Even in a noisy environment, what he says is sufficiently predictable as to be understandable most of the time.

The contextual features that make the biggest difference to speech are those of situation, participant status, participant social relations, and shared environment and knowledge. In turn, the interaction redefines or confirms these features. The reason we have any stable expectations in the social world is precisely because interaction occurs as it does. What is psycholinguistic about discourse then takes place within a powerful social nexus.

Context of situation

Erving Goffman (1963) made important distinctions between types of encounters between speakers and listeners which are basic to the construction of talk. He distinguished civil attentiveness, in which the other is normally ignored, from unfocused interaction, where people follow norms of public demeanor, and glance at one another as they pass into and out of view, and focussed interaction, where people cooperate with a common focus of attention. Goffman made acute observations about the problems of entering into and terminating focussed engagement, and about the issues of attention which constitute breaches, such as distractions during focussed engagement (e.g., looking in a mirror) or incursions of undesired involvement, such as street remarks from strangers. A street remark presents an unresolved dilemma to women, who must breach the etiquette of responding to summons or collide in an unwelcome exchange which breaches civil attentiveness (Gardner, 1984).

A situation can be recognized by the setting, personnel, and activities. Settings may have spatial organization, objects, and standing behavior patterns (Barker & Wright, 1954). These patterns can be instantiated in activities. For instance, a classroom normally is a setting for a class, but it could be the setting for a party, for a political speech, or for intimate conversation, which are different activities. We recognize these situational switches by the properties of the talk we hear. The personnel also have implications for activities. A two-year-old is less likely to be giving instruction than an adult.

Situations with names like classes, church services, trials, job interviews, and football games often are conventional situations. These involve norms, so violations of constraints on actions and speech are recognized and talked about in a community. During wartime or other civic crises, there has been debate in American colleges about whether a college professor or the students are on strike when the class moves...
Activity may be verbal or nonverbal—chatting is an activity. Jumping rope, disputing, cooking, and telling a story are activities. Activities may be parallel or joint between participants, and joint activities may involve complementary or similar roles. Knitting is a parallel activity, requiring no coordination between participants, so it allows unrelated talk at the same time. Bringing in groceries from the car is a joint activity, in which there can be similar or complementary roles—carrier and putteraway. Joint activities typically require some shared goals and shared notions about roles. The trajectories in joint activities allow speech to be used to direct during talk-in-action. In complementary roles, the speech of participants reflects roles. Control over participation structure—talk time and type of talk—is not the same for teacher and student, priest and congregation, lawyer and client, or doctor and patient. In language during a soccer game, for instance, there are recognizably different speech types occurring in the players, the coach, the umpire, and the onlookers because the function of talk is different for each role, though there may be overlap, such as coach-talk from teammates and onlookers.

Overlapping situations occur whenever there are two types of co-occurring activities with the same participants, such as knitting and talking. If one task requires no talk and little concentration, the situation is ideal for sociability, or overlapping personal talk, as in quilting or sewing or sorting in a canner. It is possible for a passenger in a car to intersperse sociable talk with route directions and for a driver to concurrently engage in sociable talk and drive. But there are limits; engaging talk can disrupt driving or cooking. In overlapping situations, participants can choose which to foreground in talk. Mealtime is a familiar situation of overlapping activities. Early talk about allocation of places, offering of food, or offering help may overlap with task- or sociable-talk.

In the following example of Thanksgiving dinner conversation with friends rather than family, consider how participants can identify which of the two overlapping contexts is at issue. (In these texts, \(=\) brackets overlaps, \(\approx\) is for latching or fast replies, (x) was unintelligible, * indicates emphasis):

(2) (Phone rings in household. Teenage girl picks it up, listens, covers the mouthpiece.)
Hey (*stupid! loud) [SUMMONS]
(Older brother comes to the phone.) [RESPONSE]
TR78

The sister has played with the familiar structure to accomplish two acts at once. By using an insult as a summons, she traps her brother into complicity with the insult through compliance with the summons.

**Activities**

Activities are fundamental to talk because they make evident whether talk is possible or necessary, establish roles that create speech options for participants, and in task-oriented situations, set up goals that constrain relevance. The activity of teaching, in a conventional classroom, constrains topics by roughly showing what is relevant and what is a sidetrack. Talk differs considerably when it is goal-oriented or transactional, or when it is personal.
Contextualization. In order to know how participants identify their situation or if there is overlap, what is foregrounded at the moment, we look for cues, such as posture, vocal indicators, register, code, and topics. Of course some situations can be changed; it would be hard to turn a baseball game into a mass because of setting, and personnel constraints. But it is not hard to turn a tutoring session or work conference into seduction. Learning how to alter situations verbally may be a practice defense.

Personnel

The number of participants in focussed engagement affects the dynamics. Two have an incentive to resolve conflicts, but in a group of four, there can be alliances, and a triad, one can be excluded, so interactional structure differs in these group form (Stimmel, 1902). A crucial factor in the dynamics of interaction is status equality or inequality.

Participant status. Just as there may be a situation suggested by a setting, but another developed by the participants (the classroom that is a site for a party), there can be participant status brought to the setting, in contrast to statuses constituted by the talk itself. Noticeable at the outset are clothing, gender, and physical attributes. You know whether the stranger before you is child or adult; baby talk is unlikely to an unfamiliar able-bodied adult (though nurses use it to adult patients). The importance of these features in steering interaction may be why we can be surprisingly confused when we cannot tell if a longhaired stranger is man or woman.

Ethnicity, national or regional background, social class, and education may become apparent through talk itself, since grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation are all sensitive indicators of social identity (Fasold, 1990). In an American high school, for instance, the pronunciation of vowels in peer talk can reveal not only clique membership, but also centrality in a clique (Eckert, 1989).

The division of labor demanded by a new situation may alter the relevance of prior status features. In an emergency, knowledge of CPR or of first aid may be more relevant than whether or not the participant is a teenager or an aged artist. The new context can demand a division between organizers, supervisors who control activities of others, and enablers who permit access to materials and information. On the other hand, status contrasts brought into a situation may be reinforced within. Jurisprudence to select as foreman those with high external social status. In the case of a jury there is an explicit vote, but other roles are self-nominated. The person with confidence who chooses to sit at the head of a table gains an advantage in dominating the talk. The speech may reveal to participants who has taken up what role—the role of organizer or supervisor may only be visible when one person begins to order others about.

Social relationships. Participants bring to the encounter relations with each other—strangers, friends, bosses, or parents, which differ along dimensions of power and of solidarity or distance. They can choose to foreground these relations or not, according to the situational context. Friendship deeply alters many features of talk; many generalizations in psycholinguistic research apply only to strangers.

Shared knowledge. The physical context of talk when people are copresent provides a common basis of reference with definite articles, pronouns, and gesture as in Text 4. We can talk about "the" sun because we all believe there is only one; it is hazardous to agree to meet at "the" airport if there is more than one, and experience shows disagreement about which is presupposed. Friends assume they share ideas; they rely on allusions and metaphors which presuppose common experience. When strangers talk more formally, ideationally focused, and complex in its language; to friends we use more emotive and vivid speech such as dramatizing dialogue in stories (Redeker, 1990; Tannen, 1989). Some of the theoretical reasons for these differences have been explored in a broad survey of language use by Clark (1985). Some similar contrasts have been found to differentiate middle- and working-class speech to strangers, with working-class speech to strangers more like familiar speech (Hemphill, 1989).

Participation structure

Turntaking by participants changes in various speech events, and roles in speech from audience to addressee to speaker. While turntaking is highly ritualized in some settings, such as church services, how do we manage to have organized timing in casual conversations? Conversational competence seems to require both paying attention to what partners say and making appropriate responses. Since all participants share the same speech stream, listening to another speaker might mean you have to be quiet until each speaker finishes. In a group, this requires everyone to pay close attention to others.

Mutual gaze, minimal speech overlap, and speech that is contingent on the other's in form, function, and topic—these are the clues used to show competent conversational engagement in an idealized view. An incompetent listener, in this view, would not gaze at the speaker, would display random gaps and overlaps in conversation, and would talk without regard to what was just said. What actually happens?

Detailed work on verbal turntaking has been provided by temporal studies of talk between American strangers in phone conversations (Brady, 1989) and in interviews (Jaffe & Feldstein, 1970), and by analysis of American natural conversations (Jefferson, 1973; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). In these studies, it was observed that adult Americans:

1. Overlap only briefly. Average overlap lengths in phone conversations of 0.25 seconds (Brady, 1989) and in interviews of 0.40 seconds (Jaffe & Feldstein, 1970) occupied only 4.49% or 3.29% of the speech time, respectively. Thus in these studies, over 95% of the time one speaker is talking at a time.
2. Allow very short gaps. Averages reported for stranger dyads were gaps of 0.40 seconds in adult phone conversations and 0.77 seconds in interviews. But a quarter of the time in stranger talk, there was silence. Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson called this feature "precision-timing" and pointed out that it is possible only if speakers can anticipate the end of a turn or are responsive to cues of termination, and if effectively locally managed devices for next speaker selection exist in multiparty conversation.

3. Overlap as competing first starts or at a "transition-relevant place." Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) and Jefferson (1973) noted that overwhelmingly listeners break in at points which would be plausible stopping places. They either interrupt just briefly with feedback, or they overlap at predictable tags (like O.K.), routines, or address terms. These may be cued by prosody or other surface indicators, or by content suggesting the speaker is ending the informational segment. Listeners have to be able to project such places and be ready to enter. Even requests for repairing poorly heard speech await the transition relevant place.

4. Remedy overlaps. When important material is overlapped, Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson noticed that speakers remedy by increasing volume, lengthening syllables, repeating, slowing down, or stopping. These remedies imply that speakers are concerned that speech be audible.

5. Select the next speaker in the group by name, gaze, body orientation, topic selection, or a "first" in a pair such as a question requiring an answer. Gaps at such points are the silences belonging to the next speaker. But selection isn't absolutely necessary, as we learn from the relative success of large group telephone conference calls, in which the only conscious adjustment is self-identification.

There has been a debate between those arguing that cues control turns (Duncan, 1972; Duncan & Fiske, 1977, Kendon, 1967) and those who suggest neither gaze nor prosodic cues are enough to explain switch (Ellis & Beattie, 1986; C. Goodwin, 1981), who insist that there is a social system at work.

The fast response feature of turntaking clearly makes strong demands on the processing of language by participants. Perhaps you have noticed how hard it is to interrupt with relevance in seminars. We see this problem in young children who have the greatest difficulty locating appropriate breaks in two-party talk so they can intervene (Ervin-Tripp, 1977). What seems to be required is not only an awareness of clause structure, but also following the topic sequence enough to notice when macro-units of talk are ending and there is no outstanding unfinished business like unanswered questions. That requires more than just attention; it requires figuring out the conversational structure.

Why does orderly turntaking exist? One explanation is utilitarian; speakers are really interested in what other people say. If this is the reason, we would predict more overlaps when speech is predictable or redundant. Jefferson (1973) noticed that in police phone conversations overlaps occurred during optional segments after crucial information, during recognition and acknowledgement of the information, or conversation-closing sequences. We would expect differences in overlap between different types of speech events or situations, expecting more overlap during redundant or predictable events such as praying or sports events. We would also expect more overlaps in social talk between intimates who share most information. We would expect overlapping of inferiors and children whose information is less valuable; West and Zimmerman (1983) found that men interrupt women more, though this may reflect another factor: dominance. West has found that some male patients interrupt even women doctors more, gender outweighing professional status (West, 1984). Ervin-Tripp (1977) noted that small children were interrupted more by older children and adults even when relevance of their talk was controlled. In such studies, age, acquaintance, and other factors affecting both status and overlapping must be controlled.

Another argument for turntaking has to do with politeness rather than utility or interest. This leads to ambiguous predictions, since there are, according to R. Lakoff (1973) and Brown and Levinson (1987), two kinds of politeness. Lakoff calls these rapport and deference; Brown and Levinson call them positive and negative politeness. If we want to be polite-positive we compliment by showing common interests and shared perspective. This effort can lead to fast replies with a minimum of gaps, revealing familiarity and what Tannen (1984) calls the "high-involvement style." But if we want to be deferential, we risk long gaps to avoid interruptions and allow speakers to continue. This leads to the prediction that intimacy and rapport lead to gap-minimizing and some overlaps, and deference to gap-maximizing with a minimum of overlaps.

Studies of different cultural groups have shown quite a lot of contrast in this dimension. Warm Springs Indian style (Phillis, 1972) maximizes gaps and calls for distance cues like gaze aversion, while East Indian English (Agrawal, 1976) and New York Jewish speech maximize overlaps (Tannen, 1984) and call for signs of involvement such as acknowledgements, simultaneous completions, accelerating pace, latching (immediate responses), agreements, and repetitions. In the positive politeness culture, overlaps are favored as a sign of cooperative, attentive listening. And of course we all recognize personal style differences here.

Speakers from low involvement communities find the high degree of overlap and the intensely paced talk of high involvement speakers to be rude. On the other hand, high involvement speakers regard not attending to topic, not following themes, monologuing, and allowing long gaps to be rude and inattentive.

The following text illustrates the high involvement style between two Californian college-age sisters, Mimi and Rae. In this case, the overlaps (bracketed by = =) appear to result from intimacy. Asterisks in the text indicate extra emphasis and periods indicate pauses. To get the flavor of this conversation read it aloud with another person:

(4) a M: hey there's what's her face she has a boyfriend ... um... *Joey.
b R: [laughs] [soft] oh yeah it 'might be her boyfriend from Fresno
c M: = yeah = ... she's cute.
d R: = (xxx) = so you decided to call Cindy?
e M: yeah... it's weird cause she's kinda - I don't know
f M: don't you think that she's kinda standoff - she's she's kinda
of choice in discourse

Speakers do more than divide the talk time. We will distinguish six levels at which choices are made by speakers, all of them consequential in talk: the level of topic, propositions, action, social features, key, and sometimes genre. All of these create the resulting text. The evidence suggests that we remember these features of speech better than the actual words used (Sacks, 1974; Hickman & Warden, 1991). Even when some of these levels are more salient, choices may occur on others. In hilarious conversation with lots of wisecracks the genre and key may be paramount in children's role-play, action may predominate; in a history classroom, the ideation or propositional level may be salient to major organization; in encounters at a part social relations may be at issue. But each conversation can have values on all of these dimensions.

Thematic structure

Conversational interaction involves a structure of topics. The choice of topic or ideational content is made at every point in the conversation except during fixed routines. We can ask who can initiate topics, how stable topics are in coherent speech, and how topics are supported or changed through propositional material.

Topic control is a factor in conversational power and inheres in some asymmetrical roles like teacher or presider. Topic uptake is a form of compliance, so it is not surprising that power is reflected in getting others to support one's topic. In some American studies (Fishman, 1983), women who initiate new topics are often less successful in getting topic uptake than are men. Role-derived privileges in topic choice include the right to initiate the first topic when you have summoned the bearer, as in a phone call. While topic control in transactional encounters is likely to be ascribed by status, in personal encounters between peers it is negotiated, and asymmetrical dominance can create tension.

Topics are initiated, supported, or changed. Clark and Schaefer (1999) have noted that participants must collaborate in starting and grounding a topic to establish shared belief that there has been mutual comprehension. Without this grounding, continuation on the topic cannot occur. Next turns, if there are no repairs, then display this shared understanding.

Side sequences for clarifying or repairing occur when there is some obstacle to this goal of comprehension. These practical repairs are of five types: (a) There is a
preference for self repair, such as we saw in conversation (4); (b) An addressee may make hearing or channel queries (huh?); (c) An addressee may make confirmation checks by repeating the prior turn or part of it; (d) The addressee can solicit or add extra information, supporting the first speaker's continuation; or, finally (e) The partner may expand a theme from a prior speaker, taking it over. A side sequence can carry out each practical repair (Cheeseman, 1988; Levinson, 1983; Jefferson, 1972). These side sequences are typically marked in a way that sets them off as units deviant from the thematic focus. "Oh," "anyway," and so on, are called by Redeker (1991) sequential transition markers. They help the listener to know whether to assume a topic and related thematic materials should be put on hold, or recovered and reestablished.

If we look back at the sisters' conversation (4), we see two distinct topic sections. The first three turns are stimulated by a contextual event, seeing a friend.

   (5)  a M: Hey there's what's her face she has a boyfriend ... um ... *Joey.
   b R: [laughs] [sof] Oh yeah it *might be her boyfriend from Fresno
   c M: = yeah = ... She's cute.

Though Mimi introduced this topic, Rae collaborated, confirming the topic with a feedback "yeah," and adding information. The confirmation response "yeah" was followed by an assessment in line (c) as a topic terminating move. In turn (d), Rae changed to a new topic by an elicitation oriented to Mimi's interests: Mimi's phone call to a friend about a job. This shift has a marker, "so."

   (6)  R: So you decided to call Cindy?

In the next lines there appears to be a common topic—the woman who was called—but the focus of the two speakers looks different. Mimi replied to the elicitation question by discussing the personality of Cindy.

   (7)  e M: Yeah. ... it's weird cause she's kinda I don't know/ don't you think that she's kinda she's kinda *standoff/ she's kinda- her n Jack are both kinda weird I think/

Rae responded to the first statement by interrupting and moving directly to an example, making fun of Cindy by mimicking her phone message. Her focus through the next lines is in getting this story produced. This vivid quote is an example of the informal narrative style used with friends.

   (8)  g R: She left this message.
   i She always goes she goes [(slow whiney] I'm calling for **Mii*mit]
   k Did you hear her message?
   m She goes [(slow whiney] I'm calling for *Mii*mit um if you want you can work at the music store. um tell her to call me. bye *Mii*mit]. [laughs]

The two speakers overlapped a good deal, so line (k) was Rae's move to get the floor to display the story about Cindy's weird message, which was at the same time a dramatic rendition, a confirmation of Mimi's assessment, and laughable.

In line (n) Mimi changed key and moved to a serious topic, the job mentioned in the phone message story. The next turn of Rae was a statement of solidarity which confirmed Mimi's topic. The topic of the job then preoccupied Mimi during a long turn after this segment.

   (9)  n M: == mhm mhm the thing is like ... here I know they're gonna hire me, and the thing is ... like I don't- I mean they have other people but she said = oh we'll call tomorrow =
   o R: = I'm totally like that though = I'll say.

The close knitting of topic offering, confirmation, and elaboration shows how good joint understanding was despite the large amount of overlapping. There were no examples of repairs of the sort illustrated by Clark and Schaefer except some false starts.

Continuity of topic ranges from strong maintenance in formal, task-oriented encounters to the very loose constraints of personal talk among intimates during nonverbal activity, such as sewing, knitting, or fishing. In some texts of this sort, speakers follow their own topics and seem not to be constrained by the partner's topic, as if using the other merely as audience in talking to oneself. Studies of differences in topical focus suggest it to be a cultural feature; for example, American girls have been found to have more topical continuity and topic focus than boys in conversations with best friends (Tannen, 1990).

In personal conversations topics can be individually created and relatively coherent, as in narrative rounds, or they may show gradual drift. In types of talk having topical constraints, global topic shifts may be revealed by sequential markers like "okay," and "so" before shifts or summaries, even in monologues. Within topics, the structure of support, continuation, and disagreement is maintained by propositional relations marked by discourse operators, "a word or phrase—for instance, a conjunction, adverbial, comment clause, interleaver," (Redeker, 1991) such as "but," "however," "if," and "then," or, sometimes, "still."

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**Action**

**Adjacency pairs**

Conversational engagement is expressed through adjacency pairs. These are sequences of moves, when a first occurs, the second is awaited. This second is usually matched at several levels, or it will be heard as incoherent. If there is a mismatch, the hearer still seeks a match by inferring a link, or by soliciting the second turn or some account for its absence (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973, pp. 205–206; Heritage, 1984, pp. 245–253).

The basic structure is well illustrated by phone conversations:

   (10)  a C [ring] [SUMMONS]
   b R Hello. [RESPONSE]
preference for self repair, such as we saw in conversation (4); (b) An addressee may make hearing or channel queries (huh?); (c) An addressee may make confirmation checks by repeating the prior turn or part of it; (d) The addressee can solicit or add extra information, supporting the first speaker's continuation; or, finally (e) The partner may expand a theme from a prior speaker, taking it over. A side sequence can carry out each practical repair (Cheepen, 1988, Levinson, 1983; Jefferson, 1972). These side sequences are typically marked in a way that sets them off as units deviant from the thematic focus. "Oh," "anyway," and so on, are called by Redeker (1991) sequential transition markers. They help the listener to know whether to assume a topic and related thematic materials should be put on hold, or recovered and reestablished.

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Within topics, the structure of support, continuation, and disagreement is maintained by propositional relations marked by discourse operators, "a word or phrase—for instance, a conjunction, adverbial, comment clause, interjection,” (Redeker, 1991) such as "but," "however," "if," and "then," or, sometimes, "still."

Action

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The basic structure is well illustrated by phone conversations:

(10) a C [ring] [SUMMONS]
   b R Hello. [RESPONSE]
In this example, the initial summons-response is in turns (a-b). In turn (c), which is typical of American phone calls, (C) greets with a familiar form. A return greeting is obligatory for (R), who is supposed to recognize (C)'s voice. There are thus two adjacency pairs, (a-b) and (c-d).

Is this phone call pattern universal? In England a common (b) response is to give the respondent's name “Smith here.” Some French consider Americans’ use of turn (c) to be rude; they would supply a self-identification with the caller's greeting, even when the person who picks up the phone isn’t the ultimate target of the call (Goddard, 1977). Everywhere summons obligate replies, but the requirement to presuppose or supply particular information seems to be culture specific. Cross-cultural, cross-ethnic, and cross-regional studies are an important facet of the study of conversational features.

When we examine the turns in a dialogue like (11), we notice that they do seem to be paired as initiations and responses. New initiations can occur in the same turn with a response, making a closely knit dialogue. In the following conversation, each turn by Ann reinstates the request, and each turn by the mother makes a refusal.

(11) [family valentine construction. Ann is 7.5]
   a Ann: Mommy I don’t want to make 18 so why don’t you help me. I mean twenty eight I have to make. [REQUEST]
   b Mot: Hmm? You can do that. [REFUSE]
   c Ann: Mother! [REQUEST]
   d Mot: You have a whole week. [JUSTIFY REFUSAL]
   e Ann: I know but you’re supposed to all make em today. [DENY ASSERT]
   f Mot: No you don’t have to make them all today. [DENY]

This conversation began a series of 12 requests and hints from Ann to try to capture her mother’s help. As the first in an adjacency pair, (a) sets up an expectation that the mother must soon respond to the request. Turn (b) can be heard as a refusal by inference, because it follows (a), is spoken by the person addressed in (a), and will therefore be interpreted as relevant to (a). Though mother does not explicitly say, “I won’t help you,” the turn is interpreted as a refusal since “you can do that” removes a reason for helping, and therefore recognizably justifies a refusal in this cultural milieu where direct refusals are avoided.

Each move Ann makes can be heard as reinstating her request, and each reply by the mother as strengthening her refusal, but these relations are in each case not explicit. They are accomplished by inference.

Exchanges

The action structure of a speech event concerns the function of talk in getting things done. Our language has many names for these speech acts: requests, commands, assertions, compliments, lies, promises, threats and so forth. While many of these acts take on conventional forms—‘hi’ is unambiguously a greeting—others are less obvious. We shall see that their formal diversity arises from the fact that they can serve several action functions at once, and also convey social relations and affect.

In a commercial shop, “It’s six” could imply “lock up.” The speech events in which we talk set up expectations for many action implications. Even many children of age five tell us that, “Is the door open” will get someone to open a door for a mom with a big bag of groceries. They can understand enough about a familiar situation to look for what needs to be done.

Many of these moves seem to call for typical replies, building up a series of exchanges. Summons call for responses, greetings call for greetings, invitations for acceptance or rejection, questions for answers, requests for compliance or refusal. This is a system of norms recognizable by reactions to an unexpected reply.

The exchange system is a local system, which is managed turn by turn. The evidence that participants orient to these expectations is strong. Unless there is an excuse, the next turn by whoever speaks next, if the addressee is not specified, is taken as conditionally relevant. That is, the next turn might be viewed as a possible reply. Not speaking is heard as a selected addressee’s silence; such a pause is likely to be interpreted as a problem. If no candidate reply occurs, the expectation is maintained, so that there can be insertion sequences, typically for repair, and still there is a return to the suspended action.

(12) Ordering beer.
   a A: May I have a bottle of Mich? [REQUEST]
   b B: Are you 21? [SIDE QUERY]
   c A: No [SIDE RESPONSE]
   d B: No [REFUSE]

Merritt, 1976, p. 333

In this sequence, the second turn is clearly not a reply to the first. The reply to the query in (a) is suspended until there is a reply to a contingent query in (b). We see the contingent query and response as an insertion sequence (b-c) inside the adjacency pair (a-d). In some cases these insertions are quite complex, but participants succeed in keeping track.

The principle of adjacency pairs has reflexes in the participant structure of the talk; the first part implies a turn soon to come so it creates dialogue. The other reflex is in the action structure. When the first part is conventional or “on record,” the addressee or implicated participant is constrained in terms of verbal response types. When the action is merely implied, the addressee has the choice of completely ignoring it (unless it is a question), or of responding to the manifest text level only, or to the action proposal, or to both. If I say, “Do you know where the post office is?” and your reply is “Yes,” you are responding to the manifest text level only and ignoring the implied request, which is for location information.
In a telephone study in California, Clark (1979) separated these two levels. He had people call merchants with various formats of questions (See Table 6.1). At the text or literal level, question (A) calls for a specific time reply and question (C) calls for a yes/no reply. However, in an indirect culture, where the listener is supposed to make cooperative inferences about goals, the respondent to a yes/no question might also guess the desire to know the time, and give a dual answer. "No, at ten" gives a first answer cohesive with the surface form, and a second answer compliant with an implied information request.

In the following results, P is surface cohesion by a polarity yes/no reply and T is a response to an inferred time request:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>BOTH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Could you tell me the time you closed?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Would you mind telling me the time you closed?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Do you close before seven?</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In (A), "Could you?" is just heard as a polite marker by all the respondents, who ignore the surface form of the polarity question (e.g., "At 8"). The more elaborate and less frequent form of (B) calls attention to the question format and leads to an additional surface answer cohesion by a quarter of the respondents, "No, we close at 8." Question (C) does not make explicit the request for exact closing time, yet even with a very explicit polarity question, most not only answered the surface question, but went beyond to add surplus information "No, we close at 8."

There are two contrasting theories about how this kind of understanding of what speakers want can occur. One theory is based on a set of principles of conversations which allows listeners to go beyond what is said by making inferences (Levinson, 1983, pp. 97-106). This theory was developed by Grice, who stated "maxims" about what people assume conversation is like. He believed that deviation from what is culturally expected pushes people to make inferences. The themes of these expectations include cooperation, brevity, truth, and relevance. In this view listeners try to account for unexpected features on these dimensions and thus discover nonliteral, indirectly expressed meanings. It seems to be the cooperativeness of addressees that leads them to seek for goals in conversation beyond those stated explicitly, and to provide the additional information noted by Clark and Schaefer. Another theory is that understanding is "locally negotiated," based on the informational detail in adjacency pairs. The preference system illuminates this approach.

Preference system

Close study of American adult talk has shown that there is an asymmetry in adjacency pair second parts. One type of reply is different in that it is quicker, so it looks more spontaneous. This has been termed the preferred response. Preferred responses include accepting an invitation, answering a question, complying with a request, accepting an offer, agreeing with an assessment, disagreeing with other's self-deprecation, thanking for a compliment, and denying blame, (just as denial of guilt is preferred in the legal system). On the other hand, turning down an invitation, side-stepping a question, refusing an offer, disagreeing, agreeing with another's self-criticism, accepting blame seem to be marked, or dispreferred (Atkinson & Drew, 1979, p. 112; Heritage, 1984, pp. 265-268). How can we tell?

The dispreferred second turns found in American and English texts were delayed or displaced, and were marked or elaborated by preface markers like "well...", "token agreements, apologies, mitigations, hedges, indirection, explanations, or excuses. Speakers seeking agreement or compliance from partners can use this knowledge of preference marking. If they expect immediate and overlapping agreement, they note the presence of a delay of or dispreferred markers and make remedies even while in the first turn in the exchange (Pomerantz, 1984). Quick dispreferred responses without these added markers of norm awareness can be heard as rule—though of course they can be done as wit. This system maximizes the likelihood of socially solitary moves, by delaying disaffiliative moves, according to sociologists (Heritage, 1984, p. 276).

If we examine answers to WH-questions and compare expected and unexpected replies, we can find support for this analysis of dispreference. The marker "well" occurs in 56% of answers to WH-questions that don't give an expected reply, but occurs in 14% of expected answers. Simple yes/no replies to polarity yes/no questions almost never are prefaced by "well," but we find this dispreferred marker in 48% of the other types of replies (Schiffrin, 1987, p. 107). The less in agreement the answer with the questioner's framework, the more likely one will find "well." This is an example of a pragmatic discourse marker which marks both a turn unit and a feature of action.

What is especially valuable in this reliance on local cues of preference analysis is that it allows us to check for preferences in any cultural behavior by observing rather than just interviewing. We have to start with some obvious case and see what the features that identify the dispreferred reply are for this group of speakers, then look at all the other examples to identify what is the cultural or group preference.

A nice example of cultural factors is the problem of compliments. What is the quick or "preferred" response to a compliment? East Asian immigrants to the United States are surprised to see the preference for agreement dominant in giving thanks for compliments; for many of them, immediate disagreement and self-deprecation is required by the value of humble self-presentation.

Closing

A common example of the structure of action is the closing of conversations. In phone conversations, the caller gets to bring up the first topic, but some topics are delicate and may be hard to introduce in an appropriate and coherent way, so they may still be pending at parting. In phone closings, people don't just suddenly say
"goodbye" unless interrupted. Instead, there are several turns in the closure, as in this example:

(13) [B has called to invite C, but C is going out to dinner]
    a. B: Yeah. Well get on your clothes and get out and collect some
    b. of that free food and we'll make it some other time Judy then.
    c. C: Okay then Jack.
    d. B: Bye bye.
    e. C: Bye bye.

Schegloff and Sacks, 1973, p. 87

In this text, turn (a) anticipates closure of the conversation with "well," and by projecting a vague future encounter, and leaves an opening if (C) has more to say. A new topic could be introduced at this point, but it would be marked as dispreferred. Only when the "O.K." in turn (c) ratifies agreement on closure and reveals that there is no topic on the table, can they proceed to say goodbye. This closing exchange involved only two adjacency pairs.

Four steps have been found in such closures in American phone conversations (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973): finishing a topic; topicless passing turns to ensure there is nothing left to say; optional appropriate ends like an apology, summary, or "thank you" and various warrants for closing; the final farewells. In the above example we see only the summary, passing turn, and farewells.

Pre-sequences

The first line of conversation 13 is called a preclosing since it indicates a closure is coming. There are also preinvitations, such as "Are you busy Tuesday?" and prerequests like "Is there any coffee left?" (Schegloff, 1980). These presequences are an indirect means of avoiding embarrassment to the speaker. They give an opening to the addressee to make an offer, or avoid having one's invitation turned down or having a request refused (Levinsow, 1963, pp. 356-364). In this ingenious analysis, the form of indirect requests such as "Can you help me?" suggests they began as prerequests and became conventionalized. By raising questions about ability and availability, a speaker can suggest a trajectory of action without specifying it on record, and thus save face by avoiding refusal.

"Is there any coffee left?" or "Is Sybil there?" "Have you got the time?" have become familiar in place of on-record requests (Ervin-Tripp, 1976; Brown & Levinson, 1987). They may lead directly to compliance, but as adjacency pairs they do not call conversationally for the "O.K." of compliance, so they are distinguishable from conventional requests like "Can you help me?" or "Could you tell me the time you close?" This difference tells us that though they are unambiguous as requests in context, they are nonetheless off-record as the first of an adjacency pair. On the other hand, in recalls, they are reported as requests, for example, "He asked for Sybil" (Hickmann & Warden, 1991). As we shall see, these contrasts play a role in social relations.

Social features

The social dimensions which are at issue in linguistic marking of social relations have been identified in two different theories. Brown and Gilman (1969) called them power and solidarity, when they analyzed the European pronominal contrasts which use a high form like "usted" or "vous" in Spanish and French both to superiors in age or rank, and to strangers (Brown & Gilman, 1960). P. Brown and S. Levinson (1987) elaborated the notion of "face," originally an Asian idea about one's reputation, which had been taken up as a theme of social self-presentation by Goffman. They altered the idea in two ways. First, it had been a notion of the speaker's own face, which combined dignity of demeanor with appropriateness in behavior to others. They changed the notion of face to an attempt to help satisfy an addressee's needs. Taking up a proposal of R. Lakoff, they suggested two dimensions: avoiding imposition and maintaining the addressee's autonomy, which they called "negative face." Expressing positive affect and esteem was the other, which they called "positive face." These dimensions are important when speakers "threaten face" by requests, offers, and so on, and thus must remedy the threat by a variety of tactics which they have found in many languages (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The poles they discuss seem to express the solidarity-distance dimension of R. Brown, but not the power dimension, which is more indirectly involved in verbal choices in their analysis than in Brown and Gilman's.

Address terms

Recall the conversation in which the sister, answering the phone, summons her brother with "Hey stoppid!" The action involved, a summons, is obvious because it followed the phone ring, it was prefaced by an attention getting "hey," and it was shouted. The summons is accomplished by an address term which has social content, an insult. Address terms may be used to get someone's attention, but they also occur for other functions. In persuasion and in arguments, address terms can increase in frequency. Names always do two things at once; they serve a function such as calling attention; they also convey information about social relations or about emotion or both.

In every society, naming is the outcome of a semantic choice system, typically involving setting (Your Honor), age of addressee (Bobby), kinship, relative status, gender, occupation, and possibly marital status (Ervin-Tripp, 1973). In any extended family, a list of the address terms will contain indicators of familiarity, distance, and generation. Overlaid on these regular names are variants which reflect situational and affective factors, for example the contrast between choice of nicknames and endearments in families.

Reference to people (Judge Barrows, Joe, Dad, Grams, Honey, Uncle Joe) displays similar variation (Ervin-Tripp, 1973), and the use of "we" and "you" is sensitive to issues of classification, inclusion, and exclusion. "Why do you vote that way?" may imply the general "you," the specific single "you" of the addressee, or the "you" of a
An American address system

In these systems, markers of distance and of respect are collapsed, so a 60-year-old woman cannot tell when she is first-named by a car salesman or a dentist if it is through friendliness, lack of respect, or condescension. The baby talk she receives in a nursing home or a hospital is easier to interpret.

But European systems are relatively simple. In Asia, two Korean women who meet for the first time must spend time establishing age of graduation, marital status, and if relevant, job status and number of sons. This stage is necessary to know how to talk. In Southeast Asia (e.g., Japan, Korea, Java), style level in terms of syntax and vocabulary throughout all speech is tuned to context and to the social features of the relationship of the speaker to the addressee as well as to persons named in the talk. A Vietnamese or Korean child who does not speak with respect features to an older person would be punished. The contrasts, which in Korean mark every verb and many nouns, are very obvious.

Requests

(14) Constructed examples
   a. Hey lady move your car.
   b. Ma'am, if you could move that car.
   c. Pardon me, that car is in the way.

The function of address terms is usually clear enough so the address term can be used just to convey social meaning. Requests are far more complex because the hearer must figure out both the social message and the action message. If I say "it's cold here," do I want you to do something about it or not? [Ervin-Tripp, 1976].

When speakers are in a cooperative relationship, or when the trajectory of action is obvious or conventional, speakers can use minimal cues and the action will be understood, leaving the form free to carry social and affective information.

Typically, a request is fitted into a sequence which includes attention-getters, framing moves, the request itself, supporting information which precedes or follows, and a reply along with its justifications. And there may be remedies if the reply doesn't fit the initiator's needs.

(15) [Two friends are indoors at a birthday party, Eliza (6) is outdoors with an adult]
   a. Ann (7): Oh, they're going in the back yard!
   i. [Hester (8) knocks on the window.] [SUMMONS]
   j. Hester: No! Eliza No! [PROHIBITION]
   k. Ann: Hester, don't open the . . . [grabs arm. H stops]
   l. Hester: No, don't show her. Don't show her! Don't show her. [EXPLICIT PROHIBITION]
   m. Hester: (pleading voice) It's secret! [JUSTIFICATION]
   UCBdisclab:Cannon21

In this scene, Hester's awareness of a problem was evoked in turn (a), but it was not until turn (i) that she made an inference and moved into immediate action with an attention-getter, a loud and simple prohibition, and a justification.

Tactics such as the use of prerequisites or hints can forestall making a conventional request. Often these seem emergent, not planned. They include giving reasons, forestalling intervention, neutralizing obstacles, changing the context, and getting the hearer to be aware of the speaker's goals. These hints were found most often either in cases where the speaker didn't feel authorized to make a request, or when there was such cooperative interaction there was no need to be explicit.

A request can be formulated as an order, as an offer, or as a permission request, with different social implications. Requests which are expressed as an offer or permission request give the hearer the right to refuse, in form if not in reality.
Conventional requests include imperatives, needs and wants, and requests which are qualified with deference markers like conditionals and modals.

(16) Cleaner to older boss: I could use some furniture polish.

Ervin-Tripp, 1976, p. 30

The elaboration of these mitigating features leads to the possibility of marking social relations overtly while keeping the request explicit:

(17) Teenager to friend’s mother:
Do you have any water that I could drink?

This question contains both an availability prerequisite, and a permission request containing a conditional. These three features together make a strong social statement.

Social variation. The form of requests is delicately related to social features, as the following example supplied by H. Sacks reveals:

(18) A couple is tasting herring with a stepfather:

a) W: Bring some out, so that Max could have some too.

b) W: Geschmack. Hmm. Oh it’s delicious! Ben could you hand me a napkin please?

The imperative in (a) is permitted by the shared host role with a common goal of benefitting a guest. In (b) when the beneficiary is herself, and the task is not part of the expected role of the hearer, the conventional polite request, conditional, and “please” are all used. Possibly the address term, too, is a mitigator.

In American English, usage varies with region and class. In middle-class adult speakers, subordinates are most likely to be given statements of need and imperatives; equals are likely to be given hints allowing for humor and sharing of assumptions, unless explicitness is needed so they use imperatives. To superiors, questions and hints appear when compliance is not certain; otherwise we choose permission requests and conventionally polite requests “Could you, would you mind . . . ” which contain overt markers of politeness (Ervin-Tripp, 1976). Such mitigations are characteristic of demands made outside the normal role of the addressee—that is, for special favors. Mitigating features in cases where compliance is doubtful begin to appear in preschool children even in usage with other children, and in role play where they symbolize status (Ervin-Tripp, Guo, & Lampert, 1980). Of course, aggravation is a direction of social modification which can be richly elaborated, too, especially when rights are violated or the addressee is of lower power. We found good examples from U.S. Marine sergeants.

Since the form of requests corresponds to social relationships, requests can be a good territory for status haggles, Goodwin found that in boys’ groups, directness, aggravation, and hierarchy were apparent in directives. In girls’ groups, there were more suggestions for future action, and less hierarchical differentiation by directives—except when girls talked to boys or younger children, or took on roles in play (M. Goodwin, 1990).

Mitigation upward is so automatic in adults that it can actually be life-threatening. In a study of flight crew communications in airplane accidents, Linde (1986) found that lower status members of flight crews tended to use indirect, mitigated suggestions to the pilot, and that these warnings were the least likely to be understood.

Key

The key of an interactional situation is the general tone of seriousness, task orientation, levity, playfulness, which can affect the interpretation of particular moves, and alter distance or solidarity. Rae’s whining tone in making Cindy in example (4) affects our interpretation of the quotations. Key constitutes a major contextualization cue for deciding how to interpret meaning. “When you say that, smile” refers to the many terms which can be intimate in one key and insulting in another, such as bitch and bastard. One way to check on the cues of key is to examine how you know when someone is joking. Requests, for example, can be serious or mock. The key of a conversation can shift, affecting a whole situation or text.

Telling jokes can be an activity, but much more often wit occurs in personal conversations, to serve other purposes by the construction of something laughable, as in the example below of spontaneous humor. This exchange followed a long description by Helen of how she made cappuccinos at her job in a cafe, and how Bill had been served a bad one. It was topically relevant but changed the key:

(19) a) Edie: === I can’t wait until McDonald’s gets *espressos and *cappuccinos they *will
b) Helen: === Yeah
c) Lynn: That’ll really be *good
d) Edie: mac mc = mcexpresso =
    = mcexpresso =
e) Helen: = mc =
f) Lynn: = mc = mepuccino =
g) Edie: (laughs) mepuccino = mcexpresso =
h) Bill: = mepuccino o my god =
i) Lynn: It sounds like = uh al = pacino (laughs).
j) Edie: = al pacino =
k) Edie: Yeah [laughs] yeah they’ll have al *pacino do the
    “publicity for it **yeah [laughs]

(UCBDiScLab: CCON2)

The joint construction of humor in this passage is typical of friendly groups (all were females except Bill, who provided the evaluation). Duetting (Falk, 1980) occurs in (i-j), where Edie completed the sentence Lynn had begun before Lynn finished.

The success of humor depends strongly on shared attitudes and knowledge. In this case, awareness of the naming creativity of the McDonald’s chain and of movie
stars like Al Pacino were necessary. Humor depends so delicately on the timing and awareness that shared knowledge cannot be created by explicitness as it can in disputes, narratives, or other genres. Explaining a joke often destroys its humor.

What we finally hear is the text of the conversation, the actual words that we study as a transcript, including intonation, vocal qualities and gestures, which all contribute to the meaning the hearer interprets.

Sometimes the surface features cluster in recognizable types we call registers, such as sportscaster talk, sermons, and stewardess style, which are identified with certain event, genre, or role. The characteristics of these genres are so recognizable they can be parodied.

(20) a About ready to replace the wiring, Eric?
   b That’s right, Bob. I’ve run the wiring around the joists and I’m about ready to shimmy the grout into the holes I’ve made with my inch-and-a-half chisel punch.

   J. Carroll, S. C. Chronicle 3/22/81

This text is from a column making fun of home repair television shows. We recognize that this is too wordy for normal talk while doing everyday repairs; it is hyperexplicit instructional talk. The oddness is enhanced by specialized vocabulary possibly invented and known only to experts.

In a sketch recorded by improvisational artists Elaine May and Mike Nichols, May played a flight attendant whose husband expressed despair at her emotional distance. Her voice has the calm, monotonous manner of flight attendants, the comedy lying in the inappropriateness of tone to the marital crisis.

(21) a W: I’m preparing breakfast, but if you’d rather go without it I’ll certainly hold it back for you.
   f H: = No, look = I can’t *stand it any more, do you *understand me I can’t *bear it, I’m getting *out, I *quit, I want a *divorce.
   g W: We-ell, if you *do feel that *way about it, I’d *suggest that you *wait until perhaps *3 pm when I *will be back from shopping at the beautiful *Saks Fifth Avenue.

   Nichols & May, 1989

These different types of talk, varying in vocabulary, sentence types, sometimes also in pitch and pronunciation, are called registers. Baby-talk, the speech you use to two-year-olds, is a good example, familiar to everyone. But special registers appear in many job contexts. The test is whether they are recognizable out of context. The choice of register is based on contextual factors, which is why misplacement is funny (courtroom speech to a baby, baby-talk to a judge, flight attendant style to a husband). Register is a coherent choice, so that speakers do not shift register within a setting without conveying social meaning.

Within communities of multilingual speakers code-switching between languages refers to language choice. Situational code-switching involves switching at the boundaries of change in major situational factors like setting, addressee, or situation. In Puerto Rico, English is required by law in the federal court, but Spanish might be used between speakers off the record. A public lecturer using classical Arabic switches to colloquial Arabic to talk informally face-to-face about the same topic (Ferguson, 1959). Conversational code-switching refers to juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages with features from different language systems. Switching occurs unconsciously and automatically in informal conversations on the basis of personal meaning, for example, it might occur between greeting and first topic, between a command and persuasive justification or a repeated insistence.

(22) Come here, come here. Ben aca!

Gumperz, 1982

Switches occur for quotations, to specify addressee, as interjections, to get attention, to intensify by repetition, to elaborate, qualify, personalize or objectify, to change function or action or topic. The most general effect of code-switching is to provide a contextualization cue of the cultural or personal framework for the interpretation of the content (Scotton & Ury, 1977; Gumperz, 1982, pp. 59-95).

Bilingual code-switching is not structurally random; it provides a nice marker of the seams of speech for psycholinguists. Switching most often occurs before noun (as borrowings), between large units like clauses, noun phrase subjects and predicates (but not between pronominal subjects and predicates or in ellipsis), between nouns and prepositional phrases, between conjunctions and clauses, but not within integrated units like idiomatic phrases, nor can switching oscillate within a list or a phrase. Generally each segment must have some semantic independence and permit emphasis (Gumperz, 1982; Poplack, 1980).

(23) [making valentines]

(7.5) a A: Mommy I don’t want to make 18 so why don’t you help me.
   b A: I mean 28 I have to make.
   c M: Hi? You can do that.
   d A: Mother!
   e M: You have a whole week.
   f A: I know but we’re supposed to make ‘em today.
   g M: No you don’t have to make them all today.

UCBDiscLab:Cannon1

Texts often are coherent, in the sense that their structure of actions lead to the same goals, or the ideational structure contains topics and propositions that fit together. Of course, in casual conversation, especially secondary to other activities,
frequent topic jumps are common and conversations may not appear to be coherent. Texts are also often structurally cohesive, in that there are linguistic features which co-refer, substitutions, ellipsis, and connectives (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). “That,” in turn (c) co-refers with the verb identified in line (b). “Them” in lines (f) and (g) corefers with 18 and 28 valentines which have been talked about earlier in (a) and (b). Valentines are also referred to by ellipsis in (a) and (b) where numbers are used but “Valentines” are understood. A more complex ellipsis that relies on the text for interpretation is “You have a whole week to make the valentines.” “I know” of (f) implies the preceding turn = ‘I have a whole week,’ and the turn in (g) is a negative repetition of (f).

Another structural way to make a cohesive text is through the use of reply markers and connectives. In this short text there are three reply markers: “hm,” “I know,” and “no,” and three connectives: “so” which conveys that the first clause supplies a justification for the second, “but” which implies a contradiction, and “and” which marks a repair. These connectives thus supply not only cohesion but information about the ideas in dispute, that is, the propositional structure (Schiffrin, 1977).

These markers and connectives sometimes mark turn starts, that is the participation structure, sometimes mark pragmatic relationships such as compliance with a request, sometimes mark propositional relationships such as temporal sequence, and sometimes mark the global structure of the discourse, by indicating new topics, repairs, side sequences, interruptions, or restarts.

Genre

Conversation 23 can also be analyzed as a dispute in which there is a set of moves and responses thematically related. In a dispute there is a disagreement through three turns. In move (a), Ann supplies a justification for the help she explicitly requests. Her mother's response move takes two turns, (c) and (e) which are linked in the propositional system by an implicit causal relation. In (f), Ann rejects her mother's argument, trying to remove her mother's reasons for refusal. In (g), the mother in turn rejects the argument in (f).

This is a typical dispute, which moves through a series of linked arguments. These arguments, which are at the ideational level of the structure of interaction, have reflections in the text forms. The forms particularly relevant to disputes are the “so” identifying a relation of justification to request, the “I know but” which marks agreement plus the elaboration of a new argument which implies a disagreement, and the “No you don’t . . .” + repetition, which directly contradicts the previous turn. These forms help us identify that the genre involved is a dispute.

Sometimes the first thing we recognize about a text is what is called its genre—whether it is a dispute, a joke, a riddle, a story, a poem, or a news report. Certain genres are systematically situated in speech events. The sermon and the prayer are parts of church services, the cross-examination is part of a trial, a joke can begin an after-dinner speech, the story can occur at bedtime. Others arise in the course of other talk, as strategies. The dispute in (24) was incidental to an unsatisfied request.

Stories can be used to support or contradict claims, to persuade, to joke, to support requests or settle disputes (M. Goodwin, 1980). All of these types of talk may serve more complex purposes in discourse.

How do we recognize a genre? Consider the following text:

(24) a  L: . . . you had sexual intercourse on a previous occasion
   b  E: you haven't you?
   c  L: Yes.
   d  W: Not many.
   e  L: Several?
   f  W: Yes.
   g  L: With several men?
   h  W: No.
   i  L: Just one?
   j  W: Two.
   k  L: Two. And you are seventeen and a half?
   l  W: Yes.

Levinson, 1979, p. 380

What makes this obviously a cross-examination is three properties. The language in (a) is formal and explicit, with none of the slang, humor, indirectness, hesitation, and markers of surprise or of affect that might mark personal or friendly talk on such a topic. The participation structure is question and answer, with minimal replies. The questions are not open-ended and neutral, but are built with presupposed replies to suggest a particular inference—in this case, the experience of the woman in relation to her age. Contrast this recognizable genre with the next, also in a transactional or nonpersonal conversation:

(25) a  L: What was it leading to?
   b  A: It was leading to the technician apprenticeship I mentioned.
   c  L: Oh I see, yeah.
   d  A: Yeah.
   e  L: Yeah. Right. And . . . did you complete, you completed that?

In this very different type of stranger text, an interview, a job training center interviewer used a relatively relaxed, informal style, displaying surprise in (c), and hesitation, topic boundary marking, and rewording in (e). She proceeded slowly, rather than trying to get the candidate off-guard by rapid questioning. The interviewer's first question is unsolicited and solicits formulation by the candidate. The agreement feedback in (c) and the echoing in (d) and (e) suggest affective cooperation. Solidarity features can also be found in commercial contexts when commitments are sought. The recognizability of the genre of cross-examination arises both from the adversarial relationship and the institutional features of the court.
Stories

In contrasting decontextualized sentences and those in authentic texts among friends, the most striking shift is in the degree of ellipsis, or omission of surface elements, and of cohesion that occurs. The following text belonged to a set of rounds of narratives about a recent earthquake. Art and Neal are English brothers who are students in California, Olga is Neal’s female friend, Cass is her roommate.

(26) a Art: You know... you know that nice glass china display case in our dining room?
   b Neal: == in the dining room.
   c Cass: ooohh.
   d Neal: flashed
   e Cass: forget it
   f Neal: absolutely flashed
   g Art: == whole thing == absolutely == yeah
   h Neal: == every single bit of glass and pottery in the ==
   i Olga: == and crystal?
   j Neal: == all the crystal flashed
   l Art: == crystal
   m Neal: == everything flashed
   n Cass: ooooh my *gaaawd

UCBDiselab: QUAKE

This text is an example of duetting (Falk, 1990), a participation structure in which several people collaborate to produce utterances. There are two duetting story tellers; an evaluation from Cass (c, n) and a prompt from Olga (l). The repetition with elaboration by the story tellers gives dramatic emphasis by a kind of acceleration. The first line sets the scene by identifying the characters in a typical story introduction. The event telling begins with a single predicate, "shattered" (d), then expansion of the predicate comes with an adverb, "absolutely shattered" (f), next, expansion of the subject "whole thing absolutely" in (g), then a clause spelling out "whole thing" in detail (h), to which the prompt "and crystal?" allows an addition in (l). Line (m) provides a summary and the fourth repetition of the refrain: "shattered."

The strong sense of cohesion arises from the rhetorical pairing of topics with elliptical predicates: "crystal" + "everything shattered." The heavy use of repetition is a common feature of narratives by close friends (Tannen, 1989). This story illustrates well that narrators do not act alone. "It is hearsers of the story who ultimately provide the turn, realize the point, and endorse the action," (Schiffrin, 1987, p. 17).

This brief text illustrates the basic structure of a story. It was in a round of stories about earthquake damage, so it was not elicited by a participant’s question or started with an introduction or framing as a story, such as "You know what happened the other day?" or by an introductory abstract. In rounds, "When an event of one type occurs, it becomes grounds for a second contribution of the same type," (Ryave, 1978, Tannen, 1984). But stories occur in many contexts—for instance, to support requests, to shift frames in a dispute (M. Goodwin, 1990). Since many studies of narratives elicit them in a laboratory or extract them from their context, we don’t know much about how these different contexts affect the structure of stories.

Stories contain information about the temporal location and characters, as in line (a), narrative clauses which recount a past, future, or fantasized happening or event, and evaluations, such as the last line. Some also have a coda which closes the story (Labov & Waletsky, 1967). Perhaps the summary in (m) provides the coda for this simple narrative. Stories are cultural products; participation expectations such as joint construction with the audience, and structural expectations vary (Polanyi, 1989; C. Goodwin, 1981).

Goodwin gives us a narrative example used as a strategy in a dispute between Chopper and Tony:

   b (0.8) We was comin home from *practice.
   c (0.4) and, three boys came up there. and
   d [(rapid] asked us for money and Tony did like this.)
   e (0.13) raises hands up
   f [(loud] I ain’t got! ([laughing] = no money) ==
   g Others: [laugh] ==
   h Goodwin, 1990, p. 243

Reference. In many stories, the first time a character appears, there is identifying information or an orientation. The later references to characters are by pronoun or ellipsis (also called zero anaphora). In (d) the boys are left out of the second clause, but Tony is named. In adult speech, the coordinate clauses of the narrative may use such coordinate predicates, which involve a kind of subject ellipsis. In languages like Japanese and Korean, reference to what has been mentioned before is usually absent, since in these languages ellipsis is rife. Subjects and objects can be understood and omitted. In stories, pronouns or ellipsis are most common when referents (a) are present at the time of speech, (b) have been mentioned before, and (c) were mentioned in the same chunk or episode in the story. Studies in English and French (Karmiloff-Smith, 1979) suggest that speakers like to keep the same subject through an episode, even using passives if they refer to undergoing action, just to keep the same subject throughout the episode. In side sequences or orienting clauses pronouns are used also.

But when a new episode occurs, a change in characters’ role, or reappearance of a character, a noun occurs. There is, however, social variation depending on the familiarity, class, and other cultural features. This is when gestural pointing occurs too, not during the episodes where the subject is already set up (McNeill, 1987, p. 53). Even children make this global adjustment, changing verb tenses to mark episode boundaries (Bamberg, 1987).

Backgrounding. Stories typically alternate states and events. The events in a story may be temporally located. In (27b) the temporal and spatial location of the story is suggested. Sometimes the narrative clauses are separate, or just loosely...
linked by "and" or "and then" as in (27). In such stories there is just a chain of parallel or coordinate serial clauses like route directions or recipes. Verbs are similar in marking and noun ellipsis increases. Another, more complex strategy is to highlight or foreground these narrative happenings, by putting them into main clauses, and putting the orienting information contained in descriptions of states or activities, goals or causes into subordinate clauses. Even very young children begin to make this contrast:

(28) (2.9 years)
When I was sick, I couldn't have any birthday cake.
UCB:Disclab SM

(29) (5 years)
When I was walking down the street, I saw this piece of glass and picked it up.
UCB:Disclab: BOS

This structure has the result that "unbounded states, habituals, generics and also negated propositions are generally excluded from the main structure of the narrative" (von Stutterheim & Klein, 1989, p. 50). These become the backgrounded information about places, times, and people's states of mind, wishes, and habits which help situate or motivate the narrative events. Between the subordinate or backgrounded clauses and the main or foregrounded clauses we see many contrasts. More kinetic gestures are used with the main clauses (McNeill & Levy, 1982). Verbs in main and subordinate clauses are contrasted, not parallel and similar, and pronouns rather than ellipsis are used for the nominal information in backgrounded clauses.

Are these structural contrasts in the texts peculiar to stories? In other types of texts, contrasts between clause types, verb types, nouns, pronouns and ellipsis, word order and connective forms seem to reflect topic organization. A story involves a sequence of events with a focus on an actor. A description of your apartment involves a sequence of locations with information about relative spatial position. A route direction such as directions on how to find your house involves a sequence of commands about space with a focus on the moving person. A recipe contains commands about quantities and actions. Even though this general contrast remains the same, the sentence structure of such texts is different because of the focus on place in descriptions, on moving persons in route directions, and on actors in stories (von Stutterheim & Klein, 1989). In these ways, the linguistic structure of texts reflects the goals in the activity that called for speech. The result is a type of coherence which derives from the ideational, or propositional structure of a text, whether it be within a genre or just within a topic in a more loosely structured interaction (Levitt, 1993).

Summary

The development of talk in dialogue occurs in social or task contexts where people bring notions of what the activity is, their goals, and their social relations to each other. The speech may confirm or change these. Dialogue cannot be seen as a sequence of turns at monologue, but as a joint product. The turntaking creates chances to make change through choices of topics, propositions, actions, and social meaning. Each is altered by what went before, because there are strong structural expectations, and discourse markers of the global topical, propositional, action, and sequential structure which members can recognize. All of these create the resulting text.

References

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