ational language but rather as part of the 'collective unconscious' of the 'taken for granted'.

We conclude this chapter by noting that the kinds of theoretical bracketings which have permeated it are, at best, only transiently possible within the world of everyday life. As a result, the endogenous reproductive processes through which institutional realities are maintained remain largely invisible to those who participate within them. Instead these realities continue to exist as the natural-moral outcomes of arrays of detailed accountable activities. These activities are acted out, and acted on, largely in that 'seen but unnoticed' fashion which itself undergirds the reproduction of institutions as the presuppositionally real orders of events which, from the actors' point of view, they always have been.

A curious fact becomes apparent if you look at the first paragraph — it may occur in the third paragraph — of reportedly revolutionary treatises back to the pre-Socrates and extending up to at least Freud. You find that they all begin by saying something like this: 'About the things I am going to talk about, people think they know but they don't. Furthermore if you tell them it doesn't change anything. They still walk round like they know although they are walking in a dream world.' Darwin begins this way, Freud begins in a similar way. What we are interested in is, what is it that people seem to know and use.

Sacks, Proceedings of the Purdue Symposium on Ethnomethodology

Over the past ten years conversation analysis has developed into a prominent form of ethnomethodological work and has come to exert a significant influence — both methodological and substantive — on a range of social science disciplines including linguistics, social psychology, anthropology and cognitive science. During this time its growth and diversification have become very extensive. The mimeographed lectures of Harvey Sacks (Sacks, 1964–72), who founded the field in collaboration with Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson, run to some two thousand pages and are still a major resource for contemporary researchers. Since the publication of a series of well-known papers on turn-taking and related topics (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, 1968; Schegloff and Sacks, 1973), a growing number of researchers have published papers on an ever-increasing range of topic areas embracing many different facets of conversational organization, the role of gaze and gesture in interaction, and communication in a variety of institutional domains (see Heritage, 1984c, for an overview).

Conversation analytic studies have proved to be highly
distinctive both in methodology and findings, from a range of linguistic, social psychological and sociological approaches to the data of interaction, and they have proved to be strongly cumulative and interlocking. These studies have tended to be presented in a rather formal style which presumes a competent audience and which understates what is known about a particular domain of action and the implications of that knowledge.

Each of these characteristic features — the extent, diversity, distinctiveness and style — of conversation analytic writings makes access to their methods and findings difficult. Together, they ensure that the field resists easy summary and they impose limits on what can be attempted in the present chapter. In what follows, therefore, only some of the most basic methodological and substantive aspects of the field will be dealt with.

SOME METHODOLOGICAL PRELIMINARIES: INSTANCES VERSUS IDEALIZATIONS

The inception and development of conversation analysis as a distinctive field of research is closely linked with problems surrounding the tendency for ordinary language descriptions to gloss or idealize the specifics of what they depict (see 144–50). This tendency is inherent in the use of type concepts in the social sciences irrespective of whether the types are produced by ‘averaging’ as recommended by Durkheim (1982) or by explicit idealization as proposed by Weber in his various methodological writings. In an early paper, Sacks (1963) criticized the use of both of these categories of type concepts in sociology on the grounds that they necessarily blur the specific features of the events under investigation. The result, he argued, is that sociological concepts and generalizations can have only a vague and indeterminate relationship with any specific set of events. This, in turn, inhibits the development of sociology as a cumulative body of knowledge because, given this indeterminacy, it can be difficult to decide whether a specific case in fact supports or undermines a given sociological generalization.

Sacks’s response to this problem was a deliberate decision to develop a method of analysis which would keep a grip on the primary data of the social world — the raw material of specific, singular events of human conduct:

When I started to do research in sociology I figured that sociology could not be an actual science unless it was able to handle the details of actual events, handle them formally, and in the first instance be informative about them in the direct ways in which primitive sciences tend to be informative, that is, that anyone else can go and see whether what was said is so. And that is a tremendous control on seeing whether one is learning anything. So the question was, could there be some way that sociology could hope to deal with the details of actual events, formally and informatively? . . . I wanted to locate some set of materials that would permit a test. (Sacks, 1984a: 26)

Sacks’s work on tape-recorded conversation was initiated in deliberate pursuit of this methodological aim:

It was not from any large interest in language or from some theoretical formulation of what should be studied that I started with tape-recorded conversation, but simply because I could get my hands on it and I could study it again and again, and also, consequentially, because others could look at what I had studied and make of it what they could, if, for example, they wanted to be able to disagree with me. (ibid.)

Viewed with the advantage of hindsight, Sacks’s decision to study conversation was both courageous and perceptive. It was courageous because few people in the early sixties believed that the concrete details of social interaction were, in fact, strongly organized enough to permit formal description. Indeed the dominant view, reflected for example in Chomsky’s (1957, 1965) decision to avoid the analysis of actual speech, was that social interaction is beset by randomizing factors which make any attempt at analysis problematic. The decision was perceptive however because, now that it is known how strongly interaction is organized and to what level of detail that organization extends, it is clear that human conduct could not be so coherent and meaningful, and in such subtle and nuanced ways, in the absence of such an organization.
The contemporary methodology of conversation analysis has maintained Sacks's pioneering focus on the details of actual interactions and his effort to forestall the process of idealization. Its insistence on the use of data collected from naturally occurring occasions of everyday interaction is paralleled by a corresponding avoidance of a range of other research methodologies as unsatisfactory sources of data. These include: (1) the use of interviewing techniques in which the verbal formulations of subjects are treated as an appropriate substitute for the observation of actual behavior; (2) the use of observational methods in which data are recorded through field notes or with pre-coded schedules; (3) the use of native intuitions as a means of inventing examples of interactional behaviour; and (4) the use of experimental methodologies involving the direction or manipulation of behaviour. These techniques have been avoided because each of them involves processes in which the specific details of naturally situated interactional conduct are irretrievably lost and are replaced by idealizations about how interaction works.

A range of considerations inform this preference for the use of recorded data over subjects' reports, observers' notes or unaided intuition or recollection. Anyone who has examined conversational materials will be highly conscious of the deficiencies of such resources by comparison with the richness and diversity of empirically occurring interaction. For example, although the following sequence is by no means extraordinary,

(1) (NB: VII:2) ('Transcription conventions appear in the appendix))
E:  Oh honey that was a lovely luncheon I should've called you sooner but I delayed it. It was just delightful.
M:  [Well...]
E:  [Yeah]
M:  = I wish you'd came.
E:  = I'm so glad you came. =
M:  = Oh... it was... =
E:  = That isn't she a dot! =
M:  [Ye-h isn't she pretty]
E:  = She is a beautiful girl. =
M:  = Yeh I think she's a pretty girl. =
E:  [En' that Reina'n']

(2) (Sacks 1968, 17 April)
A: I have a fourteen-year-old son.
B: Well that's alright.
A: I also have a dog.
B: Oh I'm sorry.

Although (2) is simple enough, it is not the way we imagine interaction happens. If it had been invented, it might have been used to show what is meant by incoherent interaction. But in fact (2) is taken from a conversation in which the would-be tenant of an apartment (A) is describing circumstances to the landlord (B) which might disqualify the rental and, viewed in this context, the datum is perfectly coherent and sensible. The myriad ways in which specific contexts (e.g. particular social identities, purposes and circumstances) are talked into being and oriented to in interaction vastly exceed the comparatively limited, and overwhelmingly typified, powers of imaginative intuition.

A similar range of issues arises in relation to experimentally produced data. The success of social psychological experiments is strongly dependent on the experimenter's ability to identify, control and manipulate the relevant dependent and independent variables. Not only is this extremely difficult to accomplish without some form of experimenter contamination (Rosenthal,
interaction involving 'institutional' identities – e.g. teacher–pupil, social worker–client, courtroom, news interview and other forms of interaction – were avoided. The reasons for this focusing on apparently 'trivial' interactions are as follows.

Despite the almost fortuitous decision by Sacks to begin work on conversational interaction, the topic has turned out to have a central significance for a range of social science issues. In the first instance, the social world is a pervasively conversational one in which an overwhelming proportion of the world's business is conducted through the medium of spoken interaction. Speech, moreover, is among the most ancient of human social institutions. The spoken use of language antedates all other uses and its overwhelming preponderance among contemporary uses is plainly visible in syntactic structure itself (Goodwin, 1979a, 1979b, 1981; Levinson, 1983; Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, 1979b; see also Harris 1980). Second, conversational exchange is the order of interaction through which, subject to a variety of simplifications (Bruner, 1975a, 1984; Ervin-Tripp and Mitchell-Kernan, 1977; Snow and Ferguson, 1977; Ochs and Schieffelin, 1979), the child is first exposed to the social world. It is the conventions of this communicative framework which the child must master as a condition of his or her membership of society and there is considerable evidence that the child is pre-adapted to achieve this goal (see, inter alios Richards, 1971, 1974, for a particularly vivid discussion of 'conversational' behaviour in interactions between mothers and very young children). In short, it is the acquisition of interactional competence and the common-sense knowledge gained in and through such competence which constitutes the core of childhood socialization. These considerations are, in themselves, sufficient to warrant a commitment to the study of mundane conversation.

Additionally, however, there is considerable evidence deriving from the recent application of conversation analytic techniques to 'institutional' data (Atkinson and Drew, 1979; McHoul, 1978; Mehan, 1979; Atkinson, 1982; Drew, 1984b; Heritage, 1984b) that institutional interaction tends to involve two related phenomena: (1) a selective reduction in the full range of conversational practices available for use in mundane interaction; and (2) a degree of concentration on, and

THE PRIMACY OF MUNDANE CONVERSATION

The central domain of data with which conversation analysts are concerned is everyday, mundane conversations. Correspondingly, there has been a general tendency to avoid analysing talk which is, for example, highly 'intellectual' in content or specifically 'factual' for one or another of the participants. Moreover, until recently the various forms of
specialization of, particular procedures which have their 'home' or base environment in ordinary talk. These findings support the view that not only is mundane conversation the richest available research domain, but also that comparative analysis with mundane interaction is essential if the 'special features' of interaction in particular institutional contexts are to receive adequate specification and understanding. These latter observations are supported by the consideration that activities which are normally accomplished in 'restricted' or 'specialized' settings may also occur in parallel fashion in ordinary interaction: 'interrogation' or 'cross-examination', for example, may occur over the breakfast table. As a form of interaction it is not restricted to the police station or the courtroom.

The same need to establish the characteristic features of ordinary conversation between people of similar status has led to a central focus on casual conversation between peers, neighbours, etc. rather than, for example, looking directly at relationships involving dominance and subordination or focusing exclusively on male–female interactional differences (but see, for example, Zimmerman and West, 1975). Once again, conversation analysts have proceeded on the basis that it is difficult, if not impossible, to explain specific features of such asymmetric interaction by reference to social attributes (e.g. status, power, gender, ethnicity, etc.) without a clear knowledge of what is characteristic of ordinary talk between peers.

In one respect, however, the data of conversation analysis have been atypical, namely, in the concentration on telephone calls during the first several years of research. The use of telephone calls as data was designed to eliminate the complexities of non-vocal behaviour from the analysis of interaction, while preserving a naturalistic environment of speech. In this way, the additional tasks of analysing non-vocal behaviour could be legitimately postponed in favour of an exclusive focus on the details of speech. The findings which derived from this procedure have stood up remarkably well in the face of results from an increasing body of studies focusing on face-to-face interaction (see, for example, Goodwin, 1981; Heath, forthcoming).

THE CONVERSATION ANALYTIC APPROACH: SOME BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

Conversation analysis — like the other research streams of ethnomet hodology — is concerned with the analysis of the competences which underlie ordinary social activities. Specifically it is directed at describing and explicating the competences which ordinary speakers use and rely on when they engage in intelligible, conversational interaction. At its most basic, the objective is to describe the procedures and expectations in terms of which speakers produce their own behaviour and interpret the behaviour of others. As in other aspects of ethnomet hodological work, Garfinkel's (1967a: 1) 'symmetry' proposal is employed and it is assumed that both the production of conduct and its interpretation are the accountable products of a common set of methods or procedures.

The basic outlook of conversation analysis can be briefly summarized in terms of three fundamental assumptions: (1) interaction is structurally organized; (2) contributions to interaction are contextually oriented; and (3) these two properties inhere in the details of interaction so that no order of detail can be dismissed, a priori, as disorderly, accidental or irrelevant.

The initial and most fundamental assumption of conversation is that all aspects of social action and interaction can be found to exhibit organized patterns of stable, identifiable structural features. These organizations are to be treated as structures in their own right and as social in character. Like other social institutions and conventions, they stand independently of the psychological or other characteristics of particular speakers. Knowledge of these organizations is a major part of the competence which ordinary speakers bring to their communicative activities and, whether consciously or unconsciously, this knowledge influences their conduct and their interpretation of the conduct of others. Ordinary interaction can thus be analysed so as to exhibit stable organizational patterns of action to which the participants are oriented. These participant orientations, as we shall see, can be demonstrated in a variety of ways.
A second assumption of conversation analysis, which will be familiar from the earlier chapters of this book, is that the contributions to interaction are contextually oriented. Specifically, it is assumed that the significance of any speaker's communicative action is doubly contextual in being both context-shaped and context-renewing. A speaker's action is context-shaped in that its contribution to an on-going sequence of actions cannot adequately be understood except by reference to the context — including, especially, the immediately preceding configuration of actions — in which it participates. This contextualization of utterances is a major, and unavoidable, procedure which hearers use and rely on to interpret conversational contributions and it is also something which speakers perversely attend to in the design of what they say. The context-renewing character of conversational actions is directly related to the fact that they are context-shaped. Since every 'current' action will itself form the immediate context for some 'next' action in a sequence, it will inevitably contribute to the framework in terms of which the next action will be understood. In this sense, the context of a next action is repeatedly renewed with every current action. Moreover, each action will, by the same token, function to renew (i.e. maintain, alter or adjust) any more generally prevailing sense of context which is the object of the participants' orientations and actions. While both aspects of this assumption can be clearly traced to Garfinkel's pioneering remarks on the indexical and reflexive characteristics of talk and action, they have found parallel expression in Goffman's more ethnographically oriented studies (see Goffman, 1955; 1963; 1971; 1981) and a range of other, otherwise unrelated, approaches to interaction which Kendon (1979; 1982) has linked together under the heading of 'context analysis'.

Finally, the assumption that no order of detail in interaction can be dismissed a priori as insignificant has had two major consequences for conversation analytic researchers. The first had been a general retreat from premature theory construction in favour of a more strongly empirical approach to the study of social action. Correspondingly, there has been an avoidance of the abstract theoretical constructs characteristic of earlier sociological treatments of action (for example Parsons's (1937) analysis of the 'unit act') in favour of concrete empirical research on 'actual, particular social actions and organized sequences of them' (Schegloff, 1980: 151). Second, a similarly stringent view is adopted towards the analysis of the competences which are employed in the production and recognition of actions. In particular, every effort is made to render empirical analyses answerable to the specific details of research materials and, as we have seen, to avoid their idealization. In their attitudes towards empirical materials, conversation analysts converge with other proponents of 'context analysis' in assuming that the data of interaction will, in all their aspects and unless proved otherwise, exhibit systematic and orderly properties which are meaningful for the participants.

The research objectives of conversation analysis, together with these underlying assumptions, have necessarily shaped the ways in which analysis is done. Specifically, analysis is strongly 'data-driven' — developed from phenomena which are in various ways evidenced in the data of interaction. Correspondingly, there is a strong bias against a priori speculation about the orientations and motives of speakers and in favour of detailed examination of conversationalists' actual actions. Thus the empirical conduct of speakers is treated as the central resource out of which analysis may develop. This basic research orientation, with its treatment of the details of talk as an analytic resource, has been summarized by Schegloff and Sacks in the following passage:

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 them. If the materials (records of natural conversation) were orderly, they were so because they had been methodically produced by members of the society for one another, and it was a feature of the conversations we treated as data that they were produced so as to allow the display by the co-participants to each other of their orderliness, and to allow the participants to display to each other their analysis, appreciation and use of that orderliness. Accordingly, our analysis has sought to explicate the ways in which the materials
are produced by members in orderly ways that exhibit their orderliness and have their orderliness appreciated and used, and have that appreciation displayed and treated as the basis for subsequent action. (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973: 290)

Conversation analysts have generally pursued their objectives by showing regular forms of organization in a large variety of interational materials produced by different speakers. However, the delineation of such forms is usually only part of the analytic process. Additionally, steps will normally be taken to show that the regularities are produced and oriented to by the participants as normatively oriented-to grounds for inference and action. Here the analysis of 'deviant cases' — in which some proposed regular conversational procedure or form is not implemented — is regularly undertaken. Integral to this is the task of describing the role which particular conversational procedures play in relation to particular interational activities. Beyond this lie the more general objectives of describing, wherever possible given the current state of knowledge, the roles which particular conversational procedures play in relation to one another and to other orders of conversational and social organization.

In what follows, we will look at some straightforward aspects of conversational organization, at the ways in which evidences for their existence are formulated and at the ways in which quite simple conversational procedures interlock to produce more complicated organizational structures. The reader is warned, however, that in the context of a short expository chapter only coarse presentations of richly detailed observations and findings can be attempted and, in particular, that conversational data are here being used only in an illustrative way. Recourse to the cited articles and texts, therefore, will be necessary to appraise the substantive use of data. Additional introductions to conversation analytic are contained in Atkinson and Drew (1979, chapter 2) and Levinson (1983, chapter 6), while Schegloff and Sacks (1973) and Schegloff (1984) represent clear examples of the working through of a particular problem. Those who wish to gain a sense both of the delicacy and the cumulative complexity of conversation analytic findings are referred to Jefferson (1980a, 1981a, 1981b).

CONVERSATIONAL ORGANIZATION: PAIRED ACTIONS

In the previous section, it was noted that conversation analysis is centrally occupied with describing the procedures and expectations through which participants produce and understand ordinary conversational conduct. We have already seen that this programme has issued in a strongly empirical research orientation in which attention is concentrated on organizational features of talk which are displayed, appreciated and used in the actual events of interaction. We now turn to consider a second, highly significant, outcome of this programme: namely, the concentration on action sequences. For, anticipating somewhat, the most prominent place at which the character of an action (A) is demonstrably appreciated, used and treated as the basis for some subsequent action (B) is in that very subsequent action. Conversation analysis is therefore primarily concerned with the ways in which utterances accomplish particular actions by virtue of their placement and participation within sequences of actions. It is sequences and turns-within-sequences which are thus the primary units of analysis.

At its most basic, conversation analytic research into sequence is based on the notion that in a variety of ways the production of some current conversational action proposes a local, here-and-now 'definition of the situation' to which subsequent talk will be oriented. The most elementary instance of this phenomenon occurs when some current turn's talk projects a relevant next activity, or range of activities, to be accomplished by another speaker in the next turn — a phenomenon generically referred to as the 'sequential implicativeness' of a turn's talk (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973: 296).

In its strongest form, this projection of a relevant next activity may be accomplished through a conventionally recognizable pair of actions. Many conversational actions occur within the framework of such a pair linkage, varying from the relatively 'ritualized' exchanges of 'Hello' and 'Goodbye' to more complicatedly paired actions such as question-answer, request-grant/rejection, invitation-acceptance/refusal, and so
on. A generic analytic apparatus to handle these paired actions was developed by Sacks in the mid-sixties. He termed the apparatus an ‘adjacency pair’ and described it in terms of five basic characteristics (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973: 295–6). In this formulation, an adjacency pair is

1. A sequence of two utterances, which are
2. adjacent,
3. produced by different speakers,
4. ordered as a first part and second part, and
5. typed, so that a first part requires a particular second part (or range of second parts).

To this list of characteristics, Schegloff and Sacks added a simple rule of adjacency pair operation: ‘given the recognisable production of a first pair part, on its first possible completion its speaker should stop and a next speaker should start and produce a second pair part from the pair type the first pair part is recognizably a member of (ibid. 296). Thus baldly stated, it may be difficult for the reader to grasp either the point or the implications of the adjacency pair concept. It may, indeed, simply look like a rather ponderous way of stating the rule that greetings are exchanged, questions answered, etc. In order to gain access to the very important substantive and methodological issues which cluster around the concept and its application, we will first consider what is not claimed or implied by the concept and move on from there.

First, when it is proposed that action sequences such as greetings exchanges or question-answer sequences are organized as adjacency pairs, it is emphatically not claimed that these sequences are invariably produced as succeeding actions occurring adjacent. The claim that greetings are always returned immediately, or that questions are always answered in the next utterance would, if it were being made, be palpably incorrect. The adjacency pair notion does not, therefore, command our attention as a statement of empirical invariance.

Neither, second, is the concept properly viewed as describing an empirical generalization. For, while it may be the case that 99 per cent of greetings are promptly returned or 95 per cent of questions are immediately answered, we are here in pursuit of structural organizations which shape the expectations, understandings and actions of interactants. And it may safely be assumed that a speaker, in greeting an acquaintance or asking a question, does not usually initiate the action or assess its outcome on the basis of a statistical calculation of its likely success. Neither does a greeter, for example, whose greeting has not been returned simply conclude that a statistically unlikely event has occurred. Rather, as we have already suggested (see 106–18), he or she may assess whether the greeting was, or could have been, heard or attempt to account in some way for the absence of the return. In all of this our greeter acts on the presumption that a greeting always proposes that a return is due next. Altogether it is safe to conclude that interaction is not structured, nor is its structure implemented, on the basis of statistical calculations.

An alternative point of view has already been foreshadowed. This is that the adjacency pair structure is a normative framework for actions which is accountably implemented. Within these terms, the production of an utterance identifiable as a first pair part (e.g. a question) – the utterance being so identifiable by reference to some combination of its syntactic features, sequential positioning and conventional properties (see, for example, Schegloff, 1980, 1984; Terasaki, 1976) – selects a next speaker who should immediately proceed to produce the appropriate second pair part. In this analysis, the first speaker’s production of a first pair part proposes that a second speaker should relevantly produce a second pair part which is accountably ‘due’ immediately on completion of the first.

What is the evidence for this latter conception? At an intuitive level, there are the inferences about motives, intentions, beliefs, etc. (e.g. the other intended to be insulting, or the other wouldn’t answer the question, or couldn’t do so without self-incrimination) which we all make when second pair parts are not forthcoming. Although, especially at this stage in the argument, this evidence may seem to be overly subjective, it is strengthened by the fact that other people also report similar absences and inferences to one another and to us – a fact which indicates that, at the minimum, the orientation to these absences and the inferences which they inherit are ‘in the culture'.
A second sort of evidence for the normative character of adjacency pairs derives, of course, from the very large numbers of cases in which actions conforming to their prescriptions are implemented and their associated expectations met. However, the status of this evidence is threatened by a range of instances in talk, which are not infrequent, where, for example, greetings are not returned immediately or at all and questions are not answered promptly or at all. Paradoxically, it is consideration of these ‘deviant’ cases, in which the adjacency pair structure is not implemented fully or unproblematically, which provides the strongest evidence for the normative character of the adjacency pair structure.

In what follows, we will briefly consider evidences from ‘deviant’ cases, exemplified by reference to the question-answer pair, where firstly intending questioners, then intended answerers, and finally both parties orient to the normative character of the adjacency pair structure.

Questioners. In the following two cases, an initial question (arrow 1) fails to elicit any response. Whereupon the intending questioner repeats (arrow 2) and, in the further absence of response, re-repeats (arrow 3) the question and finally gets an answer (arrow 4). Notice that in each case the questioner repeats the question in increasingly truncated form, thereby proposing that the recipient in fact heard the original question.

(3) (Atkinson and Drew, 1979:52)
1→A: Is there something bothering you or not?
   (1.0)
2→A: Yes or no
   (1.5)
3→A: Eh?
4→B: No.

(4) (Atkinson and Drew, 1979: 52)
1→Ch: Have to cut these Mummy.
   (1.3)
2→Ch: Won’t we Mummy
   (1.5)
3→Ch: Won’t we
4→M: Yes.

In each of these cases the first speaker, by repeating the question, proposes that the answer to the original question was ‘due’ and is thus noticeably or ‘officially’ absent (Schegloff, 1972). In each case, the repeat (and re-repeat) evidences the first speaker’s understanding that, while an answer was ‘due’, it was not provided. The proposed absence is invoked in – and thus simultaneously warrants – the repetition of the question. In each case, the questioned party finally acknowledges the normative requirement to respond by providing an answer (arrow 4). This class of cases, together with related instances in which second speakers’ responses are treated as ‘not answering the question’, demonstrates that questioners attend to the fact that their questions are framed within normative expectations which have sequential implications in obliging selected next speakers to perform a restricted form of action in next turn, namely, at least to respond to the question with some form of answer.

The constraint that upon the production of a first action a second is due is usefully described as the conditional relevance (Schegloff, 1968) of a second action upon a first. This property permits speakers (and analysts) to find that particular conversational events, e.g. answers to questions, are specifically and noticeably absent. And, in turn, this finding accountable permits speakers to engage in further activities to solicit the looked-for event, to report its absence to third parties and to use its absence as the basis for inferences of various kinds. As we have seen, the producers of first pair parts, e.g. questioners, orient to this property of their actions and we can now proceed to show that their respondents do likewise. This orientation is, once again, particularly visible in those ‘deviant’ cases where second speakers, e.g. intended answerers, fail to perform the activity proposed by the first speaker.

Answerers. In each of the following cases, second speakers respond to first pair part questions but their utterances are not hearable as answering the question as put.

(5) (Trio;2:11:1)
M: What happened at (.) work. At Bullock’s this evening. =
P: =h:hh::: Well I don’t know::w::
accounting (through implied ignorance) for the absence of an answer to the question as put.

In each of these cases, while the formal requirements of the question-answer adjacency pair are not met, the adjacency pair format is addressed as a normative framework and its non-implementation by the second speaker is oriented to and accounted for by that second speaker. Thus although, in each case, the second speakers do not answer the question, their utterances are nonetheless directly responsive to the field of relevances established by the prior act of questioning.

**Questioners and Answerers.** This discussion can now be concluded by a brief consideration of a further class of cases in which a question is responded to with another question which does not hearably 'answer' the first, but yet the conditionally relevant answer is not treated as officially or noticeably absent. A prototypical instance is (8).

(8) (Schegloff, 1972: 78)
A: Are you coming tonight?
B: Can I bring a guest?
A: Sure.
B: I'll be there.

Here A does not treat B's first response as inappropriate or as designed to avoid answering (analyses which A could have displayed by, for example, repeating the initial question or challenging B's response). In this context it can be noticed that B's utterance, while not answering the question, does display an analysable relatedness to it and that it is this relatedness which provides its warrant to occur where it does. Furthermore was can see that A, in answering B's question, effectively acknowledges this relatedness. Finally, the completion of A's answer ('Sure.') provides a further opportunity for B to answer A's original question. Thus although strict adjacency is not achieved between A's initial question (line 1) and B's answer (line 4), the entire sequence nonetheless proceeds under the continuously sustained expectation that A's first pair part will ultimately receive its looked-for second.

Insertion sequences (Schegloff, 1972) of this kind, occurring...
between first and second pair parts of adjacency pairs, are comparatively common. A more complex instance is shown below in which several inserted question-answer sequences are initiated after the first question — ‘How many tubes would you like sir’.

(9) (Levinson, 1983: 305 (simplified))

1 A: How many tubes would you like sir
2 1→B: Uhm (.) that’s the price now eh with VAT
3 do you know eh
4 
5 
6 
7 A: Three pounds nineteen a tube sir
8 2→B: Three nineteen is it=
9 A: =Yeah
10 B: E:h (1.0) yes uhm ((dental click)) ((in parenthetical tone) eh justa think, that’s what three nineteen
11 123→ That’s for the large tube isn’t it
13 A: Well yeah it’s the thirty seven
14 B: Er, hh I’ll tell you what I’ll just eh eh ring you back
15 I have to work out how many I’ll need. Sorry I did—
16 wasn’t sure of the price you see
17 A: Okay

Here B asks three questions (arrowed 1–3) before dealing with A’s original one. In each case, there is a displayed relatedness between B’s inserted queries and the original question which permits A to maintain his expectation across the sequence that his question will ultimately be answered. Finally, it may be noted that B eventually (line 14) defers answering the question and, as in examples 5–7, an account is offered for the deferral together with an apology (lines 15–16).

We have now come far enough to see the absurdity of viewing the adjacency pair notion either as an invariantly implemented structure for particular kinds of actions or, alternatively, as merely a statistical generalization about the sequencing of actions. For, although actions are indeed frequently organized in ways that the concept describes, some of the more significant and characteristic aspects of the nature and workings of adjacency pairs come to light when the expected pattern of action is breached. As we have seen, the normative character of the adjacency pair structure and its associated expectations is clearly evidenced in the behaviour of interactants in the context of breaches. In the examples discussed above, both questioners (in (3) and (4)) and answerers (in (5), (6) and (7)) exhibited an orientation to the normative accountability of the question-answer pair structure. Similarly, in (8) and (9) both questioner and answerer collaborated in maintaining the expectation that an original question would ultimately be answered while permitting the projected answerer to defer the moment of its provision.

We have dwelt at considerable length on these elementary features of adjacency pairs, not because they comprise a large proportion of conversational activity, but rather because the form of analysis directed to these very straightforward sequences — a form which we previously encountered in chapter 5 — is repeated in the analysis of very much more complex, subtle and nuanced conversational activities. In each case, a ‘current’ action is analysed as projecting the production of a relevant ‘next’ (or range of ‘nexts’) by another speaker. When the relevant ‘next’ occurs, it is characteristically treated as requiring no special explanation: a relevantly produced next action is specifically non-accountable. (From an analytic point of view, a normatively institutionalized sequence of actions has simply occurred.) When the relevanced or appropriate ‘next’ does not occur however, the matter is, as we have seen, specially accountable. In such circumstances, accounts may be offered by the party whose conduct has not met the relevant expectation. Or, alternatively, the conduct may become the object of special inferences and thus be explained by invoking aspects of the circumstances of the action, or the role identity, personality, goals, motives, etc. of the breaching party. Throughout, deviations from standard forms can give rise to inferences of these kinds and it is, in part at least, through such deviations that, for example, ‘motives’ and ‘personalities’ may become visible in behaviour. The ‘mask of politeness’ is thus perhaps well named, if only because an interactant’s scrupulous adherence to ‘normal forms’ can leave others strangely ignorant about the person they are dealing with.
AN ARCHITECTURE OF INTERSUBJECTIVITY

Thus far we have concentrated on the adjacency pair notion as a form of action template by looking at some simple ways in which the producers and recipients of first pair parts display their expectation that a particular next action is accountably ‘due’. But this ‘action template’ aspect of adjacency pair organization has a vitally significant interpretative corollary, namely that a first speaker can use his or her action as a presumptive basis on which to interpret what a next speaker says. Thus a questioner may assume that his or her question will be met with either an answer or, if not, an account for the lack of an answer. For example, to return to (7):

(7) (Rah:A:1:Ex:(JM)7:2)
   M: 'S alright?',
   J: Well,e hasn' c'm ba-ack yet.

It is plain that J’s utterance is to be heard as an account rather than a random observation. But the inference which permits it to be heard as an account arises solely by virtue of its sequential placement. Thus both M (and we) can use this placement as the means to see that the utterance is responsive to the question and, hence, how it is responsive. It is through these means that J’s utterance is analysable as an accounting for ignorance rather than a random remark. Plainly we are back in the area of common understandings and assumptions just known and taken for granted (see the discussion in chapter 4 of Garfinkel’s remarks on ‘trust’ and Grice’s [1975] related observations on the ‘co-operative principle’). But we can now see that it is precisely because the adjacency pair structure is a reliable and accountable template for action, that it is a reliable template for interpretation as well.

The idea that particular kinds of actions, in properly coming in ordered pairs, furnish interpretative resources may appear a simple one. Nonetheless, it has far-reaching implications. Consider the following utterance:

(10) B: Why don’t you come and see me sometimes

It is at least conceivable that (10) could be heard as a complaint and responded to as such; for example:

(11) (Invented)
   B: Why don’t you come and 
   A: I’m sorry. I’ve been terribly tied up lately

In fact, in the data from which (10) was taken, it was analysed as an invitation and the sequence in fact ran:

(12) (SBL:10:12)
   B: Why don’t you come and see me sometimes
   A: I would like to

The point here, and it is a crucial one, is that however the recipient analyses the first utterance and whatever the conclusion of such an analysis, some analysis, understanding or appreciation of the prior turn will be displayed in the recipient’s next turn at talk. Thus the production of apologies and excuses would treat (10) as a complaint, the production of an ‘acceptance’ (as in (12)) would appreciate (10) as an ‘invitation’, and so on (see Schegloff, 1984 for further discussion).

Again, in the following two sequences, the same individual (J) receives information from two different acquaintances about the recent arrival of furniture, and a more subtle differentiation of response can be observed.

(13) (Rah:B:1:(11):3:(R))
   A: the two beds’v come this morning, the new beds.
     hhh And uh b’it o-only one
   J:
   \[↑h b’it that w’z
   ↓ quick that w’z "quick them coming."
   A: Not too bad. B’th ez only one matress ↓ with it.

(14) (Rah:B:1:(12):1:(R))
   I: the things ’ev arrived from Barkev’n Stone’ou:se,
   J:
   \(↑\)
   \(↓\)
   A n’ \(↑\) round, h-h
   I: Oh:

These two informings receive quite different treatments from J and these treatments embody quite different assessments of
their implications. Thus while the first informing gets a comment about how quickly the order was delivered, J treats the second as implicating that the informant wants her to go round and inspect/admire the new furniture (see Drew, 1984a for further analysis). Here, then, J’s assessment of the arrival of the beds in the first sequence treats the informing as ‘plain news’, her self-invitation in response to the second treats the latter as implicating her informant’s desire to have her round.

The important thing is that, once again, the interpretations embedded in these treatments of the prior turn are publicly available as the means by which previous speakers can determine how they were understood. Thus the sequential ‘next positioned’ linkage between any two actions can be a critical resource by which a first speaker (and, of course, ‘overhearing’ social scientists) can determine the sense which a second made of his or her utterance. The significance of the pairing, or ‘next positioned’ linkage, of utterances is summarized by Schegloff and Sacks as follows:

by an adjacently produced second, a speaker can show that he understood what a prior aimed at, and that he is willing to go along with that. Also, by virtue of the occurrence of an adjacently produced second, the doer of a first can see that what he intended was indeed understood and that it was or was not accepted. Also, of course, a second can assert his failure to understand, or disagreement, and, inspection of a second by a first can allow the first speaker to see that while the second thought he understood, indeed he misunderstood. It is then through the use of adjacent positioning that appreciations, failures, corrections, etc. can themselves be understandably attempted. (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973: 297–8)

Linked actions, in short, are the basic building-blocks of intersubjectivity.

We are now in a position to complete this analysis by taking it one final step. So far we have seen that a second speaker’s utterance displays an analysis of the prior speaker’s turn and that this permits the first speaker to determine whether (or how) he or she was understood. How then does the second speaker come to know whether the analysis he or she displayed was, in fact, appropriate?

For those who have followed the argument so far, the answer to this question will already be apparent. The second speaker can determine the adequacy of the analysis displayed in his or her turn by reference to the next action of the first speaker. This observation can be developed by noticing, firstly, that one ‘third turn’ option which is open to the first speaker is the explicit correction or repair of any misunderstanding which was displayed in the second speaker’s turn. A rather straightforward instance of this kind of ‘third position repair’ (Schegloff, 1979c) is the following:

(15) (CDHQ:1:52)
A: Which ones are closed, an’ which ones are open.
Z: Most of ’em. This, this, (pointing)
→A: I don’t mean on the shelters, I mean on the roads.

Here Z’s analysis of the prior question as referring to the ‘shelters’ (as displayed in what he says and the direction pointed to) is explicitly corrected by the first speaker in an overlapping next turn. A slightly more subtle exhibit of the same phenomenon is (16):

(16) (Terasaki, 1976:45)
Mom: Do you know who’s going to that meeting?
Kid: Who.
Mom: I don’t know!
Kid: Ou:ch probably Mr Murphy an’ Dad said probably Mrs Timpte an’ some o’ the teachers.

Here Kid takes Mom’s first utterance, not as a question, but as an utterance designed to clear the way for Mom to subsequently announce who will be going to the meeting (see Terasaki, 1976; Levinson, 1983: 349–56). Kid displays this orientation by uttering ‘Who’, which constitutes a request for the information he assumes Mom to have. Mom’s ‘I don’t know!’ thus constitutes a third turn correction of the misunderstanding which Kid displayed in second turn, whereupon Kid now responds to Mom’s lack of information with a reporting of what he knows. Note here that Kid evidently knows a good deal about who will be attending the meeting and he could
have responded to Mom's initial turn by providing this information. The fact that he did not do so testifies to the fact that, despite its question form, he did not analyse the first turn as a 'question' (see Schegloff, 1984 for a further consideration of the issues raised).

Each of these two cases illustrates a very general phenomenon, namely that after any 'second action' the producer of the first has a systematically given opportunity to repair any misunderstanding of the first action that may have been displayed in the second. Given the generic availability of this procedure, any second speaker may look to a third action to see whether this opportunity was taken and, if it was not, conclude that the analysis and treatment of the first action that was displayed in his or her second was adequate. Any 'third' action, therefore, which implements some 'normal' onward development or trajectory for a sequence, tacitly confirms the displayed understandings in the sequence so far. By means of this framework, speakers are released from what would otherwise be an endless task of confirming and reconfirming their understandings of each other's actions.

Bearing these considerations in mind, let us return to (12). The three-part sequence partially displayed in (12) runs as follows:

(17) (SBL:10:12)
B: Why don't you come and see me sometimes
A: I would like to
B: I would like you to

Here B's third turn ('I would like you to') tacitly confirms A's treatment of the first turn as an invitation.

By contrast, had the sequence in (17) run as follows:

(18) (Invented)
B: Why don't you come and see me sometimes
A: I would like to
B: Yes but why don't you

then both A (and the 'overhearing' analyst) could see that, given that B did not deal with A's proposed 'acceptance' of the 'invitation' but instead demanded some kind of account, that B's first utterance had 'all along and in the first place' been intended as a complaint, that A's treatment of it as an invitation was being treated as inadequate and that B's third turn was a pursuance or escalation of her first complaint.

To summarize, conversational interaction is structured by an organization of action which is implemented on a turn-by-turn basis. By means of this organization, a context of publicly displayed and continuously up-dated intersubjective understandings is systematically sustained. It is through this 'turn-by-turn' character of talk that the participants display their understandings of 'the state of the talk' for one another. It is important to note that, because these displayed understandings arise as a kind of by-product or indirect outcome of the sequentially organized activities of the participants, the issue of 'understanding' per se is only rarely topicalized at the conversational 'surface'. Through this procedure the participants are thus released from the task of explicitly confirming and reconfirming their understandings of one another's actions. Mutual understanding is thus displayed, to use Garfinkel's term, 'incarnately' in the sequentially organized details of conversational interaction. Moreover, because these understandings are publicly produced, they are available as a resource for social scientific analysis.

Before leaving this topic, two further fugitive remarks are in order. First, the above observations concerning the way a turn's talk displays an analysis, appreciation or understanding of a prior turn do not simply apply to the responses or 'reactive' second utterances with which we have been primarily concerned in this section. They also apply to 'first' or initiatory actions of various sorts which, in their own various ways, also display analyses of the 'state of the talk'. For example, a speaker who initiates a pre-closing (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973: 303–9) exhibits an analysis that 'there and then' is an appropriate place for that to occur. Moreover, the manner in which the pre-closing is begun will itself display a variety of sensitivities to the conversational context (ibid.). Similar considerations may be suggested for topic initiations (Button and Casey, 1982, 1984; Jefferson, 1984b) and for a variety of other actions which are initiatory, or even premonitory, of
sequences rather than responsive within them (Jefferson, 1980b; Pomerantz, 1980; Schegloff, 1980).

Our second observation takes the form of a warning about certain limitations about the value of sequential analysis in getting at the participants’ understandings of prior talk. As we have stressed, participants’ analyses of prior talk are not overtly expressed but are indirectly exhibited in their own turns. A speaker shows she understands a prior turn as an ‘invitation’ by ‘accepting’ it, rather than some other means. In short, a second speaker’s analysis of a prior is presented indirectly and must thus be inferred. As Goodwin and Goodwin have made the point, ‘rather than presenting a naked analysis of the prior talk, next utterances characteristically transform that talk in some fashion — deal with it not in its own terms but rather in the way in which it is relevant to the projects of the subsequent speaker’ (Goodwin and Goodwin, 1982: 11). It is a commonplace that speakers may respond to earlier talk in ways which may blur, conceal or otherwise avoid displaying their true appreciation of its import. Similarly, speakers may avoid taking up and dealing with what they perfectly well know is accomplished or implicated by prior talk so as to influence the direction of the talk towards some desired objective. These occasions are common in talk and may be varyingly ‘transparent’ to analytic inspection. Some of their characteristic features can themselves be documented by means of comparative sequential analysis. But their existence serves to emphasize that ‘official’ treatments of talk occurring at the conversational surface are the starting point for interpretative and analytic work and cannot be treated simply as unproblematic representations of what the speakers’ understandings or intentions in the talk consisted of.

THE LOCAL STRUCTURING OF CONVERSATION: ADJACENCY AND AGENCY

The alert reader may have begun to notice something of a shift in the way sequences are being described during the past few pages. We started by describing very tightly organized sequences — adjacency pairs — in which the options available to second speakers were relatively constrained. By contrast, we have now lapsed into a looser mode of exposition in which the local positioning of utterances ‘next’ to one another is crucial.

We need to work in this way because, as was previously stressed, conversation is not an endless series of interlocking adjacency pairs in which sharply constrained options confront the next speaker. Rather conversation is informed by the general assumption — common to both speakers and hearers — that utterances which are placed immediately next to some prior are to be understood as produced in response to or, more loosely, in relation to that prior. This assumption provides a framework in which speakers can rely on the positioning of what they say to contribute to the sense of what they say as an action.

This assumption that adjacent utterances are, wherever possible, to be heard as related was formulated by Sacks (spring 1972, lecture 4) as a fundamental ordering principle for conversation and he summarized it as the general finding that ‘a turn’s talk will be heard as directed to a prior turn’s talk, unless special techniques are used to locate some other talk to which it is directed’ (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974: 728).

As usual, there are a range of different evidences for this finding. There is, first, the fact that the vast majority of utterances — including much of the data shown in this chapter — would be unintelligible if this assumption was not made. Moreover and secondly, there is a good deal of evidence which suggests that if a speaker wishes some contribution to be heard as unrelated to an immediately prior utterance, the speaker must do something special to lift the assumption. Thus there are a number of standard prefixes, such as ‘by the way . . .’, which are designed to show that what follows is to be heard as disjunctive with the immediately prior talk. Intonation may also be employed to the same effect (Sacks, spring 1972, lecture 4). Similarly, misunderstandings in talk may arise from a hearer’s assuming a relatedness between utterances which was not intended but where the speaker failed to signal this fact. There are, then, a variety of evidences for the fact that conversationalists assume that adjaently positioned utterances are to be heard in relation to one another and that this is an assumption of ‘first resort’. Functioning as such a resource, this assumption is generic. Indeed the very availability of the conventional notion of ‘sequence’ is dependent on it.
But although this assumption is easy enough to evidence, it is not so easy to explain. One explanation might be that speakers and hearers orient to the juxtapositioning of utterances because they are reflexively aware of the accountability of failing to do so. Just as absent second pair parts are normatively accountable and ‘inferentially rich’, so too might the failure to orient to the relevance of juxtapositioning. Thus, it may be concluded, the phenomenon of adjacency is its own explanation. As a basic normative expectancy it is accountably implemented and that is that. But this analysis explains only the maintenance of the orientation to adjacency as a normative orientation; it does not explain the existence of the normative orientation in the first place. And this is because an explanation in terms of the normative accountability of deviation depends for its force on the prior institutionalization of adjacent positioning as a generic phenomenon and it is this that we want to explain.

Another possible explanation for the significance of adjacent positioning in conversation has already been sketched. We have already noted the ways in which adjacency is implicated in the public display of continuously up-dated intersubjective understandings. Surely, it may be argued, it is this essential role of adjacent positioning which accounts for its pervasive use as an assumption in the structuring of talk. Yet the evidence also shows that speakers can in fact produce utterances which can intelligibly be heard, without difficulty, as responsive to, appreciating and displaying an analysis of utterances at some removes away. In short, it is not essential for mutual intelligibility that utterances should always be adjacent to the talk they appreciate and respond to. We are thus returned to our original question which is: why is adjacent positioning so primary and fundamental in the production and interpretation of talk?

A decisive solution to this question can only be arrived at by considering a further order of conversational organization which has not been discussed thus far, namely the turn-taking organization for conversation. Little will be said about the organization of turn-taking in the present chapter (though see Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974; Atkinson and Drew, 1979: 34–61 and Levinson, 1983: 296–303 provide further detailed summaries). Suffice it to say that turns are allocated among conversationalists by reference to a set of rules which apply recursively on a local, turn-by-turn basis. As Levinson (1983: 297), following Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974: 696), has suggested, the rules can be viewed as a sharing device by means of which a scarce resource — the opportunity to speak — is distributed among speakers. This system operates in terms of minimal units or ‘shares’ in terms of which allocation proceeds. Its operation involves the allocation of one such unit, for example a sentence, a phrase or some other turn constructional unit, to each speaker. After the speaker’s production of one such unit, the conversational ‘floor’ may readily be allocated elsewhere.

The relation between this turn-by-turn allocation system and the pervasive use of adjacency or ‘close ordering’ in conversation is set out in the following remarks by Schegloff and Sacks:

Given the utterance by utterance organization of turn taking, unless close ordering is attempted there can be no methodic assurance than an . . . aimed—for . . . utterance type will ever be produced. If a next speaker does not do it, that speaker may provide for a further next that should not do it (or should do something that is not it) . . . Close ordering is, then, the basic generalized means for assuring that some desired event will ever happen. If it cannot be made to happen next, its happening is not merely delayed, but may never come about. (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973: 297)

For example, if A asks B a question and if B, instead of answering, comments on the weather directing his remarks to C who in turn . . . , then A has no means of being assured that his question will ever be answered. Nor, of course, will he have any assured means of knowing whether he was understood. Thus the efficacy and intelligibility of A’s question — indeed A’s capacities as an agent in the conversation with B and C — are ultimately assured through the pervasive role of adjacent positioning, both as a normative requirement of action and as a constitutive feature of its interpretation.

Generalizing the argument, each speaker in conversation participates in an organization whose contingent outcomes are only partially under his or her control. Individual agency is
secured within this framework by the generalized requirement that responses to a current action should properly occur next. In turn, this action requirement is generalized as an interpretative framework for each next utterance and responding adjacently becomes a major resource for each next actor to exert agentic powers vis-à-vis a prior. And, once again, the normative character of this framework of action and interpretation — including of course the normative accountability of deviations from the framework — helps to motivate and maintain conformity to its dictates.

METHODOLOGICAL REPRISE

Earlier in the chapter, we noted a number of characteristic aspects of analysis which may be involved in the pursuit of conversation analytic objectives. We have now completed a coarse sketch which illustrates some of the relevant forms of analysis.

We began by noting what appeared to be a regular organizational pattern in conversational activity, namely that many conversational actions are paired. Some examples were greetings, ‘goodbyes’, question—answer, invitation—acceptance/declination and so on. Selecting the question—answer pair for closer inspection (any other pair would have yielded parallel, though not identical, findings), we determined that the pair structure was not accidental or artefactual, but was produced as the methodical and accountable product of the shared orientations and expectations of the speakers. These orientations, we found, were particularly visible in those ‘deviant cases’ where the pair format was not straightforwardly implemented.

Having established this, we began to explore the role which the pair structure might play in talk and we focused, in particular, on its role in the maintenance of a framework of continuously up-dated intersubjective understandings. Developing this argument, we were led to extend the arguments derived from the consideration of pairs to a more abstract and generic phenomenon — ‘next positioning’ — applied over more extended sequences of actions.

Finally, we briefly considered the relation of paired actions (and more abstractly, adjacentally positioned actions) to another order of conversational organization — the turn-taking system. This yielded a powerful explanation of the generic role of adjacent positioning in talk: adjacent positioning was found to be the major means by which individual speakers could be assured of exerting some local influence over the conduct of their co-interactants.

We have thus encountered some of the basic methods of reasoning which are employed in conversation analytic research. The discussion above does not, of course, exhaust those methods, nor their applications. Many other analytic procedures are routinely employed in ethnomethodologically oriented studies of conversation. But some indication of the form of reasoning which tends to surface in conversation analytic writings has now been given and we will proceed from here into some more substantive domains.

PREFERENCE, PRE-SEQUENCES AND THE TIMING OF SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

In the present section of this chapter, we will briefly illustrate a variety of ways in which the design of actions can contribute to the maintenance of social solidarity. Anticipating the results of this discussion, it will be suggested that there is a ‘bias’ intrinsic to many aspects of the organization of talk which is generally favourable to the maintenance of bonds of solidarity between actors and which promotes the avoidance of conflict.

We can begin by recalling that many of the two-part structures discussed earlier in this chapter have alternative second pair parts. For example requests, offers, invitations, proposals and the like may all be either accepted of refused. Characteristically however, these two alternative actions are usually done in different ways. Consider the invitation which we have already discussed earlier.

(12) (SIB:10:12)
B: Why don’t you come and see me sometime
A: I would like to
In this example, as Atkinson and Drew (1979: 58) have noted, the invitation is accepted in a simple and unvarnished fashion. Moreover the acceptance occurs ‘early’ through an utterance which begins in overlap with the completion of the invitation.

By contrast, the following invitation is refused:

(19) (SBL:10:14)

B: Uh if you’d care to come over and visit a little while this morning I’ll give you a cup of coffee.

A: 1→hehh Well that’s awfully sweet of you,
  2→I don’t think I can make it this morning
  3→hh uhm I’m running an ad in the paper and-and
  uh I have to stay near the phone.

This refusal is accomplished in a markedly different way from the earlier acceptance. First, in contrast to the ‘early’ acceptance of (12), the refusal is delayed (arrow 1) by a short outbreath (‘hehh’), a turn component associated with refusals (‘Well’) and an appreciation (‘that’s awfully sweet of you’). Second, in contrast to the earlier unvarnished acceptance, the rejection (arrow 2) is not asserted as definite (though, of course, it is a ‘non-negotiable’ refusal), but rather is asserted in a qualified or mitigated form. Third, while the acceptance in (12) is treated as non-accountable, the refusal is treated as requiring an account and in fact is accompanied by a fairly elaborate explanation (arrow 3).

These different ways of accomplishing acceptances and rejections of invitations are not specific to these two examples or to these two speakers. On the contrary, they are characteristic of the general ways in which acceptances and rejections of invitations are accomplished. Thus while most acceptances involve:

(1) Simple acceptance and
(2) no delay.

rejections are routinely designed to incorporate at least some of the following features (Levinson, 1983:334–5):

(1) Delays: (i) by pause before delivery, (ii) by the use of a preface (see (2)), (iii) by displacement over a number of turns via the use of insertion sequences.

(2) Prefaces: (i) the use of markers like ‘uh’ or ‘well’, (ii) the use of token agreements, appreciations and apologies, (iii) the use of qualifiers and (iv) hesitation.

(3) Accounts: explanations for why the invitation is not being accepted.

(4) Declination component: which is normally mitigated, qualified or indirect.

And these characteristic differences in the design of acceptances and rejections of invitations are not confined to the latter. They are also found in acceptances and rejections of requests, offers and proposals (Davidson, 1984). They inform the organization of agreements and disagreements (Pomerantz, 1975, 1978, 1984), and, relatedly, corrections (Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks, 1977; Jefferson, 1983), blamings (Pomerantz, 1978b; Atkinson and Drew, 1979) and a variety of other actions.

The generic term ‘preference’ is used to reference these basic differences. Actions which are characteristically performed straightforwardly and without delay are termed ‘preferred’ actions, while those which are delayed, qualified and accounted for are termed ‘dispreferred’. To avoid any confusion, it should be asserted immediately that these terms are not intended in any way to refer to the private desires, or psychological proclivities of speakers. On the contrary, we are here dealing with highly generalized and, as we shall see, institutionalized methods of speaking.

As we have suggested, these systematic patterns of the design of particular actions are fundamentally tied to the actions themselves and they vary little in relation to particular speakers or social contexts. Thus, as Wootton (1981) has demonstrated, even when it is a four-year-old child who is making the request and a busy mother who is refusing it, she will nonetheless package her refusal using the ‘standard’ components for a dispreferred action – delay, mitigation, accounting, etc. These observations stand as substantial preliminary evidence for the fact that the preference organization of the design of actions is strongly institutionalized.

Further evidence that these designs are institutionalized comes from the inferences which are made when the designs are not implemented. For example in invitation sequences, while ‘early’ acceptance is normal and by no means an
automatic sign of ‘enthusiasm’, a ‘delayed’ acceptance is often heard as ‘reluctant’. Similarly an ‘early’ or unmitigated or unaccounted-for refusal can easily be heard as ‘hostile’ or ‘rude’. And, once again, our knowledge of these inferential possibilities may shape our conduct, constraining it in particular ways. Thus, knowing that refusals of invitations normally have accounts, we may end up at a party we would rather have avoided because no account was available and ‘we couldn’t get out of it’. And again, as party givers, we may require the pro forma, dispreferred design for a rejection even though the rejecting invitee is someone whom we would rather not have and, indeed, even though we know that he knows it. Plainly issues of ‘face’ (Goffman, 1955; Brown and Levinson, 1978) are closely associated with our maintenance of the relevant forms and observances. And, once again, it is deviance from these institutionalized designs which is the inferentially rich, morally accountable, face-threatening and sanctionable form of action. And, as in the case of greetings, it may be these latter considerations which influence the ways in which we design our talk, constraining us to adopt the institutionalized form regardless of our private desires and personal inclinations.

Now if it is granted that the two different turn designs — preferred and dispreferred — are institutionalized methods of talking which are required and used for accomplishing particular actions, it may still be asked why these particular contrasting features are recruited to these contrasting turn types. Why are such features as accounts and delay built into dispreferreds such as refusing an invitation and avoided in preferreds such as accepting one?

Some suggestions for an answer to this question may arise from a brief examination of just which ‘second actions’ are normally done in preferred format and which in dispreferred format. Some prominent instances are set out in Table 2.

It will be obvious enough that the preferred format responses to requests, offers, invitations and assessments are uniformly affiliative actions which are supportive of social solidarity, while dispreferred format responses are largely destructive of social solidarity. The point is underlined by consideration of self-deprecatory (Pomerantz, 1984). Here, where agreement would constitute criticism of the other, it is disagreement which is packaged in the preferred response format. The point is further underscored by the fact that denials to accusations and blamings are preferred (Atkinson and Drew, 1979: 122 et seq.). Here, where an admission may announce a rift between the accused and others, denial should occur early and be unaccountable. (It may be noted that both these features are preserved in the British legal system where on the one hand suspect silence in the face of a question or accusation may be used in evidence by the prosecution (McBarnet, 1981; chapter 3, Atkinson and Drew, 1979: 112), while on the other the assertion of innocence (and denial of guilt) is specifically unaccountable according to the legal doctrine that the accused is innocent until proven guilty.)

In sum, preferred format actions are normally affiliative in character while dispreferred format actions are disaffiliative. Similarly, while preferred format actions are generally supportive of social solidarity, dispreferred format actions are destructive of it. As we shall see, the uniform recruitment of specific features of turn design to preferred and dispreferred action types is probably related to their affiliative and disaffiliative characters. In what follows, we will concentrate on the role of two of the most distinctive features of the dispreferred format — accounts and delay — to illustrate this notion.

### Accounts

The role of accounts in dispreferreds is complex, and to simplify the main lines of the argument it will be necessary to

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**Table 2: Preference Format of Some Selected Action Types**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Preferred Format</th>
<th>Dispreferred Format</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Request</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>Refusal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer/invitation</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>Refusal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Agreement</td>
<td>Disagreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-deprecation</td>
<td>Disagreement</td>
<td>Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accusation/blaming</td>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>Admission</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
concentrate on offers, invitations and requests. Here it can be suggested that, a priori, none of these projects acceptance and rejection as equivalent actions. On the contrary, each projects acceptance as the action to be accomplished next. This is formally demonstrable. For example, if I do not want Smith to come to my party, I can ensure this outcome by not inviting him. Prima facie therefore, my invitation to him formally projects his acceptance — regardless of my (or his) private feelings on the matter. Thus, just as a question projects the relevant occurrence of an answer next, so an invitation projects the relevant occurrence of an acceptance next. And, just as the failure to answer a question is accountable (see 249-51), so too is the failure to respond affirmatively to invitations (and requests, offers and the like).

This discussion may be extended by noting that, in asking a question or making an invitation, speakers commit themselves to a range of beliefs about themselves, their co-participants and their relationships. A refusal can threaten or undermine any of these beliefs and, hence, the refusal can undermine the ‘face’ of the first speaker and/or his or her relationship with the second. For example, when a question is not answered, the failure may be a product of the answerer’s not knowing the answer, or not being willing to supply it, or not acknowledging the questioner’s right to ask it. The accounts which accompany or accomplish refusals commonly address one or another of these possibilities. Thus table 3 is a simplified depiction of the range of grounds which might be used to reject or put off a simple request: ‘Would you dust the room?’.

Now although, as we have suggested, any one of these grounds might in principle serve as grounds for the rejection of the request, the striking fact is how few of them are actively invoked. When accounts for refusing requests are examined empirically, they are found to cluster around the issue of ability to comply (Levinson, 1983: 350; see also Merritt, 1976). Similarly, invitations are overwhelmingly rejected, as in (19), on the basis of inability (rather than, for example, unwillingness) to accept (Drew, 1984a). As we have seen, questions which are requests for information also get inability accounts of the ‘I don’t know’ or related forms (cf. (5), (6) and (7)). Offers, on the other hand, are commonly rejected by reference

to a ‘lack of need’ for the offered thing. Thus in (20) below, an offer of help is rejected on the grounds that there are still ‘helpers’ at home (note the canonical dispreferred rejection format):

(20) (Her:OII:2:4:ST) ((S’s wife has just slipped a disc))  
H: And we were wondering if there’s anything we can do to help  
S: Well ‘at’s  
H: I mean _ can we do any shopping for her or something like that?  
(0.7)  
S: Well that’s most kind Heatherton _hhh At the moment _ no_ because we’ve still got two boys at home.

What is common to all these forms of accounting, of course, is their ‘no fault’ quality. None of them implicate a lack of willingness to give, or accept, the goods or services on offer. None of them threaten the assumed rights of one party to offer or give, or the other to solicit or receive, such goods and services. None, in short, threaten the ‘face’ of either party or the relationship between them.

It can further be noted that these accounts are ‘no fault’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ground</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Existential status of action</td>
<td>I already dusted it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time of performance</td>
<td>It’s not time for dusting yet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for the action</td>
<td>It looks clean to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for the request</td>
<td>Don’t worry I’ll do it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability</td>
<td>I can’t do it today./I can’t do it with this wrist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obligation</td>
<td>It’s not my turn to dust./It’s not my job to dust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness</td>
<td>I hate dusting./I don’t feel like it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights</td>
<td>Who are you asking me to dust?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
accounts in a further sense. Second speakers refuse, or account for refusal, by invoking a 'contingency' which might not, could not, or even should not properly be known to the first. First speakers are thereby absolved of a particular sin: that of asking a question, or making an offer or invitation which they 'could' or 'should' have known could not be positively responded to.

Finally, in these accounts, second speakers invoke contingent knowledge of their own circumstances to account for the lack of a positive response. In thus invoking knowledge which they have rights and obligations to know as subject-actors (Pomerantz, 1980: 187), second speakers can construct accounts which are properly incontestable by others. At the end of the day, it is the speaker and only the speaker who knows his own 'needs', the state of his own knowledge or the state of his diary. The use of such knowledge as the raw materials of accounts for refusal thus forecloses the development of further argument which, indeed, is only possible through the introduction of other, collateral grounds (though see Drew, 1984a, for many subtle observations on this and related issues). Thus these contingent accounts constructed in terms of observations about the speaker's own local circumstances inherently serve to diminish the opportunities for proliferating disagreement or contest (see also Wootton, 1981, for a further discussion of sequential resources related to these matters for terminating request sequences between parents and very young children).

To sum up, accounts are commonly required as design features of disaffiliative (dispreferred) second actions to invitations, requests and the like because these first actions inherently project affiliative second actions, and invoke a variety of assumptions about the desirability etc. of the relevant second actions which, in turn, implicate the 'face' of, and the relationship between, each participant. The latter are threatened by disaffiliative second actions. Accounts resolve these threats by focusing on 'no fault' considerations. Such accounts, in drawing upon matters properly known primarily to the account giver, tend to short-circuit any potential for further conflict or disagreement (see Pomerantz, 1975, 1984, for further sequential considerations bearing on the resolution of disagreement sequences). Thus accounts designed in these ways, in functioning as threat- and conflict-avoidance procedures, serve generally to maintain social solidarity.

It needs only to be added that speakers' working knowledge and competences with respect to 'how conversation works' can add a further reflexive twist to these considerations. Thus a rejection or a refusal which is unaccounted for may be held to be suspect because the rejecting party 'would not' or 'could not' explain it in the normal way. Or again, a speaker who asserts unwillingness to attend a party to an intending host may add insult to injury since, it may be held, 'he couldn't even be bothered to invent an excuse'. And it is in virtue of such considerations that speakers may end up attending social functions for the lack of an appropriate excuse. For, lacking such a desirable social asset, they may do the non-accountable thing, and go.

Delay

While the contribution of accounts to the maintenance of social solidarity between speakers is readily available to intuition, the parallel contribution of delay — as a design feature of dispreferreds — is less so. In the following discussion, we will be centrally concerned once again with responses to offers, invitations and the like and will draw extensively from Davidson's (1984) decisive analysis in this domain of actions.

As we have seen, while 'affiliative' acceptances to offers, invitations, etc. commonly occur 'early', i.e. immediately on completion or in slight overlap with their first pair parts, 'disaffiliating' rejecting responses very often occur 'late'. Compare, for example, the overlapping acceptance in (12) with the delayed rejections in (20) and (21).

(12) (SBI:10:12)
B: Why don't you come and see me sometimes
A: [I would like to

(20) (Her:OII:2:4:ST:detail)
H: I mean can we do any shopping for her or something like that?
→ (0.7)
S: Well that's most kind Heatherton 'hhh At the moment no, because we've still got two boys at home.
(21) (Davidson, 1984: ST)
A: Oh I was gonna say if you wanted to, =
    =hhh you could meet me at UCB and I could
show you some of the other things on the computer,

\( \rightarrow \)

A: Maybe even teach you how to program Basic or
something. hhh

\( \rightarrow \) (0.6)
B: Well I don’t know if I’d wanna get all that
involved, hhhhh

These differences in the timing of preferred acceptances and
dispreferred rejections are strongly recurrent and patterned
design features of these two classes of actions. As a result, the
pauses which occur before the production of dispreferred can
easily be analysed as prefatory to rejection. Thus in (22) and
(23) such an analysis is displayed by the original enquirer/suggester after a ‘long’ pause in (22) and a micro-pause in
(23).

(22) (Levinson, 1983: 320)
C: So I was wondering would you be in your office
    on Monday \( (.) \) by any chance?

\( \rightarrow \) (2.0)

\( \rightarrow \) C: Probably not

(23) (Levinson, 1983: 335)
R: What about coming here on the way

\( \rightarrow \) ( .)

\( \rightarrow \) R: Or doesn’t that give you enough time?
C: Well no I’m supervising here

In both these cases the first speaker, hearing the pause in
progress as foreshadowing some difficulty, steps in to formulate
a negative response in (22) and to anticipate a possible problem in (23).

This analysis can be developed by observing that if first
speakers can analyse a pause as prefatory to rejection, they can
use the time to step in to modify or revise the first utterance to
a more ‘attractive’ or ‘acceptable’ form, rather than simply
using it to formulate an anticipation of rejection. Such a
revision is apparent if we re-examine (21).

(21) (Davidson, 1984: ST (detail))
A: Oh I was gonna say if you wanted to, =
    =hhh you could meet me at UCB and I could
show you some of the other things on the computer

\( \rightarrow \) ( .)

\( \rightarrow \) A: Maybe even teach you how to program Basic or
something. hhh

Here A, analysing the micro-pause as foreshadowing a
rejection of his general offer about computing, revises it to the more concrete one of teaching ‘Basic’ and does so before the rejection is actualized.

As we have seen, dispreferred are also routinely prefaced by
objects such as ‘well’ and ‘uh’ (Davidson, 1984). These, too,
concretely foreshadow rejection and, again, they take time to
produce. During this time, revisions can be made to prior offers, etc. and these revisions in response to pauses, can occur
before the anticipated rejection occurs. Thus in (24) a
suggestion is reinforced after an ‘uh well’, and in (25) a revised offer is re-visited after ‘well’.

(24) (Davidson, 1984: ST)
A: Listen that could be a job for Sammy:::

\( \rightarrow \) A: =hhh

\( \rightarrow \) B: \( \begin{array}{c}
\text{Uhh, we'll, ( .) }
\end{array} \)

\( \rightarrow \) A: \( \begin{array}{c}
\text{And his station wagon.}
\end{array} \)

(25) (Davidson, 1984: ST)
P: Oh I mean uh: you wanna go to the store
    or anything over at the Market? Basket or anything?

\( \rightarrow \) A: \( \begin{array}{c}
\text{h)))))))))))))))))))))))))))))))))))))))))))))))))))h=}
\end{array} \)

\( \rightarrow \) A: =Well honey I——

\( \rightarrow \) P: \( \begin{array}{c}
\text{Or Richard’s?}
\end{array} \)

Here, in (24), the suggestion of ‘Sammy’ for the job is
reinforced in advance of rejection by a subsequent reference to
his ‘station wagon’. And, in (25), a new store (‘Richard’s’) is
mentioned by P who has heard enough in A’s ‘Well ho—’ to
know that her offer of a trip to the ‘Market Basket’ is not
attractive enough.

Generalizing the argument, we can now see that delay is a
general device which permits potentially ‘face-threatening’ rejections to be forestalled by means of revised proposals, offers and the like. Thus, just as the ‘early’ production of affiliative actions (e.g. agreements, acceptances, etc.) maximizes the likelihood of their occurrence (Pomerantz, 1984), so the delayed production of disaffiliative actions (e.g. disagreements, rejections etc.) minimizes the likelihood of their occurrence by permitting them to be forestalled (ibid.). In short, the institutionalized timing features of preference design maximize the tendency for socially solidary actions to take place. The preference system itself is intrinsically ‘biased’ towards solidary actions.

A final extension to these arguments can be achieved by noting that speakers can ‘design in’ delay features into their first actions. One way in which this can be done is by adding ‘redundant’ components – which Davidson terms ‘monitor spaces’ – to the ends of turn units. One such component which has been prominent in the examples above has been ‘or anything’. If we re-examine (25), it can be seen that P’s first proposal is, in fact, a compound proposal:

(25) (Davidson, 1984: ST (detail))
P: Oh I mean uh: you wanna go to the store
→ or anything
over at the Market Basket
→ or anything?

Here a first proposal is hearably complete at the point at which the word ‘store’ is uttered and could have been responded to then and there. The addition of ‘or anything’ thus provides a monitor space in which an early acceptance could have been initiated (in overlap with ‘or anything’). With no positive uptake at this point, P builds ‘or anything’ into a revised proposal referencing the ‘Market Basket’ in place of the ‘store’ – this component being hearable as ‘or anything over at the Market Basket’ with a new completion point on the word ‘basket’. Early acceptance of this proposal would then overlap with P’s final ‘or anything?’. Thus, by the time P hears A’s turn beginning with ‘Well’, she can be sure that rejection is likely because A has already passed over a number of opportunities to accept her variously revised suggestion.

Returning to (20), we can see retrospectively that H’s offer is also designed of give the recipient plenty of opportunities to accept and to give himself the opportunity of revision:

(20) (Her:OH:2:4:ST) ((S’s wife has just slipped a disc))
H: And we were wondering if there’s anything we can do
→ to help
S: Well ‘at’s
H: I mean → can we do any shopping for her
or something like that?

Here it can be seen that H’s first offer has reached a possible completion point at the word ‘do’. The addition of ‘to help’ provides a monitor space in which S could have taken the option of early acceptance but did not. Thus with no early uptake from S, H can proceed to revise his offer to a more concrete one just as S is beginning to reject it. This use of additional post-positioned turn components is just one of several procedures (see Davidson, 1984) by which first speakers can build monitor spaces into their utterances so as to anticipate, and forestall, rejection.

We have now considered in some detail some ways in which both accounts and time are systematically used, whether consciously or not, as institutionalized resources in the design of preferred and dispreferred actions in ways which maximize the potential occurrence of supportive, solidary social actions. We now complete this discussion by looking briefly at a way in which both elements are combined in a particular class of ‘forestalling’ sequence – the pre-sequence.

Consider the following:

(26) (Atkinson and Drew, 1979: 253)
A: Whatcha doin’?
B: Nothin’
A: Wanna drink?

(27) (Atkinson and Drew, 1979: 143)
C: How ya doin’=
= say what’re you doing?
R: Well we’re going out. Why?
C: Oh, I was just gonna say come out and come over here and talk this evening, but if you're going out you can't very well do that.

Plainly the first utterance in each of these sequences is transparently prefatory to something (as it turns out, an invitation in both cases). Equally plainly each is understood as such by the second speaker. Thus, in (26), B's 'nothing' is not to be treated literally but as some kind of 'go ahead', while in (27) R's 'why?' also attends to the prefatory character of C's enquiry.

These two enquiries transparently prefigure some kind of claim (whether in the form of an invitation or a request) on the time of the recipient and they are directly addressed to the most commonly used account for the refusal of such a claim: namely that the time is already occupied and the speaker is unable to accept an invitation or comply with a request. Pre-sequence objects of this type and their near relatives (e.g. pre-announcements (Terasaki, 1976), joke and story prefaces (Sacks, 1974), pre-introductions, pre-closings (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973) and pre-self-identifications (Schegloff, 1979a) are extremely common in conversation. They constitute a further procedure through which speakers can collaborate in forwarding preferred sequences or actions and avoiding (or aborting) dispreferred ones. As such, an utterance such as 'Are you doing anything tonight?' affords specific advantages both to its producer and to its recipient:

1. In the event that the recipient already has an activity in hand, this can be stated in advance of the invitation/request being made. The intending inviter/requester may thus abort his or her up-coming action and hence avoid any direct threat to the other's 'face'.
2. In the event that the recipient has no plans, but wishes to avoid receiving an invitation/request, the proposal of some other up-coming activity can be used to forestall the intending inviter/requester without direct damage to the latter's 'face'.
3. In either event, the person telling about the up-coming activity is enabled to do it in the environment of an utterance which is, formally at least, a 'request for information' rather than an invitation or request per se. Such a person is thus saved from having to engage in, or remedy, face-threatening behaviour.

(4) In the event that the recipient indicates 'no plans', the intending inviter/requester may proceed with greater confidence than before for two reasons. First, a substantial proportion of post-refusal accounts based on references to 'ability' has now been pre-emptively eliminated and, second, because someone who has declined to use a less face-threatening account (i.e. an 'ability' account) in advance of an up-coming invitation/request (a less face-threatening/request/position) is unlikely to use a more face-threatening account after the event (itself a more face-threatening position).

Here, then, we encounter the pre-sequence object as a further, very commonly used conversational device through which dispreferred, face-threatening actions and sequences can be systematically avoided in interaction. Moreover, it may be added that since pre-sequences are commonly used to this end, a participant's failure to employ one may itself become accountable. The utterance 'May I borrow your car?' which is unprefaced by, for example, 'I was wondering if, by any chance, you weren't using the car tonight' may, unless the circumstances are very special, provoke both sanction and irritated gossip.

By now it should go without saying that the various issues raised above do not begin to exhaust the range of empirical possibilities. For example, a speaker who gives the 'go ahead' in anticipation of an invitation to an enjoyable event may 'suddenly recollect' an obstacle when a less attractive request emerges. Various equivocations may be engineered in the face of pre-sequence objects and the latter may, themselves, vary from the transparent to the opaque (see Drew, 1984a for some more complex examples and issues in relation to pre-sequence objects, and Brown and Levinson, 1978, for a much wider range of issues bearing on turn design). Nonetheless here, in outline at least, we encounter some further resources which contribute towards the maintenance of social solidarity.
through the ways in which they involve both temporal and accounting considerations.

In this section we have examined some of the ways in which some standard, institutionalized features of utterance and sequence design may be systematically implicated in the maintenance of social solidarity. These characteristic features of preference organization exhibit a systematic 'bias' in favour of conflict avoidance, and their institutionalization collectivizes that bias as a feature of social structure. Only one of several domains in which preference organizations are clearly implicated in conflict avoidance has been touched upon here. But it can be suggested that, minute and short range though these preference constraints may be, their power is substantial because their influence on conduct is so pervasive.

THE AVAILABILITY OF CONTEXT

Towards the beginning of this chapter it was observed that the significance of any speaker's communicative action is doubly contextual. Each action is context-shaped in the ways in which it is designed and understood by reference to the environment of actions in which it participates. And it is context-renewing in the way that each action, in forming a new context to which the next will respond, will inevitably contribute to the enviroring sequence of actions within which the next will be formed and understood.

Now the issue may properly be raised that the concept of 'context' so far discussed is, by any standards, an exceptionally immediate and local one. The 'contexts' we have discussed thus far have comprised scarcely more than three or four turns at talk. How, it may legitimately be asked, can this highly local sense of context and contextualization enable us to get any purchase on events which are informed by a larger, overarching context such as a social institution? For example, although much has been said about the normative organization of questions and answers, has conversation analysis anything to say when the questions are being asked by managers, doctors, teachers, lawyers and the like? Is there any way in which the local sense of context discussed thus far links with these larger institutional frameworks? What, in short, is the relationship between sequences of talk and institutionalized contexts?

In a paper titled 'Activity types and language', Levinson (1979) makes the appealing proposal that the connection can be established by looking at the ways in which institutionalized 'activity types' constrain the kinds of verbal actions which speakers can perform and guide the interpretations which hearers will make of them. Thus, for example, we can readily understand the following exchange of questions and answers when we know that they took place in a classroom and that the questions were asked by a teacher and answered by school children.

(28) (Levinson, 1979: 384)

T: What are the names of some trees?
C₁: There are oaks.
C₂: Apples!
T: Apple trees, yes.
C₃: Yews.
T: Well done Johnny!
C₄: Oak trees!
T: No Sally, Willy's already said that.

Here, to gloss Levinson's remarks, we understand the sequence of questions and answers by reference to their institutional context – a school. Through knowledge of this context, we invoke the kinds of goals and objectives which the participants (especially the teacher) will tend to have, together with our knowledge of the normal ways these goals are pursued – including, of course, various procedures of questioning and answering.

These observations, which are nicely elaborated in Levinson's subsequent discussion, are plainly valid. Nonetheless, a further problem arises as soon as we ask ourselves: when is it appropriate to bring these assumptions into play, and on what basis do we do so? In short, how do we know what kind of institutional context is in play here? The orthodox response to this question is to suggest that we (and the speakers) bring knowledge about the institutional context to the talk and that they (and we) use it as a
resource in interpreting the talk. Here however it is relevant to notice that the context of interpretation is somehow being treated as exogenous to the talk — an external interpretative resource which the speakers (and we) use to understand what is going on.

These proposals, though they are plausible enough, seem to beg the question. For, even though we have a tape-recording labelled ‘Botany lesson’, we may still reasonably ask whether we can be sure that it is this specific institutional assumptions about activity types which are being made by the speakers, or whether indeed some entirely different set (or indeed no set) are being employed. And our ‘overhearer’s problem’ is matched by an equivalent problem for the speakers – namely how do they know what assumptions to bring into play as the basis on which to interpret the activities of the setting and to design their own actions within it? What, in short, are the guidelines which keep the speakers’ (and our) interpretative assumptions on the rails?

This question may, at first, seem as trivial as its answer is obvious. After all, the participants (and we) know that there are varieties of specialist activities and occupations – medicine, education, law, etc. – whose practitioners conduct their business in specially labelled buildings, at specific times of the day, and often ‘framed’ by access rituals involving a good deal of paraphernalia, pomp and circumstance. Here, surely, are all the guidelines the participants (and we) could possibly need to identify the relevant activity types, bring the relevant interpretative assumptions into play and follow through the course of events with full understanding of what is going on.

And yet a knowledge of the relevant identities, roles and institutions may still be useless (or even downright misleading) in the interpretation of conduct. It is a commonplace that recognizably non-pedagogic interaction may occur in the classroom and, by the same token, that pedagogic interaction may take place outside it – with peers, siblings or grandparents and in front of the TV or over the breakfast table. The first is understood in spite of our overarching knowledge of context, the second is grasped independently of context. Both can somehow be produced and recognized without any external or independent knowledge of context. Similarly, as the European ‘situationists’ of the late sixties demonstrated, the panoply of court procedure can easily be turned upside down by a few well-chosen words, notwithstanding the weighty authority of ‘context’. Cross-examination, moreover, is not unknown outside the courts. Or again, the exchanges which occur in a surgery do not automatically and necessarily assume a consultative character from the moment we walk into the doctor’s office. And so when, really, and how does the ‘consultation’ recognizably happen?

A solution to these problems can emerge as soon as we abandon our traditional conception of ‘context’ as something exogenous to interaction or as an external interpretative resource. Instead, we can begin to think of ‘context’ as something endogenously generated within the talk of the participants and, indeed, as something created in and through that talk.

There are plenty of demonstrations that an awareness of context is something which is created through the details of talk. For example, as Atkinson (1982) has observed, it is often possible to recognize the ‘institutional’ character of sequences of talk without any information beyond the words on the page. Consider the following:

(29) (Levinson, 1979: 380–1)
A: . . . you have had sexual intercourse on a previous occasion haven’t you?
B: Yes.
A: On many previous occasions?
B: Not many.
A: Several?
B: Yes.
A: With several men?
B: No.
A: Just one?
B: Two.
A: Two. And you are seventeen and a half?
B: Yes.

Few readers will have been able to resist the conclusion that (29) above is part of the transcript of a rape trial. Many will have correctly inferred that the answers are being produced
by the alleged rape victim (B) who is being cross-examined by
counsel (A) for the alleged rapist. Somehow this is being
inferred endogenously – solely from the resources supplied by
the sequence of questions and answers. And so the question
arises: what kinds of resources are being drawn upon in this
inference and ones like it? And how are they being used, by us
and, more importantly, by the parties to the sequences?

In what follows, we will sketch an outline answer to this
question, beginning with some uses of questions in ordinary
conversation and in pedagogical interaction. As a way into the
relevant issues, it is useful to make a preliminary distinction,
following Searle, between ‘real’ questions and ‘exam’ questions.
Here Searle proposes: ‘In real questions the speaker wants to
know (find out) the answer; in exam questions, the speaker
wants to know if the hearer knows’ (Searle, 1969: 66).
Consider then, the issue of how a recipient might decide
whether he has been asked a question of the ‘real’ or ‘exam’
variety. We start by instancing some polar types and
circumstances.

There will undoubtedly be some circumstances – for
example the ‘debriefing’ of an agent who has ‘changed sides’ –
where the latter may never know which of the questions were
‘traps’ whose answers were already known in advance.
Similarly, when a father asks a son who has newly acquired an
atlas for Christmas ‘What’s the capital of Ecuador?’ it may be
impossible for the son to determine whether he has been asked
a ‘real’ or an ‘exam’ question – at least at the moment the
question was asked. On the other hand, there are also
questions whose design and circumstances may seem to
render their status transparent. ‘Do you have the time?’ is
likely, other things being equal, to be understood as a ‘real’
question (though see Goffman, 1981: 68–70). While, similarly,
‘What’s the capital of France?’ – especially if asked by an
adult of, say, a seven year old – is likely to be heard as an
‘exam’ question. Yet, even here, it must be stressed that these
understandings are, properly speaking, ‘best guesses’ or
inferences. The inquiry about the time could be a ploy to
initiate a robbery or an introduction, while that about the
capital of France just might be an attempt to remedy a
temporarily faulty memory.

Between these polar types of complete uncertainty and
virtual certainty lie many gradations of doubt and confidence.
And this being the case, it might seem that answerers may
tend to remain a little ‘hazy’ about the status of questions they
have been asked and for which they have furnished answers.
Yet in practice this is rarely the case, and this is so by virtue of
the three-part character of the local sequential organization of
talk discussed earlier. The following question–answer sequences
exhibit one commonly used procedure through which the
status of prior questions is clarified.

(30) (Rah:1:8:ST)

V: And she’s got the application forms. =
1 → J: =Ooh: so when is her interview did she say y?
2 → V: [She
didn’t (.) Well she’s gotta send their form
back. She doesn’t know when the interview is yet.
3 → J: [O h : : : ] [Oh it’s just the
form,

(31) (Frankel:TC:1:1:13-14:ST)
1 → S: ’hh When do you get out. Christmas week or the
week before Christmas.
(0.3)
2 → G: Uh: :m two or three days before Christmas.
3 → S: [O h : : ]

(32) (Rah:B:1:1D:12:4:ST)
1 → J: Okay then I was asking and she says you’re
working tomorrow as well,
2 → I: Yes I’m supposed to be tomorrow yes,
3 → J: Oh:::

These three sequences are arranged in an order which
-corresponds to the degree to which the answer to the question
is ‘unexpected’. In (30) the answer undercuts the questioner’s
assumption that the application form for a job has already
been sent away and is plainly not expected by the questioner.
In (31) the questioner proposes two alternative possibilities as
an answer to her question and gets an answer which falls
within the parameters of the first of these. Finally, in (32), J’s
report of another speaker's assertion concerning her co-participant is confirmed by that co-participant (see Pomerantz, 1980, for an account of how such reports come to 'question'). Thus, in (32), the co-participant's confirmation is strongly 'expectable'.

In each of these sequences, we encounter a question-answer-'oh' pattern (arrows 1–3) which is highly recurrent in question-answer sequences. In each case, the third turn 'oh' does not indicate 'surprise' for, although surprise might be relevant in (30), it is certainly not in (31) and (32) and yet 'oh' is used to receive all three answers. In fact, the 'oh' indicates a 'change of state' of knowledge (Heritage, 1984a). Such an indication is nicely fitted to the question-answer sequences which it completes. In a 'real' question, the questioner proposes to be ignorant about the substance of the question and, as we have seen (pp. 249–51), projects the intended answerer to be knowledgeable about the matter. Thus the provision of an answer should, in such a context, commit the questioner to have undergone a 'change of state' from ignorance to knowledge. The particle 'oh' is a major means of expressing just that. It follows from this that the questioner's 'oh' response - in expressing a change of state of knowledge - serves to confirm, or re-confirm, that the original question was a 'real' one. Once again, then, we find a three-part sequence in which the provision of a third turn unobtrusively consolidates the sense of the first.

These observations can be further strengthened by a consideration of a 'deviant case'. In the following extract, three question-answer-'oh' sequences run to completion in quick succession. Subsequently a fourth such sequence is apparently initiated with the question-intoned utterance 'Nice Jewish boy?'

\[(33) (HG:11:25:ST) ((Concerning a boyfriend away at university))\]

\[1 \rightarrow N: \text{h}h\text{h}h \text{Does he have his own apartment?}\]
\[2 \rightarrow H: \text{[h}h\text{h}h\text{h}h\text{h}] \text{Yea:h,=} \]
\[3 \rightarrow N: \text{Oh:}\]
\[1 \rightarrow N: \text{How did you get his number.}\]

\[2 \rightarrow H: \text{I: (,) called information at San Francisco uh} \]
\[3 \rightarrow N: \]
\[\text{[Oh:...]}\]
\[\text{()}\]
\[N: \text{Very clever,=} \]
\[H: \text{=Thank you: I\-- hh\-- hhhhhhhh } h=\]
\[1 \rightarrow N: \text{[What's his last name,] h=} \]
\[2 \rightarrow H: \text{=Uh:: Freedland. hh hh}\]
\[3 \rightarrow N: \text{[Or:]} \]
\[H: \text{[(or) Freedland.=} \]
\[\text{a} \rightarrow N: \text{=Nice Jewish boy?}\]
\[\text{()}\]
\[b \rightarrow H: \text{[O:course,=} \]
\[c \rightarrow N: \text{[Of:course,}\]
\[H: \text{[hh hh hh]} \text{hh:mm hh=} \]
\[N: \text{=Nice Jewish boy who doesn't like to write letters?}\]

This final triplet (marked a, b, c on the transcript) although beginning with a question-like turn (arrow a) which offers an inference about the boyfriend's ethnic identity from his surname, does not run off like the previous three. Instead, after the confirming response (arrow b) to the inference, the first speaker echoes the confirmation (arrow c) in such a way as to suggest that her initial 'inference' was not a query, but rather an expression of the obvious. By means of this alternative third turn receipt, an utterance which could have been retrospectively formulated as a question is in fact treated as having been, all along and in the first place, a 'comment'.

In sum, conversationists have a variety of 'third turn' resources with which to demonstrate that an answer to a question has been 'informative' or 'news' for them. 'Oh' is one such resource, 'really', 'did you', 'God!', 'wow', etc. are other, related resources. There are yet other, more complex and intricate, means of expressing similar orientations. The point to take from this brief discussion is that the questioner's orientation of, to paraphrase Scarle, 'wanting to find out something' is, by these various means, preserved and sustained as an intersubjectively confirmed and consolidated orientation in and through these three-part sequences.

Quite a different orientation is displayed in the recurrent
three-part sequences making up 'pedagogical' interaction. Thus in (34), the questioner repeatedly assesses, evaluates or comments on the answers elicited by his questions in a characteristic (arrowed 1–3) question–answer–comment sequence (McHoul, 1978; Mehan, 1979).

(34) (McHoul, forthcoming) (simplified)
1  → T: Where else were they taking it before they started in Western Australia?
   (2.0)
T: Mm hm?
   (0.5)
2  → P1: Melbourne?
   (0.5)
3  → T: Nor:
2  → P1:
3  → T: No:
   (1.0)
1  → T: Where does BHP get its iron ore from?
2  → P1:
3  → T: Doesn't
2  → P1: (New South Wales)
......
3  → T: You're guessing

It will be apparent from even the most elementary inspection of this sequence that each and every one of the teacher's (arrow 3) responses to the answers to his questions, by accepting or rejecting those answers, proposes independent knowledge of the answer. Each response thereby proposes the prior question to have been an 'exam' question. Furthermore, across a sequence of such question–answer–comment triplets an overwhelmingly 'pedagogical' frame of reference is established. Thus, regardless of whether the above sequence took place in a classroom or not, it is clear that something 'educational' is going on through the stacking up of a series of 'exam' questions. In sum, we scarcely need to see the desks, the blackboard or the other paraphernalia of classroom 'context', because the educational context of this interaction is being renewed with every 'third turn' acceptance or rejection of an answer. By the same token we find that, no matter how objectively 'certain' a particular, a priori contextualized sense for a question may be, the participants nonetheless find themselves employing these 'third turn' resources through which they routinely assure and reassure one another that it is 'this', and not some 'other', sense of context that is operative for the local organization of 'this segment' of interaction.

Now, of course, it is not merely in 'third turns' that participants' orientations to the content and context of institutional activities is displayed as a return to (29) shows.

(29) (Levinson, 1979: 380–1)
A: . . . you have had sexual intercourse on a previous occasion haven't you?
B: Yes.
A: On many previous occasions?
B: Not many.
A: Several?
B: Yes.
A: With several men?
B: No.
A: Just one?
B: Two.
A: Two. And you are seventeen and a half?
B: Yes.

The fact that here the questioning is being done neither to 'inform' the questioner (nor, of course, to 'test' the witness's knowledge of her own past experiences) is displayed by the design of the questions. These are hearable neither as 'real' questions or 'exam' questions (Levinson, 1979). Moreover, the fact that these questions are designed to elicit information for the 'bystanding' judge and jury (cf. Goffman, 1981: 133–4) is displayed, inter alia, by the questioner's avoidance of any form of third turn receipt item in favour of a move to the next question (cf. Heritage, 1984b). Similarly, that this is a hostile cross-examination rather than a direct examination by friendly counsel is evidenced both by the design of the questions and the witness's less than co-operative responses (cf. Levinson,
1979: 374–5; Atkinson and Drew, 1979: 105–87; Drew, 1984b; Pomerantz and Atkinson, 1984) and, of course, it is also evidenced in the juxtaposition of the counsel’s questions which – especially the final one – are plainly designed to build up a portrait which is damaging to the witness (Levinson, 1979: 380–1).

It is thus through the specific, detailed and local design of turns and sequences that ‘institutional’ contexts are observably and reportably – i.e. accountably – brought into being. They may be created and realized outside of their usual formal locations in classrooms, courtrooms, etc., and, by the same token, they may fail to be realized inside these places. This observation suggests that, notwithstanding the panoply and power of place and role, it is within these local sequences of talk, and only there, that these institutions are ultimately and accountably talked into being. And this, in turn, underscores Garfinkel’s recommendation that

any social setting be viewed as self-organizing with respect to the intelligible character of its own appearances. Any setting organizes its activities to make its properties as an organized environment of practical activities detectable, countable, recordable, tell-a-story-aboutable, analysable – in short, accountable. Garfinkel, 1967a: 33)

Finally, the considerations of this section show that the details of little, local sequences which at first seemed narrow, insignificant and contextually uninteresting, turn out to be the crucial resources by which larger institutionalized activity frameworks are evoked. Such institutional contexts are created as visible states of affairs on a turn-by-turn basis. It is ultimately through such means that ‘institutions’ exist as accountable organizations of social actions.

CONCLUSION

Although this has been a lengthy chapter and an extensive effort has been made to illustrate the kind of research work represented by conversation analysis, we have in fact scarcely grazed the surface of its orientations and achievements. In essence, the omissions of this chapter are twofold. First, there are whole domains of research which have been overlooked. These include the organization of turn-making, the management of repair, the analysis of topic organization, the integration of vocal and non-vocal activities which, together with numerous sub-areas, now have extensive literatures (see Heritage, 1984c, for details). Second, while the relevance of conversation analytic findings to a number of topics – the maintenance of intersubjective understanding, the maintenance of social solidarity and the endogenous constitution of ‘context’ – has been briefly discussed, it should not be concluded that conversation analysis is specially devised or directed to deal with these matters. On the contrary, other studies could have been cited which are geared to quite different objectives, for example the analysis of how speakers manage particular interactional roles or project specific identities, or of how orators mobilize crowd support for their claims, or again how conversationalists go about the task of communicating personal troubles to one another. There is, then, no fixed agenda intrinsic to conversation analysis, any more than there is for ethnomethodology or, indeed, the discipline of sociology as a whole. Rather, conversation analysis represents a general approach to the analysis of social action which can be applied to an extremely varied array of topics and problems.

The central achievement of conversation analysis has been its wholesale advance in the detailed analysis of the organization of social action. This advance has created anxieties in some quarters. In particular, it has been suggested by commentators of a humanist persuasion that conversation analysis represents a betrayal of the principles of verstehende sociology in favour of a new behaviourism which is every bit as mechanistic and deterministic as its psychological predecessor. Such fears are entirely groundless. Conversation analysis in fact represents a vast extension – in both scope and detail – of the basic theorem of accountable action presented in chapter 5. That theorem, it will be recalled, was non-deterministic. According to that theorem actors may, or may not, act in accordance with the normatively organized constraints which bear upon them – subject only to the condition that ‘deviant’
actions may ultimately be recognizable, accountable and sanctionable as such.

The organization of talk thus participates in a dialectical relationship between agency and structure in social life and in a cognitive-moral way. Without a detailed texture of institutionalized methods of talking to orient to, social actors would inevitably lose their cognitive bearings. Under such circumstances, they would become incapable both of interpreting the actions of co-participants and of formulating their own particular courses of action. A texture of institutionalized methods of talking is thus essential if actors are to make continuous sense of their environments of action. Moreover, a range of moral considerations may be superimposed on these cognitive ones. For in the absence of a detailed institutionalization of methods of talking, actors could not be held morally accountable for their actions, and moral anomic would necessarily compound its cognitive counterpart. In the end, therefore, what is at stake is the existence of a form of social organization which is so strong and detailed as to render choices among courses of action both conceivable and possible. It is the specification of this social organization, with all its nuances, ramifications and cultural variations, which conversation analysis is essentially about.

In exactly the ways that a setting is organized, it consists of members’ methods for making evident that setting’s ways as clear, coherent, planful, consistent, chosen, knowable, uniform, reproducible connections, i.e. rational connections.

Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*

In the final chapter of this book we turn to the most recent phase of Garfinkel’s programme of research: the ‘studies of work’. These studies were first introduced at the Ninth World Congress of Sociology at Uppsala, Sweden, in 1978 and a number of publications have subsequently appeared (Garfinkel, Lynch and Livingston, 1981; Lynch, 1982; Lynch, Livingston and Garfinkel, 1983). The latter have been concerned with aspects of natural scientific activity, but a series of forthcoming volumes (Garfinkel, forthcoming; Lynch, forthcoming) will deal with a broader range of work domains including law, medicine, art and mathematics. The discussion of the present chapter cannot properly or usefully anticipate these concrete studies but will be limited to a treatment of the programme of work outlined in the published papers.

At its most basic, the studies-of-work programme is directed to analysing the specific, concrete material practices which compose the moment-to-moment, day-by-day work of occupational life. These practices are treated as endogenous to the work domains in which they occur and which they constitute. Access to these practices is gained through the fact that in a variety of ways – some tacit, some partially formulated – they are produced and recognized by the parties to work environments as locally accountable competences in working activities. The competences which enter, for example, into such activities as playing jazz piano (Sudnow, 1978), or using ‘chalk and talk’