

Conversation Analysis and Institutional Talk:
Analyzing Distinctive Turn-Taking Systems

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In: S.Cmejrková, J.Hoffmannová, O.Müllerová and J.Svetlá (1998) (eds.)
Proceedings of the 6th International Congress of IADA (International
Association for Dialog Analysis), Tübingen: Niemeyer, pp.3-17.

Introduction

In the thirty years since its inception, conversation analysis has emerged as a major, and distinctively sociological, contribution to the analysis of discourse. During this time, discourse analysis has acquired considerable prominence as a field of inquiry. Correspondingly, conversation analysis has grown and diversified in many different directions.

The sociological origins of conversation analysis are to be found in the work of two great American originators: Erving Goffman and Harold Garfinkel. With Goffman (1955; 1983), conversation analysts begin with the notion that conversational interaction represents an institutional order sui generis in which interactional rights and obligations are linked not only to personal face and identity, but also to macro-social institutions. With Garfinkel (1967), conversation analysts recognize that analyzing the institution of conversation in terms of rules and practices that impose moral obligations, in the way that Goffman stressed, needs to be supplemented by recognizing the importance of intersubjectivity. In particular, this means focusing on how interactional rules and practices are ceaselessly drawn upon by the participants in constructing shared and specific understandings of 'where they are' within a social interaction. Central to this process is a 'reflexive' dimension in social action: by their actions participants exhibit an analysis or an understanding of the event in which they are engaged, but by acting they also make an interactional contribution that moves the event itself forward on the basis of that analysis. In this sense, to adapt Otto Neurath's famous metaphor, they are building the ship while already being out on the ocean.

Most of the early work in conversation analysis focused on 'ordinary conversation' - a term that has come to denote forms of interaction which are not confined to specialized settings or to the execution of particular tasks. Ordinary conversation is often defined negatively: wedding ceremonies are not 'ordinary conversation', legal proceedings in court are not 'ordinary conversation', though both adapt practices of talk and action from ordinary conversation and press them into service in these more specialized and restricted speech settings. In contrast, the studies of 'institutional talk' which began to emerge in the late 1970s focused on more restricted environments in which (i) the goals of the participants are more limited and institution-specific, (ii) restrictions on the nature of interactional contributions are often in force, and (iii) institution- and activity-specific inferential frameworks are common (Drew and Heritage 1992).

The relationship between 'ordinary conversation' and 'institutional talk' can be understood as that between a 'master institution' and its more restricted local variants. Relative to the institution of conversation, the law courts, schools, news interviews, doctor-patient interactions, etc. are comparatively recent inventions that have undergone a great deal of social change. The institution of mundane conversation by contrast exists, and is experienced as, prior to institutional

interaction both in the life of the individual and the life of the society. Relative to institutional interaction, it is relatively stable: the interactional maneuvers in the plays of Shakespeare, sophisticated though some of them are, are perfectly intelligible to us four centuries later.

In addition to its stability, 'ordinary conversation' encompasses a vast array of rules and practices, which are deployed in pursuit of every imaginable kind of social goal, and which embody an indefinite array of inferential frameworks. 'Institutional interaction,' by contrast, generally involves a reduction in the range of interactional practices deployed by the participants, restrictions in the contexts they can be deployed in, and it frequently involves some specialization and respecification of the interactional relevance of the practices that remain (Drew and Heritage 1992). As Atkinson (1982) observes, these reductions and respecifications are often experienced as constraining, troublesome and even threatening - especially by the lay participants.

Conversation Analysis: Methodological Preliminaries

Conversation analysis (CA), like other forms of discourse analysis focuses extensively on issues of meaning and context in interaction. However, CA is distinctive in developing this focus by linking both meaning and context to the idea of sequence. In fact, CA embodies a theory which argues that sequences of actions are a central aspect of the social context of an action, that the meaning of an action is heavily shaped by the sequence of previous actions from which it emerges, and that social context itself is a dynamically created thing that is expressed in and through the sequential organization of interaction.

Underlying this approach is a fundamental theory about how participants orient to interaction. This theory involves three interrelated claims.

(1) In constructing their talk, participants normally address themselves to preceding talk and, most commonly, the immediately preceding talk (Sacks 1987 [1973], 1992 [1964-72]; Schegloff and Sacks 1973; Schegloff 1984). In this simple and direct sense, their talk is context-shaped.

(2) In doing some current action, participants normally project (empirically) and require (normatively) that some 'next action' (or one of a range of possible 'next actions') should be done by a subsequent participant (Schegloff 1972). They thus create (or maintain or renew) a context for the next person's talk.

(3) By producing their next actions, participants show an understanding of a prior action and do so at a multiplicity of levels - for example, by an 'acceptance', someone can show an understanding that the prior turn was complete, that it was addressed to them, that it was an action of a

particular type (e.g., an invitation), and so on. These understandings are (tacitly) confirmed or can become the objects of repair at any third turn in an on-going sequence (Schegloff 1992). Through this process they become 'mutual understandings' created through a sequential 'architecture of intersubjectivity' (Heritage 1984).

CA starts from the view that all three of these features - the responsiveness to context by producing a 'next' action that a current projects, the creation of context by the production of that next action, and the showing of understanding by these means - are the products of a common set of socially shared and structured procedures. CA analyses are thus simultaneously analyses of action, context management and intersubjectivity because all three of these features are simultaneously, but not always consciously, the objects of the participants' actions. Finally, the procedures that inform these activities are normative in that participants can be held morally accountable both for departures from their use and for the inferences which their use, or departures from their use, may engender.

Conversation Analysis and Institutional Interaction

As CA turned to the study of talk in institutions, it began with the same assumptions that had proved successful in studying ordinary conversation. Rather than starting with a 'bucket' theory of context (Heritage 1987) in which pre-existing institutional circumstances are seen as enclosing interaction, CA starts with the view that 'context' is both a project and a product of the participants' actions. The assumption is that it is fundamentally through interaction that context is built, invoked and managed, and that it is through interaction that institutional imperatives originating from outside the interaction are evidenced and made real and enforceable for the participants. We want to find out how that works. Empirically, this means showing that the participants build the context of their talk in and through their talk. For example, if we analyze emergency calls to the police, we want to be able to show the ways in which the participants are managing their interaction as an "emergency call" on a "policeable matter." We want to see how the participants co-construct it as an emergency call, incrementally advance it turn-by-turn as an emergency call, and finally bring it off as having been an emergency call.

At this point, we encounter significant methodological difficulties. The most important of these concerns the maintenance of empirical and methodological control over the temptation to attribute features of the interaction to its 'context' in an ad hoc way (Schegloff 1991; Wilson 1991). In this context, Schegloff (1991) has argued that that, if it is to be claimed that some interaction has a specifically 'institutional' character, then the relevance and procedural consequentiality of the institutional context and its associated roles, tasks and identities must be shown in the details of the participants' conduct. This means that in addition to the normal

CA tasks of analyzing the conduct of the participants and the underlying organization of their activities, that conduct and its organization must additionally be demonstrated to embody orientations which are specifically institutional or which are, at the least, responsive to constraints which are institutional in character or origin. This additional task is often very demanding. As Schegloff observes, although we can have strong intuitions that activities are 'organized differently' in institutional settings, it is much more difficult to specify these differences precisely, and to demonstrate their underlying institutional moorings.

In earlier papers, Drew and Heritage identified six distinct domains of interactional phenomena which might be investigated for their relevance to the nature of institutional interaction (Drew and Heritage 1992; Drew and Sorjonen 1997; Heritage 1997). These domains are:

- (1) Turn-taking organization
- (2) Overall structural organization of the interaction
- (3) Sequence organization
- (4) Turn design
- (5) Lexical choice
- (6) Epistemological and other forms of asymmetry

In the remainder of this paper, I will focus on the first of these -- turn-taking organization.

Turn-taking Organizations: An Overview

All interactions involve the use of some kind of turn-taking organization (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974), and many kinds of institutional interaction use the same turn-taking organization as ordinary conversation. Some, however, involve very specific and systematic transformations in conversational turn-taking procedures. These special turn-taking systems can be very important in studying institutional interaction because they have the potential to alter the parties' opportunities for action, and to recalibrate the interpretation of almost every aspect of the activities that they structure. For example, the opportunities to initiate actions, what the actions can be intended to mean, and how they will be interpreted can all be significantly shaped by the turn-taking rules for interaction in a 'formal' classroom (McHoul 1978).

In conversation, very little of what we say, the actions we perform or the order in which we do things is determined in advance (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974). In this sense, conversations are unpredictable. In some forms of interaction - debates, ceremonies, and many kinds of meetings - the topics, contributions and order of speakership is organized from the outset in an explicit and predictable way. This kind of organization involves special turn-taking procedures that can be described as special turn-taking systems.¹

The most intensively studied institutional turn-taking organizations have been those that obtain in the courts (Atkinson and Drew 1979), news interviews (Greatbatch 1988; Heritage and Greatbatch 1991) and classrooms (McHoul 1978; Mehan 1985). As these examples - courts, news interviews, classrooms - suggest, special turn-taking organizations tend to be present in large scale 'formal' environments that normally have two significant features:

- (a) there are a large number of potential participants in the interaction, whose contributions must be 'rationed' in some kind of formal way,

and/or

- (b) when the talk is designed for an 'overhearing' audience.

However, special turn-taking systems can be found in more private, and less formal, contexts. For example, Peräkylä (1995, Ch.2) has described turn-taking practices within counselling contexts that are designed to implement special therapeutic processes. Similarly Garcia (1991) has shown that mediation can involve special turn-taking practices as a means of limiting conflict between the participants. Finally, there are other turn-taking organizations that order speakership by age, rank or other criteria of seniority (Albert 1964; Duranti 1994) though, perhaps because European and North American societies are less hierarchical than others in the world, these systems have so far been less studied.

The interest in formal turn-taking systems that has been considerable during the past decade or so, has arisen partly because of their methodological significance. Turn-taking organisations are a fundamental and generic aspect of the organisation of interaction. They are organisations whose features are implemented recurrently over the course of single interactional episodes. This characteristic gives them a special methodological significance for the study of institutional talk. For if it can be shown that the participants in an institutional setting such as a courtroom pervasively organise their turn-taking in a way that is distinctive from ordinary conversation, it can be proposed that they are organising their conduct so as to display and realise its 'institutional' character over its course and that they are doing so recurrently and pervasively - thus meeting Schegloff's 'relevance' requirement at a single stroke.

Identifying Distinctive Turn-Taking Systems

How do we identify interactions in which a distinctive and institutionalized turn-taking system is in place? Most special turn-taking systems in contemporary industrial societies exploit question-answer exchanges to form particular turn-taking systems, so we will concentrate on these. To identify special turn taking systems, we must distinguish interactions in which the pursuit

of immediate interactional goals involves the participants in lengthy question-answer [Q-A] chains, from interactions in which such chains are mandatory. Although it might seem otherwise, statistical studies indicate that it can be difficult to distinguish the two kinds of interaction on a quantitative basis (Linell, Gustavsson and Juvonen 1988).

Rather than a quantitative criterion, the decisively identifying feature of a special turn-taking organization is that departures from it - for example departures from the order of speakership, or the types of contributions individuals are expected to make - can be explicitly sanctioned. This happens in meetings when speakers are ruled 'out of order', in the courts when persons are sanctioned to answering when they should not, or failing to answer appropriately, or when children in classrooms are punished for 'shouting out' answers, or talking when the teacher is talking. These explicit sanctions are very important analytically. They tell us that the rules which we initially hypothesize from empirical regularities in the participants' actions are in fact rules that the participants recognize that they should follow as a moral obligation. In short, explicit sanctions show that a turn-taking organization is being oriented to normatively in its own right.

Turn-Taking in the News Interview: An Exemplification

Although some news interviewers like to say that their job is to engage public figures 'in conversation', even the most cursory look at the news interview reveals dramatic differences from a conversational framework. In conversation, topics can emerge freely and in a variety of ways, the participants are free to make diverse contributions to the subject at hand and anyone can initiate a new line of departure. In the news interview, by contrast, the participants are fundamentally constrained. Interviewers (IR) restrict themselves to questioning and interviewees (IE) restrict themselves to answering IR questions, or at least responding to them. This constraint shapes the form taken by the participants' talk and the order in they talk to the following pattern:

IR: Question
 IE: Response
 IR: Question
 IE: Response

This form of turn-taking involves what Atkinson and Drew (1979) have called "turn-type preallocation" in which the activities of asking and answering (or responding to) questions are pre-allocated to the roles of IR and IE. With minor exceptions, this preallocated pattern holds regardless of the number of IRs or IEs involved in the encounter.

While this pattern is familiar enough, it is worth pausing for a moment to

consider what basic kinds of conduct are excluded by it. The short answer is that the participants - IRs and IEs - exclude themselves from a wide variety of actions that they are normally free to do in the give and take of ordinary conversation. If IRs restrict themselves to asking questions, then they cannot - at least overtly - express opinions, or argue with, debate or criticize the interviewees' positions nor, conversely, agree with, support, or defend them. Correspondingly, if IEs restrict themselves to answers (or responses) to questions, then they cannot ask questions (of IRs or other IEs), nor make unsolicited comments on previous remarks, initiate changes of topic, or divert the discussion into criticisms of the IR or the broadcasting organization. In practice, of course, some of these actions occasionally turn up in news interviews but, as we shall see, only as departures from the rules of news interview turn-taking and often as noticeable, problematic and possibly sanctionable courses of action.

One major consequence of these restrictions is, in principle at least, to place IRs firmly in control of the interactional management of the interview. First, it is the IRs' questions that set the agenda for IEs' responses and which provide a context in which they will be evaluated as honest, truthful, appropriate, or dishonest, evasive or combative (Clayman 1990). Further, where there are two or more IEs, IRs' questions will generally determine which IE is selected to speak next and whether other IEs will be permitted to address the topic under discussion. Moreover, IRs can take the lead in moving to new topics and in deciding when the interview will be closed. All this is, to repeat, a normal product of adherence to the turn-taking rules and conventions of the news interview and it represents a significant potential for interactional power and control.

The value of this control is obvious when we consider that a broadcasting organization must deal with many IEs who may never have been interviewed before and may never be interviewed again. These IEs may need a strong interaction framework to get through the interview without mishap. At the other end of the scale, this control may also be a means of restraining politicians and other experienced IEs who would otherwise treat the interview situation as a kind of soapbox from which to deliver a pre-packaged message. These benefits also have certain costs. The inexperienced or unassertive IE can be restricted to an agenda that is limited by the imagination and ability of the IR. And the control exerted through IR questioning is, of course, a major point of friction with IEs who object to the agenda which an IR is pursuing, or who wish to impose their own agenda on the encounter.

Showing the Normativity of this System

To determine that this turn-taking system is normatively sanctioned as a system, we need to look for departures from it and how they are responded to. In a Q-A system like the news interview, there are several sorts of departures:

- 1) At the end of a Q-A sequence, a second (unaddressed) IE may attempt to speak, pre-empting the return of the floor to the IR.
- 2) An IE may act in some other way than responding to a question: e.g., ask a question, or anticipate a question, perhaps in an attempt to forestall it.
- 3) An IR may fail to ask a question.

Where these kinds of actions are addressed and sanctioned as events in their own right, then we are justified in speaking of a distinct turn-taking system.²

1) At the end of a Q-A sequence, a second IE may attempt to speak, pre-empting the return of the floor to the IR.

In news interviews where more than one news interviewee is present (multi-IE interviews), it is not uncommon for IEs who are not addressed participants in the talk in progress to interject comments on the issues in play. Because these IEs are unaddressed (the prior question was not addressed to them), their interjections will necessarily constitute departures from the Q-A turn-taking system through which the news interview is constructed. In this context, unaddressed IEs may request permission to speak, thus acknowledging the normative arrangements in place while simultaneously seeking legitimation for departing from them. The following is a case in point. In it, IE2 (former US official, Henry Kissinger) orients to the breach of the turn-taking rules by requesting permission to make his comment:

- (1) [PBS MacNeil 12-4-89] (Concerning the reunification of Germany)
- 1 IE1: ...as long as the two systems exist and we need
 - 2 them for stability .h we will have no:: .h uh unification.
 - 3 This is absolutely clear.
 - 4 IE2: -> May I say something,
 - 5 IR: Yes sir.=
 - 6 IE2: -> =on the subject?
 - 7 IR: Yes sir.
 - 8 IE2: Uh (.) ahem I think it is a big mistake. to equate the
 - 9 NATO alliance and thuh Warsaw Pact....

Here the IE, notwithstanding his status and expertise, clearly orients to his

restricted rights to volunteer a contribution to the topic on the floor of the interview and, even after his request is granted (line 5), further legitimizes his request with the additional claim (line 6) that he wants to say something "on the subject" of the prior IE's turn.

A similar normative orientation is also visible in 'token' requests for permission to speak, as in (2). Here, immediately after a turn component that requests permission to speak, the IE proceeds to make his contribution without waiting for the IR to respond to his request.

(2) [Greatbatch 1988]
 1 IE1: ...there was no evidence whatever that stiffer penalties
 2 di- diminish crime.=
 3 IE2: -> =Can I make a point about that.=.hhh which is that (.) if
 4 only this country...(continues)

Because he immediately goes on to make his contribution before the IR responds to his request, the IE's request effectively has only a 'token' status. In fact, the grammatical continuation of his utterance that is engineered with "which" means that his initial remark is a 'double duty' utterance that also functions as a prefatory statement, drawing attention to the remarks he is about to make. In this case, although the IE issues only a 'token' request, he nonetheless acknowledges that his action represents a departure from the turn taking provisions of the news interview which, by this acknowledgement, he treats as normative.

2) An IE may act in some other way than responding to a question: e.g., ask a question, or anticipate a question, perhaps in an attempt to forestall it.

More substantial departures from the news interview turn-taking system occur when IEs seek to engage in some alternative action than responding to the question at issue. Asking questions and preempting their delivery by IRs are the most common types of such alternative actions. For example in the following case, IE2 (British Labour politician, Roy Hattersley), rather than merely seeking to make a comment, initiates a Q-A sequence addressed to IE1.

(3) (Greatbatch 1988) ((The 'David' addressed by IE2 is the interviewer))

1 IE1: ...the sooner they join the Social Democrats the better
 2 f[o r u s] and better for them?=
 3 IE2: [Well let me a-]
 4 IE2: -> =David may I ask Mister Scargill a question you asked him
 5 and he didn't answer a moment ago. I've been in the Labour
 6 Party for thirty two yea:rs.=I was campaigning for it in
 7 South Yorkshire when you were campaigning for a different
 8 pa:rtly. .hhhh I think my socialist credentials stand up
 9 against yours in any an- analysis. .hh Do you think people
 10 like me ought to leave the Labour Party. (.) Do you want us
 11 in.=
 12 IE1: =That's a decision that you have to make...(continues)

Here IE2's request seeks permission from the IR to ask his question (acknowledging its impropriety), and partially offsets that impropriety by describing it as the IR's previous question that he is re-asking. The request also serves to project his upcoming question to IE1 and provides for the relevance of his intervening statements about his "socialist credentials" (lines 5-9) as accomplice to his question. Again, there is clear acknowledgment, through the request for permission to ask the question and its justification, of the departure from the news interview turn-taking system.

In cases where IEs attempt to anticipate or pre-empt questions, disputes emerge in which the normative nature of the news interview turn-taking system clearly emerges. Such a dispute is shown in the following interaction between then Vice-President George Bush and CBS news anchor Dan Rather. Here the topic is the 'Iran-Contra' scandal in which Bush was implicated in the decision to swap arms for the American hostages in Iran:

(4) (CBS Evening News Bush-Rather:3)

1 IR: You said tha' if you had known this was an arms for
 2 hostag[es sw]ap, .hh that you would've opposed it. .hhhh
 3 IE: [Yes]
 4 IR: You also [said thet-] [that you did NOT KNOW thet y-]
 5 IE: -> [E x a c t]ly [(m- may- may I-) may I]
 6 -> answer that.
 7 (0.4)
 8 IE: (Th[uh] right ()-]
 9 IR: -> [That wasn't a] question.=it w[as a statement eh-]
 10 IE: -> [Yes it was a]
 11 -> statement [and I'll answer it. Thuh President]=
 12 IR: -> [Let me ask thuh question if I may first]=
 13 IE: =created this program, .h has testified er s:tated
 14 publicly, (.) he did not think it was arms fer hostages.

Here, at each of the arrowed points, both the IR and the IE assert their respective rights to speak by explicitly invoking the relevance and normativity of news interview questioning and answering. Bush begins (lines 5-6) with a request to "answer" the IR's initial statement. Bush's utterance orients to the institutional roles of IR and IE by requesting permission to 'answer' the IR at a point where an IE would normally withhold talk but a conversational participant would simply proceed to talk without requesting to do so. The IR's response - a defence of his right to continue (line 9) - rests on the implied claim that his turn at lines 1-2 and 4 has not yet reached a question and suggests that it is therefore not complete. While the IR here in effect resists interruption, he does so specifically by invoking his institutional right as IR to ask a question and not the ordinary interactional right to complete an utterance in progress. Moreover, finally, when Bush insists on "answering" the statement (lines 10-11/13-14), the IR continues to resist (line 12) with an explicit appeal to be allowed to "ask the question... first". With his formulation of "thuh question," rather than "a question," the IR asserts that he was in fact leading up to a specific question and that his complaint concerns the fact that his right to ask that specific question is being denied to him.

3) An IR may fail to ask a question

News interviewers in the anglophone data that we have analyzed overwhelmingly package their contributions to interview talk as questions (Heritage and Roth 1995). Moreover when they lapse from this practice, their lapses are quite commonly treated as if they were questions, and responded to as such. However, these departures are vulnerable to being held to the standard that IRs turns should properly be constructed as questions. In (5), the topic is the handling of the US Savings and Loan financial rescue by President Bush's Office of Management and Budget (OMB) whose head, Richard Darman, is the IE. Just before this sequence, veteran TV journalist Sam Donaldson has implied that the OMB was misleading the public about the rescue by setting up a corporation to take the funds involved out of the federal budget. At the beginning of the segment below, Donaldson quite forcibly raises the question of whether, as a result of this maneuver, interest payments will cost taxpayers more. Darman's response is to reject this as a 'technical argument' (line 4).

(5) (ABC This Week 10/89: Darman)

1 IR: Isn't it a fact, Mr. Darman, that the taxpayers will
 2 pay more in interest than if they just paid it out of
 3 general revenues?
 4 IE: No, not necessarily. That's a technical argument--
 5 IR -> It's not a-- may I, sir? It's not a technical argument.
 6 -> Isn't it a fact?
 7 IE: No, it's definitely not a fact. Because first of all,
 8 twenty billion of the fifty billion is being handled in
 9 just the way you want -- through treasury financing. The
 10 remaining--
 11 IR: -> I'm just asking you a question. I'm not expressing my
 12 -> personal views.
 13 IE: I understand.

At line 5, Donaldson directly counters Darman's dismissive response to his previous question. Rejecting Darman's claim that the problem of increased costs to the taxpayers is just 'a technical argument,' Donaldson interjects and flatly contradicts Darman - though he goes on to soften the contradiction by adding the question: 'Isn't it a fact?' (line 6). Darman then reasserts his viewpoint and supports it by reference to the amount of money that is being handled in 'just the way you want' (line 9). By this phrase, Darman of course means that some of the money is being paid out of 'general revenues.' But he also, and simultaneously, challenges Donaldson's previous turn by implying that the previous utterance, though perhaps 'technically' a question, was so 'loaded' in favor of Donaldson's own personal biases as to constitute an assertion. It is at this point that Donaldson intervenes to defend his journalistic neutrality (lines 11-12) on the basis that he had asked a question rather than expressed a personal opinion. This defence is accepted (line 13). Here, Donaldson's normative defence - that he was asking a question, rather than airing an opinion - as treated as an acceptable account for his conduct and the interview continued.

The Significance of this Turn-taking System

(i) The Co-construction of 'Interview Talk'

We have seen that when IEs depart from responding to questions and IRs depart from asking them, these departures become the object of specific normative sanctions. Such events are comparatively rare in news interviews. For the most part, IRs and IEs observe the special news interview turn-taking constraints on their conduct. And this observance permits the development of an intimate collaboration between them in the construction of their talk. Consider the

following question (lines 1-13) - the topic is the apartheid regime in South Africa, and the IE is the South African Ambassador to the United States:

(6) (ABC Nightline 7/22/85:4-5)

1 IR: As Peter Sharp said in that piece it is a lot easier
 2 to impose a state of emergency than it is to lift it.
 3 .hhh You still have the root cause when you lift it.
 4 And black leaders in that country have made it very
 5 clear .hhhh that this kind of situation there's no way
 6 of stopping this kind of situation unless there is an
 7 end to apartheid.
 8 It seems to me .hh that by doing this by eh imposing
 9 I guess this kind of repression you- .hh you really set
 10 up uh system where you can do nothing it seems to me
 11 .hh when you lift it# except to change the system
 12 that exists there (.) the basic system.
 13 #.hhh# Is that unfair? er
 14 IE: Uh I- I would think it's unfair what is being said...

The interviewer's questioning turn is composed of five sentences: three background statements: lines 1-2, line 3, lines 4-7; a sentence that expresses what appears to be the IR's personal opinion (lines 8-12) and a question, line 13. The IE therefore has four earlier places at which to respond before he finally does so to the question (the fifth of his opportunities). Moreover as a representative of the South African Government he may have an incentive to rebut each of the IR's statements at the earliest opportunity - i.e., the point at which they were made. He does not do so. Rather he waits until a question is asked, and even visibly inhibits the beginning of a 'reflex response' at the end of line 12 (Heritage and Greatbatch 1991).

The delivery of this compound question, then, involves a subtle form of collaboration between the IR and IE. By withholding any response until a recognisable question has been produced, the IE displays his own understanding that the initial statements are intended by the IR to be 'prefatory' to a question and, as such, are not to be responded to in their own right. Moreover, by not responding or intervening in the IR's turn, he also collaborates with the IR's effort to arrive at a question. In turn, the IR can rely on that collaboration so as to produce 'long' multi-unit questions free of 'early' or 'interjective' IE responses.

More generally, by withholding responses to prefatory statements, IEs embody the expectation that the IR's turn should properly consist of a question (Clayman 1988; Greatbatch 1988, Schegloff 1988/9). They thus orient to, and

collaborate in producing, the 'interview' character of the interactions in which they are engaged. They do 'interview talk.' Further, the IEs' withholdings embody their acknowledgement that, in the context of an interview, they do not have rights to a turn until the IR has come to a question and the corresponding acknowledgment that their own talk should properly emerge as an 'answer' to a question.

(ii) The Institutional Relevance of this Turn-taking System

It is no accident that news interview conduct is shaped by the turn-taking constraints we have outlined above. In fact, it is clear that they are a product both of the general tasks of broadcast journalism, and of the place of broadcasting within the political and economic systems of the Western democracies. As a form of professional journalism, the basic task of the news interview is to serve as a channel for public figures, experts or other persons in the news to communicate with the news audience. Within this process, the IR essentially functions as a catalyst whose task is (1) to provide a context in which IEs can convey information and opinion and (2) and to challenge or press IEs, where appropriate, on the views they express. The primary recipients of the expressed information or opinions are the news audience for whose benefit the talk is ultimately produced. Within the news interview, it is conventional to maintain the news audience as primary recipients of the talk rather than attempting to create the impression that they are listening in on a putatively 'private' interchange. This must be managed in a process in which the news interviewer acts as the elicitor, but not the primary recipient, of the talk (Heritage 1985).

Second, IRs must manage this task while meeting a specific constraint that bears on most broadcast journalists at the present time. This constraint is that they retain a broadly balanced, impartial or neutral stance towards the statements and opinions presented by the IE. Because IRs' questions often - and unavoidably - embody assumptions that are supportive or hostile to IEs' stated positions and cannot, strictly speaking, be regarded as neutral, we will speak of this stance as embodying a position of 'formal neutrality' or, more simply, as a 'neutralistic' stance. A central feature of this stance is that IRs should avoid making statements - whether hostile to or supportive of an IE's stated position - that could be construed as a personal opinion or as the position of the news organisation that is ultimately responsible for the broadcast (Heritage 1985; Clayman 1988; Greatbatch 1988; Heritage and Greatbatch 1991). This general stance is required of news organisations by law in some countries (including Britain) and by

convention in others. This stance cannot be managed in the news interview except through restrictions on turn-taking, turn organization and turn design.

Conclusion

Distinct turn-taking systems are by no means definitive of institutional interaction. Indeed, as indicated earlier, many forms of institutional talk do not manifest specialized turn-taking systems at all. Nor do the turn-taking features described above distinguish news interview turn-taking from the special forms of turn-taking that are present in related institutional contexts such as the courts and even some job interviews. To distinguish these, it is necessary to go more fully into both the formal design and the content of questions and responses in these contexts.

However specialized turn-taking systems profoundly structure the frameworks of activity, opportunity and interpretation that emerge within them. It is for this reason that the determination of their existence (or not), and investigation into their features is an essential step in the analysis of institutional talk.

Notes

1. The term 'system' is used here because turn taking in these contexts involves (1) a group of practices, (2) employed by both speakers and hearers, that are (3) organized as a set and geared to a common outcome.
2. Of course, a fourth type of departure occurs when an IE fails to answer a question. This is an enormously complex topic and its ramifications go far beyond turn-taking issues per se. The reader is referred to Greatbatch (1986) and Clayman (1993) for some discussion of these issues.

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