Conclusion

In this chapter, analysis has focused on the ability of the speaker to differentiate particular types of recipients and to display in his talk the appropriateness of his utterance for its recipient of the moment. Though recipients may be relevantly distinguished from each other in many different ways, the present analysis has been restricted to a single feature, the state of the recipient's knowledge about the event being reported by the speaker. In examining situations in which the main addressee was an unknowing recipient but a knowing recipient was also present, it was found that when the speaker moved his gaze to a knowing recipient, he produced a display of uncertainty about what he was saying, thus constructing an action—a request for verification—appropriate to a knowing recipient. In order to maintain the appropriateness of his utterance for a recipient with a particular state of knowledge, the speaker changes his own state of knowledge. The ability to construct a turn capable of providing for the inclusion of both types of recipients was found to be useful both for the accomplishment of local tasks posed in the construction of the turn and because the copresence of knowing and unknowing recipients itself engenders particular structural problems. It was also found that a speaker might redesign his utterance for a knowing recipient by transforming the event being reported in it so that a new piece of news, appropriate to the knowing recipient, was provided. The analysis in this chapter provides further demonstration of the relevance of the hearer to the meaning and detailed construction of the utterance of the speaker.

This study has investigated some particular aspects of the interaction of speaker and hearer in the construction of the turn at talk in natural conversation. In Chapter 2, the negotiation of an appropriate state of mutual gaze at turn-beginning was examined. It was found that particular states of gaze were in fact relevant to the turn and that participants had access to systematic procedures for both achieving appropriate states of gaze and remedying the occurrence of inappropriate states. The use of these procedures produced characteristic phenomena, such as phrasal breaks, in the speaker's utterance. Chapter 3 examined some of the engagement alternatives available to participants, the ways in which particular engagement states are achieved through a collaborative process of interaction, and the consequences such engagement displays have for the organization of the talk in progress. Through use of such resources participants are able to make visible a range of different types of co-participation in the talk of the moment. In Chapter 4, the ability of participants to change the units they were in the process of producing by adding new sections to them was examined. It was found that vocal units on many different levels of organization, from within the phoneme to the sentence, as well as nonvocal units, were capable of such modification. It was further found that this ability constitutes a resource for the achievement of social organization within the turn, in essence enabling one participant to coordinate the units he is producing with the
relevant actions of a coparticipant. This process leads to changes not only in the length of units being produced, but also in their meaning. The procedures investigated in this chapter were found to be relevant to the accomplishment of a number of tasks posed in the construction of the turn, including the tasks examined in Chapter 2. In Chapter 5, the ability of the speaker to modify his emerging utterance so that it remained appropriate to its recipient of the moment was investigated. A situation was examined in which two different types of recipients, a knowing recipient and an unknowing recipient, were both present. It was found that a speaker who had been addressing his turn to an unknowing recipient could make it appropriate to a knowing recipient either by changing the states of knowledge projected both for himself and his recipient through a change in action, or by transforming the event being described so that it became appropriate to its new recipient. This study has thus described and analyzed specific procedures utilized by speaker and hearer to coordinate their interaction in the construction of the turn at talk.

The work reported here is relevant to research in several different fields. First, some empirical analysis of a basic and pervasive form of human communication, conversation, has been provided. It has been found that not only the exchange of turns, but the internal structure of the turn at talk itself, is constructed through a process of communication between speaker and hearer. Specific communication processes within the turn—for example, a speaker’s request for his recipient’s gaze and the answer to that request by the recipient—have been investigated and analyzed. It has also been found that this process of communication may systematically lead to the modification of phenomena such as sentences constructed within the turn. On the one hand, such findings cast doubt on the arguments of some communications researchers—for example, Coulthard and Ashby (1975:140) and Rogers and Farace (1975:226)—that communication is not present until an exchange of turns has occurred. On the other hand, they suggest that processes of communication may be far more deeply implicated in the production of language than has traditionally been recognized in linguistics. The present work has also provided some demonstration that the process of communication involved in the production of the turn at talk organizes not only the vocal behavior of the participants but also aspects of their nonvocal behavior, such as their gaze. Specific communications structures relating vocal to nonvocal actions have been investigated. This work thus supports both theoretically and empirically the argument long made by Birdwhistell (for example, 1970:162; 1973:93–94) that speech and body movement are integrated aspects of a single communications process. Some approach has also been made toward the analysis of communications processes from the perspective of models of the type Krippendorff (1969a) has termed discourse and communications models. Procedures through which essential variables in the turn—such as the appropriateness of an utterance for its recipient—are achieved and maintained in the face of changes in the relevant local environment—such as a change in recipients—have been specified and analyzed. Such procedures have been found to change the phenomena being constructed within the turn with the effect that the utterance eventually produced is both modified by, and a manifestation of, the constraints organizing the communication of the participants in the construction of the turn. The work in this study provides empirical analysis of specific communications behavior, such as utterances, sentences, phrasal breaks, and gaze; the codes organizing such behavior into relevant communicative messages, for example, a request and its answer; and the communications institution, the turn at talk, within which these phenomena are situated. A range of phenomena implicated in the organization of human communication are thus investigated.

Second, the work reported here is relevant to the study of human interaction and, in particular, to the analysis of conversation. Ties between the present work and other research into the structure of conversation have been made explicit throughout the analysis and no attempt will be made to summarize them here. At present I merely wish to note that some of the same sequential phenomena that have been found to be implicated in the organization of the exchange of turns—summons–answer sequences, for example—were also found to be operative within the turn itself. Further, such structures not only provide organization for the vocal behavior of the participants, but also organize aspects of their nonvocal behavior. It would thus seem that sequential structures of the type analyzed by Sacks and his colleagues operate quite generally and organize a very wide range of phenomena in conversation, and perhaps in human interaction in general.

Third, the work reported here is relevant to a number of different issues in linguistics, only some of which have been examined in the analysis. First, the process of communication between speaker and hearer as they mutually construct the turn at talk has been found to be capable of modifying both the length and the meaning of the sentence produced within the turn. Conversational structures are thus implicated not only in the relationships between sentences, but also in the internal organization of the sentence itself. Within linguistics, the sentence has

\footnote{For other analysis of how the structure of a particular type of turn, a story, might provide organization for a range of different types of participants, see Goodwin (forthcoming). See also M. Goodwin (1980b) for analysis of how utterances with a particular syntactic structure might organize participants into a particular set of occasion-specific identities.}
traditionally been examined as a fixed, static object. However, both the work of Sacks and his colleagues, and some of the analysis here, provide some demonstration that sentences are in fact time-bound structures, emerging through and within a process of interaction. Insofar as this is the case, the procedures utilized to construct sentences are, at least in part, interactive procedures.

Second, as noted in Chapter 1, some linguists have argued that natural speech should not be employed as data for the analysis of linguistic competence because of the many errors and phrasal breaks found within it. Thus Chomsky (1965:4) states that “[p]erformance obviously could not directly reflect competence. A record of natural speech will show numerous false starts, deviations from rules, changes of plan in mid-course, and so on. The problem for the linguist, as well as for the child learning the language, is to determine from the data of performance the underlying system of rules that has been mastered by the speaker–hearer and that he puts to use in actual performance.” This volume has provided some demonstration that the phenomena Chomsky dismisses as performance errors may result not from the actions of the speaker alone but rather might be emergent products of the interaction of speaker and hearer in the construction of the turn at talk. From such a perspective, objects such as phrasal breaks, rather than demonstrating the defective performance of a speaker, constitute manifestations of his competence to construct utterances and sentences that are in fact oriented to appropriately by a recipient.

If phrasal breaks are not simply noise in the system, but rather phenomena that participants attend to with precision, the possibility arises that they might in fact be relevant to the other issue Chomsky raises: the ability of an entity—child or linguist—to decipher from the data of performance the system of rules underlying a language he encounters. With respect to this possibility it may be noted that many (though not all) repairs involve the repetition, with some significant change, of something said elsewhere in the utterance. For example:

(1) We went to bed really early

(2) I ask him if he could call him

Such repetition has the effect of delineating the boundaries and structure of many different units in the stream of speech. Thus, by analyzing what is different and what is the same in these examples, one is able to discover, first, where the stream of speech can be divided into significant subunits; second, that alternatives are possible in a particular slot; third, what some of these alternatives are (in these examples different pronouns); and, fourth, that these alternatives contrast with each other in some significant fashion (or else the repair would not be warranted). In essence, these repairs provide a distributional analysis of relevant phenomena in the stream of speech, and, indeed, their form is in many respects analogous to techniques developed by linguists, such as elicitation frames and minimal pairs, for determining structure in the stream of speech.

Repairs in other examples not only delineate basic units in the stream of speech, but also demonstrate both the different forms such units can take and types of operations that can be performed upon them. Consider the following:

(3) Somebody said looking at my oldest son, he has

The repair in this utterance provides a range of information about structures utilized in the language. First, it separates out a relevant unit, a noun phrase, from the stream of speech. Second, it shows where that unit can itself be subdivided. Third, it provides an example of the type of unit, an adjective, that can be added to the noun phrase. Fourth, it locates at least one place in the noun phrase where such an addition is permitted. Finally, in the contrast between the first and second version of the noun phrase, the repair shows that such an addition is optional. Thus, insofar as repairs provide for significant differences in form to be displayed within a context of repetition, they give clear information about contrasts within the language that are significant to its users, as well as information about how the stream of speech is divided into appropriate units, the operations that are possible on those units, and the combinations they can form.1

Repairs further require that a listener learn to recognize that not all of the sequences found within the stream of speech are possible sequences within the language. Thus, in order to understand talk such as that found in the examples just noted, a hearer must distinguish between different

1 For some analysis of ways in which the process of repair is relevant to syntax, see Schegloff (1979). Fromkin (1971) analyzes some of the ways in which speech errors reveal basic structures being utilized in the production of language, and Labov (1975) describes some of the syntactic operations involved in repair. Cuarden (1972:106) reports unpublished work of Snow (1971) which suggests that partial repetition may be useful in the language acquisition process in that it provides information about the boundaries of grammatical units.
an utterance and another unit manifested within the utterance—that is, a sentence—which does not contain all of the words spoken by the speaker. Similarly, in order to properly interpret the speech in the following a hearer must be able to recognize that “you kids” is not a next element in the sentence which had been in progress until that point, but that a discontinuity has occurred and “you kids” marks the beginning of a new sentence:

(4) Brian you’re gonna hav— You kids’ll have to go down closer

In order to deal with repairs, a hearer is thus required to make one of the most basic distinctions posed for anyone attempting to decipher the structure of a language: He is called upon to distinguish between what are and are not possible sequences in the language, that is, between grammatical and ungrammatical structures. The fact, in itself, that this task is posed may be extremely important for any learning process. If a learner did not have to deal with ungrammatical possibilities, if, for example, he were exposed only to well-formed sentences, he might not have the opportunity to determine the boundaries or even the structure of the system. For example, in order to both test and formulate their rules, linguists have found it necessary to systematically produce sentences not permitted by the language. The opportunity to deal with ungrammatical structures may be an essential component of the process through which the language is learned.

Chomsky (1957:13) has formulated the basic goals of linguistic analysis as follows: “The fundamental aim in the linguistic analysis of a language L is to separate the grammatical sequences which are the sentences of L from the ungrammatical sequences which are not sentences of L and to study the structure of the grammatical sequences.” Repairs are one place where the distinction between grammatical and ungrammatical sequences is in fact made by native speakers of the language and, indeed, utilized by them in the conduct of their talk. Further, this process provides materials relevant to the systematic analysis of many aspects of a language’s structure, with the effect that someone attempting to learn the language is given a great deal of information by repairs. The argument that the repairs found in natural speech so flaw it that a child (or linguist) hearing it is faced with data of very “degenerate quality” (Chomsky 1965:58) does not appear warranted. Rather it might be argued that, if a child grew up in an ideal world where he heard only well-formed sentences, he would not learn to produce sentences himself because he would lack the analysis of their structure provided by processes such as the repair process.

In conclusion, the analysis of the turn at talk in natural conversation provides the opportunity to investigate in detail a diverse and important range of phenomena. First, the turn is a principal locus of human linguistic activity, one of the central places where sentences emerge in the natural world. Second, the turn requires for its achievement the collaborative work of both a speaker and a hearer and thus provides an elementary instance of the achievement of social order. Further, this type of social organization is extraordinarily pervasive, occurring not only in many different human societies, but also in a wide variety of institutions within a single society—from the play of children, to the conduct of business in the workplaces of tailors, salesmen, scientists, and heads of states, to the intimate encounters of lovers, the disputes of enemies, the daily activities of families, etc. Though very little attention has yet been paid to the turn as an institution in its own right, the pervasiveness of its occurrence, the range of phenomena achieved within it, and the clear but intricate data it makes accessible to detailed study, would seem to make it a crucial locus for anyone attempting to develop a general theory of how human beings coordinate their actions with each other and thus organize themselves socially. Third, within the turn participants are faced with the cultural task of displaying to each other the meaningfulness of their utterances and actions, and of maintaining this meaningfulness as relevant events change through time. The investigation of the turn at talk thus permits the analysis of basic social, linguistic, and cultural phenomena as elements of a single integrated process.