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Conversation Analysis: Methodology, Machinery and Application to Specific Settings

Conversation Analysis (CA) is a way of describing human behaviour based on the careful observation of everyday interactional practices. It is an action-oriented approach, seeing linguistic productions first and foremost as moves within social exchanges. This kind of orientation may be particularly relevant for scholars working in the field of learning and teaching Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP). CA provides a well-established methodology and a robust set of results for the systematic description of oral language practices in professional contexts. This chapter will first provide an introduction to CA's approach (section 1), methodology (section 2) and machinery (section 3) followed by a review of research applying CA to specific professional and institutional settings (section 4), with a critical discussion of the main theoretical and methodological problems involved (section 5).

1. Ethnomethodological concepts

CA evolved in the mid-sixties under the influence of scholars like Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff and David Sudnow, who had worked with Erving Goffman and Harold Garfinkel. Garfinkel's (1967) ethnomethodology has been particularly influential for the development of CA. Its aim is to uncover the ethno-methods by which members of a society make sense of their activities, thus making them recognizable, manageable and reproducible. Sociology's classical themes, such as institutions, intergroup and inter-individual relationships, normality and deviance, are deconstructed and reconceptualized so that they are no longer abstract, general categories which can be

applied to aggregate social entities but are seen as the product of a number of microscopic everyday practices.

1.1. Viewpoint

This reconceptualisation of sociological categories implies a shift in the viewpoint of the researcher on the phenomena being described. This viewpoint is no longer that of the external professional observer, describing phenomena at a macro level, as generalizations holding for thousands or millions of individuals, but that of the participants themselves, who are *inside* interactions and must make sense of each one of them.

An example, taken from Livingston (1987, ch. 6), may help understand this difference of approach. If we look at a very ordinary activity such as crossing the street at a very crowded junction, pedestrians appear to perform this task quite naturally, although in physical terms it involves finding a non-linear trajectory in an ever-changing complex vectorial matrix. One can imagine that a sociologist, after placing a camera on the roof of a building, might describe what happens when the traffic light turns green and two groups of pedestrians walk towards each other. The pedestrians might be described from above – in terms of two wedges, of which one person is at the apex opening the way for the others pedestrians who follow in a more haphazard fashion. Livingston compares this bird's eye view with the viewpoint of the pedestrians themselves: pedestrians do not see a wedge and do not have an overall picture of what is going on. What they see is other people in front of and around them and they are faced with the moment-by-moment problem of crossing the street without bumping into anyone. From the pedestrian's point of view, the strategy is to move into the space left free by the person in front, who thus acts as a scout for the people behind. This pedestrian viewpoint is precisely the viewpoint of ethnomethodology, i.e. the viewpoint of the participants from within the scene. A description based on a bird's-eye view from above in terms of wedges is not in itself wrong, but simply very different.

This attention to the participants' point of view is similar to what anthropologists call the emic viewpoint. Pike (1967) introduced

the term 'emic' as a generalization of the distinction made between phonetics – the study of language sounds *qua* sounds, independently of their belonging to different linguistic systems – and phonemics – the description of each language's sound system, with its internal logic. CA shares with ethnomethodology and ethnography this search for a viewpoint that is as much as possible aligned to that of participants. This means, among other things, that analysis is conducted step-by-step, move by move.

1.2. Action and practice

The notions of action and practice are central to ethnomethodology: social phenomena are made up of lines of action, coordinated practices in which even the smallest details matter. People are normally not aware of these details, which are taken for granted until the order of daily interaction breaks. Garfinkel produced such situations in his 'breaching experiments', aimed at demonstrating that many actions are "seen but unnoticed" and alternative courses of action appear "noticeable, accountable and sanctionable" (Seedhouse 2004: 10). The title of a famous paper by Sacks (1984b), 'On doing being ordinary', emphasizes that even when people think they are not doing anything special, they are still doing something. In other words, our attributes, our qualities, what we *are* are actually based on what we *do*.

This attention to the details of daily actions can be traced back to the work of Erving Goffman. Goffman's (1974) fundamental question, "what's going on here?", is echoed in the equally fundamental question that underpins much CA research, "why that now?" (Schegloff/Sacks 1973: 298). In both cases one finds an emphasis on the subtle aspects of interaction, an explanation based not on general abstract categories, but on the internal logic of details, on the sequential organization of actions and reaction, or 'moves'. The main difference between the two approaches lies in one important methodological aspect: while Goffman based his observation on memory and a prodigious intuition, Sacks began to capture interactional details by recording them on tape.

Conversation analysis thus began as a form of ethnomethodology or microsociology using recorded data. Its focus was, and still is,

not on language per se, as a system of structures that can be described at the levels of phonology, lexicon, syntax and pragmatics, but as a tool to be used in interactions. The aim is to describe 'practices', 'usages' (Schegloff 1992b: 120), 'devices' (Hutchby/Wooffitt 1998: 99), whereby social actors interact in ways that are ordered and intelligible to themselves and to external observers. The systematic description of such practices leads to discovering the underlying 'machinery' (Schegloff/Sacks 1973: 293) that produces the orderly appearance of social interactions.

2. Methodology

Although there is no official, single way of doing conversation analysis, there are some fundamental methodological features common to most research in the area and summarized in numerous introductory books and articles (e.g. Levinson 1983; Goodwin/ Heritage 1990; Psathas 1995; Hutchby/Wooffitt 1998; ten Have 1999; Markee 2000; Schegloff *et al*. 2002; Seedhouse 2004; Seedhouse 2005a; Wooffitt 2005). What is most characteristic of CA's methodology, and what many find disconcerting, is "a strict and parsimonious structuralism and a theoretical asceticism […] [implying] a healthy suspicion of premature theorizing and *ad hoc* analytical categories" (Levinson 1983: 295). The CA approach can be said to be ascetic for several reasons, which will be discussed below.

2.1. Data selection

CA research is based on naturalistic data, i.e. exchanges that take place independently of the investigator's need to record and analyze them. This means that conversation analysts do not *elicit* their data by setting up experimental procedures, communication tasks, role plays or interviews in order to observe particular conversational features. This is not to say that conversation analysts are not interested in these

more contrived situations, as they too belong to the range of speech exchanges that do take place in society. The fact is that an interview or a classroom role play analyzed by conversation analysts would have taken place anyway, regardless of their interest in studying them.

2.2. Data transcription

CA transcripts aim to report everything that is audible and visible, including pause lengths (in tenths of second), beginnings and ends of overlapping speech, false starts, hesitations, non-verbal sounds like *ah, oh, hm, tch*, intonation contours, body and gaze movements. This attention to detail, which implies a considerable transcription effort, is coherent with the attitude of not taking anything for granted before analysis begins. One cannot decide a priori that pause length, in-breaths or coughs, are irrelevant for participants in an interaction. By not including them in the transcript one has already decided a priori that they are not relevant, which is already imposing a preconceived point of view on the data.

However, there are practical limits to this general orientation. In fact, although CA transcriptions may look very detailed, they can be made even more detailed. For instance, words are not transcribed using standard spelling but by trying to show their actual pronunciation. This is normally done with approximations based on the target language's alphabet, as in *Ah didju getchor paper this morning ih w'z out 'n front'v ar place* (Schegloff 1986: 143). There is no doubt that a transcription using the international phonetic alphabet would be more accurate and standardized. The same holds for intonation contours, of which there are many more than the three basic ones (raising, falling and suspended) that appear in most CA transcriptions. Ideally, an instrumental acoustic analysis would be able to graphically represent each utterance's intonation with its very specific pitch contours. The same limitations hold for transcribing video data, which is being increasingly used in CA studies: even when one tries to be extremely accurate, it will never be possible to describe second by second all the movements that each participant performs with different parts of his/her body.

On the other hand, adding all these details is not only very time-consuming but it decreases transcription readability. Transcripts need to be read in order to follow a course of events in more or less the same time in which they have taken place and this is virtually impossible with a transcript full of annotations. The quantity of detail in a transcript thus usually turns out to be a compromise between readability and exhaustiveness. It should also be borne in mind that transcriptions are not themselves data – strictly speaking, the data is only the recorded material – but a support system for browsing, remembering or interpreting data. If particular analyses need to be carried out on the whole corpus or on specific fragments, it should certainly be possible to resort to more detailed transcription formats and, more importantly, to be able to go back to recorded data, which can nowadays be easily shared through the Internet.

2.3. Participant viewpoint

Turning to data analysis, CA as has already been noted favours an ethnomethodological, emic approach. This does not mean that re-searchers express themselves in exactly the same way as the observed persons would when analysing the same interaction, but that they ground their analysis on the point of view of participants *in* inter-action. An emic view thus means following interaction step by step in accordance with its internal logic (Seedhouse 2005a: 2). This also means avoiding the application of a priori macro-social categories, such as participant role, status, gender and ethnic background.

Furthermore, description and interpretation are based exclusive-ly on what is directly observable to participants and the analyst. There is no psychological speculation about speakers' intentions, desires or beliefs. Hence a CA analyst does not make statements like "A did this because he wanted to demonstrate …" or "B said this because she thought that A wanted …" but rather "A did this and this kind of action has a certain kind of value or performs a certain kind of move within this exchange". What this 'value' is or how the 'move' is to be interpreted does not depend on participants' psychological states, but on their public, social meaning which can be retrieved in principle by any participant to or observer of that interaction.

2.4. Generalisation

Another sense in which CA's methodology can be said to be ascetic concerns the question of generalization. CA investigation always begins with single cases, trying to account for their dynamics one by one. Analysis may as well stop here, with a detailed explanation of what is happening in the single example. If one wants to further generalize to other cases, this will always be done very cautiously, showing how the 'device' or 'practice' is at work in several examples. Claims are not formulated as general laws such as 'whenever X takes place, then Y follows'. Rather, in order to account for a particular practice, special attention is paid to deviant cases in which a 'breach' occurs. It is cases like these, and participants' reactions to them, that shed light on otherwise implicit mechanisms (on issues of description and generalization in CA cfr. Peräkylä 1997; ten Have 1999, ch. 3, 7; Seedhouse 2005b).

3. Machinery

We will now turn to some key concepts inherent in the machinery that regulates interactions. These have been investigated from the discipline's early days and are now common stock for everyone doing CA.

3.1. Turn taking

One of the fundamental aspects that make conversations orderly is the procedure of turn taking. When two or more people interact, how do they manage the conversational traffic? How do they exchange turns in an orderly way, without frequent overlaps, clashes or long pauses? One way in which turn taking can be handled is through explicit selection of an interlocutor, as when a teacher selects a student to answer a question. Cases like this are quite common in institutional interactions but rather unusual in ordinary conversation, in which turn allocation is

not usually so explicit. When a person speaks after another, he or she does so most of the time by self-selecting. This occurs at precise points in conversation in which one speaker starts talking exactly when the other speaker' stops, without any significant overlaps or pauses.

This coordination can be achieved because speakers orient to a 'transition relevant place' (TRP), which is located at the end of a 'turn constructional unit' (TCU) (Sacks/Schegloff/Jefferson 1974). Speech is not produced as a continuous flow but in relatively bound units. These units should not be defined in purely structural terms based on linguistic form but in essentially functional terms as actions that participants recognize as being possibly complete: "transition-relevant places […] occur at 'possible completion points'" (Sacks/Schegloff/ Jefferson 1974: 721). Usually a complete (linguistic) action corresponds to a complete syntactic unit, so that the TCU boundary turns out to coincide with the clause boundary. This syntactic unit also normally corresponds to an intonational unit and TCUs often appear as units that are complete from a pragmatic, syntactic and intonational point of view (Ford/Fox/Thompson 1996; Selting 2000). The main criterion participants orient to is the recognizability of units as complete actions – speakers might for example consider clause fragments, isolated words and even non-verbal actions to be complete TCUs.

Interactants seem to orient to this type of organization because self-selection mostly occurs at TCU boundaries. If someone starts speaking when the another speaker's turn is still in progress, this usually happens because the turn's last syllables are predictable or because a possible completion point has been reached (Jefferson 1983: 2-6).

As well as overlaps, pauses are also found in the flow of conversation. If the pause occurs within a TCU, the interlocutor usually does not take over but lets the other speaker complete the turn as far as the next possible completion point. These pauses are transcribed on the same line as the first speaker's turn to indicate that that silence belongs to him or her. When a pause occurs at a TRP, it is transcribed on a separate line to mark that it belongs to both speakers: after the TRP both had the right to speak and both remained silent. After these pauses simultaneous starts may ensue, which constitute further evidence for participants' orientation to turn-taking dynamics: after an

inter-TCU pause, both have the right to speak and both may take the opportunity at the same time, as in the following example:

Extract 1[1]
```
001    C:    hello there. .h ehm I'm looking for the book of the
002          story of pinocchio
003          (.)
004    C:                        [but in italian
005    R:                        [right
```

This model gives anybody the right to speak after a TRP and in fact conversational turns tend to be rather short. However there are cases in which the mechanism can be suspended. For instance, a speaker can book an extended turn to tell a story or a joke. These unusually long turns are often preceded by a move proposing a temporary suspension of the turn-taking mechanism such as a story preface like *do you know what happened to Bob*? (Jefferson 1978: 220-2; Sacks 1974). There are also other cases in which the turn exchange system takes on a particular form; for example, in some institutional contexts to be described later the conversational flow appears to be strongly regulated by one of the participants.

3.2. Sequences

Turns are not the only level of conversational organization. Speakers in fact orient to structures of two or more sequential turns. The minimal format is a two-move sequence, or 'adjacency pair' (Schegloff/ Sacks 1973: 295). In such pairs one can see a 'conditional relevance' (Schegloff 1968: 363) link between the first and the second pair part – the production of a certain move recognizable as a first pair part makes a certain continuation relevant, which completes and concludes the sequence. For instance, an invitation can be followed by an acceptance or rejection move. If neither is produced, the absence is 'noticeable' in that participants might indicate that something is missing by asking for an explanation about why no answer was provided or by

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1   Extracts 1 and 2 in this chapter are taken from the author's corpus of service telephone calls collected at the University of Sassari.

insisting on getting one or the interlocutor might provide explanations and justifications for not having answered.

The phrase 'adjacency pair' should not lead one to think that the second part is always produced immediately after the first. For example, it may be the case that in order to produce the second part a speaker needs some clarifications or further information. This will result in a 'side sequence' (Jefferson 1972), as in the following example:

Extract 2
```
001    C:    ((telephone rings))
002    R:    good afternoon >city museum and records office<?
003    C:    hi. could you tell me which hours you're open this
004          weekend please?
005    R:    which museum are you after?
006    C:    a:hm  eh-ahm is it the darskmouth museum i think.=
007    R:    =city museum.=
008    C:    =city museum.
```

In cases like this the conditional relevance on the second part is only temporarily suspended: participants are oriented to completion of the sequence, which remains relevant even after rather long side sequences; absence of completion is thus always noticeable.

Conversational organization not only includes coordinated and recognizable action sequences, but also moves dedicated to the transition from one sequence to the next. CA has studied many such sequential formats, particularly with regard to telephone call openings (Schegloff 1968, 1979, 1986, 2002a) and closings (Schegloff/Sacks 1973, Button 1987, 1990, Wong this volume). This kind of work has demonstrated that even an apparently trivial and ordinary routine such as opening a phone call requires considerable coordination by participants. Answering the phone may in fact look like a very simple, routine activity. However, one can hardly find two identical cases, for in each single instance intersubjectivity and coordination must be *achieved* through a complex interplay of reciprocal adjustments: speakers constantly monitor each other's behaviour to tailor their contributions in an appropriate and timely manner.

This kind of basic CA telephone call research has been used in a number of applied studies with particular relevance to LSP. Wong

(2002) provides an in-depth CA-based description and analysis of telephone call openings in LSP materials and her chapter in this volume does the same for telephone closings. Bowles and Pallotti (2003) and Bowles (2006) use a CA analysis of a telephone call corpus to discuss the teaching of pre-sequences and the negotiation of the reason-for-call to learners of English.

3.3. Repair

Another basic mechanism of conversational organization is repair, i.e. "practices for dealing with problems or troubles in speaking, hearing, and understanding the talk in conversation." (Schegloff 2000: 207). In principle, anything can go wrong at any point and with regard to any aspect of conversation. The general machinery must thus provide for ways in which such situations can be handled. In order to describe these practices it is important to differentiate between the party who initiates repair (self- vs. other-initiated repair) and the one who actually performs it (self- vs. other-repair). One also needs to specify in what turns such actions are accomplished. Let us begin with the case of a person who self-corrects (self-initiated self-repair):

Extract 3
Ken: sure enough ten minutes later the bell r- the doorbell rang
                                        (Schegloff/Jefferson/Sacks 1977: 363)

Here the speaker produces the trouble source (*bell*), initiates and completes the repair procedure by giving an alternative (*the doorbell*), all this in the same turn and without anybody else speaking. Extract 4 is different (other-initiated self-repair). The first speaker has produced a problematic form (*have you ever tried a clinic?*). The second initiates the repair procedure with a minimal clarification request. The first speaker then repairs the problematic form in the third turn, in this case with a *verbatim* repetition, thus showing that he has classified B's problem as one of hearing.

Extract 4
001   A: were you uh you were in therapy with a private doctor?
002   B: yah

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003    A:   Have you ever tried a clinic?
004    B:   What?
005    A:   Have you ever tried a clinic?
006    B:   ((sigh)) No, I don't want to go to a clinic.
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<div align="right">(Schegloff/Jefferson/Sacks 1977: 367)</div>

There may also be cases in which the trouble is not immediately identified but is made manifest later by one of the participants' behaviour. In extract 5 Dan's second turn causes Louise to realize that there was a comprehension problem regarding her first turn.

Extract 5
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001    Dan:      Well that's a little different from last week.
002    Louise:   heh heh heh Yeah. We were in hysterics last week.
003    Dan:      No, I mean Al.
004    Louise:   Oh. He …                          (Schegloff 1992a: 1303)
```

We have seen cases in which a participant notices a troublespot in conversation – either autonomously or because someone else initiates the repair procedure – and then provides a self-repair. Much rarer in ordinary conversation are cases such as extract 6, in which the second speaker initiates and directly performs repair (other-initiated other repair):

Extract 6
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001    Ken:      And they told me how I could stick a th-uh::
002              Thunderbird motor? (0.5) in my Jeep? And I bought a
003              fifty five [Thunderbird motor.
004    Roger:               [Not motor, engine. You speak of
005              [electric motor and a gasoline engine.
006    Ken:      [Okay                             (Jefferson 1987: 87)
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3.4. Preference

According to Schegloff/Jefferson/Sacks (1977), at least in the data they collected in the United States, there is a 'preference' for self-repair with respect to other-repair. This notion of preference is another basic concept introduced by CA. It has nothing to do with psychology, i.e. with what people want or like, but it is once again an aspect of the social organization of interaction, very similar to the linguistic notion

of 'markedness' (Levinson 1983: 332-45). Some actions or action sequences are preferred to others in that the former are treated by participants as normal, taken for granted, unmarked. Dispreferred actions on the other hand imply a greater quantity of interactional work, showing that speakers treat them as potentially more problematic. For example, the preferred response to an invitation will be acceptance and it is usually performed in a simple, straightforward way (A: *Shall we go out tonight?* B: *All right.*). A refusal on the other hand normally calls for some repair work, showing that participants treat it as some kind of trouble or problem: it may be preceded by hesitations, partial acceptances, justifications, and followed by excuses and various forms of repair, e.g. a suggestion to meet on another occasion.

As Atkinson and Heritage (1984: 53) note, "the term 'preference' refers to a range of phenomena associated with the fact that choices among nonequivalent courses of action are routinely implemented in ways that reflect an institutional ranking of alternatives". In other words, in selecting a course of action over another, "choice is possible but alternatives are by no means equal" (Duranti 1997: 260). Alternatives are ordered in a certain way by social norms, and this order becomes apparent in the ways actions are performed. Cautiously generalizing, at least for the cultures on which most of the CA studies have been conducted, there seems to be a preference for actions expressing affiliation, while disaffiliation tends to be dispreferred. Or, in ethnomethodological terms, "the preferred action is seen but unnoticed and promotes affiliation and reciprocity of perspectives, whereas the dispreferred action is noticeable and accountable, may be sanctionable, and works against affiliation and reciprocity of perspectives" (Seedhouse 2004: 9).

However, preference organization is made more complex by its being interwoven with other principles of social order. For example, although agreeing with what others have just said tends to be the preferred action, people normally disagree when someone addresses them with a compliment or when the other self-deprecates. In the first case orientation to agreement yields to a kind of modesty law, while in the second agreement is sacrificed to protect the other person's face (Pomerantz 1978).

4. CA in specific interactional settings

Most of the early CA studies were based on informal conversations, for instance between acquaintances and friends, often over the phone. A basic assumption was that everyday conversation was a primordial site for social order, a basic form of organization that had been previously ignored by sociologists. However, CA researchers soon began to turn to more specific contexts, such as law courts, offices, classrooms, medical consultations. It became clear that many conversational mechanisms held good in such contexts too, although each 'speech exchange system' (Sacks/Schegloff/Jefferson 1974: 729) was seen to develop specific formats so that the ways in which turns were allocated, exchanges opened and closed and actions sequenced were more or less ritualized according to the logic of the particular context.

In recent years the number of studies of conversation in specific contexts has increased considerably and they have become even more numerous than those devoted to general mechanisms of ordinary conversation. This is testified by a growing number of journal articles, edited volumes and monographs in this area (Boden/Zimmermann 1991; Drew/Heritage 1992a; Firth 1995; Sarangi/Roberts 1999; Schegloff *et al.* 2002; Richards/Seedhouse 2005).

This research is clearly relevant for LSP studies, as it attempts to define what is *specific* in certain interactional contexts. CA's approach to describing specific interactional contexts is coherent with its overall methodology. First of all, the main object of investigation are the *actions* performed by participants in their moment-by-moment coordination in order to achieve orderly interaction. The framework for describing such actions is the one originally developed for ordinary conversation and includes the basic features discussed above, i.e. turn-taking dynamics, sequential organization, repair and preference. The methodology too remains the same, beginning with the collection of naturalistic data, their careful transcription and a step-by-step analysis accounting for the smallest details of interaction.

A preliminary examination of these professional or institutional settings shows that the basic machinery underlying ordinary conversation is still at work – people have to exchange turns, construct sequen-

ces of actions tied by conditional relevance, open, close and shifting between sequences, repair troublespots and so forth. However, many practices that in ordinary conversation are quite unpredictable and locally managed appear in these contexts to be ritualized, highly predictable and constrained. These interactional features have to do with specific institutional goals, which participants orient to and actively pursue by behaving – or not behaving – in very specific ways. It is through these action patterns that institutions are 'talked into being' (Heritage 1984: 290) and that special interactional orders are produced.

A key issue for conversation analysts working on institutional discourse is how to characterize what is specifically institutional in these episodes and what can be described on the basis of more general interactional mechanisms. In line with CA's theoretical parsimony, interpretations are initially based on a description of general interactional mechanisms Much of what participants do may depend on the fact that they are jointly accomplishing a certain task and that their roles in this respect are different – something which often occurs in ordinary conversation as well. After an initial description in terms of a general 'interaction order' (Goffman 1964), one can look for a more specific 'institution order' i.e. features that are typical of a certain institution and that are evoked by participants in their being oriented to a specific institutional goal.

Heritage (1997: 164) describes six areas in which we might look for what he calls the 'institutionality of interaction'. These six areas are as follows:

1. Turn taking organization, i.e how turns are exchanged, what order is followed, who allocates the right to speak.
2. Overall structural organization of the interaction, i.e. whether it is divided into recognizable phases or sections, who introduces them and how, how transitions between them are made.
3. Sequence organization, i.e. how courses of action are opened, sustained and closed, and how different parties contribute to them.
4. Turn design, i.e. how turns are constructed syntactically, lexically, morphologically and prosodically in order to achieve particular interactional goals in performing certain actions.

5. Lexical choice, which is an especially relevant aspect of turn design, and concerns issues of word selection that exhibit, produce and maintain roles and identities and thus give a particular orientation to the interaction.
6. Epistemological and other forms of asymmetry, i.e. how participants may differ with respect to their roles, stances, rights and obligations.

To these one can also add other areas of difference between ordinary and institutional conversations. One example might be the way repair is carried out – a typical question might be the relative frequency of other-repair in certain settings, who initiates and performs it – and another might be participants' inferences (Drew/Sorjonen 1997: 103). It is in fact common that in certain contexts behaviours are interpreted in specific ways: for example, a doctor not reacting with empathic comments to a patient reporting her health problems may not be perceived as cold or uncaring, but simply being professional.

'Institutional' conversation analyses have been carried out in a variety of settings, such as law courts (e.g. Atkinson/Drew 1979; Maynard 1984; Drew 1992), broadcast media (e.g. Clayman/Heritage 2002; Heritage/Greatbatch 1991; Heritage/Roth 1995), classrooms (Markee 2000; McHoul 1978; Mehan 1979; Seedhouse 2004), medical consultations (e.g. Heath 1992; Heritage/Maynard 2005; Maynard 1992, 2003; Peräkylä 1998; Stivers/Heritage 2001) and business organizations (e.g. Boden 1994). In these settings, some "reductions, specializations and respecifications" (Drew/Heritage 1992b: 26) have been found with respect to the mechanics of ordinary conversation. These can be observed in all the areas listed above and constitute various ways in which the institution is talked into being, i.e. ways in which the coordinated behaviours of participants manifest their orientation towards the institutional goals and activities they are engaged in.

The chapters in this volume provide many examples of how interactions are organized in specialized ways within particular contexts. Before turning to the description of these specific settings and the practices occurring in them, a few theoretical and methodological issues need to be discussed.

5. Theoretical and methodological issues

5.1. Context

In describing language use for specific purposes reference is often made to the notion of context, for example when speaking of medical, legal, pedagogic, media 'contexts'. CA's approach in this respect is as always very strict and cautious. CA rejects a 'bucket theory of context' (Goodwin/Heritage 1990: 286), seeing it as a set of fixed features preceding interaction. On the contrary, CA regards contributions to interaction as 'context-shaped' and 'context-renewing' (Heritage 1984: 280), meaning that every action appears to be sensitive to some contextual features, but at the same time contributes to defining and orienting what context is relevant for participants to that interaction and in that particular moment.

Furthermore, analysis always begins with a very narrow notion of context, i.e. the turn(s) immediately preceding the spate of talk under consideration (Schegloff 1992c: 197). Having explained what is going on in terms of this very narrow context, analysis can proceed by invoking context at more global levels. For example, certain courses of action can be explained by reference to participants' roles or orient-tations, which can be known to analysts as members of the (micro)-culture or because they have done some ethnographic investigation into it. Moerman (1988), an ethnographer, proposes a 'contexted CA' incorporating members' local knowledge. Recourse to such know-ledge is unavoidable, and researchers should state clearly what sources they are drawing on, whether their own experience, previous contacts with the group, informal interviews or documentary data (Arminen 2000: 453-4).

This again raises the issue of CA's relationship to ethnography, which is in my opinion stronger than many would admit. As already stated in section 1, CA originated from ethnomethodology, which by its very name shows its ethnographic orientation. Second, CA and ethnography share a descriptive orientation, based on the careful observation of everyday behaviours. Their statements are made in interpretive terms and when generalizations are put forward they

usually do not imply explicit construct definitions, operationalizations and quantification but aim at understanding human social behaviour in its own terms, favouring an emic view close to that of the participants. Perhaps the main difference between CA and ethnography lies at the level of analysis. While CA is first and foremost concerned with the micro-details of interaction, ethnographies usually provide broader descriptions of social practices, trying to explain the local rationalities behind them. In this sense, the two approaches can be seen as complementary, one being the extension of the other. CA extends ethnography's scope to the micro-level of turns and sequences, which can be seen as the smallest units of social life. Ethnography may extend CA's focus to wider levels of social organization and knowledge, which may be necessary to interpret participants' moves in conversational exchanges. Following Silverman (1999), one might say that CA describes the 'how', while ethnography's main aim is to explain the 'why' of interactional episodes. Some ethnographers have added CA to their methodological toolkit (e.g. Moerman 1988, Duranti 1997) and some CA researchers have stated the compatibility of the two approaches and the need to incorporate ethnographic information in the analysis (Auer 1995; Silverman 1999, Arminen 2000).

5.2. Ordinary conversation vs institutional talk

Another crucial issue in applying CA to institutional discourse is how to tell the latter from ordinary conversation. The rejection of a bucket view of context implies that interactions cannot be deemed to be institutional simply because they take place in a particular location or between people with particular social identities such as a doctor or teacher. Their orientation to institutional goals and identities needs to be demonstrated, by showing that it is 'procedurally consequential' (Schegloff 1992a: 110), i.e. that it shapes interaction in recognizable and peculiar ways. The question then becomes what is peculiar to institutional interactions, in what ways they differ from ordinary conversation, or, with reference to LSP's concerns, what is *specific* in a medical, legal, business interaction and what depends on general mechanisms of conversational order.

Heritage's six areas for investigating the institutionality of interaction described above may guide this search for institution-specific interactional patterns. For instance most studies demonstrate that, compared to ordinary conversation, institutional interactions have a certain degree of predictability, various constraints on what can be said, when and how. However, in keeping with CA's methodological cautiousness, we should not conclude that everything that seems constrained, repetitive and predictable in a speech event is so *because* the event is institutional in nature. In fact, a certain interactional format may depend on the fact that some activity is being performed – e.g. giving/asking advice, seeking/providing information – or that the two participants have unequal competence – e.g. subject knowledge, previous experiences with similar situations (Schegloff 1992a). The resulting interaction may indeed look very different from a casual chat between friends, but rather than accounting for the difference in terms of 'institutionality', special features can be explained by reference to 'activity types' (Levinson 1983) or the kind of asymmetries that can be found in all exchanges.

Hence, rather than asking which particular moves are *in themselves* specifically institutional, one should look at how participants orient to specific institutional goals, i.e. how they talk the institution into being (Drew/Heritage 1992b: 28). This orientation is directed towards a specific institutional aim, which may be very general and at the same time surface in a variety of more specific contexts. For example, Seedhouse (2004: 183) identifies as the basic institutional goal of second language classrooms that "the teacher will teach the learners the L2". This overarching objective can be realized in many different ways, leading to a variety of "classroom contexts […], modes of interactional organization through which institutional business is accomplished" (2004: 206). While the overarching goal may remain constant for the whole lesson, these specific contexts may shift very rapidly. Similarly, interaction in a language classroom may shift into activities that have nothing to do with the basic institutional goal of teaching the language. In such cases, "the institution is talked out of being" (2004: 199) and participants may orient to identities other than those of language teacher and student.

The issue of institutional identity is one of the most debated in CA research. Like contexts, identities are not given before interaction

but they are instantiated and negotiated by participants moment by moment. There may be resistance to a particular identity being select-ed and attributed: who is doing what to whom, far from being obviously given, is something that takes negotiation. For example, in a communicative language lesson, participants may rapidly shift from their identities of teacher and student to those of 'women of the same age' or 'friends' (Kasper 2004). In other words, CA allows what Goffman called changes in 'framing' (1974) and 'footing' (1981) to be described in minute detail.

In conclusion, the distinction between ordinary and institutional conversation should not be seen as a dichotomy with sharp boundaries for a number of reasons: firstly because participants may shift their orientations during talk, moving from the core institutional business to more personal concerns; secondly because speech events can be posi-tioned along a continuum ranging from casual conversations between close friends to formal ceremonies, with various intermediate cases differing in their degree of pre-specification and ritualization; finally because even the most ritualized and formal speech exchange systems are specialized adaptations of the fundamental speech exchange system, which is ordinary conversation (Schegloff 1999: 413-4).

5.3. Generalization

The issue of generalizability is one of the most controversial in conversation analysis. We have already noted the difficulty in distin-guishing general conversational mechanisms from those found in more specific settings. But even these more specific settings can be described in general terms. For instance, researchers working on legal discourse do not limit themselves to statements such as 'in this particular episode this particular person performs this particular action', but reach more general conclusions like "whatever actions are taken in examination will have to be fitted with the sequential environment of questions and answers" (Atkinson/Drew 1979: 81). The problem arises, however, of how one can make such general claims while at the same time maintaining a privileged orientation to the details of interaction.

There is a tension in CA between single case analyses, which interpret what is going on in a certain episode, and analyses based on large corpora leading to general, atemporal statements like 'in context X people (typically, regularly, frequently) do Y'. This is particularly relevant for the topic of this book. LSP scholars would like to describe what is peculiar, recurrent in a certain *type* of setting, its 'unique fingerprint' (Drew/Heritage 1992b: 26), its overall 'interactional architecture' (Seedhouse 2004), differentiating it from others.

This 'generalizability problem' also holds for comparing the same type of institutional speech activity across different cultures, e.g. how cross-examinations or medical consultations are carried out in Canada and China. Several studies have applied CA's analytical concepts and procedures to a variety of languages and cultures (for a review see Schegloff *et al.* 2002). If we examine the area of telephone call openings, first investigated by Schegloff in the United States (1968, 1979, 1986), a number of CA comparative investigations have been carried out on telephone calls in other languages (Houtkoop-Steenstra 1991; Hopper 1992; Lindström 1994; Luke/Pavlidou 2002; Sun 2002, 2004; Bowles/Pallotti 2003; Varcasia this volume). However, in order to make comparisons, the analyst needs a constant frame of reference. Many have followed the set of 'core sequences' initially proposed by Schegloff (1986) for American calls: summons-answers, identification-recognition, greetings, how-are-you's or initial inquiries. Others have increased the number of moves that can be found in an opening, e.g. Sun (2004: 1434) identified the following in his Chinese data 1) greeting; 2) addressing; 3) identification; 4) questions-after-you; 5) affirmation of reconnecting; 6) voice recognition comments; 7) disturbance check; (8) prioritized communicative acts. One wonders how long the list can be, given the virtually un-limited number of moves that can be carried out in an opening. ten Have (2002) goes in the opposite direction, proposing a minimal functional scheme with just three universal categories: 1) establishing contact; 2) (re)establishing relationship; 3) working towards a (first) topic i.e. moves and sequences for performing connection, relation, and topic work. The difference between Sun and ten Have point to a crucial problem, i.e. the fact that in order to make any comparison one needs to identify the categories by which the comparison is to be made. Matters are further complicated by the fact that cross-cultural

variation interacts with other forms of variation, e.g. the specific circumstances of the call, individual styles and preferences, the degree of acquaintance between callers. In other words, if a Chinese call's opening differs from an American one, can we attribute it to the fact that they are Chinese and American, or to a host of other, more local reasons? Schegloff (2002b: 274) once again warns against premature generalizations, and suggests that *comparative* analysis should begin only after in-depth *local* and *intra-cultural* analysis. For example, openings should first be analyzed with respect to the rest of the call, then with respect to other openings in that culture – only such a detailed grasp of their local functioning "may some day permit a more robust comparative analysis". Although for many researchers 'some day' is already today and studies that compare similar activities in different cultural settings – a topic of clear interest for LSP practitio-ners – are on the increase, the problem remains of identifying what is typical, recurrent and unmarked in a given culture (or interactional setting) in order to be able to compare it with others.

One way of addressing the problem could be to follow the example of many social sciences and give explicit, operational defini-tions of the features under consideration, stating their frequency in a specific setting and contrasting this frequency with that of ordinary conversation or other settings. For example, Heritage and Roth (1995) carried out a quantitative analysis of the ways in which turns are transferred in news interviews. Their results confirm the conclusion reached by Heritage/Greatbatch's (1991: 3), i.e. "the fact that news interviews *overwhelmingly* proceed as sequences of IR [interviewer] questions and IE [interviewee] answers […] constitutes *massive* evi-dence for the existence of a Q-A preallocated turn-taking system for news interviews that is distinctive from conversation" [italics added]. Quantitative analysis yields a more precise specification of 'over-whelmingly' – turns are transferred through a question in 90% of the cases – but also provides a detailed distributional account of the different types of questions and question-like strategies employed .

The majority of CA studies, however, eschew this type of explicit quantification. The reasons are given in a classic paper by Schegloff (1993), whose basic argument is again grounded in CA's methodological asceticism. Schegloff does not deny the possibility of quantifying conversational phenomena, but warns against the risks of

premature quantification. Quantifying implies the identification of clear, neatly defined categories, which are problematic for the study of a complex phenomenon such as talk-in-interaction. Rather than making general statements based on hastily-defined categories, Schegloff suggests that it would be more cautious to rely on the researcher's 'intuitive grasp', expressed in less precise terms like frequency adverbs like *overwhelmingly* or *massively*. Perhaps the most used of this kind of adverb in CA is *regularly*, which indicates that a practice is recurrent, normatively oriented to, without stating its exact incidence in the corpus. This way of presenting generalizations is similar to that used by ethnographers, who usually do not present their findings in quantitative terms ('28 out of 34 Samoans did this'), but as general behavioral patterns.

The validity of claims based on normative orientations can be grounded on the analysis of deviant cases. For example, on the rare occasions in which an interviewee speaks without being asked a question, they often preface their turn with something like *Can I say something* (Heritage/Greatbatch 1991: 103); if this does not occur, their unauthorized interventions may be negatively sanctioned by the interviewer.

But what is deviant and what is 'regular' once again depends, at least in part, on the observation of regularities. Some phenomena may be so frequent that their distribution is apparent even without any quantification – one does not need to count in order to see that news interviews proceed most of the time as a series of questions and answers. In many other cases patterns may be subtler, and rather than being based on a categorical 'norm-following vs. deviant' opposition, they may perhaps be better characterized as tendencies, relative frequencies, preferences (in a technical and non-technical sense). In these cases, quantification may be useful for discovering patterns, revealing phenomena that do not meet the eye and may therefore be missed by the researcher's intuitive grasp. In other words, quantification, besides allowing more specific claims that follow from previous analyses based on intuition, can also be seen as a preliminary heuristic for identifying regularities, which can then be analyzed case-by-case in qualitative terms (Heritage/Roth 1995).

What is general, recurrent or orderly in a certain type of 'specific' context can thus be determined in several ways: by careful

observation followed by intuition, by deviant case analysis showing normative orientations or by explicit coding and quantification. These are all legitimate options, each with its own strengths and weaknesses, and they should all be taken in serious consideration and perhaps used in conjunction with each other in the analysis of talk in specific settings.

6. Conclusions: CA and LSP

CA can and does make a significant contribution to LSP studies. Its focus on oral discourse as action, its sensitivity to small details that build up systematic practices, its emic approach and its healthy methodological and theoretical asceticism are all unique features of an approach which can bring many insights to the LSP field and open fruitful avenues of investigation. By incorporating a CA approach, LSP researchers will be able to study how institutionality is achieved through interactional practices, thus exploring an alternative and effective way to represent the specificity of contexts. CA's attention to detail and its grounding of all claims on the dynamics of moves and counter-moves in interaction are at the same time an antidote to simplistic views of contexts as institutional containers that prescribe in advance what will take place in them, and a stimulus to conduct more research on the ways in which participants construct their identities, roles and the institutional context itself *in and through interaction*.

Implementation of this kind of research program could take the following steps. Investigation should always begin with a detailed analysis of single cases, considering first of all general mechanisms of the interactional order, without attributing institutional roles, identities or practices to speakers. Hence, one will note that a 'person' is doing a certain activity, e.g. asking questions, while another person is answering; a person may be performing a third move after the answer, which may be a sanctioning comment, a sign of appreciation, an assessment; a person may turn out to speak much more than the other, and so forth.

After examining many similar cases, recurrent patterns or practices may begin to emerge. Many of these patterns will be noticed through familiarity with the data and one's intuitive grasp; others will be more clearly discernible after some form of explicit coding and quantification. Once a firm understanding of what is going on has been reached, one can cautiously move from 'how' to 'why', e.g. connecting the observed patterns with the fundamental institutional goal and the specific contexts instantiating it, showing how institutional roles and identities are enacted by certain lines of conduct. This amounts to uncovering in general terms the interactional architecture of that particular speech exchange system, its unique fingerprint. With this general background one can return to analyzing single episodes in order to show how general patterns are implemented case by case, how identities, roles, activities are negotiated and locally managed turn by turn and how frequent shifts occur from one to the other.

All this will clearly impact on teaching languages for specific purposes. A careful conversation analysis of naturally occurring interactional episodes provides precious indications for syllabus and material design, for example by pointing out the inadequacies of instructional materials based on invented dialogues (see e.g. Wong's 2002 comparison of natural telephone conversations with examples given in textbooks). Another area that may benefit from a CA perspective is language testing, which should be based on a clear picture of interactional competence as deployed in a variety of settings for a variety of purposes (Young/He 1998). Finally, CA can also impact on classroom activities, which may involve students in analyzing professional interactions so as to develop a sensitivity towards the minute details that constitute the business of talk. It is this sensitivity, rather than encyclopaedic notions about 'who does what when', that could be the most important pedagogical result of a CA-inspired LSP program.

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