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The Production of Punctuality: Social Interaction, Temporal Organization, and Social Structure¹

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Social occasions can be distinguished by the degree to which their temporal length is locally variable or predetermined. Using the live television news interview as an extreme example of the latter, this paper describes how an interactional encounter is brought to a close at a prespecified time. The larger aim is to explore linkages between the organization of interaction and institutional forms generally regarded as social structural in character. The closing process is first examined in casual conversation, which has a variable duration. News interview closings are then examined and are shown to adhere to a systematically modified format that provides for closing at a prearranged time. It is suggested in conclusion that sociotemporal and institutional structures are reproduced through the situated adaptation of generic interactional mechanisms, and that this formulation preserves the integrity of both interaction and social structure while providing for their interconnection.

This article is a study of the interactional achievement of a temporal boundary. The analytic framework is derived from research on conversational interaction, in particular that dealing with the process by which conversations are brought to a close (Schegloff and Sacks 1973; see also Button 1987*a*). I extend this framework by investigating the closing process in a largely unexamined institutional domain: the live television news

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interview. My initial aim is to understand how an essentially spontaneous interactional encounter is routinely made to end at a prespecified time. But since fixed temporal boundaries are an integral part of many complex organizations and institutions, my analysis will also illuminate how the detailed organization of interaction can serve as the mechanism through which larger social structures are constituted and reproduced.

As a general principle, organized social life requires that human activities be coordinated in time (Durkheim [1915] 1965, pp. 22 ff.; Sorokin and Merton 1937; Zerubavel 1982). Spoken interaction, perhaps the fundamental locus of social action and organization, depends on the ability of speaker-hearers to coordinate their actions temporally so as to produce talk that unfolds turn by turn with a minimum of gap and overlap (Jefferson 1973; Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974). Contemporary industrial societies are temporally structured at higher levels as well, a development that parallels the emergence of complex institutional arrangements (e.g., Mumford 1963; Moore 1963; Thompson 1967; Zerubavel 1981). As Zerubavel (1981, pp. 1–12) has demonstrated, social activity is increasingly conducted in accordance with standardized schedules that specify its temporal location, duration, sequential order, and rate of recurrence. These represent the fundamental parameters of the “sociotemporal order” (Zerubavel 1981), and their standardization is an identifying feature of complex societies.

It is possible to view the historical convergence of sociotemporal standardization and institutional specialization as a mere correlation. From this perspective, the elaborate scheduling of activities is not essential to those activities or the institutions of which they are a part. This is consistent with the tendency to view temporality, much as Newton did ([1713] 1964, pp. 81–88; see also Alexander 1956, pp. xxiv–xl), as an independently existing environment in which worldly events occur. This view, insofar as it is accepted, furnishes a warrant for ignoring temporal matters in social analysis or treating them as peripheral to issues of more “genuine” sociological relevance (cf. Giddens 1987, pp. 141–43).

Alternatively, the sociotemporal and institutional orders may be conceived as interdependent or co-constitutive domains. Just as Leibniz proposed that time is constituted through the passage of events ([1716] 1964, pp. 89–98; see also Alexander 1956, pp. xxv–xxix), it may be held that social activities and institutions are themselves constituted in part through their temporal organization. There are both conceptual and empirical grounds for this perspective. First, as a practical matter, the scheduling of daily activities is precisely what permits institutional differentiation, specialization, and the segregation of various occupational and bureaucratic practices from other domains of social life (Zerubavel 1979*b*, 1981, pp. 68–69; Giddens 1984, 1987). Scheduling also provides for the

specialization and coordination of activities within specific institutions (Goffman 1961, pp. 6 ff.; Thompson 1967; Zerubavel 1979*a*). There is, furthermore, a cognitive dimension to the relationship between the socio-temporal and institutional orders. Zerubavel (1981, pp. 12–30) has shown that societal actors have an elaborate commonsense knowledge of the temporal routines of daily life; with such knowledge, they can maintain an awareness of the time simply by observing the social activities unfolding around them, just as they recognize and understand those activities in part by considering when they are taking place. This reciprocal relationship is thrown into sharp relief when an event is observed to occur outside its standard temporal niche. On such occasions, actors will regularly take steps to resolve the incongruity by, for example, altering their sense of time or of the event at hand. Accordingly, the evidence suggests that social settings and their constituent activities are produced and recognized against a backdrop of temporal awarenesses and expectations so that each shapes and is shaped by the other as mutually interdependent rather than discrete phenomena.

While these analyses have explored the sociological significance of standardized temporal scheduling, they tend to focus on the fact of standardization as a structural matter in broad theoretical, historical, or institutional terms. What has not yet been examined is how temporal schedules are implemented and realized in practice; in particular, the relevance of schedules for the domain of social interaction remains largely unexplored. This absence is significant because as Garfinkel (1967) has demonstrated, the seemingly transcendent features of social settings actually rest upon a matrix of taken-for-granted common practices. Like other forms of social organization, these constitutive practices deserve to be studied as phenomena in their own right. In addition, this line of inquiry can illuminate linkages between the domains of social interaction and social structure. Since schedules are an integral part of contemporary institutional forms, an analysis of scheduling as an interactional accomplishment is also an analysis of the interactional mechanisms through which social institutions are composed, maintained, and reproduced.

What follows is an analysis of the interactional foundations of one commonplace type of sociotemporal regularity: the fixed duration of a social occasion (Zerubavel 1981, pp. 5–7). The news interview is an appropriate setting for this research because it is an interactional encounter with particularly rigid temporal boundaries. It is within such extreme or “ideal-typical” settings that the procedures for reproducing the temporal boundaries of social life should appear in dramatically pure form. First, however, I shall explore the nature of the problem in more general terms, focusing on the practical difficulties of coordination posed by such boundaries.

SOCIAL INTERACTION AND THE PROBLEM OF COORDINATING
TERMINATION AT AN ARRANGED TIME

Across a range of settings, interactional occasions have varying degrees of constraint placed on their overall lengths. Even casual social encounters have a loosely defined normative length. Hence, people at an informal get-together may be seen as "abrupt" by departing "too early"; correspondingly, one may also "wear out one's welcome" by "overstaying" (Bull 1978; Zerubavel 1981, pp. 6-7). Nevertheless, casual encounters remain quite flexible in this regard (Sacks et al. 1974, p. 701), and this is in part what makes such encounters casual and informal; just when they will end remains to be negotiated. Of course, external circumstances may broadly limit the length of an informal encounter, as when one participant must depart to catch a bus or keep an appointment. But even then there is no impetus to sustain the interaction until that limit, leaving room for substantial variability in its overall length. In short, casual encounters may be *time limited*, but they lack a *fixed duration*.

In contrast, encounters in institutional settings have a comparatively rigid duration. Classroom lessons, therapy sessions, and many professional service encounters have a standard length that is substantially determined in advance (cf. Zerubavel 1981, pp. 5-7). The length associated with institutionally situated occasions represents a time that the interaction should fill as well as a limit beyond which it should not extend. Moreover, the existence of fixed boundaries is in part what gives an encounter its institutional character; it is because the encounter must end at a fixed time that participants can "feel" the constraining force of the environing institution.

Social occasions can thus be arrayed along a continuum, with durationally variable encounters at one end and durationally structured encounters at the other. Ordinary conversation is perhaps an extreme example of the former. And of the latter, no occasion is more rigidly bounded than the live television news interview. News interviews occur within the strict scheduling confines of broadcasting, so that a specific time is allotted for each program. Moreover, most of the major programs conduct their interviews "live," with varying numbers of participants. These circumstances combine to pose two interrelated problems for those interviewers who are responsible for enforcing the time schedule. On the one hand, they must successfully generate talk until the allotted time has elapsed and must continue to do so even when the interviewees are reluctant to speak. This is no small task, as the personal accounts of interviewers attest.²

² Jim Lehrer of "The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour" notes that one of the most difficult interviews on that program occurred when a guest froze and was unwilling to talk (Donahue 1985).

But there is a converse problem that is equally pressing, and it is the focus of the present analysis. Just as interviewers must generate talk up to the terminal boundary, they must also prevent it from continuing beyond that point; the encounter should be terminated then and there, preferably in an orderly and decorous fashion. This would be a straightforward matter if only one party—the journalist—were involved, but at least one and often several interviewees are also present. It would also be straightforward if the participants were simply following a predetermined script. But, while interviewers may have a more or less established set of procedures for closing on time,³ these cannot be followed blindly or automatically, for the competent implementation of any procedure will have to address emergent contingencies posed by the independent actions of the interviewees. And interviewees, for their part, have varying levels of experience on the air and are aware of the impending time limit only in general terms; they do not know specifically when the end point is being approached, nor are they responsible for meeting its restrictions. Furthermore, they may well have practical reasons for attempting to talk past the time limit in light of previous events. Together, these circumstances create a crucial problem of coordination: the independent actions of each participant must somehow be coordinated so as to achieve an orderly termination at the appropriate time.

This problem may be partially alleviated by practices that are external to the interview. It is often possible to alter the length of postinterview program segments (e.g., announcements promoting future news programs), thereby gaining some flexibility for the length of the interview itself. In addition, specific programs—primarily “Nightline”—may on occasion continue somewhat beyond the allotted time. More generally, it is possible to adjust the “scrolling speed” of the closing credits (i.e., the speed at which they traverse the television screen) to compensate for an interview that is running long. The coordination problem can thus be mitigated through institutional practices conducted outside the interview itself.

However, these practices are each limited in their usefulness. Only “Nightline” may permit an interview to extend beyond the allotted time, and even its freedom is circumscribed. And while the other practices are more generally available, all are limited in the amount of flexibility that

³ It is interesting to note that closing techniques are not discussed in the standard broadcasting texts (e.g., Cohler 1985; Fang 1972; Stephens 1986), which say little about the conduct of “on air” interviewing and even less about how their closings should be managed. It seems that interviewers acquire their skills informally, drawing on their general interactional abilities and refining them with experience in this special context.

they provide; at best they can buy a bit of leeway for the timing of a given termination.

It follows that there must be some set of local interactional practices used to solve the problem of achieving an orderly closing within a relatively fixed time limit. The aim of this article is to elucidate just what those practices are.

To do so, I have employed the methods and procedures of conversation analysis. A central concern in conversation-analytic research has been to describe the sequential or turn-by-turn mechanisms of conversational interaction.⁴ Such an approach is well suited to the present research for two reasons. First, it enables the researcher to analyze the structure of interaction in terms of its formal sequential properties. Second, it has generated a corpus of existing knowledge about the sequential organization of casual conversational interaction to serve as an analytic baseline against which the special properties of interview interaction can be more clearly seen.

Accordingly, for comparative purposes it will be useful first to examine closings in casual conversations, which ordinarily have a variable duration. I will then examine news interview closings, beginning with an analysis of the basic closing sequence. I will demonstrate that interview closings adhere to a systematically specialized and reduced version of the conversational closing sequence, with specific modifications providing for the regular coordination of termination at an arranged time.

DATA

Most of the data were drawn from two nightly news interview programs: ABC News "Nightline" and "The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour" on PBS. Each program was taped in three one-week blocks, for a total of 30 episodes consisting of an equal number (15) of each program. The weekly symmetry of these blocks is broken by the absence of one day of taping—a Wednesday—which was replaced by taping on the following Monday. For each program, 10 episodes were videotaped, while five were audiotaped only. A second set of materials were taken from the networks' major Sunday interview programs: "Meet the Press" (NBC), "Face the Nation" (CBS), and "This Week with David Brinkley" (ABC). All three programs were videotaped on one weekend.

My analysis is concerned with the final closing sequence of each interview. Hence, temporary suspensions before commercial breaks were not examined. The resulting corpus contains 50 closing events.

⁴ For overviews of the conversation-analytic literature, see Levinson (1983, pp. 284–370), Heritage (1984, pp. 233–92), and Zimmerman (1988).

The closings were transcribed according to a system devised by Gail Jefferson (see Appendix). The transcripts are intended to preserve, as nearly as possible, the verbal and prosodic details of the speech as it naturally occurred, but they have been partially simplified here for ease of presentation. Particular extracts have been selected to exemplify general interactional regularities that, unless otherwise noted, hold without exception throughout the data examined.

While the central findings are based on an analysis of these transcripts and the regularities exhibited therein, some background information on the institutional setting, obtained from ethnographic observations conducted in the studios of two national news interview programs, will also be introduced.

CLOSINGS IN MUNDANE CONVERSATION

Conversation as a Speech-Exchange System

The contrast between closings in news interviews and those found in casual or “mundane” conversation (Heritage 1984, pp. 238–40) derives in large part from the fact that these domains constitute differing speech-exchange systems (Sacks et al. 1974). All “nonconversational” speech-exchange systems (e.g., debates, ceremonies, interviews) involve the systematic specification of certain basic parameters that, in conversation, are allowed to vary (Sacks et al. 1974, pp. 700–701). For example, in conversation turn order, turn length, and turn content⁵ are not fixed in advance but are left free to vary. The overall length of a conversation is also a locally variable matter. Furthermore, as Sacks et al. (1974) have demonstrated, many of these variable parameters are achieved as the outcome of a turn-taking process in which the allocation of turns is accomplished by the participants themselves on a turn-by-turn basis.⁶ Hence, rather than turns being “preallocated” to speakers according to some arranged for-

⁵ “Turn content” is a broad concept that includes (1) the topical content of a turn (i.e., what the turn is “about”) and (2) the type of activity that is accomplished in and through the turn. Questions, answers, invitations, and complaints are all activity “types” (see Levinson 1979).

⁶ The mechanism for taking turns operates at possible turn completion points (“transition relevance places”) to allocate next turns by the following sequence of options: (1) current speaker may select the next speaker; and if current does not select next, (2) next speaker may self-select; and if next does not self-select, (3) current speaker may continue; and if current does not continue, (4) recycle to option 2. The selection of any option reengages a state of talk. If an option is declined, the next becomes available for possible use. As successive options are declined, silence is generated. For a more detailed exposition, see Sacks et al. (1974) and Wilson, Wiemann, and Zimmerman (1984).

mat, the selection of the next speaker remains to be managed in the course of each succeeding turn.

These characteristics of mundane conversation—the parameters and the turn-taking mechanism by which they are achieved—mean that conversationalists have essentially open-ended or “unconstrained” options to speak. That is, the organization of conversation does not restrict interactants to any narrowly specified agenda, order of speakership, or fixed length of talk. Hence, these features of conversation are each responsive to the practical concerns of the speakers as they arise, are exhibited, and develop *within* the occasion of interaction. Of course, any particular conversation will have a certain order of speakership, a more or less limited agenda, and a conclusion at some specific time; and one or more of these may be recognized by the parties at the outset. But the crucial point is that the mechanisms of conversation do not require such recognition; the course of a conversation remains to be negotiated and realized locally, as the interaction develops, rather than before it begins. Hence conversation, as a type of speech exchange, provides for participants’ open-ended rights and options to speak.

Closings in Mundane Conversation

The closing process in conversation is fitted to the distinctive features of this system of speech exchange. According to Schegloff and Sacks (1973), when speakers attempt to end a conversation, they face two fundamental problems. The first is to do so in a way that will be recognizable as a closing of the conversation. To stop talking is not by itself an adequate solution, since that may be heard as a silence or “lapse” within the conversation, rather than outside it (1973, pp. 293–95).

This issue is posed by the operation of the turn-taking system. Recall that the task of allocating turns is managed by the parties themselves in the course of each succeeding turn. As long as this turn-taking system is operative, any postutterance silence is interpretable as the parties declining to take the next turn rather than choosing to end the conversation entirely. It is thus a silence *within* the conversation.

The initial problem, then, is to suspend the relevance of turn transfer to provide for a recognizable closing of the conversation. The standard solution is to exchange conventional farewells such as “goodbye . . . goodbye” or their equivalent (Schegloff and Sacks 1973, pp. 295–99). This “terminal exchange,” when issued by each participant in turn, exhibits a shared orientation to the encounter’s completion and thus accomplishes what the mere absence of talk does not: it recognizably closes the conversation.

However, the terminal exchange is only a part of the closing procedure,

for its use raises another problem: at any point in a conversation speakers may have additional matters that they intend to raise but have not yet introduced. Schegloff and Sacks (1973, p. 303) refer to these as “unmentioned mentionables,” and their potential existence is a product of the open-ended character of conversation as a system of speech exchange. Given that the parameters of a conversation are not predetermined, additional talk is always a possibility. In this context, if one speaker were to initiate a terminal exchange without warning, it might interfere with a co-interactant’s ability to realize his or her as-yet-unspoken agenda.

The problem, then, is to establish a *warrant* for initiating the terminal exchange as an appropriate next action, one that does not infringe on participants’ rights to produce further talk. This problem is ordinarily resolved through the use of a “preclosing” exchange, the simplest being a pair of “passing turns” such as “well” or “okay” (Schegloff and Sacks 1973, pp. 303–9). For example,

(Rah:C:1:JS[15])

- J: →Okay Sally.
 S: →Fine uh huh.
 J: Bye bye.
 S: Bye.

These constitute turns at talk, but only in a minimal sense, as they are without topical content. By producing them, speakers publicly decline to add anything of substance to the conversation. When each speaker passes a turn in succession, they jointly propose that conversational business has been exhausted; the terminal exchange may then be appropriately initiated.

As designed, the preclosing exchange systematically provides for negotiated variability in the timing of termination. Hence, when one speaker passes a turn, thus initiating a preclosing sequence, the other may use his or her turn slot to add something to the previous topic or initiate some new topic, thus extending talk for at least another turn (Button 1987*a*). Only when all have declined this option through passing turns may the terminal exchange be properly initiated.

It should be noted that a sequence of passing turns is only the simplest method of warranting termination. The preclosing slots may be filled with a variety of more explicit closing-implicative items. Thus, speakers may demonstrate their willingness to close by expressing a need to do so or by citing pressing engagements of various sorts (cf. Schegloff and Sacks 1973, p. 311); this, when acknowledged by the other speaker, may also warrant closing (see below). Hence, temporal limits may be introduced into a casual conversation (as mentioned previously, such encounters may

be time limited), but they still require the co-interactant's acknowledgment and acceptance before closing can properly be undertaken.⁷ In addition, the preclosing may contain more than a single closing-implicative sequence:

(F:TC:I:1: 28)

- 1 G: Okay well lemme get off.
- 2 S: Yeah go do your work.
- 3 G: Yeah.
- 4 S: Okay?
- 5 G: And tell Jimmy I'll be over in awhile.
- 6 S: Okay.
- 7 G: Okay.
- 8 S: Okay bye-bye.
- 9 G: Bye-bye.

Here termination is first projected by G's announced desire to close (line 1), followed (2) by S's acknowledgment and proffered reason for G's need to close, which G acknowledges (3). All this occurs in addition to the settling of future arrangements (5–6) and a passing sequence (7–8) before the terminal exchange of farewells (8–9).

In sum, conversational closings are coordinated by at least one set of preclosing and terminal sequences. This format is sufficiently general to provide any speaker with the opportunity to introduce a variety of situational contingencies to initiate the closing process at any given time. The format is also interactional in that termination is undertaken only when each participant has shown a readiness to do so; it thereby respects conversationalists' open-ended options to speak. Moreover, by furnishing them with an opportunity to speak further, this format provides for the flexible, locally negotiated timing of termination characteristic of informal conversational encounters.

**CLOSINGS IN TELEVISION NEWS INTERVIEWS:
THE BASIC SEQUENCE**

News interview closings differ from their counterparts in ordinary conversation, and these differences are interwoven with the manner in which news interview talk, as a system of speech exchange, is configured and

⁷ Even though conversationalists may share extensive prior knowledge about each other's temporal commitments and engagements, this knowledge is not tacitly presumed but must be actively invoked and overtly acknowledged before termination is undertaken.

focused. Turn types, rather than being locally free to vary, as they are in conversation, are restricted primarily to questions and answers that are preallocated to interviewers and interviewees, respectively (Greatbatch 1988; Clayman 1987, pp. 46–105; 1988). Furthermore, and perhaps most important for present purposes, the overall length of the encounter is essentially fixed in advance by the scheduling constraints of broadcasting. As we shall see, these two restrictions combine to result in a distinctive method of closing.

This is not to say that news interview closings are organizationally unrelated to their conversational counterparts; they retain distinguishable preclosing and terminal components. But these components are systematically modified in interviews and thus have a distinctively “nonconversational” character.

The Terminal Component

The terminal utterance is ordinarily produced by the interviewer (henceforth IR) and consists of a “thanks” addressed to the interviewees (IEs).

(1) (“Nightline” 7/25/85:CT:8)

IR: →Thank all three of you for joining us, uh Terry Biern, Doctor Michael Lange, and of course as always Doctor Timothy Johnson. =
= .hhh Tomorrow on “Nightline” we’ll have a special inside look at a reign of terror that cost the lives . . .

(2) (MacNeil/Lehrer 7/22/85a: 18)

IR1: →Doctor Motlana, thank you for joining us.

(2.2)

IR2: Still to come on the “NewsHour” tonight . . .

Such thank-yous are often returned by an IE (see extracts 8–11 below), but they need not be reciprocated. In the above cases there is no verbal response, and inspection of the videotapes does not reveal any nonverbal response either. The IR instead proceeds to other programming business (e.g., plugging future news reports), which may involve addressing the viewing audience (as in 1) or handing the turn over to another IR (as in 2).

And it is not the case that a return “thanks” is accountably absent or missing in these instances; it is instead treated as optional. In (1) the IR does not wait for a return “thanks” or complain about its absence; instead, he proceeds directly to other noninterview business without delay. Moreover, in this sequence the camera does not cut to the IE to capture a

possible verbal or nonverbal response but remains focused on the IR. And in (2), although there is a silence after IR's "thanks," during which the camera remains focused on the IE, he remains silent and unmoving. Hence, as Greatbatch (1988, pp. 416–17) has observed, the IE's "thanks" is treated as procedurally redundant and thus may be omitted.

The Preclosing Component

The terminal component is always preceded by one or more preclosing items that prepare the way for termination. The preclosing here is not a sequence of turns as it is in ordinary conversation. Instead, it occurs in two distinct forms.

1. *Closing prefaces*.—In one of its forms, the preclosing is produced by the IR as a preface to the terminal component. Most commonly, the closing preface consists of an overt announcement that termination is impending and includes some reference to its necessity at that point.

(3) (MacNeil/Lehrer 7/22/85a: 9)

IR: →We have to end it there Doctor Motlana,
thank you for joining us.

(4) ("Nightline" 7/22/85: 8)

IR: →I am afraid we could go on forever. I am afraid
that we have to stop at some point, and it's gonna
have to be this point.
Reverend Boesak and Ambassador Beukes, thank you
both ever so much for joining us.

Extract (4) is a particularly elaborate example of this, as the IR notes that, although the discussion "could go on forever," it must end "at some point, and it's gonna have to be this point." The "thank-yous" are then produced without delay.

The preface may also contain a summary statement of what has been said or a formulation of its cumulative significance.

(5) ("Nightline" 6/4/85:CT: 7)

CB: . . . and the government is derelict in its duty if it
does not communicate to the four million with
security clearances that fact. That should be done.
IR: →Christopher Boyce, I think you've done it. And done
it very eloquently tonight.
Thank you very much for talking with me.
CB: Very good. Good night.

(6) (“Nightline” 6/7/85:CT: 7)

- SW*: Maybe yes and maybe no. Because the family is following the directions of the lawyer, of Rolf Mengele. And Rolf Mengele says to the prosecutor yesterday or two days ago, no comment today, and no comment later.
- IR*: All right. I have to interrupt 'cuz we've run outta time, →but you leave us with a key phrase, maybe yes and maybe no, and maybe that does stay uncertain for a long time. I thank all three of you and Doctor Snow for joining us, and I'll be back in a moment.

By encapsulating the cumulative sense or import of what has been said, such items effectively shut down the topic and establish the relevance of termination (Heritage and Watson 1979, 1980). This is particularly notable in (6), where SW's turn is treated as incomplete by the IR as he interrupts to initiate closing. After first invoking the time constraint to account for interrupting, he then (arrowed) retrieves SW's turn-initial words and pronounces them a “key” phrase that summarizes the state of knowledge now and into the future. Hence, he transforms what might otherwise be seen as an abrupt ending into one that appears to follow relevantly and appropriately from the IE's final comments.

Finally, in its most minimal form the closing preface consists simply of an item such as “well” or “all right.”

(7) (“Nightline” 7/23/85: 7)

- IR*: →All right, thank all three of you for joining us,
I appreciate it very much.

(8) (MacNeil/Lehrer 6/10/85a: 6)

- IR*: →Well Mister Adelman, thank you for joining us.
KA: You're welcome.

These tokens operate to bound off the previous exchange from what is to follow, thereby marking the next item as a shift in focus. “Well,” for instance, has been shown in previous research to function as a disjunction marker, placed before items that do not directly follow from what was implied by the previous turn (see Schiffrin 1985). “All right” is used in a similar manner here; it routinely appears as the initial component of IR-initiated changes of topic. Moreover, it is notable that these same tokens also occur in conversational preclosings (although in conversation they operate as freestanding passing turns, while here they are prefatory items). Hence, while they do not specifically project termination as the

next action to be pursued, such tokens appear to prepare for it as a possible next action by marking what is to follow as a shift of direction.

In whatever form they may appear, closing prefaces are always initiated by the IR, and they ordinarily do not receive any response from an IE. IRs simply produce the closing preface and then launch immediately into the terminal "thanks."

2. *Closing projections.*—In the present data, a closing preface of some sort is employed as the preclosing component in 39 out of 50 cases. In the remaining instances, the preclosing takes an alternative form. Instead of issuing it as a preface to the terminal component, the IR projects the forthcoming closing in some earlier questioning turn (commonly, but not necessarily, his or her preceding turn). These closing projections may be explicit, as when the IR announces in some fashion that this will be the "last question."

(9) (MacNeil/Lehrer 6/12/85b: 13)

IR: →Just one last thing.

Is there any word of advice you would give to the consumer on how to protect himself or herself from this sort of thing? Or is it the credit card companies that are really having to .hhh

RG: It's- it's both. Uh from the point of view of . . .
(8 lines omitted)

because the costs are largely passed along.

IR: Rudolph Giuliani, thank you for being with us.

RG: Thank you very much.

(10) (MacNeil/Lehrer 7/24/85b:CT: 13)

IR: →Do you have a final quick comment?

FJ: Uh just that we're now into a discussion
(5 lines omitted)

and we knew that- that technique did not work.

IR: Yeh. I have to thank you both, and [leave it] there. =
PD: [thank you]

IR: = Senator Domenici, Mister Joseph.

FJ: Thank you.

Alternatively, the forthcoming closing may be projected in a less explicit manner. That is, the IR's question may be designed to exhibit indirectly, rather than claim overtly, its "lastness." This is most commonly done through questions about future plans or prospects.

(11) (MacNeil/Lehrer 6/13/85b: 11)

- IR:* →Can you give us any idea ah when your next
implant may- may be?
- AL:* No, we have not set a date, we have not picked a
candidate. Uh we have several possibilities . . .
(3 lines omitted)
over to the uh apartment for convalescents.
- IR:* Doctor Allen Lansing, we thank you for being with us.
- AL:* Thank you. It was my pleasure.

Here, after a discussion of the present state of the artificial heart program with a noted physician, a question about plans for the next implant serves to indicate that termination is imminent.

Finally, it should be noted that closing prefaces and closing projections can be used in concert, and projective work may begin considerably earlier than the final questioning turn. However, as a general principle it appears that, as more work is done to turn the talk “downhill” at earlier points, later prefatory items become redundant and may be dispensed with (e.g., 9, 11).

Implications

News interview closings clearly share much with their conversational counterparts. Like closings in ordinary conversation, they contain a terminal component that renders the interview recognizably closed. Furthermore, the production of that item is itself warranted by a preclosing object that makes termination an appropriate next action. Granting these similarities, interview closings also depart from those found in ordinary conversation in systematic ways. I want to consider for the moment two interrelated differences that I consider fundamental.

First, interview closings are warranted on different grounds from those found in other contexts. In ordinary conversation, termination may be warranted by an exchange of “passing turns” (e.g., “so:,” “well:”) that demonstrate that the speakers have nothing further they choose to say. News interview closings, in contrast, are notable for the absence of passing turns as a preclosing procedure. Even the tokens inserted as closing prefaces (e.g., “well” and “all right”) are not employed as passing turns, since the IR does not use them to decline a turn at talk. Rather, interview closings are warranted by the general procedure of presenting some question/answer sequence as the last one to be undertaken. Closing projections exhibit this “lastness” prospectively, while closing prefaces do the

same work retrospectively. In either case, passing turns play no role in interview preclosings.

The other major difference has to do with the unilateral management of interview closings. In ordinary conversation, both participants actively take part in the closing process throughout its duration. They do so by first exchanging preclosing utterances and then farewells. In the interview, in contrast, termination is actively managed throughout its course by the IR. The IR initiates the preclosing, and, whether it is in the form of a closing projection or a closing preface, it receives no overt acknowledgment. Furthermore, the IR's terminal "thank-you" also requires no IE response; such responses do occur on occasion, but they appear to be optional. The IEs do play a role in the closing process, but it is essentially a passive one. That is, they systematically refrain from acknowledging the IR's preclosing and frequently decline to respond to the terminal "thank-you" as well. This allows the IR to proceed immediately from the preclosing preface to the terminal component and from there to other noninterview business.

In sum, news interview closings are distinguished by the *specialization* of the preclosing to exclude passing turns and by the *reduction* of the closing as a whole from a cooperatively managed sequence to one that is unilaterally managed by IRs. These differences can be understood in light of the special properties of the interview as a speech-exchange system.

First, news interview talk is distinguished from ordinary conversation by its method of turn taking. In conversation the allocation of turns is managed on a local, turn-by-turn basis; any participant may potentially become the next speaker upon the completion of any turn. In the interview, in contrast, specific turn types (questions and answers) are pre-allocated to IRs and IEs. The IEs thus may not properly speak unless a previous question has selected them to do so, and they may produce only answers within their turns.

These special constraints on turn taking can account for the special features of interview closings, such as their unilateral management by IRs (see Greatbatch 1988, pp. 416–17). Given that IEs may not speak unless a question has selected them to do so, they need not overtly decline to speak in order to accomplish termination. Hence, they need not be provided with a turn slot in which to acknowledge or respond to the preclosing or terminal components, these tasks being initiated and actively managed by IRs throughout their course.

This constraint on turn taking can also illuminate the absence of passing turns as preclosing items. It is inappropriate for IEs to "pass" a turn at talk for reasons sketched above, but it also becomes inappropriate for IRs to do so. For if the IR were to pass a turn, this would allow an IE to become the next speaker, which is improper in a turn-taking system

where IEs may produce only answers to questions. So the IR warrants closing not by declining to take a turn at talk but by exhibiting the “lastness” of some question/answer exchange by one of the techniques examined above.

Second, news interviews are conducted within a relatively fixed time limit. The overall length of a conversation is locally variable, whereas the length of an interview is predetermined by the institutional scheduling of broadcast programming, which allots a specific length of time for each program. Furthermore, knowledge of when the time limit is being approached rests with IRs, who periodically receive such information electronically from the control room.

These temporal constraints may also inform the closing process. In this context the primary impetus for termination arises when time runs out. This makes the exchange of passing turns an inappropriate method of warranting termination. If such turns demonstrate that the participants have nothing further to add, they become irrelevant in situations where time constraints do not permit the extension of the encounter at will. Accordingly, closing is instead warranted when some question/answer exchange is presented as being the last one of the interview, regardless of whether the speakers’ agendas have been exhausted. And this is done by the closing projections and prefaces discussed above, some of which make explicit reference to the temporal constraints operating in this context (see [3], [4], and [6]).

Furthermore, this may also help to account for the unilateral management of closings by IRs. If termination should be undertaken when the allotted time has elapsed, and if knowledge of and responsibility for this belong to IRs, they must actively initiate the closing at the appropriate time. Moreover, in this context additional talk from an IE is not a relevant option; for this reason, IRs need not provide IEs with a slot to acknowledge or respond to the preclosing or terminal component. Correspondingly, IEs tacitly demonstrate their recognition of the temporal constraints at work here by not responding to the IR’s closing work, thus allowing them unilaterally to bring about termination.⁸

⁸ On this point, recall that IEs sometimes do respond to the terminal “thanks,” although their opportunity to do so may be treated as irrelevant when (1) the IR proceeds to other business without delay or (2) the camera remains focused on the IR throughout this process, so that a nonverbal response (e.g., nod), if there is one, is deleted from the broadcast. Hence, when these conditions are present, they exhibit a particular orientation on the part of news personnel to the urgency of the time limit and the need to “move things along.” In contrast, on those occasions when the IE is provided with an opportunity in which to respond, and when it is taken, a somewhat different orientation is observable in which the temporal situation is treated as sufficiently “loose” to permit at least a return “thanks,” if nothing more.

In sum, the special features of interview closings can be understood in light of the manner in which news interview interaction is configured and focused in accordance with various contingencies that arise in this institutional setting.⁹ News interview talk is conducted with reference to (1) special constraints on turn types and (2) temporal constraints on the overall length of the encounter. Insofar as the participants recognize and attend to these constraints, they will systematically narrow their assumptions about the range of speaking options that are available to them. This correspondingly alters what is required to achieve termination, and the closing mechanism is specialized and reduced accordingly. The resulting sequence provides for the regular achievement of termination at an arranged time.

⁹ One possible alternative explanation for the differences observed is that research on conversational closings dealt with telephone encounters, which lack a visual channel, whereas interviews do not. Hence, it could be that news interview closings are modified because the availability of a visual channel makes some of the features of telephone closings redundant and unnecessary. However, preliminary inspection of closings in telephone interviews does not support such an explanation.

(Philadelphia Radio Interview 3/29/85)

- NH:* . . . Uh just like women, children are: interrupted by
adults: uh: (.) far more frequently than- than thuh
reverse:.
- IR:* So in other words it's uh power thing.
- NH:* .hhh =
- IR:* = Thuh person who (.) is (.) in: uh position
of power interrupts
- NH:* .hhh It's either- uh:: it could be thought of as uh
power thing or as an attempt or an as- an assertion
power.
- IR:* To- to establish power.
→.hh It's SO INt'esting what you've done = thank you
so much for being with'us
(.)
- NH:* Sure.
(.)
- IR:* Neil Hancock from * western university. = uh
sociologist. tha- that was interesting.

The summary assessment here is both nonpassing in form and unilateral in production, the latter being ensured by the latched transition between it and the terminal "thanks." While it is true that this "thanks" receives a response, this is not inconsistent with the closing format outlined here, where a return thanks may occur but is optional. Whether the IE's thanks is also optional in telephone interviews cannot be demonstrated from a single case. Nevertheless, the evidence indicates that most—if not all—of the special features of news interview closings derive not from the availability of a visual channel but from the institutional contingencies proposed above: constraints on turn types and a fixed duration.

ELABORATING THE BASIC SEQUENCE:
MICROMANAGING THE FINAL ANSWER'S LENGTH

The sequence examined thus far enables interactants to close approximately at the temporal boundary by forestalling the production of additional turns. But this may not always be sufficient to achieve a punctual closing. The parties to an interview are not equally knowledgeable about the temporal situation within which they are operating. Only the IR knows precisely when the time limit is being approached. The IEs lack this knowledge, and they regularly produce extended multiutterance answers (Greatbatch 1988; Heritage and Greatbatch, in press). These circumstances can combine to create a situation in which time runs out in the middle of an IE's turn in progress. On such occasions, IRs take further measures to control the length of the IE's final turn, thereby gearing termination more precisely to the specified boundary.

One such measure is to initiate the closing turn interruptively and thus truncate the developing response to make way for termination.

(12) ("Nightline" 6/7/85: 7)

- IR:* You've watched them so closely. Do you think the family will step forward
- SW:* Uhm maybe yes, and maybe no. Because the family is following the directions of the lawyer, of Rolf Mengele. And Rolf Mengele says to the prosecuter yesterday, or two days ago, no comment today, and no comment later
- IR:* →All right. I have to interrupt 'cuz we've run outta time, but you leave us with a key phrase, maybe yes and maybe no, and maybe that does stay uncertain for a long time. I thank all three of you and Doctor Snow for joining us, and I'll be back in a moment.

Here the IR initiates his closing turn in an apparently interruptive manner; at least he treats his own turn as an interruption by naming it as such ("I have to interrupt . . ."). In addition, SW structures his turn such that it can be construed as possibly incomplete. He begins with a statement that projects a two-part answer ("maybe yes, and maybe no"), but he then produces only the "no" component of the answer. The "yes" component remains unformulated when IR begins to close, and it is by virtue of this absence that the answer appears to have been truncated.¹⁰

¹⁰ By some insider accounts, it is easier to cut IEs off when they are speaking by a remote camera link such that their only audio connection is by means of a receiver in one ear. Then, when the IR initiates an interruption, he or she is speaking directly into

From a purely instrumental standpoint, interrupting may be a highly effective means of micromanaging the length of the final answering turn. But this practice raises another problem for the IR, who presumably must manage the closing process with a modicum of politeness and decorum. While IRs may be able to achieve a timely termination by interrupting, they are in danger of being seen as brusque or rude.¹¹ The impropriety of this action can be mitigated somewhat by invoking the time constraint to account for having interrupted. The IR does this in (12) (arrowed), thereby portraying himself as compelled by circumstances over which he has no control.

But IRs can avoid such disruptive measures while still exercising some

the IE's ear, and this is said to facilitate IR's ability to gain the floor (Alter 1985). However, the opposite point of view has also been expressed (Gladstone 1986). Some IRs claim that, when guests are actually present in the studio, the IR is in a better position to cut them off owing to the range of gaze, gestures, and physical touch resources that can be mobilized to this end.

¹¹ One recent interruptive closing has become infamous for what was seen as its "rudeness": it occurred during Dan Rather's interview of candidate George Bush on the CBS "Evening News" early in the 1988 presidential campaign (see esp. the arrowed point below).

(CBS Evening News 1/25/88)

DR: Mister Vice-President, (.) I appreciate you joining us tonight, I appreciate tuh straightforward way: in:: uh (0.2) which you've- (.) engaged in this exchange. eh- clearly some unanswered questions remain. ARE YÖÜ willing,] .hh are you willing (0.2) =
GB: (]
DR: =tuh go to a news conference. = before the Iowa caucuses, .hhh [answer ques] tions [from a:ll comeh- all comers]
GB: [I've been tuh] [eighty (six) news confere] nces since March:
DR: → [uh- [hh eighty (six- seven) since March] [I gather that the answer is no:. .hh Thank]] you very much fbeing with us Mister Vice-President.

This case is notable in that Bush was able to produce only a few words before he was cut off. Moreover, Rather does not apologize for interrupting, nor does he invoke the time limit to account for his action (unlike [12], above). Neither does he provide any advance warning that the temporal situation is pressing (a routine practice in live interviews; see examples 13–15 above). Moreover, given that both parties had previously been unusually combative and argumentative, the viewing audience was perhaps primed to see Rather's swift interjection as another move in an ongoing conflict, i.e., as a display of motivated rudeness rather than a reasonable response to an organizational constraint. And, indeed, this encounter received widespread attention in the popular press, much of it critical of Rather's conduct and in particular his way of closing. Even some who were inclined to defend his overall performance (e.g., former CBS correspondent Marvin Kalb) did not hesitate to criticize his handling of the closing. This case testifies to the complex and delicate issues that inhabit the closing task; IRs ignore them at their own peril.

control over the final answering turn. For example, they can break into the answer in progress a bit early to warn of the impending deadline and then withdraw, allowing IE to bring his or her turn to some form of completion.

(13) (“Nightline” 6/5/85: 13)

- IR:* . . . with whom is competition these days. Aren't we talking about competition within the United States any more or is it ONLY competition with these other multinational corporations.
- WA:* WELL it- uh- uh- obviously competition is BOTH domestic AND interNational. But look at the record of General Motors to come back to the GM Hughes MERger .hh
- IR:* → Lemme ca- lemme cau tion you we're down to our last minute so give it quickly please.
- WA:* Okay wha- what has General Motors done. It has aBANDoned the small car field. . . .
((Answer continues))

Notice that this interruption is not initiated haphazardly, for it occurs just after WA projects that a long discourse might be forthcoming; his call to “look at the record of General Motors” implies that some kind of corporate history is about to be elaborated. Hence, the IE is warned about the temporal situation at a demonstrably relevant point within his turn and is then permitted to continue speaking. Nevertheless, this still entails an interruption of sorts.

To avoid interruptions altogether, IRs frequently include a time warning within the last questioning turn as part of the closing projection. This works to inform the IEs in advance that the temporal situation is pressing, thus enabling them to design their responses from the outset with this in mind. The warning may include an actual report of the time remaining.

(14) (“Nightline” 7/23/85: 7)

- IR:* All right Mister Wisner,
→final twenty seconds.
How does America look in all this?
- FW:* Well, I think America is looking good. The problem in South Africa is apartheid. The problem . . .
((4 lines omitted))
that's the best way to go, not by punitive actions.
- IR:* All right, thank all three of you for joining us,
I appreciate it very much.

Alternatively, the warning may simply contain an injunction to keep the response brief (line 04).

(15) (MacNeil/Lehrer 6/11/85b: 14)

- 01 *IR*: Specifically this fight, Mister Dilday, how badly
02 do you think this hurts the denomination in the eyes
03 of the convention as well as thuh world?
04 Very briefly.
05 *RD*: A tragic disruption of what our main purpose is in
06 reaching our world for Christ and accomplishing bold
07 mission thrust goals, this kind of interjection came
08 at the insistence of a political organization
09 >six years ago. = right at the time when we
10 were on the verge of moving forward as a
11 denomination to accomplish these goals = of the
12 Bible. .hh an' we been sidetracked ever since =
13 *IR*: Ar-
14 *RD*: = then. = an' it's tragic indeed.
15 *IR*: Well Mister Pressler and Mister Dilday, = I thank
16 you very much- ah both for being with us.

Such warnings are clearly issued to encourage the IEs to limit their responses. But do they actually adjust their behavior as a consequence? This is not easily demonstrated, since there is no actual record of what would have been said in the absence of a warning. However, IEs do have various ways of demonstrating that they are “hurrying,” thereby exhibiting at least an awareness of the projected time limit in response.

If we consider extract (15) once more, we notice that in the context of the previous question, the first part of the answer (line 05) (“A tragic disruption . . .”) lacks an initial subject and verb (e.g., “*It is* a tragic disruption . . .”), departing from what might seem to be the “normal” way of answering and thus displaying an effort, however small, to abbreviate the response. Later on (09), the IE increases the pacing of his speech beginning at the point marked “>”; he also rushes past the downwardly intoned “ago” (a possible utterance completion point) by latching the next word without an intervening silence. This acceleration occurs when discussing a past event and begins just as the IE is specifying when it occurred (six years ago”), which otherwise projects that he may be launching into an extended “history” of sorts. Hence, the quickening pace exhibits continuing regard for the time limit while initiating a potentially lengthy digression. Finally, after *IR* begins and then quickly aborts an apparent closing (13), the IE continues (12, 14) with an item that is specifically *not* a blow-by-blow recounting of the “history” begun at line (09) but a quick completion of it: “an’ we been sidetracked ever since

then. = an' it's tragic indeed." That is, he eschews detailing the intervening events of the previous six years in favor of returning straightaway to the present. In sum, by eliding utterance components, quickening the pace at specific points, and omitting potential story components, IEs can present themselves as actively "hurrying up." The resulting turn is not necessarily shorter than it otherwise would have been, but through the details of its design the speaker can be seen as cognizant of the time limit and thus properly responsive to the IR's warning.

ON HAVING THE LAST WORD: RESISTING TERMINATION

It has been demonstrated that IRs unilaterally manage closings throughout their course. The IEs ordinarily facilitate this process by systematically withholding speech at relevant junctures, thus enabling the IR to proceed through the various closing components and on to other matters without delay.

The IEs are not always so cooperative, however, and on occasion they will contest the IR's closing turn by attempting to speak further. But if the previous analysis is correct, we would expect that any such attempt would occur interruptively. Having no opportunity to acknowledge the IR's preclosing preface, IEs are also deprived of a turn slot in which to introduce additional talk if they so choose. Hence, on the basis of the previous analysis, a prediction may be derived: any attempt on the part of an IE to reopen the interaction will interrupt the IR's closing turn.

This prediction is supported by the data. There are only two interviews that exhibit any IE resistance to closing, and each is undertaken interruptively. I shall examine one case in some detail. It occurs in the midst of a heated debate over corporate mergers, where each IE is attempting to have the last word. The IR's first two closing attempts (arrows 1 and 2) are interrupted and overtaken.

(16) ("Nightline" 6/5/85: 14–15)

- IR:* Lemme ca- lemme caution you we're down to our last minute so give it quickly please.
- WA:* Okay wha- what has General Motors done. It has aBANDoned thuh small car field to the Japanese by entering into the joint venture with uh- with Toyota. Uh Chrysler has imitated them. They've done thuh same thing, uh- Ford has done thuh same thing. These multinational corporations are not American corporations, they're not serving the public interest in the United States. They're loyal to only ONE flag, that's their own flag. General Motors salutes its own

- flag, it does NOT respect the Stars and Stripes. =
- 1→IR: =All right [mister-
 WA: [And it] [does not SERVE the Stars and Stripes.]
 MF: [Ya know ya DON'T- .hh ya don't meet
 many red necked economists you're quite
 an exception professor
 hhh [heh-heh-heh-heh-heh .hh-hhh-.hhh]
 WA: [Well I'm a PATriot Mister Forbes]
 MF: Uh this country's stronger than it's ever been and more
 prosperous than it's ever been, it's pulling the rest
 of the world BACK up into an economic HEALTH. And I th-
 I would say when Companies by their growth and their
 multiPLICity MULTiply jobs and more people are working = than =
 ever = before (.) THAT's PATri [o t i s m.]
 2→IR: [All [right] Mister Forbes] =
 WA: [Yes but the JOBS] =
 IR: = [Professor Adams and gentlemen I'm-
 WA: = [ARE BEING CREATED BY THUH] SMALL com-
 panies and not by the giants. The giants are merging and the
 small companies are creating the jobs.
 3→IR: I'm afraid we're out of time. I thank you all gentlemen
 very much, Mister Forbes, Professor Adams, Senator
 Metzenbaum, appreciate you coming in.

The IR first initiates the closing process at arrow 1. Notice that the turn begins with a canonical preface form (All right) and is initiated at a possible completion point in WA's previous turn. However, WA subsequently adds an additional component to his turn ("and it does not SERVE the Stars and Stripes"), which overlaps IR's closing preface. Then, MF begins a turn in overlap with WA, starting just as IR cuts off and drops out.

The IR attempts to close again at arrow 2. This turn begins a little early, overlapping the last three syllables of MF's turn. This more aggressive closing move may have been undertaken by the IR because of his previous failed attempt to close and in recognition of the possibility that WA may try to jump in with the last word. And, as it turns out, WA does indeed interject in an effort to respond to MF's last point. This time the IR persists in battling for the floor ("All right Mister Forbes Professor Adams and gentleman I'm-"), but he eventually loses out to WA, who is virtually shouting at this point ("the JOBS ARE BEING CREATED BY THUH SMALL companies . . .").

Finally, at arrow 3 the closing is successfully carried to completion. But the previous aborted attempts confirm that, while IEs may attempt to reopen the interaction, they can do so only by overlapping the IR's closing turn. This directly contrasts with closings in ordinary conversation,

which are specifically designed to provide each speaker with an opportunity to speak further.

Moreover, such a move is not without its interactional risks. This becomes apparent on those few occasions when an IE steadfastly refuses to stop talking. Such behavior is recognized as deviant, and its occurrence prompts a search by the parties involved for the personality traits, underlying motives, or cultural deficiencies that could account for such an irregularity. For example, one such incident was retrospectively explained by the IR as a product of the IE's cultural background; the IR noted that the guest in question was Egyptian and so was presumed to be unfamiliar with the conventions of American television interviewing (Krier 1986).¹² Accordingly, the IR's singular control over the closing process and its timing is taken for granted as something that any competent member of the society ought to know and defer to, so that persistent defiance of this authority is grounds for questioning one's cultural competence, motives, and the like.

DISCUSSION

This analysis has implications for the organization of interaction and the manner in which it is intertwined with wider sociotemporal and social institutional domains. Consider first the domain of the news interview and particularly that corner of it wherein the problem of closing is addressed. At first glance, interview closings may seem too brief and straightforward to be of interest. In many cases the interviewer simply announces that time is up, thanks the interviewee, and that is that; the process seems almost automatic. However, when this method of closing is contrasted with its more elaborate counterpart in ordinary conversation, it becomes evident that the very brevity and simplicity of interview closings represent an achievement. That achievement involves interviewees' withholding speech at specific junctures, while interviewers deploy a restricted range of devices to bring about closure. The former entails the *reduction* of the closing sequence through the elimination of component slots, and the latter results in its *specialization*. Moreover, these modifications are methodical in that they serve specific and identifiable functions: they place control over the closing process in the hands of the knowledgeable and responsible party while permitting that party to accomplish termination in a manner that respects the turn-taking and temporal constraints at

¹² In a study of British news interviews, Greatbatch (1988, p. 427) reports a complementary occurrence in which an IE took the closing initiative and ended the interview before the IR had so moved. This unusual action received widespread attention and "was generally considered to be far more newsworthy than the interview per se."

hand. It appears, therefore, that a generic or context-free closing sequence, one fitted to the open-ended character of ordinary conversation, has been systematically adapted to manage the focused relevancies and restricted speaking options characteristic of news interviews.

It is through such adaptations that durational boundaries are ongoingly constituted and reproduced. By selectively engaging the conversational closing sequence, reducing the number of slots in which further talk is allowable, and employing a restricted range of closing devices in the slots that remain, the participants exhibit an orientation to the time limit as something genuinely relevant to their actions. Simultaneously, they reproduce that limit as a real entity that has tangibly bounded yet another occasion of interaction. It may be tempting to view the modified closing sequence as determined by the scheduling requirements of broadcasting. But this imparts an unwarranted facticity to temporal schedules, reifying something that is socially constructed in its origins and interactionally maintained within particular occasions (cf. Zerubavel 1981, p. 42). Consider that the "factual" existence of a prearranged temporal schedule does not by itself ensure that interactants on any given occasion will attend to it and act in accordance with its strictures. For instance, even in a setting as rigidly structured as a television news interview, temporal boundaries may be deferred (although it is notable that such deferrals are treated as necessitated by matters of special importance).

(18) ("Nightline" 7/22/85: 15)

IR: . . . I have to also warn the affiliates that we're gonna run a little long because of the importance of this situation.

And given that the news interview is an extreme case, it seems likely that other settings with *officially* fixed durations permit even more situational variability *in practice*. The analytic problem, then, is to describe how interactants orient to sociotemporal schedules as something to be adhered to on particular occasions, for it is through such practices that schedules are instantiated as real and constraining entities. For the case of durational boundaries, the specialized and reduced closing sequence accomplishes this task. What we have, then, is a mechanism at the sequential or interactional level that is capable of upholding a durational structure characteristic of the occasion as a complete unit.

The significance of the closing mechanism extends beyond the reproduction of a durational structure; it has a broader institutional import. It is at such opening and closing boundaries that "the kind of occasion this is" is most prominently displayed and ratified and thus *constituted* by the parties who are shaping it (Goffman 1974, pp. 254–57; Schegloff 1979,

p. 25). And so it is with news interview closings that are organized to arrive at a specified end point. Fixed durations of talk are indicative of a preexisting obligation to interact for a given length and no longer. This amounts to a rationalization of interactional involvement that is foreign to casual conversation but common in bureaucratic and professional encounters (e.g., therapy sessions, classroom lessons, and the like), where commitments are standardized and codified along temporal lines (Zerubavel 1979b). Accordingly, a fixed duration is in part what marks an occasion of talk as something other than a purely casual conversation, for it indicates the presence of formal arrangements that predate the occasion. And when interactants coordinate their actions so as to finish “on time,” thereby reproducing a fixed temporal boundary, they are simultaneously making visible the social institution of which it is a part.

The terms of this analysis are not restricted to the news interview. They capture some rather general properties of the relationship between sequential mechanisms of spoken interaction and institutional forms generally conceived as social structural in character. This study converges with an increasing body of comparative research (see esp. Clayman and Whalen, 1988/89; Greatbatch 1988; Heritage 1984, pp. 280–90, 1985; Heritage and Greatbatch, in press; Schegloff, 1988/89; Whalen and Zimmerman 1987; see also Atkinson and Drew 1979; Button 1987b; Heritage and Greatbatch 1986; Maynard, in press; Mulkay 1984; Wilson, in press) indicating that talk in institutional settings is characterized by “(1) a selective reduction in the full range of conversational practices available for use in mundane interaction; and (2) a degree of concentration on, and specialization of, particular procedures which have their ‘home’ or base environment in ordinary talk” (Heritage 1984, pp. 239–40). The concept of specialization is meant to capture a variety of phenomena, including the selection of certain speaking practices over other sequentially relevant alternatives, and the distribution of those practices to speakers with particular institutional identities. “Reduction” refers to the sequential deletion of practices at junctures where, in ordinary conversation, they would be relevant and expectable. Institutional talk thus involves the specialization and reduction of practices that appear in their most anonymous and uninhibited form in mundane conversation.¹³

¹³ Specialization and reduction seem to apply in particular to *institutional* forms of talk, i.e., talk that serves as the vehicle for accomplishing the official business of occupational and bureaucratic settings (e.g., courtrooms, police stations, classrooms, etc.). It is within these spatially and temporally sequestered settings, where a focused set of tasks are regularly accomplished through talk (e.g., cross-examination, requests for police assistance, pedagogy, etc.), that specialization and reduction seem to operate most clearly. There are other forms of social structure—including social relationships, hierarchies of power and status, and gender, race, class, and age differences—to

This conceptual framework has emerged as a result of numerous empirical studies in a variety of institutional settings, but the theoretical implications have remained largely implicit. Accordingly, it is important to point out that this framework is distinctive in specifying concretely how interaction and social structure are interconnected while avoiding a reductionist stance toward either domain. This can be understood most clearly by contrasting the present analysis in terms of specialization and reduction with other ways of conceptualizing the relationship between talk and social structure. One possible alternative is that each institutional setting has its own indigenous set of speaking practices, unique to that setting. If this were true, social structure would be the dominant locus of organization. There would be no properties intrinsic to interaction per se, for interactional organization would be entirely contingent upon institutional factors. The antithesis of this "structural" view is that institutional talk involves the unaltered use of speaking practices that can also be found in more casual settings. If this were so, the domain of interaction would be organizationally predominant. There would be nothing distinctive about institutional talk, for its organizational properties would be entirely specifiable in terms of the generic properties of interaction.

In contrast to these reductionist alternatives, the present analysis provides for linkages between interactional and institutional domains while preserving the integrity of each. Interactants do not invent speaking practices *de novo* each time they encounter new social tasks. As we have seen in the news interview, the task of closing on time is accomplished through a set of procedures that have much in common with closings in general. Spoken interaction is thus a partially autonomous domain with its own intrinsic organizational integrity and describable practices (Sacks et al. 1974; Schegloff 1987; cf. Goffman 1983). But when interactants actually employ the formal resources of talk in some real-world context, they must adapt those resources to the particulars of the task at hand and the social occasion in which it is embedded. In the news interview, participants *selectively* engage the conversational closing sequence and use just those components that are required to accomplish termination in that distinctive context (see also Whalen and Zimmerman 1987). Institutional structures thus also retain a degree of integrity within this perspective. Rather than being reducible to an aggregate of discrete and immutable acts (cf.

which the mechanisms of talk may also be sensitive, but the precise nature of that sensitivity appears to be somewhat different. See Maynard (1985), Maynard and Zimmerman (1984), Molotch and Boden (1985), Schegloff (1987), and West and Zimmerman (1983) for relevant discussions.

Collins 1981), institutions are consequential for those acts and the detailed manner in which they are fitted together sequentially. Indeed, it is in this consequentiality, and not the “objective” characteristics of social settings (e.g., ostensibly “institutional” locales and their frameworks of norms, roles, and statuses), that institutions manifestly exist; they are incrementally realized primarily through courses of talk. In this sense, the organization of talk serves as the foundational “enabling institution” (Schegloff 1987, p. 208) through which many other institutions are contingently brought into being.

For research on talk and interaction, the methodological implications are clear. Given that institutional forms of talk are fashioned out of general interactional skills and practices, it is important to recognize that any seemingly specialized practice may well have a wider applicability. Even if the investigator has a primary substantive interest in some bureaucratic or occupational setting, comparative analysis with mundane talk is essential to determine what is setting specific and what is generic about the practices under examination. But at the same time, even if one’s primary interest is in the organization of interaction per se, it may be fruitful to examine talk in more specialized settings to gain access to practices that are infrequent or highly complex in casual talk. Institutional settings may, in other words, lead the investigator to discover forms of interactional organization that would be difficult to discern elsewhere. Such settings are of interest, then, not only because they are linked to established substantive areas in sociology but also because they offer fertile terrain for investigating the interaction order.

A fruitful place to begin is with the practices of opening and closing that serve to demarcate and define the occasions of social life. While the news interview is an extreme case, other bureaucratic and professional encounters have relatively fixed temporal boundaries, so the closing process is likely to be adapted to these and other constraints. Note, for example, that business meetings, therapy sessions, and classroom lessons, like the news interview, have turn-taking systems that provide one person with the primary interactional initiative; meeting chairpersons have special rights to determine topics for discussion, while therapists and teachers have the privilege of asking questions. Accordingly, like the interviewer, these persons will also have special rights to initiate and manage the closing process. But there are also likely to be modifications fitted to local circumstances; therapy sessions, for instance, must pose special problems, as a timely closing must be managed while the therapist exhibits due regard for the patient’s needs and expectations. Furthermore, these encounters have a fixed opening boundary as well, and its interactional foundations also deserve to be investigated in comparison

with openings in casual talk. Together, these amount to the interactional means by which social occasions and their lineaments are assembled and brought to life.

APPENDIX

Transcribing Conventions

The following conventions have been adapted from a system devised by Gail Jefferson (see Atkinson and Heritage 1984, pp. ix–xvi). The symbols are designed to capture the verbal and prosodic details of speech as it naturally occurs.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| A: I didn't know [that.] | Brackets denote simultaneous speech. |
| B: [It's_] true. | |
| A: He drove (0.2) uphill. | Numbers in parentheses mark elapsed silence in tenths of seconds; a period denotes a one-tenth of a second silence. |
| (1.3) | |
| B: Yeah? (.) How far. | Equal signs indicate the "latching" of utterances or words with no gap. |
| A: Let's wait on it. = | Capital letters mark increased volume. |
| B: = Okay | Underlining indicates various forms of stress: volume or pitch or both. |
| A: I'm NOT gonna do it. | Colon(s) indicate the previous sound was prolonged. |
| A: She <u>hadda lotta books</u> . | A hyphen denotes a glottal stop, or "cutoff," of sound. |
| A: It took so::: long, | An "h" marks audible breathing. The more h's, the longer the breath. A period preceding denotes inbreath; no period marks outbreath. |
| A: I d- I dunno. | Speech in single parentheses indicates the transcriptionist is uncertain about what was said. Parentheses with blank spaces indicate the talk was unintelligible. |
| A: .hhh hhhh I guess so. | Items in double parentheses are explanatory or provide characterizations of events not fully transcribed. |
| A: It's in thuh small (drawer) | |
| B: I'll () | |
| A: We'll be ((cough)) back | |
| ((Commercial break)) | |
| A: Continuing our discussion | |

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