Working With Collections

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To appear in Jeffrey D. Robinson, Rebecca Clift, Kobin Kendrick, and Chase Raymond (eds.) *Handbook of Research Methods in Conversation Analysis.*

Draft 2 July 2021

Conversation-analytic (CA) research methods are novel in many ways, not least of which relates to the traditional division between qualitative and quantitative approaches in the social sciences. Most CA research projects are based on samples ranging from roughly a dozen instances of the target phenomenon to upwards of 100-plus instances. There are exceptions to this generalization and some diversification in recent years, but samples of this modest size range have long been prototypical of the field.

Working at this scale — with assembled *collections* of some possible phenomenon — is so commonplace for CA practitioners that it is easy to lose sight of its distinctiveness as an approach to empirical research. Such collections are modest by the standards of survey research or corpus linguistics, but substantial by contrast with observational fieldwork or ethnography of speaking. Correspondingly, collection-based methods are not easily pigeonholed in relation to the traditional binary of idiographic versus nomothetic methods emerging from the 19th-century Austro-German *methodenstreit* (Goldthorpe, 1991); nor do they fit within the more contemporary tripartite framework of case analysis, small-N comparative analysis, and quantitative analysis (Ragin & Amoroso 2011). Apart from CA, collections are neither widely used nor much discussed as the basis for a distinct social-science methodology. They have been of secondary interest within reflections on grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Katz 2001, Pidgeon and Henwood 2004), but the contrast with theory-driven and deductive models of research has greatly overshadowed attention to collection-based methods, *per se*. Collections are, however, more prominent in the life sciences, especially botany, zoology, and paleontology in their early naturalist phases, and in other data-rich/theory-poor sciences where the

gathering of specimens is a frequent investigative starting point (Strasser 2012a, 2012b).

The appeal of working with specimen collections is that it affords at least some of the benefits of both single-case analysis and large-sample quantification. With numerically modest specimen collections, it remains possible for the researcher to (1) examine each and every instance within the collection in full contextual detail and retain a vivid sense of case-specific particularities, while also (2) developing accounts whose generality may be tested across a number of cases. These dual payoffs are beyond the reach of both single-case and large-sample projects, and they have a particular utility for research in underdeveloped areas whose elementary units and basic organizational forms are not well-understood.

Human interaction has that character. Harvey Sacks, in his early lectures, commented on the importance of singular events and event sequences as a basis for, and constraint on, theorizing about the organizational features of interaction.

> So, what we are dealing with is the technology of conversation. We are trying to *find* this technology out of actual fragments of conversation, so that we can impose as a constraint that the technology actually deals with singular events and singular sequences of events — a reasonably strong constraint on some set of rules. (Sacks 1984b: 413-414)

Sometime later, Emanuel Schegloff would offer an even stronger rationale for the centrality of the single case, as not only a constraint on theorizing but also *a primary locus of order* in this domain.

> One point which seems increasingly clear is that, in a great many respects, social action done through talk is organized and orderly not, or not only, as a matter of rule or as a statistical regularity, but on a case by case, action by action, basis. Particular complements of participants on singular occasions of interaction proceed in what are, to them, orderly ways; or, failing this, have ways of coping with the apparent lack of order which also operate on a single case basis. (Schegloff 1987: 102)

Accordingly, close analysis of such cases provides a window into an organizational phenomenon's relevance or import for the participants. It is within single cases that practices of talk/interaction can be observed to be oriented to and understood in specific ways, both by speakers deploying the practice in particular turn-constructional and action environments, and by recipients in subsequent conduct. So, in contrast to large-scale quantitative approaches that yield ideal-typical characterizations with atypical cases relegated to the 'garbage can' of random error, relatively modest collection-based work has the potential to more fully engage the case-by-case complexities of interactional conduct, and in ways more firmly anchored in the 'emic' orientations of the participants themselves.

By the same token, unlike single-case analyses or small-N comparisons, collections also enable at least the initial steps toward generalization. Sacks characterized his *primary* objective as reaching beyond any particular case to the organizational form it instantiates.

> So the idea is to take singular sequences of conversation and tear them apart in such a way as to find rules, techniques, procedures, methods, maxims [that] can be used to generate the orderly features we find in the conversations we examine. The idea being, then, to come back to the singular things we observe in a singular sequence, with some rules that handle those singular features, and also necessarily handle lots of other events as well. (Sacks [1971] 1992: 339)

> Thus is it not any particular conversation, as an object, that we are primarily interested in. Our aim is to get into a position to transform… our sense of "what happened," from a matter of a particular interaction done by particular people, to a matter of interactions as products of a machinery. We are trying to find the machinery. In order to do so, we have to get access to its products. (Sacks [1970] 1984a: 26-27)

Schegloff's first published paper (Schegloff 1968) provides a vivid illustration of the role of collections to this end. Using an array of telephone conversation openings, he identified *conditional relevance* as the key organizing principle linking first actions and their sequelae, with the power to explain both frequent sequential patterns (e.g., greetings receiving

return greetings, questions receiving answers, etc.) and occasional deviant cases (the relevant response is not forthcoming but oriented to as "missing"). Accordingly, by working through collections researchers can escape the "solipsism" of the single case and identify recurrent and generative organizational phenomena. And they can begin to illuminate such things as: (1) the scope conditions or relevant environments of such phenomena, (2) their strength and normativity within those environments, and (3) context-specific variations.

Those familiar with the scholarly origins of CA will discern echoes of both Harold Garfinkel and Erving Goffman in this approach, with Garfinkel's emphasis on the singularity of local situations of action wedded to Goffman's interest in the generic structuring of the interaction order. This improbable fusion of divergent sensibilities and interests (Clayman, Heritage, and Maynard forthcoming) finds expression in the impetus to pitch the research tent in that borderland between cases and quantities that permits due attention to both.

How, then, should collection-based work proceed? The answer resists easy summary because much depends on the objectives of a given project and the type of phenomenon it is targeting. Is it a specific form of conduct (e.g., turn-initial *well*, modal interrogatives, nodding, etc.) whose import is at present mysterious? Is is an already-familiar action type (e.g., questioning, requesting, displaying understanding) and the varying practices through which it can be implemented? Is it a coherent system of practices (e.g., the organization of turn taking, preference, repair, etc.)? Is it the specialized practices of a particular sociocultural enclave, institutional setting, or occupational task? Is an entirely novel phenomenon at issue, or is the project geared to resolving a puzzle arising from previous research, or remedying a practical problem in the real world?

Understandably, there is as yet no comprehensive roadmap for navigating these complex issues, but suggestive directions may be gleaned from prior literature. For guidance on *assembling collections*, Schegloff (1996, 1997) touches on some of the key problems involved, although not in the abstract. He uses particular empirical projects (confirming allusions (1996), other-initiated repair (1997)) as occasions for reflecting on some of the considerations involved in deciding what should properly be included within a collection. Once a collection has been assembled, guidance for *working case by case through the collection* may be gleaned from any number of excellent conversation analytic papers, where the ordered presentation of data excerpts often reflects an implicit "logic" for managing the empirical complexities of specimen collections. By reading between the lines of exemplary studies,[1] focusing in particular on how excerpts are grouped into clusters and arrayed in sequence, one can discern underlying methods for dealing with both recurrent patterns and anomalous cases observable within a given collection.

In an effort to make these methods explicit while keeping the complexities to a manageable level, the present discussion is organized primarily around what remains the prototypical and most common form of CA research: *the investigation of some previously unexamined practice-based phenomenon*. Correspondingly, I will use exemplary empirical studies in this vein to ground a broader reflection on the key issues involved in both (1) assembling and (2) working through specimen collections. It bears emphasis that projects differing from this prototype — projects that are theory- or problem-driven, or have other analytical objectives besides the explication of a novel phenomenon — may call for somewhat different procedures for collection assembly and analysis.

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[1] For some exemplary collection-based studies of singular practices, see Curl and Drew 2008, Goodwin 1980, Heritage 1984, Jefferson 1984. For studies addressed to larger sequence structures, see Jefferson 1980, 1988, Jefferson and Lee 1981, Sacks and Schegloff 1979, Schegloff 1968, Schegloff and Sacks 1973.

Assembling Collections

The decision to build a collection is rarely the first step in a research project. It almost always proceeds from some other starting point, be it an unmotivated "noticing" emerging in everyday life or in data sessions, or an unresolved puzzle suggested by previous research or by some practical reality.[2] In any event, the researcher has an expectation — whether a partially formed hunch or a more developed hypothesis - that there is something to be gained by moving beyond any initial case or handful of cases. A central trick of the trade is to allow that initial expectation to inform, but not determine, the assembly of cases for analysis.

The Recorded-Interaction Database

The study of naturally-occurring interaction poses distinct challenges for assembling a representative database.[3] Whatever the phenomenon targeted for study, not only is the universe of cases necessarily unknown in advance of the research, but the range of interactional environments in which it may occur (e.g. conversations at the dining table, on the telephone, or in the car; in shops, restaurants, offices, waiting rooms, or queues; during gatherings, parties, meetings, interviews, discussions, etc.) may be virtually limitless. Under these circumstances, genuine random sampling - where each instance has an equal probability of being selected - is simply not feasible.

This could be a trivial matter, were it not for the well-documented context-sensitivity of interactional practices. Varying social environments and activity frameworks can impact the range, frequency, and import of the practices that compose interaction (Levinson 1979, Schegloff 1993). Conduct

[2] See the chapters in this volume by Clift and Mandelbaum, Betz, Kendrick, and Barnes.
[3] For a fuller discussion of data collection, see the chapters in this volume by Hoey and Webb ("Data Collection") and Robinson ("Alternative Methods of Data Collection").

in institutional or occupational environments is particularly conditioned by the participants' sustained orientation to specialized tasks, which in turn narrows the range of relevant forms of conduct, and often gives rise to special patterns of inference and implicature (Heritage 2004; Heritage & Clayman, 2010). Such differences may be so extensive as to yield systematic transformations in turn-taking organization (Atkinson and Drew 1979, Greatbatch 1988, Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974), sequence structures (Heritage 2004), repair organization (Koshik 2002, McHoul 1990, Montiegel 2021), and so on. Moreover, individual-level differences of a stylistic or idiosyncratic nature can also impact the practices deployed in any given environment (e.g., Jefferson 1984). Accordingly, an unduly narrow database risks mis-characterizing whatever phenomenon is under investigation.

These problems may seem daunting, but they also suggest certain basic rules of thumb that can enhance the representativeness of recorded-interaction databases and, correspondingly, the specimen collections assembled therefrom. The researcher should, as much as possible, *aim for a breadth and diversity of recorded data*. What "breadth and diversity" should consist of will necessarily depend on the domain of interest within a given project. If the goal is to characterize the generic "machinery" of interaction, then casual everyday conversation — which is unconstrained by specialized occupational identities, professional norms, or tasks — is apt to offer the broadest range of practices for analysis. Correspondingly, if the goal is to characterize some more specialized domain of practice, then breadth and diversity should still be sought within that domain by, for instance, seeking out varying complements of interactants. Adhering to this maxim does not guarantee that the specimen collection eventually assembled will be perfectly representative, but it works toward that ideal and helps avoid research findings that are unduly context-bound or idiosyncratic.

Selecting Cases

Once an appropriately broad database is in hand, how should possible instances of the target phenomenon be chosen? Collecting specimens should, at the outset, be guided by a parallel and equally important rule of thumb: *begin by casting a wide net*. Do not overlook cases that seem flawed or imperfectly realized, or marginal to the target phenomenon, or even those that run contrary to expectations. When in doubt, *do not* throw it out; include it in the collection.

This impetus toward inclusiveness arises from the premise that data collection and analysis are fundamentally distinct phases of research. Indeed, the independence of the data collection process is essential for the subsequent analysis to be successful. When hunches, hypotheses, or theoretical expectations gain a controlling influence over data collection, research can become a self-fulfilling prophesy that loses touch with the real world.

More is at stake here than confirmation bias or the avoidance of outright falsehoods; at risk is the capacity to adequately characterize the phenomenon in a context where its basic conceptualization still remains to be worked out. Since the typical CA study targets some practice-based phenomenon that is not fully understood - the aim being to demonstrate its reality and clarify both its functional core and particularities in use - that project mandates a certain open-mindedness in the approach to case selection. It helps avoid prematurely arresting one's grasp of the phenomenon when such a grasp is underdeveloped and perhaps unduly influenced by whatever haphazard initial observations happened to set the project in motion (Schegloff 1997: 502). By confronting additional cases that *seem* "different" — distinctively realized, or geared to an apparently distinct project, or adapted to local contingencies — the phenomenon is permitted to grow and develop in the researcher's emerging conceptualization. And since

it is almost always easier to set aside cases from a collection than go searching for cases that were missed, it's wise to lean in favor of scooping up everything that seems possibly relevant.

To illustrate the value of casting a broad net, consider its role in a project on the English-language particle *you know* (Clayman and Raymond 2021a, 2021b). The particle was not well understood previously, in part because most studies had settled on a specialized subset of cases falling far short of the particle's full pragmatic range. Our approach to case selection was, by contrast, purposefully inclusive. We focused on syntactically optional cases that were a locus of genuine choice for speakers, but we were otherwise undiscriminating. Examining diverse conversational encounters to maximize the variety of participants, we took the first ten to fifteen *you know* instances from each conversation (depending on its overall length) without regard to the particle's manner of delivery or its positioning within turns, actions, or sequence structures. This generated a collection of 200 diverse instances, including turn-initial, medial, final, and free-standing cases, and those embedded in widely varying action environments (proposals, assessments, and other first actions; dispreferred responses of various kinds; new-topic initiations, self-repair episodes, and more).

As our understanding of the particle began to crystallize, some of these cases would be set aside as possibly tangential (see Clayman and Raymond 2021a: 93fn6) given our emerging sense of the particle's core function evident in the overwhelming preponderance (≅90%) of cases. Conversely, our diverse collection led us toward a relatively comprehensive understanding of the particle as a multi-purpose *alignment token*, advancing a claim of recipient-speaker alignment when that is accountably at risk. This analysis encompasses numerous uses within a single framework: (1) during speaking difficulties projecting problems of understanding, (2) during contentious actions projecting problems of affiliation, and (3) when

recipient's understanding and/or affiliation is actively being pursued following prior resistance. This analysis of the particle, capturing the variety of ways it can be mobilized to remediate threats to both intersubjectivity and affiliation, would not have been possible without a generous and thoroughly "agnostic" case-selection process.

The value of boundary cases, in particular, within a specimen collection cannot be overemphasized. These are cases that seem potentially relevant, requiring further analysis to determine whether they should be set aside or included after all. As Schegloff (1997: 502) observes, boundary cases are challenging to deal with but have a particular analytic utility.

> They generally "look like" our emerging phenomenon, even if they do not turn out to be instances of it. In specifying what *makes* them "look like," we learn about our phenomenon; and in specifying why nonetheless they "*are* not," we learn as well. And in specifying why some instances which look *un*like our initiating instances belong nonetheless… we do the same.

In the same paper, Schegloff vividly illustrates these points by examining boundary cases of other-initiated repair, where *turn formats identical to those for initiating repair* (e.g. *What?*, partial repeats) are evidently being used to do other sorts of things (e.g., prompt a telling, register the receipt of information). Confronting such cases illuminates our understanding of other-initiated repair's conceptual boundary, clarifying "what belongs inside it and what does not" (Schegloff 1997: 502).

Accordingly, it's best to think of the initial case-selection process as one geared to assembling, not instances of the target phenomenon, but rather *candidate* instances of a *possible* phenomenon. The "phenomenon" is still a work in progress, and it may dissolve if its "instances" fail to cohere in a defensible way. To exclude cases at this point is premature, an *analytical* decision best deferred until later in the research process.

Analyzing Collections: Identifying Patterns in Conduct

The analysis of collections cannot, of course, be separated from the analysis of single cases, the latter serving as the context-sensitive foundation and precondition for the former. But when the focus shifts from single-case immersion to the collection to which they *possibly* belong, the first problem that arises is *the identification of patterns in situated conduct*. Such patterns may inhere in the (1) composition, (2) deployment, and (3) uptake of a given practice, and in associations across these dimensions. These are important clues that can illuminate the practice's social meaning or functional import, and indeed whether the form of conduct in question constitutes a systematic practice in the first place. In the search for patterns within and across these areas, what kinds of things should the researcher be on the lookout for?

Compositional elements can include lexical, grammatical, phonetic, and nonvocal or embodied features — whatever gives the targeted item of conduct its characteristic observable form. For relatively "large-scale" practices, there can be numerous compositional elements. For instance, third-position repair (Schegloff 1992) has several components recurrently ordered as follows: (1) an initiating component (e.g., *no, oh*), (2) a pro-forma agreement component (e.g., *yeah* or *I know*) (3) a rejection component (something like *I don't mean X*), and (4) the correction component or 'repair proper' (e.g., a repeat or clarification of the trouble source turn) (Schegloff 1992: 1304-1317). Even "small" items of conduct such as response tokens and news receipts can pose compositional considerations, since varying accompaniments to talk such as prosody and gaze can impact the sense of what the response is "doing" (Kitzinger and Wilkinson 2006, Couper-Kuhlen 2009).

Contexts of use include the practice's location within a sequence (first position, second position, or expansions thereof), as well as the

specific type of action immediately preceding it (an assessment, question, etc.). For smaller turn components such as particles, the usage context will also include the item's positioning within its own turn constructional unit (initial, medial, or final within the TCU), as well as the specific type of action in which it is embedded, and any other elements of conduct within or associated with the turn at talk.

Subsequent conduct includes whether something recognizable as a response to the practice was forthcoming, and its type, timing, and other details. And if the practice yielded no overt response, what happened instead (something covertly responsive, non-responsive, silence, etc.). Further downstream, subsequent talk by speaker of the original practice may also be informative, since *third position* is a primary locus for the speaker's confirmation or disconfirmation of the recipient's understanding of the focal practice as displayed in *second position* (Heritage 1984: 254-260, Schegloff 1992).

Patterned regularities within or across any of these areas can be analytically significant, but they are often difficult to discern when embedded within the contextures and intricacies of a specimen collection. Nevertheless, there are certain procedures that can help unearth such "buried" regularities and bring them to light.

Clues from single cases

Work on any given collection must begin somewhere, and immersion in one or a handful individual cases can be a source of clues moving forward. "Zooming in" on single cases for sustained consideration can reveal potentially significant details and associations that may not be obvious in the aggregate. Consider this excerpt from the *you know* project containing two instances of the target particle (arrowed).

(1) [MTRAC 60-1:5]
1 Mar: .hhhh So uh I haven't uh,hh .hh met Ilene b't,hh
2 (0.3)
3 Erm: She's a do:ll. ˙hhh The cute thing is thet she's not only
4 pretty but she seems tuh be such a nice girl.She's: uh
5 -> **you know** she doesn't seem one of the:se eh::m .t eh::
6 -> .hhh **yihkno:w** watch me all the time kind'v kids? ˙hhh
7 Cause she's: gotta very pretty face. . .

The particles themselves neither elicit a response nor appear to be overtly inviting one (both are phonetically continuous with subsequent talk), but other clues to their function are provided by their specialized deployment. Both cases emerge in the course of a person description, and both appear to be occasioned by more local events within the description involving *junctures of self-repair*. Specifically, each particle is positioned (1) immediately after an audible hitch in speech production of the sort that initiates same-turn self-repair (here, sound stretches and filled pauses *uh/eh/ehm*), and (2) just before the trouble is resolved and talk's forward movement restored.

The particle's association with marked self-repair is parallel across these two cases, but this could be merely coincidental. Even if it is not, if it reflects some methodical choice by the speaker, what is its scope? Is it an artifact of the moment or idiosyncratic to this speaker, or does it reflect a *socially shared practice* that organizes interaction more generally?

Systematic reviews of the collection

The aforementioned possibilities can only be resolved by working comprehensively through the rest of the cases in the collection, with the single episode suggesting where and how to focus attention in that effort. Systematic reviews of this sort are the proving ground for hunches and hypotheses of various kinds, the means by which ostensibly compelling but nonetheless haphazard and context-bound observations are put to the test across a larger set of cases.

In the *you know* project, cases like those in excerpt 1 informed our first systematic pass through the 200-case collection. We examined each and every case for its turn constructional positioning (initial, medial, final, or free-standing), whether it was associated with self-repair in some way, and the details of that association. The results of that first pass demonstrated that the observations in excerpt 1 were neither coincidental nor idiosyncratic; almost half of all cases in the collection, and the overwhelming majority of turn-medial cases, were linked to self-repair (Clayman and Raymond 2021b).

But not self-repair *in general*; certain forms of repair were disproportionately implicated in the particle's use. Having also noted the specific repair operation in each case (Schegloff 2013), we discovered that the particle was rarely used for minor operations (lexical replacements, deletions, or insertions) where the speaker is tweaking a formulation whose parameters are more or less in hand; it was reserved for "larger" operations like searching repairs (excerpt 1, line 6 above) and TCU restarts (line 5 above). These are suggestive of deeper expressive problems where the entire formulation or the turn as a whole is being treated as elusive. Correspondingly, the next most frequent repair outcome, after searches and restarts, is for the repair to be abandoned altogether without any evident resolution of the trouble (Clayman and Raymond 2021a).

The systematic, case-by-case review of a collection is rarely a point event, being most effective as part of an ongoing recursive process. Each iteration tests the frequency, normativity, and scope conditions of details observed in a single case or handful of cases, while providing the researcher with another data-immersion experience that often uncovers new avenues to explore in the next iteration.

In the *you know* project, that first systematic pass demonstrated the particle's frequent association with self-repair, while also suggesting that

expressive difficulties in particular could be the primary factor driving its use. Such difficulties, we reasoned, could extend beyond the repair domain and could account for other cases in our collection. Correspondingly, we noticed that the formulations marked with *you know* — whether produced as repair solutions or outside of any repair space — often seemed to be non-straightfoward and potentially challenging for recipients to grasp as intended. In the preceding excerpt, the TCU restart (line 5) and searching repair (line 6) are both pursuing an apt person description, and what the speaker eventually arrives at is a rather odd and baroque formulation. It references her *non*-membership in a social-type category, and the category itself is an elaborate neologism (she's not "one of the:se eh::m .t eh:: .hhh yihkno:w watch me all the time kind'v kids") not meant to be taken literally. Another potentially difficult-to-grasp formulation, similarly marked with *you know*, is the following elliptical place reference (arrowed below). Lottie first refers to The Dory Fleet Fish Market as "the Dory", and then offers a slightly expanded but still abbreviated version ("Dory Fisherman"). She seems to register the inadequacy of the expended version as well, not only by framing it with "you know" but also by appending a spatial reference ("down there") that enables recognition.

(2) [NB II:1:R:135]
01 LOT: The smallest ba:ss we kep' was one pou:n' we-we uh we:ll
02 (.) Monday we we:nt uh went with this: (.) gi:rl Mary en
03 we wen'over on Elmer's do:ck 'n Faye went with us 'n=
04 EMM: =[°°Mm hm°°
05 LOT: =[we got a lot'v fish over there .hh en we take'em down
06 -> to the Dory **yihknow** Dory fisherm'n down there an'
07 they clean'em for yuh.
08 EMM: Well goo u:::[:d.

Expressive difficulties constitute a broader activity domain for *you know,* encompassing self-repair disfluencies together with what we termed *sub-optimal formulations* like those in excerpts 1 and 2. But how frequent are such expressions? Another systematic pass through the collection uncovered several varieties of sub-optimality (formulations designed as rough, non-

specific, elliptical, off-base, incomplete, or sequentially out of place) as recurrent throughout the collection. By adding these to the self-repair cases, our capacity to account for the particle's use rose from just under half to about 60% of the cases (Clayman and Raymond 2021a). After several more passes through the collection, each pass assessing a new subset of cases, our growing conceptual framework would eventually come to account for about 90% of the collection (Clayman and Raymond 2021b).

With each successive case-by-case review, one's sense of the practice and its import is apt to progress, together with the grasp of its context-specific uses. The result is an empirically grounded conceptual framework with a growing capacity to account for concrete instances of the practice within the collection and, presumably, beyond it.

One final note on the utility of spreadsheets in this process. It can be difficult to keep track of the many relevant details of each case. This is obviously true for larger specimen collections, but it can become a problem even for smaller collections insofar as the conceptual framework grows in complexity. Accordingly, spreadsheets like those provided by Excel or GoogleDocs can be enormously helpful. Ordinarily, each row within a spreadsheet is dedicated to a particular case, while each column tracks contextual and design features for each case. These need not be organized rigidly; entries can contain loose characterizations that are attentive to complexities and variations. Furthermore, an open-ended "notes" column can provide the researcher with space in which to note any additional case-specific details and potentially consequential particularities. A well-designed and maintained spreadsheet can be an invaluable aid to memory and analysis, greatly streamlining the process by which hunches and hypotheses can be put to the test throughout the collection.

Dealing With Anomalous Cases

As patterns in the data become apparent, and your understanding of the practice begins to take shape, attention is usually redirected from the regular cases to those cases that don't appear to fit the usual pattern. Such cases may be partially or imperfectly realized; or positioned in different sequential or activity contexts; or generative of different sorts of responses. They are not necessarily contrary to the practice's emerging conceptual framework, but they are unaccounted for by that framework as presently understood.

Anomalous cases can be challenging to address. At the very least they expose the limitations of the current conceptualization, and they may even cast doubt on its current form. Conversely, coming to terms with such cases tends to enrich the emerging conceptualization, adding dimension and nuance and enhancing its capacity to account for real-world events. The recurrent ways that anomalous cases have been brought under analytical control in previous studies (and the following sketch is hardly exhaustive) will provide clues as to the sorts of things to look for and consider when such cases are encountered in your own data.

Is the anomalous practice treated as "deviant," "confusing," or otherwise out of the ordinary?

Practices are treated as "deviant" when they are negatively sanctioned, or accounted for, or when they prompt efforts in pursuit of the "normal" form (Heritage 1984: 248-253). Such treatment reveals a continued orientation to the normal form even when that form is being breached. Consider this excerpt from a group therapy session, where the therapist's question (line 1) is met with silence from the patient rather than an answer (2).

(3) [Group therapy session]
1 A: Is there something bothering you or not?
2 (1.0)
3 A: Yes or no
4 (1.5)
5 A: Eh?
6 B: No.

This prompts successive attempts to elicit the called-for response (3, 5) until one is finally provided (6). Clearly the pursuit of a response treats that response as "missing" and the silence as a departure from what "should have" occurred in this sequential position.

A less dramatic outcome, but one indicative of a similar orientation to the normal form, is when the anomalous practice is treated as "confusing." For instance, Emma's invitation to lunch (lines 2-4) at a restaurant ("Coco's") elicits an unusual response ("Good" in line 2), perhaps intended as an acceptance but quite unlike the way in which acceptances of invitations are usually formulated.

(4) [NB VII]
1 Mar: = W'l haftuh do tha[t more] o[:ften.]
2 Emm: [.hhhhh] [Wul w]hy don't we: uh-m:=
3 =Why don't I take you'n Mo:m up there tuh: Coco's.someday
4 fer lu:nch.We'll go, bkuzz up there tu[h,
5 Mar: -> [k Goo:d.
6 Emm: -> Ha:h?
7 Mar: That's a good deal. .hh-.hh=
8 Emm: =Eh I'll take you bo:th [up
9 Mar: [No:::: wil all go Dutch.=
10 Mar: =B't [let's do that.]

And indeed, its unusual design generates confusion for the recipient (line 6). Her open-class repair initiation ("Ha:h?"), unlike partial repeats, understanding checks, or other ways of initiating repair (cf., Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks 1977), suggests a basic difficulty in grasping how this mode of response "fits" to the prior invitation (Drew 1997).

The treatment of anomalous practices as "deviant" or "confusing" does not explain their occurrence, and sheds no light on what a speaker may be doing by departing from the normal practice. But it does demonstrate that at least some participants recognize the move as out of the ordinary. Such

cases represent "exceptions that prove the rule," standing as powerful evidence in support of the practice's basic conceptualization and its normativity for the participants.

Is the anomalous practice an adaptation of "the same" basic practice to do some special kind of work?

Researchers often confront cases in which the focal practice is being used outside of its usual sequential or "home" environment, or even at places that seem *precisely the opposite* of the home environment. The latter can be particularly puzzling from the analyst's point of view; what the heck is going on here?

We tend to underestimate the creativity with which the toolkit of practices can be exploited, that is used in specialized, unusual, or even "perverse" ways that nonetheless rest on the same core of social meaning. A case that seems anomalous may turn out, upon closer analysis, to reflect some previously-unrecognized adaptation of the practice in question.

Consider the familiar response token *mmhm* or *uh huh*, which is widely documented as a display of passive recipiency that functions as a *continuer* (Jefferson 1984, Schegloff 1982). Such tokens are routinely deployed at moments when the previous speaker is in the midst of an extended multi-unit story or is otherwise "not finished", and they prompt that speaker to continue (see the single-arrowed lines in excerpt 5 below). So what do we make of the same token's use the *opposite* sequential context, when the speaker appears to be well and truly finished (line 20 below)?

In this excerpt from a radio discussion of legal contracts, the caller is recounting a story about a flawed contract being voided in court. The story is framed as responsive to a previous caller's legal problem (lines 1-7). When caller reports the story's outcome (19), the telling is ostensibly

finished on the basis that it offers a solution for the previous caller. But this, too, receives only “mm hm” in response (20).

(5) [Schegloff 1982: 84]
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 1 Clr:    This is in reference to a call that was made about a month ago.
 2 Hst:    Yessir?
 3 Clr:    A woman called, uh sayin' she uh signed a contract for huh son
 4         who is- who was a minor.
 5 Hst: -> Mm hm,
 6 Clr:    and she claims inna contract, there were things given, and
 7         then taken away, in small writing.
 8         ((pause))
 9 Hst: -> Mm hm
10 Clr:    Uh, now meanwhile, about a month ehh no about two weeks
11         before she made the call I read in, I read or either heard-
12         uh I either read or heard onna televsion, where the judge,
13         hadda case like this.
14 Hst: -> Mh hm,
15 Clr:    And he got disgusted an' he says 'I'- he's sick of these
16         cases where they give things in big writing, an' take 'em away
17         in small writing.
18 Hst: -> Mhhm,
19 Clr:    An' 'e claimed the contract void.
20 Hst: =>>Mhhm,
21 Clr:    Uh what I mean is it c'd help this woman that called.
22         You know uh, that's the reason I called.
```

Tokens like the one at line 20 push back against the prior context, treating the previous speaker as *not* finished despite appearances to the contrary.

What is remarkable is that such tokens can induce the speaker to resume talking anyway, “against their will” so to speak, even when they appear to have little new to add. In the preceding excerpt, the teller is nudged to re-complete his telling by articulating it’s point in a more explicit way (21-22). And in the next excerpt, after the recipient offers a token of agreement (“yeah”, line 3), she switches to the more passive token that again prompts the speaker’s continuation even though what emerges is merely an assertion that there’s nothing more to say (5-6).

(6) [Jefferson 1984: 14]
```
 1 G:    I uh you know she’s ^o:lder now than she was it gets
 2       ^harder all the t[ime.
 3 B: ->                  [Ye:ah. Mm-hm,
 4       (0.6)
 5 G:    ^A:nd uh:,hh tha:t’s uh: that’s tha:t.
 6       That’s all [I kno:w.
 7 B:               [Ye:ah. .hh Well I’m awfully glad to hear
 8       from you . . .
```

The outcomes in these two excerpts would be hard to understand except on the basis that *uh huh* retains its original sense as a display of passive recipiency that functions as a continuer even in a seemingly contradictory sequential context. The token may reflect the recipient's "misunderstanding" about whether the teller was finished, but it may also be exploited as a resource for eliciting more from a reluctant teller. Think of a therapist working to encourage a reluctant patient to elaborate on a personal problem, or a 911 call-taker (below) nudging a very cautious caller toward an actionable report.

(7) [Heritage and Clayman 2010: 76-78]

```
 1 911:     .hh Midcity emergency.
 2 Clr:     .hhh Yeah uh(m) I'd like tuh:- report (0.2) something
 3          weir:d that happen:ed abou:t (0.5) uh(m) five minutes
 4          ago, 'n front of our apartment building?
 5 911:     Yeah?
 6 Clr:     On eight fourteen eleventh avenue southeast,
 7 911:     Mm hm,=
 8 Clr:     =.hh We were just (.) uhm sittin' in the room 'n'
 9          we heard this cla:nking y'know like (.) someone was
10          pulling something behind their ca:r.='N' we
11          looked out the window'n .hhh an' there was (this) (.)
12          light blue: smashed up uhm (1.0) .hh station wagon
13          an',=.hh A:nd thuh guy made a U-turn,=we live on
14          a dead end, .hh an:d (0.2) thuh whole front end of
15          the- (.) the car (is/w'z) smashed up. .hhh And (.) >he
16          jumped outta the car and I (r)emember< 'e- (.) he tried
17          to push the hood down (with/er) something and then
18          he jus' (.) started running an' he took o::ff.
19 911:  -> Mm hm,
20 Clr:     .hh A:nd we think that maybe 'e could've (.) you know
21          stolen the car and aba:ndoned it. er something,
22 911:     What kinda car is it?
```

The caller first characterizes the problem in non-specific and rather vague terms ("something weird," lines 2-4). Her subsequent narrative (8-18) elaborates the suspicious "facts" of what she observed, but without drawing any inferences or conclusions about whether this entails any sort of crime. She appears finished upon reporting that the suspect left the scene ("he jus' (.) started running an' he took o::ff, at 18), capping off this final event with a rise-fall pitch contour and sound stretch adding to the sense of completion. 911 does indeed respond at precisely this point but only with

continuer (19), which prompts the caller to add an inference — albeit with marked uncertainty ("we think maybe he could've… er something") — that a stolen car may be at issue (20-21). With this report of a possible crime now explicitly on the record, 911 begins to process the report (22).

For a somewhat more complex illustration of a practice used outside its usual home environment to do some special work, consider the response token *oh*. This token usually marks the receipt of information in some form, tacitly claiming its speaker has undergone a shift in knowledge, orientation, or awareness (Heritage 1984). This *change of state token* has as its most commonplace environment *third position* within question-answer sequences, where it treats the answer as having been "informative" for the questioner. So what do we make of its less-frequent use in *second position* as a response to the question rather than the answer (Heritage 1998)?

Here is an example from popular culture, a magazine cover with a mock survey question about sex and two possible answers to choose from.

(8) [Glamour magazine, September 1990: Front cover]
Do you think about sex too much? ☐ Yes ☐ Oh, yes!

Both answers are affirmative, but the second one is *oh*-prefaced and capped off with an exclamation mark rendering it the stronger of the two. How does the *oh*-preface figure in this? Much like we saw with *uh huh*, *oh* retains its core meaning while doing something distinctive in this alternate context. Here the change of state indexed by *oh* comes off as triggered by the prior question rather than the answer, treating the question as somehow *unexpected*. In most cases, as Heritage (1998) has demonstrated, *oh* becomes a method of commenting on *the obviousness of the question* before responding to it.

That sense of "obviousness" can have different groundings which are transparent in context, such as prior talk. In the following example, Nancy - a middle-aged woman taking a college course - comments on feeling "like a den mother" with "all these young fellas" in the class (lines 1-3). When

Emma then asks if she's the oldest in the class (6), Nancy's *oh*-prefaced answer (7) treats the question as obvious on the basis that she already suggested as much in her prior talk.

```
(9) [NB:II:2:R:7]
 1  Nan:     .....hhh one a'the other girls hadda leave
 2           fer something en there I sit with all these (h)you(h)ng
 3           fellas I fel'like a den [mother.
 4  Emm:                             [°Uh huh°
 5  Nan:     .hhh[hh
 6  Emm:         [Are you th:e ol:dest one the cla:ss?
 7  Nan:  -> °Oh: w- by fa:r.°
 8  Emm:     Are yih rill[y?
 9  Nan:  ->             [°Oh: ya:h.°
10  Emm:     Didju learn a lo:t'n cla:ss?
```

Correspondingly, when Emma seeks reconfirmation of this (8), the answer is again oh-prefaced (9) and "obvious" this time on the basis that its content was actually stated outright in the just-prior turn.

Alternatively, the question may be obvious on the basis of sociocultural or commonsense knowledge. The magazine question about sex (excerpt 8 above) comes off in this way. In a similar vein, in a discussion with noted aesthete Sir Harold Acton regarding his time in China and his work with students translating English poetry into Chinese, the interviewer's question about learning to speak Chinese (line 5) is common-sensically obvious and treated as such by Acton's oh-prefaced affirmation (6) as well as his subsequent comment (7-8).

```
(10) [Chat Show: Russell Harty and Sir Harold Acton]
 1  Act:     ....hhhh and some of thuh- (0.3) some of my students
 2           translated Eliot into Chine::se. I think thuh very
 3           first.
 4           (0.2)
 5  Har:     Did you learn to speak (.) Chine[:se.
 6  Act:  ->                                 [.hh Oh yes.
 7           (0.7)
 8  Act:     .hhhh You cah::n't live in thuh country without speaking
 9           thuh lang[uage it's impossible .hhhhh=
10  Har:  ->          [Not no: cour:se
```

Accordingly, there is a potential for creativity in how the repertoire of social practices is mobilized and put to use across varying contexts.

Whatever their natural habitat or home environment may be, interactants can find ways to use them elsewhere, often in a bid to intervene on the context and reflexively adjust or transform it in some specifiable way. Accordingly, the conceptualization of any given practice needs to be alive to this possibility, and anomalous cases can sometimes reveal "hidden" affordances of the practice for use in atypical or even contradictory action environments.

Does the anomalous practice suggest that your current conceptualization is too narrow or in need of revision?

When anomalous cases are treated as deviant or confusing, or involve some specialized adaptation of the basic practice, our understanding of the practice as it operates in everyday life is enriched. For these ways of bringing anomalous cases under analytical control, the practice's conceptualization may undergo some elaboration but its "essential" nature remains more or less intact. Not all anomalous cases can be resolved in these ways; some require a more fundamental re-thinking of the core phenomenon.

Schegloff's classic study of telephone conversation openings recounts just such a reconceptualization (Schegloff 1968). The study initially conceived of call openings as organized by a simple rule of conduct, *answerer speaks first*, which accounts for 499 out of 500 cases. The 500th case — where the caller speaks first instead (line 3 below) — is anomalous from the standpoint of this rule.

(11) [Schegloff 1968: 1079]
1 ((ring))
2 ((receiver is lifted, and there is a one-second silence))
3 Caller: Hello.
4 Answerer: American Red Cross.
5 Caller: Hello, this is police headquarters....

To bring this case under analytical control, Schegloff re-worked his conceptual framework, replacing the *answerer speaks first* rule with a normative organization later be termed adjacency pairs (Schegloff and Sacks 1973). Within this new framework, the ringing telephone launches a type of adjacency pair sequence, namely a summons-answer sequence, and thereby establishes a field of relevance in which a response to the summons is due next. This new conceptual framework accounts for the 499 regular cases - answerer spoke first in response to the telephone ring. It also accounts for the deviant case - silence after the ring (line 2) is hearable as the absence of the relevant response, and caller then speaks first (line 3) to renew the summons in pursuit of the "missing" response. Here the shift from a simple rule to a normative organization of paired actions with conditionally relevant responses yields a more powerful account encompassing regular and deviant cases within a common framework.

In the *you know* project, our conceptual framework for the particle underwent a succession of broadening transformations in the face of anomalous cases. As noted earlier, we initially viewed the particle rather narrowly as a phenomenon of self-repair, but later discoveries (that the particle is mobilized mainly for "larger" repair operations and disfluencies, and also for sub-optimal formulations (rough, elliptical, etc.) outside of repair) suggested the management of *expressive difficulties and potential understanding problems* as the main task for the particle. Correspondingly, we began to think of *you know* as a remedial *alignment token*, one that tacitly claims recipient is on board with the sense of the talk at just those moments when intersubjective alignment is ostensibly at risk.

This reconceptuatualization accommodated many anomalous cases in our collection, but others remained unaccounted for. In one family of cases, affiliation rather than intersubjectivity seemed to be at risk, with the particle implicated in actions seeking some form of acceptance (assessments,

requests, accounts, etc.), often with hints of discord already "in the air" (Clayman and Raymond 2021b). For instance, Diane is reminiscing about a college dorm resident whom she criticizes for excessively proper dress (lines 1-6) epitomized by an inappropriate peignoir set. Her recipient is faintly nodding during this but offers no further reaction even when the criticism is possibly complete (7). Diane then pursues response with a *you know*-prefaced denunciation ("You know.<I mean who goes to college with a peignoir set.").

(12) [Clacia: 1]
```
 1 Dia:     We had this one girl,=she was from Flo:rida. An' I swear
 2          t'Go::d she wanted t'be on the bes'dress'list_
 3          (0.4)
 4 Dia:     An' 'er parents apparently wern'even that wealthy.='n she
 5          wen'out'n she bought tons of clothes so she c'd be on
 6          th'bes'dres-she even came t'college in a peignoi:r se:t.
 7          (0.2)
 8 Dia:  -> Y'know.<u=mean who goes tih college inna witha
 9          [peignoir set.
10 Cla:     [Who even o:wns one.Right?
11          (0.3)
12 Dia:     Tch!  We couldn't sta:nd her. . . .
```

This gets an affiliative response (10) that not only endorses the prior's critical stance but also matches its grammatical form (both are *Who*-framed interrogatives).

Cases like this look very different at the level of action, with recipient affiliation rather than understanding being relevant and at risk. They also look different at the level of turn construction, with the particle positioned in turn-initial or turn-final position (rather than medial position typical of other cases). And they required a further expansion of our analytic framework, one that accommodates a qualitatively different sense of recipient "alignment" further removed from the particle's literal meaning: aligned in support action or stance being taken (Clayman and Raymond 2021b). As a general principle, each reconsideration tends to yield an increase in the framework's conceptual nuance and empirical power.

Does the anomalous case represent a fundamentally different type of practice, one that properly belongs in a different collection?

If so, these constitute a type of boundary case as discussed earlier (Schegloff 1997), instances that appeared sufficiently similar to the focal practice to be included in the collection, but upon analysis turn out to be doing something qualitatively different. Thus, interrogatives that look very much like questions but in context are not actually seeking information (Heritage 2012, Robinson, 2020; Schegloff 1984), benefactive utterances with a surface resemblance to requests but functioning in actuality as offers (Clayman and Heritage 2014), and questions formally identical to other-initiated repair but substantively engaged in *non*-repair actions (Schegloff 1997) — all of these are boundary cases whose full explication clarifies both the practices that they actually represent as well as those they merely resemble.

Collecting Beyond the Target Phenomenon

As your understanding of the practice takes shape, it may be relevant to augment your collection. Insofar as the collection is confined to one focal practice as the key phenomenon of interest, you may want to consider sequentially relevant alternatives — other practices or other sorts of occurrences that may *also* be "fit" to the same sequential position, and in particular those alternatives whose comparative analysis may yield further insight into your primary phenomenon.

Collecting beyond the target phenomenon helps avoid some well-known pitfalls of data collection, limitations to which the specimen collection approach is particularly prone. These limitations are not necessarily problematic for any given project, but they can become so when the objective

is addressing causal connections between the practice of interest and other actions. The solution, in general, is to increase the range of variation in the collection.

How the practice is shaped by its sequential context(s)

For evaluating the practice's relationship to contextual events, practice-based collections are in effect assembled around one value of "the dependent variable" in that relationship. The very procedures for assembling candidate instances of a potential phenomenon virtually ensure that all cases have the same sequential outcome. Such databases are thus flawed by what is commonly termed "collecting on the dependent variable."

This plainly constrains efforts to probe the significance of that practice as a sequential outcome. With such data, one can "look backward" and assess how frequently the collected practice was produced in various activity contexts; but one cannot do the reverse, "look forward" from the activity context and assess the frequency with which it generated that practice as an outcome. In other words, one can compare the relative prominence of *different sequential contexts* in generating the practice, but not the relative prominence of *different practices* as outcomes of any given context.

When this problem emerges as stumbling block in a given project, the solution is straightforward. Supplement the collection by *sampling on the context of interest*, taking care to ensure that the full range of responses or sequential outcomes get included.

How the practice influences its sequelae

Collection limitations can also inhibit the ability to evaluate the focal practice's impact on subsequent events. Here the difficulty is that the practice naturally occurs in conjunction with many other practices and

conditions, making it difficult to ascertain what exactly is driving the outcome. Any observed association between the practice of interest and what happens next could be spurious. How can one determine whether the focal practice matters at all, and if so how much it matters independently of everything else? In short, what is the practice's *net impact* on the outcome?

Here again, augmenting the collection can help. Supplement the collection by *sampling on the conditions commonly associated with the practice*, taking care to ensure that cases *with and without* the focal practice get included. The comparative analysis of such cases can help reveal whether the focal practice actually makes a difference and, if so, how much difference it makes.

Discussion

The methods used within CA have diversified in recent years. On the one hand, the situated complexities of multi-modal interaction — especially in highly technical workplace environments — have necessitated a greater focus on ethnographically-informed single cases and small-N comparisons. And at the other end of the continuum, interest in theoretical issues arising from prior research and in practical applications has required formally quantitative and experimental initiatives. Accordingly, while collection-based work in a more exploratory vein remains a distinctive hallmark of the CA field, it is important to bear in mind how such methods sit within a broader methodological repertoire that continues to evolve in concert with practitioners' willingness to take up new questions and take on problems of practical relevance.

Collections nonetheless retain a certain pride of place within the field's evolving repertoire, and a certain eclectic sensibility. As I have argued, this scale of work lies at the cusp of cases and quantities and

affords the combined pursuit of case-specific and contextual detail with the rudiments of generalization. There is a distinctive aesthetic for this way of working, one in which both the single case and the robust pattern are given their due, where an appreciation of innovation is balanced against that of routine, and where satisfaction arises from the capacity to "see" organizational phenomena both in their situated particularities and in their generative relevance to the conduct of social life.

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