Chapter 10

The Ethnomethodological Lineage of Conversation Analysis

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Introduction

What is the relationship between ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (CA)? Textbooks and review articles have been sketchy on the ethnomethodological lineage of CA, suggesting that Harold Garfinkel's work was an "inspiration" for CA (Sidnell 2010:6), a "major force in CA's development" (ten Have 2007:6), or that CA is a "special form of ethnomethodology" that follows "Garfinkel's policy of making the commonsense methodology of the everyday world into a topic of study" (Button and Lee 1987:22–29). Heritage (1984:233) characterizes CA as a "prominent form of ethnomethodological work." Its success, Lynch (2000:529) laments, has meant "having lost sight of its charismatic origins" in ethnomethodology, although this can be regained by maintaining "an orientation to singular instances of action." In these brief and sometimes critical comments, CA's relationship to the ethnomethodological tradition remains obscure and unexplicated. This chapter takes a closer look at the scholarly lineage of CA and suggests something of a paradox: that ethnomethodology was both a profound and yet circumscribed inspiration for the development of CA, which involved a creative synthesis of certain key ideas drawn from the broader scholarly ferment surrounding the work of both Garfinkel and Goffman in the 1960s.

We bolster this claim by first discussing Garfinkel's early approach to the analysis of lived experience. Ethnomethodology's "origin story" or stories (Lynch 2007) have been told many times over, often by drawing on Garfinkel's (1974) own account of how the term

"ethnomethodology" came into being in the early 1950s. We trace somewhat earlier origins to illuminate the milieu in which Garfinkel operated and the grounds he was treading when still a graduate student and formulating, at least in nascent terms, what would emerge as ethnomethodology (see also Garfinkel 2002; Rawls 2002, 2006, Chapter 3 in this volume).

To anticipate the core of our argument: early on, Garfinkel was simultaneously dealing with the work of Talcott Parsons and that of the phenomenologists, using the latter to address what he considered to be lacunae in the action theory of the former (see Garfinkel [1962] 2019; see also Heritage 1984). Sacks, by comparison, while engaging and briefly collaborating with Garfinkel, neither addressed Parsons nor drew particularly from the phenomenologists, and ultimately diverged from Garfinkel's approach in important ways. Erving Goffman's work was another source of inspiration, but Sacks was as selective in his engagement with Goffman as he was with Garfinkel, synthesizing certain key ideas from both figures with those of his collaborators Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson. The conversation analytic discipline that emerged from this synthesis was geared to advancing a simultaneously rigorous and thoroughly emic science of the "witnessable order" (Livingston 2008) of human interaction.

Garfinkel and Interaction

> The attempt to approximate some sort of precision in the study of human conduct is not unlike the task of swatting flies with a hammer. Apart from the fact that one must make the tenuous assumption that the fly will remain still, one must be willing to settle for a low batting average while facing the prospect of leaving the room in a shamble when the game is done.
>
> —Garfinkel ([1948] 2006:99)

This analogy, which Harold Garfinkel wrote in 1948, was directed toward the social and linguistic sciences as then constituted in mid-twentieth century social thought. A central assumption of that period was that everyday reasoning and social interaction are inherently disorderly (Garfinkel 1988; Sacks 1984). The social sciences have attempted to use the hammer of social structures, invoking features such as gender, race, and class as resources for explaining actual social conduct (cf., Goffman 1964), but striking very few targets in the process. Linguistics, for its part, whether in the work of Saussure, Bloomfield, or Chomsky, was premised on the idea that spoken interaction is an impoverished and disorganized version of linguistic competence, which may be discerned through grammatical analysis centered largely on written texts (Harris 1981; Linell 2004). As Garfinkel, and later Sacks, would see it, both disciplinary perspectives rely on relatively inert tools—the structural "hammers" of their respective disciplines—that ultimately occlude the processual realities of language, interaction, and social organization as elements of lived experience.

Both Garfinkel and Sacks recognized this fundamental hammer and fly-swatting problem, and the need for inquiries that are accountable to the indigenous forms of organization that societal members themselves recognize and put into practice, but their approaches were strikingly different. Briefly put, Garfinkel initially used phenomenologically informed inquiries to gain access to the socially organized world of everyday life, deploying incongruity experiments and further forms of demonstration to expose otherwise-hidden methods of practical reasoning. Sacks, by contrast, was drawn to a more naturalistic style of inquiry and a focus on non-contrived conduct in interaction, exploiting the affordances of audio and video recordings to reveal the dynamics of action-production and recognition as it develops sequentially in real time.

In pursuing the analysis of everyday conduct, both Garfinkel and Sacks in effect put down the hammer, but the replacement tools they picked up were very different and have yielded mutually sympathetic but ultimately divergent lines of inquiry. To see how Garfinkel originated his own approach, we briefly review a 1948 dissertation proposal, which adumbrated an initial interest in exploring the domain of *interaction*. Although it represents a "road not taken" by Garfinkel himself, it included an initial and highly prescient effort to grapple with the context-dependency of meaning and action in everyday life. This theme would later inform *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Tellingly, it would also inform Sacks's treatment of the sequential organization of interaction.

The Concision and Flexibility of Language

The analogy about hammers and flies that we quoted earlier is from *Seeing Sociologically* (Garfinkel [1948] 2006), a document originally designed as a dissertation proposal. Although the dissertation project it foreshadowed was never realized (it would be one proposal among several that Garfinkel assembled), the document circulated in mimeograph form among graduate students at Harvard and later among "several key thinkers," including Erving Goffman (who commented on it), Anselm Strauss, and Harvey Sacks (Rawls 2006:2).

Seeing Sociologically raises two original and fundamental problems bearing on the intelligibility of social behavior, that would later gain increasing prominence within ethnomethodology and allied approaches. One is the concision of everyday speech, which always conveys more than what a dictionary provides. As Garfinkel ([1948] 2006:105) put it, "One need only listen to what is actually said between two close friends to realize that the heard speech conveys infinitely more than Webster would have allowed."

A second problem is related to what Garfinkel would later discuss under the rubrics of the documentary method of interpretation (Garfinkel 1962) and indexical expressions (Garfinkel 1967:4–7). He observes that, "*. . . as far as the problems of communication are concerned, any sign can signify anything in the communicative universe.* (Garfinkel [1948] 2006:106, italics in original). This observation is not to be confused with the claim that there is an arbitrary relation between sign and meaning. Rather it goes to the import of any utterance as a communicative action that achieves its status as such through its relationship with context. With these dual problems of meaning—the concision of speech and its context dependency—Garfinkel ([1948] 2006:144–45) was staking out a social territory consisting of "actual experiences," and "working acts performed with reference to another actor," which he characterizes in an understated way as "a field that is practically unexplored."

Parsonian social theory had failed to take these fundamental matters into account, instead developing an "action frame of reference" and stipulating "meanings" by way of pattern variables designating internalized value orientations to explain so-called unit acts (Heritage 1984:20). In *Seeing Sociologically*, by contrast, Garfinkel sought to minimize theoretical imposition by coming to terms with the indigenously meaningful experience of human action when sign-meanings require expansion and adjustment in context. The ensuing discussion will bring us forward from 1948 to other work on the documentary method of interpretation and on indexical expressions.

The Problem of Lived Experience

Thus far we have identified two fundamental problems that Garfinkel targeted—how "heard speech conveys infinitely more than Webster would have allowed" (its concision, for short), and how "any sign can signify anything in the communicative universe" (its flexibility, due to

context relatedness). Now we consider how he evinced an early concern with social *interaction*, only to abandon this topic in favor of *common-sense knowledge and methods of reasoning*. This shift in focus is what would come to distinguish ethnomethodology from the emerging field of conversation analysis.

In his concern with direct experience, Garfinkel referred to and explicated the notion of "communication." He was at pains to avoid the term "interaction" because in the 1940s it was associated with the stimulus-response theories of B. F. Skinner (Rawls 2006:25). We will, however, use the term "interaction" because it posits the radical priority of the actor's immediate relations with others (Rawls 2006:179) over the self as the locus of meaning and order. Garfinkel's characterization of interaction encompasses, first, the "products of communication" or "signs," which include "occurrences of his speaking" as well as "his own gestures" as they occur "in the space and time of the outer world" within the speaker's "vivid presence." Second, besides speaking, listening, and gesturing and their temporal and spatial constitution, Garfinkel ([1948] 2006:182–83) introduces the matter of "style" or the "manner of delivery," the ways in which things are said, including "tone, tics, posture, physical gesture, inflection" and "auditory coordinates" such as "pitch, intensity, and loudness."

It bears emphasis that Garfinkel was working at a time when there were few sources other than the phenomenologists, and particularly Schütz (see Chapter 2, this volume), who could offer any guidance for the analysis of actual lived experience in interaction, including signs and their manner of delivery. However, these phenomenological guides mainly provided for *what* it is that needs to be studied and understood sociologically: the actor's lived experience as constituted in concrete real-time interaction with others. As for *how* to do this, Garfinkel's own approach would come to involve experimental manipulations of "incongruities" to see what

their effects could tell us about the background expectancies involved in the lived structures of everyday life. This turn toward the underlying assumptions and presuppositions involved in the structuring of everyday experience found Garfinkel proceeding along a different track than that which later emerged from Sacks's focus on the in-course organization of interaction as displayed in real time. As explored in Garfinkel's dissertation, and in later writings about incongruities, the devices for resolving incongruity are methods that experimental *subjects* deploy in response to disruptions produced by others. Thus, we learn about how subjects display their common-sense assumptions in response to interactional disruptions, but we learn less about how these assumptions are intersubjectively managed within the flow of undisrupted and hence routine courses of interaction (Garfinkel [1948] 2006:207).

In effect, having uncovered the deficiencies of social theory in dealing with everyday experience (see Chapter 2 in this volume), Garfinkel could only make the organization of such experience visible by disabling it. "Procedurally," Garfinkel (1967:37) says, "it is my preference to start with familiar scenes and ask what can be done to make trouble." The result of this trouble-making strategy was to provide for the visibility of a substrate of trust that lies in back of ordinary social behavior (Garfinkel 1963) without exploring the intelligible structuring of the behavior itself.

Concision, Flexibility, and the Documentary Method of Interpretation

This returns us to Garfinkel's way of handling the two problems—the concision and flexibility of speech—that he exposed as endemic and unaddressed in contemporary social theory. Since concision suggests that words-in-use will convey more than their dictionary definitions, while flexibility suggests that words-in-use achieve their intelligibility by way of their indexical relationship to in-use contexts, these problems are two sides of the same interactional coin.

Papers from the late 1950s and early 1960s, later incorporated in *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (1967), address both of these problems. Garfinkel succinctly illustrated the problem of concision by way of a simple procedure in which he asked students to write out an informal conversation of theirs on the left side of a sheet of paper, and then to elaborate "what they were talking about" on the right side (Garfinkel 1967:38–42). Participants had no trouble describing assumed background knowledge on that right side and seeing that it was vastly more than the (comparatively) meager amount of actual talk on the left side. However, they began to find it irksome when Garfinkel persuaded them that their elaborations themselves required further elaboration.

In the face of the participants' inability to address utterance meaning through literal or dictionary-defined description, Garfinkel (1959:57) turned to Karl Mannheim's (1952) notion of the "documentary method of interpretation." In everyday situations, routinely concise and at times telegraphic utterances are understood in relation to a presumptively existing social context. In Mannheim's treatment, utterance and context elaborate one another in a process in which the context contributes to an understanding of the utterance, and in turn the utterance contributes to an understanding of the context. There is therefore a reciprocal, mutually elaborative relationship between utterance and context. In commenting on the "conversation clarification" process, Garfinkel (1964:228–29) drew attention to "the role of time as it is constitutive of 'the matter talked about' as a developing and developed event over the course of action that produced it, as both the process and product were known from within this development by both parties, each for himself as well as on behalf of the other." Indeed, regarding how one interlocutor waits for the other to say something further to understand the significance of what had been said, Garfinkel (1964:229) observes, "the sense of the expressions depended upon where the expression

occurred in serial order, the expressive character of the terms that comprised it, and the importance to the conversationalists of the events depicted."

Garfinkel's second problem—flexibility—is deeply related to the first, the problem of concision. For if the meanings of words, sentences, and utterances are expanded and specified by reference to context, then there may be no feasible limit on the varying meanings that can be invested in expressions. A vivid illustration is this utterance, produced in a telephone call in which the speaker is reflecting on the losses stemming from a house fire: "I guess the hardest thing is things that meant things. You know?" In this readily intelligible sentence, evidently the word "thing" is invested with three quite distinct meanings. At the level of action as well, utterances can be treated very differently depending on whether the speaker is understood in context to be: "talking synonymously, talking ironically, talking metaphorically, talking cryptically, talking narratively, talking in a questioning or answering way, lying, glossing, double-talking, and the rest" (Garfinkel 1967:29).

Implicit in Garfinkel's use of the documentary method of interpretation is what he would later characterize as the "reflexive" properties of natural language use. If the indexical properties of natural language provide for the situated understanding of language in context, its reflexive properties refer to the fact that language used in context elaborates the context it describes. Together, the indexical and reflexive properties of language use parallel Mannheim's description of the documentary method of interpretation as involving the treatment of a phenomenon as pointing to or standing on behalf of a presupposed underlying pattern. Garfinkel (1967:Chapter 3) treats this account of the documentary method as a feature of reasoning in everyday life, rather than as Mannheim treated it, as a particular scholarly method in the study of culture. In everyday life, as Garfinkel elaborates, "not only is the underlying pattern derived from its individual

documentary evidences, but the individual documentary evidences, in their turn, are interpreted on the basis of 'what is known' about the underlying pattern. Each is used to elaborate the other" (Garfinkel 1967:78).

With these observations described, Garfinkel (1959:59) had come closer to the study of language-in-use as part of an effort to more systematically address what he had mentioned, in 1948, about signs signifying anything.

Garfinkel and Sacks's Divergent Approaches to the Contextuality of Language

However much the concision and flexibility of speech sets an investigative agenda for ethnomethodology and ethnomethodology-inspired endeavors in the social sciences, the gulf separating Garfinkel's approach and that taken by Sacks and CA is nonetheless substantial. In the area of speech practices, Garfinkel's (1967:4–5) own investigations, although enormously insightful, begin with "problematic phenomena," among which are the "substitutability of objective for indexical expressions." In this light, he cites Edmund Husserl, Bertrand Russell, and Nelson Goodman for raising the "properties of indexical expressions and indexical actions," and goes on to explicate seven ways in which these properties are awkward, unavoidable, necessary, and so on. Indexicals "motivate endless methodological studies directed to their remedy;" they "present immense, obstinate, and irremediable nuisances . . ." (Garfinkel 1967:6). His explication and investigations of the use of indexical expressions, however, are for the most part retrospective textual analyses or astute observations about sense-making methods and procedures, whether from the Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Center, clinic folders in a psychiatric clinic, experiences of coding, the work of "passing" as a female, or jury deliberations. They depend on "ethnographic reportage," the phrase that Garfinkel uses in Chapter 5 of this

volume, mentioning the studies of the documentary method in particular, and suggesting that there "are grounds for dissatisfaction." In chapter 5 (written in about 1974), he was perhaps aware that his earlier insights about *interaction*, including signs, gestures, and their manner of delivery, remained out of reach through ethnographic methods. By way of contrast, he cites additional studies, such as his own investigation of queuing and those of the conversation analysts, proposing that these different approaches have "particular lessons to teach on the phenomena" regarding what he calls "the Missing What."

Garfinkel's concern with indexicals suggests the necessity of studying speech practices, but there is a crucial difference between his investigations and Sacks's explorations of talk.[1] Garfinkel (1967:Chapter 1), after referring to Husserl's and others' raising the "problem" of indexical expressions, goes on to probe everyday environments of professional and lay activity, and remark on *solutions* to indexical actions in such practices as "ad hocing," deploying "et cetera," exploiting "specific vagueness," "waiting" for a later expression to disambiguate a present one according to a "serial order" of expressions, and so forth.

Sacks, in contrast with Garfinkel, pursued a strategy, as Schegloff (1992a:xlviii) has noted, of beginning "with some *observations*," and then finding "the problem for which those observations could serve as (elements of) the solution." For example, a basic Sacksian investigation of indexical expressions, or what he calls "indicator terms," begins with noticing how members of a group therapy session (audio-recorded data used in early CA studies) invoked "here" and "this" and "this place" to display mutual understanding of the setting of their talk as just such a therapeutic occasion (Sacks 1992a:519–21). But these indicator terms represent the *participants'* ways of invoking the setting *and* possibly different features of it. Moreover, they do so in ways that do not require specification and cannot be easily disputed.

Accordingly, Sacks (1992a:517) critiques philosophical and other treatments of indexicals as problematic because they arise from an excessive preoccupation with "the 'truth' of sentences including them." Sacks (1992a:521) goes on to argue how "that whole business was exploded by Wittgenstein," in that an indicator term does not have a final *practical*, much less a theoretical, solution to solving its reference or truth value. Instead, it could be said that indexicals are a *resource* that have as their precise business the invocation of the setting without saying which aspect of the setting is being invoked. Consistent with Schegloff's (1992a:xlviii) remarks, the crux is that *indexical expressions, as a resource, do not need a solution. They* are *a solution.* As such, they are resources that participants use, not problems for them to solve. His emancipation from the view that indexical expressions are a "problem" liberated Sacks's thinking about human interaction and allowed him to consider its nuances without the theoretical baggage of logical empiricism. In this sense, Sacks began his empirical researches from the point that Wittgenstein had reached after a long struggle with a common adversary, the essentialist view of sign meanings that was so deeply entrenched in philosophy and the social sciences.

In a later joint paper with Sacks, *On Formal Structures of Practical Actions* (Garfinkel and Sacks 1970), Garfinkel once again raised indexical expressions as problematic,[2] commenting on the bulk of social scientific efforts to "remedy" indexical expressions. He also noted that these attempts to substitute context-free for context-bound expressions involved a process that his own investigations demonstrated was doomed to futility. But these Sisyphean efforts need to be distinguished from how lay members orient to the inherent contextuality of language and meaning. Accordingly, having noted how speech "contains more" than its denotations, and may "signify anything" by way of indexical expressions, Garfinkel remains preoccupied with the problematics of indexical expressions for the social sciences, one that is less effective in raising

empirical questions about how *participants* adapt and use these inherent features of everyday language use. Conversely, Sacks's starting point is not with theoretically pre-identified problems, but with observations that directly illuminate naturally occurring conduct in flight, revealing the indigenous uses to which indexical expressions are put in everyday actions and activities.

In sum, Garfinkel's treatment of the concision and flexibility of ordinary speech arose from a critique of Parsonian theory's failure to deal with fundamental aspects of social interchange, and his empirical research was inspired by phenomenological writings that pointed toward a taken-for-granted domain of common-sense knowledge and forms of reasoning. The incongruity demonstrations succeeded brilliantly in exposing the utterly foundational domain of indexical expressions and their reflexive relation to their circumstances of use, making them available for analytic appreciation. These demonstrations were less successful in showing how an empirical program might build on the investigation of these phenomena. When Garfinkel refers to how participants manage social settings by way of their "account-able" conduct, he means that there *are* actual, real-time practices both producing and recognizing the setting and its features. It has been Sacks and allied conversation analysts, however, who have carried the investigation of such practices forward.

Harvey Sacks: Formative Influences and Interests

The line from Garfinkel to Sacks is best appreciated in conjunction with other lines of inspiration and influence, and in light of Sacks's own scholarly pursuits which conditioned the kinds of resources to which he was exposed and what he made of them. Harold Garfinkel figures centrally in this process, together with Erving Goffman, a second and relatively underappreciated contributor to the conversation analytic lineage. Sacks drew from these and other sources, but what he took from them is hardly more significant than what he left behind, and he also

embraced methodological innovations from his collaborators Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson. The creative synthesis that emerged from all of this was heavily shaped by Sacks's own abiding interest in developing a thoroughly emic but rigorous science of social action.

Law School

Sacks's relevant academic background begins, not in sociology, but at Yale Law School, where he received his LLB in 1959. A central component of legal training involves applying general legal principles to specific cases, whether the principles are formally codified in statutes or inferred from precedent. This form of legal training, which interrogates the fit between abstract codes of conduct and concrete events, may have predisposed Sacks toward a receptivity to Garfinkel's exploration of the common-sense reasoning required to implement social norms and rules of conduct in everyday life. This association, although somewhat speculative, is reinforced by Schegloff's (1992a:xiii) firsthand account of a story told by Sacks about a problem in case law—how low can an airplane fly before it becomes "unreasonable" and vulnerable to property-owner lawsuits?—exemplifying the largely tacit but nonetheless controlling power of ordinary common sense in professional legal reasoning. Puzzles of this sort appear to have led Sacks away from the practice of law and toward an interest in its sociological underpinnings.

Of potential relevance also is the fact that the case method approach to legal training relies heavily on formal Socratic dialogue between professors and students. This pedagogical approach, which emphasizes active problem-solving and public accountability within an interrogative framework, emerged at Harvard Law School in the late 1800s under the influence of the then-prevalent pragmatist theory of learning, and quickly spread to become the dominant approach to legal training (Garvin 2003). As we discuss further later in the chapter, formal

dialogue would later become a source of inspiration for Sacks as he began to focus on talk as a phenomenon and speaking practices as constraints on conduct (Schegloff 1992a:xv–xvi).

Garfinkel

Sacks's relationship to Harold Garfinkel dates to his later law school years, when he was reconsidering a career in the law but had not yet made the leap to sociology. During this transitionary period, a Talcott Parsons seminar at Harvard led to an encounter with Garfinkel (Schegloff 1992a:xii–xiii), the only sociologist then focused on the import of common-sense reasoning in environments of everyday life that included courts of law.

Garfinkel's deep influence can be found in the prominence of common-sense reasoning in much of Sacks's early work, which focused on explicating "methods" or "devices" (the latter is Sacks's preferred term) for sense-making and understanding. For Sacks, however, this was paired with a parallel interest in methods for *producing* ordinary social actions and coherent sequences of action. As noted earlier, the action side of the equation was programmatically registered by Garfinkel but remained empirically underdeveloped in his studies from the 1950s–1960s; for Sacks this would become an increasingly predominant focus of research as time went on.

Garfinkelian interests also infuse Sacks's recognition that the sequential organization of action provides a workable participant-based solution to the problems of meaning and intersubjectivity posed by Garfinkel. Sacks's key insight is that since actions are frequently responsive to or at least occasioned by prior events, they are a locus for *public displays of understanding* of what just happened—whether "what just happened" was an utterance, a gesture, a silence, or whatever. This insight was plainly inspired by Garfinkel's preoccupation with the indexical features of language and action, but it was an entirely novel approach that

focused away from how understandings are *arrived at* (through a quasi-phenomenological process of sign-meaning expansion and particularization in context), and toward how such understandings are *made public* in and through subsequent conduct. Sacks's discovery of sequential organization thus had ramifications for how the indexical potential of language and social behavior gets constrained through successive understanding displays, providing a procedural basis for intersubjectivity that is continuous, emergent, and built into the exchange structure of interaction itself.

It should be apparent from this brief sketch that Sacks built upon the ethnomethodological foundation that Garfinkel had set, but he did so in highly innovative ways that entailed a rather decisive and consequential shift into the domain of action. Correspondingly, Sacks only selectively engaged with Garfinkel's program. Indeed, many Garfinkelian preoccupations (e.g., the irremediable incompleteness of norms and rules, the singularity of occasions) and methods (the use of contrived experiments and demonstrations) would prove to be marginal or irrelevant to Sacks's work. Notwithstanding their prior scholarly relationship, Sacks chose Berkeley rather than UCLA for his graduate training in sociology. Sacks's pursuit of generic "methods for doing social life" in the particular arena of human interaction, using more naturalistic research methods, was informed by the approach of his other significant mentor and primary advisor at Berkeley, Erving Goffman.

Goffman

Just as Sacks drew selectively from Garfinkel, the same can be said of his relationship to Erving Goffman. The Goffman that would prove influential for Sacks was not the analyst of total institutions and social stigma, ritual and ceremony, or even self-presentation, although this latter was closer to the mark; it was rather the Goffman who pioneered the study of *the interaction*

order as a sociological specialization. This pithy term was coined by Goffman in his 1981 American Sociological Association presidential address (published in 1983), substantially after Sacks's own untimely death in 1975. The approach to which it referred, however, was Goffman's long-standing preoccupation from his 1953 doctoral dissertation onward (Kendon 1990). Here we focus mainly on Goffman's programmatic statements and analyses (e.g., Goffman 1963, 1964, 1967), prior to and concurrent with Sacks's early work.

As far back as his dissertation, Goffman proposed that the domain of interaction between persons is a species of social organization comprising rules governing various and sundry interactional occasions. Goffman worked to abstract from otherwise diverse occasions "the orderliness that is common to all of them, the orderliness that obtains by virtue of the fact that those present are engaged in spoken communication" (Goffman's 1953 dissertation, quoted in Kendon 1990:39). This form of order underlies the more familiar institutional and structural orders of society, but it is not merely a neutral medium in which other structures operate and are reproduced (Goffman 1964); it is a partially autonomous order with its own organizational integrity. Later, Goffman would describe this order as a social institution in its own right, and its norms as a system of enabling conventions not unlike "the ground rules of a game, the provisions of a traffic code, or the syntax of a language" (Goffman 1983:5). These abstract ideas were fleshed out by Goffman's observations of the specific norms and conventions that distinguish unfocused from focused interaction, coordinate entry into and exit from the latter, regulate attention and involvement, and other elementary tasks intrinsic to the conduct of interaction per se.

Goffman maintained a thoroughly structural conception of the interaction order, which he characterized with a transparent albeit tongue-in-cheek nod to Durkheim as "a reality *sui generis*

as He used to say" (Goffman 1964:134). He later famously elaborated on this idea, portraying it as a level of social reality that transcends the individual:

> I assume that the proper study of interaction is not the individual and his psychology, but rather the syntactical relations among the acts of different persons mutually present to one another. . . . Not, then, men and their moments, but rather moments and their men. (Goffman 1967:2)

Goffman's influence on Sacks is evident in the substantive focus on the domain of direct interaction between persons, and on the structural approach to this domain. Sacks repeatedly argued that interactional practices, whether they be practices of sense-making or of talking, can be examined as trans-situational "devices" for performing certain tasks. While he insisted on documenting these practices as they are manifest within the contextual details of specific cases, his interest remained squarely focused on excavating what was generic and exportable from such materials. This interest permeates even the papers based on single cases (e.g., Sacks 1972b, 1974, 1975, 1978). Taken together, such devices and their interactional sequelae comprise a "machinery" of interaction: As Sacks noted:

> … it is 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. (Sacks 1984:26)

There is a direct conceptual line from Goffman's "moments and their men" to Sacks's conversational "machinery."

At the methodological level, Goffman's imprint is further apparent in the naturalistic thrust of Sacks's approach, which strongly emphasizes non-contrived data in conjunction with a

specimen-collection approach to data gathering (Maynard and Clayman 2018), a methodology common in geology, botany, and zoology, as well as the then-emerging field of ethology, which had a direct influence both on Goffman and on the context analytic framework developed by Fromm-Reichmann, Hockett, and Bateson, among others, at Palo Alto (Kendon 1990; Leeds-Hurwitz 1987; Scheflen 1966). Specimen-collecting involves the compilation of numerous exhibits of a given phenomenon for systematic comparison and analysis in relation to the contexts in which they occur. The development of collections, as a component of CA methodology, is a theme we take up later in this chapter.

Notwithstanding these conceptual and methodological continuities, Sacks's engagement with Goffman was just as partial and selective as it was with Garfinkel. There is no evident interest in asylums or other total institutions, and only marginal interest in dramaturgy, self-presentation, or stigma management. And while Sacks took up Goffman's call for a sociology of the interaction order, he was not particularly interested in those aspects that most preoccupied Goffman, namely the intertwined phenomena of *face*, ritual, and ceremony. As Schegloff (1988) has observed:

> Goffman's focus on patterns of talk and action was tied to ritual and face, and resisted "secularization" to the syntax of action. . . . On this reading, the greatest obstacle to Goffman's achievement of a general enterprise addressed to the syntactical relationship between acts was his own commitment to "ritual," and his unwillingness to detach such "syntactic" units from a functionally specific commitment to ritual organization and the maintenance of face. (1988:94–95)

Sacks's (1984) contrasting orientation toward the prospect of "order at all points" yielded a far broader interest in the dynamics of action and sequence, and would eventuate in the investigation

of generic systems of practice that solve the most fundamental problems that interactants face: how to manage the orderly transfer of speakership, resolve problems of speaking, hearing, and understanding, and so on (Heritage 2008; Schegloff 2006).

Sacks's debt to both Garfinkel and Goffman is overtly acknowledged in an early paper (Sacks 1972a), and the interweaving of threads from both mentors imparts a highly distinctive cast to his work. This is nowhere more evident than in the simultaneous pursuit of, and indeed tension between, analytic specificity and generality. The Garfinkelian emphasis on the indexical properties of expressions and a continued openness to the "something more" that each instance-in-context can provide, sits alongside the Goffmanian pursuit of the structural "conversational machinery" at the heart of the interaction order. How to combine and reconcile these very different analytic sensibilities was by no means obvious at the outset and would take time to develop.

Scientific Ambitions and Talk as Data

If Goffman and Garfinkel guided Sacks toward the domain of the interaction order and methods of reasoning operating within and upon it, the interest in talk per se and recorded and transcribed talk in particular came from elsewhere. For the affordances and rigors of such data, his mentors provided little if any guidance. Goffman's methods were predominantly ethnographic, although supplemented with the data of etiquette manuals and mass media accounts.[3] Garfinkel, for his part, conducted ethnographic interviews for the Agnes study (1967:Chapter 5) but, as discussed previously, he favored experiments and quasi-experimental demonstrations in much of his work. Furthermore, leading theorists of the day in both sociology and linguistics were promoting ideas whose analytical abstractness—e.g., Parsons (1937) on "the unit act" vs. concrete actions in real time, and Chomsky (1957) on language as a formal system vs. actual speech—ran against the

grain of using concrete and ostensibly "messy" everyday talk as data. Why and how, then, did recordings and transcriptions of naturally occurring talk-in-interaction enter into Sacks's research?

To address this puzzle, it bears emphasis that Sacks had an abiding interest in developing a more rigorous science of social life. If his commitment was toward an *emic* rather than a positivistic discipline, it was one characterized by greater descriptive precision and the accountability of analytic judgments. In the scholarly community then concerned with the domain of everyday life, this ambition was distinctive and was formed quite early in Sacks's graduate career. It evidently predates his first recorded lectures on conversation (in the fall of 1964), his dissertation research on suicide calls, and even his fellowship year at the Center for the Scientific Study of Suicide (1963–1964) from which the dissertation project would emerge. In his very first publication, "Sociological Description," which appeared in the student-run *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, Sacks (1963) expressed dissatisfaction with prominent social science methods such as Durkheim's statistical generalizations and Weber's ideal types. The abstractness and imprecision of such methods, he argued, were rooted in their elementary descriptive practices, which relied on "common-sense categories as sociological resources rather than as features of social life which sociology must treat as subject matter" (Sacks 1963:16). This daunting problem was diagnosed in Garfinkelian terms, but it was paired with a strikingly un-Garfinkelian expression of optimism about the prospects for greater descriptive rigor:

> Certainly no one has produced a demonstration that the world is undescribable. Indeed, what would such a demonstration look like? (Sacks 1963:16)

Such optimism was part and parcel of Sacks's overt commitment to scientific advance:

> I take it that at least some sociologists seek to make a science of the discipline; this is a concern I share, and it is only from the perspective of such a concern that the ensuing discussion seems appropriate. (Sacks 1963:2)

Although Sacks offered no solution to the problem of adequate sociological description at this early juncture, he was evidently on the lookout for a way forward.

Several convergent scholarly experiences from the early 1960s may have nudged Sacks toward a solution. One was his encounter with the work of Iona and Peter Opie on *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* (1959), a landmark monograph in folklore studies published just as Sacks was transitioning from Yale law to Berkeley sociology. As Schegloff (1992a:xvi) has noted, this work (among others) stimulated in Sacks an interest in children's culture that would eventuate in a number of course lectures and posthumous publications (Sacks 1979, 1980). But this substantive impact had a methodological corollary: the book also provided an early exemplar of how sociological interests may be pursued and vividly grounded in transcribed data. The book is a treasure trove of schoolyard rhymes, jokes and riddles, jeers and torments, and of various and sundry speech acts: affirming, betting, bargaining, giving, taking, claiming precedence, and so on. And while the database is lacking in sequential, prosodic, and embodied detail, it nonetheless exemplifies a number of methodological techniques that would become central to CA. Transcribed examples reveal concrete instances of speech acts and verbal formulae for their performance. The presentation of arrays of such examples provides for the public accountability of analytic claims (here regarding the geographic spread of such practices and their endurance over time), and is suggestive of a specimen-collection approach to data gathering and analysis. And the entire book vividly illustrates what a resolutely emic and data-driven approach to

language practices—one that begins with patterned observations and the indigenous preoccupations that they index, rather than abstract theoretical problems—might look like.

A second source of inspiration for the data of talk was formal interrogative dialogue, which Sacks encountered in different varieties and contexts. After directly experiencing the constraints of Socratic dialogue in law school (noted earlier), and then in 1963 observing psychotherapeutic dialogue at the Center for the Scientific Study of Suicide in Los Angeles, Sacks developed an interest in the latter as "a form of discourse designed to control conduct" (Schegloff 1992a:xv). At around the same time, his colleague Emanuel Schegloff was recording psychiatric competency and criminal insanity examinations for analysis (Schegloff 1992a:xvii).

Against this backdrop, when Sacks came across audio recordings and stenographic transcripts of telephone calls to the Suicide Prevention Center sometime during the 1963–1964 academic year, he would have been primed to recognize their potential as forms of data. Shortly thereafter, he would embark on his dissertation project and, in the fall of 1964, he would deliver the first course of "Lectures on Conversation," based largely on analyses of those calls.

It's remarkable how quickly Sacks realized the affordances of recorded talk for advancing a science of social action, and how rapidly his analytic approach to such materials developed. In his 1964 and very first recorded lecture (discussed in the section on Situated Actions and Responses below), he proposed that particular verbal formulae are methods for doing things, each with its own social import and sequential consequences. He further proposed that transcribed renderings of such formulae are also, in effect, rigorous descriptions that capture the design of singular actions in particular contexts, with ramifications for action implementation elsewhere. In later lectures, Sacks would also comment on the affordances of transcript excerpts for scientific accountability, allowing others to "look at what I had studied, and make of it what

they could, if they wanted to disagree with me" (Sacks 1992a:622, see also Sacks 1984). But already in 1964, not long after sketching the thorny problem of "Sociological Description" (1963), Sacks evidently understood that by virtue of such materials he was well on his way toward providing a solution, the kind of descriptive grounding essential for sociology to advance.

Sacks's Early Empirical Research

Sacks's empirical research from the 1960s, conducted before conversation analysis had crystallized as a field of study, can be found in his dissertation project and related publications (Sacks 1967, 1972b, 1972a), his UCLA and UC Irvine lectures from that time period (Sacks 1992a, 1992b), and sole-authored articles published later but originating in those early lectures (e.g., Sacks 1975, 1978). An overarching interest in "methods," "procedures," or "devices" for doing things permeates this work, each explicated through the detailed analysis of a single case or comparative analysis of a small number of cases. Within this general approach, three thematic clusters may be discerned.

Descriptive Accounts and Social Reasoning Methods

In several of these pieces, Sacks begins with a particular everyday description or account, and then explores the social reasoning that underlies its production and provides for its intelligibility. This approach is central to his dissertation, which interrogates the account given to suicide helpline counselors that "I have no one to turn to" so as to reveal the social organization underlying the reporting of personal problems (Sacks 1967). In a similar vein are papers on "The baby cried, the mommy picked it up" (Sacks 1972b), "Everyone has to lie" (Sacks 1975), as well as an early lecture on "I am nothing" (from the fall of 1964, in Sacks 1992a). Note that in each case the starting point is some actual, naturally occurring remark that is ostensibly telegraphic or "extreme," suggesting that the speaker must mean something more or at least different than what

the literal meaning of their words would indicate. The analysis then focuses on how such remarks represent a methodical solution to some problem or set of problems that speakers actually confront, and how an appreciation of that practical context provides for each remark's intelligibility and reasonableness.

The social reasoning methods that emerge from this work sometimes involve common-sense knowledge of identity categories and the conduct normatively associated with them, which would later be termed membership categorization devices (MCDs) and category-bound activities. Other such methods involve knowledge about speech acts and their sequential organization. The paper "Everyone Has to Lie," published in 1975 but originating in lectures from 1967, illustrates this range of interests. The paper explicates common-sense knowledge regarding social identities and personal information transfer, in conjunction with knowledge of conversational structure and sequence—namely the exchange of greetings and personal state queries (e.g., *How are you?*) at conversational openings. While this paper resembles other accounts-and-social-reasoning papers in its overall narrative trajectory, the sequential elements shade over into the next type of paper.

Of the three main lines of work that Sacks would develop, this line on accounts and social reasoning is most heavily indebted to Garfinkel, and in particular his preoccupation with indexical expressions. Even so, the stark contrast between Garfinkel's breaching-experiment approach and Sacks's naturalistic, conversational data-driven, and more action-focused approach to the same phenomenon is an early harbinger of developments to come.

Situated Actions and Responses

A second body of work concerns devices or practices for the performance of conversational actions. This work tends to exhibit greater attention to the situated nature of such practices and

the responses they receive, once again addressing the indexical properties of expressions, but this time in relation to the sequencing of action and thus anticipating the development of sequential organization as a primary focus of CA research. Work in this vein can be found throughout Sacks's (1992a, 1992b) lectures and some of the sole-authored papers derived from them (Sacks 1975), as well as later sole-authored papers on agreement and contiguity (Sacks 1987), and joke-telling (Sacks 1974). Contrary to the widespread belief that Sacks began focusing on accounts and social reasoning and only later developed an interest in action and sequencing, in reality both kinds of analytic efforts are intermingled throughout the earliest lectures. This point is obscured by the (often) delayed publications, which, as we noted earlier, have dates that bear little relationship to the timing of the research on which they are based.

The most telling evidence for the simultaneous development of work on accounts/social reasoning and action/sequence can be found in the first year (1964–1965) of Sacks's lectures on conversation. These lectures were contemporaneous with the dissertation research in progress and constitute the earliest written record of his empirical research interests. His very first lecture at UCLA is entitled "Rules of Conversational Sequence" and concerns telephone conversation openings, the organization of sequences devoted to greetings and identification, self-identification as an indirect method of soliciting an interlocutor's name without explicitly asking for it, and "hearing trouble" as a method of avoiding giving one's name without explicitly refusing to do so. The next two lectures are also focused on forms of action in sequence. Other lectures are concerned with accounts, MCDs, and related forms of social reasoning (most notably Lecture 5: "Suicide as a device for discovering if anybody cares," Lecture 6: "The MIR membership categorization device," and Lecture 9: "I am nothing"), but at least half of that first

year of lectures focus on matters arising from the production and sequencing of action. For instance:

Lecture 1: Rules of conversational sequence

Lecture 2: On suicide threats getting laughed off

Lecture 3: The correction-invitation device

Lecture 7: On questions

Lecture 10: Accountable actions

Lecture 11: On exchanging glances

Lecture 12: Sequencing: Utterances, jokes, and questions.

Accordingly, long before he completed his dissertation, Sacks freely interwove practices of social reasoning, action, and sequence into his first course of lectures on conversation.

Interactional Activities and Their Sociocultural Import

A third thematic cluster, emerging in the second year of Sacks's lectures (1965–1966), addressed the broader sociocultural implications of specific activity frameworks. For instance, in an analysis plainly inspired by the Opies' studies of childhood games, Sacks (1980) argued that a game called "Button, button, who's got the button" offered children the opportunity to learn and practice methods of dissembling and concealment. In a similar vein, Sacks (1979) examined teenagers discussing cars to develop the idea that teenage language use was a means of creating specialized concepts and terminology that could escape the control of adults. In a paper on responses to "how are you?" questions, Sacks (1975) addressed (among other things) social constraints in the regulation of information about personal problems. And a dirty joke told by, and to, teenagers (Sacks 1974, 1978) was explored by reference to the way such jokes can be

"tests" of sexual knowledge and understanding, and can partition knowing from unknowing joke recipients.

The generalizability offered in these lectures, and the papers that were subsequently published from them, traded off the functionality he attributed to the interactional practices he described, underwritten by reference to the ethnographic and cultural contexts in which they were situated. Some of the early lectures/papers might be characterized as "hybrid" in their combined attention to both action analysis and sociocultural import. In any case, Garfinkel's call for inquiry into the common methodic foundations of the production and recognition of actions and settings, and a resolution to problems arising from the malleability and concision of natural speech, was yet to be fully realized.

From Cases to Collections

The early 1960s, then, saw Sacks pursuing the development of an *emic* science of what Eric Livingston would later call the "witnessable order" concerned with "how members of society produce and sustain the observable orderlinesses of their own activities" (Livingston 2008:124). He was also committed to the fundamental ethnomethodological theorem that was the centerpiece of *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. As Garfinkel succinctly stated it, this was the proposal that

> . . . the activities whereby members produce and manage settings of organized everyday affairs are identical with members procedures for making those settings "account-able." (Garfinkel 1967:1)

Sacks elaborated on the point in an early lecture, imparting to it a more "generativist" and action-focused coloring:

> A culture is an apparatus for generating *recognizable* actions; if the same procedures are used for generating as for detecting, that is perhaps as simple a solution to the problem of recognizability as is formulatable. (Sacks 1992a:226, emphasis in original)

Later, Sacks commented (Hill and Crittenden 1968:41) that "there can be a set of rules which can reproduce the problems in the data with which you started," and subsequently he was still more explicit:

> 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 1992b:339)

It was this focus on generativity that would eventually displace Goffman's influence on Sacks's approach to analysis. In place of normative rules in defining and honoring self and other, Sacks substituted a focus on social action as a product of formally describable methodic practices that could also serve as resources in the management of intersubjective understanding. Treating singular specimens of action as constituted through, and evidence of, generative methods for action production and recognition opened the door to a new approach to the study of action, one that contrasted with approaches pursuing normative rules as independent causal factors identified through frequencies and measures of association. Generative methods of action could be seen to be operating anywhere, constituting a foundation not just for the generation of action but also for

its intelligibility and learnability. This was a completely novel and distinctive conception of what generalizability in social science could become (Sacks 1984:21).

In the early days, though, the search for this kind of generative generalizability was far from easy. The "terrible and essential" problem, as Sacks put it in a later note to Schegloff (March 1974), was isolating "structure in particulars." This problem arises from the fact that methods for the production of actions appear in the midst of complex streams of singular actions in particular contexts. Disentangling what might be context-free and generative about a practice meant discerning "essence" from "accident" with little, if any, disciplinary guidance (ibid.)

The identification of reproducible specimens of such methods in action, however, turned out to be critical. In his first lecture described earlier, focused on conversational sequences early in telephone conversations to a Suicide Prevention Center (SPC), Sacks observed that, after an initial exchange, the conversations could have alternative trajectories:

(1) [Sacks 1992a:3]

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SPC:    This is Mr Smith may I help you
Clr:    Yes, this is Mr Brown
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(2) [Sacks 1992a:3]

```
SPC:    This is Mr Smith may I help you
Clr:    I can't hear you.
SPC:    This is Mr Smith.
Clr:    Smith.
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And he further noted:

> If the staff member used "This is Mr Smith may I help you" as their opening line, then overwhelmingly, any answer other than "Yes, this is Mr Brown" (for example, "I can't hear you," "I don't know," "How do you spell your name?") meant that you would have serious trouble getting the caller's name, if you got the name at all." (Sacks 1992a:4)

Among other things, Sacks observed that the self-identification of the first line functions as an invitation for the caller to reciprocate, as happens in the first case in the preceding, and that it does so in a way that is not overt and that does not open the way to the provision of explanations in the way that "May I have your name?" might. Moreover, in the second of the two cases, he observed, the caller does not ignore the SPC staffer's overture; rather, his assertion of not hearing the name invites the staffer to repeat it. It thus fills the "slot" in which the caller might have responded with his own name. At the same time, the caller's response is not hearable as a "withholding" of his name, but rather as addressed to a hearing difficulty that preempts response and does so "reasonably." Finally, after the repeat "This is Mr Smith," the caller can use the following slot to acknowledge the name rather than give his own. Here, then, several conversational practices are deployed in a sequence in which a caller is invited to give his name "off the record" and avoids doing so in an equally "off record" fashion—the whole event being intelligible in terms of a context-specific confluence of generic rules of conversational sequencing.

At the core of Sacks's argument is the claim that conversational objects like "I can't hear you"[4] may cluster into a discernible practice, or set of practices, that can have particular and singular consequences in different situations of action. About this, Sacks comments that conversational objects such as "I can't hear you"

> can be used for whole ranges of activities, where for different ones a variety of the properties of those objects will get employed. And we begin to see alternative properties of those objects. That's one way we can go about beginning to collect the alternative methods that persons use in going about doing whatever they have to do. (Sacks 1992a:11)

Even as they are positioned in unique circumstances of interaction, Sacks comments that these phenomena may well be generalizable:

> There was a very classical argument that it would not be that way; that singular events were singular events, given a historian's sort of argument, that they just happen and they get more or less accidentally thrown together. But if we could find that there are analytically hard ways of describing these things—where, that is, we're talking about objects that can be found elsewhere, that get placed, that have ways of being used; that are abstract objects which get used on singular occasions and describe singular courses of activity—then that's something which is exceedingly non-trivial to know. (Sacks 1992a:11)

Here, in Sacks's very first lecture on conversation, is an outline of what would become CA's core methodology in which specimen collections of specific actions would be identified and their implementation and sequelae in a variety of social contexts would be explored.

Structure in Particulars: Preference Organization

What we have seen so far, however, was a promissory note, embodying intense theoretical intuitions, yet issued with, at best, a hazy notion of how results could be delivered. The fundamental and "terrible" problem was that, if social action is methodic in both its production and recognition, as Garfinkel had proposed, this methodicity nonetheless emerges as situated in

particular occasions that are singular and locally contexted. How are these contexts to be described and their relevant scope delimited? As Schegloff (1992a) observes:

> Starting out with a commitment to lay bare the methodicity of ordinary activities, and with his talent for seeing in singular occurrences the structural elements of which they were formed and composed, a world of data which refreshed itself every moment . . . provided a virtual infinity of opportunities for new observations, and new orders of observation. (1992a:lviii)

How could a "virtual infinity" of single cases of action be sources of evidence about general phenomena? How can actions and understandings that are utterly particular be made using generalized methods? Moreover, to the extent that the methods of interaction may be reflexively inflected or colored by their contexts of occurrence, does it even make sense to say that the "same" methods are deployed from occasion to occasion?

The later 1960s witnessed a number of shifts in Sacks's analytic outlook. One involved a decisive shift from the analyst's understanding to that of the participants as the primary point of analytic departure (Schegloff 1992a:xliii–xliv). To provide evidence of the latter, the analyst is driven to ground analytic claims about a given practice in its treatment by the participants, located especially in subsequent conduct. This treatment could include absent actions, and required work on the contexts in which actions can be seen as relevantly absent. In these developments, the notion of sequence and sequential organization would assume an ever-increasing role: for whatever the kaleidoscopic variegation of social contexts (that Garfinkel had first identified), and the multiplicity of contextual elements that could in principle be relevant at any moment, it was through sequence that participants could be shown to display their

orientations to the particular interactional grounds through which their actions would necessarily be implemented.

The end of the 1960s saw Sacks almost without publications, but with a widespread academic following that, as the Sacks Archive at UCLA shows, was hungry for copies of his mimeographed lectures given at UCLA and later UC Irvine. This collection of scholars clearly regarded him as a brilliant and original researcher, and the circulation of his lectures at this time was Sacks's "most successful and prolific form of scientific communication" (Schegloff 1992a:xix). This same period saw the emergence of an analytic methodology that would have a decisive impact on the future course of CA, and of the development of CA as a disciplined process of inquiry. This methodology involved the assembly of data corpora, and the associated creation and analysis of significantly larger specimen collections of interactional phenomena.

Starting in 1968, Sacks's lectures began to exhibit a shift in stance "toward systematicity and toward the relevance of substantial amounts of data, that is, aggregates of conversations or of instances of particular phenomena in it" (Schegloff 1992b:x–xi). This was associated with a shift in which, rather than using some particular moment in conversation as a jumping off point, Sacks began to use "an observation about a regularity in an aggregate [as] the point of departure" (Schegloff 1992b:x–xi). In short, the shift was to "an order of organization, rather than a particular practice, of talking; a class of places in an aggregate of data, rather than an excerpt; an organizationally characterized problem or form of interactional work, rather than an individually designed outcome; invariancies of features rather than context-specified practices" (Schegloff 1992b:x–xi). Although Schegloff did not mention it in this context, 1968 was also the year in which "Sequencing in Conversational Openings" (Schegloff 1968) was published. The paper was

based on a large aggregate of data (500 instances) and was likely influential in the development of Sacks's thinking. Indeed, in a later note to Schegloff (dated March 1974), Sacks remarked that Schegloff had been successful in expanding analyses so as to deal with, as he put it, "masses of data." The fruits of research using "masses of data" would emerge in the early 1970s in the turn-taking paper (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974) which is among the most highly cited papers ever published in the social sciences, a posthumously published paper on repair (Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks 1977), and a sole-authored paper on preference organization in conversation (Sacks 1987), to which we now turn.

"On the Preferences for Agreement and Contiguity in Sequences in Conversation" was prepared for delivery at the 1973 conference of the Linguistic Society of America. Sacks did not work further on the paper before he died in a car accident in 1975, and it was eventually published from an edited audio-recording some 14 years after its initial delivery. The significance of the paper lies both in the clarity of its methodological stance, and its foundation for a number of well-known subsequent studies by Sacks's graduate students of the period (e.g., Davidson 1984, 1990; Pomerantz 1975, 1978, 1984; Terasaki 2004) dealing with preference organization as a widespread and robust phenomenon structuring sequentially relevant alternative courses of action in interaction.

The paper begins from the observation that many sequences of action in conversation consist of paired actions ("adjacency pairs"), and that for many first-pair parts there are alternative second-pair parts. Focusing on polar (or "Yes/No") questions, Sacks asks whether there are rules for the selection or "Yes" or "No" answers and, additionally, for the placement of the "Yes" or "No" within the answer. During the remainder of the paper, he advances the case that there are rules of conversation that favor agreeing responses to polar questions (i.e.,

responses that affirm the proposition contained in the question), and also that these responses should be given immediately and contiguously to the question. Sacks is clear that these embody social norms that do not reflect personal impulses or desires in any direct way, and he makes the argument by identifying a range of practices and documenting their systematicity and recurrence through the presentation of an interlocking array of specimens.

First, he observes (Sacks 1987:57) that agreeing responses to polar questions are much more common than disagreeing ones. However, suggestive as this observation is, it does not directly show the work that participants do to achieve this outcome. To explicate that work, Sacks observes that while agreeing answers are performed promptly and contiguously, as in (3), disagreeing answers, as in (4) ("I w—probably won't be too early.") tend to occur "late" within the turn and hence non-contiguously:

(3) [Sacks 1987:57]

A: And it—apparently left her quite permanently damaged (I suppose).

B: Apparently. Uh he is still hopeful.

(4) [Sacks 1987:58]

A: Yuh comin down early?

B: Well, I got a lot of things to do before gettin' cleared up tomorrow. I don't know. I w—probably won't be too early.

In addition, the respondent in (4) packs the unit prior to the disagreement with items like "well" and "I don't know" that can "get treated as 'going in front of disagreements,' and that may have an import in signaling the future forthcomingness of a disagreement" (Sacks 1987:59). Moreover, the disagreement itself is "formed up so that the disagreement is as weak as possible" (Sacks 1987:58).[5] Here, then, Sacks has identified a range of potentially recurrent practices used

in the formation of agreeing and disagreeing responses to question-based propositions that accentuate agreement and downplay disagreement. These practices operate at the level of sequence, concerning the relation between turns and, at the level of the turn, concerned with the ordering of components within the turn.

Sacks next considers a set of related practices that avoid disagreement, but also avoid accepting the proposition advanced by the question. For example, in (5), the response could simply have been "No:"

(5) [Sacks 1987:62]

A: **That where you live? Florida?**

B: **That's where I was born.**

Instead however, B provides a tangentially "agreeing" response, one that finds something in the previous question to affirm. A related practice involves the provision of an agreeing response, but adding subsequent components to the response that restrict its scope with exceptions, or that otherwise "walk it back."

(6) [Sacks 1987:63]

A: **'N they haven't heard a word huh?**

B: **Not a word, uh-uh. Not—Not a word. Not at all.**
Except—Neville's mother got a call . . .

(7) [Sacks 1987:62]

A: How about friends. Have you friends?

B: I have friends. So called friends. I had friends.
Let me put it that way.

Writing about this cluster of practices, Sacks articulates the import of non-routine or deviant cases within the analysis of specimen collections:

> I am employing a strategy that we use a lot, and which therefore deserves a bit of description. The strategy is this: if we can isolate, among the exceptions, some classes—that does not mean some individual instances, but some *classes* of instances (they *have* to have class-like characteristics)—which turn out to be themselves oriented to the preference we are studying, then we figure it (the preference) has a sort of second order validity. That is to say, it not only works in a gross number of cases, which fit directly, but even when it does not work, you can see it working. (Sacks 1987:59, italics in original)

Thus far, we have focused on Sacks's account of *respondents'* practices for maximizing agreement, but *questioners* are also oriented to the same outcome. This is shown in cases where, hearing a delay in response and anticipating disagreement, questioners revise their questions in ways geared to promoting agreement. The clearest cases are those in which the second question reverses the polarity of the first.

(8) [Sacks 1987:64]

A: They have a good cook there?

((pause))

A: Nothing special?

B: No, everybody takes their turns.

(9) [Sacks 1987:64]

```
A:    Ken you walk?
      (0.4)
A:    Ud be too hard for yuh?
B:    Oh::: darling I don't know. Uh it's bleeding a little,
      e' jis took the bandage off yes'day . . .
```

Here it emerges that "agreement" between polar questions and answers is a social preference that is observably worked toward by both questioners and answerers. Moreover, the practices of both parties are coordinated with one another: most obviously, delays by answerers reliably communicating upcoming disagreement can be exploited by questioners to revise their questions before the anticipated disagreement emerges. Although Sacks did not labor the point, here is a clear form of social organization that maximizes the likelihood of affiliation and solidarity between speakers as a matter of institutionalized practice rather than personal desire or predilection (cf. Clayman 2002; Heritage 1984; Schegloff 2007).

Sacks's analysis encompasses a remarkable range of practices that interlock in the production of polar question-answer sequences. These include the asymmetrical placement of agreeing and disagreeing responses relative to questions, the mitigation of disagreements, and various practices that precede and displace disagreements within the sequence. They also include practices by questioners that display appreciation of these same asymmetries, register the foreshadowing import of preliminaries to disagreement, and provide for the circumvention of disagreement before it can be articulated. This interconnected *system of practices* may not be

entirely beyond the reach of single case analysis, but it would have to be regarded as speculative and hypothetical without the support of the "masses of data" derived from specimen collections.

The underlying phenomenon identified by Sacks in relation to polar questions and answers has proved remarkably robust across a variety of sequences, including assessments (Pomerantz 1978, 1984), requests, offers, and invitations (Davidson 1984, 1990; Drew and Couper-Kuhlen 2014; Maynard 2016), across interpersonal and mass communication (Clayman 1993; Heritage and Clayman 2010; Heritage and Greatbatch 1986), and across languages and cultures (Stivers et al. 2009). Sacks's analysis was extended to the turn-design level of varying forms of agreement by Raymond (2003), and this in turn was leveraged into treatments of more or less agentive responses to polar questions (Heritage and Raymond 2005, 2012) which are also holding up across languages and most cultures (Enfield et al. 2019). The "collections" methodology and its use to identify classes of practices that collocate around systemic dilemmas for social interaction (Heritage 2008; Schegloff 2006) have been extensively deployed ever since.

The formation of specimen collections has transformed CA, not only by providing a key method for grounding analytic claims, but also by ascertaining their range and scope. In addition to clear cases, the creation of collections normally involves cases in which the practice is partially or imperfectly realized, together with others in which the practice might be expected to occur but does not (Schegloff 1997). The formation and curation of collections of interactional practices allow the researcher to establish the inner and outer boundaries of a practice, and to examine its import across a range of contexts (Schegloff 1997).[6] In a domain where the reflexive intersection of practices and contexts is constitutive of action, collections allow researchers to

appreciate both the breadth and the specificity of practices and settings which can be shown to be the objects of participants' orientations in both the production of actions and their recognition.

Analyzing collections is, of course, hardly a foolproof method. It requires judgments of similarity across cases where almost every element of comparison involves the consideration of "family resemblances" that do not substantially abstract from, and maximally accommodate to, the particularities of each case. These judgments are by no means infallible, and are continually open for further revision and refinement (Kendon 1990:47). But collections allow analysis to proceed, developing findings subject to the checks that explicit reference to evidence makes possible. This is how empirical investigations that both attend to and reach beyond the single case can advance.

Conclusion

We have argued that conversation analysis emerged as a creative synthesis of certain key ideas drawn from Garfinkel's ethnomethodological studies of the 1950s and early 1960s, together with ideas from Erving Goffman's naturalistic observations of the interaction order, and other sources. While Garfinkel exhibited a fleeting interest in the study of interaction early in graduate school, he abandoned this in favor of phenomenologically inspired work on common-sense reasoning accessed through experiments and demonstrations. It was Harvey Sacks who developed the study of common sense in the domain of naturally occurring and temporally developing human interaction, marrying this with a Goffmanian interest in the interaction order as a structural reality *sui generis*, and with his own primary interest in developing a defensible science of social action as it operates within and upon this order.

Much of Sacks's approach can be discerned in his earliest recorded lectures, but he would later incorporate additional inputs from Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson in a process that

continued to develop and progress over a considerable period of time. This extended effort was, in retrospect, plainly necessary to fashion an approach capable of fusing together disparate and seemingly incompatible elements: concerns with both *emic* naturalism and descriptive rigor, with normative structures and the generative methods of their intelligible production and reproduction, with context-specificity and generality, and with analyses of both cases and collections in ways that are maximally public and accountable to a scholarly community. The improbable fusion of these elements released a burst of energy that continues to stimulate researchers across a wide range of disciplines that interface with human interaction.

Perhaps nowhere is the complex lineage of CA more evident than in Schegloff and Sacks's (1973) foundational study of how telephone conversations are brought to a close. This paper, among the earliest CA papers to be published and the first published collaboration between Sacks and Schegloff, contains findings—involving a set of pre-closing and closing sequences—that are specified in formal terms and linked to organized systems of practice at varying levels (turn-taking organization, sequence organization, overall structural organization). The findings are also offered as highly generalizable and functional solutions to recurrent problems that inhabit virtually any effort to close down an interactional encounter. This is Goffman's interaction order incarnate.

At the same time, particular closing practices are transcribed and reproduced with great specificity and detail and are examined with attention to their context-specific meanings and import. Comparative analysis of routine and atypical or deviant cases demonstrates how generic sequential resources can be mobilized in singular ways that yield varying outcomes—including conversational continuation rather than closure. And the entire analysis is grounded in the displayed understandings of the participants, understandings that inform the turn-by-turn

production of each closing episode and are the central means by which the participants show each other "where they are" in the closing process (e.g., "winding down," "ready to close but still in conversation," etc.). These Garfinkelian themes are underscored in a well-known and frequently cited introductory passage:

> We have proceeded under the assumption (an assumption borne out by our research) that insofar as the materials we worked with exhibited orderliness, they did so not only for us, indeed not in the first place for us, but for the co-participants who had produced them. If the materials (records of natural conversations) were orderly, they were so because they bad been methodically produced by members of the society for one another, and it was a feature of the conversations that we treated as data that they were produced so as to allow the display by the co-participants to each other of their orderliness, and to allow the participants to display to each other their analysis, appreciation, and use of that orderliness. Accordingly, our analysis has sought to explicate the ways in which the materials are produced by members in orderly ways that exhibit their orderliness, have their orderliness appreciated and used, and have that appreciation displayed and treated as the basis for subsequent action. (Schegloff and Sacks 1973:290)

It has become commonplace for authors to comment on the contemporary intellectual gulf between CA and ethnomethodology. Trends in both areas—the emergence of a post-analytic ethnomethodological stance (Lynch 1993), and the use of larger data sets and quantitative methods in some CA studies—have widened this gulf, making the common ground of their origins more difficult to discern. We have sought to reconstruct some of the scholarly ferment

out of which both enterprises arose, and to isolate the specific ethnomethodological elements that were taken up and incorporated into the conversation analytic fusion, yielding an allied but nonetheless distinct approach to the foundations of social life.

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[1] Later we address Sacks's decision to focus on the analysis of individual social actions rather than common-sense knowledge or reasoning, his investigation of sequences of action both for capturing the orderly temporal unfolding of talk, and as a method for grounding analytic claims in the displayed orientations of the participants themselves, and the use of specimen collections as a method of charting the generality and scope of the practices underlying the organization of social action.

[2] We take this paper as representing Garfinkel's perspective, based on Sacks's repeated disclaimers of significant coauthorship reported in Schegloff (1992a:xlix) and Coulter (2016) and as reflected in a footnote (fn. 40) in Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974:727) which attributes sole authorship of the paper to Garfinkel. As Wilson

(2012:231) notes, the paper contains an unresolved tension between Garfinkel's and Sacks's stances on indexical expressions.

[3] Goffman eventually developed an interest in talk and recorded data, but this did not emerge until much later (Goffman 1981) and was plainly stimulated by the advance of CA.

[4] These practices are now analyzed under the general heading of "next turn repair initiation" (Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks 1977).

[5] These characteristics of disagreeing (or dispreferred) responses are now very fully documented, (e.g., Heritage 2015; Kendrick and Torreira 2015).

[6] For a range of perspectives on the creation and uses of collections, see Robinson et al. (in prep).