

# The Interactive Construction of a Sentence in Natural Conversation

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*Charles Goodwin uses another technical source of data for the study of interaction, videotape recordings. His collection of materials includes several videotape recordings, segments of which are discovered to contain instances of the phenomenon he describes. A sentence, as Goodwin is able to show, can be shaped and re-formed in the process of its utterance. In face-to-face interaction it can be affected by such matters as the direction of glances (which indicate attention to the speaker by the recipient) and the relationship of the parties to each other. Thus, Goodwin opens for further consideration by interactional analysts the question of what a sentence is by showing that it may not be understandable as a unit apart from the situated occasion of its production. The implications for linguists and others who work with this unit of utterance are manifold.*

Sentences emerge with conversation.<sup>1</sup> However, in traditional linguistics it has been assumed that the analysis of sentences can be performed upon examples isolated from such an interactive process.<sup>2</sup> In opposition to such a view it will be argued here that sentences in natural

conversation emerge as the products of a process of interaction between speaker and hearer and that they mutually construct the turn at talk.

Two ways in which the collaborative process of constructing the turn might lead to the modification of the speaker's emerging sentence will be examined. First it will be proposed that the speaker can reconstruct the emerging meaning of his sentence as he is producing it in order to maintain its appropriateness to its recipient of the moment. It will then be argued that the accomplishment of other interactive tasks, such as the negotiation of an appropriate state of mutual orientation between speaker and hearer, may require changes in the length of the turn being constructed. To make the turn longer the speaker can change the sentence he is producing by adding to that sentence new sections, in the form of words, phrases, and clauses.<sup>3</sup> Both the length and the meaning of the sentence eventually constructed within a turn at talk can thus emerge as the products of a dynamic process of interaction between speaker and hearer.

For clarity, analysis will focus upon the following sentence: "I gave up smoking cigarettes one week ago today actually." Though only a single sentence is being investigated, the process of its construction will provide the opportunity to examine in detail some of the more basic interactive tasks posed in the construction of the turn.

This sentence is taken from a videotape of an actual conversation,<sup>4</sup> a dinner in the home of John and his wife Beth attended by their friends Ann and Don.<sup>5</sup>

The actual production of the sentence is accomplished in two different turns separated by a recipient's "yea:h":

G.26:(T)8:50

John: I gave, I gave up smoking  
cigarettes:: =

Don: = Yea:h,  
(0.4)

John: I-uh: one-one week ago t'da:y.  
acshilly,

However, irrespective of any such division, John's talk produces only a single coherent sentence. The manifest coherence of his utterances as a single sentence constitutes both an initial observation about their organization and a warrant for analyzing this talk as a single unit.

Within the coherence of this single unit it is, however, possible to

locate subunits. In producing this talk the speaker directs his gaze to three different recipients over three different sections of the utterance. Specifically, his gaze is directed to Don during “I gave up smoking cigarettes,” to Beth during “one week ago today,” and finally to Ann during “actually.”<sup>6</sup>

The relationship between the movement of the speaker’s gaze and his utterance can be displayed more precisely through use of a simple transcription system.<sup>7</sup> The gaze of the speaker is marked above the utterance. A line indicates that he is gazing at some particular recipient. The precise point where his gaze first reaches that recipient is marked with a left bracket. A series of dots indicates that the speaker is moving his gaze toward some recipient, while commas mark a movement away from some recipient.

Applying this transcription system to John’s utterance:

John: . . . , . . . . . { Don , , { Don  
I gave, I gave u<sub>p</sub> smoking c<sub>i</sub>garettes:: =

Don: = Yea:h,

John: . . . { Beth . . . { Ann  
I-uh: one-one week ago t’da:y. acshilly

In brief, by plotting aspects of the speaker’s gaze it is possible to divide his sentence into three separate sections during each of which the speaker gazes at a different recipient.

The question now to be investigated is what relevance, if any, the speaker’s gaze direction has to the accomplishment of tasks facing him in constructing a turn at talk.<sup>8</sup>

One possible rule that would implicate the speaker’s gaze in the construction of the turn might be the following:

*Rule 1:* The gaze of a speaker should locate the party being gazed at as an addressee of his utterance.

It will now be argued that this rule is in fact operative and that the speaker’s orientation to it produces characteristic phenomena within the turn.

In the first section of his sentence John tells his recipients that he has

given up smoking cigarettes. Sacks (1973, p. 139) has noted the operation in conversation of a "general rule that provides that one should not tell one's co-participants what one takes it they already know." This rule is implicated in the organization of a range of different types of *informings*, including announcements, stories, and reports.

In constructing the first section of his sentence, John is thus proposing a criterion for an appropriate recipient to it.<sup>10</sup> namely that such a recipient does not yet know that he has given up smoking.

For convenience, a possible recipient not expected to know about an event being reported by a speaker will be referred to as an *unknowing recipient* while a possible recipient already informed about that event will be referred to as a *knowing recipient*.

Don and his wife Ann are the dinner guests of John and his wife Beth. Neither has seen the speaker for some period of time before the present evening. John thus has reason to suppose that Don has not yet heard the news he is now telling<sup>11</sup> and, he would thus be an appropriate recipient of the announcement. It is to Don that John directs his gaze during this section of his utterance. Insofar as the party being gazed at can be seen to satisfy the criterion proposed for a recipient of John's statement, Rule 1 is satisfied.

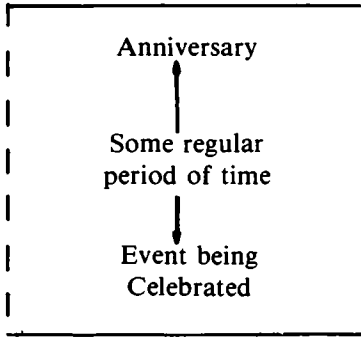
At least one party present at the dinner would not be an appropriate recipient of the first section of John's sentence. Beth, the speaker's wife, has been living in the same house with him for the past week and knows that he has given up smoking. Further, this is something that the speaker knows that she knows and indeed the others present can also legitimately see these things.<sup>12</sup> Insofar as John's initial statement is appropriate to an unknowing recipient and Beth is a knowing recipient, the present line of analysis implies that the event described to Don should not be reported to Beth.

This raises the possibility of investigating more systematically in this data the properties of Rule 1. The speaker's active orientation toward this rule could be demonstrated if when he shifted his gaze to another recipient who did not satisfy the criterion proposed by his action, he then simultaneously reshaped his emerging utterance so that it was made appropriate to the current object of his gaze.

For the next section of the sentence, "l-uh: one-one week ago t'da:y.", John switches his gaze from Don, an unknowing recipient, to Beth, a knowing recipient.

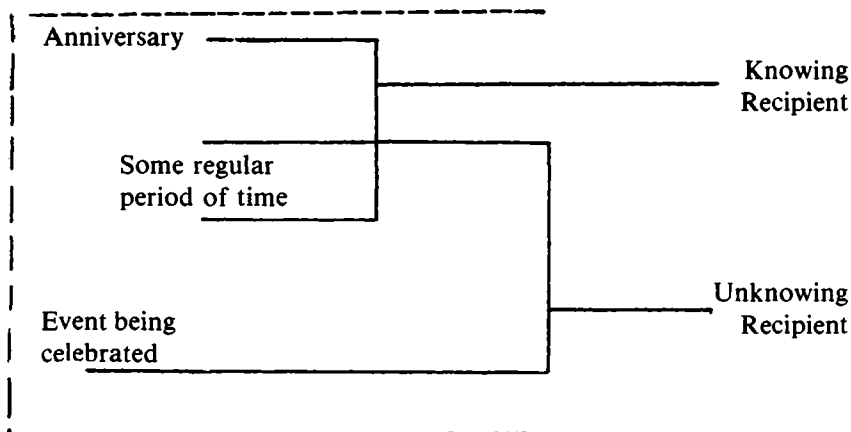
With the addition of this section to the sentence, the news that John has stopped smoking cigarettes is transformed into a different piece of news: that today is an anniversary of that event. Such an anniversary is a new event that none of the parties present, including Beth, need be expected to know about.

The structure of an anniversary makes it particularly appropriate as a solution to a problem such as that faced by John. An anniversary is constructed via the lamination<sup>13</sup> of events at two separate moments in time, an original event which becomes the object of celebration, and the anniversary itself. The two are related by the occurrence of some regular period of time between them.<sup>14</sup>



An anniversary is an appropriate object to call to the attention of someone who shared experience of the event celebrated by it with the speaker. More precisely, interest in the anniversary is contingent upon interest in the event being celebrated by it.<sup>15</sup> However, a party who knows of the original event need not be aware of the fact that a period of time appropriate for the location of an anniversary has passed. The laminated structure of the anniversary thus integrates items of common experience with novel information in a way particularly suited for the inclusion of a knowing recipient, such as Beth, in John's utterance.

Such a laminated structure also maintains the relevance of this section of the sentence for its original recipient. First, the initial report to him is incorporated within it as the lowest layer of the lamination. Second, the report of the anniversary continues to perform an action relevant to an unknowing recipient, the description of that original event. In particular, it specifies the time at which the event occurred, an item that a recipient presumed to be ignorant of that event would not be expected to know. Thus, though this section of the sentence is made appropriate to a new type of recipient, it maintains its relevance for its original recipient:<sup>16</sup>



In essence, each layer of the lamination locates an alternative type of recipient. Some demonstration is here provided that a cultural object emerging through a turn at talk might be selected for presentation at a particular moment because its structural properties permit the solution of interactive problems posed in the construction of the turn.

Other features of John's utterance provide support for the argument that he is reshaping his sentence in order to make it appropriate to a new type of recipient.

First, an alternative to the section of his sentence actually produced at this point is begun and abandoned:

John: I-uh: one week ago t'da:y.

The word beginning, "1-", plus the hesitation, "uh:", plus the second word "one" correspond to what Jefferson (1974a, p 186) has described as the Error Correction Format. The word begun by the initial fragment<sup>17</sup> constitutes an alternative to the second word, which corrects it. "Last week" and "last Monday" are possible alternatives to the section actually produced. An expression beginning with "last" in this position would do more than simply specify the time the event occurred. It would argue for the status of the speaker's statement as news to an unknowing recipient by explicitly telling the recipient that it happened since they were last in contact with each other.<sup>18</sup> In view of Don's "yea:h," which neither acknowledges the newsworthiness of the event<sup>19</sup> nor requests elaboration of it, warranting what has just been said in this fashion may be a relevant act for the speaker to perform.

Such a section differs, however, from the one eventually selected in that it does not construct an action appropriate to a recipient already informed about the event being described. The rejection of such an alternative provides further support for the argument that John, faced with the task of making his utterance appropriate to a new type of recipient, reshapes the event being described through the utterance.

Other evidence that the anniversary, which redesigns the sentence for its new recipient, was not projected as an element of the sentence from its beginning is provided by the speaker's intonation, which locates surprise at the beginning of the section and places stress on the revelation of the anniversary:

John:        l-uh: one-one week ago t'da:y.

The discovery intonation at the beginning of the section is placed in contrast to a possible beginning without such stress. Specifically, the first and second "one" differ most noticeably in their intonation so that the change in intonation is marked to be heard as the warrant for the restart. Such a structure both announces that something unanticipated has been discovered and locates where that discovery occurred. Recipients are thus informed not only that some new basis for listening is being offered but that this new information was discovered after the first section of the utterance. Such an announcement would be particularly important for a party, such as Beth, who has been located as an unlikely recipient to the speaker's sentence by its first section.

One further issue relevant to the anniversary can be briefly considered. Though the discovery of the anniversary solves the problem of including a knowing recipient in the turn, it is not in fact the characteristic way that speakers solve this problem. More precisely, the situation of a speaker in the simultaneous presence of both a knowing and an unknowing recipient is one that recurs regularly and systematically in conversation,<sup>20</sup> and speakers have available to them some standard procedures for dealing with the structural problems generated by it. For example, speakers moving their gaze from unknowing to knowing recipients regularly display uncertainty about some detail of the event being described to the unknowing recipient and request that the knowing recipient verify its accuracy.<sup>21</sup> Such a standard solution could have been employed in the present case. For example, on turning to Beth John could have produced the time that the event took place (as he indeed began to do at the beginning of the section) but indicated that it was problematic by pronouncing it with rising intonation, i.e., "last week?" or "last Monday?" In a certain

sense a solution of this type would have been simpler than the one actually used, since it would have involved less modification of the emerging utterance. John's choice of an atypical procedure for including a knowing recipient in his turn, and further a procedure that is not the most simple available for performing the tasks posed, invites speculation as to why his particular solution was chosen.

One other aspect of this data might be relevant to the speaker's seeing that a regular period of time, appropriate for the location of an anniversary, has passed. Sacks and his colleagues have shown that one feature implicated in word selection in conversation is punning relationships of various types.<sup>22</sup> Several utterances after John completes the sentence being examined here, he states that he is taking a course on how to stop smoking. Concerning the course Beth says, "Yeh, it wz like Seventh Day Adventist." The regular time relationship necessary for the discovery of the anniversary, seven days, is thus available in the scene being described.

Once the anniversary has been found it has a preferred status for being told, since it is the latest news, the original event being news that is already a week old.

The turn until this point thus provides some demonstration that the gaze of a speaker locates the party being gazed at as a recipient of his utterance. Evidence has also been provided that a speaker in natural conversation has the capacity to modify the emerging meaning of his sentence as he is producing it in accord with the characteristics of its current recipient. Through use of such procedures the appropriateness of the utterance for its recipient of the moment can be maintained and demonstrated. Though the sentence originally begun proposed that its recipient had no knowledge of the event being described within it, by transforming that event and locating a new piece of news the speaker was able to make the sentence appropriate to one who shared experience of it with him.

In constructing his turn the speaker thus demonstrates precise orientation toward the particularities of his recipient. However, within conversation sentences are not just addressed to a recipient but constructed to be actually heard by a hearer. Therefore it might be expected that the speaker would also be attentive to his recipient's orientation toward him.

One possible feature of the hearer's behavior toward which the speaker might direct his attention is the hearer's gaze, perhaps in terms of whether or not the hearer is gazing toward the speaker. However, the analytic problem is not simply to propose categorizable variations in the hearer's gaze, but rather to demonstrate the relevance of specific alternatives. not for the analyst. but for the participants themselves, who are



engaged in the task of constructing the turn.<sup>23</sup> Further, even the most casual examination of actual conversation reveals that in the course of a turn hearers regularly look both at the speaker and away from him, changing their gaze as the turn progresses. Given the presence of both alternatives within the turn it seems difficult to establish the special importance of either.

The work of Sacks and his colleagues on the sequential organization of conversation provides analytic resources with which these problems might be addressed. Sacks (1972) observes that—

Certain activities not only have regular places in some sequence where they do get done but may, if their means of being done is not found there, be said, by members, to not have occurred to be absent.

For example, the absence of a greeting may be noticed. . .

Observations such as these lead to a distinction between a “slot” and the “items” which fill it, and to proposing that certain activities are accomplished by a combination of some item and some slot.

The notion of slot serves for the social scientist to mark a class of relevance rules. Thus, if it can be said that for some assertable sequence there is a position in which one or more activities properly occur, or occur if they are to get done, then: The observability of either the occurrence or the nonoccurrence of those activities may be claimed by reference to having looked at the position and determined whether what occurs in it is a way of doing the activity. (p. 341)

If the turn at talk provides a slot for the hearer to gaze at the speaker then the problems stated above could be solved. First, the fact that the hearer looks both toward and away from the speaker during the course of the turn would pose no particular analytic difficulty. Rather than searching the turn as a whole one could look at that particular slot to see whether the hearer is gazing at the speaker. Second, the presence of such a slot within the turn would establish the relevance of this event so that one could locate its nonoccurrence as well as its occurrence, while yet

providing places in the turn where the hearer could gaze elsewhere than at the speaker without failing to bring about this event. Third, such a slot would establish the relevance of this action for the participants themselves. The presence or absence of the hearer's gaze in this slot would constitute different events for the parties with different consequences for the subsequent course of their interaction and the construction of the turn.<sup>24</sup>

The following will be proposed as a rule describing where in the turn a hearer should be gazing at the speaker.

*Rule 2: When a speaker gazes at a recipient he should make eye contact with that recipient.*

Complete discussion of the operations and implications of this rule is beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>25</sup>

However, one feature of it relevant to the construction of the utterance being examined in this paper will be briefly noted. A speaker can request the gaze of a recipient by producing a phrasal break, such as a restart or a pause, in his utterance. After such a phrasal break nongazing recipients regularly bring their gaze to the speaker.<sup>26</sup> Consider the following, where a speaker who gazes at a nongazing recipient immediately produces a phrasal break just after which the recipient begins to move his gaze to the speaker.<sup>27</sup> (The gaze of the hearer is transcribed in the same way as the gaze of the speaker, but plotted below the utterance.)

G.50:(T)05:30

Clacia: . . . X \_\_\_\_\_ , , ,  
           'N he c' a- he calls me a Vassar sno:b.  
 Dianne: . . . . . X \_\_\_\_\_

G.26:(T)18:45

Beth: . . . . X \_\_\_\_\_  
           Michael- Daniel's fa-scinated with elephants.  
 Ann: . . . . X \_\_\_\_\_

Lee: . . . . . X \_\_\_\_\_  
 Can you bring-? (0.2) Can you bring  
 Ray: . . . . .

Lee: \_\_\_\_\_  
 me here that nylon?  
 Ray: . . . . . X \_\_\_\_\_

The fact that the speaker will initiate a remedy if the situation described by Rule 2 does not occur provides some demonstration of the orientation of the participants themselves to the features specified by the rule.

The application of Rule 2 to the construction of John's utterance will now be investigated, beginning with its first section:

John: . . , , . . . . . Don , , , . Don  
 I gave, I gave up smoking ci<sup>g</sup>arettes:: =  
 Don: . . X \_\_\_\_\_

Don is the recipient toward whom John gazes during the production of this section. At one point within it the conditions specified in Rule 2 are not satisfied as the speaker gazes at a nongazing recipient. When this happens John quickly withdraws his gaze, returning it to Don only after Don has begun to gaze at him. The act of actively moving gaze away from a nongazing recipient is consistent with the argument that the speaker is oriented toward the features of Rule 2.

This section also contains a restart. While that restart fails to immediately secure Don's gaze, the expectation that it would may be one reason why John brings his gaze to Don shortly after its production. Some evidence that this might be the case is provided by the speaker's pattern of gaze (marked with dots and commas) over the restart. Just before the restart John, who had been moving his gaze toward Don, begins instead to move it away from him. Immediately after the restart his gaze once more starts to move toward Don.

For the next section of the sentence John moves his gaze from Don to Beth. According to Rule 2 a speaker should expect to gaze at a gazing recipient. However, the structure of the utterance until this point provides no basis for John to expect Beth to be gazing at him, and indeed some reason to expect that she is not doing so. As was seen earlier in this paper Beth was not located as an appropriate recipient to the sentence by its first section.

As John moves his eyes to Beth he produces a standard request for the gaze of a recipient, a phrasal break, "1-uh:". It may be noted that the production of this fragment occupies the precise time it takes the speaker

to move his gaze from one recipient to the other so that the next section of the sentence begins just as the gaze of the speaker reaches his new recipient. Such precision may not be accidental but rather seems to be achieved through the speaker's choice and control over the sounds he produces. The initial part of the fragment ends in a glottal stop, a sound of limited duration that could not be extended to occupy the entire time it takes the speaker to produce his head turn. However, to this sound is added another, "uh:", which has no fixed length of time for its production but rather can be pronounced for variable lengths of time. The speaker's production of this sound is noticeably long (as indicated by the transcriber's colon after it), this extra length providing the means to extend the fragment until the head move has been completed. This suggests that the speaker has the ability to precisely control events even within the production of a single phonetic unit in order to accomplish social tasks posed in the construction of the turn.<sup>28</sup>

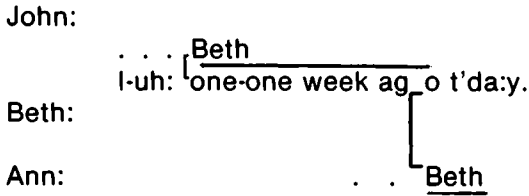
However, when John's eyes reach Beth he finds that, despite his phrasal break, she has not even begun to turn her eyes toward him. The first word John produces in this situation is terminated with a glottal stop and made the first part of a restart, "one-one", producing another phrasal break. Beth still does not bring her eyes to John and when the end of this section of the utterance arrives, remains involved in the task of eating:

John: . . . Beth \_\_\_\_\_  
 I-uh: {one-one week ago t'da:y.  
 Beth:

Despite John's careful and precise work to redesign his utterance for Beth, and to signal that her gaze is needed, Beth's failure to bring her gaze to John means that he does not make eye contact with her as specified in Rule 2. Instead the speaker is gazing at a recipient who is not gazing at him.

If Rule 2 is to be satisfied the speaker should now work to change the existing situation to one in which his utterance is being addressed to a recipient who is gazing back at him.

Though the restart does not secure Beth's gaze, another party, Ann, does begin to attend the turn at this point. During the initial sections of John's sentence, and indeed for some time previous to it, Ann has displayed lack of orientation to the conversation, staring to her side with a fixed middle-distance look. However, shortly after the restart Ann abruptly raises her head and moves her gaze to the recipient of the present utterance, Beth:



Ann's abrupt movement of her gaze occurs in the standard position for a next move to a signal that the gaze of a recipient is being requested, i.e. shortly after a restart. However, Ann does not direct her gaze to the speaker but instead to another participant, Beth. Several features of John's utterance are relevant to Ann's choice of Beth over John as the appropriate object for her gaze. First, as was seen above, the sentence at this point is being addressed to a knowing recipient, Beth, rather than to an unknowing recipient such as Ann. By the time Ann begins to move her gaze this has been displayed in a number of ways: by the replacement of "I-" with "one", by the discovery intonation of the second "one" and by the projection of an object to be recognized by a recipient provided by "one" week. . . ." as opposed to "a week. . ." or "last week. . .", which propose no such recognition.<sup>29</sup> Ann has thus been provided with resources permitting her to locate not only that she is not the current addressed recipient of the utterance but also who that addressed recipient is. Second, John's sentence is projected to come to a possible completion point rather soon after Beth brings her gaze to the turn. "I gave up smoking cigarettes one week ago today" is an adequately complete sentence and, especially in view of the idiom used to construct the anniversary, such a unit could be projected at the point Ann brings her gaze to the turn. Ann's gaze reaches Beth one word before the completion of this unit. If the floor were to pass to the speaker's addressed recipient at this point Ann would be positioned to be gazing at the new speaker.

Two different parties, John and Ann, are now gazing at Beth, who is returning the gaze of neither. If these two parties were gazing at each other instead of Beth the conditions specified in Rule 2 would be satisfied: the speaker would be gazing at a gazing recipient. Because of Beth's repeated failure to bring her gaze to him John might now be prepared to seek the gaze of another party. Ann, who has just displayed her orientation to the turn by bringing her gaze to its field of action, is a possible candidate. However, while the task of securing a gazing recipient might lead John to switch his gaze from Beth to Ann no comparable motivation exists for Ann to move her gaze from Beth to John, especially since she is not his current addressed recipient.

Less than a syllable after Ann begins to move into orientation John withdraws his gaze from Beth. He then brings it to Ann, reaching her after she has demonstrated her co-participation in the field of action constructed through his turn by gazing at Beth, but before the turn has reached its next projected completion. Note that the time required to reach this completion point has been extended through the elongation of a sound within “t’da:y”:

John:	. . .	Beth	_____	,	. . .	{	Ann	}
	l-uh:	{	one- one week ag	o	t’da:	{	y.	}
Beth:								
Ann:							}	_____
								Beth

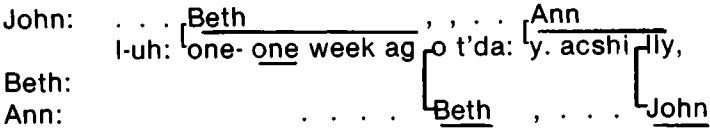
Though John is now gazing at Ann rather than at Beth he is still gazing at a recipient who is not gazing at him. His move has, however, made it relevant for Ann to bring her gaze to him. As she is the party being gazed at by the speaker, Rule 2 now applies to her rather than to Beth.

Features such as those described in Rule 2 not only provide guides for the participants’ action but also resources for viewing and appropriately interpreting the scene in which they are engaged. The viewings provided by such a structure are available to all relevant parties. Thus the opening part of this section provides Ann with the resources to see that Beth is its addressed recipient. However, when she looks at Beth she as well as the speaker can see that Beth is not prepared to take the floor at that point. When the speaker then brings his gaze to Ann this same structure enables her to see not merely where the speaker is gazing but where she herself should be gazing. The possibility of such recognition and interpretation makes nonconformity to the rule a meaningful event capable of organizing subsequent action.

John’s shift in gaze thus permits Ann to recognize that she should bring her gaze to him. However, no time is left within the turn for Ann to perform this action. As indicated not only by its grammatical structure but also by its falling terminal intonation (indicated in the transcript by a period), John’s utterance has come to a recognizable completion.

If the length of the turn could be extended, Ann might have the time to move her gaze from Beth to John. However, providing the turn with such time for maneuvering requires that the sentence being constructed through it be extended past the completion point presently proposed for it.<sup>30</sup>

Ann is given time to bring her gaze to John through the addition of the word “actually” to his sentence:



The features specified in Rule 2 are thus achieved by the collaborative action of speaker and hearer. While hearer brings her gaze to the speaker, speaker provides time in his turn for her to accomplish this task by adding a new word to his sentence. The turn now reaches completion with the speaker gazing at a gazing hearer.

An event that does not occur at this point is also relevant to the addition of this segment. “Acshilly” is not overlapped by any talk from Beth though a turn transition point for the section of the utterance addressed to her has just been passed. Her lack of action here provides some validation of the readings made earlier about her participation in the turn. From this perspective the addition of a new segment to John’s sentence can be seen not only as a way of providing time within the turn for Ann to move but also as a means of avoiding the gap that would result from Beth’s failure to take the floor from John.<sup>31</sup>

When John moves his gaze from Beth to Ann, the task of reconstructing his utterance so that it is made appropriate to his recipient of the moment is posed a second time. Unlike Beth, but like Don, Ann did not share with John experience of the event he is describing. Thus, a constraint on the segment to be added to the sentence to provide for her inclusion is that it make the proposed recipient of the sentence an unknowing recipient.

“Acshilly” accomplishes this task. Through its addition the discovery of the anniversary is transformed into a report about it. Rather than being asked to recognize the anniversary the recipient is told that in fact the event being marked by it did occur a week ago. The addition of “acshilly” thus again reconstructs the emerging meaning of John’s sentence so that once more it becomes appropriate to its recipient of the moment.

A state of appropriate mutual orientation between speaker and hearer having been achieved, a no gap-no overlap transfer of the floor to the recipient obtained through this process occurs:

John: I gave, I gave up smoking cigarettes::. =

- Don: = Yea:h,
- John: I-uh: one-one week ago t'da:y.  
acshilly,
- Ann: Rilly? en y'quit fer good?

In the course of its production the unfolding meaning of John's sentence is reconstructed twice, a new segment is added to it, and another is deleted prior to its production but replaced with a different segment. The sentence eventually produced emerges as the product of a dynamic process of interaction between speaker and hearer as they mutually construct the turn at talk. The fact that a single coherent sentence emerges, and that this was apparently the sentence being constructed all along, is among the more striking features of this process.

The turn at talk provides an area where nontrivial social, linguistic and cultural phenomena, as well as such nonvocal phenomena as gaze, can be analyzed as elements of a single integrated process. Such an integrated perspective upon this field of action might be not only valuable but necessary for the accurate description of the phenomena under analysis. For example, in traditional linguistics it has been assumed that the analysis of sentences can be performed upon examples isolated from the process of interaction within which they naturally emerge. The analysis presented here has argued, to the contrary, that the sentence actually produced within a particular turn at talk is determined by a process of interaction between speaker and hearer. Their collaborative work in constructing the turn systematically modifies the emerging structure of the sentence, adding to it, deleting from it, and changing its meaning. Insofar as this is the case, the procedures utilized to construct sentences are, at least in part, interactive procedures.

## NOTES

1. The present line of inquiry is directly motivated by the research of Sacks, Jefferson, and Schegloff into the structure of human conversation. Not only has their work on turn taking (1974) prepared the ground for the investigation of the interactive organization of the turn itself, but they also have provided and continue to provide illuminating analyses of the internal structure of the turn. See for example Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977) and Jefferson (1974b).

I am most grateful to Harvey Sacks and Gail Jefferson for a critical reading of an earlier version of this analysis which led me to substantially change it. My deep indebtedness to



them extends, however, to their work, ideas, and teaching, in general and in detail, without which my own attempts to analyze the present phenomena would not even be possible. I alone am responsible for the problems with the present analysis that remain.

2. For example, Lyons (1969) states that—

linguistic theory, at the present time at least, is not, and cannot, be concerned with the production and understanding of utterances in their actual situations of use...but with the structure of sentences considered in abstraction from the situations in which actual utterances occur. (p. 98)

See also Chomsky (1965, pp. 3-4). Curiously enough, some researchers interested in the sequencing of turns (though not Sacks and his colleagues) have also argued that the interaction of speaker and hearer is irrelevant to the construction of the turn itself. Thus Coulthard and Ashby (1975) state:

The basic unit of all verbal interaction is the exchange. An exchange consists minimally of two successive utterances: one speaker says something and a second says something in return. Anything less is not interactive. (p. 140)

3. In linguistics a distinction is frequently made between utterances and sentences and it is argued that "sentences never occur in speech" (Lyons 1972, p. 61). Rather:

As a grammatical unit, the sentence is an abstract entity in terms of which the linguist accounts for the distributional relations holding within utterances. In this sense of the term, utterances never consist of sentences, but of one or more segments of speech (or written text) which can be put into correspondence with the sentence generated by the grammar. (Lyons 1969, p. 176)

Such a distinction may be useful analytically. For example, in the following the word "put" occurs twice in the stream of speech but only once in a unit on another level of organization necessary for properly understanding that stream of speech:

Clacia: He pu:t uhm, (0.7) Tch! put crabmeat  
on th'bo::dum.  
[G.50:03:45]

The processes being examined in this paper change, in Lyon's terminology, both the utterance and the underlying sentence abstractable from it.

4. All data consists of videotapes of actual conversations recorded in a range of natural settings. Though the present paper focuses upon a very few illustrative examples to demonstrate particular processes, the total corpus for this analysis consists of over fifty hours of tape recorded jointly by myself and Marjorie Goodwin. Tape G.26 was recorded by George Kuetemeyer and I am indebted to him for permitting us to use it.

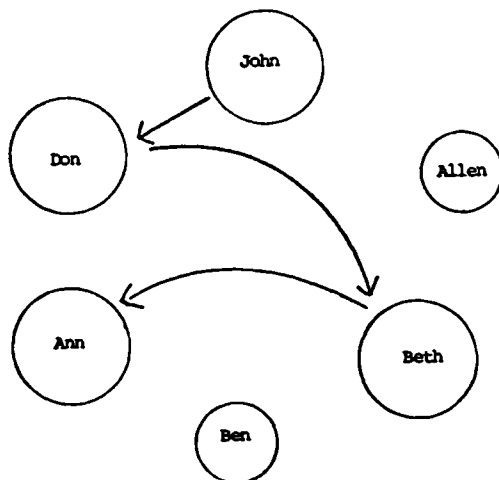
The reference cited for each example, i.e., "G.26:(T)8:50," provides (1) the tape number from which the example was taken, and (2) the place on the tape (measured from an arbitrary zero point either in minutes and seconds or in counter revolutions) where the example is found.

Data cited in the present paper is drawn from the following sources:

- |                                       |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| G. 26<br>(1/28/73, West Philadelphia) | Dinner conversation<br>of two young couples.   |
| G.50<br>(7/4/73, suburban Pittsburgh) | Conversation between<br>two middle-class women<br>during a Fourth of July<br>block party.                        |
| G.75<br>(8/12/73, central Michigan)   | Conversation between<br>several families at a<br>picnic thrown by a lodge of<br>the Loyal Order of the<br>Moose. |
| G.85<br>(7/29/73, central Ohio)       | Conversation between three<br>young couples at a backyard picnic.  |

5. John and Beth's two children, Allen and Ben, are also present. Their actions will not be considered further in the present analysis. This should not be taken to imply, however, that their actions are in no way relevant to the events being examined.

6. The route taken by the speaker's gaze as it moves from Don to Beth to Ann can be seen most clearly with a simple diagram. The participants are seated around a circular table.



The patterns regularly utilized by speakers to move their gaze from recipient to recipient in conversation have not yet been systematically investigated. It is, however, perhaps relevant in this data that the movement of John's gaze does not follow a single direction, i.e., moving from right to left, or clockwise or counterclockwise, pausing at each recipient en route. Rather, a marked change in direction is found. He gazes to his right to look at Don but then to his left to look at Beth and then Ann. Were a single direction or clearly recognizable order utilized, that might project from early in the turn that other recipients would eventually be gazed at in a particular sequence. Such recognizable projection would enable future addressees to orient to both the sequence as a whole and their approaching place in it. (For some consideration of how the structure of 'rounds,' as found for example in introductions, might provide organization for the activity of all present, including those not yet reached in the sequence, see Sacks 1966, Fall Quarter, Lecture 1, p.2.) The unavailability of such a recognizable pattern in the present data might be relevant to the fact (to be examined later in this paper) that neither the second nor the third addressee is gazing at the speaker when his gaze reaches them.

7. The data is transcribed according to a notation system for utterances developed by Gail Jefferson and a system for coding gaze direction developed by myself. The symbols most important to the analysis in the present paper are provided in Appendix II. I am indebted to Gail Jefferson for audio-transcribing the tape from which John's utterance is taken.

8. Strong empirical demonstration of the relevance of gaze to face-to-face communication is provided by the work of Kendon (1967), Goffman (1963, 1967), Argyle and Cook (1976), Schefflen (1974), Ekman and Freisen (1974) and Exline (1974).

9. Ways in which the analysis participants make of each other's information states are relevant to the organization of conversation have received considerable study. See for example Schegloff 1972, Sacks 1971 (especially his class lectures of 10-19-71 and 10-22-71), 1974, Sacks and Schegloff this volume, Jefferson 1973, Labov 1970, Labov and Fanshell 1977, Goffman 1974, and Terasaki 1976.

10. Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) have noted that "perhaps the most general principle which particularizes conversational interaction [is] that of RECIPIENT DESIGN." (p. 727). For further consideration of this issue see Garfinkel 1967.

11. What is at issue is not the actual state of Don's knowledge but rather the speaker's analysis of what is known by his recipient. Further, participants in conversation have access to systematic resources for affirming, denying or negotiating that analysis (on this issue see works cited in note 9). For detailed study of specific ways in which participants analyze what their co-participants know, display that analysis to each other, and utilize that analysis in the detailed production of their talk, see Schegloff 1972.

12. Sacks (10-19-71) notes that tellables and news of various types are organized so that one should tell particular others about some piece of news at the first opportunity. This accounts in part for the phenomenon that a party can be asked about someone that he hasn't just seen and nevertheless state that the asked-about party is "all right." If some major event had occurred the assumption is that one would have been called and told about it. For spouses the class of events that one member of the couple should tell the other is extremely large, and in fact if a spouse tells others some piece of news that he could have told his partner but didn't, this can constitute grounds for complaint:

Indeed, pretty much anything you would properly tell anybody else, you will have or should have told your spouse on the first occasion you could have—which will characteristically be

before you've had occasion to, in public with your spouse, be telling someone else. It would plainly be bizarre, seeing your spouse everyday, to, on a Saturday night in the company of others, announce that you got a raise on Wednesday. She might well figure that something is up in that you didn't tell her that. (Ibid:7-8)

Sack's analysis makes explicit some of the structures enabling all participants in the present data to legitimately see that Beth should know that John has given up smoking cigarettes.

This analysis also provides a systematic basis for the co-presence of knowing and unknowing recipients. Speakers regularly find themselves telling a story to unknowing recipients in the presence of a knowing recipient, their spouse. The rules for telling events to relevant others thus run into conflict with the general rule that one should not tell someone something they already know. This leads to

a modification of the general rule "don't tell someone what you've already told them," a modification for spouses, which says "in the presence of a variety of people, relax the don't-tell rule in the case of spouses," i.e., you can tell a story to a variety of people including your spouse that you've already told only your spouse. (Ibid:9)

The simultaneous presence of both unknowing and knowing recipients is thus a systematic product of particular conversational structures. Despite the fact that the rule that a speaker shouldn't tell his recipient something that the recipient already knows can be relaxed in such cases, this situation poses particular problems for the interaction of the participants, some of which are being examined in the present data.

13. The analytic notion of lamination as a structural feature of events and actions is discussed in Goffman (1974, pp. 82, 156-157).

14. An interesting discussion of how measurements producing "round numbers" can construct distinct cultural phenomena (a "four-minute mile" for example) is provided by Lotz (1968). Jefferson (1973, pp. 65-66) provides some analysis of how participants in conversation orient to and utilize this phenomenon in the construction of their talk. Gusfield (1976, p. 20) notes how numbers that are recognizably not round, such as percentages given in decimals, may be employed by a scientist to demonstrate "meticulous attention to details. . .thereby avoiding a judgment by the reader that he has been less than scrupulous."

15. For example, few other than a particular couple have any interest in the anniversary of their meeting.

16. Sacks (1966, Fall Quarter Lecture 1:18-19) notes that in multi-party conversation in a nonaddressed recipient is not expected to behave as an overhearer to the exchange between the speaker and his addressed recipient but rather can be held responsible for knowing what happened in that exchange.

17. Jefferson (1974a, pp. 185-186) provides evidence that participants in conversation do orient to such fragments as word-beginnings and analyzes the procedures utilized for such recognition.

18. On this issue see Sacks (1974, p. 341). The alternative in fact produced at this point also has this relevance. Sacks (1-15-70:31) provides some analysis of the use of the word "today" in reports and announcements. He notes that this term does not simply stand in

contrast to other names for days as a way of specifying a time reference but rather warrants the report as news.

19. The relevance of a recipient's acknowledging the newsworthiness of an event and ways in which this is done have been investigated by Terasaki (1976, pp. 4-9).
20. Some structural reasons for why this should be the case were noted in note 12.
21. For a more complete examination of this process see Goodwin (1977).
22. See for example Sacks (1973), Jefferson (1974a, pp. 189-190) and Sack's first three Fall 1971 class lectures.
23. On this issue see Sacks 1963, Schegloff 1972, Schegloff and Sacks 1973 (especially p. 290), Garfinkel 1967, and Sudnow 1967.
24. With respect to these issues see also Schegloff's analysis (1968, p. 1083) of the property he refers to as "conditional relevance":

By conditional relevance of one item on another we mean: given the first, the second is expectable; upon its occurrence it can be seen to be a second item to the first; upon its nonoccurrence it can be seen to be officially absent—all this provided by the occurrence of the first item.

25. The operation of this rule is more completely described in Goodwin 1977. Among other things, the rule provides the participants with different rights to look at each other within the turn, with the speaker being expected to gaze only at a gazing hearer, while the hearer may gaze at both a gazing and a nongazing speaker. This distribution of permissible lookings may account in some measure for the repeated finding that hearers look at speakers more than speakers look at hearers (see for example Exline 1974, p. 74; Argyle 1969, p. 107; Allen and Guy 1974, pp. 139-140; Kendon 1967, p. 26; and Nielsen 1964). Rule 2 also establishes a preferred sequencing for the gaze of the parties at turn beginning, with the hearer expected to bring his gaze to the speaker before speaker brings his gaze to hearer. Sequencing in the opposite order produces a situation where the speaker is gazing at a nongazing hearer. This implication of the rule is consistent with the finding of Kendon (1967, p. 33) that a speaker looks away at the beginning of his utterance, while the hearer gazes toward the speaker there.

26. The actions of speaker and hearer constitute a type of summons-answer sequence. Schegloff (1968) has provided detailed analysis of such sequences and how they are employed to open conversations. Though the present sequence occurs within the turn, rather than at the beginning of a whole conversation, it possesses the properties described by Schegloff. For example, the absence of an answer from a hearer is a relevant event which may provide for recycling of the speaker's summons, and the speaker has the obligation to produce further talk after the summons is answered by the hearer. For more detailed examination of the present sequence see Goodwin 1977. The fact that a sequence originally analyzed as operative in the exchange of turns is also found to organize phenomena within the turn would seem to indicate that the structures noted and analyzed by Sacks and his colleagues operate quite generally and organize a very wide range of phenomena in conversation, and perhaps in human interaction in general.

27. The structure of this process raises doubts about the validity of such arguments as the following: "While. . .hesitations mark speaker uncertainty they have little utility for the listener" (Martin and Strange 1968, p. 474).

Hesitation phenomena, such as restarts and pauses, have received considerable study from psychologists. In such research, phrasal breaks are assumed to result from processes entirely internal to the speaker, such as anxiety, cognitive difficulty, or problems in en-

coding the utterance (see for example Goldman-Eisler 1961, p. 19; Boomer 1965, p. 148; Dittman 1974, p. 179; Henderson 1974, p. 122; Mahl 1959, p. 110). The present data raises an alternative possibility, specifically, that the actions of the hearer as well as the speaker might be relevant to the production of phrasal breaks by the speaker. It certainly cannot be argued that processes internal to the speaker are irrelevant to the production of phrasal breaks or that the hearer is implicated in the production of all phrasal breaks. However, in cases where the speaker's phrasal break is coordinated with specific actions of the hearer it would seem inadequate to attempt to specify either the distribution of phrasal breaks within the utterance or the processes providing for their occurrence without reference to the actions of the hearer. The present work thus complements a particular line of research in psychology by investigating interactively phenomena which have there been investigated from an individual perspective.

The general organization of repair in conversation has received considerable study from Sacks and his colleagues (see for example Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks 1977, Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974, Jefferson 1972, Schegloff 1972, Jefferson 1974a, and Sacks 1974).

28. Another example of this phenomenon is found at the end of the first section of John's sentence, where a no-gap transition to Don's "Yea:h," occurs in part because the final sound of the word "cigarettes::" is lengthened. Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) note that the end of a turn constructional unit "is in fact a consequential locus of articulatory variation" (p. 707), and indeed provides one systematic basis for the occurrence of overlap.

29. These alternatives differ also in their length. The sentence could have reached completion after "ago" if the speaker had begun this section of it with "a" rather than "one" ("I gave up smoking cigarettes a week ago"). However the idiom begun with "one" projects the inclusion of a specific time reference such as "today" after "ago." The speaker also might have specified the time with a still shorter phrase such as "last week" (and indeed, as was seen above, the cut-off "I" at the beginning of this section provides some indication that such an alternative was in fact begun but changed). If this is in fact the case the speaker in this example, faced with the task of securing a new recipient's gaze in this section has gone from a short unit ("last week"), skipped the next longest ("a week ago"), and found a longer one ("one week ago today"), providing more time in his sentence for his task to be accomplished. I am indebted to Gail Jefferson for bringing this progression to my attention.

30. The turn-taking rules of Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) explicitly provide for the possibility of a sentence being extended past its initial point of possible completion, and Sacks and his colleagues have provided considerable analysis of this phenomenon.

31. Jefferson (1973) has described

'utterance lengtheners' which indicate to the recipient that the utterance can have been completed so that he may begin to talk, while as well providing that the ongoing speaker has not stopped talking. This may be seen as a technique for specifically 'avoiding' . . . a pause between the utterance containing the problematic component and the recipients' response. (p 69)

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