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9 People Are Talking:
Conversation Analysis and
Symbolic Interaction
Deirdre Boden

When people come together, they talk. Not always, nor everywhere, but most of the time that's what they do. They talk in bed, on the phone, in the classroom, in the judge's chambers, in the physician's office, in jury deliberations and counselling sessions, on tea breaks and on airplanes, around the dinner table and across the boardroom, in crisis and in comfort. Talk is the stuff, the very sinew, of social interaction. The mundane or momentous talk of people in their everyday world is what conversation analysis studies. Where the fine-grain and fine-tuned rhythm of turns at talk spark, fan, and fuel interpersonal relations, business deals, labor negotiations, trade embargoes, disarmament agreements, there too is the stuff of history.

LANGUAGE AND MEANING

One way of characterizing talk, a favorite of mine, is as language-in-action, and it is here, as thought becomes action through language, that conversation analysis meets symbolic interaction (and vice versa). Symbolic interactionists have long been concerned with language, thought, meaning, shared symbols, and social acts. Even a minor review of these concepts lies beyond the scope of this chapter, but it is worth noting that these ideas form the core of Mead's symbolic and interactional perspective on mind, self, and society, and are at the heart of a general understanding of the symbolic interactionist enterprise. The role of language and meaning is central to all that flows from them; namely that the significant and shared symbols that constitute language give rise to thought, which in turn contributes to the consti-

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tution of the social self, which is, in its turn, possible only through social interaction, and so forth.

The elegance of these formulations turns on the dynamic axis of language and meaning. The very words "language" and "meaning"—particularly the latter—seem to conjure up symbolic interactionism for most American sociologists. Meanings are seen as the products of social interaction, "as creations that are found in and through the defining activities of people as they interact" (Blumer, 1969:5).

There are times, however, when the importance of language to meaning seems more slogan than practice within the field, and language becomes one of those taken-for-granted features of interactionist research. Lately, a number of writers have formulated theories and reviewed materials that would begin to make the connections between language and meaning more concrete (e.g., Perinbanayagam, 1985; Stone, 1982; MacCannell and MacCannell, 1982; Denzin, 1983), though deconstructionism would surely seem something of a cul-de-sac in this regard (cf. Denzin, 1987). Nevertheless, rarely are language and meaning per se objects of symbolic interactionist enquiry; rather they typically serve as resources out of which the essentially shared and social nature of society is conjured. This is rather perplexing given the foundational writings of Peirce and Dewey and Mead. The very writers who gave the world semiotics, abduction, significant symbols, and the social self seem to have spawned later studies in which sign, symbol, and meaning have become rather free-floating concepts adrift from the very behavioral grounding advocated by Mead and that early Chicago School tradition.

Part of the problem is that the very notions of language and meaning are quite abstract and bound up in the very same process we might expect them to elucidate. Both have long occupied modern philosophers and linguists, as well as social scientists, literary critics, writers, artists—indeed anyone who works directly with symbols and signs knows only too well the inherently delicate mediation between symbol and meaning. The poststructural upsurge of interest in discourse and text has both expanded and compounded the problem. Suddenly everything is discourse and there are texts everywhere. Yet we are really only a little closer to being able to provide definitive notions of how language works or how meaning gets done. A blizzard of philosophically erudite phrases from Derrida or Barthes or Foucault produce flurries of insight, to be sure (cf. Lamont, 1987), but an elaborate language game is also in progress. With much the same dense and deeply interwoven philosophical, historical, and cultural concepts that char-

acterized much of critical theory a decade earlier, poststructuralism is about to spin off into intellectual limbo, leaving many of us with an improved French vocabulary and yet another collection of relatively inaccessible volumes to fill our bookshelves and impress our less eclectic friends. This is not, I hasten to add, meant unkindly; much can be learned and has been, both from critical theory and poststructuralist thought.

But the real world is elsewhere, and both symbolic interactionists and conversation analysts know that. It is that shared insight, I would like to suggest, that makes a joint examination of our shared enterprise particularly worthwhile, and particularly at this juncture (or *conjoncture*, to continue the French mood) of intellectual history. Social life needs, as Hughes (1971) insisted, to be studied *in situ*, and the combined creative forces of symbolic interaction and conversation analysis can expose just that momentary yet recurrent and patterned quality of the world.

I am inclined to agree with Giddens's insistence (1984 *passim*), for example, that it is through the recurrent and recursive properties of interaction that actors both produce and reproduce social relationships across time and space. Moreover, it is the localized process of social interaction, as Blumer (1969) has characterized it, that reveals those routine activities as a fundamentally collaborative achievement in Garfinkel's (1967) sense. At another level, Collins has recently suggested that what he calls the *x* factor in ethnomethodology may well prove to be tied to emotion and, more, that "we have to come to grips with the grounding of language not only in cognitive aspects of social interaction but in what may turn out to be its emotional interactional substrate" (1986:1349).

It is hardly a coincidence that major European social theorists have, in the past ten years, turned explicitly to the findings of American micro-sociologists (e.g., Bourdieu, 1982; Giddens, 1976, 1979, 1984; Habermas, 1984) as a way of bringing agency back in from a structuralist chill (see also Ritzer, 1985). Borrowing again from Collins (1986), it is also clear that the boundaries of artificial intelligence cannot be much further expanded without a huge revision in current psychologically and cognitively oriented concepts of so-called intelligent systems (e.g., Suchman, 1987; Irons and Boden, 1988). The "scripts" and "plans" of cognitive theory dissolve as human meets machine (Suchman, 1987), and it is just that problem of shared worlds of meaning, situated action, and joint projects that currently defeats the most sophisticated of interactive software. Issues of relevance, context, tem-

porality, sequentiality, recursivity, and indexicality shape all human interaction.

Only students of the interaction order (Goffman, 1983) can discover and document both the delicacy and durability of that moment-by-moment social order.

LANGUAGE-IN-ACTION

The purpose of this paper is to explore the complementary frameworks of conversation analysis and symbolic interaction. Conversation analysis is, as many know, the creative invention of the late Harvey Sacks. Together with Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson, Sacks developed a field that, while certainly still small, has had considerable impact in sociology and, almost more, in communications, linguistics, and, to some extent, anthropology. As students of Goffman, both Sacks and Schegloff began to dabble with tape recordings in the early 1960s. Sacks was, first and foremost, interested in getting a handle on direct data of the world, and his orientation was remarkably similar to those earlier ethological urges of Mead. He was concerned with capturing concrete behavior and felt that it is only in the direct study of the world that sociology might be able to build a genuinely *scientific* view of that social environment (Sacks, 1984).

So, one of the charms and fascinations of conversation analysis is that it is highly empirical, grounded firmly in a form of data that can be repeatedly analyzed. The data are always comprised of either audio or video recordings of naturally occurring occasions of ordinary interaction, across any variety of social settings. At the heart of the enterprise is the insistence on observation and analysis that avoids the sort of categorization and idealized description of most social science, whether quantitative or qualitative (Sacks, 1963). Talk is instead offered as primary data of the *world-as-it-happens* (Boden, in press b), a direct handle on the details of the real world, actual events as they happen, such that, as Sacks proposed, observations can be repeated and "anyone else can go and see whether what was said is so" (1984:26). Of particular note here to students of the interaction order is the proposal—offered by both Sacks (1963) and Garfinkel (1967; Garfinkel et al., n.d.)—that in *describing* the world in detail we also come to know profoundly how that world is organized and ultimately what it consists of, again, in all its detail. The interest of conversation analysts is not in language in a linguistic sense but rather in talk as the very heart of social interaction, and in the formal properties of social order or "structures of social action" (Atkinson and Heritage, 1984). The materials

just happened to be conversations—given the nature and recent availability of magnetic recording tape in the early 1960s. A better name for the field would, in fact, probably be something like “interactional analysis,” as everything in the interaction, from a quiet in-breath to the entire spatial and temporal organization of the scene, may be subject to analysis. The essential difference, for purposes of our current discussion, is on the general insistence on recorded materials in naturally occurring interactional settings as opposed to any retrospectively constructed dialogue or researcher-mediated setting such as interviews or experimental settings.

Twenty-five years later, conversation analysis researchers continue to study a wide variety of recorded materials that encompass both verbal and nonverbal aspects of interaction and social setting. The orientation is essentially ethnomethodological, although that is not always explicitly acknowledged. Nevertheless, it is the force of Garfinkel's seminal ideas that drives conversation analytic exploration, in particular his recurrent insistence on the irremediably local production of social life. There is a good deal of internal debate about technical issues of just how best to track conversational phenomena, but a kind of universal fascination with what Garfinkel is fond of calling the “structures of practical action.” The more one studies interaction—and the more closely—the greater one's respect for the interactional domain as a kind of primordial site of sociation, to borrow both from Simmel and Schegloff (cf. Rawls, 1987). Indeed, much classic conversation analysis is highly Simmelian, given the concern to uncover the formal properties of interaction.¹

The primal site of interactional intimacy and interchange is at the heart of the conversation analytic enterprise. Conversational interaction is taken as having a “bedrock” in relation to all other forms of institutional and interpersonal exchange (Heritage and Atkinson, 1984: 12).

Talk as Data

Conversation analysis is probably the most micro of all micro-sociology. While linguists often use made-up examples of talk in their work, and ethnographers routinely reconstruct dialogue from field-notes, conversation analysis is always done with actual recordings and, as noted above, materials that have been gathered in natural settings of interaction.² The insistence on recordings centers on at least two practical factors: (1) it provides for near-endless reexamination of the primary data, and by anyone, and thus goes a long way to meeting typi-

cal issues of "interpretation," and (2) it is, as Heritage points out (1984b:236), quite difficult to imagine the invention by social scientists of data such as the following strip of talk.

E: Oh honey that was a lovely luncheon I shoulda ca:lled
 you s:soo :ner but *I*: l:- lo:ved it. It w's just
 M: .((f)) Oh::: ()
 E: deli:ghtfu :l
 M: Well I w's gla d you (came).-
 E: 'nd yer f: friends 're
 so da:xli:ng, =
 M: = *Oh*::: : it w'z:
 E: e-that *P* a:t isn'she a do: :ll?
 M: iYe h isn't she pretty,
 E: Oh: she's a beautiful girl.
 M: = Yeh *I* think she's a pretty gir l.
 E: En' that Reinam'n
 E: She SCA:RES me.=

(cited in Heritage, 1984b:236)

Neither informant nor ethnographer's reconstruction could hope to capture this detail nor, as Heritage also underlines, could it be heard again and again. The transcripts in this sort of work, developed by Gail Jefferson, are always considered as a technical convenience while the primary data is always the actual talk (see appendix). Most notable for general purposes here is the rather remarkable interactional density available at this level of analysis and transcription.

Conversation analysis has focused, since its inception, on what Heritage characterizes as the "primacy of mundane conversation" (1984b:238), which is to say on ordinary, everyday conversation. The payoff has been high. What linguists and communication specialists had long seen as a rather random and almost chaotic activity turns out to be a profoundly ordered and orderly social organization. Here I do not mean to be redundant; to propose that phenomena are ordered and orderly is the essence of reflexivity, in Garfinkel's (1967) sense—or

what Giddens calls the "duality of structure" in structuration theory (1984). Conversational phenomena are *ordered* in that, as we shall see shortly in this chapter, the very structure of turns *shapes* them in sequential and consequential ways. At the same time, talk is *ordering* in that participants collaborate in mobilizing those same ordered properties to achieve meaningful and purposive interaction. In this sense, social order and social structure are not external to action but rather produced *in and through the local structures of interaction*. This is the heart of the interaction order and it is here, I believe, that Goffman, Garfinkel, and Giddens meet.

Conversational turn-taking, for example, has been revealed to be a highly precise and predictable system for structuring interpersonal exchange, a kind of driving mechanism for all interaction. This finding, first demonstrated in the now seminal paper by Sacks and his colleagues in 1974, has held up across a range of languages and cultures such that it now seems quite reasonable to claim that this core machinery for talk transcends both language and culture (Moerman, 1977; Boden, 1983; Besnier, 1989). Turn-taking, moreover, appears to be an utterly central social act so that, however banal it may appear, it merits critical and careful analysis (cf. Collins, 1988).

The turn-taking model proposed by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) predicts that turn allocation and turn transfer will occur in a recursive cycling series of options which enable precise and timely coordination between interactants (Jefferson, 1973, 1983). As simple as this formulation may appear, the interactional consequences that flow from it are considerable. The structured and structuring mechanism of turn-taking "exerts pressure on the design of individual turns and hence on syntax" (Heritage, 1985:2). Moreover, the central operation of the turn-taking system has both enabling and constraining consequences for the overall interaction (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974; C. Goodwin, 1979; Schegloff, 1979; Levinson, 1983).

The early work of Sacks has led by now to a wide range of findings in the organization of talk, including such familiar features as greetings, questions/answers, invitations, topic initiations and transitions, laughter, interruptions, and so forth. A full review of these studies is hardly germane here,³ but it may be useful to note two central theoretical assumptions in all conversation analytic work, and two clear strains in current research. The organizational features of conversation are treated as structures in their own right and are taken to operate—like other social structural factors—individually of specific actors,

psychological dispositions, or attributions of particular individuals. That is not to say, of course, that there isn't variation across individuals, but rather that these conversational structures are "context free." Secondly and simultaneously, the structures of talk are assumed to be "context sensitive" in the sense that their instantiation at particular moments and in particular contexts, as well as at specific points in interactional time, constitutes that moment and shapes that interaction (see also Wilson, 1982; Giddens, 1984; Boden, in press a). Again, this is not to say that much talk does not run off as routine and non-problematic, but that "routine" is itself an interactional accomplishment, as both ethnomethodologists and symbolic interactionists have long known (see also Maynard, 1984; Schegloff, 1986, 1987; Wilson, in press).

Conversation analysts have long been interested in the systematic ways in which one turn (or turn component) predicates the next in sequential and interactionally consequential ways. Schegloff (1980), for example, has demonstrated the systematic and thereby highly stable manner in which interactants project a question by saying, in effect, "Can I ask you a question?" Conventional social science logic would find such an analysis trivial, assuming that what would follow such an opening gambit would be the question itself. Instead, in finely accomplished ways, what follows is *another "preliminary"* as actors routinely then produce a further frame of reference, typically a context for the question that follows. Schegloff went on to note that the organization of "preliminaries" in conversation—to a question, an offer, a story, a denial, and so forth—shows how the "sequential machinery" of turn-taking is, through and through, an interactional accomplishment. Moreover, hearers are clearly oriented to this projected organization. It is, I would suggest, in this way that meaning—as a cognitive construct—becomes empirically available for analysis. What Heritage calls the intersubjective architecture of talk (1984b:284) provides a "framework in which speakers can rely on the *positioning* of what they say to contribute to the *sense* of what they say as an action" (1984b:261, emphasis in original). This is, with more analytic precision, Blumer's general notion that social interaction entails a fitting together of lines of action such that group life can be brought off as joint action. Moreover, as Heritage has also forcefully argued, conversational structures are additionally context *shaping* and context *renewing* in that they both organize the local flow of interaction and thereby also create the renewed conditions for further exchange. In-

deed, it is reasonable to argue that it is through just such structured and structuring properties of interaction that social order is possible at all.

Current research in conversation analysis moves along two intertwined and complementary strands. Basic research continues into the fine-grained structures of talk, analyzing both the analytic and formal properties of turns and their connective tissues such as pauses, uhms, overlaps, and chuckles, as well as the myriad nonvocal and gestural displays that accompany the briefest of face-to-face exchange (Pomerantz, 1984; Heritage, 1984a; Schegloff, 1986; Jefferson, Sacks, and Schegloff, 1986; Wilson and Zimmerman, 1986; Houtkoop-Steenstra, 1987). The organization of more topic-related features have also begun to receive the same analytic attention, though it must be noted that that very density of interactional detail noted earlier makes the establishment of apparently simple issues like topic boundaries very tricky indeed (Maynard, 1980; Button and Casey, 1984; Maynard and Zimmerman, 1984; de Fornel, 1986, 1987; Boden and Bielby, 1986; Bergmann, 1987).

The second stage of work that has emerged in the past ten years or so has moved researchers into a more varied range of settings of talk and interaction and, in the process, into a variety of different occasions of turn-taking as well. Some of the earliest work was Zimmerman and West's (1975) on gender differences in conversation (see also West and Zimmerman, 1983, 1987), which West later extended in her research on doctor-patient interaction (1984). Medical settings have become a considerable area of research more generally (Heath, 1981, 1984, 1986; Frankel, 1984; ten Have, 1987, *in press*), as have legal and judicial settings (Atkinson and Drew, 1979; Atkinson, 1982; Lynch, 1982; Maynard, 1984, 1988), and a variety of other institutional areas such as classrooms, learning disability clinics, crisis intervention services, and so forth (e.g., McHoul, 1978; Mehan, 1979; Maynard and Marlaire, 1987). Research has also expanded into organizational and work settings (Zimmerman, 1984; Meehan, 1986; Anderson, Hughes, and Sharrock, 1987; Whalen and Zimmerman, 1987; Suchman, 1987; Boden, *in press a*) and into areas utilizing media materials as data (Greatbatch, 1982; Atkinson, 1984; Molotch and Boden, 1985; Heritage and Greatbatch, 1986; Clayman, 1988; Halkowski, 1988).

Throughout all, researchers working with everyday conversational materials have uncovered a veritable gold mine of "structures of social action" (Atkinson and Heritage, 1984); precise and patterned proce-

dures for producing talk that reveal, in their instantiation, the sort of fine-grained order in the social world that so amazed early naturalists in the nineteenth century as they began to systematically observe the natural environment. This is, I believe, the fascination of talk for anyone who has taken the time to slow down the spinning world of interaction and watch the effects. And, they *are* "effects" in that it is the essential reflexivity and indexicality of language-in-action that produces that density of interaction alluded to above. The structures of social action studied in this manner are locally managed mechanisms that simultaneously structure and transform the interaction.

Close analysis of everyday conversation reveals just that coordination of action Mead and Blumer were so sensitive to, and locates it precisely in the orientation of one actor to another in the most pervasive of all social acts. Language and meaning come together as talk. It is, as Schegloff suggests, through analyzing discourse as an achievement rather than a text that we can discover "the contingency of real things" (1982:89). Moreover, it is by treating language-in-action as a topic of enquiry that we can begin to trace out just how thought becomes action through language, and thus learn rather precisely what "meaning" comes to mean in and through interaction. Talk is, I am suggesting, language-in-action. Thus I am proposing that the symbolic interaction that is *thought*, in Mead's sense, becomes quite concretely available, both for analysis and further theorizing, through the fine-grained activities of talk in interaction.

TRACKING THE INTERACTION ORDER

Language and meaning are practical matters. That is to say, academic theorizing apart, they present and resolve pressing and omnipresent problems in everyday human intercourse. There is a temptation to characterize much of daily life as "ritual" or "routine," and much of the very language of social science contributes to this notion. Yet a return to Mead reminds us that each social act is produced in a continuous present in terms of a never-to-be-arrived-at future. Habit, to be sure, plays a part, but the process of meaning is ongoing, varied, and indeterminate. It is that realtime and contingent flavor of social life that is captured at the level of talk.

In a recent study of organizational life (Boden, in press a), I was interested in the reflexive relation of organizational structure and conversational interaction. Talk in organizations paces the business of the day, and I have been interested in tracking the interactive and interde-

pendent nature of talk and task in producing and reproducing that abstract object we call "the organization"—both within and beyond the boundaries of the firm itself. Organizational members, their clients, and suppliers, for example, spend a considerable amount of interactional energy coordinating activities in time and space while, at the same time, their very talk is itself a microcosm of that synchrony.

Rhonda: Thizziz = Rho:nda.
 (0.2)

Bill: .hh Hi Rhonda! Bi::ll here?
 []

Rhonda: Hi:: Bill?

Bill: Retu::rning (.) not Marco's (0.2) but Ro::n's
 call?

Rhonda: Right. Jus'a minnit.
 ((caller on hold: 6.5 secs))

Ron: Hullo: ::?
 []

Bill: Hi Ron. Sorry I didn'git back t'ye,
 'Kay. D'ja =talk =t' (.) Jo::hn?

Bill: Yeah =an =I =go:t the figures
 (0.3)

Ron: Oh. (0.2) Alrea::dy?

Bill: Yeah.

Ron: N'ka::y (0.3) ya wanna come u::p?
 []

Bill: .h Ri:ght.

Ron: 'Ka::y, I'm here?

Bill: Ri:ght =bye.

((click))

This strip of interaction is assuredly routine, produced in and through the flow of talk, yet it is hardly automatic since each turn shapes the next in ways that, while patterned, cannot be abstractly pinpointed. A feature both of interaction and of the world is that it is sequential, not merely serial. The world unfolds, as Garfinkel has often noted, on a "once through" basis, with each moment shaping the next in consequential ways. Each moment is both new and old; old in that it contains and reproduces existing features of the world, yet new in that this particular moment has just been reached, under just these conditions, just now, with just certain information to hand, just certain

actors involved, just those, no more. Bill, Ron, and Rhonda work together every day, moving from the twenty-fourth to the twenty-fifth floors of an office building in search of figures, files, and the occasional friendly face. But *how* that day and those routines are constituted and reconstituted is the essence of organizational life.

Rhonda's opening line "self-identifies" with "Thizziz = Rho:nda" and frames this call as intraorganizational, i.e., an internal communication between frequent and familiar interactants (Boden, in press a). Bill responds with a greeting and self-identification, getting an overlapped return greeting and thus completing two canonical rounds of telephone openings (Schegloff, 1968). Bill's "reason for the call" is similarly located in the typical next slot, where it is the caller who provides a warrant for the call; he announces a temporal and organizational issue, namely that his is a "return" call, a response, not to Marco, but to Ron, thereby embedding a number of organizational relationships and commitments in a single economical turn at talk. Note, too, the interweaving of temporal frames such as "returning" a call, waiting "jus'a minnit," apologizing for not getting "back t'ye," and having the figures "alrea::dy?" These formulations also involve coordination of actors and activities that are critically contingent on such realtime accommodation, as is Ron's demand, "D'ja = talk = t'- (...) Jo::hn?" and Bill's locally produced understanding that such a contact had to do with "the figures"—that is to say, not any figures but a shared and oriented-to set of numbers that each understands and whose current possession precipitates a next organizational task. These coordinated issues are, in turn, also organized around further understandings about mutual availability and the need for copresence in time and space, so that having the figures results in an invitation from Ron and an offer of being "here." Importantly, for this discussion of the interactional achievement of meaning through language-in-action, Bill marks both invitation and offer with an unambiguous and unelaborated affirmative, and their short exchange is terminated.

Action and meaning, at this level of analysis, reveal that their negotiation is a highly local affair. It is joint action, in Blumer's sense, but more. Their talk and tasks are mutually elaborative in a turn-by-turn manner. They are not just talking "about" work; that work is, and will continue to be, produced as talk. Organizational members routinely produce multiple levels of activities that are reflexively and simultaneously tied in and through their talk. Take, for example, the following fragment from a multiparty meeting.

Dean: We scre:wed up agai::n. We didn' *a::sk f'r* that material- we a:sked f'r it *last year* (.) la:te in pie ce ri ght?

[]

Matt: Yeah.

The *fe::llowship* people again,

Jim: S'there uh March fiftee:nth dead li:ne?

[]

Matt: Ye::s.

Jim: Tha's sad we'll have *a::ll*- all these people's

[[] []]

Jean: .h::: of all-

Jim: =applications (.) by the time (you need 'em)

[] }

Dean: MAY I MA:KE

(.) thuh following suggestion?

[]

Matt: WE CAN DA::NCE around the March fiftee:nth . . .

The "topic" of this exchange between four university administrators might be described as "fellowships" or perhaps "fellowship deadlines," but with the dean's opening gambit the organizational stage is set for a round of interdepartmental accommodations. The dean and Jim represent the graduate school who "screwed up again." Matt is from the office of financial aid. As Jim laments the fact that, practically speaking and despite the technical deadline of March 15, their office will have needed materials by the time they are needed, the dean initiates a suggestion and, faster on his conversational feet, Matt offers to "dance" around the deadline. Such is the stuff of bureaucratic life, but note the degree to which the very accomplishment of accommodation is an interactional one produced in and through the ordering and overlapping of turns at talk. Note too that the temporal formulations are not in any way loosely "socially constructed" but rather precisely produced as interdepartmental *and* interactional collaboration. It is in this way, I believe, that the business of talk constitutes the business of the day (Boden, in press a). The connection between talk as structure and structure *through* talk is a tightly coupled phenomenon.

Organizations are ubiquitous settings of modern society. Such organizations are often viewed by sociologists as abstract entities persisting in time and space, setting agendas, pursuing goals, making decisions, expanding, contracting, collapsing, resurging. They are seen as having existence and momentum above and beyond the individual.

And so they do. But when an organization such as the New York Stock Exchange dives precipitously in a single trading day, it is to the traders on the floor, the analysts at their computers, the account executives at their phones, and the institutional buyers in fern-filled offices across the country that we look. It is their actions, impressions, conversations, rumors, and reactions that constituted so-called Black Monday in October 1987. Even the programmed trading that may have triggered the volume trading of the day is the result of earlier conversations and impressions, rumors of currency and commodity shifts, talk of inflation, and so forth. People are a central part of all organizations, and their talk is the interactional material out of which those organizations are constituted.

Indeed, one of the recurring features of all organizations is the stories and myths through which the daily activities and long-range actions of firms are understood. These stories are often mistakenly treated as a kind of culture and studied abstractly and acontextually. But stories are part and parcel of talk. They draw their strength and carry their message in interaction.

TELLING STORIES

It is interesting that Erving Goffman experienced a linguistic turn of his own in his latter years, inspired and also apparently irritated by the work of his former students (e.g., Schegloff, 1988). In *Forms of Talk* particularly, he recommends firmly that "microanalysis of interaction lumber in where the self-respecting decline to tread" (1982:2), namely into the realm of talk, and goes on to offer a number of useful approaches to that study. Among them, he correctly observes that we spend a good deal of our talking-time telling stories. People in their everyday intercourse tell stories all the time, as Sacks and others have pointed out (Sacks, 1972, 1974; Jefferson, 1978; Boden and Bielby, 1983; Maynard, 1988). This too has parallels in symbolic interactionist enquiry in that it provides a way of moving further along the important task of letting subjects tell their own narratives (see McCall and Wittner, this volume). They do. All the time. It is just a matter of sitting back and letting the world happen—with a tape recorder or video camera running.

In McCall and Wittner's essay (this volume) on life histories, for example, storytelling groups studied by McCall provide a way of examining how people discover new meaning in their lives and their shared location in history. In some recent ethnographic and conversation ana-

lytic work, I spent time hanging out in an English senior center in west London and in a coffee shop on what I call "High Street" in Palo Alto located near a medical center, a favorite drugstore, and the local senior center. In earlier research (Boden and Bielby, 1983, 1986), we found a great deal of narrative in the everyday talk of the elderly and among strangers provides a remarkable display of spontaneously generated life history. These stories are, however, *part of the talk*, rather than some special interlude.

Ben: And uh-

Erma: .hh Well when- (.) when I:: lived there in this
liddle German community .h uh FARMING community
[]

Ben: .hh Oh yea:h

Erma: =and uh- (.) th- the only way we could get *out* of
there was by TRAIN and it- it was on the branch
[]

Ben: Ye::s?

Erma: =line of the MK and T .h:: we called it the KATIE,
it was uh- Missouri Kansas an TEXas line and
[] []

Ben: Yes Yeah

Erma: =we- we uh-

Ben: Do they still have that railroad? I
think it's call- They do?
[]

Erma: YE:S I thi:nk so I think so
[]

Ben: Yeah I
'member cuz I RODE that one uh-

Erma: And the County Seat was Gai::nesville and uh
[]

Ben: Oh yes

Erma: =the County Seat and that- if we wanted to-
t'go to the County Seat we hadda either go by
bug- horse an' BUGGY o:r .h
[]

Ben: Uh!

In this "life as narrative" (cf. Gergen and Gergen, 1983; Bruner, 1987) interaction, old people establish identity and explore shared history in

a highly collaborative manner, often interweaving several layers of public history with quite detailed accounts of private lives lived across long spans of time and space. Analytically Ben and Erma can be seen, in one sense, to compete for the topical floor, but in terms of their shared storytelling we argued that they are also, significantly, contrasting past with present in a constructive and coconstitutive manner (Boden and Bielby, 1986). The result is, for the researcher, rather compelling insights into the role of the past in the present lives of the elderly, a role that turns out to be both interactive and positive rather than a "living" in the past. Thus, as we also suggested (Boden and Bielby, 1983), the past is a *resource* out of which present lives are made meaningful and interactionally active.

My more recent research in and around senior centers suggests a similar pattern, although here—in settings of food preparation, card playing, and eating—talk and task in the present interplay with narratives of the past in a more complex manner. The pattern of marking shared historical periods persists as present-day events are contrasted with stories told out of past events. In this fragment, Edith is making tea in the back of the London senior club as Bess struggles to open a package (packet) of cookies (bickies, as in biscuits).

Edith: . . . an' 'e tol' me- he to::ld me no' t' take 'm
wif'outuh cuppa tea:::
(1.7)
((sound of electric kettle clicking off—
plastic wrapping noise, voices in background))

Edith: He said *ne:vuh t'ta::ke 'm wi- withou:t uh cuppa.*

Bess: *Ye:h.*

Edith: A::n' a:h do::n' (0.2) nei:ther. *Here!* Le'me 'elp
you:: wif that pa cket?

Bess: []
O:h a:wrrigh' the:n?
((sound of wrapping paper))

Edith: Like my A:nd rew?

Bess: [] Hm hmm,

Edith: When 'e was li'ttle?

Bess: Yeh.

Edith: 'E had a::wf'lly bad bronchi::tis? =

Bess: = Hmm,

Edith: 'e did. An' thc doctuh sai::d- There y'a::re, tha's

done i:t? Those bickies look evuh so goo:d?
 [] []
 Bess: (Yeh) Mm.

Right then.
 []

Edith: Thuh doctor said 'e was to 'ave those bi:g
 ta:blets with tea as well. They were ever so bi:g,
 an' 'e was ever so lihhle, an it was during the war?

Bess: Oh ye:h, hmhmm?

Edith: An' we wuz livin' in Battersea, so I . . .

((story continues))

Stories are intriguing, though tricky, conversations to study analytically, particularly as their sequential production mimics though does not mirror the sequence of events being captured. Stories, as Sacks (1974, 1978) has demonstrated, are artful both in their telling and in what is told. They fit into an ongoing conversation as they unfold in real time, and contain their own intricate and consequential structure. They are staged, both in their sequentially produced elements and in the story they track. They are also carefully located interactionally as, above, Edith's announcement to Bess about taking large tablets with tea builds into a wartime story of when her son was young and they lived in Battersea. Storytellers are often, as Maynard has noted, "part of the narratives they present" (1988:452), and this has important implications for the way both stories and tellers can be understood.

Maynard's own work demonstrates the rather subtle ways in which storytellers engaged in third-party narratives can become *part* of the narrative and thus demonstrate their position vis-à-vis the story. More generally, my own point is that all storytellers reveal aspects of self and other in the way stories are told and the relative stance they take in relation to the narrative (e.g., Whalen and Zimmerman, 1985). Stories are thus not "just" tales but active and interactive productions which, particularly when examined on video, reveal collaborative qualities of verbal and nonverbal displays of participation both by speaker and recipient (M. Goodwin, 1982; C. Goodwin, 1984).

In the above strip of interaction, Edith has been telling a story about a recent visit to her doctor, a story that has been contextually cued by the joint activity of making tea. The doctor, she says, told her not to take her medication "withou:t uh cuppa." This instruction is then summarized in the claim: 'A:n a:h do:n' (0.2) nei:ther." The local activity of struggling with wrapping, an increasing daily problem for

the elderly whose dexterity is decreasing as packaging is becoming ever more complicated, produces an inserted "Here! Le'me 'elp you::." Again, we can observe, in fine detail, that localized production of joint action characterized by Blumer, as talk, task, and topic are managed. The medication story is then built into a wartime story of Edith's son Andrew and his bronchitis, in a deft yet typical telling of past and present (see also Boden and Bielby, 1986).

Indeed the very activity of "telling" turns out to be a rather precise and coordinated act. Jefferson, for example, has developed this vein of research in a particularly elegant examination of how people tell troubles in everyday life (Jefferson, 1980).

The telling of a trouble revolves around maintaining both the routine features of the conversation and discourse identity while inserting a more intense focus—the trouble—and then returning to business as usual. Jefferson proposes that trouble-telling has a kind of trajectory that moves interactants from the routine to the trouble and back. Of interest here is that the close-up techniques of conversation analysis have not only an illuminating but also an animating quality for micro-analysis in that they both track the interaction order and rather graphically trace its fundamentally interactional ordering, bringing to the analytic surface the dynamic structure of the interaction order itself.

HISTORY AS TALK

Jefferson's examination of trouble-telling points to a further feature of conversational interaction that has only begun to be explored by researchers in the area, namely the sequential aspects of interaction across long stretches of talk (Jefferson, 1980; Heritage, 1985; Button, in press) and across interactions (Boden, in press a). In my own organizational work, I had become concerned with whether the sequential quality of interaction could be used to understand the constitution of institutions across time. This is a recurring problem for organizational analysis (Hall, 1987), one which has been forcefully theorized by Giddens in recent years (1979, 1984, 1987) as well as by Foucault, (1977; see also Glassner, 1982) but rather rarely demonstrated empirically.

Temporality and duration are central to both ethnomethodology and symbolic interaction (Glassner, 1982). There is a temptation to consider the work of Garfinkel and Sacks, for instance, as "merely" concerned with the details of structure in action. Yet this would be a fundamental misreading of their work because it is in the mutual elaboration of structure in action (and vice versa) that social organiza-

tion is possible at all. That interpenetration of action and structure is, in turn, essential to understanding the embeddedness of micro in macro and macro in micro (e.g., Alexander et al., 1987; Alexander, 1988; Collins, 1987, 1988; Fine, 1987; Boden, n.d.). Indeed it points, as Giddens is fond of insisting, to the futility of such distinctions, a "division of labour [that] leads to consequences that are at best highly misleading" (1984:139).

In this light, I have recently become interested in the possibility of tracking history through talk and thereby revealing, in the fullness of verbal interaction, the *production* of history, both objectively and subjectively. That is, as a sequence of events in time and a sequentially achieved series of intersubjectively located events in the lives of real people. Given Hall's illuminating discussion (this volume) on the relation of historical considerations to more general issues in symbolic interaction, a final section on what I call "history as talk" may further ground this brief excursion into the dense world that is everyday talk.

I have been focusing, for my ethnomethodological study of history, primarily on a single series of telephone calls that occurred between John F. Kennedy and the governor of Mississippi on a single weekend in 1962 that came to be called "the Mississippi crisis" or the "insurrection at Ole' Miss."⁴ The materials are audio recordings made at the White House, and now in the archives of the Kennedy Presidential Library, along with extensive documents of the incident, its immediate precursors, subsequent consequences, historical assessments, and so forth.

A fragment of these materials quickly captures the flavor of this rather new type of historical record. The crisis at the University of Mississippi involved the registration of James Meredith as the first black to attend an institution of higher learning in that deeply traditional state. The confrontation is recognised by historians as the most significant crisis in federal-state authority since the close of the American Civil War a century earlier. That drama and those aspects of history were clearly not lost on Jack Kennedy and his brother as attorney general as they managed events from the White House that long weekend. Furthermore, the interactional data, comprised of a sequence of telephone calls and a limited number of snatches of meeting conversation in the Oval Office, catch and document that sense of crisis in a highly analyzable way. The following "moments of history" take place about halfway through the weekend of crisis, in the afternoon of Sun-

day, September 30, 1962. Earlier calls between President Kennedy and Governor Barnet display a distinct kind of negotiation between the two leaders, one marked by Kennedy's willingness to tolerate the governor's attempts to avoid cooperation, an avoidance that is as much interactionally produced and reproduced as it is legally located in the governor's official stance vis-à-vis a federally mandated court order to register Meredith. The president is providing an account of why the governor must keep in close touch with the White House. The governor breaks in to announce the death of a state trooper, victim of a sniper's bullet, who had earlier been accompanied to a hospital.

JFK: Y'see we don'- we got an hour t'go::: an' that's not
u:h- we- we may not ha::ve an hour what with this-

[]
Gov: Uh- this man

this man has jus' died

JFK: Did he die?

Gov: Yes sir

[]

JFK: Whi ch one? State police?

Gov: Tha's the State Police

JFK: Yea:h, well you see we gotta get order up there an'
that's what we thou::ght we were gonna ha:ve =

[]

Gov: Mistuh
= Pre::s'dent PLEA::SE why don't you uh- can't you give
an order up there to remo::ve Mer' dith

[]
JFK: HOW CAN I REMO::VE

HIM GOVERNOR when there's a- a ri::ot in the street an'
he may step out of that building an' something ha::ppen
to him? I can't remove him under tho::se conditions.

(1.0)

Gov: U:::h- but-but- but we can-

[] []
JFK: Y'go- let's get o::rder up there an' then we can do
something about Meredith

[]
Gov: we can sur::rou::ound it with
plenty 'v offi::cials

JFK: Well we've got to get somebuddy up there now to get
order, and stop the firing and the shooting. Then we-

you and I will talk on the phone about Meredith
 (0.2)

But firs' we gotta get order

[]

Gov: A::right I'll- I'll call an'
 tell'em to get every- every official they ca::n?

The governor's announcement is notable in numerous ways that lie outside the current scope of this discussion, but it is worth highlighting a few ways in which the sequential shape of these turns consequentially shapes the action of these historical moments, social action that both structures and is structured by the unfolding events. In routine conversation, the governor's announcement of a death would project an immediate assessment by his interactant (Pomerantz, 1984). But the president's first move here is a clarification request, "Did he die?" followed by more specificity, "Which one? State police?" concluded with a token acknowledgment and a disagreement marker, "Yea:h, well." He then shifts the topic back to his own earlier point of the need to establish order at the campus at Oxford. The governor again breaks in with a plea for a very different sort of order, one that would achieve his goal of removing Meredith from the campus and, preferably, far from the state of Mississippi. The notion of "order" thus proceeds at several levels. It is through *sequentially produced*, rather than structurally located, power that the president's definition overrides the governor's version, not just in this closing sequence of the telephone conversation, but across the long-distance interactions that continue deep into that night in 1962. By the next morning, the president's concern for the situation, assessed largely through these telephone calls both to Governor Barnet and through an open telephone line to his own staff on the Oxford campus, has resulted in the arrival of over 5000 national guards from nearby Memphis, and quietly at 9:00 a.m. James Meredith registered at Ole' Miss, to graduate a year later. The rest, as they say, is history.

This meeting of history and one of the newest subfields of sociology underlines, I believe, another important area of shared ground between symbolic interactionists and conversation analysts. The latter's more focused concern for the sequential details of action is complemented by symbolic interactionist interest in recurrent patterns of collective activity (e.g., Becker, 1982, 1986). Historical crises occur neither in a tidy research vacuum, nor are they structurally determined in such a way as their outcome is inevitable. Rather they are the result of particular people coming together (or not) in temporally located and se-

quentially organized ways (cf. Collins, 1988). Meredith, Kennedy, and Barnet occupied structural positions unlikely to produce an intersection in any social scientist's model of such events. Yet people do make history, and how they do it under conditions, both material and interactional, outside their choosing is the stuff of sociology and history. Series and sequence are, as Hall (this volume) notes, the objects of historical enquiry. To capture them sociologically as talk can be the conversation analyst's contribution—at least in the area of contemporary history where recorded and video materials are becoming increasingly available.

CONCLUSION

It has been my goal in this chapter to suggest that the friendly paths of symbolic interaction and conversation analysis come together at the intersection of language and meaning. Through characterizing talk as language-in-action, I have suggested that *where thought becomes action through talk* we may find that crossroads. Symbolic interactionists and conversation analysts travel together more broadly along a route that examines the intertwining of meaning, shared symbols, joint action, and social order.

Thus, at that larger intersection of agency and structure, sociologists generally may expect to find both symbolic interactionists and conversation analysts. Both are centrally concerned with temporality, with duration, with action, and with, as it were, the pulse of society. In this ability to trace the measured and thereby measurable pace of social life, we have much to offer the often arbitrarily collapsed categories and aggregate abstraction of most quantitative sociology. Methodologists are fond of characterizing much social research as having a "snapshot" quality—capturing a cross-sectional moment of society. But this is really hopelessly inaccurate. Most sociology captures no moment at all, but rather the latent and leftover traces of past action, past emotion, past cognition—inaccurately remembered, recorded, or measured. The considerable virtue of the shared enterprise of symbolic interaction and conversation analysis is a steady yet animated view of the world-as-it-happens.

APPENDIX

The transcription notation used by conversation analysts was developed by Gail Jefferson. It attempts, using a standard typewriter or computer keyboard symbols, to capture for the eye the way the talk is heard by the ear. Transcripts are always analyzed together with relevant audio or video materials and are not intended as substitutes for the data they capture. The transcripts in this

chapter have been simplified for presentation purposes. For more extensive discussion, see Atkinson and Heritage (1984:ix–xvi).

A: Ye s, two.	Brackets indicate the point at which simultaneous speech starts and ends.
B: { Oh goo :d.	
A: How-	Utterances starting together are indicated by double left brackets.
B: When did you hear?	
A: Hello::=	When there is no audible gap between one utterance and the next, equal signs are used.
B: =Hi.	Numbers in parentheses indicate elapsed time in tenths of seconds.
(0.8)	
(.)	A dot in parentheses indicates a slight gap, typically less than one-tenth of a second.
A: Right.	Italic indicates emphasis in delivery.
B: HOW MUCH?	Capital letters indicate that a word or phrase is louder than the surrounding talk.
A: So:::	Colons indicate that the immediately prior syllable is prolonged or “stretched”; the number of colons denote, approximately, the duration.
A: We added to-	A hyphen represents a cutoff of the immediately prior word or syllable.
A: Sure.	Punctuation marks are used to capture characteristics of speech delivery rather than grammatical notation.
B: Issues,	period = downward contour
C: Ca:mpus?	comma = sustained contour
.hh::	question mark = rising contour
Heh-heh-huh-huh	A dot-prefixed <i>h</i> indicates an in-breath; without a dot, exhalation.
(h)	Laughter particles
('r something)	An <i>h</i> in parentheses denotes breathiness or a plosive delivery.
((cough))	Empty parentheses or items enclosed in single parentheses indicate transcribers doubt of a hearing.
((ring))	Double parentheses are used to enclose a description of some phenomenon that characterizes the talk or the scene.
((loud bang))	

NOTES

1. I am indebted to Gary Alan Fine for this insight.
2. There are a few exceptions to this claim, most notably in the work of West and Zimmerman, who, in part of their studies of gender and interruption, used quasi-experimental settings (e.g., West and Zimmerman, 1983; see also Boden and Bielby, 1983, 1986).