

## 7 | Joint projects

Signaling is of interest only because it is used in advancing the joint activities people are engaged in. Take this exchange from an interview by a British academic of a prospective student (3.1.174):

Arthur: u:h what modern poets have you been reading -  
Beth: well I'm . I like Robert Graves very much -

When Arthur says “u:h what modern poets have you been reading -” he doesn’t want Beth merely to understand what he means – that he wants to know what modern poets she has been reading. He wants her to *take up* his question, to answer it, to *tell* him what modern poets she has been reading. She could refuse even though she has understood. To mean something, you don’t have to achieve uptake, and to understand something, you don’t have to take it up. Still, Beth’s uptake is needed if she and Arthur are to achieve what Arthur has publicly set out for them to do at this point in their interview.

Arthur and Beth’s exchange is used to carry out a *joint project*. The joint project begins with Arthur *projecting* a joint task for Beth and him to carry out – she is to tell him what modern poets she has been reading. It continues with Beth agreeing to that project, and it becomes complete, though slightly altered, with her answer. *A joint project is a joint action projected by one of its participants and taken up by the others*. Recall levels 3 and 4 of the joint action ladder for communicative acts (see Chapter 5):

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| 4 | A is proposing joint project <i>w</i> to B | B is considering A's proposal of <i>w</i> |
| 3 | A is signaling that <i>p</i> for B         | B is recognizing that <i>p</i> from A     |

Arthur and Beth go beyond the meaning and understanding of their signals at level 3 to the proposing and uptake of joint projects at level 4.

With it, they advance their official business, the interview, by one step.

Uptake, however, presupposes understanding. If Beth is to take up Arthur's proposal, she must settle on what he means. What does he really intend by "modern poets" and "reading"? How many names will he be satisfied with? Does he want more than just names? Although Beth reaches a construal of Arthur's utterance, is it the one he intended – is it one he will accept? I will call this the *joint construal problem*. Note that Beth gives Arthur evidence of her construal in her answer, "well, I'm . I like Robert Graves very much -." If her construal had been unacceptable, Arthur would have corrected it, and he didn't. There is a tight link between the way two people settle on a joint construal of a signal (level 3) and the way they propose and take up joint projects (level 4). Once we realize this, we are led to two surprising conclusions. First, the joint construal of an utterance, a signal, gets established in an interactive, sequential process that depends on the joint projects they contribute to, and vice versa. And second, exchanges like Arthur's and Beth's are the joint actions from which larger joint actions in discourse emerge. The goal of this chapter is to substantiate these conclusions.

### **Public displays**

Reaching a joint construal of a signal isn't easy. When Arthur says "u:h what modern poets have you been reading," Beth must settle on a construal acceptable to Arthur – one they can take as a joint construal. How do they do that? One source of information is the form of Arthur's utterance, and another is their mutual beliefs about the current situation. But a third source of information, ignored in most accounts, is Beth's public display of her construal and Arthur's evaluation of that display. To see how this works, let us look at public displays of construals in general.

#### **EVENTS AND REACTIONS**

People try to make sense of the world around them. When they see things happen, they try to interpret them, to construe them as one thing and not another. Many things are easy to construe. I see a fish, and I construe it as a fish, as a trout, or as food for a grizzly bear. Social events aren't always so easy. I see a strange man walking toward me. Is he approaching me by accident, or by design? Does he want to ask me directions, rob me, or what? My construal will determine what I do next.

It is often useful to signal a construal – to display it publicly. Suppose Jack and Kate are watching a tennis match when one of the players makes

a double fault and Jack goes “Uh oh!” With this signal, he makes public to Kate his construal of selected aspects of what he has just seen. The double fault is not to his liking. He signals Kate about his construal to show his solidarity with her on the course of the match. Kate might have suspected his disappointment with the double fault, but his signal gives her public evidence. Or suppose Kate wins a race, and Jack is proud of her accomplishment. To make his construal public, he needs to display it, which he can do by congratulating her: “Congratulations.” Or suppose Jack steps on Kate’s toe, an accident he regrets. Since he isn’t certain that she thinks he construes it that way, he needs to make his construal public, which he can do with an apology: “Sorry.” People display construals of many types of public events, as in these examples:

<b>Instigating event</b>	<b>B's Reaction to event</b>
A and B see tennis player double fault	“Uh oh,” or B frowns
A and B notice a beautiful sunset	“What a beautiful sunset!”
B notices A wearing new earrings	“What beautiful earrings!”
A holds out cup of coffee for B	“Thank you” as B takes cup
A plays piano for B	B applauds
A holds money out for B	B takes money

Displaying an attitude toward an event is apparently so important that languages have evolved a special type of illocutionary act for the purpose, namely expressives (see Chapter 5). Here are illustrations:

<b>Type of event</b>	<b>Expressive</b>	<b>Example</b>
B is offended by A	A apologizes to B	“Sorry!”
B achieves something positive	A congratulates B	“Congratulations!”
B does a favor for A	A thanks B	“Thanks!”
B approaches A	A greets B	“Hi!”

In each case there is an instigating event followed by A’s construal of it. An apology shows that an event is being construed as an offense, and a congratulations is for a positive achievement, a thanks is for a favor, and a greetings is for a desirable meeting. It is precisely these displays that give expressives their uses.

More often, people display their construals by the next step they take in the social process they are engaged in. When Kate trips, Jack helps her stand back up. Not only does he keep her from falling down, but he shows her that he has construed the trip as accidental and unwanted. And when Kate holds money out for Jack, he takes it, displaying that he has construed her action as one of transferring the money to him.

Certain social events come in what I will call *event-reaction pairs*. They have five main properties:

1. Event-reaction pairs consist of two ordered events – an *instigating event* and a *reaction*.
2. The two events have different origins.
3. The instigating event is any event mutually recognized by A and B.
4. The reaction is an action by B that is or includes a signal to A.
5. B's reaction is intended, among other things, to display B's construal of the target event.

Example: A car accident is an instigating event, and B's "How awful!" is a reaction. When the instigating event is an action by A toward B, we have an *action-response pair*, e.g., A's offering B a cup of coffee, and B's accepting it.

#### VALIDATING AND CORRECTING CONSTRUALS

Almost every event is open to differing construals – and this is especially true of social actions. When Kate places a glass of wine in front of Jack, he may construe the action in one of several ways:

K's action	J's construal of K's action	J's response
K places wine on table	K is doing a favor for J	"Thanks."
K places wine on table	K is doing a duty for J	"Right."
K places wine on table	K is showing J a new skill	"Nicely done."

When he says "Thanks," that is public evidence that he is treating Kate's action as a favor, and he expects her to see that. His response is a shared basis for the mutual belief that he has taken her action to be a favor.

What if Jack doesn't construe Kate's action as intended? If Kate has brought the wine for Helen and not for Jack, and Jack says "Thanks," she has two main choices. She can consider his construal to be incorrect and correct it, "Oh, this is for Helen – what would *you* like?" This way she provides a shared basis for the mutual belief that her action was intended as a favor to Helen and not him. Or she can accept Jack's construal unchanged. She might reason: "Aha, Jack wanted wine too. I can just as well leave this glass for him and bring another for Helen." She would then answer "You're welcome," laying down a shared basis for the mutual belief that her action was indeed to be taken as a favor to Jack. As far as Jack is concerned, that may be all Kate ever intended, and Kate knows that.

Kate's second option is an instance of revised intentions – a *revised construal*. Suppose I start driving from Palo Alto to shop in San Francisco. But halfway there, in San Mateo, a violent storm breaks out and I decide to shop in San Mateo instead. All I have done is change my mind, revise my intentions. In San Mateo I reason: "Well, I was originally intending my drive to San Mateo to be the first half of a drive to San Francisco, but I can just as easily treat it as the completion of a full drive to San Mateo. So what I originally construed as 'a half-trip to San Francisco to go shopping,' I now construe as 'a full-trip to San Mateo to go shopping.'" People regularly change their minds, revising their intentions to accommodate to the circumstances.

Suppose, instead, that Kate brought the wine for *either* Jack or Helen: She is indifferent to whether Jack construes her action as a favor for him or for Helen. So when Jack says "Thanks," she can accept his construal, reasoning this way: "Although I brought the wine for either Jack or Helen, he has construed it as a favor for him alone. That is consistent with my intention, so even though it is more specific, I can accept it." She could then answer "You're welcome." She would thereby lay down a shared basis for the mutual belief that her action was intended as a favor to Jack alone. As far as Jack is concerned, that may be all Kate ever intended, and Kate knows that. This we might call a *narrowed construal*.

A final possibility is that Jack misconstrues Kate without either of them noticing it. Suppose Kate has brought the wine for Helen and not for Jack, and Jack says "How nice!" thinking the favor was for him, but Kate thinks he is referring to the favor for Helen and accepts his apparent construal with a smile. They may or may not catch their error later. Here is an *undetected misconstrual*. In all, Jack's construal of Kate's actions may take one of five forms:

J's initial construal	K's intervening action	J's final construal
full construal	accept	verified construal
misconstrual	detect and correct	corrected misconstrual
misconstrual	detect yet accept	revised construal
narrowed construal	accept	narrowed construal
misconstrual	not detect yet accept	undetected misconstrual

In social processes, the argument goes, people often need to agree on what is taking place. One way of reaching consensus is by displaying construals of what is taking place for the others to accept or correct, and that

often leads people to revise their intentions in greater or smaller ways. The process is sequential and interactive. We should expect the same in the understanding and uptake of utterances.

### Local projects

In conversation, utterances tend to come in pairs. The point is illustrated in this brief telephone conversation (8.11.851):

- Jane: (rings C's telephone)
- Kate: Miss Pink's office -
- Jane: hello
- Jane: hello,
- Jane: is Miss Pink in.
- Kate: well, she's in, but she's engaged at the moment,
- Kate: who is it?
- Jane: oh it's Professor Worth's secretary, from Pan-American College
- Kate: m,
- Jane: could you give her a message \*for me\*
- Kate: \*certainly\*
- Jane: u:m Professor Worth said that, if . Miss Pink runs into difficulties, .  
on Monday afternoon, . with the standing subcommittee, .  
over the item on Miss Panoff, ---
- Kate: Miss Panoff?
- Jane: yes,  
that Professor Worth would be with Mr Miles all afternoon, - so she  
only had to go round and collect him if she needed him, ---
- Kate: ah, ---
- Kate: thank you very much indeed,
- Jane: right
- Kate: Panoff, right \*you\* are
- Jane: \*right,\*
- Kate: I'll tell her, \*(2 to 3 syllables)\*
- Jane: \*thank you\*
- Kate: bye bye
- Jane: bye

As the bracketing suggests, Jane and Kate don't merely take turns. Rather, Jane says something and Kate responds, or vice versa. Pairings like this are characteristic of everyday talk: Conversations are not so much sequences of *individual* actions as they are sequences of *paired* actions.

## ADJACENCY PAIRS

The paired utterances in Jane and Kate's conversation are what Schegloff and Sacks (1973) have called *adjacency pairs*. The prototype is the question and answer, as in this exchange:

Kate: who is it?

Jane: oh it's Professor Worth's secretary, from Pan-American College

According to Schegloff and Sacks, adjacency pairs have five essential properties:

1. Adjacency pairs consist of two ordered utterances—the *first pair part* and the *second pair part*.
2. The two parts are uttered by different speakers.
3. The two parts come in types that specify which part is to come first and which second.
4. The form and content of the second part depends on the type of the first part.
5. Given a first pair part, the second pair part is *conditionally relevant*—that is, relevant and expectable—as the next utterance.

Jane's question is the first pair part, and Kate's answer, the second. And given Jane's question, Kate's answer is conditionally relevant as the next utterance.

Adjacency pairs come in many types. Jane and Kate's brief conversation illustrates many of them, but there are others as well:

<b>Adjacency pair</b>	<b>Example</b>
1. Summons	Jane: (rings)
2. Response	Kate: Miss Pink's office
1. Greetings	Kate: hello
2. Greetings	Jane: hello
1. Question	Kate: who is it?
2. Answer	Jane: oh it's Professor Worth's secretary, from Pan-American College
1. Assertion	Jane: oh it's Professor Worth's secretary, from Pan-American College
2. Assent	Kate: m
1. Request	Jane: could you give her a message *for me*
2. Promise	Kate: *certainly*
1. Promise	Kate: I'll tell her
2. Acknowledgment	Jane: thank you

- |                   |                                  |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Thanks         | Kate: thank you very much indeed |
| 2. Acknowledgment | Jane: right                      |
| 1. Good-bye       | Kate: bye bye                    |
| 2. Good-bye       | Jane: bye                        |

Why do adjacency pairs take the form they do? The answer, I suggest, is that they solve two problems at once. At level 3, speakers and addressees face joint construal problems, and they solve them in two-part exchanges. In the first part, speakers present a signal, and in the second, addressees display their construal of it for speakers to accept or correct. At level 4, speakers and addressees try to complete joint tasks, and that also requires two-part exchanges. In the first part, speakers propose a joint project, and in the second, addressees take up their proposal. In the ordinary case, these two two-part structures coincide, and the result is adjacency pairs.

#### UPTAKE AND UNDERSTANDING

When Jane asks Kate “Who is it?” she is trying to get Kate to tell her who she is. She is proposing a joint project – a transfer of information. If Kate is willing and able, she will complete it and tell Jane who she is. Let me stress that Kate’s answer (“oh it’s Professor Worth’s secretary, from Pan-American College”) is not just any perlocutionary effect of Jane’s utterance. She might have been surprised, outraged, or pleased by Jane’s question. Rather, it is the perlocutionary effect projected by Jane’s illocutionary point. It is an uptake of the particular joint project Jane proposed. Such joint projects become complete only through uptake, so completion at level 4 requires not only Jane’s question but Kate’s answer.

Proposals and their uptake provide a rationale for the first four properties of adjacency pairs. In particular, there are these correspondences:

- |                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| First pair part  | A proposes a joint project for A and B. |
| Second pair part | B takes up the proposed joint project.  |

In this scheme, there are two utterances (property 1) from different speakers (property 2). The two parts come in types – a proposal and an uptake – that specify which part comes first and which second (property 3). And the form and content of the second part, Kate’s uptake, depends on the type of the first part, Jane’s proposal (property 4). In short, proposals and their uptake often map directly onto the first and second parts of adjacency pairs.

What about conditional relevance (condition 5)? It has been characterized by Schegloff (1968, p. 1083) this way:

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 non-occurrence it can be seen to be officially absent – all this provided by the occurrence of the first item.

The second part must be expectable from the first – a property I will call *expectability* – and as the very next utterance – a property I will call *adjacency*. The rationale for expectability is already clear. For Jane and Kate to complete the joint project, Kate's uptake (the second part) must be contingent on, and therefore follow, Jane's proposal (the first part).

To understand why Kate's uptake is adjacent, let us return to level 3 – meaning and understanding. At that level, Jane uses “Who is it?” to signal Kate that she is to say who she is. But how can they reach the mutual belief that Kate has understood Jane as intended? What better way than for Kate to *display* her construal of Jane's utterance in her next move, because that way Jane can accept or correct it. And Kate does just that. With “Oh it's Professor Worth's secretary, from Pan-American College,” she displays her construal in two ways. Identifying herself as Professor Worth's secretary is an appropriate uptake for a question about who she is. And the form of her answer “it's ...” matches the syntax of the question “Who is it?”

The two parts of an adjacency pair, then, also give an optimal fit to the two-part structure of meaning and displayed understanding. That leads to these correspondences:

First pair part	A signals to B that $\rho$
Second pair part	B displays B's construal of A's signal

Because A's signal must come before B's display of its construal, this provides a rationale for the adjacency property of conditional relevance. The second pair part is expectable as the next utterance because it displays B's construal of the first part for A to accept or correct.

All this is in line with the property of *downward evidence* introduced in Chapter 5. “In a ladder of actions,” according to the property, “evidence that one level is complete is also evidence that all levels below it are complete.” When Jane produces “Who is it?” she means (at level 3) that Kate is to say who she is and, thereby, proposes (at level 4) that Kate tell her who she is. So when Kate takes up the proposed joint project (at level 4), she is also giving evidence that she has understood what Jane means

(at level 3). The generalization is this: *Uptake is evidence of understanding*. That is why second parts of adjacency pairs serve both functions – uptake and evidence of understanding – and why they are expected to be adjacent.

Although the second part of an adjacency pair is *expected* to be adjacent, it often isn't, and the argument just offered explains why. Take this example (4.2.193, simplified):

- A: that wasn't the guy I met, was it - when we saw the building? -
- B: saw it where -
- A: when I went over to Chetwynd Road
- B: yes

Here the answer “yes” is separated from the question by two turns, a *side sequence* (Jefferson, 1972; Schegloff, 1972). B realizes that he cannot take up A's question until he has cleared up a point about what she meant, so he initiates a query about that point, and only when it is cleared up does he answer. B must come to some construal of A's question before he can use his uptake to display that construal. Side sequences between first and second pair parts are designed to complete that process.

Adjacency pairs, therefore, are emergent structures. Two people, A and B, face the problem of how to complete what they are doing. They must both establish a joint construal and effect the uptake. The most efficient solution is to do both at once, and that results in adjacency pairs.

#### ACTION AND RESPONSE

Adjacency pairs are clearly a type of action–response pair. A's action toward B is followed by B's reaction toward A that, among other things, displays B's construal of A's action. It is just that adjacency pairs accomplish something else too – the proposal and uptake of a joint project.

With this comparison, it is easy to see several problems in the original definition of adjacency pairs. First, neither first nor second part need be an utterance. The first part may be any type of signal, and the second, any action that takes up the proposal of the first part, as here:

<b>Adjacency pair</b>	<b>Example</b>
1. Summons	Jane: (ring's Kate's telephone)
2. Response	Kate: Miss Pink's office
1. Question	Burton: Are you coming with us?
2. Answer	Connie: [nods]

Questions like “Which finger did you cut?” and commands like “At ease, soldier” and requests like “Two tickets please” often yield non-linguistic responses, yet they are surely best classified as adjacency pairs too.

According to properties 3 and 4, the two pair parts of adjacency pairs also come in types. But just as there is no principled typology for illocutionary acts, there is also no principled typology for the first and second pair parts. They get labeled question, request, offer, acceptance, and thanks, but these are merely types of illocutionary acts and inherit all the problems of classifying illocutionary acts. Even if adjacency pairs had their own typology, there is no reason to think that they can be typed any more clearly.

Adjacency pairs, we must conclude, are a special type of action-response pair. Properties 1, 2, and 3 are inherited from action-response pairs, but they have an additional property 4:

1. Adjacency pairs consist of two ordered actions – a first part and a second part.
2. The two parts are performed by different agents A and B.
3. The form and content of the second part is intended, among other things, to display B's construal of the first part for A.
4. The first part projects uptake of a joint task by the second part.

What makes adjacency pairs special is that the first part projects the uptake of a joint task, and the second part effects that uptake.

### **Minimal joint projects**

When Jane and Kate talk on the telephone, they have official business to complete. In the view I have been taking, they do that through joint projects. Joint projects can be of any size. The entire conversation is one type of joint project, and so are many of its sections. I will argue that the *minimal* joint project is the adjacency pair – a proposal plus its uptake.

### COORDINATING ON JOINT PROJECTS

In any joint action – from shaking hands to planning a party – the participants must go from the state of not being engaged in the joint action to being engaged in it and back out again (see Chapter 2). Every joint action has three parts:

1. *Entry* into the joint action
2. *Body* of the joint action, i.e., the joint action proper
3. *Exit* from the joint action

When Dan and Melissa play a piano–flute duet, there is, ideally, an instant at which they mutually believe they have begun playing the duet. That marks the entry. That is followed by a stretch of activity they mutually believe to be the duet proper, and that is the body. Finally, there is an instant at which they mutually believe they are no longer playing the duet, and that marks the exit. Playing the duet depends on establishing these mutual beliefs well enough for current purposes.

How do people coordinate on the entry, body, and exit of a joint action? For many joint actions, they need to coordinate on only three features (see Chapter 3):

1. *participants*: who is participating in the joint action in what roles
2. *entry time*: the entry time  $t$  into the joint action
3. *content*: the individual action  $x(i)$  that participant  $i$  is to take in the joint action

To play measure 5 of their duet, Dan and Melissa need to identify themselves as the participants, synchronize their entry, coordinate who plays what notes and how. There is no need to synchronize the exit because it coincides with the entry into the next measure. (Recall the synchrony principle: In joint actions, the participants synchronize their processes mainly by coordinating on the entry times and participatory actions for each new phase.) Measure 5 is a sequence of smaller phases, or joint actions, each of which works the same way.

Joint actions in conversation are more complicated. Conversations, unlike duets, have no written score, so the participants must create their joint actions as they go. And when there are more than two parties, the participant roles change from one moment to the next. Dan may address Melissa, then Susan; next, Susan may address Melissa, then both Dan and Melissa; and so on. For each joint project, the three parties must coordinate on the participants, entry time, and content.

Adjacency pairs – in our revised definition – are ideal as minimal joint projects. The reason: They establish the participants, entry times, and contents of the joint projects with a minimum of joint effort. Let us return to Jane and Kate’s joint project:

Jane: who is it?

Kate: oh it's Professor Worth's secretary, from Pan-American College

The participants are established by who addresses whom in the first pair part – Jane addresses Kate. The entry time is marked by Jane’s initiation of the first pair part, “Who is it?” while she has Kate’s attention. The con-

tent is also established jointly. The process begins with Jane's proposal "Who is it?" and it is completed with Kate's answer, "Oh it's Professor Worth's secretary, from Pan-American College," which not only establishes a joint construal of the project but completes it. Adjacency pairs are the perfect vehicle for coordinating the participants, entry times, and contents of joint projects.

#### JOINT PURPOSE

Joint projects serve joint purposes, and any joint purpose must fulfill these four requirements:

For A and B to commit themselves to joint purpose *r*

1. *Identification* A and B must identify *r*
2. *Ability* It must be possible for A and B to do their parts in fulfilling *r*
3. *Willingness* A and B must be willing to do their parts in fulfilling *r*
4. *Mutual belief* A and B must each believe that 1, 2, 3, and 4 are part of their common ground

People ordinarily establish joint purposes through negotiation. In their adjacency pair, Jane's proposal sets forth a possible joint purpose – the joint project – for their exchange (property 1) and shows that she is willing and able to do her part (properties 2 and 3). Kate's response, in turn, displays that she has identified Jane's purpose (property 1) and that she too is willing and able to do her part (properties 2 and 3). Together, these public displays help establish the mutual belief that both Jane and Kate have identified Jane's purpose and that both are willing and able to do their parts (property 4).

Joint purposes aren't always so easy to establish. When I ask you to sit down – when I propose that you sit down for me – you may understand me perfectly and yet be unable or unwilling to take up my proposal. You may respond in several ways. Here are the four main ways, which are illustrated with responses to questions (see Goffman, 1976; Stenström, 1984).

1. *Full compliance.* Respondents may comply fully with the project as proposed:

Jane: who is it?

Kate: oh it's Professor Worth's secretary, from Pan-American College

Jane wants to know who Kate is, and she tells her, completing the joint project as originally proposed in its entirety.

2. *Alteration of project.* Respondents may alter the proposed project to something they are able and willing to comply with (1.2.349):

Reynard: Oscar is going to the States?

Charles: well, this is what I heard just before I came away ---

Charles isn't in a position to give a certain "yes" or "no" about Oscar's going to the States, so he alters the project to one of telling Reynard about what he heard just before he went away. He signals the change in stance with a tell-tale "well." Charles chose his altered project presumably because it would give Reynard information relevant to Oscar's going to the States. He was trying to be cooperative, though alterations may also be uncooperative.

3. *Declination of project*. When respondents are unable or unwilling to comply with the project as proposed, they can *decline* to take it up, usually by offering a reason or justification for why they are declining (1.8.40):

Betty: what happens if anybody breaks in and steals it, - are are is are we covered or .

Cathy: um - I don't know quite honestly .

Betty presupposes that Cathy knows whether they are covered by insurance, but Cathy doesn't and declines with her reason "I don't know." A declination leaves the joint project incomplete. It also displays an unwillingness or inability to find an altered project that might serve some broader purpose.

4. *Withdrawal from project*. Respondents can also *withdraw* entirely, for example, by deliberately ignoring the question and changing the topic. Here is an example from the beginning of a telephone conversation (8.2e.1042):

Susan: who's calling .

Jane: well, could you give her a message -

Here Jane withdraws from Susan's proposed joint project, not telling Susan who's calling, and makes a request instead. The four options can be summarized as follows:

Category	A's proposal	B's response
1. Compliance	A proposes w	B takes up w as proposed
2. Alteration	A proposes w	B takes up an altered form of w
3. Declination	A proposes w	B declines to take up w
4. Withdrawal	A proposes w	B withdraws from considering w

With these four options – and there are further subtypes – people create not just adjacency pairs strictly defined (option 1, full compliance), but other pairings. The pairings result from two people trying to

coordinate on a joint project and finding success (option 1), partial success (option 2), failure (option 3), or a termination of the attempt (option 4). Their form comes from what the participants are trying jointly to do and how well they succeed, not vice versa.

To speakers proposing joint projects, the four types of responses aren't equivalent. Publicly at least, they would prefer completion to alteration, alteration to declination, and declination to withdrawal. This ordering accounts for what are called preferred and dispreferred second pair parts of adjacency pairs (see Davidson, 1984, 1990; Drew, 1984; Houtkoop, 1987; Levinson, 1983; Pomerantz, 1978, 1984; Sacks, 1987). For each first pair part (e.g., "What time is it?"), the second pair part is expected to be conditionally relevant. A direct answer (e.g., "Five after three") is more relevant, hence more preferable, than an indirect answer ("Well, Susan left quite a while ago"), declination ("I don't know"), or withdrawal ("Gosh, what a beautiful sunset!"). Other adjacency pairs have similar preference orderings. In terms of joint projects, a second pair part is preferred the more fully it completes the joint project proposed in the first pair part.

Treating adjacency pairs as minimal joint projects also accounts for why dispreferred responses tend to be linguistically marked, or more complex. For "What time is it?" the most preferred response is highly elliptical ("Five after three"), determined by the syntax of the question, and the dispreferred responses are not. Dispreferred responses are also often marked by expressions such as "well" or "sorry" and produced with hesitations and self-repairs. In joint projects, it should be simpler to continue the first speaker's project than to alter it. Altering it requires rejection of the first speaker's perspective ("It is such and such a time") and establishment of a new perspective with new syntax ("Susan left quite a while ago") and marking that alteration, as with "well." Alterations should take time to choose and formulate.

Minimal joint projects, then, are shaped by both of the participants. Jane may propose one project, and although Kate can complete it as proposed, she can also alter it to something else, decline to complete it, or withdraw from it altogether.

### **Extended joint projects**

Conversations pose a paradox. On the one hand, people engage in conversation – as in any joint activity – to do things with each other. On the other hand, they cannot know in advance what things they will actually

do. Jane and Kate's conversation is a good illustration. Jane rang up to tell Miss Pink where Professor Worth would be that afternoon. When she discovered Miss Pink was busy, she recruited Kate to pass on the information. Kate had her own aims in answering the telephone. Her job was to take messages and keep callers from interrupting Miss Pink, but she had no idea who was calling or what they would say. Even though Jane and Kate began with their own aims, they couldn't know what they would end up doing. As Sacks et al. (1974) argued, they had to manage their conversation turn by turn. They had to adapt their actions to deal with the exigencies of each moment. In conversation, the participants' actions are *local* and *opportunistic*.

The paradox leaves us with a puzzle: How do people in conversation ever achieve their broader goals or interests? Part of the answer is that they engineer *extended joint projects* of more than one adjacency pair. These projects don't come prefabricated, but emerge through the opportunistic deployment of minimal joint projects. Here I will describe three basic ways in which extended projects emerge, deferring a fuller account to Chapters 10 and 11.

#### EMBEDDED JOINT PROJECTS

Respondents aren't always prepared to take part in the joint actions that others have contemplated for them. Indeed, they can alter, decline, or withdraw from joint projects that speakers have proposed. And speakers can't always anticipate the obstacles that respondents face in taking up their proposals. Often it is simpler for speakers to forge ahead, propose a joint project, and let the respondents deal with the obstacles that arise. The result is often an *embedded joint project*.

Take this hypothetical exchange in a restaurant between a waitress and customer:

Waitress:	What'll ya have?	[1. request for order]
Customer:	I'll have a bowl of clam chowder and a salad with Russian dressing.	[2. uptake of request]

The waitress asks for an order, and the customer gives it, creating a minimal joint project. But if the customer isn't prepared, she can interrupt the exchange, as in this actual example (Merritt, 1976, p. 333):

Waitress:	What'll ya have girls?	[1. request for order]
Customer:	What's the soup of the day?	[1'. request for information]

- |           |   |                         |
|-----------|---|-------------------------|
| Waitress: | Clam chowder  | [2'. uptake of request] |
| Customer: | I'll have a bowl of clam<br>chowder and a salad with<br>Russian dressing. | [2. uptake of request]  |

This time the waitress asks for the order, but to take her up, the customer needs to know the soup of the day and initiates a side sequence to find out. Once she has what she needs, she returns to take up the joint project originally proposed. The result is one joint project (the side sequence about the soup of the day) embedded within another (an exchange of the order). The embedded project is introduced to satisfy a *preparatory condition* of the customer's uptake – here the ability condition.

The issue is, as Schegloff (1972, p. 114) put it, "how do people see when a question follows a question that it is not any other question, not an evasion?" The side sequence, he suggested, "is specifically done and heard as prefatory to the activity made conditionally relevant by the question" (p. 114), and so "attention both to that activity and to the question is thereby exhibited." When the customer places her question where the waitress has projected an answer, she makes it clear she is initiating a joint project in preparation for such an answer. The side sequence needn't start with a question, as we see in this interchange in a British shop (Levinson, 1983, p. 305, simplified):

- |           |   |                              |
|-----------|---|------------------------------|
| Customer: | U hm . what's the price now<br>eh with VAT do you know eh | [1. request for information] |
| Server:   | Er I'll just work that out for you                        | [1'. promise of information] |
| Customer: | thanks<br>(10 second pause)                               | [2'. uptake of promise]      |
| Server:   | Three pounds nineteen a tube sir                          | [2. uptake of request]       |

The server initiates the side sequence to work out the tax in preparation for taking up the customer's proposal. Side sequences are used to establish preparatory conditions of all kinds – ability, willingness, or identification – and can be initiated in many ways.

#### CHAINING

When people take up one minimal joint project, they are usually initiating another one too. The second part of one adjacency pair is almost invariably the first part of a second one. Questions, for example, project answers, but because those answers are assertions, they in turn project assents, as here (8.1n.921):

Jane: do you know when when he'll be back in  
 Rod: he's around now, u:m I don't know where he is, . at the moment  
 Jane: oh.

Rod's response completes a question–answer pair, but initiates an assertion-assent pair, which Jane completes with “oh.” Here we have a *chain* of two joint projects – question–answer, and assertion–assent – that are *linked* by the part they share, the assertion. If  $a_1$  and  $a_2$  are the two parts of one minimal joint project, and  $b_1$  and  $b_2$  are those of another, chaining might be represented this way:  $[a_1 + , a_2 = b_1] + b_2$ .

Chaining is remarkably useful for creating extended joint projects. When Jane asks Rod her question, she is projecting not just his answer, but her uptake of his answer. She is projecting not just an exchange of information, but an *evaluated* exchange of information – question + answer + evaluation. Such evaluated exchanges are common in conversation (Heritage, 1984; Mehan, 1979; Stenström, 1984). Here are several three- part chains illustrated with schematic exchanges:

Chain	Part 1	Part 2	Part 3
Real question–answer–evaluation	Where's Duncan?	At school.	Oh.
Test question–answer–verdict	What's pi?	3.14159.	Correct.
Offer–agreement–compliance	Want some cake?	Yes, please.	Here.
Request–compliance–thanks	I'll have cake.	Here.	Thanks.
Favor–thanks–acknowledgment	Here's your bag.	Thanks.	No problem.

Speakers can also project chains of more than three parts. Because offers project agreements, which project compliances, which project thanks, a speaker making an offer may project the entire sequence, as here (8.1f.655):

B: do you want the telephone number? [offer]  
 A: u:m . might as well have it I \*suppose\* [agreement to offer]  
 B: \*yeah\*. one? -  
 A: yes?.  
 B: one two one?.  
 A: yes?  
 B: five one seven eight - [completion of compliance with offer]  
 A: thanks very much [gratitude for compliance]

B's offer is taken up by A's agreement to it, which is taken up by B's assertion of the information offered, which is taken up with A's thanks. With chaining, speakers project extended joint actions, even though each move through the chain depends on local actions, on minimal joint

projects. Of course, it is one thing to project an extended joint action and quite another thing for it to go through as projected.

#### PRE-SEQUENCES

If speakers anticipate that their respondents aren't prepared to take up a joint project, they can often do something about it ahead of time. One way is by using what Schegloff (1980) and others have called *pre-sequences*, and the result, once again, is an extended joint project. A good example is the *pre-question*, as illustrated in this sequence (7.1d.1320):

- Ann: **oh there's one thing I wanted to ask you**
- Betty: **mhm-**
- Ann: in the village, they've got some of those . i- you're going to get to know, .  
what it is, but it doesn't matter really
- Betty: mhm
- Ann: u:m . those rings, that are buckles --
- Betty: that are buckles
- Ann: yes, tha- they they're flat,
- Betty: mhm
- Ann: and you wrap them round,
- Betty: oh yes I know
- Ann: and, . you know, . \*they're\* a little belt.
- Betty: \*m\* m
- Ann: **would you like one .**
- Betty: oh I'd love one Ann -

When Ann says "Oh there's one thing I wanted to ask you," she is performing a pre-question. On the surface, she is asking Betty to let her ask a question, and Betty consents with "Mhm." But why didn't she ask the question she really wanted to ask? Apparently, she realized Betty wasn't prepared for it. She needed to establish that she and Betty both understood the type of buckle she wanted to offer. It is only once that is accomplished that she goes on to ask "Would you like one?"

Pre-questions request space not just for questions, but for preliminaries – preparatory conditions – to those questions. Pre-questions are, as Schegloff (1980) put it, preliminaries to preliminaries. The result is a structure like this:

<b>Joint project</b>	<b>Speaker A</b>	<b>Speaker B</b>
I.	Pre-question	Consent
II.	Preliminaries to III	Acknowledgment
III.	Question	Answer

Locally, the pre-question and its response (I) form a minimal joint project: Ann seeks permission to ask a question and Betty grants it. But with that pre-question, Ann also projects a larger enterprise consisting of I, II, and III, and when Betty consents, she is committing herself to the larger enterprise too. Ann and Betty use the minimal joint project (I) to initiate the larger joint project (I + II + III). So when Ann says “Oh there’s one thing I wanted to ask you,” Betty construes her as proposing not one, but *two* joint projects: (1) that Betty let her ask a question; and (2) that Betty give her space to provide the preliminaries to that question. When Betty gives consent with “Mhm,” she is simultaneously taking up both joint projects.

Pre-questions and their responses are only one type of pre-sequence. Just as pre-questions gain consent to ask a question, pre-announcements gain consent to make an announcement, pre-invitations to make an invitation, pre-requests to make a request, and pre-narratives to tell a story. Here are some examples:

<b>Pre-sequence</b>	<b>Example</b>
Pre-question	A: Oh there's one thing I wanted to ask you.
Response	B: Mhm.
Pre-announcement	A: tell you who I met yesterday -
Response	B: who
Pre-invitation	A: What are you doin'?
Response	B: Nothin' what's up.
Pre-request	A: Do you have hot chocolate?
Response	B: Yes, we do.
Summons	A: Hey, Molly
Response	B: Yes?
Telephone summons	A: (rings telephone)
Response	B: Miss Pink's office
Pre-closing statement	A: Well okay
Response	B: Okay
Pre-narrative	A: I acquired an absolutely magnificent sewing-machine, by foul means, did I tell you about that?
Response	B: no

With each pre-sequence, the initiators seek to satisfy a preparatory condition, and once they have accomplished that, they proceed to the projected question, announcement, invitation, request, conversation, closing, or narrative.

Pre-sequences vary in how extended a joint project they initiate. The pre-request “Do you have hot chocolate?” was followed immediately by the request “I’ll have hot chocolate and a Danish.” In contrast, the pre-narrative “I acquired an absolutely magnificent sewing-machine, by foul means, did I tell you about that?” opened a five-minute narrative. The summons on Miss Pink’s telephone – the telephone ring – opened a minute-long conversation. The length of the larger project depends not only on what is projected – a request, narrative, or conversation – but on whether the participants carry it through as projected.

Because pre-sequences check on preparatory conditions, they should fail precisely when that check fails. On the telephone, Ben might expect “Is Susan there?” to work out this way:

- Ben: Is Susan there?
- Charlotte: Yes, she is.
- Ben: Can I speak to her please?
- Charlotte: Sure.
- Hold on.

If the preparatory condition holds, Ben’s pre-request will be affirmed (“Yes, she is”), and he can ask to talk to Susan. If it doesn’t hold, the course will be different, as here (9.1j.700):

- Jane: is Mrs Davy there please.
- Margaret: sorry, she’s interviewing this morning

Another course is illustrated in Jane and Kate’s telephone conversation:

- Jane: is Miss Pink in.
- Kate: well, she’s in, but she’s engaged at the moment

The speaker may have made the wrong presupposition altogether, as here (Hopper, 1992; p. 69):

- Gordon: is Dawn there (0.2)
- Dawn: this is Dawn

In all three examples, the respondents take up altered, but helpful joint projects. So there are good reasons for checking on preparatory conditions. Pre-sequences are engineered to make optimal use of the current opportunities (see Chapters 10 and 11).

Embedding, pre-sequencing, and chaining are the three basic ways of creating extended projects on the fly. With embedding, the initial minimal project emerges with another minimal project embedded within it: [a<sub>1</sub> [b<sub>1</sub> b<sub>2</sub>] a<sub>2</sub>]. With chaining, the initial project is linked to the next to form a more encompassing joint project, [a<sub>1</sub> a<sub>2</sub> = b<sub>1</sub>]b<sub>2</sub>. And with pre-sequencing, the initial minimal project becomes embedded in a more encompassing one: [[a<sub>1</sub> a<sub>2</sub>] b<sub>1</sub> b<sub>2</sub>]. All three methods are achieved locally and opportunistically. Most extended joint projects in conversation—no matter how large—are created by a combination of these methods.

#### JOINT CONSTRUALS

We are now in a position to return to the joint construal problem—how speakers and addressees settle on what speakers mean. The classical view is this. When Jack says to Kate “Sit here,” he has a particular meaning in mind, and it is Kate’s job to recognize it. “What the speaker means” is a specific, objective intention of the speaker, and addressees are to identify that intention. Addressees are said to have misunderstood when they don’t identify it. Although there is a lot wrong with the classical view, the underlying problem is that it treats the speaker’s and addressee’s actions as autonomous: Speakers fix their intentions unilaterally, never changing their minds, and addressees try independently to identify those intentions. If communicative acts are joint acts, that just won’t work. But if the classical view is wrong, what are we to replace it with?

In the view I will argue for, the notion “what the speaker means” is replaced by “what the speaker is to be taken to mean.” The change is small, but radical. The idea is that speakers and addressees try to create a joint construal of what the speaker is to be taken to mean. Such a construal represents not what the speaker means per se—which can change in the very process of communicating—but what the participants *mutually take* the speaker as meaning, what they *deem* the speaker to mean (see Grice, 1982). The idea is captured in this principle:

*Principle of joint construal.* For each signal, the speaker and addressees try to create a joint construal of what the speaker is to be taken to mean by it.

By this principle, Kate isn’t trying simply to identify what Jack means by “Sit down.” She is trying to create a construction that the two of them are willing to accept as what he meant by it. She will usually try to infer his initial intentions, but the joint construal they arrive at will often be different from those intentions. Indeed, for many signals, the classical

idea of “what the speaker means” doesn’t even make sense, whereas “what the speaker is to be taken to mean” does.

#### CONSTRUALS IN UPTAKE

Recall the problem with imperatives. When Jack says “Sit here” to Kate, he may be performing a command, request, offer, advisory, threat, exhortation, or other illocutionary act, and the form doesn’t say which. Now Kate may have a good idea of what he is doing, but that isn’t enough either. Jack and Kate must reach the mutual belief that her construal of his action matches his intentions – or at least is all right with him. To do that, Kate needs to provide Jack with evidence of her construal that he can validate or correct. And what better way than by using her uptake as she completes the joint project she believes he is proposing.

If uptake is used this way, it should regularly distinguish among alternative construals of first pair parts, and it does. Take these four choices for Kate’s response to “Sit here”:

A's utterance	B's construal	B's uptake
Sit here	an order	Yes, sir.
Sit here	a request	Okay.
Sit here	an offer	No thanks.
Sit here	an advisory	What a good idea!

When Kate responds “What a good idea!” she shows Jack that she is construing his utterance as an advisory. That is equivalent to saying that she shows him she is construing the joint project he is proposing as an exchange of advice. And she expects him to see that her uptake is a proper shared basis for the mutual belief that she considers his illocution to be an advisory. It is also evidence that she doesn’t consider it to be an order, request, offer, or warning. And once he accepts her construal, it becomes their *joint* construal.

Kate’s uptake is also important because it makes clear what joint project she is willing and able to commit to. She may be happy to take up “Sit here” if it is an advisory, but not if it is an order. “I think Jack intends ‘Sit here’ as an advisory,” she might reason. “But if I take it up without signaling that, he may think I am committing myself to an order, which I am not willing to do. I had better display what I am committing myself to.” Hence she says, “What a good idea!”

People have at their disposal an array of expressions for displaying

construals of what they are taking up. Many are idioms that seem to have evolved for just this purpose. Here are a few, classified by the illocutionary act they take up:

Type of illocution	Example	Idioms of uptake
Assertive	The movie was great.	Uh huh. Yes. Right. Of course. Quite. Indeed. Oh?
Order	Sit down.	Yes sir. Yes ma'am.
Request	Please sit down.	Okay. Right. All right.
Yes/no question	Was the trip dangerous?	Yes. Yes it was. Indeed. No. No it wasn't. Not a bit. Not at all.
WH-question	Who brought the gift?	Mildred did. [Ellipsis]
Promise	I'll get you a beer.	Thanks. Thank you. Thank you very much. Thanks a lot. Much obliged. Many thanks.
Offer	Want a beer?	Please. Yes please. No thanks. No thank you.
Thanks	Thank you.	You're welcome. Don't mention it.
Compliment	What a nice sweater.	Thanks.
Greeting	Hello.	Hello. Hi.
Farewell	Good-bye.	Good-bye. Bye. Bye bye. See you. So long.

Although these categories overlap a bit, the overlap is benign. Much of it is between categories that are unlikely to be confused. Speakers can make their uptake as precise as they want.

An uptake often displays more than the construal of a joint project. It may express one's *commitment* to that project. When Jack promises "I'll get you a beer," Kate can choose among "Okay," "Thanks," "Thanks a lot," and "Thanks very much indeed," which differ in their enthusiasm. Much of this attitude is carried by intonation. For Jack's "Sit down," Kate can deliver "Okay" or "Right" with an enthusiastic, business-like, disappointed, or subdued intonation, each expressing a different commitment. Or for Jack's assertion "The movie was awful," Kate can display agreement with "Uh huh," "Yes it was," or "Quite," or lack of prior knowledge or skepticism with "It was?" or "Oh?" each with many different melodies.

#### VALIDATION AND CORRECTION OF CONSTRUALS

One reason for displaying construals is to give partners the opportunity to validate or correct them. Much of the time, the displayed construal matches the speaker's original intentions, and the partner validates it by initiating the next contribution at that level. If it doesn't match, as we saw for Kate serving wine, the partner has several options.

Suppose Jack utters "Sit here" intending it to be a request, but Kate replies "What a good idea!" Jack has two choices. He can consider Kate's construal to be incorrect and correct it: "I'm not just advising you to sit here—I'm asking you to." Or he could leave her construal unchanged and revise his own intentions—change his mind about what he is to be taken as doing. He might reason: "So what if Kate doesn't interpret my utterance as a request. She is still going to sit down, and that is my goal." He might then answer "Good," laying down a shared basis for the mutual belief that his action is to be taken as an advisory. As far as Kate is concerned, that may be all he ever intended, and he knows that.

Another possibility is that Jack intended his utterance to be a vague directive, and he is indifferent to how it is construed within broad limits. He simply wanted Kate to sit down. So when Kate says "What a good idea!" he accepts her construal even though it is narrower than intended. He might then answer "Good," laying down a shared basis for the mutual belief that "Sit down" is to be taken as an advisory. As far as Kate is concerned, the narrower construal may be all Jack ever intended, and Jack knows that.

The final possibility, again, is that Kate misconstrues Jack without either of them noticing. Suppose she replies "Uh huh," interpreting Jack's utterance as an advisory, whereas Jack thinks she is taking it up as a request. Jack may accept her apparent construal (e.g., with "Good") in such a way that she doesn't realize he was making a request. They may or may not catch their error later. Here we have an undetected misconstrual.

With minimal joint projects, there are six main patterns of A's proposal, B's uptake, and A's validation:

<b>Pattern</b>	<b>Display in B's uptake</b>	<b>A's response</b>
Verified construal	full construal A intended	Acceptance
Revised construal	a construal A didn't intend but finds acceptable	Acceptance
Narrowed construal	one of several intended construals	Acceptance

Corrected misconstrual	a construal A finds unacceptable	Correction
Undetected misconstrual	a construal A would find unacceptable if it were known	Acceptance
Elective construal	one of an inclusive disjunction of acceptable construals	Acceptance

Each pattern starts with A's proposal of a joint project. What happens next depends on B's uptake. It may show B's construal to be complete, acceptable though unintended, acceptable but narrowed, or incorrect. Or it may be inadequate to show whether B's construal is correct or not. (I will take up elective construals shortly.) A then has to choose whether to accept or to follow up on B's construal.

A and B, then, have a procedure for establishing a joint construal of A's utterance. Although it begins with A's utterance, it depends on B displaying a construal for A to inspect—and to correct if necessary. Even when the procedure is successful, the joint construal arrived at may differ from A's original intentions. It may be a revision or a narrowing of it. What counts in the end is not A's original intentions, but what A accepts as a construal of his or her public intentions ("what A is to be taken as meaning"). Just as people can change their minds about other things, speakers can change their minds about what they are to be taken as meaning, and they often do.

#### ELECTIVE CONSTRUALS

The final type of construal, *elective construals*, emerges from what have traditionally been called *indirect speech acts*. When Jack asks Kate, "Can you reach the mustard?" he appears to be asking whether or not she can reach the mustard, a yes/no question. Yet if the situation is right, he appears also to be asking her to pass the mustard, a request. The question is a *direct* or *literal speech act*, and the request is an *indirect speech act*. In this view, Jack is performing two illocutions:

- Direct speech act (a question):    "Do you have the ability to reach the mustard?"  
 Indirect speech act (a request):    "Please pass the mustard."

Indirect speech acts come in a great variety. Almost any illocutionary act, it seems, can be performed indirectly.

Indirect speech acts have usually been viewed as Gricean implicatures (e.g., Searle, 1975a; see Chapter 5). Jack expects Kate to see that he realizes she can reach the mustard, so he cannot be asking whether or not she is able to. He is flouting the maxim of quality, "Be truthful," and

from that, she is to work out that he is asking her to pass the mustard. The traditional treatment has many problems, but the main one is that it assumes: (1) speakers have a particular interpretation in mind (“what the speaker means”); (2) addressees are to recognize that interpretation; and (3) they are to do so autonomously. All three assumptions are suspect.

Utterances like “Can you reach the mustard?” can be viewed, instead, to have elective construals. In one study (Clark, 1979), a woman named Susan telephoned fifty restaurants in and around Palo Alto, California, and asked “Do you accept credit cards?” Here were three forms of uptake:

- |        |          |                                     |
|--------|----------|-------------------------------------|
| Case 1 | Susan:   | Do you accept credit cards?         |
|        | Manager: | Yes, we do.                         |
| Case 2 | Susan:   | Do you accept credit cards?         |
|        | Manager: | Yes, we accept Mastercard and Visa. |
| Case 3 | Susan:   | Do you accept credit cards?         |
|        | Manager: | We accept Mastercard and Visa.      |

In case 1, the manager’s uptake displayed a construal of Susan’s utterance as a question (“Yes, we do”). Nothing suggests he also construed it as a request for the credit cards. In case 2, the manager displayed a construal of her utterance *both* as a yes/no question (“Yes”) *and* as a request for credit cards (“We accept Mastercard and Visa”). In case 3, he displayed a construal of her utterance as a request for the credit cards (“We accept Mastercard and Visa”), and that was all. If he thought she was seriously asking whether he accepted credit cards, he displayed no evidence of it. The three cases are summarized here:

<b>Case</b>	<b>Manager’s response</b>	<b>Manager’s construal</b>
1	“Yes, we do.”	question
2	“Yes, we accept Mastercard and Visa.”	question + request
3	“We accept Mastercard and Visa.”	request

In each case, the manager’s construal was validated by Susan and became their joint construal.

So what illocutionary act did Susan perform here? It wasn’t a question alone, or a request alone, or even a question plus a request. She accepted all three construals – indeed, she had to. In 1, if she had corrected the manager with “No, I meant what credit cards do you accept,” he could rightly have complained that she had been unclear. In 2 and 3, if she had corrected him with “No, I was only asking whether you accept

credit cards,” that would have been obtuse because he had already told her. The remarkable thing is that by using this utterance Susan left it up to the *manager* to determine which of these options she was to be taken to mean. She put herself in a position where it was impossible to correct whichever option he chose.

The two construals of “Do you accept credit cards?” are elective construals: Susan designed her utterance so the manager could *elect* what she was to be taken as doing – asking a question, making a request, or both. She performed not simply an illocutionary act, but an inclusive disjunction of illocutionary acts: a question, or a request, or both. She intended the manager to see it was up to him to choose, and he chose.

One reason for offering elective construals is to allow short cuts. When Susan used “Do you accept credit cards?” as a pre-request, she was checking on a preparatory condition just as if she were saying, “If you accept any credit cards, please tell me which ones you accept.” That condition may fail, as in case 4, which was yet another way managers responded:

**Case 4**    Caller:            Do you accept credit cards?  
                 Manager:        No, we don't.

The preparatory condition didn't hold, so the request interpretation became moot, and the manager had to elect the question construal alone. I will return to elective construals in Chapters 10 and 12.

#### ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS REVISITED

What, then, is an illocutionary act? The traditional view is that it is an act entirely determined by the speaker who performed it. The addressees may be right or wrong in interpreting it, but it is the speaker's intentions that count. The traditional view, however, cannot be correct.<sup>1</sup> When Susan asked the restaurant managers “Do you accept credit cards?” it didn't matter whether she had intended a question, a request, or both. She left it up to the manager to decide which she would be taken as meaning.

Elective construals sound paradoxical only because we are used to thinking of illocutionary acts as autonomous. But speakers can only perform illocutionary acts by reaching joint construals with their respondents, and that takes actions from them both. Sometimes speakers

<sup>1</sup> See also Streeck (1980).

are led to revise or narrow their original intentions. Other times they leave the construal of their actions open to several interpretations, as with elective construals. Yet as far as both speakers and respondents go, it is their *joint* construal that counts – what the speaker is to be taken to mean. They have a shared basis for that mutual belief and for no other.

With these steps we return to a view of illocutionary acts that is surprisingly close to Austin's. He argued (1962, pp. 115–116):

I cannot be said to have warned an audience unless it hears what I say and takes what I say in a certain sense. An effect must be achieved on the audience if the illocutionary act is to be carried out...Generally the effect amounts to bringing about the understanding of the meaning and of the force of the locution.

If illocutionary acts require actions from both speakers and addressees, as Austin argued, that makes them participatory acts. Most investigators dropped Austin's requirement that illocutionary acts include “bringing about the understanding of the meaning and of the force of the locution” simply because they refused to treat illocutionary acts within a framework of joint actions. The view championed here might have suited Austin very well.

### Conclusions

In conversation people accomplish business one piece at a time. They do that, I have argued, largely via joint projects: One participant projects a joint action for all the participants to complete, and the others take it up and complete it. The canonical joint project is accomplished with adjacency pairs, as illustrated in this question–answer pair:

1. Proposal Ann: when is it
2. Uptake Ben: four thirty tomorrow ---

With “When is it?” (part 1) Ann *proposes* a transfer of information from Ben to Ann, and with “four thirty tomorrow” (part 2), Ben *takes up* her proposal and completes it. The two parts of adjacency pairs are ideal for joint actions for many reasons. They identify the two participants. They require individual actions from both. And these actions are the required participatory actions for a larger unit of work – here, the transfer of information. In conversation, people create extended joint projects out of minimal joint projects by embedding, chaining, and pre-sequencing. Global joint projects are created out of local joint projects that take advantage of the opportunities that arise.

Minimal joint projects are essential to reaching joint construals of

what speakers are to be taken to mean. When Ann says “When is it?” she can determine whether Ben has arrived at an acceptable construal by examining his uptake. His “four thirty tomorrow” displays a construal that she can validate or correct. With this procedure, people in conversation have an added way of arriving at a joint construal of a signal. They rely not only on the form of the signal and the circumstances of its use, but also on uptake and its validation. This process is further evidence that language use is truly a joint activity.