1 Introduction to sequence organization

One of the most fundamental organizations of practice for talk-in-interaction is the organization of turn-taking. For there to be the possibility of responsiveness – of one participant being able to show that what they are saying and doing is responsive to what another has said and done – one party needs to talk after the other, and, it turns out, they have to talk singly. It is the organization of the practices of turn-taking that is the resource relied upon by parties to talk-in-interaction to achieve these outcomes routinely: they talk singly – that is, one at a time; and each participant's talk is inspectable, and is inspected, by co-participants to see how it stands to the one that preceded, what sort of response it has accorded the preceding turn. The organization of turn-taking requires a book of its own; all we can give it here is a capsule review, which will appear below. Suffice it to say that the turn-taking organization for conversation works extremely effectively, and produces long stretches of turns-at-talk that follow one another with minimized gap and overlap between them.

A moment's observation and reflection should suggest, however, that turns do not follow one another like identical beads on a string. They have some organization and "shape" to them, aside from their organization as single turns and as series-of-turns (that is, as turns starting with a back-connection and ending with a forward one). One might say that they seem to be grouped in batches or clumps, one bunch seeming to "hang together" or cohere, and then another, and another, etc.

The most common tendency is to think of these clumps as topical, the turns hanging together because they are somehow "about" the same thing. It turns out that such a claim is more complicated than it initially seems to be, although we must leave for treatment elsewhere what these complications are (Schegloff, 1990:51–53). Whatever may be the case about topics and topicality, it is important to register that a great deal of talk-in-interaction – perhaps most of it – is better examined with respect to *action* than with respect to *topicality*, more for what it is *doing* than for what it is *about*. An utterance like "Would somebody like some more ice tea" – as in Extract (1.01) – is better understood as "doing an offer" than as "about ice tea," as can be seen in the response to it, which does not do further talk about iced tea, but accepts an alternative to what has been offered. (Digitized audio or video files of the data are available at the

following website: http://www.cambridge.org/9780521532792; transcription symbols are explained in Appendix 1.)

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(1.01) Virginia, 11:16-19
1  Mom:  = ˙ hhh Whooh! It is so hot tuhnight. *Would somebody like
2        some more ice tea. ((* = voice fades throughout TCU))
3        (0.8)
4  Wes:  Uh(b)- (0.4) I('ll) take some more ice.
```

When we think of clumps of turns in "action" terms, we are dealing with courses of action – with sequences of actions that have some shape or trajectory to them, that is, with what we will call "sequence organization" or "the organization of sequences." Because much of what Conversation Analysis is concerned with is "*sequential* organization," we would do well to take a moment to get our terms sorted out, and be clear on the difference between "sequential organization" and "sequence organization" as they are used here.

"Sequential organization" is the more general term. We use it to refer to any kind of organization which concerns the relative positioning of utterances or actions. So turn-taking is a type of sequential organization because it concerns the relative ordering of speakers, of turn-constructional units, and of different types of utterance. Overall structural organization is a type of sequential organization; by reference to its shape, some types of actions/utterances are positioned early in a conversation (e.g., greetings) and others late in conversations (e.g., arrangement-making, farewells).

"Sequence organization" is another type of sequential organization. Its scope is the organization of courses of action enacted through turns-at-talk – coherent, orderly, meaningful successions or "sequences" of actions or "moves." Sequences are the vehicle for getting some activity accomplished.

Just as parties to talk-in-interaction monitor the talk-in-a-turn in the course of its production for such key features as where it might be possibly complete and whether someone is being selected as next speaker (and, if so, who), so they monitor and analyze it for what action or actions its speaker might be doing with it. One basic and omnirelevant issue for the participants for any bit of talk-in-interaction is "why that now" (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973:299), and the key issue in that regard is what is being done by that (whatever the "that" is). And the parties monitor for action for the same reason they monitor for the other features we investigate; namely, because the action that a speaker might be doing in or with an utterance may have implications for what action should or might be done in the next turn as a response to it. If it is doing a request, it may make a granting or a declining relevant next; if it is doing an assessment, it may make an agreement or a disagreement relevant next; if it is doing a complaint, it may make

an apology relevant next, or an account, or a denial, or a counter-complaint, or a remedy, etc.

So each turn – actually, each turn-constructional unit – can be inspected by co-participants to see what action(s) may be being done through it. And all *series* of turns can be inspected or tracked (by the parties and by us) to see what course(s) of action may be being progressively enacted through them, what possible responses may be being made relevant, what outcomes are being pursued, what "sequences" are being constructed or enacted or projected. That is, sequences of turns are not haphazard but have a shape or structure, and can be tracked for where they came from, what is being done through them, and where they might be going.

In this book, we will be asking whether there are any general patterns or general practices which can be isolated and described through which sequences – courses of action implemented through talk – get organized. Across all the different kinds of actions which people do through talk, are there any sorts of general patterns or structures *which they use* (and which we can describe) to co-produce and track an orderly stretch of talk and other conduct in which some course of action gets initiated, worked through, and brought to closure? If so, we will call them "sequences," and we will call their organization "sequence organization."

Before going much further, we need to be sure we share some basic understandings of what is meant here by terms such as "turns," "turn-constructional units" (or "TCUs"), and "turn-taking" on the one hand, and by "action(s)," and particular types of action, on the other. To that end, the next few pages are set aside for two "capsule reviews" – brief and highly concentrated reviews of these two domains which figure centrally in the concerns of this book, each of which is meant to be the topic of its own installment in the larger project of which this book is a part.

Capsule review 1: turns

Actions accomplished by talking get done in turns-at-talk. What are the features of this environment for talking/acting-in-interaction? And how are the opportunities for action through talk distributed among parties to interaction? That is, from the point of view of a participant, how does one come to have a turn and, with it, the opportunity and obligation to act?

The building blocks out of which turns are fashioned we call turn-constructional units, or TCUs. Grammar is one key organizational resource in building and recognizing TCUs; for English and many other languages (so far we know of no exceptions), the basic shapes that TCUs take are sentences or clauses more generally, phrases, and lexical items. A second organizational resource shaping TCUs is grounded in the phonetic realization of the

talk, most familiarly, in intonational "packaging." A third – and criterial – feature of a TCU is that it constitutes a recognizable action in context; that is, at that juncture of that episode of interaction, with those participants, in that place, etc. A speaker beginning to talk in a turn has the right and obligation to produce one TCU, which may realize one or more actions.

As a speaker approaches the possible completion of a first TCU in a turn, transition to a next speaker can become relevant; if acted upon, the transition to a next speaker is accomplished just after the possible completion of the TCU-in-progress. Accordingly, we speak of the span that begins with the imminence of possible completion as the "transition-relevance place." Note: it is not that speaker transition necessarily occurs there; it is that transition to a next speaker becomes *possibly relevant* there.

Speakers often produce turns composed of more than one TCU. There are various ways this can come to pass which cannot be taken up here. Suffice it to say that if a speaker talks past a possible completion of the first TCU in a turn, whether by extending that TCU past its possible completion or by starting another TCU, whether in the face of beginning of talk by another or clear of such overlapping talk, then at the next occurrence of imminent possible TCU completion transition to a next speaker again becomes relevant.

But how does a party to the interaction come to be in the position of a speaker beginning to talk in a turn in the first place? There are two main ways. First, a just-prior speaker can have selected them as next speaker by addressing them with a turn whose action requires a responsive action next – for example, with a question that makes an answer relevant next, with a complaint which makes relevant next an apology, or excuse, or denial, or remedy, etc. Second, if no one has been so selected by a/the prior speaker, then anyone can self-select to take the next turn and does that by starting to fashion a first TCU in the turn-space they thereby claim; the first one to do so gets the turn. There is a good deal more to be said about this, but this will suffice for our purposes.

There are two features of turn-taking and turn organization that are most salient for readers to have a firm grasp of for our purposes. First, the TCU as a unit of conduct – readers should be alert to the TCU composition of a turn, to where a TCU is projectably coming to imminent possible completion, and what action or actions the TCU is recognizably implementing; and, second, that feature of a TCU that serves to select someone as next speaker (that is, that action), and what sort of responses that action makes relevant for that next speaker to do. It is these two features that, taken together, compose the central organizing format for sequences – the adjacency pair.

Here is one exchange to exemplify some of the points just discussed. Vivian and Shane (seated to the left) are hosting Nancy and Michael for a chicken dinner, and are recording it for use in a college course. Vivian has prepared the meal, and her boyfriend Shane has been teasing her by

complaining about this or that claimed inadequacy. In this exchange, he is doing this again.

```
(1.02) Chicken Dinner, 4:28-5:06
 1             (1.1)
 2   Sha:      Ah can't- Ah can't[get this thing ↓mashed.
 3   Viv:                        [Aa-ow.
 4             (1.2)
 5   Nan:      You[do that too:? tih yer pota]toes,
 6   Sha:         [This one's hard ezza rock.]
 7   Sha:      ↑Ye[ah.
 8   Viv:         [It i:[s?
 9   Sha:              [B't this thing- is ↑ha:rd.
10             (0.3)
11   Viv:      It's not do:ne? th'potato?
12   Sha:      Ah don't think so,
13             (2.2)
14   Nan: →    Seems done t'me how 'bout you Mi[chael,]
15   Sha:                                       [Alri' ]who
16             cooked this mea:l.
17   Mic: →    hh Little ↓bit'v e-it e-ih-ih of it isn'done.
18   Sha:      Th'ts ri:ght.
19             (1.2)
```

The exchange starts with a complaint by Shane at line 2; Nancy tries to divert the exchange into "shared ways of eating potatoes," but Shane is insistent at lines 6 and 9, and Vivian is taken in by the ruse at lines 8 and 11. After Shane reinforces (at line 12) Vivian's concern that the potatoes are "not done," insufficiently cooked (at line 11), Nancy joins in at line 14. Notice here the following exemplars of matters taken up in the preceding paragraphs: a) Nancy's turn is composed of two TCUs: "seems done t'me," and "how 'bout you Michael"; b) each of these is a grammatically possibly complete construction, and each does a recognizable action (the intonational contour of the first TCU is not clearly "final" for reasons we cannot take up here, except to note that it anticipates and projects another TCU to come); c) the first of these TCUs is addressed to the question Vivian has asked at line 11 – it answers that question in a fashion designed specifically to disagree with, or contest, the answer previously given by Shane, and reassures Vivian that the potato has been properly cooked; d) the second TCU is addressed to Michael – designed as a question that makes an answer relevant next, it selects its addressee as next speaker and the appropriate action: answering the question. It is also designed to put Michael on the spot – having to side with either his friend Shane or his partner Nancy and their host Vivian, a fix which he tries to finesse with questionable success.

Here is one more exchange to consolidate some of the points just discussed – this one a bit more complicated than the last.

```
(1.03) Virginia, 1:6-16
 1          (3.2)
 2  Mom:    (C'n)we have the blessi-ih-buh-Wesley
 3          would you ask the blessi[ng¿ please¿
 4  Wes:                            [Ahright.
 5          (0.2)
 6  Wes:    Heavenly fahther give us thankful hearts
 7          (fuh) these an' all the blessings °ahmen.
 8          (.)
 9  Vir:    >°Ahmen.<
10          (2.0)
```

This family has just sat down at the dinner table – Mom at its head; to her right, eldest child Wesley, in his mid- to late twenties; to his right his fiancée, Prudence; to Mom's left, youngest child, Virginia, 14; and, to her left off camera, middle child, Beth, 18, a college student videotaping the meal for a course assignment, and therefore minimizing her own active participation.

At line 2, Mom, on her own initiative (that is, self-selecting for next turn) produces a TCU (a sentential one) almost to completion. It initially appears (both on the page and in the video) to be a request for someone to say grace, but closer examination suggests that it was designed and understood as announcing the imminent saying of grace (by Mom) so that others might assume the appropriate posture and demeanor. As she begins her turn, Mom does not look at anyone at the table to whom "Can we have the blessing" might be being addressed as a request; rather she begins lowering her head to assume the appropriate posture for grace, and Wesley, looking at her and seeing this, lowers his own head to assume the same posture. As he does this, and as Mom reaches the fully lowered positioning of her head, on the "i-[ng]" sound of her utterance, she aborts the articulation of its potentially final sound, thereby preventing its reaching possible completion. In its place, she looks up and over to Wesley, and she produces a variant version of the utterance; it is now addressed specifically to Wesley (not only by visual targeting but by addressing him by name), who raises his head and orients it and his eyes toward Mom, showing that he has registered her targeting him as recipient, and displaying his alignment with that move (Goodwin, 1979, 1980, 1981). Her redone version of the TCU is now overtly fashioned as a *request* to him ("would you," "please") to do the actual "asking" of the blessing. So Mom has now produced a possibly complete turn, one addressed to a particular recipient, one which makes relevant a particular kind of response by that targeted recipient.

Wesley's response comes in two parts. The first part, at line 4, is apparently a possibly complete turn in its own right (of the lexical sort). It comes at just the place in the articulation of "blessi-[ng]" at which Mom, in her first version of this TCU, had cut it off, and begun its redoing; as well, it can be noted, the intonation contour at this point in the revised version of her

utterance is hearable as possible completion. Wesley's initial response is a "compliance token." First, we can note that he does not reply to Mom's utterance as a question with a "yes," although her turn had the form of a "yes/no" question. What he does is to display his *understanding of it as a request*, and to betoken his *acceptance* of the request. This betokening is not itself the satisfaction of the request, however; it is only a commitment to provide that satisfaction. The "ahright" is not, then, the possible completion of the turn, for the action it does projects more to come. Then, at lines 6–7, Wesley provides the action requested by Mom; note here that the performance of this action is done in talk, but it is talk very different in character than the "ahright." What he does at lines 6–7 is equivalent to passing the salt, had that been Mom's request. That is, the "ahright" gives an undertaking that he will deliver what has been requested; lines 6–7 is that delivery; it just happens that what had been requested in this instance was something to be articulated, to be performed, and so its delivery is done through talk.

The rest of this volume will be full of such turns: one making some sort of response relevant next, another providing such a response – although not always in the next turn, and not always involving separate commitments to deliver the response on the one hand and actual delivery of the response on the other.

Capsule review 2: actions

When we talk about "actions" getting done through turns-at-talk, what kinds of actions are we talking about? How do we determine what action or actions is/are getting done in/by some TCU? How do we know we are right in so characterizing a TCU's action(s)? Good questions all, which will need separate treatment in a work entirely given over to what we can call "action formation"; that is, what the practices of talk and other conduct are which have as an outcome the production of a recognizable action X; that is, that can be shown to have been recognized by co-participants as that action by virtue of the practices that produced it. Here we can at best provide an orientation to this sort of issue.

What sort of actions are we talking about? Well, in discussing the preceding data extracts we had occasion to refer to asking, answering, disagreeing, offering, contesting, requesting, teasing, finessing, complying, performing, noticing, promising, and so forth. And the pages to follow will feature inviting, announcing, telling, complaining, agreeing, and so forth. Two observations about these terms and what they are meant to name will be useful to register here.

First, not all the actions that demonstrably get done by a TCU can be referred to by common vernacular terms like the ones listed above. Unlike

the other main analytic stance concerned with characterizing actions – speech act theory of the sort primarily associated with the names of John Austin and John Searle (Austin, 1962, 1979; Searle, 1969, 1975, 1976; Searle and Vanderveken, 1985) – we do not begin with classes or categories of action named by terms like the above and deconstruct them analytically into the conceptual components that make some particular act an instance of that class.

Instead of starting out from the outcome action (e.g., What would make something a promise?), we start from an observation about how some bit of talk was done, and ask: What could someone be doing by talking in this way? What does that bit of talk appear designed to do? What is the action that it is a practice for? We try to ground our answer to this sort of question by showing that it is *that* action which *co-participants in the interaction* took to be what was getting done, as revealed in/by the response they make to it. And if, in the data with which we began, co-participants did *not* treat it as the sort of action we (as analysts) made it out to be, then we need to look to other data where that practice is being deployed and see if in that instance – or in those instances – it was understood to be doing the action we took it to be. If we find that, then we have strong grounds for a claim that in the instance we began with, the co-participants failed to understand correctly what the speaker was doing or, at least, that they acted as if they failed to understand it. So the first observation is that we start *not from the names of types of action*, not from *classes* of actions, but from singular bits of data, each in its embedding context, and seek out what – in that instance – the speaker appeared to be doing, and what in the talk and other conduct underwrote or conveyed that that was what was being done. Often proceeding in this way yields analyses of bits of data as "a request" or "an invitation" that are far removed from what we ordinarily think of as an instance of a request or an invitation.

Second, proceeding in this way can lead us to discover actions that have no vernacular name, that speech act theory could not ordinarily undertake to analyze. For example, sometimes one party does an utterance which agrees with another (so there is one way of characterizing it – agreeing); indeed, more than agreeing, this party's utterance seems to confirm what another has said (so there is another way of characterizing it – confirming), and yet we notice that, instead of using the most common way of doing the "confirming" version of "agreeing" – for example, by "that's right" – they repeat the thing that they are agreeing with, indeed, that they are confirming. Could they be doing something else by doing it in that way? If one follows this trail of inquiry, one can find new things, new actions, that we did not previously know people did. And, even though there is no separate term for this action (at least not in English), and therefore presumably no special concept of it, the conduct of the parties makes it clear that they understand something different by it than they understand by a conventional

confirmation, "that's right," or a conventional agreement, "yes, I think so too." We cannot continue this search here; the outcome can be found in Schegloff, 1996a.

Because this book is about sequence organization and not about action formation, it will not be possible on each occasion of characterizing the action a TCU is doing, and thereby perhaps what a sequence is doing, to present an analysis that will underwrite that characterization; that will be the task of another volume. But it is important for readers to understand at least this much about our use of the terms that name actions.

One additional point will figure importantly in the undertaking which follows, and that is that a single TCU can embody more than one action, and, indeed, some actions which a TCU implements are the vehicle by which other actions are implemented. In all three of the extracts examined so far, questions figure centrally, but in each of them more is being done than questioning or requesting information. In Extract (1.01), Mom's question is not (only) asking, it is offering; in (1.03), Mom's question is requesting, but not information. And in (1.02), Nancy's question to Michael serves to pose a dilemma which moves him to give other than a straightforward "answer," and provide instead some support to each "side."

With these resources made explicit, we can now return to the central preoccupation of this book – sequence organization. Before taking our brief detour, we had posed the question, Are there any general patterns or general practices which can be isolated and described through which sequences – courses of action implemented through talk – get organized? If so, we will call them "sequences," and we will call their organization "sequence organization." We now return to address this question.

One very large set of sequence types seems to be organized around a basic unit of sequence construction, the *adjacency pair*. Most of this book will be concerned with this resource for talk-in-interaction, and its expansions and deployments. There *are* sequence organizations not based on adjacency pairs – for example, some forms of storytelling and other "telling" sequences (pp. 41–44), some forms of topic talk (although adjacency pairs may figure in such talk, even when not supplying its underlying organization, see below, at pp. 169–80), what will be discussed under the rubric "retro-sequences" in Chapter 11 below, and quite possibly other ones not yet described, perhaps because the settings in which they figure have been less studied (or not studied at all). But a very broad range of sequences in talk-in-interaction does appear to be produced by reference to the practices of adjacency pair organization, which therefore appears to serve as a resource for *sequence* construction comparable to the way turn-constructional units serve as a resource for *turn* construction.

In the closing paragraphs of the Preface, our ambition in this work was described as getting at the organization of "courses of action implemented

through turns-at-talk." Both parts of that phrase are consequential: the turn-at-talk is being examined for the *actions* being implemented in it and the *relationship(s) between those actions*, on the one hand; and, on the other, the focus is on actions that are implemented through *turns-at-talk*. But, of course, not all actions are implemented through talk. How do actions not implemented through talk figure in this undertaking? How do they figure in adjacency pair organization?

Perhaps the most important sequence organization *not* basically organized by the adjacency pairs is that organized by other ongoing courses of actions which take the form, not of talking, but of other physical activity. That is, a very large domain of what we mean by "action(s)" refers to things done with the hands, as in Extracts (1.04) and (1.05), in both of which we see things being passed at the dinner table:

```
(1.04) Chicken Dinner, 3:15-32
 1 Viv:      ↑ˑhu:hh
 2           (0.3
 3 Sha:      °Goo[d.°
 4 Mic: →        [Butter please,
 5           (0.2)
 6 Sha:      Good.
 7 Viv:      Sha:ne,
 8 Mic:      ↑ (Oh ey adda way)
 9 Sha:      eh hu[h  huh  hih  hih  hih-]hee-yee hee-ee ]    [aah=
10 Nan:           [eh-heh-hih-hih-hnh-hnh]h n h-h_n_h hnh]-hn[h
12 Sha:      =aah aah
13           (0.5)              ┐ Shane
14 Sh?:      °ˑhhh°             │ passes
14           (.)                │ butter
15 Sha:      (Hih        ).     │   to
16 Mic:      ha-ha.             ┘ Michael
17 Sha:      (Hih        ).
18           (2.3)
```

```
(1.05) Housemates
video only; no talk in this extract except a bit of laughter
```

Another large domain refers to things done with the feet, as in Extract (1.06), where what is at stake is who is going to move closer to where the other one is; and yet another large domain involves things done with the head and torso, as in Extract (1.07), where a new sequence start is launched with a summons ("Hey"), which attracts first the eyes of the targeted recipient (which it does as the word "like" is said) and then a stable postural commitment (at "telephone"), and so forth.

```
(1.06) US, 3:10-23
 1 Mik:       Jim wasn' home, [°(when y'wen over there)]
```