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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
hot can be inspected. tea. "why - that now" (Schegloff - organization of sequences.) Because much of what Conversation get organized. (( * = voice fades throughout TuU))

"the tuhnigh. *Would somebody like coherent, orderly, meaningful successions or "sequences" of actually, each turn-constructional unit with sequences of actions that have some shape or basic and omnirelevant issue for the One participants for any bit of talk-in-interaction is declining relevant next; if it is doing an assessment, it may make an agree­

ment or a disagreement relevant next; if it is doing a complaint, it may make tum as a response to it. And the parties monitor for action for the speaker might be doing with it.

and Sacks, 1973:299), and the key issue in that regard is what is being done if so, who), so they monitor and analyze it for what action(s) may be being done through it. 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 organiza­

ional 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 the prior speaker, then anyone can self-select to take the next turn and does that 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.

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 f’m,” 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.
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 “[fuh] these an’ all the blessings °ahmen."

You can see the camera, middle child, Beth, 18, a college student videotaping the meal for a course assignment, and therefore minimizing her own active participation.

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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 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 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: I didn’t go by the hall.
2 [Vic:]
3 Shh: [Vic:]
4 Mic: [Vic:]
5 Car: [Vic:]
6 Vic: =Yeh?
7 Car: C’me here.
8 Car: [please?
9 Vic: =I haftuh go t’he bathroom.
10 Car: =Oh.
11 (3.5)

(1.06) US, 3:10-23

1 Mix: Jim wasn’ home. ['when y’wen over there']

Some “sequences of action” may not involve any talk at all (indeed, do not require another person at all). Some may have talk going on but not concerning ongoing other courses of action. Some may involve talk organized to be complementary to courses of action being otherwise implemented, and thereby be organized by the structure of the physical activity they are complementary to. Sometimes the course of action being realized in talk is “functionally” quite distinct from that being realized in other ways, and yet each has some consequences for the other. Sometimes an action done in talk gets as its response one not done in talk; or, conversely, sometimes an action not done in talk gets as its response something done by talk.

There is, of course, a by-now substantial literature describing the organization of bodily action, a great deal of it focused on work settings, but there is not yet a broad framework for capturing in the participants’ terms the sequential organization that orders the courses of action of single participants, let alone the coordinated conduct of several. There is, therefore, no reliable empirical basis for treating physically realized actions as being in principle organized in adjacency pair terms, and this matter will, therefore, not have a place on our agenda. On the other hand, there are exchanges which at least initially appear to map onto adjacency pair organization: either an initial utterance being done in talk and a responsive action being physically embodied, as in Extract (1.04), or an initial move being made non-vocally, and being responded to with talk. These we shall take as at
least potentially relevant to our central preoccupation, although we will not give them any special attention.

Our examination of adjacency pair-based sequences will be organized as follows. First, we will spell out the main features of the basic minimal form of the adjacency pair, and the minimal sequence which it can constitute (pp. 13–27). Second, we will explicate some of the ways in which sequences can expand well beyond the minimal, two-turn sequence which the adjacency pair itself constitutes – pre-expansions (pp. 28–57), insert expansions (pp. 97–114), and post-expansions (pp. 115–68), yielding extensive stretches of talk which nonetheless must be understood as built on the armature of a single adjacency pair, and therefore needing to be understood as expansions of it. In the course of describing these expansions, we will examine a key feature of adjacency pairs – their “preference” structure (pp. 58–96). Third, we will take up larger sequence structures to which adjacency pairs can give rise and of which they may be building-blocks – such as topic-proffering sequences (pp. 169–80), sequence-closing sequences (pp. 181–94), and sequences of sequences (pp. 195–216). Fourth, we will touch on some respects in which sequences and the practices which give rise to them can vary in particular contexts (pp. 220–30), and can be flexibly deployed in ways that give rise to non-canonical forms (pp. 231–250). At the end (pp. 251–64), we will take up some suggestions for using the materials that have been presented so that they can become part of the reader’s analytic resources, ready to be activated by the data you, the reader, have occasion to examine.

2 The adjacency pair as the unit for sequence construction

We begin with the most elementary features of adjacency pairs and their basic mode of operation.

In its minimal, basic unexpanded form an adjacency pair is characterized by certain features. It is:

(a) composed of two turns
(b) by different speakers
(c) adjacent placement, that is, one after the other
(d) these two turns are relatively ordered, that is, they are differentiated into “first pair parts” (FPPs, or Fs for short) and “second pair parts” (SPPs, or Ss for short). First pair parts are utterance types such as question, request, offer, invitation, announcement, etc. – types which initiate some exchange. Second pair parts are utterance types such as answer, grant, reject, accept, decline, agree/disagree, acknowledge, etc. – types which are responsive to the action of a prior turn (though not everything which is responsive to something else is an S). Besides being differentiated into Fs and Ss, the components of an adjacency pair are

(e) pair-type related, that is, not every second pair part can properly follow any first pair part. Adjacency pairs compose pair types; types are exchanges such as greeting-greeting, question-answer, offer-accept/deny, and the like. To compose an adjacency pair, the FPP and SPP come from the same pair type. Consider such FPPs as “Hello,“ or “Do you know what time it is?,” or “Would you like a cup of coffee?” and such SPPs as “Hi,” or “Four o’clock,” or “No, thanks.” Parties to talk-in-interaction do not just pick some SPP to respond to an FPP; that would yield such absurdities as “Hello,” “No, thanks,” or “Would you like a cup of coffee?” “Hi.” The components of adjacency pairs

1 Schegloff and Sacks (1973:295–96). A major resource on the adjacency pair may be found in the Sacks lectures for spring 1972 (Sacks, 1992b: 521–69); another early treatment is Schegloff (1968). Jefferson and Schenkein (1978) take a different view of what the minimal unexpanded unit of sequence organization is and what should be treated as expanded. What they treat as “unexpanded” is what will be later treated here as “minimally post-expanded,” and involves the addition of a third turn. The Jefferson and Schenkein analysis is compelling for the data which they examine, but those data represent but one configuration of sequence organization, through which a particular kind of interactional dynamic is pursued. The account offered here is designed for different goals and, in particular, for more extended and general scope. It should be compatible with the Jefferson and Schenkein account for sequences of the type they address.
are "typologized" not only into first and second pair parts, but into the pair types which they can partially compose: greeting-greeting ("Hello," "Hi"), question-answer ("Do you know what time it is?", "Four o'clock"), offer-accept/decline ("Would you like a cup of coffee?", "No, thanks," if it is declined).

The basic practice or rule of operation, then, by which the minimal form of the adjacency pair is produced is: given the recognizable production of a first pair part, on its first possible completion its speaker should stop, a next speaker should start (often someone selected as next speaker by the FPP), and should produce a second pair part of the same pair type. The product of this practice and these features may be represented schematically in a very simple transcript diagram:

A First Pair Part
B Second Pair Part

None of these features – (a)–(e) above and the basic rule of operation – is rigid or invariant, and they all require some elaboration. As part of their exploitation as a resource for sequence construction, adjacency pair-based sequences can come to have more than two turns (though still two basic parts), they can be separated by intervening talk (what will be discussed later as insert expansions), they can on occasion be articulated by the same speaker as a way of conveying two "voices" (though this use relies on the basic property that Fs and Ss are produced by different speakers), some utterance types can be used as both Fs and Ss (for example, complaint can be used to initiate a sequence but also in response to an inquiry; an offer can be an FPP but also a response to a complaint) and, under specified circumstances, as both Fs and Ss at the same time (as when someone asks you to repeat your question, and you do – thereby doing both an S in granting their request and an F, since in doing so you re-ask your question), etc. In the next several pages, we take up a number of observations about the minimal, basic unit, the adjacency pair, which elaborate its features and explore some of its flexibility.

### Adjacency, nextness, contiguity, progressivity

Among the most pervasively relevant features in the organization of talk-and-other-conduct-in-interaction is the relationship of adjacency or "nextness." The default relationship between the components of most kinds of organization is that each should come next after the prior. In articulating a turn-constructional unit, each element – each word, for example – should come next after the one before; in fact, at a smaller level of granularity, each syllable – indeed, each sound – should come next after the one before it.

So also with the several turn-constructional units that compose a multi-unit turn; so also with the consecutive turns that compose a spate of talk; so also with the turns that compose a sequence, etc. Moving from some element to a hearably-next-one with nothing intervening is the embodiment of, and the measure of, progressivity. Should something intervene between some element and what is hearable as a/the next one due – should something violate or interfere with their contiguity, whether next sound, next word, or next turn – it will be heard as qualifying the progressivity of the talk, and will be examined for its import, for what understanding should be accorded it. Each next element of such a progression can be inspected to find how it reaffirms the understanding-so-far of what has preceded, or favors one or more of the several such understandings that are being entertained, or how it requires reconfiguration of that understanding. For our purposes in this book, what will matter most is the relationship between successive turns; and what matters most immediately is the difference between the adjacent turns relationship on the one hand and adjacency pairs on the other.

The relationship of adjacency or "nextness" between turns is central to the ways in which talk-in-interaction is organized and understood. Next turns are understood by co-participants to display their speaker's understanding of the just-prior turn and to embody an action responsive to the just-prior turn so understood (unless the turn has been marked as addressing something other than just-prior turn). This is in large measure because of the way turn-taking for conversation works; namely, one turn at a time – and, specifically, exclusively next turn allocation. That is, as each turn comes to possible completion and transition to another speaker becomes possibly relevant, it is transition to a next speaker that is at issue. If the turn is to be allocated by the current speaker selecting someone, it is next speaker that is being selected; and if no selection by just-ending speaker is done and another participant self-selects, it is for the next turn that they are self-selecting. However this contingency is handled, each participant has to have been attending to the just-ongoing-about-to-be-possibly-complete turn to determine (a) if he or she has been selected as next speaker, or (b) if anyone has been selected as next speaker in order to determine whether they can properly self-select as next speaker, and (c) what action(s) are implicated by the just-ending turn, relative to which any next turn will be understood. Each next turn, then, is examined for the understanding of the prior turn which it displays, and the kind of response which it embodies, and this is endemic to the organization of conversation without respect to adjacency pairs. The

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2 Note that this discussion is focused on conversation in particular. Because different organizations of turn-taking can characterize different speech-exchange systems (Sacks et al., 1974:701 n. 11, 729–31), anything that is grounded in turn-taking organization may vary with differences in the turn-taking organization. It is a matter for empirical inquiry, therefore, how the matters taken up in the text are appropriately described in non-conversational settings of talk-in-interaction, for example, in courtrooms-in-session, in traditional classrooms, etc.
adjacency relationship taken up in this paragraph operates most powerfully backwards, each turn displaying its speaker's understanding of the prior.

The adjacency pair relationship is a further organization of turns, over and above the effects which sequential organization invests in adjacency per se. Adjacency pair organization has (in addition to the backwards import just described) a powerful prospective operation. A first pair part projects a prospective relevance, and not only a retrospective understanding. It makes relevant a limited set of possible second pair parts, and thereby sets some of the terms by which a next turn will be understood – as, for example, being responsive to the constraints of the first pair part or not. And, as we shall see, the adjacency pair relationship invests a specially indicative import in the relationship of contiguity between first and second pair parts. Even if they are in adjacent turns – that is, no turn intervenes between them – other sorts of elements may be counted as obstructing or violating their contiguity, with considerable interactional import being attached to such a positioning.

**Alternative second pair parts**

Most adjacency pair types have alternative types of second pair part, a matter to be discussed in Chapter 5 under the rubric “preference organization.” But some sequence types (a very few) seem to have only one type of second pair part. The prototypes here are greetings and farewells or terminal exchanges (“Bye,” “Seeya,” “Ciao,” “Cheers,” “Later,” etc.). Actually, with great regularity and their responses are done with the same form (“Hi,” “Hi”), as are farewells (“Bye,” “Bye”), and we may note that, where there are not alternative types of SPP, the actual SPP utterance frequently is not different from the FPP (at least in its lexical composition). But, with very few exceptions, there are alternative types of SPP with which to respond to an FPP.

**Counters**

There are alternatives to doing an appropriate SPP next after an FPP, and they will be taken up as part of our discussion of sequence expansion (and in particular, insert expansion, in Chapter 6). Virtually all such alternatives to an SPP in next turn are understood as deferring the doing of an SPP until a bit later, and are done in the service of a later SPP. But

there is one alternative to an SPP in next turn whose effect is quite different, and it requires mention at this point. That next turn is the “counter”; that is, before (or without) responding with an SPP to the just completed FPP, the same FPP (or a closely related modification of it) is redirected to the one who just did it.

A familiar experience may exemplify this tack anecdotally, before a display of more determinate empirical instances. Readers may recall emerging with a companion from some entertainment or cultural event – a movie, performance, exhibit, etc. – especially one testing the boundaries of familiarity, and asking, “Well, what did you think?” or “How did you like it?” and getting back not an answer, but instead, “How did you like it?” or “What did you think?” or just “How about you?” These are counters; they do not serve to defer the answering of the question (though the one doing the counter may end up answering later nonetheless); they replace it with a question of their own. They thus reverse the direction of the sequence and its flow; they reverse the direction of constraint.

Here are several empirical instances. In the first, a mother and her child of just over a year and a half are looking at a children's picture book together:

(2.01) Tarplee, 1991:1
1 Chi: F → What's this
2 Mom: Fₜ → er::m (. ) yo[u ] t'ell me: what is it
3 Chi: ["() "]
4
5 Chi: S → gie:bra
6 Mom: zgbra: ye:s

In line 1, the child has asked a question (an FPP), but in the next turn the mother does neither an answer nor a form of turn which projects later answering of the question. Rather, she redirects the same question back to its asker, for its asker to answer. Nor does she herself answer the question later.

The second instance is taken from a psychotherapeutic session:

(2.02) Scheflen, 1961:114, as adapted in Peyrot, 1994:17
1 Pat: F → Do you think I'm insane now.
2 Doc: Fₜ → Do you think so?
3 Pat: S → No, of course not.
4 Doc: But I think you are.

In this exchange, the doctor does end up answering (at line 4) the question which the patient asked, and so his redirecting it to the patient and getting an answer (at lines 2–3) ends up having only deferred the answer, and inserted one question–answer exchange inside another. But, following the sequence, as the participants did, in real time, when the doctor's question was asked at line 2, it did not project a later answer. It redirected the question, and could easily have been used to launch a line of inquiry by the doctor (e.g., at line
Sequence organization in interaction

4. “Why not,” etc., or “Why did you ask me then?” etc.). Again, then, the counter reverses the direction of the sequence.

In the third instance, Vic is a janitor/custodian, socializing with buddies in a local used-furniture store. His wife Carol comes to the door and “calls him” (lines 4–5).

(2.03) US, 3:10–23 (previously appeared as [1.06])
1 Mil: \[ \text{Jim wasn' home, ['(when y'wen over there)]} \]
2 Vic: \[ \text{[ I didn' go by theh.]}= \]
3 Vic: \[ =I \left[ \text{left my garbage pail in iz [hallway.]}= \right] \]
4 Car: \[ \text{[Vic,} \]
5 Car: \[ \text{[Vic(tuh),} \]
6 Vic: \[ =\text{Yeh?} \]
7 Car: \[ C'mmere fer a minnit. \]
8 \[ (0.7) \]
9 Vic: \[ \text{Y'come [here. [please?]} \]
10 Car: \[ \text{[You c'co[me ba:ck,} \]
11 Vic: \[ \text{I haftuh go t'the bathroom.=} \]
12 Car: \[ =\text{Oh.} \]
13 \[ (3.5) \]

When Vic responds from a distance (line 6), Carol asks him to detach himself from his friends and come closer (line 7); this is a first pair part—a request. What it requests is a physically realized action, not one implemented by an utterance (though it is not uncommon that, when such a requested action is done next by the recipient of the request, it is accompanied by some utterance—for example, a compliance token such as “sure”). Such requested physically enacted actions are under the same constraints as talk-embodied ones would be: the first pair part makes relevant the occurrence of an appropriate second pair part, which should come “next.” In this episode, however, what comes next is not Vic’s compliance with the request, not the projected second pair part, but rather a counter; he reverses the sequence (line 9), and makes Carol the recipient of the same request she had directed to him.

In the fourth instance, Tony has called his ex-wife Marsha about the return of their teenage son Joey, who ordinarily lives with him, after the son’s holiday visit to his mother in a city some four hundred miles away.

(2.04) MDE-MTRAC: 60-1/2, 1
1 \[ \text{ring} \]
2 Mar: \[ \text{Hello,?} \]
3 Ton: \[ \text{Hi: Marsha?} \]
4 Mar: \[ \text{Yehah.} \]
5 Ton: \[ \text{How are you.} \]
6 Mar: \[ \text{Pissme.} \]
7 \[ (0.2) \]
8 Mar: \[ \text{Did Joey get home yet?} \]
9 Ton: \[ \text{Pon\rightarrow Well I wz wondering when 'e left.} \]

In this exchange, Marsha’s question to Tony at line 8 is not followed by an answer, even though an answer may be understood to be conveyed by implication in the following turn. Instead of answering, Tony asks his own question, a version of the same question but as seen from the point of view of the destination of a trip rather than from its point of origin. In effect, then, this is a counter to Marsha’s question, and it is Marsha who ends up answering, not Tony (nor does Tony answer later). Here again, the counter reverses the direction of the sequence, and it reverses the direction of constraint.

What does that mean, “reverses the direction of constraint”? In order to make clear what is meant by “reversing the direction of constraint,” we need to take up what we call “relevance rules,” because the adjacency pair is one main locus of relevance rules, one place in talk-in-interaction where they have a specially notable bearing. Because this is an important topic in its own right, we will linger on it a bit, but the discussion will come back to the sense of “reversing the direction of constraint.”

Relevance rules and negative observations

The organization of turn-taking provides a way (for co-participants and for us as external observers) to say non-trivially that someone in particular is not speaking, when in fact no one at all is speaking. It is by virtue of a “rule” or “practice” having been invoked or activated which makes it relevant for that particular “someone” to be talking. Even though no one is talking, it is the relevance introduced by a prior speaker having selected someone as next speaker that makes that person be specifically singled out as not talking, even when there is general silence.

But this is just a special case of a much more general issue, one concerning what we will call “negative observations.” There is an indefinitely large and extendable number of things that have not been said, of events that have not happened, of persons who are not speaking, of actions that are not being performed by someone who is speaking. This paragraph has not so far reported who won the American Presidential election in 1992, or 1988, or . . . , etc. Any asserted observation of an absence is at risk of being but one of a virtual infinity of absent occurrences or activities, and in that sense a trivial observation or assertion (however true). For the noting of an absence to be non-trivial, we need a “relevance rule” that makes it relevant for something to happen or be done or be mentioned, etc. Then, if it does not
happen (or is not done or is not mentioned, etc.), it is “missing” in a different sense than the sense in which everything that does not happen is missing, and with a different import. We can then speak of it as a “noticeable absence” or an “official absence” or a “relevant absence.” Negative observations imply relevant absences, and relevant absences imply relevance rules. Noticing that someone in particular is not speaking constitutes a claim of sorts that this is a relevant absence (as set against the non-speaking of everyone else), and turns on some relevance rule that makes it so—such as a prior speaker having selected the noticed one as next speaker. The turn-taking organization, then, constitutes (among other things) a set of relevance rules.

Adjacency pair organization is also a major locus of relevance rules. What relates first and second pair parts can be termed a relationship of “conditional relevance.” “First” and “second” do not refer merely to the order in which these turns happen to occur; they refer to design features of these turn types and sequential positions. The very feature of “first-ness” sets up the relevance of something else to follow; it projects the relevance of a “second.” It is the occurrence of a first pair part that makes some types of second pair part relevant next; that relevance is conditioned by the FPP. If such a second pair part is produced next, it is heard as responsive to the first pair part which preceded. If such a second pair part is not produced next, its non-occurrence is as much an event as its occurrence would have been. It is, so to speak, noticeably, officially, consequentially, absent. The relevance of some turn type which can be a second pair part is conditional on the occurrence of a first pair part from the same pair type. Often enough, the person who can be observed (relevantly) to be “not talking” (by reference to the turn-taking rules) can be heard as well to be “not answering” when their “non-talking” follows a prior utterance which was a question. Thus, the silence in a room can nonetheless often be characterized (and, in the first instance, heard) specifically for who is not talking, and what kind of talk they are not doing. The first of these is furnished by turn-taking organization, the second by adjacency pair organization, and specifically by hearing to be missing the kind of second pair part (or some kind of second pair part) made relevant by a just-preceding first pair part.

But relevance rules contribute not only to how silences get heard, but also to how the talk itself gets heard. Just as not talking after a question can thus be “not answering,” so a great variety of talk after a question invites hearing as, and does get heard as, “answering” (even if, on occasion, “answering indirectly”). Academic inquiry is sometimes puzzled by how some apparently semantically unrelated talk gets heard as an answer, especially when trying to build the “artificial intelligence” for computers to answer questions “naturally” or to recognize answers. (For example, how can “It’s raining”—or even “Isn’t it raining?”—be a recognizable answer to “Are we going to the game?”) What is critical here is that the action which some talk is doing can be grounded in its position, not just its composition—not just the words that compose it, but its placement after a question. Talk after a question invites hearing for how it could be answering, and invites it from those who can bring all the particulars of the setting to bear, rather than by some general rules of interpretation. Just as the questioner presents a puzzle of sorts to its recipient, so does the one who responds; that challenge is, “how is this an answer?” and “what answer is it?” At the same time, doing something which is analyzable/recognizable as a relevant second pair part is its speaker’s way of showing an understanding that the prior turn was the sort of first pair part for which this is a relevant second. Doing something which can be an answer displays an understanding of the prior turn as a possible question.

Adjacency pairs organize with special potency these relevance rules, which can imbue the talk following a first pair part with its sense or meaning, and can imbue the absence of talk with sense or meaning or import as well. Given, via the turn-taking organization, that the absence of talk can be an event in its own right, the adjacency pair’s relevance rules infuse it with a specifiable action import. The first pair part thus sets powerful constraints of action (what the recipient should do) and of interpretation (how what the recipient does should be understood) on the moments just following it. Relevance rules are a key part of the glue that binds actions together into coherent sequences.

The earlier observation that counters following first pair parts “reverse the direction of constraint” should now be more readily accessible. The recipient of some first pair part is put under certain constraints by it—either to do a relevant second pair part, or be heard as “not doing” such a relevant second pair part. We will see in Chapter 6 that recipients of first pair parts are not without resources for dealing with these constraints. But for now we should notice that “counters” take the very constraints that were just cast on the recipient of the first pair part and shift them back onto its speaker; they “reverse the direction of constraint.”

Upshot

What relevance rules do, then, is to set the initial terms for conduct and interpretation in the next moments following their invocation. They do not define those next moments and what occurs in them; virtually nothing in interaction is that unilateral. But it is by reference to a first pair part that what follows gets selected, done, and understood. The first pair part casts a web of meaning and interpretation which informs the surrounding talk. But “surrounding talk” can include more than just second pair parts. As we bring under examination more of the sequences which can grow out of adjacency pairs, we will see how much more, and where.