

## **On the syntax of sentences-in-progress\***

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### ABSTRACT

This article describes how it could be possible for two participants engaged in conversation to jointly produce a single syntactic unit such as a sentence. From an inspection of sentence types that are achieved through such joint production, it was determined that participants have available a single utterance construction format. This format, the compound turn-constructional unit format, may be a component of a socially construed syntax-for-conversation. It can be constituted by a wide range of interactionally relevant features of talk in interaction that reveal an emerging utterance as a multiple component turn-constructional unit. The compound turn-constructional unit format is primarily a resource for turn-taking. It can be used to project the next proper place for speaker change. However, it concomitantly provides the resources needed to complete the utterance-in-progress of another participant, thus allowing for the construction of a single sentence across the talk of two speakers. (Conversation, interaction, recognizable activity)

The central task of this report is the characterization of single sentences that are produced across the talk of two (or more) speakers. This can be seen in Example (1), where the recipient of an ongoing turn produces a completion for the not-yet-completed turn.

(1) [CDHQ:II]

Marty: Now most machines don't record that slow. So I'd wanna- when I make a tape,  
→ Josh: be able tuh speed it up.

The collaboration of two speakers within what is achieved as a single sentence provides a way to recover features of sentence structure, where those features are not wholly tied to the talk of individual speakers.<sup>1</sup> Sentence production can be seen here as an interactional achievement.<sup>2</sup> The import of this is that the completion of one speaker's utterance by another participant reveals aspects of an interactionally relevant syntax. Rather than simply describing the "historical" constituents of a complete sentence, the examination of this type of collaboration makes possible the description of features of a sentence-in-progress.

## TURN-TAKING AND UTTERANCE COMPLETION

Speaker change in the course of a sentence must be understood in relation to the usual way speaking turns are allocated in conversation. Overwhelmingly, one finds in conversation one party talking at a time.<sup>3</sup> This is accomplished by the organization of talk into turns whose features provide for the place and means of transfer. In the production of talk in interaction, most speakers begin talking in the vicinity of possible utterance completion places. Central to this accomplishment is the systematic inspection of the current talk for its next possible completion. In their description of the turn-constructual unit, Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) stated:

There are various unit-types with which a speaker may set out to construct a turn. Unit-types for English include sentential, clausal, phrasal, and lexical constructions. Instances of the unit-types so usable allow a projection of the unit-type under way, and what, roughly, it will take for an instance of that unit-type to be completed. (702)

The turn-taking system for conversation organizes talk into turns-in-a-series, where each speaker that gets a turn is then entitled to talk at least until a possible unit completion. This report describes the syntactic features of turn-constructual units-in-progress that provide a systematic opportunity for talk by another participant *before* a possible completion has been reached.

## COMPOUND TURN-CONSTRUCTUAL UNITS

What features of the start of a turn-constructual unit enable the production of an utterance that is recognizable as a continuation of the turn-in-progress?<sup>4</sup>

The occurrence of an *if* at the beginning of a speaker's utterance can fore-show a second component. A formalized version of this two-part format, *if X-then Y*, can be found in any elementary logic textbook (e.g., Copi 1972). In addition, psychologists have looked at the "proper" and "erroneous" uses of such logical propositions in conditional reasoning (Taplin & Staudenmayer 1973), communication scholars have examined the effects of context on decoding conditionals for inference making (Ray & Findley 1984), and linguists have described the formal structure of conditional sentences (Comrie 1986; Haiman 1986), as well as determined their distribution in written and spoken discourse (Ford & Thompson 1986). However, what is of interest to this discussion is neither the ability of recipients to "decode" and properly use conditional propositions, nor the description of a formal syntax for conditionals, but rather the observation that participants orient to and use *if X* and *then Y* (and related forms such as *when X-then Y*) as sequential components of a single turn-constructual format.

Not every *if* projects or is followed by the *then* component. On the other hand, some *if* components may even be produced in a manner that “invites” production of the *then* component by a recipient. A variety of contextual, sequential, gestural, and intonational resources are certainly put to work here as elsewhere. In the present discussion I am concerned only with characterizing the two-part utterance format. Descriptions of the situated uses speakers make of this format to collaborate with or preempt another participant, and description of the “collaborative turn sequence” that can be initiated by anticipatory completion are topics for other reports.

Utterances produced in an *if X-then Y* (or *when X-then Y*) form reveal their completions in a special way (see Example 2).

- (2) [US]  
 → Vic: If yeh intuh one I'll take one too.=  
 Mike: =Yeh.

For the discussion that follows it is particularly important to keep in mind the distinction between preliminary component completions, which I will argue are not turn-transition places and turn-constructive unit completions that do constitute turn-transition places.

*If* can be a turn-initial token that projects an expanded turn shape and delays, by at least one turn-constructive component, the occurrence of the next possible turn-transition place. This neither suspends the transition relevance of the next turn-transition place nor requests such a suspension. Instead, *if* foreshows that the projectability of the next turn-transition place will not be available from the inspection of the current turn component. That is, it shows recipients that the completion of the current component will not finish the turn, that there will be another component after the current one to complete the turn.

The preliminary component *if X* can nevertheless be characterized as coming to completion and having completion relevance for recipients. The preliminary component is examined for its completion, as possible turn completion only becomes projectably available after the occurrence of the preliminary component completion. The *if X* construction indicates that an inspection should be made of the current talk for the place from which the current turn-constructive unit will begin to go toward completion. Locating the preliminary component completion is in the service of locating the next turn-transition place, because the turn will only begin to go toward completion upon the completion of the preliminary component.

Although the preliminary *if X* component can project in its course a preliminary component completion, that completion is only a first possible place for the final component to begin. The preliminary component can be extended by additional preliminary components (Examples 3, 4).

- (3) [NB]  
 B: When we get unpacked, and you get through with your guests, we'll get together.
- (4) [Birthday party]  
 Mom: Now when you take yer stockins off, er things like that  
 (0.4) kinna ease um down

The possibility of multiple preliminary components makes problematic the location of the final component. As any preliminary component may upon its completion be followed by an additional preliminary component that does not bring the turn to a turn-transition place, it is inadequate to characterize the preliminary component simply as a *pre-completer*. That is, the preliminary component cannot be thought of as projecting a turn-transition place at the close of the next component.

The preliminary component allows for the production of additional yet nonfinal components. In addition to marking the delayed availability of the next turn-transition place, the preliminary component projects in its course the form its final component will take. That is, to provide for the possibility of expansion, the final component is projectably available not in terms of actual location but in terms of format and possible location. So any next component is inspected for the possibility of it being an instance of the projected final component format. If, at the completion of a preliminary component, the turn does not begin to go to completion, then this inspection procedure is reapplied for the next component and for each subsequent component that is an expansion of the initial preliminary component.

Turns are not expandable in this way without restraint; however, the search for a transition space on some occasions can become an extended task. Example (5) includes such an expanded preliminary component.

- (5) [Gerald]  
 J: .hh when you go to France unless you cn speak perfect French er: 'h mosta the French-speaking countries in Europe anyway like in Belgium 'n stuff 'h if you can't speak French 'n speak it fluently 'n the way they speak it they don' wan anything t'do with you.  
 R: They don' ( )

At the onset of a recognizable final component, recipients can then examine the utterance for its upcoming transition-relevant completion and, as in (5), can begin speaking just at that completion.

Any turn unit which in the course of its construction projects a [preliminary component + final component] turn format (i.e., a compound turn format) constitutes a compound turn-constructional unit.

#### COLLABORATIVELY CONSTRUCTED SENTENCES

The completion of a preliminary component is not a transition relevant completion but is nonetheless oriented to in the service of turn-taking. The *if X-*

*then Y* format, while in the first place providing the resources to achieve the features required by turn organization, concomitantly provides participants with the format of the final component, *then Y*, and a projected within-turn completion place. This within-turn completion place has the dual characteristics of not being a transition-relevance place itself, while nevertheless being the place from which a turn can be brought to the next transition-relevance place. It is this turn-taking mandated orientation, to these features, that provides the resources for the achievement of a collaboratively constructed sentence. That is, it provides for the *sequential possibility* of anticipatory completion.

The fragments of conversation in Examples (6–10) contain instances of collaboratively constructed sentences.<sup>5</sup> Each one begins with the preliminary component of a compound turn-constructive unit and is brought to completion by a second speaker.

- (6) [US]  
       Rich: if you bring it intuh them  
       Carol: ih don't cost yuh nothing
- (7) [HIC:I]  
       David: so if one person said he couldn't invest  
               (.)  
       Kerry: then I'd have ta wait
- (8) [GTS]  
       Dan: when the group reconvenes in two weeks=  
       Roger: =they're gunna issue strait jackets
- (9) [Gerald]  
       R: if you don't put things on yer calendar  
           (.)  
       D: yer outta luck.
- (10) [GTS]  
       Louise: when he gets his eyes like this an' he starts thinkin, you know  
       Ken: then you get to worry

Not only do recipients inspect compound turn-constructive units for turn-transition places, but they can also place an instance of the final component in the course of the ongoing turn. Because a second speaker can produce an instance of the final component and initiate it at a place it could be due, it suggests the sequential availability of these features from an inspection of the utterance-in-progress. That is, the turn-so-far projects an upcoming slot for a specifiable final component. This makes it sequentially possible to produce a next utterance that can be affiliated to the turn-constructive unit-in-progress as a fitted completion of that unit.

The *if X-then Y* and *when X-then Y* syntactic formats are two among a set of compound turn formats that begin with a turn-initial compound format marker.<sup>6</sup> Turn-constructive units begun in this way provide the opportunity for a collaboratively produced turn-constructive unit.

Thus far, I have described the compound format in terms of a single syntactic feature. The remainder of the article generalizes the scope of this de-

scription in several ways. First, other syntactic features are shown to furnish the same completable format. Second, other features of conversation beyond surface syntax are also shown to furnish the same format. Third, sequential units beyond the single turn are shown to possess a compound format, and it is shown that these units are themselves completable by someone other than the speakers who began them.

*Quotation in conversation*

In the course of an utterance, when a speaker uses a quotation marker such as *she said*, the talk that follows is taken to be an instance of talk by the person referred to in the quotation marker. An instance of this commonly used format is shown in Example (11).

- (11) [Meat market]  
 Andy: She says but look. Sh'says you wanna play it smart she says  
       (o.4) don't call'er up this // week  
 Paul: A girl's tellin you this?

Quotation in conversation can be produced as a two-component format, *X said-Y* (i.e., quotation marker + quote). This is similar in form to the *if X-then Y* compound turn-constructural format.

Although a quotation marker may not itself specify anything about the quotation that follows, a completion can be type-fitted in detail. In Example (12), the quotation marker is placed in a way that locates the upcoming quote as a second version of the prior wish to *eat a turkey dinner someplace*.

- (12) [GL:TF]  
 A: I just wish I were gonna eat a turkey dinner someplace ahh, he, I wish that he'd  
       say, he said, I have to be back around four, because our family is having some-  
       thing and I wish he'd say  
 B: why don't you come over honey?  
 A: yeah

The quotation marker (1) projects an upcoming utterance, (2) provides a place for that utterance, and (3) proposes the form that utterance will take – a quote. Though the type of utterance is not specified by the quote marker itself, the placement of the quote marker provides a form for an already projectable utterance type.

*Parenthetical inserts*

Not all jointly produced turn units are built out of such easily recognizable formats as *if X-then Y* and *X said-Y*. For example, a parenthetical insert can contain all the features of a preliminary component, therein providing a place for anticipatory completion of the turn-constructural unit by another participant (Example 13).

- (13) [GTS]  
       Dan: it seemed to be  
            (.)  
       → to Ken at least  
            (.)  
       Roger: the wrong kind.

In Example (13), the parenthetical insert (*to Ken at least*) is placed within an emerging turn-constructural unit, without otherwise disturbing the form of the utterance currently being produced. The inserted phrase does not change the trajectory of the turn, rather it suspends progress towards the next turn-transition place until the completion of the insert. The insert is available to participants as a nonfinal turn component that will come to a completion prior to the completion of the turn unit as a whole. So the insert, in its course, projects a place (i.e., its completion) from which the already projected turn unit can resume. In addition, the turn-transition place for the whole turn-constructural unit-in-progress, though not projected by the insert, is nonetheless projectable in the course of the insert, having been projected by the initial part of the utterance. These features provide a place and a form for the completion of the turn-constructural unit, as projected prior to the initiation of the insert. A turn-constructural unit-in-progress that contains a parenthetical insert can therefore be characterized as a compound turn-constructural unit.

The features of the *if X-then Y*, quotation, and parenthetical insert type compound formats can be found in the “surface structure” of the utterances alone. In the following sections, the same general format is shown to be available, but this format is constituted by features that cannot be described solely in traditional syntactic terms. That is, I show that the compound turn-constructural unit format is available as a part of what Schegloff (1979) called a syntax-for-conversation.

#### *List structure as a projectable feature of talk*

From a traditional linguistic standpoint, “there is no intrinsic limit on the number of conjuncts a coordinate structure can have . . . for length alone never renders such a sentence ungrammatical” (Langacker 1973).<sup>7</sup> In other words, a sentence, in theory, can be of infinite length, because an infinite number of clauses (conjuncts) can be conjoined with elements such as *and*. However, given the transitory nature of human life, not to mention the requirements of social organization (e.g., turn-taking), one might suspect that there would be a practical, if not linguistically intrinsic, limit on such conjoining.

In talk-in-interaction, conjoined clauses (including reduced versions in which a constituent is moved out of all the conjuncts) are regularly used to construct lists. Jefferson (1990) determined that lists constructed in conver-

sation regularly, though not exclusively, have a three-part structure. Further, she described three-partedness as programmatically relevant for the construction of lists. That is, both speakers and recipients of lists orient to a three-part structure.

A list-in-progress is recognizable as a list prior to its completion. The production of the second item as the second part of a list marks an utterance as a list-in-progress. Further, the programmatic relevance of three-partedness for list construction can locate the second part of the list (and, retrospectively, the list-so-far) as a nonfinal component of the current turn-constructive unit, and project, on the completion of the second item, a third-as-*final* part.

Such a characterization suggests that list construction can provide – in the course of its production – features for list completion by another participant at just the place a possible last component is due (Examples 14, 15).

- (14) [GTS]  
 Louise: first of all they hit rain then they hit hail  
 → Roger: n then they hit snow  
 (15) [Adato (simplified)]  
 J: Well it's a, it's a mideastern yihknow it's – they make it in Greece, Turke::y,  
 → B: Armenia

List structure provides a compound turn-constructive unit format [items 1, 2 + item 3]. It is not syntactic structure (in a traditional linguistic sense) that provides the list-in-progress with the features of a preliminary component, as there is no grammatical limit to list size. Rather, list construction, as a situated social achievement in conversation, is shaped by the social coordination that organizes conversational interaction. In particular, turn-taking practice calls for recognizable turn-transition places, and the three-part form seems to constitute the minimal recognizable list. (Sacks & Schegloff [1979] noted a “preference for minimization” in conversational interaction in their description of reference to persons.) This list construction practice provides recipients with the resources needed to complete an emerging list.

The availability of the compound turn-constructive unit format can also be seen in the operation of other coordination systems (i.e., systematically organized practices) for conversational interaction. The next section examines an aspect of one of these systems: the organization of agreement/disagreement.

#### *Prefaced disagreement*

Sacks (1987) and Pomerantz (1975, 1984) described some of the features of disagreement. One turn-organizational form that disagreements regularly take is the prefaced disagreement [preface + disagreement]. For example, *well* is a turn-initial component that Pomerantz suggested “typically precedes



disagreement, rather than agreement.” She suggested that there is a range of preface types that are disagreement implicative. That is, the preface component projects a potential upcoming disagreement component.

Using this as a resource, Example (16) can now be examined. The participants are discussing the merits of “living with a man” versus “getting married.”

- (16) [Mother’s Day] ((R is C’s father))  
 R: what would be good is t’ sit down here ’n tell- you tell me  
     (1.1) ((R chewing food))  
     what is wro::ng (.) if you f:ind, like yer mother says someone thet you-  
     (0.2) ((chewing))  
 C: nothing if you’re sure,  
     (0.3) ((chewing))  
 → R: well honey  
     (0.5) ((chew and swallow))  
     in dis world, really truly.  
     (.)  
 C: you can’t be sure.

The *well honey* projects an upcoming component that will disagree with the prior turn. Then, *in dis world*, as an extension of the preface, is a specification of the shape the disagreement component will take – a general formulation. The second extension, *really truly* is a further amplification of the “father knows best” formulation being proposed as a framework for the upcoming disagreement component. It seems that disagreement is clearly on its way.

In its course, the expanded preliminary component projects recurrent places for the disagreement component to begin, and through that provides recurrent places for the initiation of an utterance that appropriates the final component, thereby preempting the projected disagreement. I am not claiming that an anticipatory completion is “invited” or “required.” The point being made here is only that the [preface + disagreement] structure of disagreement provides an opportunity for such an utterance. The disagreement preface, as an oriented-to structure of conversation, fits the characterization of a preliminary component of a compound turn-constructional unit. The disagreement preface is a nonfinal turn component that both projects a potential place for a final component upon its completion and projects a final component type (the disagreement) that can bring the turn to the next turn-transition place. The interactional import of appropriating a completion in a disagreement environment – and thereby preempting the disagreement – has been examined elsewhere (Lerner 1989).

#### *Additional formats*

The turn-constructional unit formats described were presented to develop the assertion that the compound turn-constructional unit format is a widely available, abstractly characterizable feature of utterances. The formats described

should not be seen to exhaust the possibilities. So, for example, another compound format can be constituted by a contrast stress that marks the current utterance as a preliminary component (Example 17).

- (17) [F:TC:I Geri and Shirley]  
 Geri: I mean I don't (.) that much. But he does.  
 (0.4)  
 Shirley: Ri//ght.  
 Geri: En it doesn't matter et this point  
 → I've waited this long I // c'n (wait)  
 Shirley: c'n wait another three wee:ks.  
 Geri: Ye:ah,

Or the fact that two-syllable names are spelled in two parts (i.e., participants orient to this as a feature in the spelling of names in conversation) can provide a projectable compound format (Example 18).

- (18) [CDHQ:II]  
 Mrs. R: His name is Joe,  
 Josh: Mm hm?  
 Mrs. R: Vandiver.  
 Josh: Vandiver?  
 → Mrs. R: V-a-n, // d-  
 Josh: d-i-v-e-r.  
 Mrs. R: d-i-v-e-r. Uh huh,

In other words, participants can project an opportunity space using a phonological feature of a prior utterance.<sup>8</sup> Any aspect of the organization of talk in interaction that includes a projectable compound turn-unit format therein provides the resources for completion by another participant.

### *Concurrent formats*

In Example (19), there is a co-occurrence of the quotation format and a format that includes a turn-initial compound unit marker *instead of* *X-Y*.

- (19) [GTS]  
 Ken: *instead* my grandmother offering him a drink, of beer she'll say  
 Louise: wanna glassa milk?

The co-occurrence of two formats produces a serially established, jointly relevant specification of the final component of the current turn-constructive unit. The quotation marker sets the form of the contrastive offer. This is not simply an extension of a prior preliminary component but a transformation of the final component of the *instead of* *X-Y* format from an offer report to an instance of the offer. Thus, the more recent format does not supercede the earlier one; rather, a subsequent format places an additional constraint on the production of the projected component. This orientation to concurrence provides one way to locate what "context" entails for participants and how it is systematically used in the production of the conversational interaction emerging from it.

Under the sway of concurrence, the adjacency pair relationship of [ques-

tion + answer] organization (Schegloff 1990; Schegloff & Sacks 1973) can also provide the features needed for anticipatory completion. In Example (20), a storytelling is in progress, and a quote within the telling has just occurred.

- (20) [GTS]  
 [Ken is telling a story about being sick in bed and having a buzzer to call his mom when he needs something.]  
 Ken: I uh pushed the thing and my mom comes running oh oh he must be dying y'know practically,  
 → Yes, whattya want? ((breathy))  
 Roger: I like the way you walk, mom

There is continued and conjoint relevance of both quoting and [question + answer] organization. In this instance, the breathy *Yes, whattya want?* marks the onset of a quote in the story. The [question + answer] sequence is preserved as the talk of the storyteller, since the quoted question makes relevant a quoted answer as a part of the telling of the story. This provides the recipients with the features of a preliminary component. Under the auspices of a quoted question, a story recipient can produce an answer that will be heard as part of the current story component. This demands further explanation. However, it is necessary to examine a different type of format from those examined so far before continuing the analysis of Example (20).

### *Preformulated formats*

Compound turn-constructional units-in-progress provide recipients with a variety of projectable formats. Each preliminary component examined so far reveals the form of an upcoming component marking the current component as a nonfinal turn component. The compound form of the turn-constructional unit, and the segmentation of the turn space it constitutes, is realized reflexively in the course of the compound turn-constructional unit's production. The business of the turn unit is not specifically taken up with the job of claiming or proposing an extended turn. However, speakers can preformulate a compound turn-constructional unit.

This can occur when the projected compound unit will be made up of more than one turn-constructional unit. An orientation to turns as turns-in-a-series and of potentially limitable size produces a problem for speakers, since the completion of the first turn-constructional unit may be used by another participant as a turn transition place. How can a speaker project a turn at talk that is recognizably intended to be longer than a single turn-constructional unit? The solution to this problem can occupy a complete turn-constructional unit (Example 21).

- (21) [HIC]  
 → Kerry: you have two different types of decisions. That means that every time a teacher wansa tell a kid to take a pee 'e doesn' have ta ask the principal to open the bathroom  
 Dad: but if they send a kid home

The preformulation, *you have two different types of decisions*, provides a characterization of what will be taken up in a subsequent turn unit. This is distinct from other formats, because here the preliminary component is marked as preliminary prior to its onset. In addition to formulating a two-part structure, the preformulation provides a characterization of what will be taken up in the next two turn components, *types of decisions*, and their relationship to each other, *two different types*, thus providing the form of the second turn component – a contrast. In proposing the extended turn shape, this device also provides recipients with the resources for issuing an utterance that can be recognized as a completion at just the place the contrastive component could occur.

In addition to the preformulation of two-component structures, there are other devices that are available to speakers to preformulate the suspension of the transition relevance of several upcoming turn-constructional units (Schegloff 1982). These procedures propose the suspension of transition relevance for an unspecified number of turn units. One such device described by Sacks (1970:Spring lecture 2; 1974) is the story preface. Another is the “pre-pre” (Schegloff 1980). In both cases, while preformulation occurs without specifying the exact formats of the upcoming units, what it will take to complete the extended unit is projected. For example, a storytelling requires a recognizable story ending. A brief consideration of storytelling organization will lead the analysis back to Example (20).

Story prefaces can lead to a suspension of turn-by-turn talk for the duration of a telling. Though story recipients do talk within the course of the telling (and the continuation of a storytelling is a collaborative, moment by moment achievement), storytellers regularly gain an extended storytelling space to tell the story to completion. Because a storytelling is produced as a sequence of turn-constructional units, it will have within it a series of recognizable turn-unit completion places, but most of these completion places are not treated as possible story completion places. In addition, various action sequences (e.g., question + answer), whose parts are ordinarily produced by different speakers, can be done within the storytelling space by a single speaker. These action sequence packages also have recognizable completions.

We now have the resources in hand to return to Example (20). The utterance in question, *I like the way you walk, mom*, occurs in the course of a storytelling. Roger’s utterance seems hearable as an anticipatory completion, because it finishes a projectable unit of the telling in progress. That is, it provides an answer to the question as quoted in the story. The utterance is done within the projected turn space or, more precisely, within the extended storytelling space of another participant. Even though it is produced as a separate *turn*-constructional unit, it completes a projectable compound *story*-constructional unit. The continuing relevance of the storytelling, the quota-

tion in the telling, and the question in the quotation provides the possibility of anticipatory completion as a recognizable, accountable action.

This suggests a generalization of the operation of participant orientation to compound units. Not only are some turn-constructive units available as compound units, but larger, internally segmented actions are as well. For example, preformulated two-part units and action sequence packages within storytellings both extend beyond a single turn-constructive unit, yet can be oriented to as single compound units.

Any action that foreshows a recognizable completion furnishes an action space. This space extends from the emerging utterance-so-far to the projectable completion of the unit. Units that foreshow a segmented action space are thereby completable.<sup>9</sup> Completable units regularly have a projectable preliminary completion place from which the anticipatory completion can begin.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, when anticipatory completions are produced, they are sited at the completion of the preliminary component even when they are not actually placed there.<sup>11</sup> One can think of the affiliating utterance as not only continuing and completing an emerging compound turn-constructive unit (or other action unit), but also as occurring within the projected turn space begun by the current speaker, thereby in a sense appropriating completion of the turn. In this way a single turn-constructive unit can be produced across the talk of two speakers.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conversation, there are places for turns to begin and recognizable beginnings to turn-constructive units. However, occasionally speakers do begin talking at other than a turn-transition place. I have described in interactional terms – that is, in terms of turn-taking organization – one such class of places where speakers begin their utterances. They begin in the course of turn-constructive units that have a compound format. These are units that contain a turn-constructive component that is available to recipients as preliminary to some later, final component. The final component need not be the next component.

The organization of turn-taking requires an orientation to projected unit completion by recipients. This requirement then provides the resources for the production of a recognizable completion by a recipient.

The features that constitute an utterance as a compound turn-constructive unit can be syntactic in nature (e.g., the *if X-then Y* format), but other aspects of the structure of conversational interaction can provide the same features (e.g., prefaced disagreement or word pronunciation).

In each of these formats, the preliminary component projects the place where a final component could begin and projects the form of the final com-

ponent. The projection of the form of the final component and not simply its location is required, because the turn-constructive unit-in-progress can be expanded prior to the final component. So, each next component must be examined to see if it is an instance of the projected final component.

Though a compound turn-constructive unit-in-progress provides an opportunity for anticipatory completion, it does not require it; that is, the opportunity is sometimes taken and sometimes not taken. (And the opportunity space can indeed be used for other actions besides anticipatory completion.) Completion of a compound turn-constructive unit-in-progress by another participant is sequentially possible but not necessarily sequentially required or implicated.

#### *Anticipatory completion and turn-taking*

Though the current article clearly relies on the bare-bones framework for turn-taking sketched out by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974), it must also be seen as both a test of its robustness and as an extension of its findings. It is a test in that, as a framework for the description of anticipatory completion, the "simplest systematics" proposed by Sacks et al. (1974) did not collapse under the weight of extremely close scrutiny. This investigation, after all, dwelt upon features of conversational interaction that seem at first to be counterevidence for a basic component of turn-taking, that is, its basic unit, the turn-constructive unit. Rather, the possibility (and actuality) of anticipatory completion has here been shown to be rather direct evidence for a turn-taking organization consistent with the features and constraints proposed in Sacks et al. (1974).

This article is an extension of the work on turn-taking organization, because it provides a detailed characterization of one sort of turn-constructive unit, the compound turn-constructive unit. The compound turn-constructive unit is not composed solely of syntactic features. Rather, its features were shown to be available from sequentially relevant syntactic features as well as other aspects of talk-in-interaction. In fact, the utterance format described here seems to transcend the particulars of context, content, and surface syntactic structure, thus demonstrating what a component of a socially constructed, empirically described "syntax-for-conversation" might look like.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, the compound turn-constructive unit provides an opportunity space for speaker transition. That is, it provides a systematic (though secondary) place, besides the turn-transition place, for the transfer of speakership.<sup>13</sup>

Further, the operation of the compound unit format extends beyond the bounds of turn-taking to other basic forms of organization in conversational interaction, such as storytelling and sequence organization. Investigation has shown (though it was not reported here) that the sequencing of actions in conversational interaction can also supply features that betoken a compound

“action unit,” thereby providing the resources for anticipatory completion of the foreshown sequence of actions. Finally, use of compound unit formats extends beyond conversational interaction to other types of interaction such as speech making.<sup>14</sup> Compound units are used within each of these types of organization and appropriation of these units can occur.

### *Language and action*

Language (and its rules) grew out of the cauldron of situated social action. It is therefore not surprising that syntactic structures (and their constituent boundaries) are oriented to and analyzed by participants. However, because participants to a conversation must analyze every syntactic structure both within its course and within its context, the components of participant's syntax must be described within these constraints and with the situated interests of the participants in mind.

### NOTES

\* I am indebted to Gail Jefferson for advice during the early stages of this research and to Manny Schegloff for his advice over the long course of its development. It was at Harvey Sacks's invitation that I began working on materials that led me to the present report – though regretfully he and I never had a chance to talk in any depth about it.

1. The phenomenon of the collaborative or joint production of turn-constructional units was first introduced by Harvey Sacks (see, e.g., 1965:Fall lecture 1; 1968:Fall lecture 5; and 1971:Fall lecture 4). Two themes are evident in Sacks's lectures. First, anticipatory completion provides a special sort of evidence for a participant administered turn-taking mechanism. In Sacks's (1967:Fall lecture 4) words, “that persons go about finishing incomplete sentences of others with syntactically coherent parts would seem to constitute direct evidence of their analyzing an utterance syntactically in its course.” A second interest is that collaboratively produced sentences reveal a relationship between syntax and social organization. It provides evidence of how syntax can be mobilized to organize participants into “groups.”

2. Goodwin (1979, 1980, 1981) described gaze-related aspects of the interactional construction of turn units.

3. The formulation of turn-taking used throughout this article is that of Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974). For an alternative formulation, see Duncan (1972) and Duncan and Fiske (1977). Wilson and Zimmerman (1986) provided one empirical comparison.

4. In this article, the speaker of the preliminary component will be considered to have been the speaker of the turn-constructional unit from its beginning. However, more than one participant can be involved in the construction of a turn unit prior to production of a completion by a third participant.

[GTS]

Dan: So what- what bedder wa:y  
(0.2) in terms of uh  
(.)

Roger: t' git myself i:n

Dan: in

Louise: is tell'm how bad I am

Here, the preliminary component, *So what better way, in terms of to get myself in*, is itself produced by two participants. (The evidence that utterances such as this constitute preliminary components is presented in the section on parenthetical inserts.)

5. As the concern of this article is to describe an aspect of the organization of interaction, all fragments of talk displayed are taken from naturally occurring conversations. The transcrip-

tion conventions employed in this report are those developed by Gail Jefferson (Atkinson & Heritage 1984; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson 1974; Schenkein 1978).

6. This set includes a variety of forms. For example,

[HIC]

David: in case: the president isn't at the meeting,  
(0.3)

Dad: who's gunna be there?

[GL:FN]

A: Did you use the button holer on that?

B: Once you cut the button hole open

A: you can't use the button holer.

The *if X-then Y* format is intended to include instances of this structure, generally. (Linguists might characterize these formats syntactically as dependency relationships begun with sentence-initial subordinators such as *if*.)

7. This view also seems to be shared by generative-transformational grammarians. Chomsky (1965) not only maintained that the number of conjuncts does not change the grammaticalness of a sentence (Chapter 1, notes 7 & 9; Chapter 3, notes 7 & 11), but he also asserted that multiple-branching constructions such as coordinate structures are optimal in performance acceptability (Chapter 1, pp. 10-13).

8. A similar grouping practice can also be seen in the transfer of phone numbers in conversation (cf. Goldberg 1975).

[SF:1]

Mark: Okay it's area code two one three

JoAnn: Yah. Four three one.

Mark: Right.

Here, JoAnn produces the prefix at just the point Mark finishes the area code.

9. One implication of this is that aspects of talk in interaction that do not project recognizable completions do not furnish an action space and therefore cannot be appropriated in the same manner. Such features should have quite distinct organizational properties. I think the most likely candidate for this type of organization is the organization of "topic." See, for example, Jefferson's (1984) discussion of step-wise movement in open and closed topic-types.

10. However, for a discussion of unprojected places for completion, see Lerner (1987: Ch. 3).

11. Not all anticipatory completions are actually located precisely at a place an utterance completion could be due. However, those placed elsewhere are regularly produced in a way that nevertheless demonstrates that precise siting. A fuller characterization of the "opportunity space" for anticipatory completion can be found in Lerner (1987) and will be the topic of a future report.

12. The terms used by linguists to parse sentences have not been used to characterize the sentential, clausal, and phrasal units that can be employed as preliminary components. It could be suggested that compound turn-constructional unit formats such as *if X-then Y* are simply sentences that have preposed subordinate relationships. However, the subordinate/dependency relationship does not capture all the sentence types that prove to be completable. Not only can sentences with constituents in a subordination relationship be appropriated (e.g., adverbial clauses such as *when . . . then . . .*), but constituents in a coordination relationship can also be appropriated (e.g., contrasting constituents such as *either . . . or . . .*).

It is not an issue of subordinate versus coordinate (or even subordinate and complex conjunctive versus other coordinates), but one of projectability. The relevant features of conditionals are the placement of the utterance-part before the main clause and the marking of that utterance-part, in its course, as an antecedent (preposed) utterance. Certainly, linguistic structures can provide projectable features, but not all compound turn-constructional units rely solely on these features (e.g., list construction). The point here is that a participants' syntax (i.e., participants' orientation to talk as segmented and structured) seems to be shaped by the situated use of language (i.e., by the requirements of talk-in-interaction), and therefore the description of this syntax by analysts ought to follow suit.



13. There are at least two additional places where speakers systematically start talking. They begin at points of "adequate recognition" (Jefferson 1973, 1983), and they begin at places where the "progressivity" of the ongoing utterance has been disrupted (Jefferson 1983; Lerner 1987).
14. Atkinson (1984) described several techniques speakers at public meetings use to invite audience applause. Furthering the examination of applause generation, Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) found seven rhetorical devices that precede applause. Virtually all of these devices entail compound turn-constructive unit formats. Moreover, audience applause is not limited to the completion of compound formats. Heritage (personal communication) found audience response after the first part of such devices as contrasts. In other words, applause occurs in the opportunity space after a preliminary component. In such cases, Heritage suggested applause is used as a disaffiliating device, affiliating with the negative (to the speaker) first component, while drowning out the second affirmative component of the contrast.

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