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Reflections on Talk and Social Structure

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Whether starting from a programmatic address to the structure of face-to-face interaction or from a programmatic concern with the constitutive practices of the mundane world, whether in pursuit of language, culture or action, a range of inquiries in several social science disciplines (most relevantly anthropology, sociology and linguistics) have over the past 25 to 30 years brought special attention to bear on talk-in-interaction. It is not unfair to say that one of the most focused precipitates of this broad interest has been that family of studies grouped under the rubric "conversation analysis." It is, in any case, with such studies of "talk" that I will be concerned in reflecting on "talk and social structure."

   Although itself understandable as a sustained exploration of what is entailed in giving an analytic account of "a context" (as in the phrase "in the context of ordinary conversation"), various aspects of inquiry in this tradition of work have prompted an interest in neighboring disciplines in relating features of talk-in-interaction to "contexts" of a more traditional sort – linguistic contexts, cultural contexts, and institutional and social structural contexts. At the same time, investigators working along conversation analytic lines began to deal with talk with properties which were seemingly related to its production by participants oriented to a special "institutional" context; and, wishing to address those distinctive properties rather than ones held in common with other forms of talk (as Sacks had done in some of his earliest work based on group therapy sessions), these investigators faced the analytic problems posed by such an undertaking.

The interest in the theme "talk and social structure" comes, then, from several directions – the most prominent being technical concerns in the analysis of certain forms of talk on the one hand, and an impulse to effectuate a rapprochement with the concerns of classical sociology, and to do so by relating work on talk-in-interaction to those social formations which get referred to as "social structures," or generically as "social structure," on the other hand. My reflections will have this latter impulse as their point of departure, but will quickly seek to engage it by formulating and confronting the analytic problems which it poses.

Of course, a term like "social structure" is used in many different ways. In recent years, to cite but a few cases, Peter Blau (1977) has used the term to refer to the distribution of a population on various parameters asserted to be pertinent to interaction, claiming a derivation from Simmel and his notion of intersecting social circles. Many others have in mind a structure of statuses and/or roles, ordinarily thereby building in an inescapable normative component, of just the sort Blau wishes to avoid. Yet others intend by this term a structured distribution of scarce resources and desirables, such as property, wealth, productive capacity, status, know-ledge, privilege, power, the capacity to enforce and preserve privilege, etc. Still others have in mind stably patterned sets of social relations, whether formalized in organizations or more loosely stabilized in networks.

The sense of "social structure" intended in the thematic concern with "talk and social structure" does not range across all these usages. But almost certainly it includes a concern with power and status and its distribution among social formations such as classes, ethnic groups, age grade groups, gender, and professional relations. It is this sense which has animated, for example, the work by West (1979) and Zimmerman and West (1975) on gender and interruption, and West's work (1984) on doctor/patient interaction. And it includes as well a concern with the structured social relations which comprise organizations and occupational practice and the institutional sectors with which they are regularly identified (as, for example, in Atkinson and Drew's treatment of the courts (1979), in the work of Zimmerman and his associates on the police (for instance, Zimmerman 1984; Whalen and Zimmerman 1987), Maynard's work (1984) on the legal system, that of Heritage (1985a) on mass media news, or Boden's (forthcoming) on organizations; see also part II below). Mehan's studies of decision making in the context of educational bureaucracies (Mehan, Hertweck and Meihls 1986; and Mehan, chapter 4 below) touch on both usages (as of course do some of the other studies which I have invoked to exemplify one or the other).

The work which engages with these classical sociological themes and incorporates reference to and treatment of them in studying talk-in-

interaction has revived for me some concerns which were deep preoccupations some 25 years ago when work on the analysis of talk-in-interaction, of the sort now referred to as "conversation analytic," was getting underway. In these reflections, I want among other things to review, restate and update some of those considerations, and ask how contemporary efforts to engage these topics stand with respect to some of these older concerns. Do the old concerns still have the force they once had, or have they faded in felt significance? Are there now solutions to the problems as once formulated? Or can the results of current work at the interface of conversation and social structure be usefully enriched or constrained by engaging these issues?

Whatever answers we arrive at to these questions, there is one point I want to make before taking them up. Whatever substantive gains there are to be had from focusing on the relationship between talk and social structure in the traditional sense, this focus is not needed in order to supply conversation analysis with its sociological credentials. The work which is focused on the organization of talk-in-interaction in its own right – work on the organization of turn-taking, or on the organization of sequences, work addressed to the actions being done in turns and the formats through which they are done, work on the organization of repair, and work directed to the many discrete practices of talking and acting through talk which do not converge into domains of organization – this work is itself dealing with social organization and social structures, albeit of a different sort than in the received uses of those terms, and is no less sociological in impulse and relevance (Schegloff 1987b).

For some, the fact that conversation analysis (henceforth, CA) concerns itself with the details of talking has meant that it is a form of linguistics. Perhaps so, but certainly not exclusively so. If it is not a distinctive discipline of its own (which it may well turn out to be), CA is at a point where linguistics and sociology (and several other disciplines, anthropology and psychology among them) meet. For the target of its inquiries stands where talk amounts to action, where action projects consequences in a structure and texture of interaction which the talk is itself progressively embodying and realizing, and where the particulars of the talk inform what actions are being done and what sort of social scene is being constituted. Now, from the start, one central preoccupation of sociology and social theory has been with the character of social action and what drives it (reason, passion, interest, utility) – this is familiar enough. Another concern has been with the character of interaction in which action is embedded, for it is observations about some aspects of the character of interaction that motivated such hoary old distinctions as those between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, between status and

contract, and the like. "Action in interaction" is, then, a longstanding theme of social analysis.

CA's enterprise, concerned as it is with (among other things) the detailed analysis of how talk-in-interaction is conducted as an activity in its own right and as the instrument for the full range of social action and practice, is then addressed to one of the classic themes of sociology, although to be sure in a distinctive way. Of the several ways in which CA shows its deep preoccupation with root themes of social science and sociology in particular, these standing conversation analytic preoccupations resonate more with the title of the recent Atkinson/Heritage collection (1984): they are concerned with "structures of social action" – structures of single actions and of series and sequences of them. Atkinson and Heritage's title is, of course, a thoroughly unveiled allusion to the title of Talcott Parsons's first major work, *The Structure of Social Action* (1937), the work which launched the enterprise of Parsonian action theory. The difference between Parsons's title and the Atkinson/Heritage allusion, "*The Structure* of Social Action" versus "*Structures* of Social Action," may suggest some of the distinctiveness.

Parsons's tack was conceptual and global. For him there was "*the* structure," and it was arrived at by theoretic stipulation of the necessary components of an analytical unit – the "unit act," components such as "ends," "means," "conditions." This was a thoroughly conceptual enterprise on a thoroughly analytic object. The Atkinson/Heritage "structures of" suggests not only multiplicity of structures, but the empirical nature of the enterprise. The units are concrete activities, and the search for their "components" involves examination and description of empirical instances.

But with all the differences in conception, mode of working, etc., there is a common enterprise here, and it has long been a central one for sociology and the social sciences more generally – to try to get at the character of social action and social interaction. In CA's addressing of this theme and the varied problems and analytic tasks to which it gives rise, it is itself engaged in "*echt*" sociology, even without the introduction of traditional sociological concerns such as "social structure." But the claim that the problems which have preoccupied conversation analysis *are* sociological in impulse and import is without prejudice to our engagement with the work which tries to relate talk to more traditional conceptions of social structure. That engagement is already underway.

The reasons for thinking about the relationships of talk and social structure are ready to hand. Both our casual and our studied examination of interaction and talk-in-interaction provide a lively sense of the occasions on which who the parties are relative to one another seems to

matter, and matter to *them*. And these include senses of "who they are" that connect directly to what is ordinarily meant by "social structure" – their relative status, the power they differentially can command, the group affiliations they display or can readily have attributed to them such as their racial or ethnic memberships, their gender and age-grade status, their occupational status and its general standing and immediate interactional significance, and the other categories of membership in the society which can matter to the participants and which fall under the traditional sociological rubric "social structure."

The issue I mean to address is not: is there such a thing as gender/class/power/status/organization/etc.? Or: does it affect anything in the world? Rather, the question is: whatever observations we initially make about how such features of social organization as these work and bear on interaction, how do we translate them into defensible, empirically based analyses that help us to get access to previously unnoticed particular details of talk-in-interaction, and appreciate their significance. For the lively sense we may all share of the relevance of social structure along the lines I have mentioned needs to be converted into the hard currency (if you'll pardon the cash nexus) of defensible analysis – analysis which departs from, and can always be referred to and grounded in, the details of actual occurrences of conduct in interaction.

Again, I do not mean to be addressing myself to two apparently neighboring stances, although there may well be implications for them. I am not centrally concerned with those investigators whose primary analytic commitment is to social structure in the received senses of that term, and who mean to incorporate examination of talk into their inquiries because of the role attributable to it in the "production" of social structure – although I do later comment on them (see pp. 64–5). And I do not take up the position (apparently embraced in Goffman 1983a) in which the prima facie relevance of social structure to the organization of interaction is in principle to be disputed (although I do suggest that some received notions may not be sustainable when required to come to terms with the details of actual occurrences). Rather, I mean to formulate and explore the challenges faced by those attracted to the interaction/social structure nexus. A solution must be found to the analytic problems which obstruct the conversion of intuition, casual (however well-informed) observation, or theoretically motivated observation into demonstrable analysis. For without solutions to these problems, we are left with "a *sense* of how the world works," but without its detailed explication.

So what *were* those problems? Or, rather: what *are* those problems? My discussion will be organized around three issues: the problem of

relevance, the issue of "procedural consequentiality," and a concern for the competing attentional and analytic claims of conversational structures and "social structure" respectively in the analysis of the data of talk-in-interaction.[1]

The Problem of Relevance

First, *relevance*. Here I draw directly from among the earliest contributions to conversation analysis, the first systematically developed work of Harvey Sacks, now over 20 years old (1972a, 1972b, but the arguments were developing as early as the lectures in Sacks 1964–5). Let me remind you of some issues he raised with respect to how "members" characterize, identify, describe, refer to, indeed "conceive of" persons, in talking to others.

The original focus of the work by Sacks which I mean to recall was the way in which persons engaged in talk-in-interaction did their talk, specifically with respect to reference to persons. Sacks noted that members refer to persons by various category terms – as man/woman, protestant/catholic/jew, doctor/patient, white/black/chicano, first baseman/second baseman/shortstop, and the like. He remarked that these category terms come in collections. In presenting them above, they are inscribed in groups: [man/woman], [protestant/catholic/jew], and so on; and that is the correct way to present them. It is not [man/woman/protestant], [catholic/jew]. This is what is being noted in the observation that the category terms are organized in *collections*.

Some of these collections Sacks called "Pn adequate;" they were adequate to characterize or categorize any member of any population, however specified, whether or not it had been specified (for example, counted, characterized or bounded) in some fashion (1972a:32–3). Other collections were not Pn adequate. [Male/female] *is* Pn adequate; [first baseman/second baseman/shortstop . . .] is *not* Pn adequate, because the latter is only usable on populations already specified or characterized as "baseball teams," whereas the former is not subject to such restrictions.

One of Sacks's main points was that there demonstrably are many Pn-adequate category collections. The collection of category terms for gender/sex and age are the most obvious ones, and these two alone serve to allow the posing of the problem of relevance. The point is that since everyone who is an instance of some category in one of those collections is necessarily (for that is the import of Pn adequacy) also an instance of some category in the other, or *an* other, the fact that someone *is* male, or *is* middle aged, or *is* white, or *is* Jewish is, by itself, no warrant for so

referring to them, for the warrant of "correctness" would provide for use of any of the other reference forms as well. Some principle of relevance must underlie use of a reference form, and has to be adduced in order to provide for one rather than another of those ways of characterizing or categorizing some member. That is the problem of relevance: not just the descriptive adequacy of the terms used to characterize the objects being referred to, but the relevance that one has to provide if one means to account for the use of some term – the relevance of that term relative to the alternative terms that are demonstrably available.

Now, this problem was developed by Sacks initially in describing how members talk about members. It showed the inadequacy of an account of a conversationalist's reference to another as a "cousin" by reference to the other "actually being a cousin." But, once raised, the point is directly relevant to the enterprise of *professional* analysts as well. Once we recognize that whoever can be characterized as "male" or as "protestant," or as "president" or whatever, can be characterized or categorized in other ways as well, our scholarly/professional/scientific account cannot "naively" rely on such characterizations, that is, cannot rely on them with no justification or warrant of their relevance.

Roughly speaking, there are two types of solution to this problem in the methodology of professional analysis. One type of solution can be characterized as the "positivist" stance, in one of the many senses in which that term is currently used. In this view, the way to warrant one, as compared to another, characterization of the participants (for example, in interaction) is the "success" of that way of characterizing them in producing a professionally acceptable account of the data being addressed. "Success" is measured by some "technology" – by statistical significance, a preponderance of historical evidence, and so forth. Sometimes there is an additional requirement that the characterization which produces "successful" analysis be theoretically interpretable; that is, that the selection of descriptive terms for the participants converge with the terms of a professional/scientific theory relevant to the object of description. In this type of solution, which I am calling "positivistic," it does not matter whether or not the terms that are used to characterize the participants in some domain of action, and which have yielded "significant" results, are otherwise demonstrably oriented to or not by the participants being described. That is what makes this solution of the problem "positivist."

The alternative type of solution insists on something else, and that is that professional characterizations of the participants be grounded in aspects of what is going on that are demonstrably relevant *to* the participants, and at that moment – at the moment that whatever we are trying to provide an account of occurs. Not, then, just that we see them to

be characterizeable as "president/assistant," as "chicano/black," as "professor/student," etc. But that for them, at that moment, those are terms relevant for producing and interpreting conduct in the interaction.

This issue should be of concern when we try to bring the kind of traditional sociological analysis that is implied by the term "social structure" to bear on talk-in-interaction. Much of what is meant by "social structure" in the traditional sense directly implicates such characterizations or categorizations of the participants as Sacks was examining. If the sense of social structure we are dealing with is the one that turns on the differential distribution of valued resources in society, whether status or power or money or any of the other "goods" whose distribution can be used to characterize social structure, then that implies a characterization or categorization of the participants on that occasion as one relevantly to be selected from that set of terms. But then the problem presents itself of the relevance of those terms to the participants for what they are doing. Without a show of that warrant, we are back to a "positivistic" stance, even though the animating concerns may be drawn from quite anti-positivistic theoretical sources or commitments.

Now let us be clear about what *is* and what is *not* being said here. The point is not that persons are somehow *not* male or female, upper or lower class, with or without power, professors and/or students. They may be, on some occasion, demonstrably members of one or another of those categories. Nor is the issue that those aspects of the society do not matter, or did not matter on that occasion. We may share a lively sense that indeed they do matter, and that they mattered on that occasion, and mattered for just that aspect of some interaction on which we are focusing. There is still the problem of *showing from the details of the talk or other conduct in the materials* that we are analyzing that those aspects of the scene are what the *parties* are oriented to. *For that is to show how the parties are embodying for one another the relevancies of the interaction and are thereby producing the social structure.*

The point here is not only methodological but substantive. It is not just to add a methodological apparatus supporting analyses already in hand. It is rather to add to, and potentially to transform, the analysis of the talk and other conduct itself by enriching our account of it with additional detail; and to show that, and how, "social structure" in the traditional sense enters into the production and interpretation of determinate facets of conduct, and is thereby confirmed, reproduced, modulated, neutralized or incrementally transformed in that actual conduct to which it must finally be referred.

This is not, to my mind, an issue of preferring or rejecting some line of analysis, some research program or agenda. It is a problem of analysis to

be worked at: how to examine the data so as to be able to show that the parties were, with and for one another, demonstrably oriented to those aspects of who they are, and those aspects of their context, which are respectively implicated in the "social structures" which we may wish to relate to the talk. If we treat this as a problem of analytic craft, we can use it as leverage to enhance the possibility of learning something about how talk-in-interaction is done, for it requires us to return again to the details of the talk to make the demonstration.

So, one issue posed by the theme "talk and social structure" is relevance.

The Issue of Procedural Consequentiality

The issue just discussed with respect to the characterization of the participants in some talk-in-interaction also is relevant to a characterization of "the context" in which they talk and interact. "Context" can be as much a part of what traditionally has been meant by "social structure" as attributes of the participants are. So, for example, remarking that some talk is being conducted "in the context of a bureaucracy," "in a classroom," "on a city street," etc. is part of what is sometimes intended by incorporating the relevance of social structure.

Such characterizations invoke particular aspects of the setting and not others. They involve selections among alternatives, and among subaltern-atives. For example, one type of formulation of context characterizes it by "place," and this is an alternative to various other sorts of context characterization. But within that context type, various forms of place formulation are available, all of which can be correct (Schegloff 1972). So, although the details of the argument have not been fully and formally worked out for the characterization of context or setting in the way that Sacks worked them out for the characterization of participants, it appears likely that the issue of relevance can be posed in much the same way for context as it has been for person reference.

What I want to do here is add something to this relevance problem for contexts. It concerns what I am calling the "procedural consequentiality" of contexts.

Even if we can show by analysis of the details of the interaction that some characterization of the context or the setting in which the talk is going on (such as "in the hospital") is relevant for the parties, that they are oriented to the setting so characterized, there remains another problem, and that is to show how the context or the setting (the local social structure), *in that aspect*, is procedurally consequential to the talk.

How does the fact that the talk is being conducted in some setting (say, "the hospital") issue in any consequences for the shape, form, trajectory, content, or character of the interaction that the parties conduct? And *what is the mechanism by which the context-so-understood has determinate consequences for the talk?*

This is a real problem, it seems to me, because without a specification of such a linkage we can end up with characterizations of context or setting which, however demonstrably relevant to the parties, do little in helping us to analyze, to explain, to understand, to give an account of how the interaction proceeded in the way in which it did, how it came to have the trajectory, the direction, the shape that it ended up having.[2] When a formulation of the context is proposed, it is *ipso facto* taken to be somehow relevant and consequential for what occurs in the context. It is the analyst's responsibility either to deliver analytic specifics of that consequentiality or to abjure that characterization of the context. Otherwise, the analysis exploits a tacit feature of its own discursive format, but evades the corresponding analytic onus. A sense of understanding and grasp is conveyed to, and elicited from, the reader, but is not earned by the elucidation of new observations about the talk.[3]

So, this is an open question, somewhat less formally stated than the other: how shall we find formulations of context or setting that will allow us (a) to connect to the theme that many want to connect to – social structure in the traditional sense, but (b) that will do so in a way that takes into account not only the demonstrable orientation of the participants, but, further, (c) that will allow us to make a direct "procedural" connection between the context so formulated and what actually happens in the talk. Otherwise we have a characterization that "hovers around" the interaction, so to speak, but is not shown actually to inform the production and grasp of the details of its conduct.

As with the issue of "relevance," I am here putting forward not principled objections to the invocation of social structure as context, but jobs to be taken on by those concerned with the intersection of talk and familiar senses of social structure. They challenge us to be alert to possible ways of showing such connections. I will just mention a few possible directions here.

Some formulations of setting do the sort of job I have in mind because they capture features of the setting that fall under the general rubric of "speech exchange systems" (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974:729ff.). They satisfy this concern because they characterize a setting or context both in ways that connect to our general notions of social structure and in ways which directly refer to aspects of the practices by which the

participants organize their talk. Some such settings carry with them as well a set of relevant identifications for the participants.

Consider, for example, the case of the courtroom in session (cf. Atkinson and Drew 1979; my remarks here rest on a much looser, vernacular and unstudied sense of the setting). To focus just on the turn-taking organization, it *is* the "courtroom-ness" of courtrooms in session which seems in fact to organize the way in which the talk is distributed among the persons present, among the *categories* of persons present, in the physical setting. So, for example, onlookers (members of the "audience") are not potential next speakers, as the official proceedings go on. And among the others who *are* potential next speakers at various points – the judge, the attorneys, the witness and the like, there are socially organized procedures for determining when they can talk, what they can do in their talk, and the like. It could be argued, then, that to characterize some setting of talk-in-interaction as in "a court-in-session" characterizes it with a formulation of context which can not only be claimed to connect to the general concern for "social structure" (for it certainly relates to institutional context), but can be shown to be procedurally consequential as well. Insofar as members of the audience sitting behind the bar never get up and talk but rather whisper to one another in asides, whereas the ones in front of the bar talk in defined and regular ways, by the very form of their conduct they show themselves to be oriented to the particular identities that are legally provided by that setting and show themselves to be oriented to "the-court-in-session" as a context.[4]

We have to be careful here to see what sorts of characterizations of context will satisfy these requirements. It is clear to me that vernacular accounts or formulations of context, even if informed by social scientific considerations, will not necessarily do it, if they do not specify how the talk is organized. One example, one not uncommon kind of proposed context description of talk-in-interaction is "an experiment" or "in a laboratory setting." Those terms sound like an adequate formulation of a kind of setting, and for some concerns perhaps they are. But these characterizations do not satisfy the concerns we have been discussing; under the rubrics "laboratory" or "experiment" very different sorts of organization of talk-in-interaction can be conducted.

Consider, for example, a study of repair recently published by the Dutch psycholinguist Willem Levelt (1983). Levelt had conducted an experiment on the so-called "linearization problem" (organizing a mass of simultaneously presented information into a temporally organized, hence linearized, format in talk). He asked a number of subjects to look at a screen on which were projected different shapes – circles, triangles, and

the like, which were connected by lines of various sorts. Their job was to describe these figures so that someone else (not present) would be able to retrieve the figure from the description. The descriptions were all tape recorded. Levelt noticed that in the course of producing the descriptions, people regularly "mispoke;" they started to say one thing, cut themselves off and went back and "fixed" it. Levelt recognized these as self-repairs (Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks 1977), and he wrote up a separate paper on various aspects of the placement and organization of self-repair and the evidence it gives about processes of self-monitoring by speakers.

But it seems to me that the findings of this work, at least with respect to the organization of repair, have an equivocal status at the present time. Why? Not simply because the talk was produced in a laboratory or experimental context. That the data come from laboratory-produced protocols does not tell us what consequences for the character of the talk are entailed. For example, it does not tell us what the speech exchange system was in which this talk was produced. As it happens, this *was* consequential, and has a bearing on the topic of the research report.

The speech exchange system in which this talk was produced was one whose turn-taking organization denied anyone else the right to talk besides the experimental subject. That is to say, within the boundaries of "the experiment," there was no possibility of a sequence in which current speaker's turn (that is, the subject's) is followed by a next turn in which some recipient (that is, the experimenter or a lab assistant) could have initiated repair. That is, this speech exchange system's turn-taking organization transforms the familiar organization by which opportunities to initiate repair are ordered (Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks 1977). In fact, one of the classical rationales for the insistence on the methodology of experiments, *formal* experiments, is precisely to exclude the talk or other "extraneous" conduct of the experimenter. The whole point was to hold everything (except the variables of interest) constant. And one part of holding everything constant is to keep the experimenter or the experimenter's agent from talking in potentially varying ways to the different subjects, thereby introducing extraneous, and unmeasured, effects into the experimental results. So the whole point of this sort of experimental format *requires* the denial of the possibility of a next turn in which recipient/experimenter could talk.

We have then a very different turn-taking organization that seems to be subsumed by the formulation of context that we call "laboratory" or "experiment," with various sorts of consequences for the organization of repair. Aside from general organizational considerations that relate next-turn repair to same-turn repair (Schegloff 1979b), more specific analytic issues are implicated, only one of which can be mentioned in passing here.

It is that the sequential possibility of a next turn by another participant, and orientation to such a possibility, adds a wholly different *sort* of position for initiating repair to the ones incorporated into Levelt's account. He describes the positions in which repair is initiated *within* a turn in terms of their relationship to that which is being repaired (as do Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks 1977 with respect to the initiation of repair *across* turns). However, he does not (and with his materials he *can* not) formulate the placement of the initiation of repair relative to the structure of the turn in which it occurs. For example, the initiation of repair cannot be formulated relative to possible completion of the ongoing turn by current speaker and possible start of a next turn by another (the relevance of which is analytically instantiated in Schegloff 1987b:111), a matter we would expect to be strategic if there is a "preference for self-correction."[5]

Until someone does a parallel analysis on talk from ordinary interaction, and sees whether the findings about same-turn repair come out the same way or not, we will not know the status of Levelt's findings about how same-turn repair is organized (where repair is initiated relative to the trouble source, how far back people go when they are going to reframe the trouble source and the like) – how substantial a contribution to our understanding of repair it can be.

In this case, I think the notion of "the laboratory as context" raises some serious concerns about particular research that was conducted under its auspices. But this is by virtue of the particular speech exchange system which composed it on that occasion, which provides the link of procedural consequentiality to the particular features of the talk being focused on in the research.

Compare with this the data addressed in such work as that reported in Zimmerman and West (1975) and Maynard and Zimmerman (1984). These data are also referred to as occurring in a "laboratory" context. But the speech exchange system involved here is a wholly different one. That speech exchange system provided for the parties (in this case, two "subjects") to talk to each other. The organization of the talk did not render any speaker free of the contingency of someone talking next (with the opportunity, in principle, of initiating repair). Were one to use those tapes to study self-repair, I do not think the results would be subject to the concerns raised above about Levelt's results, even though both of those settings can be characterized by a single context descriptor: "laboratory." The vernacular terms do not do the work. In one case "laboratory" is, and in the other case it is not, procedurally consequential *for the particular phenomena being studied.*[6]

In the search, then, for characterizations of context which will link talk to social structure, we cannot necessarily rely on the social-structural

terms we have inherited from the past. Some of them will be procedurally consequential, and some of them will not, just as some will be demonstrably relevant to the participants and some will not. We have to find those terms for formulating context which are both demonstrably relevant to the participants and are procedurally consequential for the aspects of the conduct being treated, *on any given occasion*.

But it is not necessarily our *loss* that we cannot just appropriate terms from the traditional lexicon of "social structure" to understand talk. For we come thereby to use our data as a test of the relevance and viability of our sociological inheritance. We should be prepared to find that some of what we have received from the past, however cherished theoretically, culturally, politically, or ideologically, will not pass this test, and must therefore not be incorporated in our analysis. Rather, we should exercise our capacity to address the details of conduct, and exploit our data as challenges to our theoretical and analytic acumen, to enhance and expand our understanding of what "social structure" could consist of, as a robust and expanding tool of analysis rather than as an inheritance from the disciplinary past.

Social Structure or Conversational Structure?

The third concern mobilized by the present theme is for the balance between the focus on social structure and the focus on conversational structure in studying talk-in-interaction. These two thematic focuses (we would like to think) are potentially complementary. But are they really? We must figure out how to make them complementary, because they can also be alternatives in a more competitive sense. Each makes its own claims in organizing observation and analysis of the data, and one can preempt the other. In particular, the more familiar concerns with social structure can preempt new findings about conversational phenomena.

Let me offer some illustrations of this tension, and exemplify them from a recent paper of Zimmerman's, "Talk and its occasion" (1984), whose object of interest is "calls to the police" (an object with which I have also had some experience, cf. Schegloff 1967). The paper's enterprise appears directed specifically to attending both to the concerns of social structure and to the concerns of conversational structure. It offers a full account of this type of talk-in-interaction, and it does so with a sensitivity not only to the social structure involved, but also to the conversational structure of these occurrences. For example, the paper begins with an account of the kind of overall structural organization of the calls, and

then focuses on the particular sequence type that makes up most of the calls, namely, an extended request or complaint sequence.[7]

Despite this commitment to both concerns, it seems to me, there is a tendency for the formulated social-structural context to "absorb" and "naturalize" various details of the talk. These features of the talk are thereby made unavailable, in practice if not in principle, for notice and analysis as accountable details of the talk. Their character as aspects of the talk produced by reference to some conversational or interactional organization is vulnerable to being slighted, in favor of assimilation to some social-structural, institutional, or vernacularly contextual source. How to balance these competing claims on our attention, when the competition takes this form, will be a matter to which analysts who are concerned with the thematics of talk-and-social structure will have to remain sensitive. Let me mention just three instances of the tension of which I speak which come up in Zimmerman's paper, and their consequences, to alert investigators to some of the forms which the issue can take.

One form which this issue takes concerns the proper analytic locus of some observed conversational phenomenon. There is, for example, the treatment of requests by organizations, and service agencies in particular. The police are clearly a service agency, and Zimmerman provides data on animal control services, emergency services, and an airline company, to support the claim that it is the "service agency organization" aspect of the setting which matters. Zimmerman's point is that the requests that callers introduce can involve contingencies, and specifically *organizational* contingencies, that are unknown to the caller. "Social structure" is thus doubly oriented to here, first in the institutional locus of "the police," and second in the fact that one of the parties to the conversation can be characterized as "an organization."

Zimmerman points out that in many of these calls a fair amount of talk intervenes between the request or complaint and its remedy. Regularly this takes the form of a series of question–answer sequences, which Zimmerman terms an "interrogative series." He notes that, sequentially speaking, it is a form of "insertion sequence" (Schegloff 1972), but stresses another aspect of this talk, namely that a number of inquiries get made by the recipient-of-the-request which reflect on the *organizational* contingencies and considerations which the request has occasioned. For example, the police have to decide whether the request is something actionable by the police, and that is not something the caller can be supposed to have the technical information to assess. Zimmerman's discussion (1984:220–2) links the occurrence of extensive insertion sequences or interrogative series to the contingencies generated by the

fact that one of the parties to the request sequence is an *organization*.[8] If this were so, this might be a type case in which we would *have* to invoke the social-structural characteristics of one party to the conversation in order adequately to understand features of the talk (Levinson 1979).

But there are many occurrences in which non-organizational, non-service agency recipients of a request go through a quite similar insertion sequence before responding. One example with which I am familiar in detail is a telephone call involving a 15-year-old boy who has been asked by his 14-year-old "sometimes girlfriend" whether she can borrow his "gun." The request sequence itself goes on for four pages of transcript, and he takes her through a series of considerations – an "interrogative series," if you will: what do you want it for? what kind of gun? why that kind? etc. It turns out that there are considerations that apparently never entered her mind in making this request – should it be the longest one? the best one? the best looking one? the best shooting one? Indeed, when he asks "which gun," it is unclear that she knows the "right" terms with which to characterize which one she wants. (The sequence is discussed in Schegloff 1990).

The point is that we have here a long insertion between request and response. Neither participant is an organization or a service agency. The insertion is addressed to such matters as the warrant for the request and its consequent "actionability" by its recipient. It is not clear, then, what distinctively turns on the participation of *organizations* in request or complaint sequences. We seem to have here a regular expansion property of request/complaint sequences (including, perhaps, some recurrent insert types, such as warrant seeking). Perhaps there are particular features of the conduct of insert expansions which are distinctive when organizations are parties to the talk, but this needs to be shown by analysis which juxtaposes request sequences from organizational settings with request sequences (or their cognates) from other settings: that is, what is distinctive to this talk must be spelled out, and it needs to be shown that for the parties it has to do with "doing organizational talk," or with adapting the talk to their organizational exigencies.[9]

The problem to which I am trying to call attention is the cooptation or preemption of a sequential feature of the talk by a social-structural formulation of its context. In this case, if expansions of the sort here illustrated are endemic to request or complaint sequences, if they are part of the methodic practices for doing *sequences of that sort*, then there is no warrant for introducing *social structures of that sort* into the account. They are not "needed." Further, to introduce the social-structural specification of context is to risk missing the potentially general relevance of insertions to sequences of this type. The attributions to social

structure, then, can be *at the expense of* increments to our understanding of conversational organization.[10]

A second issue concerning the tension between the social-structural and the conversation-specific is its persistence within a particular analysis. An illustration is provided by the discussion of a call to the police in which, after the police clerk opens the call with a self-identification as police, the caller says, "Yes, I'd like tuh report a loud party." Zimmerman writes:

> What is being made focally relevant in the opening segment of the call is the division of labor in our society with regard to matters of social control. In Sharrock and Turner's terms . . . a socially organized resource – police power – is being mobilized to deal with a problem that others cannot or choose not to deal with by other means. This mobilization raises certain issues, i.e., the policeable nature of the problem and its urgency . . . *The point to be noted here is that the hearability of an utterance as a "complaint" draws on its location within an institutional framework – that of policing – which touches the interactional realm through the organization of the call.* That organization provides a place, just after the alignment of identities in the opening sequence, the "first topic" slot . . . which is where the reason for the call is ordinarily provided. (1984:213, emphasis added)

There is an intended mutual resonance and grounding between the point of this paragraph and the cited instance – that is, between the caller's utterance being a complaint and having been said in what is "in fact" a call to the police. Again, then, institutional context seems criterial to conversational outcome. Indeed, this seems to be an almost ideal case in point, where the articulation of different components of social structure (via the division of labor with respect to police power) is localized and specified in conversation-structural terms – first-topic position after the opening section.

But how is the bearing of the institutional context – its relevance and procedural consequentiality – provided for here as a resource for analyzing the talk? Well, the police have self-identified as police; that appears to certify the relevance of the institutional context, at least for the police participant. But how about the caller? In a corpus of calls to the police with which I worked some years ago, some callers were not "controlled" by the self-identification by the answerer as "Police," but in the very next turn initiated a transformation of the relevant identities of the participants into personal acquaintances (Schegloff 1967:ch. 5; this happens in Zimmerman's corpus as well, cf. Whalen and Zimmerman 1987:177). The fact that the call is on the "police line," and has been

answered by a "police" self-identification, does not *ipso facto* guarantee that is the orientation relevant to the caller.

This issue does not remain unaddressed. Zimmerman points out that callers/complainants ordinarily begin their first turns with a response token ("yes" or "yeah") which registers the police self-identification and reconciles it "with the caller's sense of who the recipient of the upcoming complaint or report should properly be" (1984:218). When the initial response by the police (or other service agency) presents some problem in this regard, the caller's first turn does not begin with such a token. Thus, Zimmerman concludes that these initial bits of utterance, "in aligning their situated identities, provide a working framework which commits participants to the nature of the occasion summoned up by the initiation of the call and thereby *provides for the presumptive hearability of utterances as relevant to the purposes of that occasion of talk*" (1984:219, emphasis added). This is the basis for the earlier cited claim that "the hearability of an utterance as a 'complaint' draws on its location within an institutional framework." The opening utterances establish that framework, on which the subsequent talk may then "draw."[11]

It is, however, in point to observe that the understanding of the caller's initial utterance as a request or complaint is not provided for solely by the institutional context which the opening may have shown to be mutually relevant. The caller, in the call whose examination is at issue here, has constructed the talk in his/her first turn ("Yes, I'd like tuh report a loud party") not only to *be* "calling the police," but to *do* "calling the police." The format employed for the turn, "I'd like to report . . ." appears to be a format for "reporting to the authorities," and perhaps even for "reporting to the police" specifically.[12] A complaint to the landlord is not, I think, done in this way. In this case, it could be argued, the hearability of the utterance as a complaint most proximately draws on *its conversational construction* as "a complaint to the police." Invoking its "factual" institutional location distracts from the method of its conversational accomplishment.[13]

Here again, the social-structural formulation masks the practices of the talk, in this case as *conversationally constituting* the context for the interaction. Once the identification talk in the opening has been invoked to establish the relevance of the institution for the participants, that institutional locus serves to "naturalize" the mode of talk, to provide a tacit covering principle that normalizes the particular way the participants construct the talk. The vernacular characterization "absorbs" the details of the talk as an unnoticed "of course" in such a "formulated-as-institutional" setting, and does not prompt one to note and explicate how the talk enacts "doing being in that setting". There is a mutually

grounding relationship between the details of the talk (here, the "I'd like to report . . ." format) and the global provision that this is a "call to the police," with the former having not been explicitly noted at all, and with the latter shown to be relevant by the police opening self-identification. Relevance having been shown by that, concern for the issue is relaxed. The question is not pressed: how is the next (and *any* next) utterance constructed so as to show/do "calling the police"?

A methodological canon is suggested: establishing relevance and establishing procedural consequentiality should not be "threshold" issues, in the sense that once you have done "enough" to show it, you are finished. Rather they are questions for continuing analysis. And not necessarily in the "loaded" form of "how are they now doing 'calling the police'?", but in "open" form – "what does the form of the talk show about recipient design considerations and about orientation to context (institutional, social-structural, sequential, or whatever)." Because we "know" that not everything said *in* some context (institutional or other) is relevantly oriented to that context.

If the focus of inquiry is the organization of conduct, the details of action, the practices of talk, then every opportunity should be pressed to enhance our understanding of any available detail about those topics. Invoking social structure at the outset can systematically distract from, even blind us to, details of those domains of event in the world.

If the goal of inquiry is the elucidation of *social structure*, one might think that quite a different stance would be warranted, and one would want to give freer play to the effective scope of social structure, and to do so free of the constraints I have been discussing. Though this stance has much to recommend it, it could as well be argued that one does not best serve the understanding of social structure by attributing to it properties which are better understood as the products of other aspects of organized social life, such as interactional structure, or by failing to explicate how social structure is accomplished *in* the conduct. In any case, the understanding of social structure will be enhanced if we explicate how its embodiment in particular contexts on particular occasions permeates the "membrane" (Goffman 1961) surrounding episodes of interaction to register its stamp within them.

A third expression of the tension between social-structural and con-versation structural interests in talk data concerns the direction in which analysis is pursued; it can distract pursuit of otherwise inviting analytic tacks on the structure of the talk. For example, Zimmerman reports (1984:219–20) that most of his data accord with the Sharrock and Turner finding that callers package their complaints in a "single utterance format" (Sharrock and Turner 1978), but he displays as well an instance in

which the complaint is presented in a multiple utterance format. It appears that this multiple utterance format (or multiple "turn – constructional unit" turn, Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974) is a structural alternative to the insertion sequence (the "interrogative series") which occurs in the more common cases. For example, the response to the request which ordinarily follows only after an interrogative series here follows directly after completion of the multi-unit request/complaint turn itself.

This relationship (as possible structural alternatives) between [single-utterance request + interrogative series + response] on the one hand, and [multi-unit request + no interrogative series + response] on the other hand, presents some attractive possibilities for analysis. What varies regularly between organization of a story in a multi-unit, single-turn format as compared to a sequence (that is, multi-turn) format? What are the consequences of the contrasting divisions of labor involved in the two formats, especially the differing "steering" potentials? What is added to or subtracted from or modified in the talk by the imposition of sequence structure on it, or by its preemption by single speaker organization? These questions may be put while "holding constant" that the callers are soliciting police action by the telling.[14]

Of course, such questions may remain unaddressed because inquiry is addressed to other matters, equally conversation relevant, and because one cannot do everything in a single paper. But it is possible that the focus on showing how conversations are articulated with, and shaped by, social and institutional structure diverts attention from the questions about conversation structures which particular details of the talk might otherwise prompt.

What then shall be the balance between the claims of conversational structure, with its stress on the methodic ways of talking in which turns and sequences have ways of developing anonymously, whoever the parties are, as aspects of particular structures of action, sometimes shaped by the participants for the particular co-participants with whom they are engaged – what shall be the balance between those claims on the one hand, and on the other hand those of social structure, with their implication of the constitutive relevance for action and interaction of differentiation, both of participants and of institutional contexts? Clearly there are observations here about the nature of organizations, and perhaps of organizations as participants on one end of the conversation. But how shall we assess their relative claims? When shall we attribute some feature we have noticed about the organization of talk to "internal," conversation structural concerns, and when to "external," social-structural or organizational ones?

Let me introduce here what I will call the "paradox of proximateness," a consideration prompted by various efforts to argue the indispensability of social or legal context for understanding talk.[15] If it is to be argued that some legal, organizational or social environment underlies the participants' organizing some occasion of talk-in-interaction in some particular way, then either one *can* show the *details in the talk* which that argument allows us to notice, and which in return supply the demonstrable warrant for the claim by showing the relevant presence of the sociolegal context in the talk; or one *cannot* point to such detail. If the detail *is* available, then it is the participants' demonstrable orientations *in* the interaction which are the effective agents for the relevant aspects of the interaction (though the parties may also talk in a way which attributes their orientation to some legal constraint, etc.). If the detail *is not* demonstrable, then for the task of explicating the organization and practices of the *talk*, it is not clear what warrant there is for invoking the relevance of the legal and social context or environment which the analyst may want to claim. That is, either there is a proximate, conversationally represented indication of the relevance of context, in which case invocations of more remote context are unnecessary; or there is no conversationally represented indication of the relevance of the aspects of context which have been invoked, in which case the warrant for invoking it has not been established.

An analyst may feel the need to invoke such contexts for the distributional and institutional concerns which animate an inquiry. But if the inquiry is animated by distributional, institutional, or traditional social-structural concerns, why should the character of inquiry into the nature of talk-in-interaction be shaped by considerations extrinsic to *that* enterprise, but felt necessary to another? Indeed, one might argue that the study of talk should be allowed to proceed under its own imperatives, with the hope that its results will provide more effective tools for the analysis of distributional, institutional, and social-structural problems later on than would be the case if the analysis of talk had, from the outset, to be made answerable to problems extrinsic to it.

It may, of course, be the case that talk (or *some* talk) is not analyzable *for its own problematics* without reference to social and institutional contexts of the traditional sort. But that has to be shown. That is, it has to be shown that it is necessary to invoke such contexts in order to understand aspects of the talk itself, rather than aspects of the context in which the talk occurs, or distributional or institutional aspects of that context. (It is, of course, quite a different claim to say that the context is necessary in order to understand the context.) Once it has been shown that some particular spate of talk cannot be adequately analyzed without reference to its "context," it will be necessary to elucidate what in its

claimed context is needed to understand the talk, and how to articulate and blend such analysis of context with analysis of the talk. Such a blend will need to adapt, but nonetheless incorporate, such previously discussed constraints on analysis as relevance and procedural consequentiality.

In considering the respective concerns for conversational structure and social structure, then, we must first be clear about the overall commitments and preoccupations of inquiry. It is one thing to be addressed to the understanding of talk-in-interaction as the object of inquiry, and to ask how references to social structure bear on it and might need or permit incorporation in it. It is quite another to be addressed to understanding distributional or institutional or social-structural features of social life, and to ask how talk-in-interaction figures in their social production. I have taken the former of these enterprises as the premise of my discussion. I think the latter enterprise would benefit from analyzing talk by methods appropriate for the analysis of talk in its own right. But the latter enterprise *can* be understood as a development quite independent of the one concerned with the fundamental organization of talk-in-interaction – as a kind of extension of mainstream institutional sociology. In that regard, it could be quite free of the analytic constraints under which conversation analysis has developed. On the other hand, that enterprise, too, might find a quite fresh turning were it to respect the constraints on the study of talk-in-interaction in its own right.

Conclusion

These then are three sorts of issues mobilized, or remobilized, for me when the talk turns to "talk and social structure." However lively our intuitions, in general or with respect to specific details, that it matters that some participants in data we are examining are police, or female, or deciding matters which are specifically constrained by the law or by economic or organizational contingencies, however insistent our sense of the reality and decisive bearing of such features of "social structure" in the traditional sense, the challenge posed is to find a way to show these claims, and show them from the data in three respects:

1   that what is so loomingly relevant for us (as competent members of the society or as professional social scientists) was relevant for the parties to the interaction we are examining, and thereby arguably implicated in their production of the details of that interaction;
2   that what seems inescapably relevant, both to us and to the participants, about the "context" of the interaction is demonstrably consequential for some specifiable aspect of that interaction; and

3   that an adequate account for some specifiable features of the
    interaction cannot be fashioned from the details of the talk and other
    conduct of the participants as the vehicle by which *they* display the
    relevance of social-structural context for the character of the talk, but
    rather that this must be otherwise invoked by the analyst, who
    furthermore has developed defensible arguments for doing so.

In brief, the issue is how to convert insistent intuition, however correct,
into empirically detailed analysis.

This is a heavy burden to impose. Meeting it may well lead to exciting
new results. But if it is not to be met in one or more respects, arguments
will have to be put forward that the concerns I have discussed are no
longer in point, are superseded by other considerations, or must yield to
the new sorts of findings that are possible if one holds them in abeyance.
Simple invocation of the burden of the sociological past will not suffice.

With respect to social structure, then, as with respect to other notions
from social science's past such as "intention," the stance we might well
consider is treating them as programmatically relevant for the parties, and
hence for us. In principle, some one or more aspects of who the parties
are and where/when they are talking may be indispensably relevant for
producing and grasping the talk, but these are not decisively knowable a
priori. It is not for us to *know* what about context is crucial, but to *discover*
it, and to discover *new sorts* of such things. Not, then, to privilege
sociology's concerns under the rubric "social structure," but to discover
them in the members' worlds, if they are there.

Otherwise, we risk volunteering for a path which has led close inquiry
into social life astray in the past, but which we now have an opportunity
to avoid. In the past, one has needed a special warrant or license to
examine closely the details of ordinary life and conduct. Whether it was
the "defectiveness" of the people involved as with the mentally ill or
retarded or physically handicapped, their moral taint as with criminals,
delinquents or other versions of "evil," or the possibilities of enhanced
efficacy, as in the improvement of production processes or bureaucratic
administration, or enhanced justice or fairness, there was always a "good
reason" for looking closely at the details of conduct.

With the license came a shaped focus, either on a target population, a
target set of behaviors, or a target aspect of conduct which one examined.
What was found was then generally attributed to the license under which
one found it. Thus, early investigations into the language of schizophrenics
(see Kasanin 1944) came upon the phenomenon of a spate of talk being
touched off by the sound of some word in a prior utterance (so-called
"clang association"), a phenomenon which students of conversation will

recognize as not uncommon in ordinary talk. But having found it through the close examination of schizophrenic talk (talk which could be so closely examined by virtue of its speakers' diagnoses), it was taken as specially characteristic of such talk. So also with children's talk, etc.

   If the study of conversation and talk-in-interaction is once again required to be "licensed," whether by practical concerns or by the institutionalized interests of traditional disciplines, then we may well find ourselves attributing – now to "social structure" – what are the indigenous features of talk-in-interaction. Should we not give the latter a chance to be recognized in their own right, especially since they constitute their own sociology in any case?

Notes

These reflections were prepared to serve as the opening presentation of the Talk and Social Structure Conference. In some places they address once again matters taken up in an earlier paper (Schegloff 1987a), but different facets of those matters or in a more detailed fashion. My thanks to Jennifer Mandelbaum for contributions of tact and clarity in the preparation of this written version. I am also indebted to Deirdre Boden, Paul Drew, Douglas Maynard and especially Jack Whalen, whose reactions to an earlier draft, or to the reactions of others to the earlier draft, helped in my efforts to arrive at a text which might be understood as I meant it.

1   Of course, these need not be *competing* claims; the aim must be to make them complementary. For a penetrating treatment of many of the issues taken up here, cf. Heritage 1984a:280–90.
2   A similar argument is made in Schegloff 1987c for explicating how cultural/ linguistic context has the consequences attributed to it. Aspects of prosody may well have consequences for misunderstanding in cross-cultural interaction (e.g., Gumperz 1982), but understanding how they issue in the particular misunderstandings which ensue will require explicating what in the structure of talk-in-interaction converts that prosody into that *type* of misunderstanding.
3   Reasons both of relevance and of procedural consequentiality motivated a decision not to characterize the "Opening up closings" paper (Schegloff and Sacks 1973) as contextually specific to American culture, as had been requested by an anthropologically oriented referee (cf. p. 291, note 4, and also Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974, p. 700, note 10, on the same issue). That request invoked on behalf of anthropology a cultural sense of "context," parallel to the invocation by sociologists of social-structural senses of "context."
4   A penetrating account along these lines of the constituting of a speech exchange system through practices of talking, in this case of "the job

interview," may be found in Button 1987, see also Heritage and Greatbatch, chapter 5 below.

5 I leave aside here the exclusion of interactional considerations (Jefferson 1974) which can bear on where and how repair is initiated, an exclusion which allows the depiction of the initiation of repair in strictly grammatical terms.

6 One could harbor a concern that the setting of the Zimmerman/Maynard data *is* procedurally consequential for the organization of topic talk which is their focus, since the participants in their experiment were asked to talk while knowing they were to be interrupted for the start of an experiment in a "few minutes" (Maynard and Zimmerman 1984), a prospect which may well constrain the sort of topic talk participants undertake. There are naturalistic settings which are in many respects similar (such as medical waiting rooms, though there is no injunction to talk there) in which the seriousness of this concern might be assessed.

7 In addition, as several readers of an earlier version of this chapter have pointed out, Zimmerman has in various other writings (both general, as in Wilson and Zimmerman 1980, and other reports of the project on the police, such as Whalen and Zimmerman 1987, 1990) aligned himself with the principles of analysis with which the text here is preoccupied. What is at issue in the ensuing discussion is, then, not a difference over principle, but a concern about how general theoretical and analytic principles are embodied in the *practice* of analysis and its reports. It is a concern with the vulnerability of a newer and technical stance toward the materials of talk-in-interaction in the face of an older stance and idiom, one which furthermore mobilizes our vernacular intuitions despite our contrary resolve.

8 For example, he writes: "Of particular interest here is the fact that making a request engages an organization rather than simply an individual, and thus, varying with the circumstances of the call, encounters contingencies of response which are evident to the organizational personnel receiving the request, but are perhaps unknown or only vaguely perceived by the caller. Thus, a complaint or request routinely involves some processing, that is, some course in which its features – many of which have yet to be made evident – are fit to the requirements of organizational response" (p. 220).

9 One candidate is suggested in another report from the same project (Whalen and Zimmerman 1990). There they suggest that when the call to the police comes from another organization, the police do not undertake to test out the robustness of the report by the caller, as they do when the caller is a "private party," apparently taking it that an "organizational caller" would already have established the actionability of the reported state of affairs. Here the bearing of "organizations" is not the fact that the police *are* an organization, but is rather what they do by virtue of their *interlocutor* being an organization. And what is critical for the way the police complaint-taker proceeds is not just that the complainant actually *is* an organization, but the complaint-takers' *orientation* to its being an organization, and inferences occasioned by that orientation. Still, the argument is that the police conduct

themselves differently by virtue of the property of their interlocutor that he speaks for an organization.

10 The key here is the juxtaposition of contextually specialized materials with others of canonical form. This sort of tack is taken in the analysis of conversational openings in calls to the police in another report from the same research project (Whalen and Zimmerman 1987), and on other analytic objects in such recent work as Button 1987, Clayman 1989, and Heritage 1985a. Analysis along such lines may prove attractive as well for materials such as those reported on in Maynard's conference paper (chapter 7 below) which concerned parents of retarded children being informed of the retardation by clinic personnel. Such materials might well invite first an account of the structure of announcement sequences in general, then an account of "bad news" announcement sequences in particular, and then the introduction of the particular setting and task under examination, and the ways in which they informed the enactment or realization or modification of such sequences, insofar as they could be shown to be oriented to by the participants (cf. Schegloff 1988b).

On occasion the literature already provides an account of the non-contextually specialized form of the talk (e.g., for the matters taken up in Whalen and Zimmerman 1987) needed for comparative examination. In most cases, however, the investigator of institutionally specialized forms will need to supply the more generic analysis as well (as in Heritage 1985a, for example). In general, the most promising path for research in this area, it seems to me, is for all students of (claimedly) institutionally specialized conduct to work with generic forms as well, if possible.

11 A subsequent paper (Whalen and Zimmerman 1987:178) describes this position as follows (attributing it to Wilson 1985, but not to Zimmerman 1984):

When callers report or describe events such as crimes, fires or accidents to a representative of the police, fire department or ambulance service, they engage the occupational responsibilities of such a recipient. The force of a description or event as a request is achieved by the alignment of the identities of teller and recipient in a particular way: as a reporting party or complainant speaking to the agent of an organization officially responsible for dealing with such matters. This is accomplished by the completion of the opening identification sequence (categorical self-identification by dispatcher / acknowledgement by caller) occasioned by the telephone summons. This alignment establishes a sequentially realized institutional context for hearing reports/descriptions as requests.

But Whalen and Zimmerman go on to broaden their account of how the openings of these calls work, and to deepen our understanding of the relevance structure which the police bring to the incoming calls. They show convincingly that even silence or "ambient sounds" on the line (without any

confirmation by caller of the relevance of the police institutional self-
identification) are treated by the police as possible calls for assistance. (This is
to my mind the most cogent basis for arguing that "hearability as a
complaint" draws on institutional context.) In developing a basis for this,
they drive the account backwards in the structure of the occasion – to the
orientations of the police participants in the conversations' "pre-beginnings"
(Schegloff 1979a:27, 34; Whalen and Zimmerman 1987:180–1) – the
moments preceding the first utterance of the conversation itself. What they
deepen thereby is our understanding of the orientations which the *police*
bring to the talk. What I am concerned with in the text here is, on the other
hand, what the *callers* show they bring to the talk, *in* the talk, and after the
convergence of identification in the opening.

12 There are other forms of talk in which a caller's first turn displays an
    orientation to the police, *does* "calling the police," for example, by referring
    to a car as being "vandalized" (Wilson, chapter 2 above), or, more generally,
    by use of proto-technical terminology of the criminal law or policing. Jack
    Whalen (personal communication) reports such forms to be "very frequently
    employed" in complainants' reports to the police. In a later paper from the
    same research project (Whalen and Zimmerman 1990), complainants' reports
    to the police are taken up, but their formulations of "the trouble" are left for
    treatment in a separate paper.

13 Heritage (1984a:280–90) offers a similar treatment of questions and
    questioning.

14 These two formats could be examined in concert with a third which might
    prove instructive. It was Alene Terasaki who suggested several years ago (in
    work which did not come to written fruition) that "announcements" seem to
    be prepared by their speakers so as to be deliverable in single sentence
    formats. This is commonly done through one or more pre-expansions or pre-
    sequences (in addition to the familiar "pre-announcement"). The prospect is,
    then, to compare (a) a single, multi-unit turn format, with (b) a single-unit
    turn followed by insertion sequences, with (c) a single-unit turn "prepared"
    by pre-sequences. It is unlikely, however, that the third of these possibilities
    will be found in police call data.

15 The point is occasioned most directly by Mehan's conference presentation
    (see chapter 4 below). Mehan aims to account for the distribution of a school
    district's disposition of special education cases, in particular the non-
    allocation of any cases to one program in particular. The account is built
    from a description of the organization's ways of processing cases, in which a
    meeting at which disposition is decided and accepted by the parent figures
    centrally. Mehan argues that various features of the meeting, including the
    non-mention of certain program possibilities and the order in which the
    several phases of the discussion are taken up, are centrally conditioned by
    various features of the legal and economic context in which the school district
    finds itself (including various provisions of formal law). This claim is not
    grounded in overt specifiable details of the talk, however.