

Sequencing in Conversational Openings¹

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An attempt is made to ascertain rules for the sequencing of a limited part of natural conversation and to determine some properties and empirical consequences of the operation of those rules. Two formulations of conversational openings are suggested and the properties "nonterminality" and "conditional relevance" are developed to explicate the operation of one of them and to suggest some of its interactional consequences. Some discussion is offered of the fit between the sequencing structure and the tasks of conversational openings.

ויאמר אלין אברהם, ויאמר ה'.

"And He said, Abraham; and he said,
Behold, I am here."

Genesis XXII: 1

MY OBJECT in this paper is to show that the raw data of everyday conversational interaction can be subjected to rigorous analysis. To this end, I shall exhibit the outcome of one such analysis, confined to one limited aspect of conversation. The aspect is sequencing, in this case sequencing in two-party conversations, with attention directed to the opening of such conversations (although only one kind of opening is considered). The paper proceeds by suggesting a first formulation—referred to as a "distribution rule"—to analyze materials drawn from telephone conversation. The first formulation is found deficient, and the search for a more adequate analysis leads to a second formulation not limited to telephone conversations alone, but able to deal with them, and subsuming the "distribution rule" as a special case. Some properties of the second formulation—called "summons-answer sequences"—are detailed, and consideration is given to the uses of the interactional mechanism that has been analyzed.

This work may have relevance for anthropologists for several reasons. First, there is a possible direct interest in the materials under investigation; second, the developing interest in the ethnography of communication, recently represented by a special number of this journal (Gumperz and Hymes 1964); and third, what I take to be a pre-

vailing interest of anthropologists in the possibility of direct analysis of the "stuff of everyday life" so as to discover its orderly or methodical character.

I cannot say for what domain my analysis holds, but, as the biblical citation in the heading and references to settings other than the contemporary United States should indicate, I do not think the findings are limited to America today. Since cross-cultural variability and invariance are of abiding interest to anthropologists, information on this question will have to be sought from them. Whether this sort of analysis is possible or practical on materials from societies of which the analyst is not a member is also not clear, and again it may remain for anthropologists to supply the answer. (See, for example, Moerman [in press].)

INTRODUCTION

I use "conversation" in an inclusive way. I do not intend to restrict its reference to the "civilized art of talk" or to "cultured interchange" as in the usages of Oakeshott (1959) or Priestly (1926), to insist on its casual character thereby excluding service contacts (as in Landis and Burt 1924), or to require that it be sociable, joint action, identity related, etc. (as in Watson and Potter 1962). "Dialogue," while being a kind of conversation, has special implications derived from its use in Plato, psychiatric theorizing, Buber, and others, which limits its usefulness as a general term. I mean to include chats as well as service contacts, therapy sessions as well as asking for and getting the time of day, press conferences as well as exchanged whispers of "sweet noth-

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ings." I have used "conversation" with this general reference in mind, occasionally borrowing the still more general term "state of talk" from Erving Goffman.

It is an easily noticed fact about two-party conversations that their sequencing is alternating. That is to say, conversational sequence can be described by the formula *ababab*, where "a" and "b" are the parties to the conversation. (I am indebted to Sacks [ms.] for suggesting the significance of this observation, and some of its implications.) The *abab* formula is a specification, for two-party conversations, of the basic rule for conversation: *one party at a time*. The strength of this rule can be seen in the fact that in a multi-party setting (more precisely, where there are four or more), if more than one person is talking, it can be claimed not that rule has been violated, but that more than one conversation is going on. Thus, Bales can write:

The conversation generally proceeded so that one person talked at a time, and all members in the particular group were attending the *same conversation*. In this sense, these groups might be said to have a "single focus," that is, they did not involve a number of conversations proceeding at the same time [Bales et al. 1951:461].

When combined with an analytic conception of an utterance, the *abab* specification has a variety of other interesting consequences, such as allowing us to see how persons can come to say "X is silent," when no person in the scene is talking. (For a psychiatric usage, see Bergler 1938.)

The problem I wish to address is the following: the *abab* formula describes the sequencing of a two-party conversation already underway. It does not provide for the allocation of the roles "a" and "b" (where "a" is a first speaker and "b" is a second speaker) between the two persons engaged in the conversation. Without such an allocation, no ready means is available for determining the first speaker of the convention. The *abab* sequence makes each successive turn sequentially dependent upon the previous one; it provides no resources when who the first speaker might be is treated problematically. I should like to examine the ways in which coordinated entry by two parties into an orderly sequence of conversational

turns is managed. (This general area has been considered from a somewhat different perspective in Goffman 1953:chap. 14; see also Goffman 1965:88-95).

Notice that I do not mean to identify a "turn" necessarily with any syntactic or grammatical unit or combination of units, nor with any activity. In the former case, it should be clear that a turn may contain anything from a single "mm" (or less) to a string of complex sentences. In the latter, it is crucial to distinguish a single turn in which two activities are accomplished from two turns by the same party without an intervening turn of the other. An example of the latter occurs when a question must be repeated before it is heard or answered; an example of the former is the line, following the inquiry "How are you," "Oh I'm fine. How are you." A "turn," as I am using the term, is thus not the same as what Goffman refers to as a "natural message," which he describes as "the sign behavior of a sender during the whole period of time through which a focus of attention is continuously directed at him" (Goffman 1953:165). There are, of course, other views of the matter, such as using a period of silence or "appreciable pause" to mark a boundary (as in Stephen and Mishler [1952:600] or Steinzor [1949:109]). But unanalyzed pauses and silences are ambiguous (theoretically) as to whether they mark the boundary of a unit, or are included in it (as the very term "pause" suggests).

TELEPHONE CONVERSATION: THE DISTRIBUTION RULE

A first rule of telephone conversation, which might be called a "distribution rule for first utterances," is: *the answerer speaks first*. Whether the utterance be "hello," "yeah," "Macy's," "shoe department," "Dr. Brown's office," "Plaza 1-5000," or whatever, it is the one who picks up the ringing phone who speaks it.

This rule seems to hold in spite of a gap in the informational resources of the answerer. While the caller knows both his own identity, and, typically, that of his intended interlocutor (whether a specific person or an organization is being phoned), the answerer, at least in most cases, knows only who he is and not specifically who the

caller is. That is not to say that no basis for inference might exist, as, for example, that provided by time of day, the history of a relationship, agreed upon signaling arrangements, etc. To the question "whom are you calling?" a caller may give a definitive answer, but to the question "who's calling?" the answerer, before picking up the phone, can give only a speculative answer.

Without developing a full analysis here, the import of the gap in the answerer's information ought to be noted. If, in this society, persons uniformly used a single standardized item to open a conversation without respect to the identity of the other party or the relationship between the two, then the informational lack would have no apparent import, at least for the opening. This, however, is not the case. A variety of terms may be used to begin conversation and their propriety is geared to the identity, purposes, and relationships of either or both parties. Intercom calls, for example, are typically answered by a "yeah" or "yes" while incoming outside calls are seldom answered in that way (In citations of data in which the police receive the call, "D" refers to the police "dispatcher" and "C" refers to the caller.):

#68

- D: Yeah.
 C: Tell 85 to take that crane in the west entrance. That's the only entrance that they can get in.
 D: O.K. Will do.
 C: Yeah.

#88

- D: Yes.
 C: Uh Officer Novelada.
 D: Yes, speaking.
 C: Why uh this is Sergeant ——,
 D: Yes Sergeant.
 C: And uh I just talked to [etc.]

#123

- D: Yeah.
 C: If you can get a hold of car 83, go'm tell him to go to [etc.]

Full consideration of the problem that this answerer's information gap presents, and some solutions to it, requires reference to aspects of conversational openings other than sequencing, and cannot be adequately discussed here (see Schegloff 1967, chap. 4).

It may help to gain insight into the working of the distribution rule to consider, speculatively, what might be involved in its violation, and the reader is invited to do so. (For the illumination of normal scenes produced by considering disruption of them, I am indebted to Harold Garfinkel; see Garfinkel 1967.) One possible violation would involve the following: The distribution rule provides that the answerer normally talks first, immediately upon picking up the receiver. To violate the rule and attempt to have the other person treated as the one who was called, he would not talk, but would remain silent until the caller spoke first. Suppose after some time the caller says "Hello?" This might be heard as an attempt by the caller to check out the acoustic intactness of the connection. In doing so, the caller employs a lexical item, and perhaps an intonation, that is standardly used by called parties in answering their home phones. This would provide the violator (i.e., the answerer acting as a caller) with a resource. Given the identity of the lexical items used by persons to check out and to answer in this case, the violator may now treat the checking out "hello" as an answering "hello" Continuing the role reversal, he would be required to offer a caller's first remark.

We may note that, without respect to the detailed substance of their remarks, it is a property of their respective utterances that the answerer typically says just "hello," whereas the caller, if he says "hello," typically then adds a continuation, e.g., "this is Harry." Our hypothetical violator, in having to make a caller's first remark to achieve the role reversal, must then say "hello" with a continuation.

To be sure, a caller might say only "hello," so as to invite the called person to recognize who is calling. This is a common attempt to establish or confirm the intimacy or familiarity of a relationship. To cite one instance from our data, in which a police complaint clerk calls his father:

#497

- Other: Hello
 Police: Hello
 Other: Hello, the letter, you forgot that letter
 Police: Yeah but listen to me, the —— just blew up, [etc.]

The "intimacy ploy," however, is available only to a "genuine" caller, and not to the hypothetical violator under consideration. If the violator says it, the genuine caller might hear it as a correct answerer's first remark that was dealed. The attempted violation would thereupon be frustrated.

In saying "hello" with a continuation, however, the would-be violator would encounter trouble. While trying to behave as a caller, he does not have the information a genuine caller would have. In having to add to the "hello" to play the caller's part, the choice of an appropriate item depends on his knowing (as a genuine caller would know) to whom he is speaking. We may give three examples of what this bind might consist of:

(1). One common addition to a caller's "hello" involves the use of a term of address, for example: Answerer: "Hello?"; Caller: "Hello, Bill." Not knowing to whom he is speaking, the violator can obviously not employ such an addition.

(2). Another frequent addition is some self-identification appended to the "hello." Self-identification involves two parts: (a) a frame and (b) a term of identification. By "frame" is meant such things as "this is —," "my name is —," or "I am —."² Terms of identification include among others, first names, nicknames, or title plus last name. We may note that the choice both of appropriate frames and appropriate self-identification terms varies with the identity and relationship of the two parties. For example, the frame "My name is —" is normally used only in identifying oneself to a stranger. Similarly, whether one refers to oneself as Bill or Mr. Smith depends upon the relationship between the two parties. Our imagined violator would not have the information requisite to making a choice with respect to either determination. Although these two examples are not exhaustive of the variety of caller's continuations, a great many calls proceed by use of one or more of them, and in each case a masquerading caller, not having the simple information a genuine caller would have, would have trouble in using such a continuation.

(3). An alternative continuation for a caller, whether used in combination with one of the foregoing continuations or as the

caller's next turn suggests another rule of opening conversations: the caller provides the first "topic" of conversation. This rule would confront a violator with the problem of formulating a topic of conversation that could serve appropriately without respect to to whom he is speaking. Whether there are such topics is unclear. A promising candidate as a general first topic might seem to be the ritual inquiry "How are you?" or some common variant thereof. This inquiry is usable for a very wide range of conversational others, but not for all conversational others. For example, telephone solicitors or callers from the Chamber of Commerce would not be typically greeted in this way. As formulated here, the rule "The caller provides the first 'topic'" is not nearly as general as the distribution rule. There are obvious occasions where it is not descriptive, as when the "caller" is "returning a call." A formulation that would hold more generally might be "The initiator of a contact provides the first topic." But this alternative is no better in providing a continuation to "hello" that is usable for all conversational others. (It may be noted here that much of the analysis in this section will be superceded below.)

Other violations of the distribution rule are readily imaginable, and need not be enumerated here. My interest is chiefly in exploring the operation and constraints provided by the distribution rule, as well as the resources it provides for keeping track of the developing course of a conversation. I found, in attempting to imagine violations, that without the proper operation of the simple distribution rule, it was difficult to keep track of who was who, who the genuine caller and who the violator, the order of events, what remarks were proper for whom, etc. Although I have attempted to describe the hypothetical violation clearly, I fear, and trust, that the reader will have been sore-pressed to follow the "play-by-play" account and keep the "players" straight. It may be noted, then, that not only does the distribution rule seem to be routinely followed in the actual practice of telephone conversationalists, but that it provides a format by which observers maintain a grasp of the developing activity.

Finally, consider as evidence of the binding character of the distribution rule the fol-

lowing personal anecdote recounted by a student. At one time, she began receiving obscene phone calls. She noted that the caller breathed heavily. She, therefore, began the practice of picking up the receiver without speaking. If she heard the heavy breathing, she would hang up. The point she wanted to make in relating this anecdote was that she encountered considerable irritation from her friends when it turned out that it was they calling and she had not made a first utterance upon picking up the receiver. She took this to be additional evidence for the correctness of the rule "the answerer speaks first." However, she has supplied an even more pointed demonstration than she intended. It is notable that she could avoid hearing the obscenities by avoiding making a first utterance; however obscene her caller might be, he would not talk until she had said "hello," thereby obeying the requirements of the distribution rule.

A Deviant Case

The distribution rule discussed above holds for all but one of the roughly 500 phone conversations in the entire corpus of data. In the vast majority of these, the dispatcher, when calls were made to the police, or others, when calls were made by the police, spoke first. In several cases the tape recordings contained instances of simultaneous talk at the beginning of the interchange (often because the caller was still talking to the switchboard operator when the dispatcher "came on the line"). In these cases, a resolution occurred by the callers withdrawing in favor of the called. That is, either the caller stopped and the dispatcher continued, or both stopped and the dispatcher went on.

#364

D: Police Desk. }
 C: First aiders with me. } Simultaneous
 D: Police Desk.
 C: Hello?
 D: Yes.
 C: Uh this is [etc.]

#66

D: Police Desk.
 C: (Simultaneously giving phone number in background to operator)
 D: Hello
 C: I am a pharmacist. I own [etc.]

#43

D: Police Desk. }
 C: Say, what's all the } Simultaneous
 excitement... }
 D: Police Desk?
 C: Police Headquarters?
 D: Yes.
 C: What's all the excitement [etc.]

Simultaneous talk is of special interest because it is the converse of *abab*, which requires that only one party talk at a time. If simultaneous talk could be shown to be regularly resolved via the distribution rule, at the beginning of telephone conversations, then its status as a solution to the problem of coordinated entry would be more general. A fully adequate demonstration might involve giving somewhat stronger explication of the notion of one party's "withdrawal," perhaps by reference to some utterance unit, e.g., a sentence, begun but not finished. (For this last point, I am indebted to Harvey Sacks).

One case clearly does not fit the requirements of the distribution rule:

#9 (Police make call)

Receiver is lifted, and there is a one second pause
 Police: Hello.
 Other: American Red Cross.
 Police: Hello, this is Police Headquarters . . . er, Officer Stratton [etc.]

In this case the caller talks first, while the distribution would require that the first line be "American Red Cross," the statement of the called party.

While indeed there is only one such violation in my data, its loneliness in the corpus is not sufficient warrant for not treating it seriously. Two alternatives are open. We might focus exclusively on this case and seek to develop an analysis particular to it that would account for its deviant sequencing. This would constitute an *ad hoc* attempt to save the distribution rule, using a technique commonly used in sociology—deviant case analysis. Alternately, we might reexamine the entire corpus of materials seeking to deepen our understanding of the opening sequencing. We might ask: Is this best treated as a deviant case, or would a deeper and more general formulation of the opening sequencing reveal properties of the initi-

ation of talk that the distribution rule glosses over. Analysis of the case reveals that the distribution rule, while it holds in most cases, is in fact best understood as a derivative of more general rules. As we shall see, the additional sequencing rules, which this case forces us to examine, clarify properties of talk in nontelephone communication as well as in telephone communication. The rules discussed below do not make the distribution rule superfluous, but concern more finely grained aspects of the opening sequence. They require that we analyze aspects of the opening structure that the distribution rule does not handle. The distribution rule is but one, if indeed a most typical, specification of the formulation to follow, and the deviant case is another specification. As Michael Moerman has suggested, the distribution rule is no less a "special case" for having many occurrences, nor the latter more so for having only one (in my corpus of materials). Not number of occurrences, but common subsumption under a more general formulation is what matters. It will be shown that, in broadening the formulation of the opening sequence, a set of more interesting and formal properties of the opening sequencing structure are exposed.

SUMMONS-ANSWER SEQUENCES

Originally we spoke of two parties to a telephone interaction, a caller and an answerer. The distribution rule held that the answerer spoke first. One of the activities in the material under examination seems to be "answering," and it is appropriate to ask what kind of answering activity is involved and what its properties are.

Let us consider for a moment what kinds of things are "answered." The most common item that is answered is a question, and a standardized exchange is question-answer. At first glance, however, it seems incorrect to regard the "called" party as answering a question. What would be the question? A telephone ring does not intuitively seem to have that status. Other items that are answered include challenges, letters, roll calls, and summonses. It seems that we could well regard the telephone ring as a summons. Let us consider the structure of summons-answer sequences.

It can be noted at the outset that a summons—often called an "attention-getting device"—is not a telephone-specific occurrence. Other classes besides mechanical devices, such as telephone rings, include:

- (1) terms of address (e.g., "John?" "Dr.," "Mr. Jones?," "waiter,"³ etc.)
- (2) courtesy phrases (e.g., "Pardon me," when approaching a stranger to get his attention)
- (3) Physical devices (e.g., a tap on the shoulder, waves of a hand, raising of a hand by an audience member, etc.).

It is to be noted that a summons occurs as the first part of a two part sequence. Just as there are various items that can be used as summonses, so are there various items that are appropriately used as answers, e.g., "Yes?," "What?," "Uh huh?," turning of the eyes or of the body to face the beckoner, etc. Some typical summons-answer sequences are: telephone ring—"hello"; "Johnny?"—"yes"; "Excuse me"—"Yes"; "Bill?"—looks up.

The various items that may be used as summonses are also used in other ways. "Hello," for example, may be used as a greeting; "Excuse me" may be used as an apology; a name may be used as a term of address only, not requiring an answer. How might we differentiate between the summons uses of such terms and other uses? Taking as an example items whose other use is as terms of address, it seems that the following are ways of differentiating their uses:

- (1) When addressing, the positioning of a term of address is restricted. It may occur at the beginning of an utterance ("Jim, where do you want to go?"), at the end of an utterance ("What do you think, Mary?") or between clauses or phrases in an utterance ("Tell me, John, how's Bill?"). As summons items, however, terms of address are positionally free within an utterance. (This way of differentiating the usages has a "one-way" character; that is, it is determinative only when an item occurs where terms of address [as nonsummons items] cannot. When it occurs within the restrictions on placement of terms of address, it clearly is nondifferentiating.) As a mere address term, an item cannot occur between a preposition

and its object, but as a summons it may, as in the following telephone call from the data:

#398

C: Try to get out t'—Joe?

D: Yeah?

C: Try to get ahold of [etc.]

(2) Summons items may have a distinctive rising terminal juncture, a raising of the voice pitch in a quasi-interrogative fashion.⁴ This seems to be typically the case when a summons occurs after a sentence has already begun, as in the above datum. It need not be the case when the summons stands alone, as in "Jim," when trying to attract Jim's attention.

(3) A term of address is "inserted" in an utterance. By that I mean that after the term of address is introduced, the utterance continues with no break in its grammatical continuity; e.g., "Tell me, Jim, what did you think of. . . ." When a summons occurs in the course of an utterance, it is followed by a "recycling" to the beginning of the utterance. The utterance is begun again, as in the datum cited in point 1 above. Although in that datum the original utterance is altered when started again, alteration is not intrinsic to what is intended by the term "recycling."

It is an important feature of summonses and answers that, like questions and answers, they are sequentially used. This being so, the unit of our analysis is a sequence of summons and answer, which shall henceforth be abbreviated as "SA" sequence. Question-answer sequences shall be referred to as "QA." We now turn to an examination of two major and several subsidiary properties of SA sequences.

Nonterminality of SA Sequences

By nonterminality I mean that a completed SA sequence cannot properly stand as the final exchange of a conversation. It is a specific feature of SA sequences that they are preambles, preliminaries, or prefaces to some further conversational or bodily activity. They are both done with that purpose, as signaling devices to further actions, and are heard as having that character. This is most readily noticed in that very common answer to a summons "What is it?" Nonterminality indicates that not only must something follow, but that SA sequences are spe-

cifically preliminary to something that follows.

Is the continuation upon the completion of an SA sequence constrained in any way, e.g., in which party produces it? The very property of nonterminality is furnished by the obligation of the summoner to talk again upon the completion (by the summoned) of the SA sequence. It is he who has done the summoning and by making a summons incurs the obligation to talk again. With exceedingly rare exceptions, some of which will be noted below, the summoner fulfills this obligation and talks again. It is the fact of the routine fulfillment of the obligation to talk again that produces data in which every conversation beginning with an SA sequence does not terminate there.

It may be noted in passing that the structure of SA sequences is more constraining than the structure of QA sequences. It seems to be a property of many QA sequences that the asker of a question has the *right* to talk again, but not an obligation to do so.⁵ SA sentences more forcefully constrain both contributors to them. One way to see the constraining character of nonterminality as a normative property of an SA sequence is by observing what regularly occurs when the summoner, for whatever reason, does not wish to engage in whatever activity the SA sequence he originated may have been preliminary to. Here we characteristically find some variant of the sequence: "Sam?" "Yeah?" "Oh, never mind." Note that in the very attempt to appropriately withdraw from the obligation to continue after a completed SA sequence, an original summoner must in fact conform to it and not simply be silent. Even in telephone conversations between strangers, where maintaining the intactness of some relationship would not seem to be at issue, the obligation to continue talk upon an SA sequence has been observed to hold. For example, in calling an establishment to learn if it is open, that fact may sometimes be established positively when the ringing phone (summons) is lifted and "hello" or an establishment name is heard. Rather than hang up, having obtained the required information, many persons will continue with the self-evidently answered question "Are you

still open?" (although note here the common tendency to append to it a more reasonable inquiry, one not rendered superfluous by the very act, as "How late are you open?" even though that might not, on the given occasion, be of interest). The limited rule "the caller supplies the first topic" advanced earlier may be seen to be one partial application of the obligation of a summoner to talk again.

A property directly related to the nonterminality of SA sequences is their nonrepeatability. Once a summons has been answered, the summoner may not begin another SA sequence. A contrast is suggested with QA sequences where a questioner, having a *right* to talk again after an answer is given, may fill his slot with another question. Although a questioner may sometimes be constrained against asking the same question again (e.g., in two-person interaction: A: "How are you?" B: "Fine." A: "How are you?"), he may choose some question to fill the next slot. A summoner is not only barred from using the same summons again but from doing any more summoning (of the same "other"). If, as occurs on occasion, a summoner does not hear the answer of the other, and repeats the summons, should the answerer hear both summonses he will treat the second one as over-insistent. This is most likely to occur in those situations where physical barriers make it difficult for the summoned person to indicate his having received the summons and having initiated a course of answering. Continued knocking on the door is often met with the complaint as the answerer is on his way, "I'm coming, I'm coming." To sum up, the summoner's obligation to talk again cannot be satisfied by initiating another SA sequence to the same other. This does not mean, however, that one might not have, in a transcript of the opening of a conversation, two SA sequences back-to-back. As we shall shortly see, if the nonterminality property is not met, i.e., should the summoner not fulfill his obligation to talk again, the answerer of the first SA sequence may, in turn, start another with a summons of his own, as in the first line below (E has called M—the initial S):⁶

M: MacNamara (pause). Hello? (A#S)

E: Yeah uh John? (A . . .)

M: Yeah.

E: I uh just trying to do some uh intercom here in my own set up and get ahold of you at the same time.

We may further see the operation of the nonterminality property in a common misunderstanding of the use of a name. Names may serve, as suggested above, both as simple terms of address or as summoning terms of address. Should a name intently uttered as a simple term of address be heard as a summons, the hearer will expect a continuation while the speaker will not be prepared to give one. While not a particularly frequent occurrence, when found, it usually occurs in the following way: *X* uses *Y*'s name, and in so doing waves. This is a typical way to perform a greeting, part of which is verbally accomplished and part of it gesturally accomplished. The lexical item perceived alone, i.e., where the gesture is not seen, may be heard as a summons, and one who hears it in this way will then answer it and await the activity to which it was expectably preliminary. The misinterpreted sender, like he who calls merely to find out information that the answer conveys, may feel obligated to say "I was just saying 'hello.'"

It is worth noting about such occurrences that misinterpreted persons can see how they were misinterpreted. Being able to see the kind of error involved rather than having to investigate its character, allows immediate correction. Such availability of the nature of an error may be quite important. One consequence may be the following. That the systematic ambiguity of the term (i.e., its use to do more than one activity—here "summoning" and "greeting") is available when invoked by the second party, suggests that the summoner can see how the error could be made; he can see its methodical character. Members may be able, then, not only to methodically detect which of two activities a term is being used for, but also to detect methodical errors in such determinations. The hope may, therefore, be warranted that investigators will be able to describe methods for differentiating "term of address" usages from "summons" usages, even if the three suggestions offered earlier prove wrong.

Nonterminality is an outcome of the obligation of the summoner to talk again. Corollary to that obligation is the obligation of the answerer, having answered the summons, to listen further. Just as the summoner, by virtue of his summons, obligates himself for further interaction, so the answerer, by virtue of his answer, commits himself to staying with the encounter. More will be said about this matter and some of its ramifications in the discussion of what I term the problem of "availability." For the present it may suffice to give an example of a common situation under which the power of this reciprocity makes itself felt. Compare, for example, two ways in which a mother may seek to call her child to dinner from a play area. One way would involve the use of his name as a term of address with the request that he return home, e.g., "Johnny, come home. It's time for dinner." It is not an anomalous experience in this culture that such calls may elicit no response from the parties to whom they are directed. It may be claimed, upon complaint about this nonresponse, that the call was not heard. Contrast with this, however, a sequence in which the child is summoned prior to a statement of the summoner's intention. If the child answers the summons, he is estopped from ignoring what follows it, e.g., "Johnny," "Yes?" "Come home for dinner." Children may resist answering the summons, knowing what may follow it, and realizing that to answer the summons commits them to hearing what they do not want to hear. Although they may nonetheless not obey the commandment, claiming they have not heard, it is more difficult if they have answered the summons.⁷

It is to be noted that the nonterminality of an SA sequence and the obligations that produce it are mutually oriented to by the parties to the interaction and may affect the very choice of an answer to the original summons. A prospective answerer of a summons is attuned to the obligation of the summoner to respect the nonterminality of the sequence (i.e., to continue the interaction, either by talk or bodily activity) once the answer is delivered. He is likewise attuned to his obligation, having answered, to be prepared to attend the summoner's obligated next behavior. Should he not be in a

position to fulfill this listener's obligation, he may provide for that fact by answering the summons with a "motion to defer," e.g., "John?" "Just a minute, I'll be right there." Of course, such deferrals may, in fact, serve to cancel the interaction, as when a "just a minute" either intendedly or unwittingly exhausts the span of control of the summons. More will be said below about deferrals, and their appropriateness, in our consideration of the issue of availability to interact. (Compare Goffman [1953:197]: "sometimes the reply may contain an explicit request to hold off for a moment . . ." The present analysis is intended to explicate why this should be needed [its occurrence being independently establishable] by reference to the temporal organization of the opening sequence.)

We now turn to a consideration of another property of SA sequences, one that will allow us to examine not only the relationship between completed SA sequences and their sequels, but the internal structure of the sequences themselves.

Conditional Relevance in SA Sequences

The property of conditional relevance is formulated to address two problems. (The term and some elements of the idea of "conditional relevance" were suggested by Sacks [in press].) The first of these is: How can we rigorously talk about two items as a sequenced pair of items, rather than as two separate units, one of which might happen to follow the other? The second problem is: How can we, in a sociologically meaningful and rigorous way, talk about the "absence" of an item; numerous things are not present at any point in a conversation, yet only some have a relevance that would allow them to be seen as "absent." Some items are, so to speak, "officially absent." It is to address these problems that the notion of conditional relevance is introduced. By conditional relevance of one item on another we mean: given the first, the second is expectable; upon its occurrence it can be seen to be a second item to the first; upon its nonoccurrence it can be seen to be officially absent—all this provided by the occurrence of the first item.

We may begin to explicate conditional

relevance in SA sequences by employing it to clarify further some materials already discussed. The property of "nonterminality" may be reformulated by saying that further talk is conditionally relevant on a completed SA sequence. In such a formulation we treat the SA sequence as a unit; it has the status of a first item in a sequence for which further talk becomes the second item, expectable upon the occurrence of the first. As noted, the specific focus of this expectation is upon the summoner who must supply the beginning of the further talk. Within this reformulation, if he fails to do so, that fact is officially noticeable and further talk is officially absent. It is by orienting to these facts that an answerer may find further talk coming fast upon him and, if unprepared to fulfill his obligation to attend to it, may seek to defer it by answering "Just a minute," as was noted above.

My main interest in conditional relevance at this point does not, however, have to do with that of further talk upon a completed SA sequence, but with the internal workings of the sequence itself. Simply said, *A is conditionally relevant on the occurrence of S*.

We can see the conditional relevance of A on S most clearly in the following sort of circumstance. If one party issues an S and no A occurs, that provides the occasion for repetition of the S. That is to say, the non-occurrence of the A is seen by the summoner as its official absence and its official absence provides him with adequate grounds for repetition of the S. We say "adequate grounds" in light of the rule, previously formulated, that the summoner may *not* repeat the S if the sequence has been completed. As long as the sequence is not completed, however, the S may be repeated.

Two qualifications must be introduced at this point, one dealing with the extendability of repetitions of S, the other with the temporal organization of those repetitions relative to the initial S. To take the second point first: In order to find that an A is absent, the summoner need not wait for posterity. In principle, unless some limitation is introduced, the occurrence of S might be the occasion for an indefinite waiting period at some point in which an A might occur. This is not the case. In noting this fact, a subsidiary property of the conditional relevance of

A on S may be formulated—the property of immediate juxtaposition.

The following observations seem to hold: In QA sequences, if one asks a question, a considerable amount of silence may pass before the other speaks. Nonetheless, if certain constraints on the content of his remarks (having to do with the relation of their substantive content to the substantive content of the question) are met, then the other's remark may be heard as an answer to the question. Secondly, even if the intervening time is filled not with silence but with talk, within certain constraints some later utterance may be heard as the answer to the question (e.g., X: "Have you seen Jim yet?" Y: "Oh is he in town?" X: "Yeah, he got in yesterday." Y: "No, I haven't seen him yet.").

By contrast with this possible organization of QA sequences, the following may be noted about SA sequences. The conditional relevance of an A on an S must be satisfied within a constraint of *immediate juxtaposition*. That is to say, an item that may be used as an answer to a summons will not be heard to constitute an answer to a summons if it occurs separated from the summons. While this point may seem to imply that temporal ordering is involved, it is far from clear that "time" or "elapsed time" is the relevant matter. An alternative, suggested by Harvey Sacks, would make reference to "nextness" plus some conception of "pacing" or of units of activity of finer or coarser grain by reference to which "nextness" would be located.

We may now note the relevance of this constraint to the formulation of the absence of an A. When we say that upon A's absence S may be repeated, we intend to note that A's absence may be found if its occurrence does not immediately follow an S. The phenomenon is encountered when examining occurrences in a series such as S-short pause-S-short pause, or "Dick" . . . no answer . . . "Dick" . . . , etc. In this mechanical age it may be of interest to note that the very construction and operation of the mechanical ring is built on these principles. If each ring of the phone be considered a summons, then the phone is built to ring, wait for an answer, if none occurs, to ring again, wait for an answer, ring again, etc. And in-

deed, some persons, polite even when interacting with a machine, will not interrupt a phone, but wait for the completion of a ring before picking up the receiver.

The other qualification concerning the repeatability of an S upon the official absence of an A concerns a *terminating rule*. It is empirically observable that S's are not repeated without limitation, until an A is actually returned. There is, then, some terminating rule used by members of the society to limit the number of repetitions of an S. I cannot at this point give a firm formulation of such a terminating rule, except to note my impression that S's are not strung out beyond three to five repetitions at the most. However, that some terminating rule is normally used by adult members of the society can be noted by observing their annoyance at the behavior of children who do not employ it. Despite the formulation in numerical terms, a similar reservation must be entered here as was entered with respect to time above. It is not likely that "number" or "counting" is the relevant matter. Aside from contextual circumstances (e.g., location), the requirement of "immediate juxtaposition" discussed above may be related to the terminating rule(s). It may be by virtue of a telephone caller's assumption of the priority or "nextness" of a response, given the ring of the phone, that the telephone company finds it necessary to use the phone book to advise callers to allow at least ten rings to permit prospective answerers time to maneuver their way to the phone.

One further observation may be made at this point about repetitions of S. "Repetition" does not require that the same lexical item be repeated; rather, successive utterances are each drawn from the class of items that may be summonses, although the particular items that are used may change over some string of repetitions. For example, "Mommy . . . Mommy" may then shift to "Mom . . . Mom" or "Mother . . ."; "Jim" may shift to "Mr. Smith," or "Jim Smith" (as, for example, when trying to attract someone from the rear in a crowded setting). A ring of a doorbell may shift to a knock on the door, the mechanical ring of a phone is replaced by some lexical item, such as "hello" when the caller hears the receiver lifted and nothing is said (as with the de-

viant case introduced earlier to which I shall return later).

While I am unable to formulate a terminating rule for repetitions of S when no A occurs, it is clear that we have a terminating rule when an A does occur: *A terminates the sequence*. As noted, upon the completion of the SA sequence, the original summoner cannot summon again. The operation of this terminating rule, however, depends upon the clear recognition that an A has occurred. This recognition normally is untroubled. However, trouble sometimes occurs by virtue of the fact that some lexical items, e.g., "Hello," may be used both as summonses and as answers. Under some circumstances it may be impossible to tell whether such a term has been used as summons or as answer. Thus, for example, when acoustic difficulties arise in a telephone connection, both parties may attempt to confirm their mutual availability to one another. Each one may then employ the term "Hello?" as a summons to the other. For each of them, however, it may be unclear whether what he hears in the earpiece is an answer to his check, or the other's summons for him to answer. One may, under such circumstances, hear a conversation in which a sequence of some length is constituted by nothing but alternately and simultaneously offered "hellos." Such "verbal dodging" is typically resolved by the use, by one party, of an item on which a second is conditionally relevant, where that second is unambiguously a second part of a two-part sequence. Most typically this is a question, and the question "Can you hear me?" or one of its common lexical variants, regularly occurs.

We may note that the matters we have been discussing are involved in problems having to do with the coordinated character of social interaction, whether they be coordinated entry into a conversation, coordinated re-entry into an interrupted conversation, or the coordination of the activity in its course. In particular, we will shortly turn to a consideration of the bearing of SA sequences on coordinated entry.

The power of the conditional relevance of A on S is such that a variety of strong inferences can be made by persons on the basis of it, and we now turn to consider some of them. We may first note that not only does

conditional relevance operate "forwards," the occurrence of an S providing the expectability of an A, but it works in "reverse" as well. If, after a period of conversational lapse, one person in a multi-person setting (and particularly when persons are not physically present but within easily recallable range) should produce an item that may function as an A to an S, such as "What?," or "Yes?," then another person in that environment may hear in that utterance that an unspoken summons was heard. He may then reply "I didn't call you." (This, then, is another sort of circumstance in which we find an immediately graspable error, such as was remarked on earlier.) The connection between a summons and an answer provides both prospective and retrospective inferences.

A further inferential structure attached to the conditional relevance of A on S can lead us to see that this property has the status of what Durkheim (1950) intended by the term social fact; i.e., the property is both "external" and "constraining." When we say that an answer is conditionally relevant upon a summons, it is to be understood that the behaviors referred to are not "casual options" for the persons involved. A member of the society may not "naively choose" not to answer a summons. The culture provides that a variety of "strong inferences" can be drawn from the fact of the official absence of an answer, and any member who does not answer does so at the peril of one of those inferences being made.

(Terms such as "casual option," "naively choose," and "strong inference" are used here in a fashion that may require explanation. Although not supplying a fully adequate explication, the following suggestion may be in order. By "may not naively choose" is meant that the person summoned cannot deny that *some* inference may legitimately be made. If some *particular* inference is proposed, then in denying *it* the summoned offers a substitute, thereby conceding the legitimacy of *an* inference, though not perhaps of a *particular one*. If questioned as to the warrant for his inference, the summoner may refer to the absence of an answer, and this stands as an adequate warrant. A sequence constructed to exemplify these remarks might be:

Summoner: Are you mad at me?

Summoned: Why do you think that?

Summoner: You didn't answer when I called you.

Summoned: Oh. No, I didn't hear you.

Conversely, the following observed exchange may suggest what is intended by "casual option" [or naive choice"]

Wife: What are you thinking about?

Husband: Who says I'm thinking?

Wife: You're playing with your hair.

Husband: That doesn't mean anything.

The activity "playing with one's hair" is a "casual option" [or "naive choice"] in this interaction and, therefore, the claim can be made that no inference is warranted.)

What sorts of inferences are involved? A first inference is "no answer—no person." When a person dials a number on the telephone, if the receiver on the other end is not picked up, he may say as a matter of course "there is no one home"; he does not typically announce "they decided not to answer." A person returning home seeking to find out if anyone else is already there may call out the name of his wife, for example, and upon not receiving an answer, may typically take it that she is not home or, while physically home, is not interactionally "in play" (e.g., she may be asleep. The term is from Goffman 1965). If one person sees another lying on a couch or a bed with eyes closed and calls their name and receives no answer, he takes it that that person is asleep or feigning sleep. He does not take it that the person is simply disregarding the summons. Or, to use a more classical dramatic example, when Tosca, thinking that her lover has been only apparently and not really executed, calls his name, she realizes by the absence of his answer that he is not only apparently dead but really so. She does not take it that he is merely continuing the masquerade.

It is this very structure of inferences that a summoner can make from the official absence of an answer that provides a resource for members of the society who seek to do a variety of insolent and quasi-insolent activities. The resource consists in this: the inference from official absence of an answer is the physical or interactional absence of the prospective answerer. Persons who want to engage in such activities as "giving the cold shoulder," "sulking," "insulting," "looking down their noses at," etc., may employ the

fact that such inferences will be made from "no answer" but will be controverted by their very physical presence and being interactionally in play (they are neither asleep nor unconscious). So, although members can, indeed, "choose" not to answer a summons, they cannot do so naively; i.e., they know that if the inference of physical or interactional absence cannot be made, then some other inference will, e.g., they are cold shouldering, insulting, etc.

We may note what is a corollary of the inferential structure we have been describing. The very inferences that may be made from the fact of the official absence of an answer may then stand as accounts of the "no answer." So, not only does one infer that "no one is home," but, also "no one is home" accounts for the fact of no answer. Not only may one see in the no answer that "he is mad at me," but one can account for it by that fact. More generally then, we may say that the conditional relevance of A on S entails not only that the nonoccurrence of A is its official absence, but also that that absence is "accountable." Furthermore, where an inference is readily available from the absence of an answer, that inference stands as its account.

However, where no ready inference is available, then no ready account is available and the search for one may be undertaken. Something of this sort would seem to be involved in an incident such as the following (field notes): A husband and wife are in an upstairs room when a knock on the door occurs; the wife goes to answer it; after several minutes the husband comes to the head of the stairs and calls the wife's name; there is no answer and the husband runs down the stairs. If the foregoing analysis is correct, we might say that he does so in search of that which would provide an account for the absence of the wife's answer. The point made here does not follow logically, but empirically. From the relationship of the availability of an inference to its use as an account, it does not logically follow that the absence of an inference entails the absence of an account and the legitimacy of a search. An account may not be needed even if absent. It happens, however, that that is so although not logically entailed.

We have now introduced as many of the features of conditional relevance as are re-

quired for our further discussion. While the discussion of conditional relevance in this section has focused on the relations between A and S, these features are intrinsic to conditional relevance generally, and apply as well to the relations between completed SA sequences, as a unit, and further talk. If a called person's first remark is treated as an answer to the phone ring's summons, it completes the SA sequence, and provides the proper occasion for talk by the caller. If the conditional relevance of further talk on a completed SA sequence is not satisfied, we find the same sequel as is found when an A is not returned to an S: repetition or chaining. In our data:

#86

- D: Police Desk (pause). Police Desk (pause).
Hello, police desk (longer pause). Hello.
(A#AA#A)
C: Hello. (S)
D: Hello (pause). Police Desk? (A#A)
C: Pardon?
D: Do you want the Police Desk?

We turn now to a consideration of the problem of the availability to talk that provides the theoretical importance of SA sequences and opening sequences in general. In doing so we return to the concerns with the coordinated entry into an encounter, and the deviant case that required the reformulation of the distribution rule.

THE AVAILABILITY TO TALK

After having formulated a simple description for the opening sequence of telephone calls, we encountered a deviant case that was not described by that formulation. Rather than developing a deviant case analysis we set out to try to deepen the formulation of the opening sequence so that it would encompass with equal ease the vast majority of cases already adequately described and the troublesome variant. It will be recalled that the datum that gave us trouble read as follows:

- #9 Police make call—receiver is lifted and there is a one-second pause.
D: Hello.
Other: American Red Cross
D: [etc.]

In that piece, the caller made the first remark, whereas the distribution rule requires that the called party makes the first remark.

The foregoing analysis provides for this occurrence as being as rule-governed a phenomenon as other interchanges are. Treating the ringing of the phone as a summons and recalling the conditional relevance of an answer on it, we find that after the receiver has been lifted, the expectation of an answer is operative. In this piece of data, what occurs after the receiver is picked up would have passed as a normal case of the distribution rule had it not been noted that it was the caller, not the called who uttered it. The SA formulation gives us the circumstances under which it is not unusual for that remark to be uttered by the caller: treating the ring of the phone (which the distribution rule disregards) as a summons to which no answer is returned. As was noted in our discussion of conditional relevance, A is conditioned upon the occurrence of an S and should it not occur it is officially absent and warrants a repetition of the S. Hearing, now, the "Hello" as such a repetition provides for its status as a second summons in such an occurrence. The structure of the datum thus is seen to be S, no answer, S, A.

Likewise, all the cases easily handled by the distribution rule are handled with equal ease by the SA formulation, so long as the telephone ring is regarded as a summons. Thus, the rule "the called talks first" follows clearly from the conditional relevance of an A upon the occurrence of an S; and the less general rule, the "caller provides the first topic," follows from the conditional relevance of further talk upon a completed SA sequence. The distribution rule's operation is incorporated within the structure of SA sequencing.

We will now discuss the work SA sequences do by elaborating some properties of the component summons and answer items. The remainder of the present discussion, on the availability to talk and the coordinated entry into the sequence, will be devoted to further explicating the opening interactional structure.

Many activities seem to require some minimum number of participants. For thinking or playing solitaire, only one is required; for dialogue, at least two; and for "eristic dialogue," at least three.⁸ When an activity has as one of its properties a requirement of a minimal number of parties, then the same

behavior done without that "quota" being met is subject to being seen as an instance of some other activity (with a different minimum requirement, perhaps), or as "random" behavior casting doubt on the competence or normality of its performer. (This is so where the required number of parties is two or more; it would appear for any activity to get done, one party at least must be available.) Thus, one person playing the piano while another is present may be seen to be performing, while in the absence of another he may be seen to be practicing. Persons finding themselves waving to no one in particular by mistake may have to provide for the sense of their hand movement as having been only the first part of a convoluted attempt to scratch their head.

Conversation, at least for adults in this society, seems to be an activity with a minimal requirement of two participants. This may be illustrated by the following observations.

Buses in Manhattan have as their last tier of seats one long bench. On one occasion two persons were observed sitting on this last bench next to one another but in no way indicating that they were, to use Goffman's term (1965:102-103), "with each other." Neither turned his head in the direction of the other and for a long period of time, neither spoke. At one point, one of them began speaking without, however, turning his head in the direction of the other. It was immediately observed that other passengers within whose visual range this "couple" were located, scanned the back area of the bus to find to whom that talk was addressed. It turned out, of course, that the talk was addressed to the one the speaker was "with." What is of interest to us, however, is that the others present in the scene immediately undertook a search for a conversational other. On other occasions, however, similar in all respects but one to the preceding, a different sequel occurred. The dissimilarity was that the talker was not "with" anyone and, when each observer scanned the environment for the conversational other, no candidate for that position, including each scanner himself, could be located. The observers then took it that the talker was "talking to himself" and the passengers exchanged "knowing glances." The

issue here could be seen to involve what Bales (1951:87-90) has called "targeting", and, to be sure, that is what the persons in the scene appear to have been attending to. It is to be noted, however, that it is by reference to the character of conversation as a minimally two-party activity that the relevance of seeking the target is established in the first place. In this connection, it may be remarked that such phenomena as "talking to the air" (Goffman 1953:159) or glossing one's behavior by "talking to oneself," are best understood not as exceptions to the minimal two-party character of conversation, but as special ways of talking to others while not addressing them, of which other examples are given in Bales (1951:89-90).

On another occasion, two persons were observed walking toward one another on a college campus, each of them walking normally. Suddenly one of them began an extremely pronounced and angular walk in which the trunk of his body was exaggeratedly lowered with each step and raised with the next. The one encountering him took such a walk to be a communicative act and immediately turned around to search the environment for the recipient of the communication. In the background a girl was approaching. The two males continued on their respective paths and after some fifteen to twenty paces the one looked back again to see if, indeed, it was to the girl in the background that the gesture was directed.

We have said that conversation is a "minimally two-party" activity. The initial problem of coordination in a two-party activity is the problem of availability; that is, a person who seeks to engage in an activity that requires the collaborative work of two parties must first establish, via some interactional procedure, that another party is available to collaborate. It is clear that a treatment of members' solutions to the problem of availability might, at the same time, stand as a description of how coordinated entry into an interactive course of action is accomplished. Our task is to show that SA sequences are, indeed, germane to the problems both of availability and coordinated entry, and how they provide solutions to both these problems simultaneously.

We must show how the working and properties of SA sequences *establish* the

availability of the two parties to a forthcoming two-party interaction (and, in the absence of a completed sequence, foreclose the possibility of the activity) and how they, furthermore, ensure that availability, both at the beginning and in the continuing course of the interaction. We noted before that the absence of an answer to a summons led strongly to the inference of the absence of a party or claimed the other's unavailability to interact. Conversely, the presence of an answer is taken to establish the availability of the answerer; his availability involves, as we have seen, his obligation to listen to the further talk that is conditionally relevant upon the completion of the sequence. In sum, the completion of a sequence establishes the mutual availability of the parties and allows the activity to continue, and failure to complete the sequence establishes or claims the unavailability of at least one of them and perhaps undercuts the possibility of furthering that course of action.

We may note, in addition, that a distinction must be made between a party's "presence" and his "availability" to interact (as we shall later distinguish between his "availability" to interact and his "commitment" to do so). In our earlier discussion, we pointed out that the resource that members of the society draw upon in doing such activities as "cold shouldering," "insulting," "sulking," etc., involves the joint observability of physical presence, social presence (that is, consciousness and awakeness) and the absence of an answer to a summons, indicating or claiming unavailability for interaction. For the insolent activity to be accomplished via such a contrast, obviously enough, requires the distinctness of the items so contrasted. Several additional illustrations may serve to extend the scope of our sense of this difference.

Those who can remember their adolescence may recall occurrences such as the following in their high schools. In the morning, quite often as a first piece of official business, the teacher would "call the roll." In that case, a student, when his name was called, would respond by answering "present" or by raising his hand. Neither party then expected that further interaction between them would occur. Mere presence was being established. If they went to a

"proper" high school they may have been required to respond to a teacher's calling of their name in a recitation period by jumping to their feet, and awaiting some further behavior by the teacher. In that situation, their presence already established, they were being summoned to be available for some interaction, typically some examination. Teachers who saw a student physically present but not attentive to the official environment might make that fact observable to the public there assembled by calling a student's name and allowing all to see that he did not answer by standing up and establishing his availability. In that way then, the properties of a summons-answer sequence could be employed not only to establish availability or unavailability but to proclaim it to all who could but see.

In telephone interactions, the lifting of a receiver without further ado serves to establish the presence of a person at the called number. It does not, however, establish the availability of that person for further conversation. Indeed, the deviant case that was introduced earlier presents precisely this set of circumstances, and was met by further summoning by the caller to elicit some demonstration of availability, i.e., some answering remark.⁹ In this age, in which social critics complain about the replacement of men by machines, this small corner of the social world has not been uninvented. It is possible, nowadays, to hear the phone you are calling picked up and hear a human voice answer, but nevertheless not be talking to a human. However small its measure of consolation, we may note that even machines such as the automatic answering device are constructed on social, and not only mechanical, principles. The machine's magnetic voice will not only answer the caller's ring but will also inform him when its ears will be available to receive his message, and warns him both to wait for the beep and confine his interests to fifteen seconds. Thereby both *abab* and the properties of SA sequences are preserved.

While the machine's answer to a summoning incoming call is specifically constructed to allow the delivery of the message by the summoner, and is mechanically constructed with a slot for its receipt, the fact that it is a machine gives callers more of an option either to answer or not than they have when the voice emanates from a larynx

and not a loudspeaker. One thing that is specifically clear and differentiated between a human and mechanical answerer is that although both may provide a slot for the caller to talk again, the human answerer will then talk again himself whereas currently available machines will not. We have previously provided for the obligation of the answerer to listen to that talk, but we have not yet provided for the possibility that the answerer may then talk again, and it is to that we now turn.

One hitherto unnoticed and important fact about answers to summonses is that they routinely either are, or borrow some properties of, questions.¹⁰ This is most obviously so in the case of "what?" but seems equally so of "yeah?" and "yes?" which three terms, together with glances of the eyes and bodily alignments, constitute the most frequently used answer items. The sheer status of these items as questions, and the particular kinds of questions that they are, allow us to deepen the previous analysis of the obligation of the summoner to talk again upon the completion of the sequence, the obligation of the answerer to listen, and what may follow the talk he listens to.

The obligation of the summoner to talk again is not merely a distinctive property of SA sequences. In many activities similar to the SA sequence, where, for example, someone's name may also be called, the caller of it need not talk again to the person called. Such activities as indicating someone's "turn to go," as in a discussion or game, share with "signaling" by rings of the telephone the fact that they are prearranged or invoke some shared orders of priority and relevance. Such activities much more directly can be seen to be pure signaling devices and not summoning devices. That an activity starting, for example, with the enunciation of a name, is a summons, is provided by its assembly over its course. The obligation of the summoner to talk again is, therefore, not merely "the obligation of a summoner to talk again"; it is the obligation of a member of the society to answer a question if he has been asked one. The activity of summoning, is, therefore, not intrinsic to any of the items that compose it; it is an assembled product whose efficacious properties are cooperatively yielded by the interactive work of both summoner and answerer. The

signaling devices accomplish different outcomes. By not including questions as their second items, they do not constrain the utterers of their first items to talk again. Rather, they invoke prearrangements, priorities, and shared relevances as matters to which the addressed party must now direct his attention.

We now see that the summons is a particularly powerful way of generating a conversational interaction. We have seen that it requires, in a strong way, that an answer be returned to it. By "in a strong way" we intend that the strong set of inferences we described before attend the absence of an answer, e.g., physical absence, social absence (being asleep or unconscious), or purposeful ignoring. Moreover, it seems to be the case that the answer returned to it has the character of a question. The consequence of this is two-fold: (1) that the summoner now has, by virtue of the question he has elicited, the obligation to produce an answer to it, and (2) the person who asked the question thereby assumes an obligation to listen to the talk he has obligated the other to produce. Thus, sheerly by virtue of this two-part sequence, two parties have been brought together; each has acted; each by his action has produced and assumed further obligations; each is then available; and a pair of roles has been invoked and aligned. To review these observations with specific reference to the two steps that are their locus:

Summoner: Bill? [A summons item; obligates other to answer under penalty of being found absent, insane, insolent, condescending, etc. Moreover, by virtue of orientation to properties of answer items, i.e., their character as questions, provides for user's future obligation to answer, and thereby to have another turn to talk. Thus, preliminary or prefatory character, establishing and ensuring availability of other to interact.]

Summoned: What? [Answers summons, thereby establishing availability to interact further. Ensures there will be further interaction by employing a question item, which demands further talk or activity by summoner.]

We may notice that in relating our observations to the first two steps of the sequence we have dealt not only with two

steps but with the third as well. We may now show that the span of control of the first two items extends further still. Not only is it the case that a question demands an answer and thereby provides for the third slot to be filled by the summoner, but also one who asks a question, as we noted above, has the right to talk again. The consequence of this is that after the summoner has talked for the second time, this talk will have amounted to the answer to the answerer (of the summons), and the latter will have a right to take another turn. This provides for the possibility of four initial steps following from the use of a summons, which thus emerges as an extraordinarily powerful social item.¹¹ We have not yet exhausted its power.

We may note that the item the summons elicits in the second slot is not adequately described as merely "a question." It is a question of a very special sort. Its special characteristic may become observable by contrast with other kinds of questions. One not unusual type of question has the property that its asker knows the specific content of the answer that must be returned to it. So, for example, radio interviewers acquainted with the person they are interviewing and perhaps long and intimate friends of theirs, may nonetheless ask such a question as was heard posed to one musician by another who doubles as a disc jockey: "Tell me, Jim, how did you first break into music?" In a second type of question, while the asker does not know the specific content of the answer, he knows, if we may use a mathematical analogy, the general parameters that will describe it. So, for example, while the doctor in an initial interview may not know specifically what will be answered to his "What seems to be the trouble?" he very readily takes it that the answer will include references to some physical or psychic troubles.

The character of the question that is returned to a summons differs sharply from either of these. Its specific feature seems to be that the asker of "what?" may have little notion of what an accomplished answer may look like, both with respect to its substantive content and with respect to the amount of time that may be necessary for its delivery. This property—the specific ambiguity of what would constitute an answer—is clearly

seen in the use that is often made of it by those persons in the society who may have restricted rights to talk. Thus, we may understand the elegance involved in a standardized way in which children often begin conversations with adults. A phrase such as "You know what, Mommy?," inviting a "what?" as its return, allows the child to talk by virtue of the obligation thereby imposed upon him to answer a question while retaining a certain freedom in his response by virtue of the adult's inability to know in advance what would have been an adequate, complete, satisfactory or otherwise socially acceptable answer. (For these points I am indebted to Harvey Sacks.)

Such an open-ended question does not expand what can be said beyond the constraints of the categorical relationship of the parties. But as compared with other kinds of answers to summonses, it does not introduce additional constraints. Additional constraints may of course be introduced by modifications on "what?," such as intonation or addition (e.g., "what now?"). (Other lexical items used as answers are [on the telephone] "hello" or some self-identification [e.g. "Macy's"]. For a discussion of the ways the latter items impose additional constraints, see Schegloff [1967:chap. 4].)

In other words, there are constraints on the "contents" of a speaker's remarks once a conversational course is entered into and some conversational "line" is already present to be coordinated to. At the beginning of a conversation, however, no such "line" is already present and the open-endedness of the answer that "what?" allows is a reflection of that fact and the requirement that if there is to be a conversation it must be about something. The fact of open-endedness, however, does not necessarily imply the absence of all constraint. How much constraint is to be put, or can be put, on the content of some opening substantive remark may depend strongly on the relationship of the parties to one another, and that includes not only their relationship as it may turn out to be formulated, but their relationship as it develops from moment to moment. While two parties who are about to be joined by an interaction medium may later be properly categorized as father and son, for them, as the phone rings, and indeed when it is picked up and the "hello" is uttered, they may be strangers.

Their relationship to one another may have to be "discovered" while interactional work must precede the "discovery." Under such a circumstance, given that strangers have restricted rights to talk to one another and restricted topics about which they may talk, then a completely open-ended "what" may be a "hazardous" opening for a phone conversation in which, at the moment of its utterance, the other may be a stranger. The consequences of such matters for the infrequency of answers such as "what" or "yes" on the phone, and for the alternatives that may be employed in their stead, are matters that cannot be gone into here.

To conclude the present discussion, it may be noted that provision is made by an SA sequence not only for the coordinated entry into a conversation but also for its continued orderliness. First, we may note, that in the very doing of the two items that constitute SA sequences, and in the two turns these items specifically provide for, the first two alternations of *abab* are produced and that sequence is established as a patterned rule for the interaction that follows.

Insofar as the answerer of the summons does not use his right to talk again to introduce an extended utterance, the work of SA sequences may be seen to extend over a yet larger span of conversation. By "not introducing an extended utterance," I mean that he simply employs one of what might be called the "assent terms" of the society, such as "mmhmm" or "yes" or "yeah," or "uh huh." Under that circumstance the following may be the case: as the initial response to the summons establishes the answerer's availability and commits him to attend the next utterance of the summoner (that is, ensures his continued availability for the next remark), this obligation to listen and this assurance that he will, may be renewable. Each subsequent "uh huh" or "yes" then indicates the continuing availability of its speaker and recommits him to hear the utterance that may follow. Availability may, in this way, be "chained," and, in fact, speakers with extended things to say may routinely leave slots open for the other to insert an "uh huh," thereby recalling them to and recommitting them to the continuing course of the activity.¹²

It was remarked earlier that conversation is a "minimally two-party" activity. That re-

quirement is not satisfied by the mere copresence of two persons, one of whom is talking. It requires that there be both a "speaker" and a "hearer." (That "hearer-ship" can be seen as a locus of rules, and a status whose incumbency is subject to demonstration, is suggested by some of Sachs' work.) To behave as a "speaker" or as a "hearer" when the other is not observably available is to subject oneself to a review of one's competence and "normality." Speakers without hearers can be seen to be "talking to themselves." Hearers without speakers "hear voices." (But cf. Hymes 1964 on cultural variations in the definition of participants in speech events.) SA sequences establish and align the roles of speaker and hearer, providing a summoner with evidence of the availability or unavailability of a hearer, and a prospective hearer with notice of a prospective speaker. The sequence constitutes a coordinated entry into the activity, allowing each party occasion to demonstrate his coordination with the other, a coordination that may then be sustained by the parties demonstrating continued speakership or hearership. It is by way of the status of items such as "uh huh" and "mmhmm" as demonstrations of continued, coordinated hearership that we may appreciate the fact that they are among the few items that can be spoken while another is speaking without being heard as "an interruption."

NOTES

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This discussion is a shortened and modified version of chapters two and three of the author's Ph.D. dissertation (Schegloff 1967). It is based on the analysis of tape-recorded phone calls to and from the complaint desk of a police department in a middle-sized Midwestern city. References to the "data" in the text should be

understood as references to this corpus of materials. Names have been changed to preserve anonymity; numbers preceding citations of data identify calls within the corpus. I wish to thank the Disaster Research Center, Department of Sociology, The Ohio State University, for the use of this recorded material, which was obtained in connection with studies of organizational functioning under stress, especially disaster conditions. The views expressed and the interpretations of the data, of course, are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Center.

² The latter framing item, "I am . . ." is not normally used on the telephone as the frame for a name, although it may be used in a next item, as when an organizational affiliation is offered to provide further identification. In face-to-face interaction, "This is . . ." is not typically used for self-identification but only for introducing a third party. "My name is . . ." is usable in both face-to-face and in telephone interactions.

³ We may note here several special classes of occupational titles. Most occupational titles cannot be used as terms of address or to summon persons of whom they are descriptive. So, for example, one would not introduce into a sentence as a term of address, nor seek to get attention via the term "secretary." There is a small collection of occupational titles that can be used, under appropriate circumstances, as terms of address or to summon their possessors. For example, one may either address or summon by way of "Doctor," "Rabbi," "Officer," "Nurse," etc. There is a still smaller class of occupational titles which, while not usable as terms of address, are usable as summons items. For example, "cabby," or "ice cream man," etc. About this collection we may note that aside from their referential uses, e.g., "He is a cabby," they seem to be used only as summons items.

⁴ Bolinger (1958). We say, with Bolinger, "quasi-interrogative" because there is in American English apparently no definitive interrogative intonation, such that anything so intoned is a question, or if not so intoned cannot be a question.

⁵ I am indebted to Harvey Sacks for the first part of this observation. Some questions may, to be sure, obligate their askers to talk again. The statement in the text may, therefore, reflect a stage in the analysis of questions where such questions have not yet been closely examined.

⁶ The datum is from a collection of calls to and from a public agency other than the one from which the bulk of the data are drawn. The first two SA sequences are indicated in parentheses.

⁷ The same phenomenon is presented in a

rather more exalted setting in the following excerpt from Kafka's *The Trial*:

He had almost passed the last of the pews and was emerging into the open space between himself and the doorway when he heard the priest lifting up his voice. A resonant, well-trained voice. How it rolled through the expectant Cathedral! But it was no congregation the priest was addressing, the words were unambiguous and inescapable, he was calling out: "Joseph K.!"

K. started and stared at the ground before him. For the moment he was still free, he could continue on his way and vanish through one of the small, dark wooden doors that faced him at no great distance. It would simply indicate that he had not understood the call, or that he had understood it and did not care. But if he were to turn round he would be caught, for that would amount to an admission that he had understood it very well, that he was really the person addressed, and that he was ready to obey. Had the priest called his name a second time K. would certainly have gone on but since there was a persistent silence, though he stood waiting for a long time, he could not help turning his head a little just to see what the priest was doing. The priest was standing calmly in the pulpit as before, yet it was obvious that he had observed K.'s turn of the head. It would have been like a childish game of hide-and-seek if K. had not turned right around to face him . . . "You are Joseph K.?" said the priest, lifting one hand from the balustrade in a vague gesture. "Yes," said K., thinking how frankly he used to give his name and what a burden it had recently become to him; nowadays people he had never seen before seemed to know his name. How pleasant it was to have to introduce oneself before being recognized: "Yes," said K., "so I have been informed." "Then you are the man I seek," said the priest. "I am the prison chaplain."

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⁸I touch here only tangentially on a larger area—what might be termed "*n*-party properties and problems." What is suggested by that term is that for activities with a common value for *n* (i.e., two-party activities, three-party activities, etc.), there may be, by virtue of that common feature, some common problems or properties. For example, two-party activities may share some problems of coordination, or some properties as compared to three-party activities. Alternatively, activities that have a minimum-number-of-parties requirement may have common properties as compared to those whose relevant parameter is a maximum number of participants. It is the latter possibility that is being touched on here.

On "eristics," see Perelman:

Were there any need for a clear sign enabling one to contrast the criterion of eristic dialogue with that of the other kinds, it would

be found in the existence of a judge or arbiter charged with giving the casting vote between the antagonists, rather than in the intentions and procedures of the adversaries themselves. Because the purpose of the debate is to convince not the adversary but the judge; because the adversary does not need to be won over to be beaten; for this very reason the eristic dispute is of no great interest to the philosopher [1963 : 166].

⁹Note that the French may answer the phone with a remark specifically oriented to their availability—"j'écoute"; while the British may respond to an interlocutor's failure to answer a summons or question by inquiring if the "no answer—no person" inference is correct—"Are you there?"

After this paper had been completed, Miss Gail Ziferstein brought to my attention the following datum (from another corpus of materials) that is relevant here and at other points in the analysis:

Operator: Hello, Mister Lehrhoff?

Lehrhoff: Mh hm . . .

Operator: Mister Savage is
gon' pick up an' talk to ya. } simultaneous
Lehrhoff: Alright.

[52 seconds intervening]

Operator: Hello.

Lehrhoff: Yes.

Operator: Did Mistuh Savage ever pick up?

Lehrhoff: If he did, he didn't say "hello."

Operator: Oh, o alright,
smarty, just hold on. } simultaneous

Lehrhoff: heh! heh heh heh
heh heh heh

Operator: hhh!

¹⁰I am indebted here to David Sudnow. The notion of "borrowing properties of questions" is a difficult one. How one might prove that some item, while not a question, borrowed some property of questions is not clear, in part because it is not clear how one would prove that some item was or was not a question. The discussion that follows may, therefore, be read as being limited to items that are, intuitively, "clearly" questions, e.g., items that have "interrogative intonation," or that are lexically question items (e.g., "what?"), deferring the issue of "borrowing properties."

¹¹That conversational oaks may out of conversational acorns grow is a frequent theme in folklore. One version of such a story, starting from a somewhat different acorn, is the following:

On the express train to Lublin, a young man stopped at the seat of an obviously prosperous merchant.

"Can you tell me the time?" he said.

The merchant looked at him and replied: "Go to hell!"

"What? Why, what's the matter with you! I ask you a civil question in a properly civil way, and you give me such an outrageous rude answer! What's the idea?"

The merchant looked at him, sighed wearily, and said, "Very well. Sit down and I'll tell you. You ask me a question. I have to give you an answer, no? You start a conversation with me—about the weather, politics, business. One thing leads to another. It turns out you're a Jew—I'm a Jew. I live in Lublin—you're a stranger. Out of hospitality, I ask you to my home for dinner. You meet my daughter. She's a beautiful girl—you're a handsome young man. So you go out together a few times—and you fall in love. Finally you come to ask for my daughter's hand in marriage. So why go to all that trouble. Let me tell you right now, young man, I won't let my daughter marry anyone who doesn't even own a watch!!" ["To Save Time," in Ausubel (1948:404-405)]

¹² It is as wry recognition of the operation and subversion of this mechanism that a standard joke of the society may be appreciated. In it, a tired husband returns from the office, sinks gratefully into his easy chair and opens the evening paper to the sports page. His nagging wife, however, wishes to unburden herself of the accumulated troubles of the day and begins an extended monologue. Routinely, she leaves a slot of silence and he dutifully inserts "Yes, dear," until, dimly aware that all is not as it appears to be, she says, "Are you ignoring me?" and he replies "Yes, dear."

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