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Membership Categorisation Analysis, Sequences and Meeting Talk

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the sequential and categorical features of team members' talk within multidisciplinary meetings. An examination of turn taking, topic management and extended sequences in team members' talk is carried out through the analysis of naturally occurring data. In addition, the observable means through which `understanding' is socially accomplished as a recognisable feature of team members talk is introduced. The local and situated character of team members talk is established as a primary observational feature of multidisciplinary meetings and is taken to be the fundamental matrix of methods through which the activities of team members within meetings is achieved in situ.

Key words: category, sequence, meeting, institutional talk

Introduction

The convention of the meeting is one that is so old, that its origins are perhaps as obscure as the appearance of language amongst our species. It is a primordial activity that has been used as a means of getting a number of social activities done. These activities often involve an exchange of information and often some process of decision making. The use of the meeting as an organisational device is not an object of management science; it is a device that members of society use during the course of their everyday lives. However, this lay device has become increasingly `institutionalised' and various models of `meetings' have been devised and propagated as a means of 'increasing effectiveness' within organisations (Housley, 2003). However, ethnomethodological studies of meetings have examined them in terms of a particular set of activities and conversational interaction (Boden, 1994). For example, Hester's work on referral talk (1992) examines the actions and practices carried out in describing pupils as exhibiting 'problems or needs' within referral meetings between teachers and educational psychologists. For Hester, the meeting is a practically constituted and locally produced set of activities and accomplishments that constitutes a particular interactional order. Thus, we may conceive of meetings as particular types of devices that various predicates, e.g. sharing information, making referrals, making decisions are associated with.

The examination of information, meaning and dialogue within multidisciplinary teams has been described in terms of a number of different processes. However, in the examination of multidisciplinary team meetings presented in this paper the conversational activities of teams within meetings is viewed as the main way through which members carry out and realise teamwork. Clearly, the team meeting is not the only expression of multidisciplinary team work, however it is representative of a fundamental expression of teamwork and multidisciplinary practice (Housley,2003). Indeed, in many respects meetings are the primary ways in which a sense of teamwork is realised. Consequently, the examination of the decision making process (and the way in which different modes of expertise inform such a process) will be examined in terms of conversational interaction. Clearly, written reports, documents and issues surrounding professional practice and confidentiality are important. However, I wish to focus on the domain that Øvretveit (1987) describes as dialogue, meaning and the exchange of information. Even the most basic observation of professional teams suggests that an examination of conversational interaction is of fundamental importance to understanding the dimensions and lived reality of communicating within teams (Housley, 2006) and making decisions about clients `needs'. The abstract theoretical constructs of accounts of multidisciplinary social work practice are heavily grounded within the systemic accounts of team organisation and function (Housley, 2003). Such accounts, from an ethnomethodological point of view, compound traditional sociological enquiries orientation towards operationalising theorised accounts of the social in explaining societal processes and informing policies and initiatives through a varied range of recommendations and general observations. One strand of conversation analytic enquiry, which has examined professional practice and interaction, is known as the Institutional Talk Program. The aims of this programme can be said to involve a concern with documenting and examining the particular properties of formal talk within institutional contexts (e.g. clinics, hospitals, courtrooms and meetings). As Hester and Francis (2001:2) put it:

> The basic assumption of the Institutional Talk Programme (hereafter ITP) is that the concepts and methods of CA can be extended beyond the study of `ordinary conversation' to the investigation of various forms of `institutional talk' in order to show that such interaction differs from ordinary conversation *in systematic ways*. Where CA has focussed upon the organisation of ordinary conversation, ITP aims to describe the organisation of `institutional talk and interaction'. At the heart of ITP studies is the claim that that the sequential organisational characteristics of `ordinary conversation' comprise a `bedrock' to which other

> `speech exchange systems' are tied as specific modifications of that `paramount system'.

The display of categories and conversational sequences within institutional settings is well documented within ethnomethodological and interactionist based studies. In a book entitled *Talk at Work: Interaction in institutional settings* (Drew and Heritage 1992), a collection of discourse analytic and conversation analytic studies provide a contemporary corpus of analyses concerned with linguistic discourse in the work place and professional contexts. The opening three papers of this dense collection involve a consideration of the theoretical and analytical issues involved in studying the conversational characteristics of institutional discourse.

Drew and Heritage begin with an acceptance that there is not `necessarily a hard and fast distinction between `ordinary conversation' and `institutional conversation'. Furthermore, they designate their task as not corresponding to the construction of a concrete definition of institutional `talk' rather the development of an analytic concern for identifying `features that may contribute to family resemblance's among cases of institutional talk that are predominantly addressed in the papers that follow' (1992:21).

For Drew and Heritage a concern for the contextual specifics of institutional talk is well served by the conversation analytic framework proffered by Emmanuel Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974). Conversation analysis provides a wide corpus of work which also provides for a comparative approach whilst paying attention to the detail of in situ locally produced contexts. In analysing institutional talk the observation made by Schegloff in paper three of the collection is referred to as a useful methodological consideration. This consideration accepts, that whilst an `intuitive' connection between social interaction and social structure can be heard (e.g. references to ethnicity or status), the temptation to provide `factual correctness' should be avoided and the spectre of positivism deflected via the acknowledgement that a number of readings of interactional data is possible. Placing themselves within Schegloff's recommendation Drew and Heritage (1992:20) argue that the studies contained in the volume:

> ... are concerned to show that analytically relevant characterizations of social interactants are grounded in empirical observations that show that the participants themselves are demonstrably orientated to the identities or attributes in question.

Having established their analytical orientation Drew and Heritage (1992:22) continue by focussing on some features of institutional talk gleaned from the studies included in their collection. The following propositions are made:

> 1 Institutional interaction involves an orientation by at least one of the participants to some core goal, task or identity (or set of them) conventionally associated with the institution in question. In short, institutional talk is normally informed by goal orientations of a relatively restricted conventional form.
> 2 Institutional interaction may often involve special and particular constraints on what one or both of the participants will treat as allowable contributions to the business at hand.
> 3 Institutional talk may be associated with inferential frameworks and procedures that are particular to specific institutional contexts.

Heritage (2004) building on earlier commentaries argues that the methods for doing institutional identity and institutionality can be summarised through reference to the following interactional practices in talk-in-interaction. These are turn-taking organisation, overall interactional organisation, sequence organisation, turn design, lexical choice and epistemological and other forms of asymmetry. Heritage (2004:241) notes how each of these interactional practices inter-relate in a 'Russian doll' like manner. An analogy that corresponds to the micro-interactional characteristics of complexity and social organisation (Atkinson and Housley, 2003). During this paper I want to illustrate how notions of category and categorisation within institutional talk and interaction underpins these practices within an institutional settings. I intend to do this by concentrating on turn organisation, turn design and sequence organisation within social/care work team meeting talk. The paper will also attempt to unpack the notion of topic (Coulthard, 1977) as a gloss for the sequential management of category organisation and display. The confines of this paper do not permit a comprehensive treatment of the role and implicative character of categorisation to all the interactional practices identified by Heritage as crucial features in accomplishing institutional identity and institutionality noted above. With respect to categorisation practices and lexical choice, asymmetry and claims making I have dealt with these practices in relation to meeting talk elsewhere (Housley, 2000a, Housley, 2003). In both this paper and previous work within institutional settings the fulcrum of this reconsideration of institutional talk-in-interaction is the relationship between category and sequence.

The Reconsidered Model of Membership Categorisation Analysis

During the course of this paper I would like to draw on two interrelated approaches to the analysis of talk-in-interaction. These are known as Conversation Analysis (CA) and Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA). Recent developments within ethnomethodological analyses of talk have involved a combination of the sequential concerns of Conversation Analysis with the categorical focus of Membership Categorization Analysis (Baker 1984, Eglin and Hester 1992, Hester and Francis 1994, Hester and Eglin 1997, Housley and Fitzgerald. 2002, Watson 1978, 1997). It should come as little surprise that a reconnection of MCA to CA should emerge as both are firmly located within the innovative work of Harvey Sacks (1992 a,b). During the course of this paper the analysis of the sequential organisation of meeting talk will be investigated in terms of the categorical dimensions of the turn-generated utterances within the talk-in-interaction examined. Furthermore, it will be claimed that the specific categorical features of meeting formats are central to our understanding of this dimension of 'institutional talk'. An additional consideration here is the normative and moral characteristics of categories and categorisation. Whilst the display of categories and devices are situated events they also display members moral work and normative assessments as a practical and occasioned matter (Jayussi, 1991). Thus, a central methodological characteristic of this analysis is a concern with the categorical and sequential dimensions of talk-in-interaction. A further methodological consideration in this paper is a commitment to a cumulative paradigm of social research (Silverman, 1998, Housley, 2002b). The analysis that follows is a single case analysis, it does not represent an appeal to a statistical frame of validity or a counting of cases. Clearly, such an approach in discourse studies is a valid line of enquiry. Rather, this paper builds on previous exploratory research and thinking as a means of building upon a concern with categorisation and sequence in talk-in-interaction.

The Local Management of Categories

During the course of this paper, I should like to examine themes concerning the categorical methods and sequential methods involved in the social organisation of the transcribed meetings. With respect to the issues surrounding the relationship between conversation analysis and membership categorization analysis, I should like to emphasise the notions of i.) category display and ii.) the sequential management of categories - in - talk. Category display refers to the use and deployment, by members, of categories in talk. Furthermore, this notion is grounded in the praxiology of membership categorization devices, membership categories, modes of predication and the associated rules of application. Thus, category display refers to those methods of categorisation that are made recognisable in and through conversational interaction and the local, practical accomplishment of order. The concern with `display' is an attempt to draw attention to the way in which categories are made recognisable (in and through talk) and how this activity is representative of a fundamental orientating feature of talk. However, in attempting to address the relationship between categories in talk and sequentiality I seek to propose that, as Harvey Sacks (1972) initially noted, that categories are sequentially organised in and through observable structures. These observable structures can be understood as the means through which members manage categories in talk. Furthermore, as has been previously noted, categories and sequence are reflexively and mutually constitutive. Watson (1997) notes that Schegloff and Sacks formulation of adjacency pairs did not, initially, characterise the categorical relationship between, for example, a question and a proffered answer. Watson begins to note the way in which recipiency, as a sequential phenomena, can also be thought to involve categorical work, which through specific procedural work such as the consistency rule, can be understood to be exhibiting a `tying procedure' that may establish `...the specific relatedness of just this answer to just this question, here and now ' (Watson 1997:59). Thus, the analogy is not a strict demarcation, but is a useful analytical distinction in illustrating the conversational, social and praxiological organisation of the meetings that have been transcribed. I will begin by focussing on the sequential methods for managing talk before attempting to consider how such management of talk, as Watson has suggested, relates to the categories in talk.

Identifying Categorical and Sequential Methods within Meetings

Within traditional modes of sociological inquiry the social organisation of a meeting may be equated with notions of social structure (e.g. class, race and gender) and the experience of social actors in terms of such structural components and the attendant processes of power, labelling and social control. However, in ethnomethodological terms the social organisation of meetings and other similar social activities have been observed to consist of members practical work displayed through conversational interaction (Hester and Francis 2001). Consequently, whilst other resources may be used by members (such as seating arrangements and the local geography of the space in which such activities are to be carried out) the language activities of members is axiomatic to the process of doing a meeting. As has been stated, from an ethnomethodological point of view, a view established through observational studies, the social organisation of meetings necessitates an examination of the social organisation of talk. This social organisation of talk, according to ethnomethodology, can be examined through the observation of the conversational methods that members use in constituting the activity of a meeting. It is to these methods, as displayed by members in the team meetings examined, that we now turn.

Turn Taking

The structure of conversation has been of prime importance to conversation analysis. The seminal paper by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) presents the method of `turn taking' as the basic sequential unit of conversation. Furthermore, Sacks draws our attention to the notion of `adjacency pairs' which, according to Coulthard (1977:70), possess the following characteristics:

> ...they are two sentences long; the utterances are produced successively by different speakers, the utterances are ordered - the first must belong to the class of first pair parts, the second to the class of second pair parts; the utterances are related, not any second pair can follow any first pair, but only an appropriate; the first pair part often selects next speaker and always selects next action - it thus sets a transition relevance and expectation which the next speaker fulfills, in other words the first part of the pair predicts the occurrence of the second. (1977:70)

The `discovery' of structural units within conversational interaction heralded the drive towards the sequential analysis of conversation. For Sacks, turn taking was representative of those `naturally occurring social activities' which he believed could be submitted to formal investigations. Consequently, Sacks argued that sociology could be a primitive observational science that examined the `formal procedures which members employ'. Within the context of this paper it is the way in which adjacency pairs exhibit what Sacks calls recipient design[1] that is of considerable interest in any consideration of turn-taking. For example, adjacency pairs may take the form of a question and answer sequence or complaint and apology sequence. As has been noted previously, Sacks et al (1974) draw our attention to different turn taking systems, for example in `formal contexts' turns may be `pre-allocated', as in teacher-pupil interaction, in which overlaps and interruptions are minimised. The principles of adjacency and recipient design still hold within formal turn taking systems such as the IRE speech exchange mechanism. Within pedagogical discourse each component describes particular predicated forms of design. In other words, the design is not merely spontaneous but organised in order to fulfil local contingencies of conversational order and social interaction.

From an ethnomethodological point of view, the examination of the mundane was seen as a way of illustrating the lived orderliness of social life. The significance of turn taking structures was, according to Psathas (1995:17), that:

> Order was seen to be a produced order, integral and internal (endogenous) to the local settings in which the interaction occurred. That is, it was ongoingly produced in and through the actions of the parties. It was not imposed on them, nor was it a matter of their following some sort of scripts or rules. They were freely involved in that production and were themselves oriented to that production. What they were doing was carrying out actions that were meaningful and consequential for them in that immediate context. They were, for example, opening up conversations, or closing them, or exchanging greetings, or responding to invitations, and so on. (1995:17)

Thus, the study of turn taking initiated the examination of the organisation of social action. Furthermore, this organisation was seen to exhibit sequential characteristics and contextual considerations in and through members' conversational work in accomplishing senses of social order.

The organisation of turn taking (Sacks 1974) is characterised by two components and a corresponding set of rules. These components are known as the turn constructional component (TCC) and the turn allocation component (TAC). The turn constructional component could vary from a single phrase to a full sentence or account. The completion of a TAC, i.e. completing a turn, was followed by a turn transition relevance place (TRP) in which a change of speaker could occur. The turn allocation component is characterised by a number of techniques that can be described by a number of rules for example, i.) current speaker selecting the next speaker and, ii.) current speaker self selecting a next turn.

Analysis: Team Talk in Meetings?

The team talk examined in this paper was gathered during a larger a study into multidisciplinary social work practice (Housley,2003). The extracts in this paper come from a study of a multidisciplinary social/care work team that had been established in order to provide support to a flood hit community. The team structure, as envisaged by the team, was viewed as drawing on a range of different disciplines and bodies of expertise as a means of carrying out their work in a multidisciplinary manner. It consisted of a number of different team members who occupied different professional positions and were considered to possess different competencies and expertise. They included the team leader, three social workers, a counsellor, a lay volunteer co-ordinator and a social work student. The Flood Support Team had been involved with the support of flood victims during the aftermath of serious flooding. During the course of research and fieldwork carried out on the everyday work of the team a number of team meetings and allocation meetings were recorded and transcribed. A team meeting was open to all members of the team and dealt with team matters and the exchange of information concerning the flood victims and the flood hit community. The allocation meetings were open to qualified social workers, the team leader and the counsellor (who also had professionally recognised social work qualifications). The allocation meeting was concerned with the allocation of clients to particular professional members, the discussion of cases and referrals to other agencies. This provided a corpus of data for investigating the praxiological and discursive accomplishment of the team, multidisciplinarity and the associated duties of ‘flood support’. Within the team and allocation meetings members enjoyed a degree of differentiation predicated upon distinct bodies of knowledge or expertise.

Turn Taking in the Team Meetings.

The prevalence of turn taking can be observed in nearly all aspects of conversation interaction. As has been stated, within CA, it can be heard to occupy the fundamental sequential method for organising conversation. The use of turn-taking can be observed in the following transcribed data, within which the Team Leader initiates an appeal to members of the team to commit themselves to operating a drop in centre during weekday evenings. The drop in centre has already been organised and is designed as a service through which members of the flood-hit community can access the expertise and help of the flood support team in person.

Example One - Turn Taking in the team meeting
23\5\95

1. TL: Any volunteers for the seven thirty till ten shift on Thursday (.)
2. St: Well I'll do it

Clearly, this example involves a straightforward question\answer adjacency pair. Furthermore, it is observable how they form an adjacency pair a) in terms of the sequential proximity of the next utterance, i.e. they stand beside each other but also in terms of b.) the action predicate 'I'll do it' (L.2), can be heard to be tied to the category `volunteer' (L.1) and the predicate of the 'seven thirty until ten shift'. In this sense, the predicate of `I'll do it' is recipiently designed in terms of the predicate of shift work tied to the device 'team'. Consequently, we hear the next part of the adjacency pair as displaying membership of the category `volunteer' and `team member'. Thus, the sequential organisation and the categorical display are mutually constitutive and are being used in the course of accomplishing the order of allocating activities via this instance of turn-taking.

In the following extract, the discussion concerning the drop in centre and the availability of team members during weekday evenings is heard to exhibit further turn taking amongst team members. This is part of the work of allocating people to times that the drop in centre is to be open to members of the flood-hit community.

Example Two : turn taking in the team meeting
23\5\95

1.C: I'm quite willing to do that until Seven thirty
2.LVC: I'm still working Friday (.)
3.C: Yes I'll do it until seven thirty =
4.TL: = Friday (2.0) seven thirty [until]
5.LVC: [whenever] you want me to do it I'll do it

In this extract we can hear another form of turn taking in operation. The counsellor states a willingness to work until seven thirty on a project that the team have been discussing, in this instance a drop in centre which will be open for twenty four hours a day. The counsellor's utterance can be heard as a report and as a question about the availability of persons for the twenty four-hour `drop in’ centre. The LVC answers the question, saying he is working on

Friday and is therefore available, the counsellor then reaffirms the initial position. The turn taking system here consists of (a.) a statement (b.) a response to the statement and (c.) a reaffirmation of the initial statement. Again, the dual nature of recipiency can be heard to be operating. The adjacency of making a question\statement with an adjoining answer\response and the following reaffirmation of the first statement can be heard as a particular type of turn-taking structure. In categorical terms, the counsellor displays the predicate of `willingness' alongside the time category of `until seven thirty' (L.4) (a category of the device time), the LVC's response reflects the initial statement by the counsellor through reference to `still working' on `Friday'. In categorical, terms we can hear the relationship between the counsellors utterance and the LVC's utterance as talk between legitimate team members. The counsellors' reaffirmation of her initial utterance then provides the sequential method for hearing the previous two statements as 'going together'. Thus, the two utterances are not only adjacent in terms of the recipient design of the sequential structure, but also in terms of the categories and predicates displayed. The sense of the utterances `going together' is reinforced through the third part of the sequence, which, whilst repeating the same category work, sequentially displays that the two previous utterances are to be considered together and as referring to exactly the same topic.

This analysis is displayed by the TL's utterance that selects the category `Friday' from the LVC's utterance and `seven thirty until' from the counsellor's utterances. The TL's recipiently designed utterance is also posed as a question. It can be heard, in terms of the previous category work, as an invitation to the LVC to speak. That is to say, it forms part of a clearly identifiable and recognisable transitional relevance place for the LVC to take a turn. The TL is not only displaying recognition of the previous sequence, but is also asking the LVC to elaborate on the time that he is available for duty. The LVC, who has already made himself available as a volunteer for the drop in centre, replies in a way which ties the speaker's incumbency with being available to the project after seven thirty on the Friday. Thus, we are met with a statement, response and reaffirmation sequence, which is then followed by a question\answer sequence. Within these sequences both categorical and sequential methods are being used in order to make a decision and allocate jobs to be done.

Within this extract SW1 suggests that the team `cascades'. This refers to the process of sharing the details, issues and professional problems associated with particular cases that the team members may be `carrying'. The purpose of this exercise is to share professional experience as a means of improving practice amongst the team members.

Example Three -Turn Taking
Allocation Meeting 23\5\95

1.SW1: When are we going to do the cascade things (1.0) oughtn't be at this
2. meeting =
3.TL: =Yes (.)
4.SW1: I mean we've prepared them all (0.5) long time hence(.)
5.TL : Yes (.)
6.SW1: Right

During the course of this sequence we can follow the talk in terms of a pattern of adjacency. These patterns of adjacency can be understood as `turn constructional units' that build up the sequence; they fold category and sequence together through the interactional exchange. The SW1 proffers a rhetorical statement in the form of a question that is then followed by a simple affirmative answer to the question by the TL. The SW1 continues by self-selecting a turn, which seeks to describe and `add weight' to her initial question. The TL responds to the description with a simple affirmation or acknowledgement, a turn that in terms of adjacency is heard to agree with SW1's description of the topic that she had initiated through the initial question. The SW1 then closes this sequence with the utterance `Right' (L.6). In one sense, we hear this as the closing of the topic (the topic in this case being the initiation of the process known as cascading) and this particular sequence of talk. The closing is followed by a three second pause, this indicates that the topic has been dealt with and that it is time to move on.

From Topic to Category Organization and Display

A further aspect of conversational structure that is relevant to the notion of managing category flow[2] is the concept of topic (Fitzgerald and Housley, 2002). Topics are concerned with what it is members are talking about. Topics may include newsworthy items that inform the recognisable features of the interactional moment. For example, opening topics may include reasons for coming around to visit or experiences gathered from `the weekend' within the circumstances of a friend making a social visit. Topics can be seen as representative of a sequential feature of conversation in that conversation often involves talk around a number of topics. As a consequence of this observation we may note that different topics are opened and closed and form an integral part of the sequential and ultimately temporal organisation of team members' conversation.

Sacks (1991) describes the movement in conversation from one topic to the next as `topic change'. For Sacks, `talking topically' does not consist of `blocks of talk about topic', rather the management of topics is part and parcel of the interactional achievement of conversation. Members cannot assume that the following interlocutor will accept an introduced topic, members' talk, according to Sacks, recognises these problems and members use methods through which topics can be managed. One of the principal ways by which topic change occurs is through the `touching off' of one topic on to another[3]. According to Coulthard, (1977) topic management may transform into topic conflict within which more than one interlocutor competes for the opening of a particular topic. Conversation may overlap as different interlocutors compete for the floor and even when a speaker manages to introduce or open a topic, co-conversationalists may `skip connect'. This method involves referring to the `last but one' utterance, thus an interlocutor may simply ignore the previous utterance which attempts to open a topic by `reasserting their own' (Coulthard 1977). However, the proximity of the topic openings suggests that they appear to be relatively contextually bound to the conversation at hand.

Another feature of topic identified by Sacks is the notion of topical coherence. For Sacks, this is tied to the notion of membership categorisation analysis and the rules of application. Topical coherence is a categorical phenomena in terms of category display but it can also be conceptualised as an organising principle in terms of the praxiological considerations described in Sacks' rules of application. Furthermore, the notion of `category coherence' as an organising principle of topic is, within the work of Harvey Sacks, connected with the more explicit concerns of the social and sequential organisation of conversation.

In this extract, the SW1 is recounting her experience of relationships between team members in different teams that she has worked within. Furthermore, she presents an account of a `problem' that the first part of the account is used to introduce. The display of such reflexive evaluations by different *individual* team members was not unusual although, as this extract indicates, such topics were seldom `taken up' by other team members within the meetings.

Example Four : Topic changing
Team Meeting 23\5\95

1.SW1: I personally have found (2.0) I think the relationships were warmer (1.5) I
2. dunno if anyone else agrees
3.LVC: mmmm (.)
4.SW1: Very hard to talk seriously in this team (1.0) isn't it =
5.LVC: =Yep
6.SW1: It's where the issue is (1.0) I think(.)
7.SW3: I think it did do a good thing in a way [from the wor']
8.TL: [with Karens thi ::]ng (.)
9.SW1: She's not joining our (0.5) moving into our room

During the course of this extract, we can observe how the SW1 is concerned with relating an account about her experiences of communication with other social service agencies at other meetings. She states that the `relationships were warmer' at these encounters (L.1). However, she is not met with a response after providing the question, towards the end of the account, as to `whether anyone else agrees'. Her invitation to the other participants to speak is not taken up by any other members of the team. Consequently, she shifts topic, that is to say, she reselects herself to speak again on a next topic, namely the difficulty of `talking seriously in the team' (L.4) and this being representative of `where the issue is'. This next topic’s `topical organisation' (category display - in - topic) contrasts with the previous topic's categorical organisation, i.e. `warmth of relationships' as opposed to difficulty talking 'seriously' within 'this team'.

At this stage the LVC takes a turn (L.5) that leads to a description of the topic of not being able to talk seriously as an `issue'. Having done this the SW1 self-selects a turn that seeks to address the topic proffered by the last utterance as an `issue’. However, the interruption (note the overlap) by the TL is representative of a topic change through interruption and 'skip connecting' from the first utterance by the SW1 in which she referred to her experience of interactions with other agencies working within the community. The TL refers to 'Karen's thing’, we hear this as a description of the SW1's account of her experiences. However, by referring back to the initial utterance (and hence topic) the TL switches the topic from the 'issue', i.e. talking seriously in the team, back to the initial, relatively safe topic of the SW1's initial account. The SW1 responds to the TL's interruption, question-based topic change by stating that 'Karen' (possibly a potential inter-agency worker or potential secondment) is not coming to work from the same premises.

The following extract exhibits further aspects of topic conflict within talk. During this extract, the team are discussing the topic of smoking and the location of smokers and non - smokers within different parts of the building. Certain members of the team who do not smoke are attempting to secure a specific part of the building as a non - smoking area. The topic of smoking is interesting here, as it could be heard to involve a specific type of organisational talk and the social geography of the team within the building. Indeed, the topic of smoking is not discussed in a jocular fashion. Within the work place it is viewed as an important work issue within the teams day to day work activities.

Example Five: Topic Conflict
Allocation Meeting 2\4\95

1.SW3: I'm (0.5) I'd want assurances that the room upstairs would be no smoking and
2. no smoking in absence either =
3.TL: = mm =
4.SW3: = cos you come back often and there's smoking been going on and you walk
5. into it anyway (.)
6.C: That's been the nice thing about our room
7.SW3: Yes (.)
8.C: [It's that there's been] no smoking
9.SW3: [Yes especially in]
10.CDW:If you do [tha ']
11.C: [People] have to smoke I can appreciate that y'know but I don't
12. want to sit there

In this extract, the topic is smoking in particular the activity smoking in a shared facility. An account is assembled through a collection of `utterances' (a process which I will discuss in more detail at a later stage during this paper). However, having assembled the account around the topic, the CDW attempts to make a bid for the floor through interrupting the SW3 who has been jointly producing an account on a turn by turn basis with the counsellor. At this point, the counsellor interrupts the CDW by stating that she appreciates that `people have to smoke' but not in her environment. The person hearably attended to is not specified but we hear it, through adjacency and recipient design, as including the CDW. Indeed, by attempting to select himself to speak (and `change' topic') he fills the conversational availability of the incumbency of a person who smokes in the room in question, i.e. by recognising the TRP as his point to speak. The topic conflict occurs between his interruption of the SW3 and the subsequent interruption by the counsellor. In one sense, by recognising the TRP as his point to speak, the counsellor uses it as a resource (sufficient evidence of inclusion of the membership category and the predicate of smoking in the room in question) to close the exchange.

Within the following extract a member of the team initiates a topic. The topic involves initiating a form of team activity that involves exchanging accounts about interesting cases in order to exchange expertise and views on particularly challenging or difficult aspects of their casework. Such activities were not commonly observed within the Flood Support Team although members did acknowledge that an exchange of views about aspects of casework often occurred in non- - formal settings such as the coffee room or corridor. However, such non- formal situated work was outside the parameters of this study although its professed existence was brought to my attention. Within this example, the topic of carrying out a formal exchange of views (namely \`cascading') and the subsequent response to the suggestion could be explained in terms of the above. However, my concern here is not with the *why* but with the *how*.

Example Six - Closing down a topic
Allocation Meeting May 23rd

1.SW1: When are we going to do the cascade things (1.0) oughtn't be at this
2. meeting =
3.TL: =Yes (.)
4.SW1: I mean we've prepared them all (0.5) long time hence(.)
5.TL : Yes (.)
6.SW1: Right
7. (3.0)
8.SW1: More bloody skills you mean (laughter)
9.TL: It's time to cascade (.)
10.SW2: er hmmm (.)
11.SW3: [mm]
12.St: [mm]
13.C: [mmm =]
14.TL: = Can we cascade in our thoughts
15. (sound of shuffling and chairs moving)
16.SW1:Can we (1.0) also need some sharing of cases that are particularly difficult (0.4)
17. interesting (1.0) cos I don't think we do enough of that (0.5) except informally
18. often there are learning points (.)
19.TL: What are you desperate to learn
20. (laughter)
21.St: Yes (.) but it should be casual
22. (7.0)

During the course of the conversation two topics are initiated. Firstly, the opening statement (L.1) introduces the topic of holding a cascading session during the meeting. Once this is established between the Team Leader and SW1 (L.1-L.4), it provides an utterance which can be heard as a prompt for people to take a turn and therefore cascade by providing accounts of cases that they are involved in (L.9). The responses provided by the team members present can be heard as taking a turn (i.e. recognising the TRP) but not orienting themselves toward the recipiently designed features of the TL's request. That is to say, not taking up the invitation to speak in a way, which recognisably conforms to the activity of cascading. This is made recognisable by the TL's following utterance `Can we cascade in our thoughts then' (L.14). Clearly, this makes recognisable that the predicate of cascading consists of providing accounts concerning cases and not thinking about them. The SW1 attempts to reinitiate the form of talk described as cascading by providing an account of cascading (L.16 to 18). We hear that cascading may involve the sharing of difficult or interesting cases that can facilitate the desired predicate of learning. The SW1 states that this process occurs informally but not in formal contexts. The use of the contrast class can be heard as a means of documenting, and re-emphasising what type of talk is required to accomplish cascading. This account is met by a question by the TL that changes the topic (L.19). By questioning an aspect of the category coherence of the SW1 account (namely the reference to 'learning' which is tied to the category of states of mind i.e. being desperate) the initiated topic of cascading is re-orientated. This reorientation is met by laughter, the student (L.21) continues by referring to the term `casual', which we may hear as meaning that the process should be informal. The use of this predicate may be seen as a strategy for `going off topic'. The student's utterance asserts that the form of talk being pointed to and requested at this point `should be casual'. This is then followed by a seven second pause and a topic change that concerns phone messages and team member availability. Thus, the team members go off topic and use the category of `casual' as a means of closing down the proposed topical talk which the SW1 ties to the process of `cascading'. In each of the examples of topic management and organisation within meeting interaction discussed in this section of the paper we can see how the relationship between category, sequence and task are crucial features of the meeting talk.

Stories, Accounts and Extended Sequences

A further feature of managing category flow is the conversational structure identified and described by Sacks as the `story' (April, 1970). For Sacks, a story may be relatively brief or longwinded. Sacks states:

> Since they take more than one utterance to produce, it is relevant that the recipient learns (hears) that a story is to be produced. Otherwise, because of the turn taking system of conversation, a speaker at a turn completion point may find that another person begins to speak. How it is that another person knows that it is not a place to speak since any next possible completion point is a place to speak. One way would be to produce an utterance which says that what I plan to say will take more than one utterance and the number of utterances cannot be specified in advance. If this is accepted by the others, then the speaker may retain the right to speak over a series of utterances.

For Sacks stories are problematic, in terms of the speech exchange systems for conversation, in that interlocutors are likely to `self select' in opening a story. Furthermore, stories are not recipiently designed, however they are designed for hearers in the sense that through the method of self-selection stories may be used to perform a variety of locutionary, illocutionary and pre - locutionary acts. They are designed for listeners without necessarily conforming to rules of relevance and the contingencies of previous utterances. Sacks also notes how stories are organised into story *prefaces*, the story *proper* and story *closings.* For Sacks, the story preface can be heard as a request to take an extended turn. The story preface, Sacks argues, makes recognisable that something interesting or important is to follow. The story proper consists of a designed collection of categories, which are chosen or displayed in order to facilitate and realise the design potential of the story such designs may resemble Sacks' description of `request formats '[4]. Request formats may consist of a story in which the categories displayed within the story proper facilitate and `point to' the information that the `story teller' wants to be heard[5]. Such a method exhibits Sacks' observation that stories are primarily designed, as a conversational format, for the listener. Furthermore, it provides a further description of a method for realising conversational structure that sequentially and temporally organises categories -in - talk. However, stories have to be newsworthy, and concern themselves about something in particular. To this extent, whilst stories\accounts can be viewed as sequential components, they are also a means of category display. In terms of Sacks' work, we may argue that stories\accounts, as a means of having something to say, are topically organised and therefore in terms of categorisation have to be topically (that is categorically) coherent. Furthermore, whilst coherence may be a design feature of an interlocutor's utterance, the sequential and categorical activity of recipience provides a method through which `coherence' is constituted as a displayable and recognisable feature of utterances. Thus we may, in the course of discussing stories and accounts, emphasise the intertwining, `folding back' matrix of categorical and sequential methods. This is done through categories in talk that can be viewed as being managed through sequential methods. However, this is not a rigid or a formalistic distinction but a reflexive and mutually constitutive process of practice, action and organisation.

The following extract involves talk recorded at an Allocation meeting. It involves a discussion concerning problems and clients that the team is in contact with. In particular, the discussion is concerned with elderly clients who have serious medical conditions and the support that the overstreched social service agencies can provide. Furthermore, the discussion begins through an account of an individual working with such clients who, we are told, is feeling bad about the predicament of such elderly clients and the difficulties in meeting the needs of such vulnerable people.

Example Eight: Stories and Accounts in problem talk and story telling
Allocation Meeting - May 23rd (p.4 -p.5)

1.TL: I saw June on Thursday (1.0) she was saying she feels very guilty because (1.0)
2. bec (0.5) well she feels like (0.5) (she's ?) leaving them in a dumping ground
3.All: mmm =
4.TL: =So I told her not to worry because it's a bit of problem (1.0) obviously the ones
5. were going to get are going to be serious which errr (4.0)
6.SW3: When I applied for a phone for the (name of clients) (.)
7.All: mmm (.)
8.SW3: Yeah (1.0) this woman was (1.0) at the time she was very (0.5) terminally ill
9. (0.5) she was walking about and is still (1.5) inoperable (1.0) you know what I
10. mean (5.0)
12.TL: Anybody have anything else they wish to share (.)
13.SW1: Yeah (0.5) my child care orders (1.0) are quite interesting. John's not going to
14. be the problem it's the parents (1.0) both of them (1.0) it's like parents rule over
15. anxious (0.5) real tense lot (0.5) real tense lot (0.4) tackling it all th' (1.5) next
16. day(.)
17.All: mm[m mmm]
18.(?) [Yeah]

In the extract above, we are met with a number of accounts\stories. The first involves the initiation of a topic namely the account provided by the team leader that refers to the experience of an external worker who `feels very guilty' about leaving certain clients `in a dumpling ground'. The clients referred to in this extract are elderly people who are terminally ill, a point referred to in this extract but established in talk before this particular stretch of talk. The first part of the account namely, the introduction of an external worker (June) who has reported these experiences, is met by a set of prompts by team members (i.e. the `mmmm' insertion at L.3). The team leader continues by reporting his response to the external worker's dilemma, namely that it is a bit of a `problem' (L.4). The team leader attempts to close his account through reference to the `ones' (namely elderly terminally ill people) which may be referred to the team. The display of `errr' can be *recognised* as an inability to select a suitable category or predicate to which his closing utterance is designed to include (L.5). In other words, the team leader displays and makes recognisable an inability to describe the type of `terminally ill elderly people' that the team may have had referred to them. This display is met by a four-second pause, there is no immediate self-selection. In one sense, the inability to describe the type of terminally elderly people that the team may have under its care suggests that there are no criteria or associated set of available predicates of the `flood support team ' that can be tied to `terminally ill elderly people', `them' or `the ones' as the category of client group is variously described. The problem of terminally ill elderly people in the community stands outside the parameters of `flood support'. Within the rubric of flood support, other `problems' within the community cannot be tied to the device of `the flood' easily. Other devices or descriptions which may have been chosen include social problems, lack of health care for elderly people and poverty. These cannot be selected via the use of `we', the pro-term standing on behalf of `the Flood Support Team'. Thus, we may infer that flood support (as a set of activities) cannot be easily, in praxiological terms, be reconciled to the support, treatment and care of terminally ill, elderly people unless they are also explicitly categorised as flood victims.

Following the pause, SW3 self selects and refers to an experience by providing a preface to her account (L.6) that involves applying for a phone for one of her clients. The preface is acknowledged through the display of `continuers’, namely the cacophony of `mmm's (L.7). The SW3 begins an account which corresponds to a second story format, in that it leads on, in terms of recipient design and topic, from the team leader's first story\account. We are informed of a woman who was `very ill', `walking about' and was `inoperable', here, we note how the story account\structure is sequentially and categorically organised. We are then introduced to a description of the woman that can be heard to belong to a number of membership categories and devices. For example, we may hear it as a category of `flood victim' or `client'. However, in terms of recipient design and the secondary story format we hear it as belonging to the category of `elderly terminally ill people'.[6] The predicates that follow display this reading in that they are associations, attributes and activities tied to the aforementioned device. The SW3 then closes with a question, `do you know what I mean?' this is followed by a pause for about five seconds. No one immediately selects himself or herself to speak, the problem of describing terminally ill people remains conversationally recognisable but it has become an unsafe topic.

This space is then followed by the team leader self-selecting a turn (L.10) which, in fact, is merely a further invitation for other team members to have a turn and, in terms of what has been said produce a similar type of sequence (i.e. an account\story). This request for similar formats is displayed through the request, `anybody else have anything they wish to share' (L.10). Clearly, this may involve an invitation to change topic but also to 'share' something. This something is a story similar to those that have been elicited beforehand, and can be understood as a conversational concession for inviting a change from the unsafe (and praxiologically and categorically problematic) topic of terminally ill people. Consequently, sharing is not an explicit request to recipient categorical design as such, but an invitation to talk about a 'newsworthy topic' in terms of the story\account format. In this sense, sharing is not only the provision of a 'newsworthy item' but also the display of symmetry in the sequential organisation of the next utterance.

The next utterance is sequentially symmetrical and `newsworthy'. However, the topic has changed a precondition of taking this turn. It begins with a preface, i.e. `child care orders' (L.12) references to categories of person (of the device flood victim) through explicit reference to the client's name and his `parents'. Through the use of the clients name and reference to `parents' we understand that it is not only tied to the device of `flood victim' or 'social work client', but the device of the `family' is invoked. The problem here is that the parents are `anxious' and a `real tense lot' and that such associations and attributes are representative of `parents rule' (L.13, 14). The parents are therefore described in terms of predicated attributes which may also be tied to the device `states of mind' or individual psychology. This claim is not explicitly made, but the predication, in terms of the weak form of recognisability makes such a reading available in terms of the orientating features of problem talk and story telling.

Concluding Remarks

During the course of this paper I have sought to illustrate, through references to transcribed examples collected from the field, some of the methods through which team meetings are socially and interactionally achieved. Furthermore, I have sought to focus on the local, in situ use, by members, of specific conversational methods and strategies in carrying out a range of activities. I have also sought to indicate the way in which categories-in-talk, as category flow (Watson 1997) or display (Housley and Fitzgerald, 2002) are realised and are managed in and through sequential methods of conversational organisation. This paper has also begun the process of respecifying social work practice, within the context of the meeting, as an activity that is grounded within an array of conversational work and praxiological considerations by members. As opposed to a model of externalised social forces or exogenously described pre-programmed professional behaviour resulting from a *causal* relationship arising from the previous training or experience of team members. By focussing on the local management of categories I hope to have emphasised the need to focus on multidisciplinary practice, within the context of meetings, as opposed to peoples 'internal states of mind', as an endogenously, in situ and locally produced phenomena. Furthermore, by examining the situated character of team member’s talk I have sought to illustrate the way in which the formalised, ‘institutional’ character of such talk can benefit from an analysis of both categories and sequence within this particular form of life.

TRANSCRIPT CONVENTIONS

Transcript Notation

SW1: Social Worker One (Psychiatric Social Worker)
SW2: Social Worker Two (Geriatric Social Worker)
SW3: Social Worker Three
C: Counsellor
CDW: Community Development Worker
TL: Team Leader
LVC: Lay Volunteer Co—ordinator
Sec: Secretary
St: Student

The following conventions, developed by Gail Jefferson, were used for my transcripts. These conventions denote lapses in time, overlapping talk, pace and in some instances pitch, pronunciation and stress. I have only included those symbols used in my transcriptions.

Numbers in Parentheses: e.g. (1.0) denotes the approximate duration pauses or gaps between utterances in seconds or tenths of seconds.

Point in Parentheses: (.) indicates a 'micro — pause' of less than two tenths of a second

Letters, words or activities in parentheses: (cough) sounds, words or activities that are distinct or difficult to locate to a particular interlocutor (s)

Square Brackets: [ ] mark the points where talk overlaps

e.g. SW1: I think that we should proceed with [the pla::n]
TL: [I couldn't] agree more

Full Colons: (: :) denote an extension in the vowel or consonant sound in the utterance of a word

e.g. SW2: Tha::t's the one

Equals signs: = identifies a 'latching' between utterances, whereby which utterances follow each other rapidly after a preceding utterance.

e.g. C: I thought you were supposed to be at the meeting =
LVC: = I was at the meeting

1 A comprehensive discussion of recipient design can be found in Sacks's Lectures in Conversation (1992). The notion of recipience is being invoked here in order to prepare ground for a more thorough discussion of the local production of conversation and the socially dynamic organising principle of recognisability.

2 This term is used to describe the occurrence of categories, predicates and devices within conversation. Furthermore it seeks to illustrate the way in which clusters of categories have to be managed in terms of praxiological considerations (Sacks rules of application and recipient design) and the associated considerations of sequential organisation e.g. conforming to the expectations of a first part of an adjacency pair. In this sense the raw material of 'knowhow' and 'knowledge' (i.e. a set of categories which predicate a specific set of relationships that convey an internal logic and make ontological and epistemological claims about phenomena) can be seen to be managed by praxiological and sequential methods of conversational organisation.

3 This method involves the production of category relevance within the earlier part of the topics' delivery. If the topic is managed and\or organised in a story format we might conceive to situate category relevant material within the preface. However having made such category relevance recognisable the dual function of relevance has to be realised through a topic shift (and consequently a category shift) that remains associated and intelligible to the listener and listeners in terms of the in situ conversational fabric

4 Volume I Lecture 3, Spring 1970

5 A good example of this can be read in Sacks Volume I , Lecture 3, Spring 1970, p.299

6 That is to say that this description is duplicatively organised in that it is part of the collection, 'population' but is then becomes a device\collection in terms of SW1's use of the term woman and the modes of predication that follow.

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