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Series Foreword

Qualitative approaches have become accepted and indeed embraced as empirical methods within the social sciences, as scholars have realized that many of the phenomena in which we are interested are complex and require deep inner reflection and equally penetrating examination. Quantitative approaches often cannot capture such phenomena well through their standard methods (e.g., self-report measures), so qualitative designs using interviews and other in-depth data-gathering procedures offer exciting, nimble, and useful research approaches.

Indeed, the number and variety of qualitative approaches that have been developed is remarkable. We remember Bill Stiles saying (quoting Chairman Mao) at one meeting about methods, "Let a hundred flowers bloom," indicating that there are many appropriate methods for addressing research questions. In this series, we celebrate this diversity (hence, the cover design of flowers).

The question for many of us, though, has been how to decide among approaches and how to learn the different methods. Many prior descriptions of the various qualitative methods have not provided clear enough descriptions of the methods, making it difficult for novice researchers to learn how to use them. Thus, those interested in learning about and pursuing qualitative research need crisp and thorough descriptions of these approaches, with lots of examples to illustrate the method so that readers can grasp how to use the methods.

The purpose of this series of books, then, is to present a range of qualitative approaches that seemed most exciting and illustrative of the range of methods

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appropriate for social science research. We asked leading experts in qualitative methods to contribute to the series, and we were delighted that they accepted our invitation. Through this series, readers have the opportunity to learn qualitative research methods from those who developed the methods and/or who have been using them successfully for years.

We asked the authors of each book to provide context for the method, including a rationale, situating the method within the qualitative tradition, describing the method's philosophical and epistemological background, and noting the key features of the method. We then asked them to describe in detail the steps of the method, including the research team, sampling, biases and expectations, data collection, data analysis, and variations on the method. We also asked authors to provide tips for the research process and for writing a manuscript emerging from a study that used the method. Finally, we asked authors to reflect on the methodological integrity of the approach, along with the benefits and limitations of the particular method.

This series of books can be used in several different ways. Instructors teaching courses in qualitative research could use the whole series, presenting one method at a time to expose students to a range of qualitative methods. Alternatively, instructors could choose to focus on just a few approaches, as depicted in specific books, supplementing the books with examples from studies that have been published using the approaches, and providing experiential exercises to help students get started using the approaches.

In this book, Hepburn and Potter describe a challenging but rewarding approach to understanding everyday and organizational interactions. Their approach reveals how words are combined with tone, gesture, and setting to capture how people communicate. The authors provide a systematic method for analyzing spoken interaction that relies on close observation of actual communicative occasions rather than interviewing participants for their understanding of events, much as is done in other qualitative methods. The data generated are precise and reproducible rather than relying on interpretations by researchers. Although different structurally and philosophically from the other qualitative methods in this series, this method allows for a deep understanding of communication strategies and is applicable across many disciplines.

—Clara E. Hill and Sarah Knox

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1 CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF CONVERSATION ANALYSIS

Conversation analysis (CA) is a method for studying social life as it happens, in all its rich, varied, and intricate complexity. With over 50 years of development, it has revealed much about the basic architecture of social interaction and social life more broadly. CA has built a sophisticated understanding of practices in the kinds of everyday conversation that go on in phone calls, family dinners, or student dorms. This work has been developed to study interaction in professional or institutional settings: primary care consultations, helplines, psychotherapy and counseling, mediation, classroom interaction, news interviews, business meetings, legal settings. CA is a science based on direct observation of natural interaction that is not staged by the researcher; unlike much of the psychological mainstream, it uses neither experiments nor qualitative interviews to come to its conclusions. It reveals the basic ways in which speakers coordinate their talk; how they manage problems of production and understanding; how they perform offers and requests, complaints, and compliments; how they tell stories and indicate what they know and do not know; how emotion is displayed and responded to; how gaze, prosody, and gesture help to orchestrate interaction; and many more

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themes. These basic practices are refined and put to work in professional and institutional settings; CA reveals how each has a distinct architecture of interaction.

After over 50 years of progress, CA now boasts an international community of practitioners across sociology, linguistics, communication, anthropology, and psychology. Its main conference draws more than 500 attendees, and its literature is large and growing. CA aspires to a high level of scientific rigor in the production of precise and reproducible findings, and it has supported applied interventions, guided by its careful explication of how institutional interaction works and how professionals conduct their business. Although not developed specifically as an approach to psychology, contemporary CA reveals in extraordinary detail what it is to be human in any particular setting and throws important light on basic issues of knowledge and understanding, emotion and influence, intersubjectivity and intention, attitudes and beliefs, counseling and psychotherapy, and disability. The goal of this book is to introduce the method of CA. Compared with other approaches, a high proportion of research time is focused directly on analysis; high-quality analysis is what allows research to move forward. Our aim is to show what is involved in high-quality CA research. We begin this chapter with an illustration of how conversation analysts approach data and then consider the contextual and philosophical foundations of CA.

RATIONALE

Mum and Anna (her 3-year-old daughter) are British English speakers. The following fragment is from their midday meal. The notation used in the fragment is described in detail in Chapter 3. The lunch has been good-natured and chatty. Anna has eaten some, but not all, of her beans.

Extract 1.1. Eat Some Beans

```
01 Mum:   pt You still got some ↑bea:ns left ↑‘aven’t you:.
02        (2.7)
03 Anna:  Don’ wan::ta bea::ns:
04        (0.5)
05 Mum:   You’ve to eat some bea:ns.
06        (1.2)
07 Anna:  °↓#Mm:,
08        (2.3)
09 Anna:  ((eats a spoonful then drops spoon on plate,
          lifts arms over head))
```

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CA works with material like this. It is

- natural interaction made up of a series of turns of talk;
- recorded on digital video, allowing us to see what Mum and Anna can see: the beans on Anna's plate and Anna's gesture after eating the spoonful of beans;
- transcribed to capture features of delivery with added line numbers to allow us to point to specific features of the interaction (e.g., delay and pronunciation, changes in intonation and volume) because this is what people attend to when they are interacting with one another; and
- real life unfolding before us as researchers, laid out to capture most precisely how it unfolded for participants, which is most important. For conversation analysts, this kind of direct interaction between speakers is the primordial site of human social life.

Neither we, as researchers, nor Anna and Mum have functional magnetic resonance imaging recordings of brain states; nor have Anna and Mum been interviewed about what is going on or filled in survey questionnaires. Nevertheless, they talk in a coordinated way with one another, and that coordination is our focus. But where shall we look? If we focus just on grammar and abstract semantics, we might think that "`You still got some ↑bea:ns left ↑'aven't you:.`" is merely presenting something Mum has noticed for confirmation with "`↑'aven't you:.`". Yet, at this point in the meal, the words "`still`" and "`left`" invoke a potential eating shortfall on Anna's part, perhaps indicating that there is still (healthy) eating to be done.

But the key thing that shows the coordination is that Anna's refusal on Line 03 treats what Mum is doing as requesting she eat her beans, albeit indirectly. Mum is performing an action, and building that action as simply noticing a shortfall is designed to allow Anna's possible resumption of eating to be relatively unforced. Anna's "`Don' wan::ta bea::ns:`" is pushing back against that action—she refuses the request. This pushback shows us as analysts what Anna's understanding is. Extract 1.1 also shows us that young children like Anna have already figured out that they need to tune into what the talk is doing—speakers do not simply focus on content; they focus on its action.

Conversation analysts work closely with participants' understandings of what is going on as those understandings unfold and change moment by moment in real time. But conversation analysts do not ask them about those

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understandings; rather, they study them in situ as displayed by participants, for participants in the turn-by-turn unfolding of their talk. The focus on what is displayed and the recipient's uptake provides a powerful check on analytic interpretation. For CA researchers, the response to a speaker's turn provides an important check on analytic interpretation; they refer to this as the next turn proof procedure (Sacks et al., 1974). Any speaker's analysis of the prior turn's action is relevant to their construction of their own next turn, so it is their analysis that conversation analysts seek to represent. Note that it is a radically different approach from more common alternatives that tend to work through questioning people about their understandings (or views, beliefs, feelings, and so on) post hoc. These understandings are then typically seen as lying below the "surface" of talk, requiring special research instruments to access. For us, the medium of talk provides its own system for understanding, and much of the important business of psychology lives and works in that system.

Conversation analysts focus on the actions performed in interaction—and they have this focus because that is the focus of our participants. Actions are mostly done through talk, and thus CA is sometimes called the study of talk-in-interaction, to acknowledge that interaction is not simply talk. In its early years, CA researchers typically used recordings of interactions on the phone as data (e.g., Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). This has the analytic virtue that participants cannot see facial expressions and movement, thus simplifying the focus of analysis. Moreover, a traditional telephone call is limited to two parties. However, as researchers have focused increasingly on records of copresent interaction, and now interaction mediated through screens such as those of Zoom or Skype, they have addressed issues of embodied (sometimes referred to as "multimodal") action and the way gaze, gesture, and bodily orientation are coordinated with talk to contribute to ongoing actions. In this case, for example, Mum's initial reference to beans is bright and cheerful—the arrows in the transcript mark upward intonation. And she is simultaneously looking away from Anna and emptying a packet of potato chips onto her own plate. The project of getting Anna to eat her beans is done lightly here—almost as a reminder. Later in the extract, we can see how Anna shows that she has completed the bean-eating project by dropping her spoon and putting her hands above her head; she literally embodies it. We have seen that Mum's "`You still got some ↑bea:ns left ↑'aven't you:.`" is a kind of request. Typically, in conversation, actions come in pairs—question and answer, greeting and greeting, complaint and apology, and so on. The technical term for such pairs of actions is *adjacency pairs*. For now, note that a request like this sets up a limited set

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of response possibilities. Anna could comply with the request, finishing off her beans; she could decline, maybe with an account—she is full up or does not like them. Alternatively, she could try to ignore the request altogether, or maybe she could do something that makes it unclear whether she is going to comply or decline—we might call that *incipient compliance*. This range of options highlights two things. First, in natural interaction, actions are not caused by one another; rather, their relations are contingent. If parental requests simply and directly caused children's compliance, family life would be a somewhat alarming world of mechanical order and discipline. Instead, we see a different form of order, showing actions and different kinds of possible resistance. Second, this contingency is not random or infinite. An action sets up an orderly set of response possibilities (and these response possibilities in turn set up an orderly set of further response possibilities). CA studies the systematic organization of contingent action.

The fact that conversational actions have these systematic options means they exist as a powerful inferential system for participants. Mum's expectation is that the next action will come from a limited set of options. The issuing of an action outside of these limited possibilities is not impossible, but it may lead Mum to think that she has misheard or Anna has misspoken. Conversation analysts have, in fact, documented an intricate set of possible repair operations directed at fixing problems with talk, which we discuss in Chapter 5. However, the power of CA is that actual interaction is studied. Here we have Anna's actual response to Mum's request. This is more analytically powerful than speculating about what might have happened.

We have discussed just a brief fragment to illustrate key issues. Actions are threaded together in sequences, and those sequences are themselves organized in systematic ways that conversation analysts have documented (Schegloff, 2007b). In Extract 1.1, for example, Mum responds to Anna's pushback by upgrading from a request to a more explicit directive on Line 05: "You've to eat some bea:ns.". This patterning, where parental projects of behavior modification become increasingly insistent, is regularly found in parent–child interaction sequences and give us a way to address broader questions about socialization (Hepburn, 2020). The organization of sequences is a major concern for speakers, and that makes it a major tool for conversation analysts.

The fact that interaction is intrinsically contingent means that turns can be designed in very different ways. We have seen how the request in Line 01 is indirect; rather than using a standard grammatical request form, it is formulated as a *noticing*. It could have drawn on different words (different lexical items) or different grammar, used different prosody (varying stress

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and intonation), and so on. These possibilities are important for the different expectations they set up. They work to shape what comes next. *Action formation* is, therefore, another major field of CA research. Conversation analysts study how turns are put together to accomplish actions. One way of thinking of this is that the aim of CA is to reveal how the machinery of interaction works.

Our illustrative example focused on everyday interaction in a family setting. As we noted at the outset, CA research on everyday talk has provided a platform for the systematic understanding of how interaction works in professional and institutional settings. Often, this shows how everyday conversational forms are refined or exploited in the institutional setting (Drew & Heritage, 1992). For example, in a children's bullying helpline, advice may be embedded in questions ("Have you talked to a teacher"; Butler et al., 2010); television news interviewers often build challenging questions by embedding them in the views of "experts" or "political opponents" (Heritage & Clayman, 2010). CA provides a powerful set of tools for understanding what happens in institutions. Knowing the specific ways in which interaction is organized in an institution can, for example,

- help us to recruit more participants into mediation (by building rejection of mediation as being "unwilling" to participate; Sikveland & Stokoe, 2016),
- keep critical callers on the line in 911 calls (by highlighting the impending transfer to dispatch for more information just when the caller completes their report and may expect to close; Kevoe-Feldman & Pomerantz, 2018), and
- limit unnecessary antibiotic prescription (through the clinician's "on-line commentary" during the diagnostic phase of the visit; Heritage & Stivers, 1999).

Interest in institutional problems often brings researchers into CA, but that work is supported by continuing development in the study of everyday talk.

HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL ORIGINS

CA was developed throughout the 1960s and 1970s by the sociologist Harvey Sacks, who was influenced by Harold Garfinkel (the founder of ethnomethodology), as well as by the sociologist Erving Goffman. Sacks worked originally with Emmanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson. The key publication that did much to establish the power and ambition of CA was a paper by Sacks and colleagues (1974) on the systematics that underpin