

The definitive version of this article is published by Blackwell as:
Paul Seedhouse. [On Ethnomethodological CA and "Linguistic CA": A Reply to Hall](#).
The Modern Language Journal 2007, 91(4), 526-532.

On Ethnomethodological CA and ‘Linguistic CA’: A Reply to Hall

Paul Seedhouse. Newcastle University.

In her article, Hall puts the Conversation Analysis (CA) mechanism of repair on the agenda of language learning research, and I think this is most welcome. However, our conceptions of the ontology, purpose and use of the CA mechanism of repair differ completely. In the first part of this article I explain how the interactional organisations of CA (turn-taking, sequence, repair) were intended to be employed normatively for emic analysis in ethnomethodology. I also explain how linguists have attempted to ‘linguistify’ or adapt these organisations to conform to a descriptivist linguistic paradigm and will show that this adaptation renders them incapable of being used for emic analysis. I further argue that Hall is attempting to linguistify the organisation of repair and render it static and uni-dimensional as an analyst’s concept for coding interaction, whereas it is a participants’ concept which they adapt and employ normatively to perform their social actions; our task as analysts is to trace how they do this.

As a gross generalization, CA methodology has often been misunderstood by linguists. This is, in a sense, quite natural and the reasons for this are quite easy to trace. Firstly, sociologists (who developed CA) have rarely tried to explain the ethnomethodological principles on which CA is based in terms which are comprehensible to linguists. By contrast, the interactional organizations of turn-taking, adjacency pairs, and repair are readily comprehensible and very useful to linguists and appear at first sight to fit neatly into a descriptivist linguistics paradigm of units and rules. So it is in a sense quite natural that introductory texts on discourse analysis for linguists (e.g., Burns, 2001; Cameron, 2001; Cook, 1989; McCarthy, 1991) should have introduced the above types of interactional organization without explication of the ethnomethodological principles which revealed them. The same point applies to their introduction in Hall’s article. Linguists reading such accounts of the organizations might naturally assume by default that turn-taking, sequence and

repair were a system of units and rules in the sense of descriptivist linguistic methodology and that they were the methodology of CA. By contrast, a brief introduction for social scientists (Bryman, 2001) starts with the principles of reflexivity and indexicality. It should be noted that Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson (1974) presented their model of turn-taking in a linguistics journal without explicating the ethnomethodological principles on which their work was based or the ways in which they differed from linguistics. It is again easy to understand how the confusion has arisen. In any case, there is now a common misconception among linguists that doing CA is a matter of transcribing talk and then identifying or coding patterns of turn-taking, adjacency pairs, and repair; the ethnomethodological principles, emic perspective and the dimension of social action are entirely absent. There is no space here to explain the ethnomethodological principles which underlie CA; see Seedhouse (2004) for these. Rather, I will exemplify how linguists have 'linguistified' CA organisations and explain, by contrast, how CA organisations are intended to be employed in ethnomethodological CA.

We will now look at three different but related types of interactional organization which were uncovered by Sacks and associates by grappling with their data and which can now be employed in analysis by CA practitioners: turn-taking, sequence and repair. First we should clarify that these organizations are *not* the same as 'units of analysis' in the linguistic sense. Rather, they should be understood as interactional organizations which interactants use normatively both as an action template for the production of their social actions and as a point of reference for the interpretation of their actions. We as analysts are obliged to use them in the same way if we want to create an emic perspective. Since the emic/etic distinction is vital to this article, we need to define it at this point. An etic or analyst's perspective views interaction from outside an alien system, using procedures and criteria alien to the system. An emic perspective views interaction from the participants' perspective, using the same procedures and criteria as them. There is no sense that either perspective is inherently superior to the other, and CA does not claim that social actions and emic perspectives are inherently more important than language or etic perspectives *per se*; it is simply the case that CA's unrelenting aim is to portray social action in interaction from an emic perspective. What CA means by an emic perspective, however, is not merely the participants' perspective, but their perspective *from within the sequential environment in which the social actions were performed*.

Here the interactants talk their social world into being by employing the context-free interactional architecture in context-sensitive ways. The participants display in the interaction those terms of reference which they employ and these provide us with access to the emic perspective; I explain below what is meant by this. The ease with which the organisations of CA may be misunderstood is well captured by ten Have:

In its first phase CA's conceptual apparatus was developed in its originators' struggle with the data, while in its second phase this apparatus is generally available as an established repertoire... The danger in this situation is that less talented, insightful, or sensitive practitioners may be tempted to 'apply' the established concepts in a mechanistic fashion, as 'coding instruments'... In other words, the temptation is to use CA's previously established concepts and findings as law-like or even 'causal' rules, whereas one should ... see them as descriptions of possible normative orientations of participants, available for various usages as they see fit. (ten Have, 1999, p. 41)

I firstly examine a linguistic CA misconception of the organisation of turn-taking. Cameron (2001) introduces the CA model of turn-taking using data1 in which friends speak simultaneously.

Extract 1

A: and she didn't she didn't like Katie she didn't ge[t on with Katie at all]

B: [no she didn't get on with] Katie

(Cameron, 2001, p. 92)

Cameron refers to similar observations in two other publications and concludes:

The simplest systematics model assumes that 'one at a time' is both normal and fundamental: there is no obvious place in the model for simultaneous speech which is neither an error nor a violation, but merely a normal feature of certain kinds of talk. The question this raises is whether Sacks and colleagues make assumptions about talk-in-general which are not, in fact, universally valid... if the analyst's claim is that 'one speaker speaks at a time', one would expect participants in talk to display their orientation to that pattern by treating instances of simultaneous speech as problems requiring

repair... But in ... the conversation... reproduced above, there is no display of orientation to the 'one speaker speaks at a time' pattern, and this is what motivates speculation that some other system of floor organization may be operative. (Cameron, 2001, p. 93)

The linguistic CA perspective, then, is that 'one at a time' is a rule and that if speakers do not follow this, there is something wrong with the rule. However, in ethnomethodological CA, the turn-taking model is a constitutive norm which interactants make use of to display the meaning of their social actions to their partners and to interpret their partners' actions. It is indeed common for close friends, family and associates to use overlap and simultaneous speech and this may be significant social action, although this would have to be explicated on a case by case basis. As Schegloff (2000) puts it, "Specific action ... outcomes are co- constructed by reference to one-party-at-a-time, even though they are realized through designedly simultaneous talk" (p. 48). It is quite common for preferred second turns such as acceptance of an invitation or agreement to be undertaken in overlap, as in extract 1. The point is that it may be precisely by reference to the transition relevant point and the norms of turn-taking that close friends and family index their degree of agreement and affiliation and talk a relationship of intimacy and a context of informality into being. Similarly, it may be precisely by reference to the norms of turn-taking and to the transition relevance point that we display disaffiliation.

Extract 2

C: We:ll I wrote what I thought was a a-a

Rea:son[able explanatio:n

F: [I: think it was a very rude le:tter.

(Levinson, 1983, p.299)

F begins his/her turn in the middle of 'reasonable'. This cannot be considered a transition relevant point, so it must be an interruption. This is confirmed by the disaffiliative social action embodied in F's turn, which directly contradicts first speaker and the 'bald' linguistic formatting, with no attempt at mitigation. Overlap, then, may be designedly used to intensify the affiliative or disaffiliative nature of particular social actions. The degree of B's agreement in extract 1 and of F's

17 Rather: Tha[t wasn't a ques]tion. It was=
18 Bush: [(Th- right)]
19 Rather: [=a statement.]
20 → Bush: [Yes it was] a statement,=
21 =[an' I'll a:answer it.= The President=]
22 Rather: [Let me ask the question if I may first.]
23 Bush: =created this progra:m, .hh has testifie- er:
(Schegloff, 1992, p. 130)

It is because the participants (and we as analysts) are able to identify the gap between the context-free model and its context-sensitive implementation that they (and we as analysts) are able to understand the social significance of the context-sensitive implementation. So in the example above it is precisely because we know what the context-free norms of adjacency pairs (and turn-taking) are that we are able to analyse Bush's normative use of them as being very unusual and draw implications as to the motivation for his actions. The institutional expectation in the news interview is that Rather asks a question for Bush to answer. By trying to 'answer' a statement (or rather a pre-question), Bush gives the impression of trying to pre-empt delivery of a real question and of having something to hide.²

CA, then, provides context-free statements (or definitions) of an organisation. Ethnomethodological CA analysis then involves matching this context-free statement to the participants' context-sensitive implementation of these organisations in their talk and revealing the value of the social actions thus performed. Linguistic CA, however, uses only the context-free statements of the organisation in order to etically 'code' the interaction rather than to emically analyse it. This is exactly what we find in Hall's article in her treatment of the organisation of repair. Hall uses the context-free definition of repair to label or code extracts as either repair or correction and there is no attempt at emic analysis of data. There is no attempt to understand how participants adapt the mechanism of repair to their social actions in a context-sensitive way. The organisation of repair becomes fixed, static and uni-dimensional, an etic or analyst's construct rather than a participants' construct available for emic analysis.

In ethnomethodological CA, however, analysts attempt to uncover how the participants have normatively employed the mechanism of repair to perform their social actions. A broad CA definition of repair is as the treatment of trouble occurring

in interactive language use. Trouble is anything which the participants judge is impeding their communication and a repairable item is one which constitutes trouble for the participants. Any element of talk may in principle be the focus of repair, even an element which is well-formed, propositionally correct and appropriate. Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1997, p. 363) point out that “nothing is, in principle, excludable from the class ‘repairable’”. Repair, trouble and repairable items are participants’ constructs, for use how and when participants find appropriate. A CA definition of ‘correction’ is ‘replacement of a trouble item by another item’. Initiation and performance of correction can be undertaken by self or others, so a variety of trajectories are possible. The term ‘correction’ has no special status in CA in relation to ordinary conversation or institutional discourse – it is merely one practice amongst many in the numerous repair options available to interactants. The correct CA perspective on the relationship between repair and correction is provided by Hutchby & Wooffitt (1998, p. 57):

Repair ... is a generic term which is used in CA to cover a wide range of phenomena, from seeming errors in turn-taking to any of the forms of what we commonly would call ‘correction’ – that is, substantive faults in the content of what someone has said.

Although Hall does not reference or discuss it, a major relevant aspect of CA work is the CA institutional discourse perspective; Drew & Heritage (1992) is the best known work in this area. These works make clear that, in institutional settings, the mechanisms of turn-taking, sequence, and repair are all re-organised and adapted in relation to the institutional goal. In institutional talk, the institutional goal and focus determine what constitutes trouble and what the focus and conduct of repair is. In courtroom cross-examination of a witness by an opposing lawyer, for example, a failure by the witness to answer questions with *yes* or *no* may constitute trouble within that institutional setting (Drew, 1992). Such a failure is therefore repairable (for example by the lawyer and/or judge insisting on a yes/no answer) and even sanctionable. So within a particular institutional setting, the constitution of trouble, of what is repairable and how repair is conducted becomes adapted to the particular institutional focus.

Extract 4

C: Now Miss Lebrette (1.2) when you were interviewed by the police sometimes later – sometime later that evening (1.1) didn't *you* tell the police that the defendant had been drinking (.) [did you tell them that

W: [No I told them that there was a cooler in the car and that I never opened it =

C: =The answer er: may the balance here be stricken your honour and the answer is *no*

J: The answer is no

(Atkinson and Drew, 1979, pp. 71-2)

The legal aim of cross-examination is for evidence presented to court to be robustly tested. The organisation of turn-taking, sequence and repair become totally adapted to this aim in an inflexible sequence of questions by the lawyer to which the witness must answer yes or no. We see in extract 4 above that an answer may be deleted from the official record and be inadmissible as evidence if it is not in the correct format. Employing the ethnomethodological principle of reflexivity, we can see that it is not just that these organisations become adapted to the institutional aim. Also, the rigid organisation of turn-taking, sequence and repair talks the formal legal setting into being.

Similarly, in L2 classrooms, the definition of what is trouble, what is repairable, and the entire mechanism of repair becomes adapted to the institutional goal of language learning and to the particular pedagogical focus employed. Seedhouse (2004) depicts how the mechanism of repair is re-organised in relation to the institutional goal of the L2 classroom.

Extract 5

1 T: right, the cup is on top of the box, ((T moves cup))

2 now, where is the cup?

3 L: in the box.

4 T: the cup is (.)?

5 L: in the box

6 T: the cup is in (.)?

7 L: the cup is in the box.

8 T: right, very good, the cup is in the box.
(Seedhouse, 2004, p. 144)

According to Hall, I am wrong to characterise T's actions in lines 4 and 6 of extract 5 as other-initiated repair; she says that T is in fact engaged in correction: "To be other-initiated repair (OIR), as claimed by Seedhouse (2004), the teacher's actions would have to display some trouble with hearing or understanding the prior student turns." I will argue that the extract does in fact involve understanding and misunderstanding and that the teacher is indeed initiating repair. I will make first a general and then a specific point. The ethnomethodological CA perspective is that all talk inescapably involves displays of understanding and non-understanding:

Built into the very organization by which opportunities to talk are allocated to participants in ordinary conversation is a related 'understanding-display' device. The consequence is that speakers almost necessarily reveal their understanding of that to which their talk is addressed, whether that is prior talk, other conduct, or events and occurrences 'scenic' to the interaction. When an utterance is addressed to prior talk, its speaker reveals some understanding of that prior talk, an understanding that the speaker of that prior talk may treat as problematic. (Schegloff, 1991, p. 167-8).

Looking at the extract from an ethnomethodological CA perspective, it does involve understanding and non-understanding and employs the mechanism of repair. What we need to do as CA analysts is to understand how T adapts and normatively employs the mechanism of repair. The major feature of the organisation of repair in this form and accuracy context is the very tight connection between the linguistic forms and patterns of interaction which the learners produce in the L2 and the pedagogical focus which the teacher introduces. In other words, repair may be initiated by the teacher if the linguistic forms and patterns of interaction produced are not exactly identical to those intended by the teacher's pedagogical focus. In the above extract the teacher's pedagogical focus is to get the learner (via L2 prompts) to produce a specific string of linguistic forms, namely "The cup is in the box". I suggest in Seedhouse (2004) that the omnipresent unique feature of the L2 classroom is that there is a reflexive relationship between pedagogy and interaction. So participants in

L2 classroom interaction are always displaying to one another their understanding of the current state of the evolving relationship between pedagogy and interaction and acting on the basis of these analyses. In line 3, L displays an understanding of the relationship between pedagogy and interaction as being to supply an answer about location, which s/he does in line 3. Whilst this answer would be acceptable in a meaning and fluency context, T displays in line 4 an understanding that this is not the required relationship between pedagogy and interaction by initiating repair. This is designed to help L form a complete sentence, but this is misunderstood by L, who displays in line 5 the same understanding as before of the relationship between pedagogy and interaction. T therefore initiates repair again in line 6 and this time L displays in line 7 an understanding of the relationship between pedagogy and interaction as being to form a complete sentence; in line 8 T displays an understanding that this has been achieved.

The entire mechanism of repair, then, has been adapted by the teacher for a specific pedagogical focus. We can see that it is an unusual adaptation, in that the linguistically correct and appropriate learner utterance in line 3 is still subject to repair by the teacher. From the evidence of my database, repair of linguistically correct and appropriate utterances seems to be peculiar to form and accuracy contexts within the L2 classroom. An emic analysis, then, shows how T has employed context-free resources of repair in a context-sensitive way. We can also see the ethnomethodological principle of reflexivity here in the relationship between the use of repair and the pedagogical focus. It is precisely by T's initiation of repair of a 'correct' response that a form and accuracy focus is talked into being. The above extract certainly does not involve correction in the CA sense. As Hall herself writes, "Correction is a particular type of repair in which errors are replaced with what is correct". The teacher does not correct the trouble item, but rather initiates repair so that the learner is eventually able to self-repair in line 7. Readers can decide for themselves whether they prefer my analysis or Hall's description of extract 5 as the participants sailing through an IRF sequence "with no apparent disfluency or uncertainty".

Hall does not state which methodology she is employing in her article and this is unclear as different concepts and methodologies are mixed. She quotes CA definitions of repair but does not employ the mechanism in ethnomethodological CA fashion. Hall also places great emphasis on the IRF sequence, which does not derive from CA

at all, but from discourse analysis (DA) (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; Mehan, 1979), which *is* perfectly compatible with descriptivist linguistic methodology. Certainly her description of extract 5 is much more DA than CA. I suggest in Seedhouse (2004) that ethnomethodological CA can provide us with an overall description of the interactional organisation of the language classroom, its basic sequence organisation and an emic methodology for its analysis. However, this can only be the case if its organisations are employed holistically using ethnomethodological principles. Hall's approach of mixing linguistic CA with DA will only provide us with more superficial etic coding schemes. In ethnomethodological CA we are dealing with a holistic system of analysis and this is the case because the interactants are using the same holistic system of analysis themselves to organise their talk.

In this article I have tried to distinguish ethnomethodological CA from linguistic CA. Many students of linguistics now believe *doing CA* to mean producing a detailed transcription and then merely identifying instances of turn-taking, adjacency pairs, and repair; there is etic description or coding of superficial linguistic features rather than an analysis of social action. Linguistic CA is basically CA minus the methodology. Metaphorically, it presents the reader with a Porsche which has had a lawn-mower engine put in it instead. It may have the same name badge and bodywork and crawl forward in the same direction after a fashion, but the power is no longer there.

We should consider whether there is any fundamental objection to having two alternative versions of CA. In my view there is no crucial problem provided that the two versions are separated, defined and named differently. Some linguists will no doubt continue to find it useful to etically employ the interactional organizations as a coding scheme in a descriptivist linguistic paradigm. Provided that it is recognized that this is linguistic CA and is different to doing CA analysis, I cannot see any fundamental objection. This separation and re-naming would avoid the current problem which does seem to me to be very serious. This is the current blurring between the two versions which gives the impression to many linguists that ethnomethodological CA is a superficial coding scheme. So, for example, we saw above that Cameron's introduction to CA suggests that CA is unable to handle straightforward data, whereas the ethnomethodological version is perfectly capable of doing so. The term 'CA' should be reserved for the original ethnomethodological version and 'linguistic CA' for the linguistic version. It is therefore possible that

formalizing a separation between the two versions would lead to greater clarity and understanding between all parties involved.

From the perspective of modern language teachers, does this debate have any relevance? I think it does relate to how the professional work of teachers in interaction is portrayed. In Seedhouse (2004) I use a CA approach to show that, by virtue of language being the object as well as the vehicle of instruction, L2 teachers are doing fantastically complex and demanding interactional and pedagogical work on multiple levels, compared with 'content' teachers and compared with professionals in other institutional settings. By contrast, coding approaches tend to represent language teachers as doing one thing on one level at a time and as plodding from one monotonous IRF cycle to the next. I would suggest that this does not do justice to the complexity of the interactional work we are engaged in and hence to our profession.

Repair becomes, in the L2 classroom, an interactional and pedagogical mechanism of amazing power, fluidity and complexity. Rather than attempting to linguistify repair, rendering it uni-dimensional and static, we need to realise the full potential of the ethnomethodological conception of repair and to employ it to uncover the processes of instructed language learning. Certainly it takes a very long time and it is very hard work to train in ethnomethodological CA, but the results are worth it. In an interview directed specifically to applied linguists, Schegloff (Wong & Olsher, 2000, p.126) issues the following challenge:

.... It's not until our colleagues actually engage with materials, and try to make sense of them, and understand how they're orderly, how they are organized, how they underlie and underwrite what people do with their social lives in interaction. Not until then will they have a clue of what we've been talking about.... They'll think they have a clue, and that's what makes it more dangerous, because at least if they understood fully that they didn't have a clue, then they would be prompted to go on and to get into the thick of it, but often people think 'that's it'.

References

- Atkinson, J. & Drew, P. (1979). *Order in Court*. London: Macmillan.
- Bryman, A. (2001). *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Burns, A. (2001). Analysing Spoken Discourse. In A. Burns & C. Coffin (Eds.), *Analysing English in a Global Context* (pp. 123-148). London: Routledge.
- Cameron, D. (2001). *Working with Spoken Discourse*. London: Sage.
- Cook, G. (1989). *Discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Drew, P. (1992). Contested evidence in courtroom cross-examination: the case of a trial for rape. In P. Drew & J. Heritage (Eds.), *Talk at Work: Interaction in Institutional Settings* (pp. 470-520). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Drew, P. & Heritage, J. (Eds.). (1992). *Talk at Work: Interaction in Institutional Settings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Have, P. ten (1999). *Doing Conversation Analysis: a Practical Guide*. London: Sage Publications.
- Hutchby, I. & Wooffitt, R. (1998). *Conversation Analysis*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Levinson, S. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McCarthy, M. (1991). *Discourse Analysis for Language Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mehan, H. (1979). *Learning Lessons: Social Organization in the Classroom*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press

Sacks, H., Schegloff, E. & Jefferson, G. (1974). A Simplest Systematics for the Organisation of Turn-Taking in Conversation. *Language*, 50, 696-735.

Schegloff, E.A. (1991). Conversation Analysis and Socially Shared Cognition. In L. Resnick, J. Levine & S. Teasley (Eds.), *Perspectives on Socially Shared Cognition* (pp. 150-171). Washington DC: American Psychological Association.

Schegloff, E.A. (1992). On Talk and its Institutional Occasions. In P. Drew & J. Heritage (Eds.), *Talk at Work: Interaction in Institutional Settings* (pp. 101-136). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schegloff, E.A. (2000). Overlapping Talk and the Organization of Turn-Taking for Conversation. *Language in Society*, 29, 1-63.

Schegloff, E.A., Jefferson, G. & Sacks, H. (1977). The Preference for Self-Correction in the Organization of Repair in Conversation. *Language*, 53, 361-382.

Seedhouse, P. 2004. *The interactional architecture of the language classroom: A conversation analysis perspective*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Sinclair, J. & Coulthard, R.M. (1975). *Toward an Analysis of Discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wong, J. & Olsher, D. (2000). Reflections on Conversation Analysis and Nonnative Speaker Talk: An Interview with Emanuel A. Schegloff. *Issues in Applied Linguistics*, 11(1), 111-128.

Biodata

Paul Seedhouse is Professor of Educational and Applied Linguistics in the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences, Newcastle University, UK. His monograph *The Interactional Architecture of the Language Classroom: A Conversation Analysis Perspective* was published by Blackwell in 2004 and won the 2005 Kenneth Mildenerger Prize of the Modern Language Society of the USA. He has also co-edited the collections *Applying Conversation Analysis* with Keith Richards and *Language Learning and Teaching as Social Inter-action* with Zhu Hua, Li Wei and Vivian Cook.

King George VI Building,
School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences,
Newcastle University,
Newcastle, NE1 7RU,
UK.
Paul.seedhouse@ncl.ac.uk

1 For a detailed analysis of these data, see Seedhouse, 2004, p. 47.

2 See Schegloff, 1992, for a detailed analysis.