questioning strategies in sociolinguistics

Lindsey Churchill
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The City University of New York

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and
in memory of Harvey Sacks
SERIES IN
SOCIOlinguistics

Roger W. Shuy, Series Editor
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The term *sociolinguistics* has been used since approximately the mid-1960s to designate the complex intersection of the fields of language and society. Sociologists have used linguistic data, often referring to the expression, *the sociology of language*, to describe and explain social behavior. Linguists, on the other hand, have tended to make use of social behavior to interpret linguistic variation. Still others have conceived of sociolinguistics in a more practical or applied sense, usually related to social dialects in an educational setting or language teaching. These three perspectives, sociological, linguistic and educational, are all legitimate, for it would be difficult to claim that any one group has an exclusive right to the term. It has become apparent increasingly that those who are interested in the ethnography of speaking, language planning, linguistic variation, the dynamics of language change, language attitudes, pragmatics, multi-lingualism and applied sociolinguistics are all concerned with sociolinguistics in one sense or another. As might be expected in any field, some scholars prefer the more linguistically dominating aspects, some the social or ethnographic, and some the applied or relational. Thus sociolinguistics may be studied in a number of different contexts.

This new series of books will cover a broad spectrum of topics which bear on important and changing issues in language and in society. The significance of social, linguistic, and psychological factors as they relate to the understanding of human speech and writing will be emphasized. In the past most language analyses have not taken these factors into account. The most exciting development of recent linguistic theory and research has been the recognition of the roles of context, variability, the continuum, and cross-disciplinary understanding.
by Roger W. Shuy

As scholars in many different fields probe more penetratingly into exactly what happens in conversation, it is only natural that the subject of responses to questions should become prominent. Like many social scientists, Professor Churchill has made much use of the interview as a data-gathering process but, unlike the others, he has actually stopped to analyze the process scientifically. The result is an intersection of sociology and linguistics that deserves to be called sociolinguistics every bit as much as do the various other intersections of language and academic discipline represented in this series. All of us who try to understand the process of language in context ultimately face the same sort of problem. Professor Churchill introduces his perspective vividly in the first chapter of this book and then proceeds to analyze in detail the facts of the interviewing process.

The study of how a discipline uses language to get its data need not be limited to the sociology interview. This book may well serve as a general model for similar analyses in other fields in which it is critical to use language to obtain critical or diagnostic information from one's clients. Disciplines such as medicine, law and education come to mind immediately. The detail and care with which Professor Churchill presents this study is a model of sociolinguistic method and analysis. We are indeed proud to present it in this series.
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The work presented in this volume began in graduate school with my studies with Robert F. Bales. He showed me the fascination of the world of conversation and let me use his laboratory to explore that world. However, the theoretical thinking here does not derive so much from him as it does from two other thinkers in sociology, Harold Garfinkel and Harvey Sacks. I much admire their work, and have tried to listen to both of them in writing this manuscript.

The work itself has been furthered by various grants and fellowships that I have received to pursue it. I want to thank the Air Force Office of Scientific Research for a grant to Harold Garfinkel in which I participated, and to thank Russell Sage Foundation and the National Science Foundation for additional grant support. Finally, I want to acknowledge my debt to the Fulbright program and to the University of Helsinki for making a year of writing time possible during 1976-1977. Much of the manuscript was written during that year.

Along the way, a number of people beyond the ones named above have been helpful in clarifying my thinking and trying to dissuade me of various forms of silliness. Two in particular were helpful as my research assistants at different times. I am happy to name them here: Sandra Halberstam and Richard Frankel. Sandra Halberstam is also the author of Chapter 2.

Lindsey Churchill

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questioning strategies in sociolinguistics
INTRODUCTION

This set of essays summarizes my thinking on how Americans respond to questions. Since that may seem like a strange topic for a sociologist to study, let me describe how I came to it, and why I think it is important for sociology.

With an interest in methods of inquiry and a strong training in mathematics, I was exposed to all phases of quantitative research methods in sociology. But I had constant difficulty trying to relate what I was taught to my own intuitive knowledge of the social world. Once the data were collected, the process of analysis ran more or less smoothly; how the data were collected was a problem for me. One problem was that I could not understand how interviewing was done. It seemed to me, naively, that a discipline that pretended to be a science should have a scientific description of its own methods, and it would be there that I would discover how to do interviewing. To my surprise I found that there was no such description. There was nothing but some common-sense rules of thumb, like “Be polite” and “Dress neatly.”

The more I studied the manuals of interviewing, the more I realized that there were spots of knowledge, surrounded by seas of ignorance. And that ignorance, while recognized, was not a matter of concern, because everyone in the culture already knew how to ask questions and answer them, the bases for interviewing. Therefore, it was simply a matter of instructing me how to do a specialized kind of questioning, called interviewing. It was assumed that the common-sense description of interviewing would guide me successfully into the mysteries of interviewing. My reply that a guide was not scientifically adequate was taken as a sign of resistance to graduate training in sociology.
I found one belief commonly held among practitioners of interviewing that gave some support to my problem: good interviewers are born, not made, a left-handed admission that the process was not understood. Somehow, some trainees use the sketchy accounts of how to do interviewing better than others. (More probably, they never read them at all!) They are able to do interviewing qualitatively better than others, and of course, they are in strong demand by researchers.

I soon realized that my persistent concerns here were annoying to my colleagues. They believed that the training offered to novice interviewers, by the better places at least, was adequate for their research purposes, even if not perfectly understood. I can recall being put down with the sarcastic question: How much training does it take to ask a person his age? A more sympathetic brush-off went like this: What you raise is very interesting, and we would like to hear what you discover. But in the meantime we have work to do. Would you please excuse us?

When I did get someone to discuss the problem at length, the solutions offered were invariably based on statistical studies of some kind, experiments, surveys, and the like, which did not seem to me to address the subject properly. (The reasons for this dissatisfaction are discussed in Chapter 2.)

It wasn't until I saw what Harvey Sacks was doing that I found a method for studying questioning more to my liking. His method, now called conversational analysis, is similar to the central method of linguistics, particularly as practiced by Chomsky, although practiced without special attention by generations of linguists. (A more detailed presentation of conversational analysis is given in Chapter 3.) The basic methodological criterion is one of reproduction or regeneration of social events. The phenomena under study are assumed to be explained if a set of elements and rules for using those elements can be proposed that reproduce instances of the phenomena. For linguists the basic unit for reproduction is taken to be the sentence, and the elements and rules for reproducing sentences are collectively called a grammar. One criterion of success of the grammar is the degree to which a novice can be taught how to write correct sentences by following the grammar, and—by adapting the model of the written language to talk—how well he can be taught to speak the language. Thus, it seemed to me that I could make progress on how to do interviewing by seeking to reproduce responses to questions.

I soon realized that this methodological criterion, virtually unknown in sociology, was independent from the central statistical criterion used in sociology, the level of significance. (Perhaps that independence accounts for the fact that sociology and linguistics, though both addressed to the study of social phenomena, have had very little contact
over the years.) That the two are independent of each other can be seen from the following example. Suppose a sociologist came into linguistics prepared to use his statistical criterion to discover the laws of written language. Having agreed with the linguists that the object of study should be the sentence, he would go about defining variables on sentences that he supposed would be useful in the search for these laws. Let us assume that he decides to count the number of verbs per sentence in a large corpus of randomly selected sentences, and the number of nouns in those same sentences. He would then produce two numbers per sentence, and might decide to use the product-moment correlation coefficient, $r$, to relate the two variables. Suppose he finds a high positive correlation coefficient, $r = +0.90$. After the proper test of significance, he would probably conclude that he had a statistically significant coefficient, and might propose that—if replicated—there is a scientific law that says either that nouns cause verbs, or that verbs cause nouns. It is also possible that the two are implicated in a larger system of causation mediated by other, as yet unknown variables.¹

The linguists would, I assume, laugh at this approach, without for a minute denying the finding. They would respond that there was little chance that this finding and the collection of findings so produced would be able to meet their own criterion, reproducing sentences by rule. The statistical approach is fine for checking frequency statements, e.g., that sentences contain the same number of nouns and verbs, but not for discovering the rules of the grammar.

It also became clear that there were both advantages and disadvantages to the use of this criterion. One advantage for sociology is that the reproduction criterion is expressly designed to deal with that fundamental stumbling block in present sociological methods, the problem of sequences of social events. The statistical methods of the field simply do not attack problems of sequence in any but the most cumbersome of ways, e.g., through panel analysis or path analysis. One disadvantage is that the criterion can only be used at the moment on the smallest of social units, just above the linguist’s sentence. It is clearly silly at present to propose that a social class could be reproduced, or a war reproduced, or the problem of crime reproduced.

Thus, my first reason for studying how Americans respond to questions is to reveal some of the implicit cultural practices on which the sociological method of interviewing rests. I believe that the reproduction criterion provides a method that makes this analysis possible.

My second reason for pursuing this approach is this. I want to introduce a harder kind of description into sociology than we presently have, by forcing sociological description to meet a harder criterion than
it does now. Put simply, I think all present sociological description is vague. The attempt to meet the reproduction criterion will force the removal of some of this vagueness by taking explicit account of a variety of implicit and unseen conditions to make the rules do the work of reproduction.

With this introduction the questions of this study can be stated. First, in the sense of the reproduction criterion, how do Americans respond to questions? Second, how useful is the reproduction criterion likely to be in sociology?

NOTE

1 More carefully, "nouns" should be replaced by "nouniness" and "verbs" by "verbiness" to reflect their definition as variables.
INTERVIEWING IN SOCIOLOGY:
A BRIEF REVIEW

Sandra Halberstam

This essay presents a selective review of the literature on interviewing. The review is made to document the argument that in spite of these studies very little is known about the process of interviewing. Further, it is argued that that lack of knowledge cannot be substantially removed through the usual variable approach that seeks the laws of interviewing by means of traditional statistical methods. Literature more relevant to the present study is reviewed in Chapter 3.

This essay is divided into two sections. Section One seeks to display some of the central ideas of four books on interviewing. While differential emphases and interests are manifest, the four works presented are united by their common conception of the interview as an instrument for data collection. As with any scientific measurement device, the chief problems with the interview are those of validity and reliability. The major task is to keep the measurement process error free. Culling from the relevant literature, Section Two concentrates on this issue. At the end of this section, we point to the inevitability of error in the interview as traditionally conceived, and touch upon the suggestion put forth by Cicourel that the interview be treated as a topic for investigation rather than a resource to aid investigation.

SECTION I

This section deals with four books on interviewing. That we could have chosen to include a greater number of books or others is obvious.
However, we feel that these represent major works in the field and that the inclusion of additional works would be repetitious. Furthermore, our purpose is not to be exhaustive but rather to present an adequate display of the literature in the field. First we shall discuss the two general works selected, namely Interviewing (Richardson, Dohrenwend and Klein, 1965) and The Dynamics of Interviewing (Kahn and Cannell, 1957) and then we shall treat the more specialized works, namely The Art of Asking Questions (Payne, 1951) and The Focused Interview (Merton, Fiske and Kendall, 1956).

Both Kahn and Cannell and Richardson, et al. define the interview as a method for data collection which may be described as a distinct pattern of interaction involving mutual influence between the interviewer and the interviewee, the purpose of which is to obtain valid and reliable information. For both sets of authors respondent cooperation is essential for the successful conduct of the interview. Kahn and Cannell address this problem in Lewinian terms by constructing possible “psychological fields” for possible respondents. Richardson, et al. deal with the problem of respondent participation in a looser though lengthier fashion, touching upon such factors as “altruism,” “intellectual satisfaction,” and “demands of the interview.” Furthermore, they discuss factors which may influence respondent motivation such as the power structure of the community, the degree of communication among respondents, and informal leaders which are neglected by Kahn and Cannell. Even if the respondent is willing to cooperate, validity is not automatically conferred upon the information received. For, while conscious motivation to distort may be absent, the respondent may be unable to provide the information sought or unconsciously engage in distortion. Various techniques are thus put forth to help produce validity and reliability. Both sets of authors discuss such standard devices as direct versus indirect questions, open versus closed questions, leading questions, and sequencing. The function of the interviewer is, therefore, to maintain a balance between the need for adequate respondent participation and the need for accurate information. The balance point will shift according to the nature of the interview situation; hence, which combination of techniques to use will depend upon the purpose of the interview, the type of respondent, the type of interviewer, etc. According to Kahn and Cannell, for example, closed questions are most appropriate when the following situation pertains: the level of information is constant across respondents and that level is known; opinions regarding the subject under investigation are relatively structured; there are a limited and known number of frames of reference relevant to the interview situation. As
Richardson, et al. indicate, if the responses to closed questions "are to be valid, the questions must mean to the respondent exactly what they mean to the interviewer. The limited-response interview appears, therefore, to be appropriate when interviewer and respondent share a common vocabulary relevant to the issues and alternatives to be included in the interview" (p. 263). Similarly, conditions most suitable for using the open question are laid out. Kahn and Cannell generally advocate a non-directive clinical technique (as developed by Rogers), appropriately adjusted to the information getting interview. Richardson, et al. emphasize that directiveness varies throughout the interview and that relative effectiveness of a direct or indirect approach may similarly vary with the type of respondent. The authors in contrast to Kahn and Cannell suggest that greater rather than less control on the part of the interviewer is desirable for obtaining more and more relevant information. Experiments which they conducted indicate that there were a higher proportion of relevant statements when respondents were asked closed as opposed to open questions.

While general features of the question-answer process are dealt with by both sets of authors, the essential building blocks of the process are ignored, namely the words which make up the questions, the threads which compose the fabric of meaning. To our knowledge the only book which devoted itself entirely to this task is Stanley Payne's *The Art of Asking Questions*. In the preface, Payne states that the book may be thought of "as a collection of possible considerations for question wording" (p. xi). Payne emphasizes the fact that every question must assume something; however, frequently the underlying assumptions that are taken for granted in posing the question are unwarranted. Much of the book may thus be seen as an exposé of unwarranted assumptions involved in the wording of questions. As a glaring example Payne attacks the notion that "stability of replies" indicates that the question is a meaningful one. On the contrary, according to Payne, "The more meaningless a question is, the more likely it is to produce consistent percentages when repeated. . . . The fact that we get answers to . . . questions is no proof of the pudding. It may only indicate that people like to testify and that they don't want to appear to misunderstand what they think must be a straightforward question" (p. 17). A question may *work*, then, but for the wrong reasons. Indeed, it is often assumed, although unjustifiably so on occasion, that a high proportion of "Don't Know" and "No Opinion" replies means that a question is not a good one. There are situations which would indicate otherwise. For example, if respondents have no basis for an opinion, then a high response rate is
undesirable and receiving or "forcing a choice where none exists is not realistic" (p. 23). What Payne wishes to emphasize is that a high response rate is not necessarily desirable and should not be used as an automatic criterion of good questioning procedure.

Payne is keenly aware of the problems of meaning. Complicated terminology may obviously present comprehension problems. However, even simple words are liable to cause problems in interpretation. The same questions may be assigned opposite meaning. Even factual answers to well-understood questions are liable to kinds of misunderstanding. Indeed, it is the commonplace that people take most for granted. Since "the phenomenon of unobservance" is typical, "its result is that answers come not in terms of the facts as they exist but in terms of what the respondent thinks the facts ought to be" (p. 29).

Payne goes on to consider various types of questions, documenting their virtues and vices with copious examples. Substantial differences, for example, may be obtained with closed questions, with implied alternatives, and with explicitly stated alternatives. He discusses such phenomena as the order in which alternatives are presented, the tendency of respondents to choose the middle figures in a list of numbers, the problems incurred by double-barreled questions, etc. Toward the middle of the book Payne examines the meanings of words. All kinds of problems lie in wait for us, even with the simplest and most familiar words. Words may have multiple meanings, they may have more than one pronunciation, they may have homonyms.

Having presented the numerous problems in constructing a good question, Payne closes by providing us with a checklist of 100 considerations to aid in the construction of properly worded questions.

Finally, we come to The Focused Interview, which is concerned with a particular type of interviewing technique. The focused interview is distinguished by the following characteristics: "First, . . . the persons interviewed are known to have been involved in a particular situation. . . . Secondly, . . . the structure of this situation (has) been provisionally analyzed. . . ." Thirdly, this provisional analysis serves as the basis for an "interview guide." Fourthly, the interview focuses on the respondents' "definitions of the situation" (p. 3). The focused interview is thus a respondent-centered interview. The overall strategy recommended by the authors is nondirective. According to them, a nondirective strategy best promotes the attainment of an effective focused interview in terms of the criteria set out: appropriate range, specificity, depth, and the identification of the respondents' personal context.

As the title page states, the book is intended to be "a manual of problems and procedures" with regard to the focused interview. The
possibility for such a manual rests upon the authors' assumption "that there are recurrent situations and problems in the focused interview, many of which can be effectively handled by communicable and teachable procedures. From this standpoint, the 'art of interviewing' consists of the following elements:

1. recognition of typical situations and problems.

2. knowledge of probably effective and previously developed techniques for coping with each type of situation; and

3. skill in the application of these procedures" (p. 17).

In short, the book consists of a collection of do's and don'ts regarding interviewing procedures, with illustrations of points from actual interview protocols. Despite the catalogue of rules presented, the authors conclude that "there are few hard and fast rules for the focused interview" (p. 53). Indeed, the focused interview, as is the case with the interview in general, remains an art which is not reducible to a set of precise formulas.

Having reviewed the four books, we emphasize that although each sees the interview in a different focus, the image that emerges is substantially the same. The interview is a measurement device whose purpose is to collect valid and reliable information. As with any measurement process, the interview is liable to distortion due to human fallibility. Hence, the chief task of researchers has been the identification of error and its subsequent control and/or elimination. It is to this problem that we turn in the next section.

SECTION II

The recognition that error is inevitable in the interview has resulted in a voluminous literature concerned with the discovery and remedy of error. Indeed, any theoretical model developed to account for the interview as an observable empirical regularity must come to grips with the error problem. Error may be loosely defined as anything which contributes to or inhibits the results, relationships, etc., which has not been taken into account initially. Despite the extensive literature, a precise and complete definition of error is avoided and is perhaps ultimately impossible. For at some point, collaboration is necessary on the part of the reader in order to see what error means.

The error problem is closely intertwined with the concepts of validity and reliability. In relation to error arising from the interviewer, Hyman comments that "one must somehow balance the gains in reduction of inter-interviewer variability that come from standardization against the
possible loss of validity due to the inflexibility of the procedures for the range of circumstances, the constraints placed upon the interviewer's insight, and the loss of informality” (Hyman, 1954, p. 30). In relation to error arising from the respondent, validity problems revolve about issues concerning the respondent’s memory and truthfulness. Kinsey found that incidence data were more accurate than frequency data. However, the results of a survey conducted in Detroit indicated that when social pressure operates, errors in incidence data may vary “from nearly zero to half of the responses” (Parry and Crossley, 1950, p. 76). The fact that social pressure frequently results in invalidity suggests the necessity for caution in accepting even so-called factual data on the basis of face validity (Parry and Crossley, 1950; Hyman, 1954; Weiss and Dawis, 1960).

Furthermore, the interview as a form of self report is always suspect. Factors which cast doubt on the validity of self reports, include selective perception, and recollection, as well as sensitivity to the testing situation (Gorden, 1956; Webb and Salancik, 1966). By the very fact that we study a situation we may influence it. Even if the interviewer remains unidentified, Riecken concludes that it is highly probable “that observers cannot avoid exercising some influence on behavior and beliefs” of subjects (Riecken, 1956, p. 212). The reverse situation may occur as well. A problem or idea which the researcher has initially conceived may be dissipated into thin air as a result of influence exercised by subjects. In fact, the influence of subjects may be so pervasive that “the interviewer unwittingly becomes instrumental in 'murdering' the idea as a result of some process of acculturation” (New, 1956, p. 214).

An important, though neglected, source of bias may be silence. Since silence is an ambiguous response it is subject to diverse and conflicting interpretations. (See Biderman, 1960, for more detailed information relevant to the silence problem.) Of course, the interviewer must be able to distinguish “productive silence” from “dead silence.” In any case, a general rule is that silence should not be broken by a chain of questions, because the interview is likely to be brought to a standstill. Instead, the troublesome question should be paraphrased—as a single question—and if no answer is forthcoming, the interviewer should take some notice of the reaction and proceed with the interview schedule (Merton, Fiske and Kendall, 1956).

Another variant of the silence problem dealt with in the interview literature is the non-answer or non-response problem which appears in several guises. As item non-response it is a widespread phenomenon and is patterned according to respondent characteristics such as age and sex.
While the consequences of item non-response on parameter estimates is difficult to ascertain, their reliability may be reduced considerably. Ferber, therefore, suggests that “an adjustment for such non-response [is] desirable” (Ferber, 1966, p. 415). Non-response in the form of questionnaire-return bias is typical of blue collar populations and certain other populations, and may affect the nature of the relationship of the variables under investigation (Schwirian and Blaine, 1966). Along similar lines, Eckland discovered, through the use of prodding techniques to increase mail-back returns, that the degree of accessibility of respondents may influence the results as well. For the less accessible respondents may exhibit the characteristic under investigation more frequently than the more accessible respondents (Eckland, 1965).

If interviewing has such a high risk level, then why not dispense with it altogether? Part of the answer is, as Hyman points out, that we have no choice. If we are to study certain kinds of human behavior, we must use whatever tools are available, albeit imperfect ones. The best that we may hope for, then, is to locate the source of error, attempt to control it, and thereby reduce its effects. In connection with this problem, Hansen, Hurwitz and Pritzker suggest that the principle of highest accuracy be abandoned. Instead they propose a cost-benefit type analysis to determine an optimal level of accuracy by balancing losses due to bias against costs of greater precision (Hansen, Hurwitz, and Pritzker, 1953).

Decisions regarding accuracy levels must be based upon knowledge regarding source, type, and extent of error. For, as Berry reports, people apparently trust accounts of events about which they are ignorant (Berry, 1967). And in our ignorance we may do likewise. For acceptable accuracy levels vary with the degree of expertise and involvement of the audience. As the degree of expertise and involvement increases, the boundary of indifference to error shrinks and must be taken into consideration when accuracy limits are fixed.

Maximizing accuracy means minimizing error, which presupposes the ability to locate error and to control it. And at every step, the interview is fraught with the danger of error. Error may arise from initial technical procedures such as sampling and selection. After the data has been collected, error may be introduced through data processing procedures such as counting, punching, coding and so forth. Errors resulting from such processes are in theory comparatively easy to control. “Control of processing errors,” for example, “can usually be achieved through verification procedures” (Hansen, Hurwitz, Marks and Mauldin, 1951, p. 147). Verification procedures, however, are usually performed by “hired hand researchers” who are likely to engage in a variety of “cheating”
techniques which compound rather than reduce error (Roth, 1966). Even worse, Rosenthal's work on experimenter bias shows that investigators will make unconscious errors in procedure so that the hypotheses they are testing will be borne out (Rosenthal, 1966).

An important task of research design is the construction of the questionnaire or interview schedule. Both interviewer and respondent error are frequently related to type of question, question order, etc. Beyond the bald statement that such a relationship exists there is usually scant treatment of the issue. Thus, Ferber and Wales assert "that interviewer bias is a fairly frequent phenomenon and depends at least as much on the question being asked as on the interviewer himself" (Ferber and Wales, 1952, p. 127). Stock and Hochstim find "that [a particular] question . . . was in this case some kind of freak. The high proportion of interviewer variance observed for the probability sample was apparently not caused by one interviewer's behaving very differently from the rest . . ." (Stock and Hochstim, 1951, pp. 331-332). Saying that the question was "some kind of a freak" merely demonstrates a lack of knowledge about the activity of questioning. Evidence of the relationship between the questioning process and respondent error is provided in a study by Ferber which indicates that item non-response increases "for questions requiring thought or effort on the part of the respondent" (Ferber, 1966, p. 414). Ferber, however, does not show us how to differentiate between those questions requiring thought and those not requiring thought. A final study may be mentioned in which several respondents were "interviewed twice with the same questionnaire within a time interval of less than one hour . . . ." However, "the results of the two interviews bear almost no resemblance to each other." The results "seem to be nothing but answers at random . . . . This was, luckily, an extreme and unusual finding . . . ." (Hyman, 1950, p. 365). Such a description, however, neither accounts for the problematic nature of any findings, nor sheds any light on the relationship between the question-answer process and error.

It is apparent that interview studies do not engage in any deep analysis of the question-answer process which somehow mediates the occurrence or nonoccurrence of error. The core of the problem is that the question-answer process is not a self-contained one. Thus, in different contexts an identical question may be a loaded or extreme item, a vague or an explanatory item. Error, then, is not an intrinsic quality of a question, but a function of the investigator's purpose. Litwak states the problem well: "If bias is a function not only of wording, but also of purpose, must we redefine 'bias' every time our research is for a new
Interviewing in sociology: A brief review

purpose?” (Litwak, 1956, p. 184). Stated somewhat differently, we must not merely look at which words are used, but how the context is involved in the question-answer process as well.

One consideration of context is in terms of the rules of the game of interviewing. It is only through appropriate orientation to the rules, that a successful, i.e., valid, interview is possible. A fundamental assumption of interviewing is that information freely given is subject to least distortion; hence, “the rules of interviewing are designed to conserve the neutrality of the interviewer or to facilitate the self-expression of the respondent” (Caplow, 1956, p. 165). As Kahn and Cannell maintain, the interviewer must be “amoral” or “non-evaluative.” Too little as well as too much rapport are equally undesirable. Extrapolating from Williams’ findings regarding the bias potential of threatening questions (Williams, 1964), threatening interviewers may similarly be regarded as a source of bias. Apropos too much rapport, Dohrenwend, et al. find that status homophily leads to overrapport, which in turn increases the likelihood of bias (Dohrenwend, Colombotos and Dohrenwend, 1968). What is essential is that the respondent see the interviewer as a neutral individual. What neutrality is, then, depends upon the respondent’s perception. Dexter, thus, discovered in the course of his experience, that when an interviewer represents an “enlightened” point of view, ordinary methods of producing neutrality are not only insufficient but may even backfire. In fact, a simple declaration of neutrality conveyed the impression that the interviewer was lying in some cases. In order to achieve neutrality in such a situation, Dexter found that the interviewer must violate the procedural rules for producing neutrality. To be considered neutral, the interviewer had to be neutral on the informant’s side—which is ordinarily considered the opposite of neutrality (Dexter, 1956).

Aware of the fact that members create the particular setting in which they operate, investigators have paid increasing attention to context as an integral element of the question-answer process. Getzels’ formulation of the question-answer process emphasizes the role of context in the production of valid information. According to Getzels a question triggers an internal response set which is then assimilated to the situational context. Finally a response is formulated “that will facilitate or at least not threaten the respondent’s adjustment in the light of personal needs relative to the situational demands” (Getzels, 1954, p. 85). Similarly, Gorden indicates that the same question in one context may be largely objective and factual, whereas in another context it may be highly subjective and threatening. “What is in one social situation a mere ‘objective’ fact, as, for example, the respondent’s age, may be a
devastating threat in another." He relates the shift in meaning to the concept of depth: "The 'depth' of any item of information depends upon its meaning for the respondent, which, in turn, depends upon how he perceives the relationship between the information and the total social context, in which it is given" (Gorden, 1956, p. 158).

The significance of interviewer neutrality as a necessary basis for the possibility of a valid interview should not be underestimated. But even if the interviewer does remain neutral, other elements of the interview situation may affect the validity of the results. As Payne points out, replies to a question may not be related to the meaning of the question at all. Instead, the answers may be consistently patterned after some "known (or unknown) predisposition such as the tendency to choose the last alternative, the inclination to read a meaning into a word based on its similarity to known words, the middle ground proclivity, or the aura effect of general familiarity" (Payne, 1950-1951, p. 692). And "to complicate the interviewer's task further, the respondent does not say 'I have forgotten' but usually continues talking, filling in the gaps in his memory with whatever his imagination suggests" (Gorden, 1956, p. 160). Furthermore, it is well known that interview results may differ according to different characteristics of the interviewer such as age, sex, class, and race. Interview results may also differ according to different aspects of the interviewing situation: (a) presence or absence of a third party (see Taietz, 1962); (b) physical details of the setting (see Inbau and Reid, 1967, for uncanny attention to and usage of details of setting); (c) spatial arrangement (see Merton, Fiske, and Kendall, 1956); (d) type of setting, such as prison (see Johnston, 1956) and (e) length of the interview (see Gross and Mason, 1953).

In taking account of this problem investigators have attempted the precise specification of the particular context in which an interview takes place. Recommendation of the specification principle consists in the addition of contextual variables to the definition of the interview. Then, by holding the social situation constant, problems of validity and reliability are eliminated or at least considerably reduced. Specification of the social situation, however, provides no solution to the problem. For in numerous ways the solution itself partakes of the same difficulty that it seeks to solve.

As we have previously indicated, specification is directed toward solving two interrelated problems. First, specification leads to the identification of biasing factors and (hopefully) to their subsequent elimination or control, thereby assuring us that the observed relationship is (more clearly) due to the hypothesized variables. Second, specification
permits the reproducibility of the observed relationship under comparable conditions. Briefly, specification is an attempt to provide for both the validity and the reliability of findings.

The specification solution is problematic on several counts. First, studies conducted in order to correct deficiencies (i.e., to eliminate and/or to control biasing factors) themselves require correction. Indeed, the list of confounding variables is infinite. Hence, the institution of controls merely leads to an infinite regress. The specification principle turns out to be a multiplication of the problem instead of a possible solution. Second, studies conducted under (supposedly) comparable conditions often lead to contradictory results. The materials provided by Hyman, Rosenthal, and others, clearly demonstrate "that one could not possibly specify the literal moves, thoughts, utterances, and the like of the interviewer and respondent or any two actors" (Cicourel, 1964, p. 89). To insure comparability with experimental rigor is impossible. "Thus, no matter how much stress is placed on training and standardized schedules, the material Hyman, et al. present is convincing in its demonstration of the presence of meaning structures anchored in idiosyncratic, situational, and differential cultural attachments and definitions. The routinization of such meaning structures would make interviewing procedures sterile and devoid of the very characteristics that make it part of, and a basic source of data on, social interaction and communication in everyday life." (Cicourel, 1964, p. 97).

The implication of the foregoing is that every situation is a unique one, with the result that comparability in the sense of strictly identical properties across situations is untenable from a theoretical point of view. Yet practically speaking, we are aware that somehow the world hangs together; there is social order out there. How is it possible for members to engage in socially organized activities, to know what to do and to know how to do it, if each activity is unique? The key lies in what Garfinkel terms the phenomenon of "clear-for-all-practical-purposes," which consists of devices and procedures which permit members to use their knowledge in order to transform unique situations into situations that are "clear-for-all-practical-purposes."

Bias is an unavoidable, or more accurately, an essential, feature of social interaction (both for the interviewer and the respondent); for the actor's perception of the world is vague, occasional, and retrospective-prospective in nature (Garfinkel, 1967). Any theory, then, which does not take these features into account, will treat their occurrence as error. "Hyman, et al. document this time and again when they refer to the respondent or to the interviewer as 'undemocratic,'
'biased,' 'apathetic,' and so on. The problem is rarely viewed as an unavoidable dilemma of doing research" (Cicourel, 1964, p. 93). Reliability in the hard sense, then, is an unattainable goal. In fact, we must engage in procedures in order to transform particular studies into studies which are comparable "for-all-practical-purposes." It is thus that reliability is achieved. Even if we admit to the practicality of our procedures and results, the unresolved question is: How do we do it?

A related and perhaps more fundamental issue may be raised: With reference to what are we trying to achieve reliability? Irwin Deutscher states the issue well: "We have been absorbed in measuring the amount of error which results from inconsistency among interviewers, or inconsistency among items on our instruments. We concentrate on consistency without concern with what it is we are being consistent about or whether we are consistently right or wrong. As a consequence we may have been learning a great deal about how to pursue an incorrect course with a maximum of precision" (Deutscher, 1966, p. 241). Even if we are able to reproduce our results perfectly, i.e., reliability is 100%, how can we account for the observed relationship?

The meaning of a relationship, an account of its production, is not possible as long as the nature of the rules governing it remain implicit and unexamined. Indeed, the problem of meaning or validity has been largely ignored or taken for granted by a variety of definitional ploys which are equivalent to "I-say-what-I-mean" and "I-mean-what-I-say," e.g., operational definitions. The problem with such putatively self-contained definitions is that they are not self-contained at all. In coding a set of events or items as instances of an operationalized category scheme, for example, coders used knowledge outside the coding instructions in order to recognize the relevance of the coding instructions to what was being coded in the first place. Such outside knowledge, "ad hoc considerations" as Garfinkel puts it, is not subject to elimination through specification procedures. Indeed, "to treat instructions as though ad hoc features in their use were a nuisance, or to treat their presence as grounds for complaint about the incompleteness of instructions, is very much like complaining that if the walls of a building were only gotten out of the way one could see better what was keeping the roof up" (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 22). In short, the specification approach cannot solve the problem of meaning. Furthermore, as Blumer indicates, sociological concepts are basically "sensitizing concepts" which are defined "by general sense or understanding and not by specification" (Blumer, 1954, p. 6). Besides, "definitions which are provided to such terms are usually no clearer than the concepts which they seek to define" (Ibid., p. 5).
Indeed, any list of instructions, rules, etc., generated to define a concept, in itself will not enable us to decide whether any particular event, activity, etc., is an instance of that concept or not. "Seemingly we have to infer that any given instance in our natural empirical world and its content are covered by one of our concepts." And "since what we infer does not express itself in the same fixed way, we are not able to rely on fixed objective expressions to make the inference" (Ibid., p. 8). In other words, in deciding the fit between an indicator and a concept or between an event and a category, we move outside the definition in order to arrive at a decision. We invoke our common-sense knowledge, employing "ad hoc-ing procedures," procedures which are not included in the stated procedures for producing and using definitions.

It seems, then, that: "(1) the diversity of behavior named [in any concept or category] resists distillation in a formula or fixed calculus, and (2) we cannot use any formula only and exclusively because it has to be interpreted, and to do such interpretive work, requires us to move beyond the list, which presupposes settling the very questions which the list is supposed to resolve [in the first place]" (Blum, 1970, p. 35).

To employ any such list as a departure point for investigation is to ignore or at best to assume meaning rather than to explicate it. The variables which constitute such a list are endpoints of much socially organized activity and therefore are shot through with common culture. To treat such variables as "given," puts the sociologist in a parallel position with a common-sense member. He, as they, relies on implicit meanings to provide a reasonable base, thereby assuming the validity of his enterprise. Instead, the task of the sociologist should be to describe how such "givens" are possible. The problem is how to make the categorization problem observable. How do members do labeling? In labeling, members are organizing and assigning meaning to the world; they are producing the social order. In order to describe the social organization of any phenomenon, then, we must describe its production, i.e., how do members do it? Describing how members do it means locating a set of rules that will reproduce the data. Such rules may serve as a set of instructions on how to produce the phenomenon, thereby providing a basis for the possibility of the phenomenon in the first place.

Much of the foregoing presentation has been in the nature of a critique of a widely accepted research paradigm, for which the major criticism here is inescapable. First and foremost, the paradigm of variable research in its current form cannot provide a solution to the problems for which the paradigm was originally created. Thus, the validity of the paradigm is highly questionable (Kuhn, 1965). The paradigm has ceased
to be fruitful and the current situation is reminiscent of the situation described by Kuhn as "crisis": "The proliferation of competing articulations, the willingness to try anything, the expression of explicit discontent, the recourse to philosophy and to debate over fundamentals, all these are symptoms of a transition from normal to extraordinary research" (Kuhn, 1965, p. 90).

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE?

The central point of this review, that it is impossible to control error in the interview, is certainly not new. And we have found that traditional survey men, in relaxed, undefensive moments, readily admit all that we say. In return, they ask two questions: What do you propose that we do about it and won’t any proposal from you be subject to the same impossibility of removing error?

Our answer to the first question is reassuring. Keep right on doing interviews and surveys the way you are, with one exception: call them practical rather than scientific methods. Not only would such modesty be becoming, but the word practical will help us to focus on what we don’t know far more than does the word scientific. Our answer to the second question is, quite simply: Yes; no research that we do will escape the problem. But we believe that if the process of questioning is studied directly through the method of reproduction, a great deal more can be learned, practical though it may be. In the next essays we will carry out some practical studies of our own that we think will illuminate the problems of interviewing discussed earlier.

NOTE

1 This essay was written by Sandra Halberstam during 1970 when she was with the Department of Sociology, New York University. A search for additional literature since then was undertaken in 1976 by Elliot Linzer, Program in Sociology, Graduate School and University Center, CUNY. Nothing new of this kind was discovered.
CHAPTER

OVERVIEW

This chapter is divided into two parts, some background decisions and assumptions made in the study, and an overview of the results.

BACKGROUND DECISIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS

Since a major goal of this analysis is the description of what happens in responses to questions, I take my material from one of the places where they occur, in face-to-face conversation among two or more speakers of American English. A central decision was to work only from transcripts of these conversations. I was not a participant in any of them, nor did I ever hear any of the tape recordings of them, nor did I do any of the transcribing. Hence, I can only imagine the various settings, the appearances of the conversationalists, the nonverbal aspects of the talk, and the like, things that I must do to make sense of the question-response sequences that occur. Worse, I imagine them at second hand, through the eyes of the transcriber. I believe that for my present purpose this degree of removal from the events themselves is not a serious obstacle. The reader must judge for himself to what degree the results of my analysis are affected by my choice of data. (However, I have done nothing that differs in more than degree from what other sociologists do. All sociologists must construe their data to make sense of it, and that doesn't occur through a magical radiation direct from the data into the mind of the researcher.)

Second, I view the relation of the question-response sequence to the conversation and setting of which it is a part as one of foreground and
background. I assume that for the conversationalists the question or the response is the focus of their interest at the moment it occurs, while the other features are secondary, though immediately focusable depending on the results of the constant monitoring that goes on. (See Chapter 8 on constant monitoring.) There is an obvious analogy here to the concepts of foreground and background in Gestalt psychology; see, for example, Katz (1950). The position is developed by Schutz (1962) and by Garfinkel (1967).

A few comments about my conception of conversation and setting may be useful. By a conversation I mean coordinated talk among two or more persons, having at least the following features: (a) The conversationalists are normal native members of the same culture, with normal hearing and understanding ability, and have normal competency in the use of their native language. (b) The conversationalists are within face-to-face hearing distance of one another. (c) One talks while others listen. The regulation of this feature has been discussed by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) in their work on turn-taking in conversation. (d) The conversationalists must talk responsively to each other in their turns. Otherwise, they would be like children playing side by side, but not together.1

By setting I mean such features as the following: the physical features of the place in which the conversation occurs; other activities besides talking and listening in which the conversationalists are engaged; the social insignia that the conversationalists display to one another; the history of the relationship among these persons, if any; the accumulating history of the present conversation as each utterance settles into the past; etc. All these features are not what they really are when subject to tests of accuracy, but what each partner to the conversation takes them to be. The conversationalist’s awarenesses or constructions can change on a moment-to-moment basis, as features not yet noticed become noticed. Hence, the setting is not a static thing; the conversationalists change it constantly, though mainly in little ways.

Third, I, the analyst, take the position of the hearer throughout this analysis. Thus, I ask the conditional question: Given a question, how did H respond to it? Then, given H’s response, S becomes the new hearer, and the question can be applied to him: Given H’s response, how did S respond to it? I take this position, rather than the position of the actor (speaker) because I think the hearer must evaluate S’s question and display that evaluation by his response to the question. It is those evaluations that I want to reach, because they reveal the social machinery that both S and H share, the cultural maxims that guide responses to questions.
However, I do not wish to slur over the fact that H’s evaluation of S’s question is unavailable to me. I have nothing more than what H said in response to a question as given in the transcript to judge what his evaluation was. And this unavailability is an essential one, not merely the result of a limitation to transcripts. Even if I knew H and had been present during the conversation, I would have had access only to more pieces of information such as found in demeanor and other nonverbal actions. I still would not have access to H’s evaluation, because that can only be a matter of my inference, not my knowledge.

Thus, I, the researcher, am inevitably in and through this analysis at every point. I am much like a person who overhears the conversations of other people. I make no claim to complete objectivity, though I do claim that I am a normally competent member of the culture. In essence, I adopt the position that Bales takes in his method of Interaction Process Analysis (1950), but give up the claim to be—or to be made into, through training—a scientific coding instrument.

The analysis here is clearly the product of my own reactions to the transcripts. To the degree that H and I share the same culture, I can claim that my reactions were identical to his reactions, but, of course, I do not know, nor can ever know, to what degree that is true. However, I believe that this problem is only a minor one for the merely practical studies carried out here, and not a fundamental weakness. While I could argue the point, it really comes down to the amount of successful instruction I can give to readers on responses to questions. That is a matter for them to decide.

Finally, I note that S, the speaker, is also a hearer even while speaking. He monitors his own utterance as he produces it, just as does H. As will be seen later, he corrects what he regards as mistakes in his questions; he removes questions from the floor by answering them himself; etc.

Fourth, I give up the concept of rule in any strong sense, and substitute the concept of maxim, following Sacks (1974). I take the position that maxims only guide behavior; that members use them as necessary; that they don’t follow them in a rigid way. My belief can best be stated in the negative: H cannot be confined to any set of responses to a question required by some rule or set of rules. There is no physical necessity that requires him to say anything in response to any particular question, no matter how likely it is that he will do only one thing, e.g., give a direct answer. Both S and H know that the other may do anything at all in their respective turns to talk (and disrupt the turn-taking system, too). They may earn negative attributions for varying from the expected set of responses, but they cannot be held to it. In this way I include Garfinkel’s concept of the “etcetera” property right from the beginning.
in my definition of rule. The “etcetera” property applies to every rule without exception, and says, roughly: “Use this rule appropriately, even if that means acting in contradiction to the rule” (Garfinkel, 1967). For me, then, a maxim is a rule plus the “etcetera” property.

Thus, H may do anything technically possible in his reaction to S’s question and suffer the consequences of whatever negative attribution S puts on the reaction. A maxim is just another constraint to be attended in the production of a reaction.

However, the problem is worse than this. Following Garfinkel, I think many violations of maxims are not even noticed by participants and observers of the actions involved. The basic problem seems to rest in the fact that a large number of maxims apply simultaneously to every question and every response that S and H may make, maxims concerning the grammar of the language, maxims concerning etiquette that define proper gestures and proper tone of voice at that point, maxims concerning how to respond to a question, etc. The problem is that the maxims aren’t all in one harmonious whole, so that all may be followed simultaneously. On many occasions, some conflict with others. If the focus is on some of the maxims, then the others may recede into the background and not be attended closely. Hence, violations in the background may not be noticed at all by S and H. They don’t become violations until I, the analyst, discover them through intensive study, something not normally done by the conversationalists themselves.

Some of the decisions and assumptions that I make here place me close to the group of researchers in sociology called conversational analysts. The leading figure was Harvey Sacks; his program is being developed very ably by Emanuel Schegloff, Gail Jefferson, James Schenkein, Anita Pomerantz, Marilyn Merritt, Richard Frankel, and others. In my opinion, the best piece of analysis from this group to date is the work on taking turns in conversation, and it is in part the model for the present work (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974). Other research has analyzed ways to begin conversation (Schegloff, 1968), ways to end conversation (Schegloff and Sacks, 1974), and “side sequences” in conversation, e.g., correction sequences that one speaker initiates when he corrects a mistake another has made (Jefferson, 1972).

However, only one paper has appeared directly on the topic of question-response sequences from this group. That is a paper by Merritt (1976). (A number of insights about question-response sequences are also contained in the papers mentioned above.) In an analysis of conversation during customer-server encounters Merritt proposes four ways in which two question-answer pairs can be linked together: by chaining, by
coupling, by embedding, and by elliptical coupling. (A review of Merritt's results is deferred until Chapter 7.)

Her analysis refines and extends Sacks' concept of "adjacency pair," an important concept informing the present analysis as well. The question-answer pair is a major example of an adjacency pair. Schegloff and Sacks (1974) define the concept of adjacency pair this way: "... Briefly, then, adjacency pairs consist of sequences which properly have the following features: (1) two utterance length, (2) adjacent positioning of component utterances, (3) different speakers producing each utterance . . . (4) relative ordering of parts (i.e., first pair parts precede second pair parts), and (5) discriminative relations (i.e., the pair type of which a first pair part is a member is relevant to the selection among second pair parts)" (p. 238).

The present study differs from Merritt's in several ways: (1) The settings are different. I have only an occasional example from a service setting. (2) My definition of maxim is looser than her definition of rule. (3) My results cover more kinds of responses to questions than hers do. I have tried to include as many different types of response to questions as possible. Where we have looked at the same kind of phenomena, we are in good agreement.

Finally, an important paper in this area is by Goffman (1976). Goffman's paper really presents a program of research for the study of question-response sequences. He is not a conversational analyst, though he shows how that work fits into his conception of the issues involved. His article is difficult to summarize briefly; I mention only one major distinction that he makes, between "system" constraints and "ritual" constraints. System constraints are constraints on a question-response pair that would be in the province of the communication engineer, including "a two-way capability for transceiving acoustically adequate and readily interpretable messages" and "back-channel feedback capabilities for informing on reception while it is occurring" (p. 264). Ritual constraints are constraints of politeness, including honoring the good character and territoriality claims of the other (p. 266).²

However, some of my assumptions are not compatible with conversational analysis, notably my decision to use a loose or porous conception of rule, that I call a maxim.³ I take this point of view from Garfinkel, trying to keep open a path to his notions of the total situatedness of social events, while doing an analysis that appears to deny that position. In effect, I am trying to learn more about his concept of, e.g., indexicality by seeing myself use the practices involved in indexicality to be able to do this study. (See Garfinkel, 1967.)
Goffman’s conclusion in his 1976 paper expresses the position that I take here very well. “Every conversation, it seems, can raise itself by its own bootstraps, can provide its participants with something to flail at, which process in its entirety can then be made the reference of an aside, this side remark then responsively provoking a joking refusal to disattend it. The box that conversation stuffs us into is Pandora’s... Thus the whole framework of conversational constraints—both system and ritual—can become something to honor, to invert, or to disregard, depending as the mood strikes. It’s not that the lid can’t be closed; there is no box” (pp. 310-311). Here, I believe that Goffman and Garfinkel share common ground, even to the imagery that they use. Compare Goffman’s “box” here with Garfinkel’s “boat” in his well-known quip that ethnomethodology is a boat that can’t be sunk, because it has no bottom.

Additional literature on question-response sequences is available from ordinary language philosophers, from linguists who study the pragmatics of language, and from others. Goffman summarizes much of this work, and I refer the interested reader to his paper for other approaches.

In summary, I have in mind a speaker and a hearer who must each juggle a large number of maxims in deciding (not necessarily consciously, of course) what question to ask and what response to give. In some mysterious way those maxims are part of the process of defining every feature of the conversation and setting, as the conversationalists literally create them once more at this instant, so that after the fact everyone will be able to see that a question was asked and a response was given.

OVERVIEW OF THE RESULTS

There are two general purposes to this analysis. The first is to provide a description of some of the kinds of responses that can be made to a question. That will involve both different kinds of questions and their customary responses, and different kinds of response to the same kind of question.

The second purpose is to assess the advantages and disadvantages to the use of the reproduction criterion in a sociological study. This issue was broached in Chapter 1 and will be pursued in Chapter 9.

A brief synopsis of the kinds of responses to questions analyzed here is now given, to keep the reader from getting lost in the detail that follows in Chapters 4-8.

In general, I made an attempt to get “all the way around” the problem. That is, I selected three different activities that members do
when asking and responding to questions that are very different from each other. The idea was to get some sense of the range of things that members can do when asking and responding to questions. The three activities are making requests (Chapters 4-6), announcing and repairing procedural problems (Chapter 7), and denigrating the hearer or speaker (Chapter 8). (A fourth activity, taking turns, is largely ignored here, because it has already been described in my sense by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974.) Each of these activities is conceived to be regulated by maxims, and some central maxims for each are proposed.

The first maxim studied is the chain maxim, proposed by Sacks under the name chain rule. It says the following: “When you are asked a question, respond with a direct answer, and then give the turn back to the questioner.” In effect, this maxim states the central idea of Sacks’ concept of adjacency pair, considered as an instruction to the hearer. I believe that the chain maxim is the dominant one in responding to questions, but the analysis in Chapter 4 shows that this maxim fails massively in its attempt to reproduce responses to questions. (The concept of adjacency pair is reconsidered in Chapter 9.)

The second maxim studied I call the invitation maxim. The maxim assumes a division of questions into general ones and specific proposal ones. General questions are requests for information that do not propose an element of the answer-set in the statement of the question, while specific proposal questions do propose such an element, for confirmation or disconfirmation. A simple pair of examples is this: “What time is it?” (general) and “Is it four o’clock?” (specific proposal). The maxim applies only to specific proposal questions, and says: “If you are asked a specific proposal question, and the answer is the confirming one, follow the chain maxim. If the answer is the disconfirming one, give the disconfirming answer, then give the correct answer, and then give the turn to the questioner.” (The idea is due to Sacks.) To continue the example above, this maxim proposes that the proper response to “Is it four o’clock?” in the disconfirming case is not simply “No.” Rather, it is “No” plus “it’s X o’clock,” where X is the correct time. There is also an elliptic form of the maxim where only the disconfirming answer is given, eliding the direct answer “No.” This analysis is given in Chapter 5. While it reproduces some cases not reproduced by the chain maxim, it too leaves many cases unreproduced, cases to which it appears to apply.

The third maxim studied depends on a shift away from the linguistic kind of maxim discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. I shift now from the form of the utterance, a question, to the work that the question does in the conversation between S and H. Following Searle (1969), it is assumed
that all questions are requests. Thus, I shift my attention from question-response sequences to request-response sequences that begin with questions.

Given this shift to requests, the questions discussed in Chapter 5 can be reread as requests for information, either in general form or in specific proposal form. However, there is another class of requests that I call requests for action (beyond giving information), that can be put in question form with this standard frame (and variants thereof): “Will you do X for me?” (This form can also be used to ask for information; the distinctions are discussed in Chapter 6.)

It is these latter questions that are the subject of the third maxim, the **permission maxim**. The permission maxim is based on what I take to be the central principle for guiding responses to requests (of any kind): the hearer of a request directed to him has the right to agree or refuse to comply with it. Put simply, this says that no member can warrantably force another to do something; he must seek the other’s permission first. The permission maxim, then, is this: If a request is made of you in permission question form, and you agree to comply with the request, respond with an agreement and then do the requested action. If you refuse to comply with it, respond with the disconfirming answer and then give a reason for the refusal. Then give the turn back to the requester. This maxim reproduces some cases not reproduced by the earlier maxims, but also leaves many more unreproduced to which it should apply. The maxim is a generalization of both the chain maxim and the invitation maxim. The analysis is given in Chapter 6.

So far, the maxims have asserted various kinds of response-sets for various kinds of questions. I turn now to a different kind of response, that I call a procedural problem response to a question. By that I mean an announcement by the hearer that something has gone wrong in his receiving of the question, e.g., he has not heard it clearly, or he does not understand what it means. (I use the term in a similar way to the term “misfire” that Austin (1965) uses.) These problems are temporary in the sense that the hearer is still expected to respond to the question once they have been removed. Procedural problems are commonly announced in question form themselves, and give rise to the phenomenon of a question in response to a question.

The maxim studied here is the **procedural problem maxim**: With S’s help, repair any procedural problem in the speaker’s request in question form that makes it difficult or impossible for you to respond intelligently to it. Then respond to the request, using the earlier maxims, and give the turn back to S. Another set of responses to questions, not reproduced
before, is now reproduced, but not all to which the maxim appears to apply. The analysis is given in Chapter 7.

Chapter 8 presents two maxims and a corollary related to denigration in requests. By denigration I mean the classification of H by S in one or more categories that H feels are inferior for him here-and-now. For example, if S tells H: “You are a thief,” H will be denigrated if he feels that the category of thief is inferior for him right now, in the sense that he is better than a thief.

Denigration is not a kind of utterance, like a question, but an evaluation that can be carried in an utterance. Hence, denigration can accompany any utterance, including a question or its response. When it accompanies a question, the hearer has two meanings to handle, the request itself and the denigration. The central maxim guiding H’s response to this kind of request is the denigration maxim: Respond appropriately to any perceived denigration in a request in question form made of you. Then give the turn back to the requester. The most common appropriate response is denigration in return.

Not all denigration is seriously intended or heard, obviously. A lot of it is made in joking or humorous ways, that either lighten the denigration or remove it. The nonseriousness maxim and a corollary for denigration in nonserious requests handle these cases. The nonseriousness maxim says: Do not respond seriously, or only seriously, to requests in question form that you perceive to be nonserious. The corollary says: Do not respond seriously to any perceived denigration that occurs in a request in question form that you perceive to be nonserious.

These maxims allow an additional set of responses to questions to be reproduced, but again not all to which the maxims appear to apply. The analysis is given in Chapter 8.

In summary, the analyses done in Chapters 4-8 propose that the original concept of an answer-set to a question, formed on linguistic grounds, should be replaced by an enlarged, open-ended response-set, containing responses based on the maxims studied. The open-ended character of the response-set indicates that there are further maxims to be found that will contribute new responses to the set. Some of the kinds of phenomena are known already, though not attended here, e.g., interruptions. Further, the set is presently designed for two-person conversation. Its extension to more than two persons will again enlarge it and change it.

No maxim was found to reproduce more than 30% of the cases to which it appears to apply, and in cumulative total only 25% of the total number of question-response sequences studied was reproduced. These
results clearly confirm the notion of porous rules, and even make questionable the existence of these maxims in the culture. Until more work is done, I simply regard these maxims as my working ideas in search of reproducibility.

NOTES

1 A better characterization of conversation is given by Goffman in his 1976 paper.
2 I came upon the Merritt and Goffman papers late in my own analysis, to my detriment. My analysis would have been improved if I had been aware of them at an earlier time.
3 I follow Sacks here, as noted above, but in his earlier work. In his later work he seemed to move in the opposite direction, from maxim to rule. Compare Sacks (1974), originally published in 1973, but largely written much earlier than that, with Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974).
I begin my analysis by studying the chain maxim, a version of Sacks' chain rule:

*Chain Maxim.* When you are asked a question, respond with a direct answer, and then give the turn back to the questioner. (See Sacks, 1966.)

The maxim states the essential idea of Sacks' concept of adjacency pair in the particular case of the question-answer pair. Hence, study of the maxim will help to understand the power of that concept.

The two major concepts in the maxim are question and direct answer. Both need definition. I follow Bolinger (1957:2-5) in my definition of a question. A question is an utterance that meets one or more of the following four criteria:

1. It has interrogative distribution. The fact that an answer has occurred following an utterance can often be used to infer that a question elicited it.
2. It has interrogative syntax. Included here are inverted word orders from the declarative form, e.g., “Do you like it?” from “You do like it”; interrogative words such as *what* and *why* at the beginning of the utterance; and tags such as *isn’t it* in “It’s all right, isn’t it?”
3. It has interrogative intonation, i.e., rising or high pitch at the end of the utterance.
4. It has interrogative gestures, i.e., gestures accompanying the utterance that indicate that it is a question.
More carefully, these criteria define a potential question for the hearer. That I, the analyst, have detected a question in the transcript by using these criteria (or however I do it) does not mean, of course, that the hearer did so.

By a direct answer to a question I mean one of the set of possible assertions of which the question is a transformation. Following Chomsky (1957), a question, a passive sentence, and a negative sentence can be seen as transformations of an active, positive, declarative sentence. I assume that the member learns the maxims of his native language so well that he can quickly make the reverse transformation to the set of possible assertions whenever he is presented with a question. I call this set of assertions the answer-set for the question. One element of the answer-set is correct or preferable, the direct answer of the maxim.

More carefully, the reverse transformation idea holds for questions in general form, i.e., questions like “What time is it?” that do not propose a possible answer in the question. Thus, “What time is it?” is transformed back to “It is what time?” with what known to be equivalent to the unknown $X$, giving rise to “It is $X$ time.” The last assertion stands for the set of possible assertions that could be the answer to the question.\(^1\) However, some questions are in specific proposal form, i.e., questions like “Is it two o’clock?”, that do propose a possible answer in the question. In these cases the reverse transformation provides only one assertion, “It is two o’clock,” which is equivalent to a “Yes” answer to the question. The problem is that the “No” answer to the question is not included in the transformation. To include that possible answer, thus yielding the familiar (Yes, No) answer-set, I assume that members hear the specific proposal question as a variant form of “What time is it?” That produces all the assertions produced by “What time is it?” but now partitioned into two subsets, “It is two o’clock” and “It is not two o’clock.” (This distinction between general and specific proposal questions is developed in Chapter 5.)

There is a third major concept in the maxim, the concept of turn. That concept has been developed by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson in their work on taking turns in conversation (1974). I rely on their work here and do not systematically look at any issue that can be related to the turn-taking system, e.g., interruptions of questions or answers, and pauses between question and answer that are too long.

Initially, I assumed that the chain maxim would explain most of the examples of question-response sequences that I found in my transcripts. Various people that I asked about it agreed with me. Predictions that at least 75% of the examples would follow the chain maxim were common.
The present analysis almost ended before it began, until I decided to check the accuracy of my own belief and these predictions. An account of that check now follows.

**Method**

The question for study, How often is the chain maxim followed? is pursued in the following way. First, I try to locate each question in transcripts of conversations. I then try to determine from the ensuing interaction as reported in the transcripts if the hearer gave a direct answer and then gave the turn back to the questioner. (I infer that the hearer has given the turn back when the questioner makes a second remark immediately following the hearer's response.) If these two conditions hold, I count the question-response sequence as an instance of following the chain maxim.

**Transcripts** I have conducted this analysis on three transcripts. The three are *Verbal Interaction in a Young Married Couple* (Soskin, 1963), the courtroom examination of Russell Sage (from *Laidlaw v. Sage*, 1894), and the excerpts of the Perroni case presented by Szasz (1965).

The transcript given in *Verbal Interaction* consists of three long segments from the conversations between a graduate student and his wife, occasionally involving others, while they are vacationing at a lakeside resort. In exchange for a free vacation the young couple agreed that they would carry or wear a back-pack transmitter that would broadcast their conversation to a receiving station located at the resort. The young man and his wife were encouraged to act as freely as possible at the resort, to be on vacation.

The resort provided housing in large buildings something like motels, in cottages, and in tents. These housing units were located on the shore of a lake about eight or nine miles in length. During most of their stay the young couple lived in a two-room cottage near the edge of the lake.

Other facilities at the resort included a large dining room, a snack bar, an administration building, a lounge, a post office, a small general store, two large recreation buildings, a large auditorium, a golf course, and tennis courts. There were also facilities for boating and swimming.

One of the three segments of the transcript is taken from the conversation of the young couple during their first day at the resort; the other two are taken from their last day there, about two weeks later. The three segments show some of the different activities and settings in which the young couple participated. I partitioned the segments into eight excerpts, each referring more or less to a single activity and setting, as
Table 1 Description of the Excerpts in Verbal Interaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excerpt</th>
<th>Length in time</th>
<th>Number of different speeches\textsuperscript{(a)}</th>
<th>Activity and setting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>about 40 mins.</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>Rowing on the lake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>about 2 hrs. and 20 mins.</td>
<td>1,353</td>
<td>(Varied; see below)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>nearly 30 mins.</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>Having a snack at the snack bar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textit{Breakdown of Excerpt 2}

\begin{tabular}{ll}
2a & 112 & Dressing before breakfast \\
2b & 542 & Conversation over breakfast in the dining room \\
2c & 320 & Beginning to pack to return home \\
2d & 49 & Exchanging an item in the canteen \\
2e & 75 & Going to the crafts building \\
2f & 255 & Doing crafts in the crafts building \\
\hline
\end{tabular}

\textsuperscript{(a)}A "speech" is the set of utterances made by a speaker during his turn to talk.

shown in Table 1. With this partition a check can be made on how closely the chain maxim is followed in different settings.

The second and third transcripts analyzed here are transcripts of courtroom trials. I chose legal transcripts for study to see what would happen to the chain maxim under conditions in which it should be rather strictly followed. I expected that examination of witnesses in a court trial would show very little variation from the chain maxim because lawyers and judges would insist that it be followed.

One legal transcript gives the examination of Russell Sage in the famous \textit{Laidlaw v. Sage} case. It was taken from the official record on appeal following the fourth trial in 1894. I divide it here into the direct examination and the cross-examination of Sage.

Wellman (1962) gives the following summary of the case. In December, 1891, a man named Norcross came to Russell Sage's outer office in the Wall Street area of New York City and handed him a note that said, "This carpet bag I hold in my hand contains ten pounds of dynamite, and if I drop this bag on the floor it will destroy this building in ruins and kill every human being in it. I demand twelve hundred thousand dollars, or I will drop it. Will you give it? Yes or no?" Sage
responded that he would attend to the matter in several minutes, after he had sent a man in his private office away. At that moment a man named Laidlaw came into the outer office and went by the two into the anteroom to Sage's private office to wait for Sage. Sage backed into the anteroom near Laidlaw, and, allegedly, pulled Laidlaw between himself and Norcross, who was still in the outer office. Just then Norcross dropped the carpet bag. The explosion killed him outright, injured Laidlaw seriously, but injured Sage only slightly.

Laidlaw sued Sage on the grounds that Sage had deliberately used him as a human shield. The case was tried four times. The first trial was decided for Sage, but reversed upon appeal. The second trial was decided for Laidlaw, but reversed upon appeal. The third trial ended in a hung jury. The fourth trial was decided in favor of Laidlaw, sustained on first appeal, but reversed in favor of Sage on appeal to a higher court.

The other legal transcript consists of some excerpts from the case of Louis Perroni, presented by Szasz (1965). The matter at issue is whether or not Perroni is sane enough to stand trial on the charges for which he was originally arrested. When arrested, he had been certified by psychiatrists as mentally incompetent to stand trial, and had been incarcerated in mental hospitals for seven years. Szasz appears as an expert witness to testify that Perroni is fit to stand trial; two psychiatrists appear for the state to testify that he is still not fit to stand trial.

In the Perroni case I partitioned the transcript presented by Szasz into six excerpts corresponding to the direct examination and cross-examination of the two psychiatrists for the state and of Szasz, the psychiatrist for the defendant. (Szasz gives only selections from these six examinations. Since his principle of selection has nothing (obvious) to do with the chain maxim, I believe that I can analyze the edited examinations without prejudice to the chain maxim.)

Reliability

Detecting questions As a reliability check, I had another person independently check my coding for the presence of questions. The instruction to her was to identify all the questions in the transcript. The results show high reliability in detecting questions in the three transcripts.

In Verbal Interaction the two of us coded 634 utterances in total as questions. Of these, we agreed upon 601, or on 94.8% of them. Within the eight excerpts our agreement ranged from a low of 91.4% in Excerpt
2b to a high of 100.0% in Excerpts 2a and 2e. After resolving disagreements, we came to a total of 622 questions.

The reliability in coding questions in the *Laidlaw v. Sage* case was not quite as good as the reliability in *Verbal Interaction*, but it was still very high by traditional standards. The coding was carried out separately for the direct examination and the cross-examination of Sage. In the direct examination the two of us coded 81 utterances altogether as questions. We agreed on 72 of these, for a reliability of 88.9%. Upon resolving the nine disagreements, we arrived at a total of 72 questions for the direct examination. In the cross-examination we coded 763 utterances as questions, and agreed on 677 of them, for a reliability of 88.8%. Upon resolving the disagreements, we reached a total of 732 questions.

The reliability in coding questions in the *Perroni* case stands between the previous two results. Overall, there was 91.8% agreement. Agreement ranged from a low of 84.2% in one of the direct examinations to 96.0% in another of the direct examinations.

Following the chain maxim Coding for whether or not the chain maxim was followed once a question had occurred was generally high.

In *Verbal Interaction* a reliability check by an independent coder led to 90.5% agreement in coding overall, ranging from 87.7% agreement in Excerpt 2b to 100.0% agreement in Excerpt 2c.

In *Laidlaw v. Sage* the reliability check for the direct examination produced 88.9% agreement, while the reliability check for the cross-examination produced 92.2% agreement.

The reliability check for the *Perroni* case produced 91.9% agreement overall. The agreement ranged from a low of 81.3% in one of the direct examinations to a high of 95.8% in one of the cross-examinations.

All cases of disagreement were resolved to form a basis for later analysis.

Methodological difficulties A number of methodological difficulties are now discussed. I present them in some detail because they show that we the coders had the same kinds of problems that the hearers did in responding to questions. That is, no matter how strictly we told ourselves to follow the coding rules, we invariably found ourselves using Garfinkel’s “etcetera” property. Our difficulties here document the kinds of difficulties that Garfinkel found in his study of coding (1967, pp. 18-24):

1. It is more difficult to locate questions in a transcript than it might appear at first because there is no single universal criterion or set of them
by which one might do so. While I have defined a question in terms of Bolinger's four criteria, there are difficulties in using them.

In the first place, the criterion of interrogative distribution is ruled out for me. Knowing the answer and reading backwards may help the investigator to detect questions, but it cannot help the hearer, who must produce the answer. He then must have used other criteria to recognize a question, such as in 2-4 on page 29. (We did not use the criterion of interrogative distribution in detecting questions; we made our decisions (so far as we know) on the utterance itself, and not on what followed it.)

Second, examples can be given where none of Bolinger's criteria are present, yet my fellow coder and I felt that the utterance had the feel of a question. Bolinger offers the example: "I wonder if he's coming," which can be heard as a question even if not spoken with rising inflection or accompanied by interrogative gestures. Line 174 in the following example from *Verbal Interaction* has the same problem.

(17/9/170-176)³

170. Roz: If you want to get rid of me, just tell me to go and I'll go.
171. Jock: Hah, ha, ha. I've tried so often and you always come back.
172. Roz: Well, I didn't say I wouldn't come back. (Jock laughs, they kiss.)
173. Roz: What I mean is I'll go. Mmmm. And I will always help you to think, dear. And any dreams you ever have you may always call on me for the quickest ((interpretation)).
174. Jock: I can call on you.
175. Roz: Yes.
176. Jock: Okay. You, you're pretty good to me.

I initially coded L. 174 as a question; the second coder did not; we finally agreed that it was not a question, though we both felt "questioning" content in it.

Bolinger concludes:

For persons who demand rigorous definitions, the term question cannot be defined satisfactorily so as to include the types that they themselves would spontaneously identify as Qs.... Since a common term blankets the complex, however, one is prone to ask whether there is not a common element. Speaking as an amateur psychologist
or sociologist rather than as a linguist, I venture to say that a question is fundamentally an attitude, which might be called "craving"—it is an utterance that "craves" a verbal or other semiotic (e.g., a nod) response. . . . A question appears to be a behavior pattern, and is as real—but as hard to pin down—as other behavior patterns: aggressiveness, deference, anxiety, or embarrassment. No inclusive definition can cover the pattern and at the same time meet the demands of scientific parsimony (1957, p. 5).

2. The chain maxim seemed perfectly clear when we started the coding, but it soon proved to be inadequate to handle all the cases. We found ourselves forced to refine the statement of the chain maxim in the process of trying to apply it. The following kinds of problems occurred:

a) The whole issue of how technical to get in detecting variations from direct answers arose continuously. We discovered that we were finding more and more kinds of variations in the same transcript as we went along, because we were detecting more and more kinds of minor variations from the chain maxim. For example, does "I am" in the following example mean that a variation has occurred?

(15/38/784-785)

784. Jock: Are you sure your mother's coming?
785. Roz: Yes, I am.

Technically, the answer-set here consists of "Yes" and "No." Therefore, "I am" is extraneous and the example could be coded as a variation. It also struck us that the question was a little bit doubting and the response a little bit emphatic, suggesting annoyance, another reason for coding the example as a variation. (See the next point b.) But we drew the line here. We decided to loosen our definition of answer-set to include apparently equivalent answers to the ones in the answer-set. Thus, we decided that "Yes" is identical to "Yes, I am," and to "Yeah," to "Uh-huh," etc.4

b) A more serious problem occurs with the response "Yes" itself. We are certainly counting on the printing in the transcript to lend an illusion of identity to the different "Yes" responses that were given, a clear weakness in relying on written transcripts. If we had heard a "Yes" answer delivered angrily on the tape, we would have coded it as a variation from the chain-maxim. In fact, we did so, when the transcriber added a stage direction to the transcript saying that the "Yes" had been given in an angry tone. We realized as we faced these cases that we had some hidden assumptions in our conception of direct answer. We really
meant a direct answer delivered in a normal tone, and not in a non-normal tone like an angry one.

c) As with direct answers, we soon discovered that the concept of question wasn’t clear enough to us as we saw more and more examples of questions. I had been treating a question as a marker to see what kind of response followed it, and hadn’t paid sufficient attention to the question itself. Does a false start in a question constitute a separate question? We decided that it did not. Are there two questions or one in a compound question? We decided that there were two. For example, consider the following example from the cross-examination of Sage:

872. From all that time—reading that note—all you did was done deliberately to gain time and save yourself, if you could, was it not?

We finally decided to code two questions here, one for “to gain time” and the other for “to save yourself.” But now an even more perplexing problem arises: Is it a variation if the hearer responds to only one of the two parts of the compound question? We never had to make a decision, because the number of cases was few and all failed the chain maxim on some other ground.

d) Another practice that we developed over time was “second-guessing” the transcriber. We did not always believe him when he put a question mark at the end of an utterance. Some utterances with question marks we did not code as questions; and some utterances with a period at the end we did code as questions. The first kind of case occurred most frequently in the Laidlaw v. Sage transcript. We felt that the transcriber—and recall that the transcriber worked from another human observer, the stenographer, and not from a tape recording—put in too many question marks on the lawyers’ utterances. Line 174 in Example (17/9/170-176) (p. 35) gives a case where one of us coded a question even though a question mark is not present.

e) Pursuing the question of hidden assumptions raised in b, we realized that the chain maxim was merely a sketch that we had to fill in before it could be applied. We found that some of our hidden assumptions were the following, as new examples shocked us into awareness of them. In more complete form we found that we were developing the following conception of the chain maxim:

“The speaker in a sober and affectless way asks a logically and grammatically complete question, while the hearer—who has been clearly picked out by the speaker—listens in a sober and affectless
way. When the question has been completed, and after a proper length of pause, the hearer responds to the question in a sober and affectless way with a direct answer from the answer-set for the question (allowing for some equivalent forms of direct answers). He then gives the turn back to the speaker, who has been listening to the answer in a sober and affectless way, so that the speaker may have another turn to speak, if he wishes.”

Put this way, the conceptualization sounds wrong somehow, overly cognitive and overly pedantic, perhaps. The problem, of course, is that the statement of a maxim leaves vague how it is to be applied in the variety of situations in which it is found relevant. We found ourselves filling in that vagueness in the way outlined above under the self-imposed assumption that our maxim must handle all cases. The problem is not ours alone; the member must also fill in the vagueness in the maxim when he uses it for his purposes. He doesn’t get into our trouble because it is of no interest to him to have a single rule applied consistently to the various cases that occur. He doesn’t act under the constraint of fully clarified, complete consistency that we imposed on ourselves; he acts under a notion of merely reasonable consistency. (The general problem broached here is discussed by Schutz (1962) and by Garfinkel (1967) when comparing the attitude of everyday life with the attitude of scientific theorizing.)

In summary, the methodological difficulties discussed here all arose as we got deeper into the business of doing the coding. Our grasp of the issues became more penetrating, but things didn’t get better; they got worse. We simply didn’t find ourselves cleaning up the details of the coding, as the minor annoyances due to ignorance were swept away. The true facts of what a direct answer is and what a question is never came to light; the phenomena became more puzzling, not less puzzling. We found that we were forced into the “ad hoc-ing” practices that Garfinkel (1967) describes. We had to make practical and theoretically arbitrary decisions to get the coding done.

Results

I turn now to the major task of this essay. How many of the questions were followed by responses that indicate the chain maxim was followed? Table 2 gives the results for the first transcript, Verbal Interaction. The central finding is that the chain maxim is strictly followed in only 12.2% of the cases.
Table 2 Variations from the Chain Maxim: Verbal Interaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excerpt</th>
<th>Follows chain maxim</th>
<th>Does not follow chain maxim</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>N(a) (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8 (6.0)</td>
<td>125 (94.0)</td>
<td>133 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a</td>
<td>3 (7.5)</td>
<td>37 (92.5)</td>
<td>40 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b</td>
<td>18 (16.2)</td>
<td>93 (83.8)</td>
<td>111 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2c</td>
<td>16 (14.5)</td>
<td>94 (85.5)</td>
<td>110 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2d</td>
<td>1 (10.0)</td>
<td>9 (90.0)</td>
<td>10 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2e</td>
<td>3 (13.6)</td>
<td>19 (86.4)</td>
<td>22 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2f</td>
<td>11 (12.2)</td>
<td>79 (87.8)</td>
<td>90 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>14 (15.4)</td>
<td>77 (84.6)</td>
<td>91 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>74 (12.2)</td>
<td>533 (87.8)</td>
<td>607 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) The total of 607 is smaller than the total found in the reliability analysis (622) because the responses following a few questions were not intelligible. These cases were dropped from the analysis.

Table 3 Variations from the Chain Maxim: Laidlaw v. Sage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excerpt</th>
<th>Follows chain maxim</th>
<th>Does not follow chain maxim</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE(a)</td>
<td>26 (36.1)</td>
<td>46 (63.9)</td>
<td>72 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CE(b)</td>
<td>167 (22.8)</td>
<td>565 (77.2)</td>
<td>732 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>193 (24.0)</td>
<td>611 (76.0)</td>
<td>804 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Direct Examination  
(b) Cross Examination

The results for the second transcript, Laidlaw v. Sage, are shown in Table 3. The result again shows that the chain maxim is followed in only a small percentage of the cases, here, in 24.0% of the cases.

Table 4 gives the results for the third transcript, the Perroni case. The totals show that more of the cases follow the chain maxim than in the previous two transcripts, but still the percentage is only 34.6%.

That variation from the chain maxim can be affected by setting is seen by comparing the results for the direct examinations with the results for the cross-examinations in the two legal cases. The direct examinations in the Perroni case show more conformity to the chain maxim than do the cross-examinations (54.0% vs. 30.0%). Further, the same result holds for each of the three witnesses separately. The same result is also found in the Laidlaw v. Sage case. There is more conformity to the chain maxim under direct examination than under cross-examination. (I leave the topic at this point, because it leads away from my central concerns.)
Table 4  Variations from the Chain Maxim: Perroni Case

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excerpt</th>
<th>Follows chain maxim</th>
<th>Does not follow chain maxim</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 (Direct) pp. 89-91</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(43.8)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (Cross) pp. 91-110</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>(27.5)</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 (Direct) pp. 110-113</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>(66.7)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 (Cross) pp. 113-123</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>(37.2)</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 (Direct) pp. 123-128</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>(51.1)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 (Cross) pp. 128-140</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>(27.3)</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>(34.6)</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>(54.0)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>(30.0)</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, the results from the three transcripts show that the chain maxim is followed in a relatively small percentage of cases. I do not dispute that transcripts can be found where the percentage of cases following the chain maxim is much higher than what I have found here. However, I don’t pursue this kind of analysis because I am not now interested in variations in this rate. My next step is to find out why the percentages are so low in the transcripts I have here.

Discussion

It should be emphasized that the finding here is predicated on strict adherence to the chain maxim. Thus, many insignificant variations are coded here as “Does Not Follow.” It is not the case that most questions receive no answer, as a hasty interpretation of this finding might suggest. Most questions do receive an answer, supporting the power of Sacks’ concept of adjacency pair in a general, if not a specific, way.

How typical a result do I have in Tables 2-4? I could find very little literature on the topic. The only papers that I know are by Allport (1934) and Fearing and Krise (1941).

Allport chose a number of norms and patterns of norms where deviating behavior could be measured in degrees, from least deviant (i.e., conforming) to most deviant. He found in all his cases that a J-curve resulted, i.e., that the largest number of cases fell in the first category on
the left, the conformity category, while diminishing numbers of cases fell in the succeeding categories, moving to the right. The J—backwards here—was most pronounced when virtually all of the cases conformed, leaving a small number to distribute in a diminishing fashion through the rest of the successive categories. Of interest here, the percentage of cases in the conforming category was not always very high. Allport reports figures as low as 46.2% and 32%. To remove these non-J-curve cases Allport limited himself to situations where at least 50% of the cases conformed to the norm or pattern in question.

Fearing and Krise dispute Allport’s J-curve hypothesis. They report a situation where the conformity category contains only 2.1% of the cases (stopping for a stop sign at or before the white line in the road). Their modal category is the fourth in degree of deviation, and the resulting curve looks more like a normal curve than it does a J-curve.

The chain maxim doesn’t lend itself to this kind of analysis because the variations do not fall along a single continuum of severity of deviation. The important point, I think, is that the results I have found are not new, though their theoretical significance has not been developed.

Kinds of Variations

To give the reader some feel for the kinds of variations that occur, I present some examples, organized in a typology, some of which will be pursued in later chapters and some not. The examples are given in Table 5. I don’t discuss these kinds of responses further here; I leave that to the later chapters, where procedural problems, completions of invitations, some ellipses, some emotional responses, and clarifications and specifications of one’s own question will be considered. The others await analysis.

Table 5  A. A Typology of Responses to Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Procedural problem</td>
<td>A response that indicates that communication has broken down in some way.</td>
<td>Roz: What were you doing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion of invitation</td>
<td>A response that completes an invitation in the question to say more beyond</td>
<td>Jock: Huh?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Completion of correction-invitation</td>
<td>A correction of a fact in the question is added to a direct answer.</td>
<td>Ben: Hoods are not crooks?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(13/30/595-596)  (10/19/342-343)
Table 5 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b. Completion of reason-invitation</td>
<td>A reason is given that explains the direct answer.</td>
<td>Roz: Shall we go home? Jock: No, We’ve [only] been here ten minutes exactly. (3/11/220-221)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellipsis</td>
<td>A response that skips over a piece of conversation understood by the hearer.</td>
<td>Jock: Yeah, I like the smell of that. It smells like burnt firecrackers. Doesn’t it? Roz: It smells like branded steer. (23/5/98-99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect answer</td>
<td>A response that is the direct answer to a different but related question.</td>
<td>Jock: . . . What time did you [start work] this morning? Man: I come in every morning at six except Sunday. (20/19-20/380-381)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interruption</td>
<td>A response that begins before the question is completed. (And similar variants.)</td>
<td>Roz: Don’t you want me to express myself freely . . . Jock: Let’s return the [playing] cards, Roz: . . . like I’m supposed to do? (16/5/80-82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarifications, specifications of own question, or of answer</td>
<td>A response by the speaker that clarifies or specifies his question, or a response by the hearer that clarifies or specifies his answer.</td>
<td>Ben: Well, what about white people? Can they find a residence at a reasonable rental? (9/14/240)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answers to own question</td>
<td>A response by the speaker that answers his own question.</td>
<td>Jock: We never did get up to the eight inch [tele]scope, did we? Too bad. I’d have liked to have seen, uh, Saturn’s rings. (21/24/478)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5 (continued)  B. Results of Coding the Typology of Responses to Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>(%) (a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct answers</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>(40.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedural problems</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>(14.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion of correction-invitation</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>(4.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion of reason-invitation</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>(3.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellipses</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>(8.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect answers</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>(7.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interruptions</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>(8.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional responses</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>(8.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarifications, specifications</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>(13.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answers to own question</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>(7.7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Percentages based on total N of 607. Because of multiple coding, the percentages add to more than 100%.

Are the Variations Noticed?

Throughout this essay I have used the term "variations" and not the more usual sociological term "deviations" for cases that do not follow the chain maxim. That usage is deliberate, based on the assumption that most of the variations go unnoticed. From this point of view deviations are noticed variations.

However, the assumption that the variations are unnoticed should be demonstrated. A tabulation is now presented to show that very few of these variations are noticed. The tabulation is in answer to the coding question, "How many of the variations were noticed by participants in the conversation?"

The variations in *Verbal Interaction* were coded as "Noticed" or "Unnoticed." The reliability of the coding was quite low, so the results must be regarded as tentative. One of us coded virtually no cases in the "Noticed" category; the other one (myself) coded relatively more. To be conservative the results of the second coder were used in Table 6.

Clear cases of "Notice" were rare, such as "Why didn’t you give the turn back to me after answering my question?" or "Your response is a non-sequitur." I felt that in a number of less clear cases, notice had been taken, but the amount of interpretation involved in that intuitive feeling rendered the reliability low. For example, it was hard to decide if the anger or surprise expressed occasionally after a variation had occurred was due to the variation, or to some other feature of the talk at that point, such as its content.
Table 6  Noted vs. Unnoticed Variations from the Chain Maxim: 
*Verbal Interaction*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excerpt</th>
<th>Number of noticed variations</th>
<th>Number of unnoticed variations</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percent of noticed variations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2c</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2d</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2e</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2f</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 gives the results. The table shows that only 10.9% of the variations were noticed by someone in the conversation at the time that it occurred. The percent is very low, and supports our argument that most of the variations went unnoticed.

**Summary**

The central finding of this analysis is that the chain maxim is strictly followed in only a small percentage of cases. It was also found that most of the variations go unnoticed, though that conclusion is tentative. The findings support my shift from the concept of rule to the concept of maxim. Persons are better conceived as maxim-users than as rule-followers.

**NOTES**

1 Ordinarily, these assertions state possible clock times, but the question could also be heard to ask for periods of the day, like morning, afternoon, or evening.
2 This transcript is referred to throughout simply as *Verbal Interaction*.
3 All examples marked in this way are taken from *Verbal Interaction*. Double parentheses that contain words mean that the transcriber was not sure that he heard them correctly; double parentheses that are empty mean that the transcriber heard an utterance that he could not understand at all. A bracket in the left hand margin connecting two or more turns to talk means that the turns occurred simultaneously.
4 On the problem of equivalence see Cicourel (1964), Chapter 1.
SPECIFIC PROPOSAL QUESTIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to increase the number of responses to questions reproduced beyond the ones reproduced by the chain maxim. My strategy is to introduce another maxim that is different from the chain maxim and which members appear to use when responding to questions. I call that maxim the invitation maxim. Before stating it, some preliminaries need to be discussed.

GENERAL QUESTIONS VS. SPECIFIC PROPOSAL QUESTIONS

Questions that request information can be divided into two classes, general questions and specific proposal questions.¹ As defined in Chapter 4, a general question is a question that asks the hearer to pick an element from the answer-set for the question without proposing a particular answer to him in the question. “What is Jim's occupation?” is an example. A specific proposal question was defined as a question that proposes an element of the related general question’s answer-set as the correct answer. “Is Jim a teacher?” is an example. The related general question here is the one above, “What is Jim’s occupation?”, and the specific proposal question proposes one of the elements of the answer-set to that question as the correct one: “teacher.” Its own answer-set, then, is (Yes, No). More generally, one answer confirms the proposal in the question, while the other disconfirms it.

The idea that a specific proposal question is paired with a related general question is known to members of the culture. One way that that knowledge appears is in asking a question in the first place. In some
instances members ask both the general question and the specific proposal question (in either order) before giving the turn over to the hearer. (That, of course, created a variation from the chain maxim, i.e., two questions in a row by the speaker.) Some examples are the following.

(8/10/160, 162)
160, 162 Ben: ... do you mean ... Dryden [Street] on one end and the river on the other, or what?

(17/7/121)
121. Jock: [Referring to a receipt] What's this for? Rent?

In the first example, Ben uses a specific proposal question (“Do you mean Dryden on one end and the river on the other?”), followed by its related general question (“What [do you mean]?”). In the second example the general question comes first (“What's this for?”), followed by a specific proposal form of the same question (“[Is this for] Rent?”).

**THE INVITATION MAXIM**

The invitation maxim is derived in the following way. If the speaker asks for a piece of information in specific proposal form, members assume that he has some degree of belief or certainty that his proposal is correct. Otherwise, he would have used the related general form. But if he is wrong, then giving the disconfirming answer will not tell him what he presumably wants to know. It has come to be accepted, I think, that the hearer should supply the missing piece of information in this circumstance.

The invitation maxim is a formulation of this proposal, in the following way:

*Invitation Maxim.* If you are asked a specific proposal question and your answer is the confirming one, follow the chain maxim. If your answer is the disconfirming one, give the disconfirming answer, then give the correct answer, and then give the turn back to the questioner.

Continuing the example earlier, this maxim says that if the speaker asks, “Is Jim a teacher?” and is wrong in his proposal, then the hearer should answer “No” and add the correct occupation, e.g., “He's a carpenter.” That is, he must add the correct X from the answer-set to the related general question, “What is Jim's occupation?”
The invitation maxim replaces the chain maxim for specific proposal questions. (Actually, it replaces it only in the disconfirming case.) The chain maxim still applies, however, to questions in general form.

Some examples of the use of this maxim will make it more understandable:

\[(13/33/660-661)\]

660. Woman: \ldots You were making some of them [earrings], weren't you?
661. Jock: No, I was just making a lanyard.

\[(6/3/43-44)\]

43. Jock: \ldots Look! Here, is this it?
44. Roz: No, it's my lipstick brush.

In both examples the hearer gives the disconfirming answer to the speaker's specific proposal, and then continues on to give the correct answer. If just the disconfirmation were given in each case, I would hear it as a little rude. I invite the reader to see for himself, by comparing these hypothetical examples with the ones above:

Woman: \ldots You were making some of them, weren't you?
[Jock: No.]

Jock: \ldots Look! Here, is this it?
[Roz: No.]

**The Elliptic Form of the Invitation Maxim**

There is one common variant of the invitation maxim, an elliptic form of the maxim. In this variant H does not give the disconfirming answer; he just gives the correction. In these cases he assumes that S will infer that the disconfirming answer obtains because he would not have given a correction otherwise. Some examples will show this form of the maxim at work.

\[(9/16/295-296)\]

295. Jock: [To Ben and Flo] \ldots Now, inside the main house she had all the rooms rented out. And, uh, there's a fairly—it probably was the living room at one time—it was a fairly large room, she had four Porto Rican boys in there.
(He turns to Roz for confirmation)
Weren't they Porto Rican?
296. Roz: (Correcting him) Israeli boys.
(10/19/338-340)

338. Ben: [To Jock and Roz] Hoods are crooks?
339. Jock: Well...

In L. 296 of the first example Roz disconfirms that the boys were "Porto Rican" by saying only that they were "Israeli boys," elliptic for the longer response, "No, Israeli boys." Similarly in the second example: "Little toughs" in L. 340 is an elliptic form of the longer response, "No, little toughs," to Ben's specific proposal question in L. 338.5

The existence of the elliptic form leads to a generalization of the invitation maxim:

Generalized Invitation Maxim. If you are asked a specific proposal question and your answer is the confirming one, follow the chain maxim. If your answer is the disconfirming one, either give the disconfirming answer and then give the correct answer, or give the correct answer only. Then give the turn back to the questioner.6

Ellipsis can be seen in the invitation maxim in a second way, as well. The maxim in the non-elliptic form operates by eliding Line 3 in the following paradigm:

1. S: Is X correct?
2. H: No.
3. S: What X is correct?
4. H: Y is correct.

That is, if S and H were following the chain maxim exactly, they would produce an instance of this paradigm. But the invitation maxim in non-elliptic form proposes that H give Line 2 and Line 4 together in his response to the question. The elliptic form of the maxim involves a further elision; H may give only Line 4, on the assumption that Line 4 implies Line 2.7

The complete four-line paradigm here is sometimes produced in conversation when H does not follow the invitation maxim, i.e., in instances where S asks a specific proposal question to which H responds simply "No." Then S may use the paradigm to get the answer he wants. He asks "What X is correct?", to which H's "Y is correct" provides the information that H should have provided in his previous turn. An example will make this clear.
Jock watches Phil at work for approximately two minutes, then asks him about the miniature golf club in the statue [of a golfer that Phil is making].

499. Jock: Was it a toothpick?
500. Phil: Yeah. I have to shape it down a bit.
501. Jock: And this is after the [golf] swing?
502. Phil: No.
503. Jock: No?
504. Phil: It's before.

Phil gives only the disconfirming answer to Jock's specific proposal question in L. 501, and I hear it as too abrupt, a little rude. Jock then appears to express surprise in his follow-up question in L. 503, evidence that the invitation maxim was in fact violated for him at that point. He is then given the correction. (The example follows the paradigm if Jock's "No?" is assumed equivalent to, or implies, "What X is correct?")

Ellipsis will also motivate the central maxim of Chapter 6. Hence, it appears to be an important practice for members. Yet its existence creates theoretical difficulties because it forces us to introduce some notion of anticipation into the analysis. Through ellipsis, H anticipates what S wants. He doesn't confine himself to direct answers in response to S's questions. He responds, then, to what he perceives as S's desire or intention, not only to the form of S's utterance.

A final point. The invitation maxim is just one form of a general maxim that says: Correct incorrect facts in another person's utterances. It is commonly used to teach children proper facts about their language, as in this hypothetical example:

Child: Mommy, mommy. Two mouses just ran across the floor.
Mother: No, honey. Mice, not mouses.

Results

Specific proposal questions were found in Verbal Interaction and the utterances following them were examined for conformity to the generalized invitation maxim. As with the chain maxim, the percentage of cases strictly following the maxim was small. The results are given in Table 7.

The table shows that the percentage of cases that follow is higher among the confirming cases than among the disconfirming cases, 20.4% vs. 6.7%. The percentage of following combining the two kinds of cases is
Table 7  A Test of the Generalized Invitation Maxim: 

Verbal Interaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Confirming Case:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not follow</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>79.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disconfirming Case:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not follow</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>93.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Combining the Confirming and Disconfirming Cases:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not follow</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>89.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10.9%. As with the chain maxim, the cases of strictly following the maxim occur regularly but infrequently throughout the transcript. In a number of cases the maxim was partially followed, i.e., at least a confirming response, or a disconfirming response plus a correction, or a correction alone occurred. But something else was wrong: an interruption occurred; the turn was not given back to the speaker; noticeable affect accompanied the response; etc. Additional maxims will help to remove the blurring that occurs in these cases by referring each separate feature to maxims that appear to regulate it.

To begin a cumulative total of the number and percent of cases reproduced, it is necessary to redo the analysis for the chain maxim. That analysis originally did not differentiate among kinds of questions, simply coding them as they came along for conformity with the chain maxim. But as noted earlier, the invitation maxim replaces the chain maxim for specific proposal questions, reducing the scope of the chain maxim to general questions that are requests for information. Redoing the chain maxim analysis only for general questions produces the result shown in Table 8. The table shows much the same result as shown in Chapter 4. Only a few more cases were reproduced among general questions alone than among all questions from *Verbal Interaction*, 14.9% vs. 12.2%.

Combining the results of testing the two maxims, we find that 66 cases are reproduced in cumulative total, or 10.9% of the total of 607.
Table 8  A Test of the Chain Maxim for General Questions Only

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follows</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not follow</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>85.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One final note here: There are eight cases of specific proposal questions reproduced by the chain maxim, but not by the invitation maxim. They are cases where H gives just the disconfirming response and no correction. These cases are of two kinds, one where denigration is involved, and the other where the specific proposal question takes a dichotomous correction. The first kind of example is discussed in Chapter 8 and the second kind is discussed later in this chapter.

The Certainty Series

Speakers appear to have differing degrees of belief or certainty in the proposals that they make in specific proposal questions. That permits questions to be grouped together that ask for the same information but differ in S's degree of certainty in his own specific proposal. I call this grouping a certainty series. It is derived in the following way.

There are several devices that heighten the impression that S has more belief in his proposal than he does with the ordinary specific proposal question. First, let us compare two different kinds of specific proposal questions, nonintensive ones with intensive ones. An example will make the distinction between nonintensive and intensive clear. The nonintensive form of the specific proposal question for the time is "Is it four o'clock?" The intensive form of that question that I have in mind is "Isn't it four o'clock?" The negative "not" carries the appearance that S has more belief in his proposal than in the nonintensive case. Hence, it is not a genuine negative in this usage. 8

Another way to heighten the appearance of belief in the proposal is to place the question part after the proposal, rather than before it. For example, "It's four o'clock, isn't it?" implies that the speaker has a higher degree of belief in his proposal than he does in "Isn't it four o'clock?", the intensive form above. 9

A third way to heighten the appearance of belief in the proposal is through inflection. If the question "It's four o'clock, isn't it?" is said with higher inflection on isn't than on it at the end, the resulting question sounds more certain than it does if uttered with the higher inflection on it. To indicate this difference, I write the question this way:
"It's four o'clock, isn't it.

This variation in the degree of belief residing in the form of the question leads to an ordering of some of the possible ways to ask the same specific proposal question in a certainty series. The certainty series is the set of ways to ask for the same piece of information, ordered by degree of certainty in the proposal. The lowest degree occurs in the general form of the question. Then follow specific proposal forms of the question that convey increasing degrees of belief according to the three principles discussed above. Finally, the highest degree of certainty is expressed by the speaker's assertion that the piece of information is such-and-such. The assertion is not a question, of course, but the asymptote which the questions approach.

The paradigm of the certainty series and an example of it are now given. The example gives some of the possible ways to ask for the name of a particular person, apparently assumed to be Harry by the speaker. It shows how the degree of belief in the person's name can range from none to certainty by varying the form of the utterance. The certainty series is this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of certainty</th>
<th>Paradigm</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Kind of utterance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>&quot;What is X?&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;What is his name?&quot;</td>
<td>General question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>&quot;Is X Y?&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Is his name Harry?&quot;</td>
<td>Nonintensive specific proposal question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>&quot;Isn't X Y?&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Isn't his name Harry?&quot;</td>
<td>Intensive specific proposal question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>&quot;X is Y, isn't it?&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;His name is Harry, isn't it?&quot;</td>
<td>Intensive specific proposal question with question-part at end</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 5                   | "X is Y, isn't it."
|                     |                                     | "His name is Harry, isn't it."   | Intensive specific proposal question with question-part at end and "down" inflection at end |
| 6                   | "X is Y (I know it is)."           | "His name is Harry (I know it is)." | Assertion                       |
I assume that any of the other ways to ask for Harry’s name can be located at one of the degrees of certainty or between them.

These forms are well known to members, and a hearer of any of them not only knows what information he has been asked to supply, but also the degree of belief that the speaker has in his own proposal for the answer. (It is obvious, of course, that the speaker may have a different degree of belief from the one inferred by the hearer from the form of the question that he uses. That further issue is not under discussion.)

One use of the certainty series is to help decide if a particular utterance is a question or not. As the reader will recall, that was a problem in doing the coding for the analysis in Chapter 4. Consider the following examples:

(1/3/52-53)
52. Jock: Aren’t those cabins nice.
53. Roz: Yes. . .

(17/9/173-175)
173. Roz: . . . And I will always help you to think, dear. And any dreams you ever have you may always call on me for the quickest ((interpretation)).
174. Jock: I can call on you.
175. Roz: Yes.

(7/9/143-145)
[The conversation is about a lecturer that Jock and Ben heard the previous evening, who lectured on black-white relations in a nearby big city.]
143. Jock: You notice the cracks he made against the, uh, city parks, about the baseball and that sort of thing.
144. Ben: You mean about ((politicians)).

The utterances in question are L. 52 in the first example, L. 174 in the second, L. 143 and L. 144 in the third. In Chapter 4 we decided finally that L. 52 and L. 174 were not questions, and that L. 143 and L. 144 were questions. In terms of the present analysis we were confused by the simultaneous presence of an assertion (specific proposal) and a question in each one.

The concept of certainty series allows us to see the four utterances as questions somewhere in the “middle” of their respective certainty series. Line 52 in the first example is at Degree 3 in the paradigm, but the period at the end suggests that it is even closer to an assertion than that, perhaps near Degree 5. Line 174 in the second example has no sign of a
question about it, yet we both felt there was some uncertainty in the assertion, locating it between Degrees 5 and 6. Similarly, for L. 143 and L. 144 in the third example: they didn't feel quite certain to us, and we would now place them between Degrees 5 and 6 in the paradigm.

It is interesting to note that the problem in distinguishing assertion from question is not as difficult for the hearer as it was for us. That is because agreeing with the assertion and answering the question here are both handled by the same response, “Yes.” Thus, in L. 52, L. 174, and L. 144, “Yes” can mean “I agree to your assertion” or “Yes is the answer to your question.” (Line 143 is responded to with a procedural problem, and that can also follow an assertion or a question. See Chapter 7.) Thus, the culture has artfully arranged the handling of what, after all, is an essential ambiguity.

The concept of certainty series makes clear what our coding problem was in these instances. We were facing an assertion and question inextricably blended together that could never be resolved into one or the other. Like an optical illusion, they had the nasty habit of flip-flopping from one into the other as we considered them.

The organization of questions into the certainty series suggests that there are maxims that guide H’s response to the various degrees of belief expressed in the same specific proposal question. For example, a candidate principle is this: The more certain S’s question sounds, the higher his degree of expectation that you will use the invitation maxim if he is wrong. However, this avenue was not pursued.

Uses of the Invitation Maxim

The invitation maxim can be used by itself to produce a number of interactional activities. I discuss some of them here.

a) Detecting a lie       An example will show how the invitation maxim can be used to detect a lie. I paraphrase one that I saw in a western movie:

A U.S. marshall from Wyoming is visiting the sheriff of Tucson. He wants the sheriff to help him locate a band of outlaws that he has followed from Wyoming to Arizona. To decide whether or not he really is the marshall he claims to be, the sheriff asks the following questions:

Sheriff: Do you know John Smith, the U.S. Marshall next to you in Idaho?
Sheriff: Has he recovered from that bullet wound in his arm yet?
Marshall: Yes, he has, but it was in his leg, not his arm.
Sheriff: Okay, you're the marshall you say you are.

Since the sheriff knew that the bullet wound was really in Smith's leg (his question was a trap question), he accepted the man as the U.S. marshall he claimed to be.

The sheriff's second question contains the relevant invitation. By the invitation maxim the marshall is expected to correct an incorrect fact, in this case, that the wound was in Smith's leg, not his arm. Not to do so would make the sheriff suspicious that the man really didn't know where Smith had been wounded; therefore, didn't know Smith; and therefore was lying when he said that he did know Smith. That would suggest that he was not really the marshall, etc.

Note that traps could have been laid in the sheriff's first question. He could have proposed Peter Smith for John Smith or Montana for Idaho, and the man would have been expected to correct them, also.

Even if the man had answered "No" to the sheriff's first question, the sheriff could have pursued it with "Why not? I thought you always visited each other in neighboring territories (Idaho and Wyoming)," etc. Though not as powerful as the sequence leading to the invitation question, the man can be expected to give some account for why he doesn't know the marshall in Idaho, an account that can be examined for its own possible discrepancies.

A more effective trap question, a (Yes, No) question where both answers are damning, is seen in this hypothetical example. Suppose S tells H a lie, that he visited a friend in Mt. Sinai Hospital yesterday, beginning the following sequence:

S: I was visiting a friend of mine in the hospital yesterday. He's in Mt. Sinai.
H: Oh, is that the hospital on East 68th Street?
[S: Yes.] [S: No.] [S: No, it's at 100th Street and Fifth Avenue.]

If H knows that Mt. Sinai is at 100th Street and Fifth Avenue, then a "Yes" response is a lie. But if S answers "No," he is supposed to follow it with the correct address, by the invitation maxim. However, if he didn't make the visit, he is unlikely to know, and so makes H suspicious by not being able to supply a correction. In both cases, then, S has a problem in keeping his lie undetected. The third response shown follows the invitation maxim and presumably would not cause suspicion.
I have presented this example as if H knew the correct answer and was testing S. Actually, it is easy to produce the phenomenon inadvertently just by being interested in a detail like an address. A more likely explanation of the example here is that H does not know where Mt. Sinai is and is just interested in finding out. If S responds only with "No," H may realize that he has embarrassed S by catching him in a lie. If S responds "Yes," then H will accept the answer. But later, when he learns differently from some other source, he may realize that S was lying to him on that past occasion.

b) Fishing for information

An example will show the use of the invitation maxim to try to gain information in circumstances where H is unwilling to give it. The example was told to me by the sociologist Robert Greenfield:

I was interested in learning more about the dangerous Mexican-American folk practice of administering a drop or two of a poisonous mercury solution to babies for colic. I suspected that pharmacists in the Mexican-American areas of Los Angeles knew of this practice by local folk doctors (curanderos) and even supplied mercury solution for it. But I had found that pharmacists would not admit the practice. I discovered that the following device persuaded one pharmacist to reveal that he knew of the practice:

Greenfield: (Talking as a customer over the prescription counter) Say, is it true that curanderos around here give colicky babies a whole teaspoon of mercury?

Pharmacist: Oh no, not that much. Only a drop or two.

Here, the pharmacist's automatic correction of the incorrect fact in the question revealed the very practice that he would probably not have admitted knowing if asked directly.

A second example comes from the field of police interrogation. Inbau and Reid (1967) give the following case:

When the manager [of the warehouse] was interrogated, on the well-founded assumption that he was responsible for all or part of the loss [by theft from the warehouse], the interrogator began by saying: "Joe, there's a big shortage of merchandise here at the company, and it looks like you're in the middle of it. You were seen at the warehouse with two other men on Sunday night, February 16, and the auditors found that a lot of carbon copies of your invoices are
missing. Joe, you got $40,000 since you started taking this stuff, didn’t you?” Joe’s reply was “Ye gods, no!” Then followed this line of conversation:

**Interrogator:** “Was it about $30,000?”
**Joe:** “Hell, no!”
**Interrogator:** “Was it about $20,000?”
**Joe:** (speaking less firmly now): “No.”
**Interrogator:** “Was it as little as $15,000?”
**Joe:** “Not even that much.”
**Interrogator:** “Well, how much was it, Joe? Be fair and honest about it. Was it $14,000?”
**Joe:** “It’s not even $10,000 worth.”
**Interrogator:** “Joe, it’s more than $10,000 worth, and you know it.”

At this stage of the interrogation the interrogator asked the subject to relate the details of the thefts—the ways and means employed, the specific items taken and the disposition made of them, or their present location. Then the interrogator confronted the subject with the audit figure of the actual value of the missing merchandise—$20,000. The point was also made that since all the merchandise disappeared in the same manner, the subject must be responsible for the entire loss. The manager soon thereafter admitted a total theft of merchandise valued at $20,000. He also revealed exactly how and where he had disposed of everything he had taken (pp. 68-69).

The interrogator knew in advance that the loss was valued at $20,000, but by proposing a wrong amount, $40,000, he tricked the suspect into confessing. Here, a perfect case of following the invitation maxim would have been this:

**Interrogator:** Joe, you got $40,000 since you started taking this stuff, didn’t you?
**Joe:** Ye gods, no! *It was only about $20,000 worth.*

Joe, in fact, violated the maxim by responding only with the disconfirming answer (“Ye gods, no!”). The interrogator, utilizing his right (?) to get the answer to the question he intended (“How much was it?”), uses an alternative version of the complete four-line paradigm given earlier. He follows up with three more specific proposal questions before he asks the related general question, “Then how much was it?” as called for in the paradigm.
However, this is a situation where Joe is excused from following the invitation maxim. He has been denigrated by the police (see Chapter 8) by being classified as a thief, and in response he need not complete any invitations in questions they put to him. That is, he can defensibly use just the chain maxim, i.e., answer each question literally and not help the interrogator out with information. Hence, giving only the disconfirming response is not in itself suspicious. It is the vehemence of Joe's answer, suggesting that he was startled by the exaggerated amount, that confirms the interrogator's suspicion and even persuades Joe that he has revealed his complicity in the theft.

Note also that the question, "Joe, you got $40,000 since you started taking this stuff, didn't you?" is at Degree 4 in its certainty series, implying that the interrogator already has prior information about Joe's guilt. He just wants Joe to confirm what he already knows, except that he has the amount wrong. That high degree of certainty may encourage Joe to admit his guilt.

These two examples show the invitation maxim at work on a special phenomenon, one based on quantity, that I call the invitation-to-balance. An invitation-to-balance is a quantity that H may feel is exaggerated (either too high or too low). It may appear in any kind of remark, and the hearer may feel "invited" to "balance" it by providing another quantity in the direction opposite to the exaggeration. H's balance may itself be exaggerated in the opposite direction but need not be. (See Churchill, 1966, for more detail on the topic.)

In the first example the pharmacist balances Greenfield's deliberately exaggerated "a whole teaspoon" with "only a drop or two." In the second example Joe's surprise occurs, presumably, because of the exaggeration in the interrogator's original proposal of $40,000. Another use of the invitation-to-balance, where the balance is as exaggerated as was the original quantity, is seen in haggling with a bazaar merchant. The merchant begins by asking for too high a price, and the customer is expected to reply by offering too low a price, etc.

c) Making jokes A common form of joke relies on the invitation maxim. Two examples are the following:

Two boys are standing by a staircase in a school.
S asks: Will these stairs take me to the third floor?
H replies: No, you have to walk.

(Seen on a bubble gum wrapper)

(A "singing knock-knock" joke)
S: Knock-knock.
H: Who's there?
S: Barbara.
H: Barbara who?
S: Barbara, Barbara, black sheep, have you any wool?
(Heard on the Captain Kangaroo TV show)

In the first example the joke is made through an incongruity, where H corrects a fact not seen by S or the audience to need correction. The device rests on a pun; there is some element of the utterance that has a different meaning in another, unexpected, context. Here, the pun is on the verb phrase take me. S intends it in the sense of lead me, of course, but H has seen a second possible meaning, carry me (as on an escalator).

In the second example a standardized joke form has evolved based on a use of the invitation maxim. The joke initiator must produce a punch-line that completes the name asked for in L. 4 without giving a name. That is, he must begin L. 5 with the first name he gave in L. 3, as if he meant to give the person’s whole name. But the words following the first name must complete a non-name pun beginning with the first name. The invitation maxim (in elliptic form) is invoked in the sense that H is led to believe that he will hear a person’s name, when in fact something that is not a name is being proposed all the while by S. H is induced to ask for the person’s last name, which S then corrects as a wrong inference. It can be seen better in this way:

4. H:  Barbara who?
5. S:  [No, not someone whose first name is Barbara, but] Barbara, Barbara, black sheep, have you any wool?

Problems with the Invitation Maxim

Finally, I turn to some problems with the invitation maxim. First, the fact that a question contains a specific proposal does not always mean that the proposal is to be corrected if wrong. Though the maxim is stated so that the sheer presence of a specific proposal question invokes it, that is not borne out in the actions of members. More accurately, H must believe that S is seeking the answer to the related general question. If S is not seeking that information, he may only want to have the confirming or the disconfirming answer to his question. For example, suppose S is trying to solve a crossword puzzle. One clue is “Lizard” and S notes that it takes three spaces in the puzzle. The word gnu suddenly comes to mind, but S is not sure what a gnu is. So he asks H, “Is a gnu a lizard?” to which H responds, “No, it’s a kind of antelope.” To which S replies, “I don’t care what it really is, I just want to know if it’s a lizard or not.”
And if H sees that S is doing a crossword puzzle, he may simply answer "No," with no awareness that the invitation maxim should apply.

An example from *Verbal Interaction* is the following:

(17/10/184-193)

184. Jock: [To salesgirl] I've got two rolls of the wrong film. Can you change that for Super Plus X?

... 

189. SG: Did you get this here?


191. SG: I didn't think so. We don't carry ... 

... 

193. SG: ... that kind.

Here, Jock's disconfirming response to the question in L. 189 is all that is sought. The salesgirl doesn't care where he did buy the film.

A related problem to the one above occurs with questions that in general form have only two possible answers. H need not follow the invitation maxim if the specific proposal form of such a dichotomous question is used. An example is: "What position is the light switch in?", taking the answer-set: (On, Off). If the question is asked in specific proposal form, e.g., "Is the light switch on?" H may properly answer "No," assuming that S will make the inference that the switch is therefore in the "off" position.

Some examples from *Verbal Interaction* will help make this point clear:

(8/10/154-156)

154. Flo: And now, is that [area] Negro?

155. Roz: No ... 

156. Jock: No, not yet.

(19/17/123-124)

123. Jen: Did it have that ( ( ) ) piece on?

It didn't.

124. Dave: No.

In the first example the answer-set (in the given context) to the related general question "What kind of area is it racially?" is: White, Black. Hence, when the H's deny "Black" as the answer, they imply "White." In the second example the related general question to Jen's question in L. 123 is "What relation did the piece have to it?" or more understandably, "Was the piece on or off?" with answer-set: (On, Off). H's denial that it
was "on" clearly implies "off" and makes it unnecessary for him to supply the correction.\textsuperscript{11}

A second problem involves secrets. H may feel that S is not entitled to have the information he is seeking by means of a specific proposal question. In that case he may simply respond "No," willing to risk whatever attribution or reaction S makes.

S is either not entitled to have the information at all, and H will not give it to him under any circumstances, or S is entitled to it only if he guesses correctly in his specific proposal question. The latter case often occurs in courtroom trials where an opposing attorney is entitled to specific information from a witness only if he guesses what it is and asks the witness to confirm it.

A third problem with the invitation maxim is a technical one. The specific proposal has to be from such a well-known and standardized collection of categories that the proposal of one of them invokes the entire collection. Clock time has that character in the earlier example, "Is it four o'clock?" If it is not four o'clock, H assumes that S wants the correct time, one of the other possible numbers from a standardized set of clock times.\textsuperscript{12} But not all specific proposals are part of such standardized collections of categories, and if not, \textit{then} H may have trouble knowing what correction to supply if he feels S's proposal is wrong. For example, suppose S asks H this specific proposal question: "Is X very well-educated?" Let us suppose further that H does not think that X is very well-educated. Since level of education does not have the accepted standardized categorization that time has (for example), H might well respond, "What do you mean by 'very well-educated'?" rather than responding with "No" plus a correction.

Whether these problems can be handled by proper qualification of the invitation maxim remains to be seen. The first two problems really pose judgmental problems for H, problems not ordinarily considered by linguists, and as yet, little studied by sociologists. The only thing that is sure is that the member has little difficulty in answering specific proposal questions in context. He rarely gets confused, and he rarely stumbles into a deviation sufficient to earn a negative attribution.

\textbf{SUMMARY}

To summarize, the analysis here has dealt with the problems that H must solve when faced with a specific proposal question. A specific proposal question contains both a question and an assertion, stated by S with a varying degree of certainty. The central problem for H is how to deal with S when S has some degree of belief in a \textit{wrong} answer to his own
question. It was proposed that the invitation maxim guides H in how to deal with this problem. Though not followed in a large percent of the cases in Verbal Interaction, examples using it are found recurrently. Some uses of the invitation maxim were described, and some problems with it were discussed.

NOTES

1 Questions that request actions beyond giving information will be discussed in Chapter 6.

2 In these cases the speaker has really asked the wrong question; he should have asked the related general question, not the specific proposal question. Why he would ever use the specific proposal question is a puzzle. I have the impression that something like "good faith" is being shown to H when S uses this kind of question. That is, S reveals what he thinks in advance, and he shows that he is trying to help in getting the information he seeks.

3 The concept of "invitation" is taken from Sacks (1966), who used the term "correction-invitation."

4 Merritt (1976) discusses the same phenomenon when she introduces "elliptic coupling" as a variant of her response linkage of "coupling."

5 Another ellipsis is present here that I ignore. "Israeli boys" can be heard as an elliptic form of "They were Israeli boys." See Goffman, 1976.

6 I do not assume that the hearer who uses the elliptic possibility has gone through an extra step of deletion. I have no idea how speakers "really" formulate responses. I classify the elliptic responses with the non-elliptic ones only because they are logically related in the stated way in my analysis.

7 Here and throughout I argue that certain responses are elliptic forms of a longer complete sequence based on the chain maxim, I do that only to show a logical relation between the two. I don't assume that the complete sequences are historically prior to the elliptic sequences.

8 I believe that this was pointed out by Jesperson, but I could not find the reference.

9 The same effect is created when using the nonintensive form as the base, though here the intensive form is rare. That is, "It's four o'clock, is it?" sounds more intensive to me than "Is it four o'clock?" though it is awkward and occurs rarely. For this reason I drop it from the analysis.

10 More likely, it is a Degree 5 question with "down" inflection at the end. Since there is no standard notation for that kind of ending, non linguistically trained transcribers render Degree 4 and 5 questions in the same way.

11 Payne (1951) also discusses this phenomenon.

12 Even that answer-set is not standardized for all situations. For example, a train conductor may expect a correction to the nearest minute while on the job, yet only expect a correction to the nearest half-hour while waiting for his favorite TV show.
REQUESTS IN QUESTION FORM

This chapter deals with a third maxim guiding responses to questions, that I call the permission maxim. The purpose of introducing this maxim is to reproduce responses to what I call permission questions, i.e., questions in the form "Will you do X for me?" Some development is necessary before this maxim can be stated.

THE RELATION OF QUESTIONS TO REQUESTS

The interrogative features that Bolinger discusses (see Chapter 4) provide a highly reliable method for detecting questions. This high degree of reliability in detecting questions regardless of situation gives the concept of question a strong independent existence in the minds of members. However, the proposal here is to look not at the formal characteristics that typically locate questions, but at the work that questions do in conversation. I assume that questions are used by members to help carry out various kinds of interactional activities, like requesting, suggesting, and offering. The point of view taken here is that the hearer does not only hear a question, he more fundamentally hears a request in question form, or a suggestion in question form, or an offer in question form. Each of these initiates the interactional activity of requesting, suggesting, or offering, in which the hearer is invited to participate and produce an instance.

The interactional activity of requesting can be as short as two utterances in sequence: a request in question form by S and a compliance by H. But it can also be longer, e.g., when a procedural problem occurs
(see Chapter 7). The other activities can similarly be represented by sequences of two or more utterances, some from S and some from H. Hence, question-response sequences divide into request-response sequences, suggestion-response sequences, offer-response sequences, etc. All three are instances of Sacks' concept of adjacency pair.

One problem arises as soon as we make the shift from questions to activities: questions no longer form an independent category in themselves. Questions can be used to make the different kinds of utterances that initiate the activities mentioned above, and each of them can also be initiated by means of other kinds of utterances. A question, then, is not an independent *kind* of interactional activity, but only one *mode* in which various kinds of interactional activities can be initiated.

**ALL QUESTIONS, TECHNICALLY, ARE REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION**

However, there is still some coherence to the class of questions even within the field of interactional activities, and this coherence simplifies the analysis. The following property holds, I believe, relating questions to activities:

*Property.* All questions, technically, are requests for information.

1. The first step in discussing this property is to define and discuss the concept of request. A request is the initiating utterance in the culturally regulated activity of requesting, specifically, suggesting that the hearer perform an action that will directly benefit the requester. The hearer completes the activity with a response (possibly an action), either by complying or refusing to comply. This definition can be realized by the utterance frame: "I request that you do X for me."

The central principle regulating requesting appears to be that the hearer has the right to agree or refuse to comply with a request. Thus, a request is only an *appeal* to the hearer to comply, even if expressed as an order to do so.

My conception of requests in this analysis is the following: In every situation there is a boundary around the actions that S can warrantably request of H. Inside the boundary H will evoke notice if he does not comply; outside the boundary S will evoke notice for having made the request, and H can defensibly refuse to comply. The boundary changes from situation to situation, but generally, the boundary includes little things, actions that cost H very little to perform. The boundary becomes
larger the more power or authority S has over H in a particular situation. But in the minimal power situation, as in Verbal Interaction, I assume not only that these little things cost H very little, but also are easier for H to do than for S to do. For S to request something in this kind of relationship that he can more easily do himself is seen as taking advantage.

Some examples will make this assumption clear. Suppose S requests that H tell him how many countries there are in the world. H will assume that he can give a rough estimate, like "a couple of hundred." H is not expected to do the relevant research to find out exactly how many there are, because S can do that as easily as he can. Again, suppose S asks H what time it is. If H does not have a watch or cannot otherwise see a clock easily from the position that he is in, he can properly respond, "I don't know." He is not expected to go look, because that is something that S can do as easily as H. (Or, if S is bedridden, say, then the boundary may move to cover that particular case but not the case where S has a clock directly in front of him but refuses to look at it.)

2. The second step in examining the property above is to argue that all questions are requests. The instruction that accompanies a question in an understood way makes this clear: "I request that you tell me the answer to the following question." That is a specification of the central request frame: "I request that you do X for me." (I follow Searle (1969) here.)

3. The third step is to discuss the concept of information. I view information in a common sense way as an assertion that members agree is true or false. The assertions refer to the class of things that members believe have the property of existence independent of themselves, i.e., objective status. The class includes facts, opinions, decisions, intentions, reasons, physical objects—anything that members agree has a history. The only things not reportable as information are actions or objects coming into being now, or contemplated to come into being in the future. They may be referred to only indirectly as someone's intentions, plans, desires to accomplish, etc. In effect, I follow the line of thought that says that all objects and events are thought by members to gain the property of facticity as they move from the present into the past.

4. With this background I turn now to the property itself: all questions, technically, are requests for information. I dispose of technically immediately. I put it in the property to make clear that the main purpose of many requests is not to convey information, but to request some action beyond giving information.

There are only two general classes of requests in question form to consider. One is the class of permission questions equivalent to the
frame, "Will you do X for me?" The other is the class of requests for information in short question form, like "What time is it?" and "Is it X o'clock?", discussed as general and specific proposal questions in Chapter 5. It is my belief that all requests in question form fall into one class or the other, i.e., that all such requests are somehow equivalent to the standard frames in each class. I discuss each class in turn.

a) Permission questions The general frame for all requests is "I request that you do X for me," as noted above. When only the subset of requests in question form is considered, that frame can be specified as "Will you do X for me?" I call questions in this form permission questions, because the question directly asks H to permit the request. A permission question consists of two parts, a first part addressing H's right to agree or refuse to comply with the request, followed by a second part, stating what action the S would like H to do for him.

For this analysis indirect forms of "Will you do X for me?" are considered equivalent to it. Thus, indirect ways to request the time, like "Do you have the time?", "Can you [meaning "Are you able to"] tell me the time?", and "Do you have a watch?" are considered here as pre-elliptic forms of "Will you tell me the time?", i.e., they elide Lines 2 and 3 in the following paradigm following themselves.

1. S: "Do you have the time?" or "Can you tell me the time?" or  
   "Do you have a watch?"
2. H: "Yes."
3. S: "Then will you tell me the time?"
4. H: "Yes. It's X o'clock."

Further, permission questions high in their own certainty series (see later in this chapter) are considered equivalent to the question with no particular certainty contained in it. That is, "Won't you tell me the time?", "You'll tell me the time, won't you?", etc., are considered equivalent to "Will you tell me the time?" for this purpose.

b) Requests for information in short question form There should be no reason to consider this class separately since requests for information in question form are included among all requests in question form by specifying "Will you do X for me?" as "Will you tell me Y?" That is, giving information is one action that can be requested from H. However, requests for information in question form can also be made by using short frames that don't refer to the action requested. For example,
Requests in question form

I mean frames like "What is X?", "Is Y the correct X?", "What did A do?", "Did A do B?", etc., which are the content parts of the related permission questions: "Will you tell me what X is?", "Will you tell me if Y is X?", "Will you tell me what A did?", "Will you tell me if A did B?", etc. In effect, it appears that requesting information is so common that it has generated its own short, abbreviated frames over time, where the reference to the action requested of H is omitted. It is assumed that H knows what action he is being asked to do.

To return now to the property under discussion: the property is obviously true for the second class, because all the questions there are assumed to be requests for information. That the property is also true for the first class can be seen negatively. It is impossible to use a question to request directly that the hearer carry out an action. Compare, for example, "I request that you pass me the salt," with "Will you pass me the salt?" The first, the general frame for all requests, proposes the action directly, while the second, the question form, proposes it only indirectly, referring directly to whether or not the hearer will agree to comply, embedded in "will you." The target of "will you" is information: Does the hearer agree to comply or not? Obviously enough, the question contains the request itself, after "will you," but the question technically addresses the problem of H's agreement. Another way to see this is to note that the answer-set to "Will you pass me the salt?" is (Yes, No), which is information and not the action of passing the salt. 1

5. There is a similarity between specific proposal questions, the subject of Chapter 5, and requests for action beyond giving information here. That is that all requests for action are also specific, and not general, and thus take Yes, No as their literal answer-set.

6. The distinction between requesting information in question form and requesting action in question form beyond giving information can be summarized in the following way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kinds of Request</th>
<th>For information</th>
<th>For action beyond giving information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permission question</td>
<td>General: &quot;Will you tell me what time it is?&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Will you pass me the salt?&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Specific proposal: &quot;Will you tell me if it's two o'clock?&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short question</td>
<td>General: &quot;What time is it?&quot;</td>
<td>(None)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Specific proposal: &quot;Is it two o'clock?&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thus, it appears that there are two ways to request information in question form, by means of a permission question or a short question, while there is only one way to request action beyond giving information, the permission question form.

**THE PERMISSION MAXIM: CASE OF AGREEMENT**

The right of the hearer to agree or refuse to comply leads to this paradigm for making a request.

1. S: Makes appeal to H’s right to agree or refuse to comply with a request.
2. H: Agrees to entertain S’s request.
3. S: Makes request.
4. H: Agrees to request and complies.

This slightly less general form of the paradigm may be more illuminating:

1. S: “May I request an action from you?”
3. S: “Do X for me.”
4. H: “All right” (and complies).²

One part of the permission maxim flows from the summary above. That is the case of agreement where H agrees to comply with the request. The maxim applies to permission questions, i.e., to the questions in the upper two cells of the earlier table.

*Permission Maxim (Case of Agreement).* If a request is made of you in permission question form, and you agree to comply with the request, respond with an agreement and then do the requested action. Then give the turn back to the requester.

The maxim reflects an elliptic use of the paradigm above. The maxim assumes that S asks a question that combines Lines 1 and 3 of the paradigm: “Will you (reflects Line 1) do X for me (reflects Line 3)?” Since H is being asked to do two things at the same time, it is not surprising to find a maxim like this guiding his response.

I can find only one classic example of the use of the permission maxim in *Verbal Interaction*, and even that is blurred:
Here, Roz agrees to comply with the permission question asked of her and then goes on to do the requested action. The blurring occurs because it is not entirely clear that Jock’s utterance is a question. While it has inverted word order at the beginning, it has no question mark at the end, and is close to an order.

The permission maxim has an elliptic form, performing the requested action without explicitly indicating agreement to comply. Some examples are these:

(4/13/276)

276. Jock: ... Pull harder [on the oars], Honey, hmmm?
Roz: [Complies]

(23/3/40-41)

40. Jock: ... Did you bring your cigarettes? If you'd quit smoking, I would quit smoking.
41. Roz: Why should either of us?
Roz offers Jock a cigarette.

In the first example Roz simply complies with Jock’s request to “pull harder,” thereby implying that she agrees to do it. In the second example we have a pre-elliptic permission question. (See earlier discussion of pre-elliptic questions.) The permission question is “Did you bring your cigarettes?” in L. 40, which is heard by Roz to imply “May I have a cigarette?” Roz complies elliptically by simply offering Jock a cigarette, at the same time that she is responding to the second of his remarks.

A generalized permission maxim for the case of agreement including the elliptic possibility is this:

**Generalized Permission Maxim (Case of Agreement).** If a request is made of you in permission question form, and you agree to comply with the request, respond with an agreement and then do the requested action, or respond only with the requested action. Then give the turn back to the requester.

A final point here. I think it is possible to reread Schegloff's “summons” in his “summons-answer” pair as a kind of request that uses a version of this paradigm. By a “summons-answer” pair, another kind of
adjacency pair, Schegloff refers to S's announcement that he wishes to speak to H and H's agreement to listen that often precede a conversation or a new segment of a conversation. (See Schegloff, 1968.) Two examples from *Verbal Interaction* are these:

(25/13/274-277)
274. Roz: Jock?
275. Jock: What?
276. Roz: Are you going to die when you're twenty-eight?
277. Jock: Honey, I want to get out of this school!

(19/18/348-350)
348. Roz: (Calls to instructor) Hey!
349. Dave: M-hmm.
350. Roz: What kind of stitch can I do around the edge of this? Because the other one doesn't look so good.
        Roz shows the instructor her sandal.

If the first example is read with its understood instructions, we have this reading:

Roz: Jock [I want to say something; will you listen to me]?
Jock: [Yes.] What?
Roz: [Makes request for information]

This reading is a version of Lines 1-2 of the paradigm above if “Will you listen to me?” is read as an instance of “May I request an action from you?” , and “What?” is read as an elliptic form of “Yes.” Though not a perfect fit, the comparison shows, I think, that the summons appeals to the right of H to agree or refuse to comply, i.e., that it seeks H's cooperation to listen to what S wants to say. This view of the summons-answer pair stresses the permission element involved, and helps me to understand the occasional example of a summons that is treated like this hypothetical one:

My wife: Lindsey?
Me: Not now, Bobbie; I can’t talk.

More generally, the present analysis shows the presence of permission in all the forms of adjacency pairs studied, question-answer, request-compliance, summons-answer (and later in the chapter, offer-acceptance, and suggestion-compliance). Though never denied by the conversational analysts, they tend to ignore it in their drive to find hard rules governing
aspects of conversation. In Goffman's terms the present analysis falls more on the side of "ritual" constraints on responses to questions than it does on the side of "system" constraints (1976).

The second example from Verbal Interaction is similar to the first. It also shows that neither the summons nor the answer need to be questions.

**THE PERMISSION MAXIM: CASE OF REFUSAL**

So far the permission maxim applies only to cases where H agrees to comply with S's request. What happens when H refuses to do so? I believe that in that case H is expected to offer a reason for why he is not willing to comply. (Recall that these requests are for little things, things that S could reasonably expect of H.) That is, I assume that the following paradigm comparable to the one above holds for the case of refusal:

1. S: May I make a request of you?
2. H: Yes.
3. S: Do X for me.
5. S: Why?
6. H: Because Y.

The paradigm is longer than before because I assume here that H will not refuse to hear the request asked for in Line 1. If he refuses to comply with the request in Line 3, I believe that he can then be asked for a reason why. Using the frame "Will you do X for me?" that combines Lines 1 and 3, this shorter paradigm is produced:

1. S: Will you do X for me?
2. H: No.
3. S: Why?
4. H: Because Y.

This analysis leads to the second part of the permission maxim, by eliding Line 3.

*Permission Maxim (Case of Refusal).* If a request is made of you in permission question form, and you refuse to comply with it, respond with the disconfirming answer and then give a reason for the refusal. Then give the turn back to the requester.
A hypothetical example of this maxim is this. (None occurred in *Verbal Interaction.*

S: "Will you pass me the salt?"
H: "No. There isn’t any."

There is also an elliptic form of the maxim for the case of refusal. Here, H simply gives the reason, which implies that he refuses to comply with the request. A generalized permission maxim for this case is the following:

*Generalized Permission Maxim (Case of Refusal).* If a request is made of you in permission question form, and you refuse to comply with it, either respond with the disconfirming answer and then give a reason for the refusal, or give only the reason for the refusal. Then give the turn back to the requester.

An example is this:

(17/10/184-188)

185. Salesgirl: Has it been opened?
186. Jock: No, that hasn’t been opened. That’s just the way we got it. That’s the way it comes. (pause) It’s too fast a film. I want a Super Plus X instead of Super Double X.
187. 2nd SG: Did you . . .
188. 1st SG: We don’t have Super Plus X.

The first salesgirl uses the elliptic form in L. 188 in answer to Jock’s original question in L. 184, “Can you change that for Super Plus X?” That is, I read her utterance in L. 188 as equivalent to “[No, because] We don’t have Super Plus X.”

A second example, hypothetical, is the elliptic form of the example given above:

S: "Will you pass me the salt?"
H: "There isn’t any."
THE MAYBE RESPONSE

I have analyzed requests for action to this point as if there were only two possible responses, the agreement to comply and the refusal to comply, each leading to further response. That is not true; it is also possible for H to respond with some form of maybe, i.e., to postpone his decision until he has more information. The paradigm here seems to be the following:

1. S: Will you do $X$ for me?
2. H: Maybe. Why do you ask?
3. S: Because $Y$.
4. H: All right (and complies), or No, because $Z$.

This response seems to be operating in the following cases:

(14/36/717-722)
717. Roz: Since I like this little braid, why don't you get some more?
718. Jock: Get the what?
719. Roz: Get some more of this round braid, this round braid. Roz yawns.
720. Jock: For what?
721. Roz: Because I might want to make one [a lanyard]. (( ))
722. Jock: Oh, this one is for you.

(2/6/121-123)
121. Jock: Hey, hey, be careful! . . . You move up forward.
122. Roz: Oh, what for? . . . Want me to row a while?
123. Jock: Yeah, if you want to.

In the first example Jock's question "For what?" in L. 720 appears to be an expression of the maybe response. He wants to know why Roz wants more of the round braid before deciding whether to agree or refuse to comply. In this case he decides to refuse to comply because her request is made irrelevant by what he has in mind, to give her the one he is making.

In the second example I infer that the maybe reaction occurred to Jock's request in order form in L. 121, "You move up forward." Roz asks "What for?" but proposes her own reason, rather than waiting for Jock to give his. Jock then accepts her reason as if that was what he had in mind all along.
This third possible response helps to explain another kind of variation that I noted when studying the chain maxim. That is the case where the speaker asks a question and then offers a reason for why he is asking that question, before giving the turn to H. These cases can now be seen as anticipations of the maybe response. And since maybe implies the possibility that H may refuse to comply, these examples also show evidence of knowledge of the permission maxim in refusal form. Thus, S anticipates that H may exercise his right to refuse to comply. To forestall that possibility, S offers a reason in advance, to help persuade H to comply. In terms of the maybe paradigm above, S combines Lines 1 and 3, producing “Will you do X for me? Because Y.” He thereby tries to elide a possible “Why” question from H in Line 2.

An example is this:

(4/13/268)  
[ Jock and Roz are in the rowboat; Roz is rowing. ]
268. Jock: Go that way, huh? I want to see around the point.

RELATION OF THE PERMISSION MAXIM TO THE
CHAIN MAXIM AND TO THE INVITATION MAXIM

How do the chain maxim (for general questions only) and invitation maxim relate to the permission maxim? I believe that the permission maxim is a generalization of both.

Chain Maxim

The chain maxim can be seen as a special case of the permission maxim in the case of agreement. Consider this example of the use of the permission maxim to request information:

S: Will you tell me what X is?  
H: Yes. X is Y.

The information requested is in general question form (“What is X?”) and so covers the cases to which the chain maxim applies. The chain maxim can be seen as a special case of this one with “Will you tell me” elided from the first line (and “what X is” changed to “what is X”) and “Yes” elided from the second line. That is, all reference to H’s right to agree or refuse to comply disappears in the chain maxim.
Invitation Maxim

The permission maxim is also a generalization of the invitation maxim. That can be seen in the following ways:

The refusal part of the permission maxim is a generalization of the correction part of the invitation maxim. Consider this paradigm from Chapter 5.

1. S: Is $X$ correct?
2. H: No.
3. S: What $X$ is correct?
4. H: $Y$ is correct.

Putting “Is $X$ correct?” into the paradigm here in the section “The Permission Maxim: Case of Refusal” in permission question form, we have this:

1. S: Will you tell me if $X$ is correct?
2. H: No.
3. S: Why?
4. H: Because $Y$ is correct.

The invitation maxim paradigm is a special case of this if “tell me if” is heard as “confirm that,” i.e., if “Will you tell me if $X$ is correct?” is heard as “Will you confirm that $X$ is correct?”. (The sense of confirming arises from the special character of the specific proposal question that its user has some degree of belief in his proposal.) Then, combining Lines 2 and 4 as called for by each maxim, we see that “No” plus a correction is a special form of “No” plus a reason.

It is also the case that the permission maxim generalizes the invitation maxim in the agreement part. The argument is similar to the one for the chain maxim above. In the invitation maxim the confirming response is the compliance, because it is the information that S requested, and it implies that H has agreed to respond. Consider this example of the permission maxim to request information in specific proposal form:

S: Will you tell me if $X$ is correct?
H: Yes. Yes it is.

The invitation maxim appears if “Will you tell me” is elided from the first line (and “if $X$ is correct” is changed to “is $X$ correct”) and the first “Yes” is elided from the second line, along with “it is.”

\[^4\]
Thus, putting the two parts of the argument together, I infer that the invitation maxim itself is a special case of the permission maxim.

With this generalization, it is now possible to understand two phenomena not handled by the invitation maxim. The first is the case where S asks a specific proposal question and H responds "Why do you want to know?" That is, H uses the maybe response from the permission maxim on a request for information in short form. No such example occurred in Verbal Interaction, but the following shows what I mean:

S: Was Henry the Eighth a member of the Plantagenet family?
H: Why do you want to know?

If S's question is sufficiently "out of the blue," then H's response here is not simply denigrating to S. H always retains his right to refuse to comply with nonnormal requests, and this may be one of them. The analysis here of the permission maxim makes this response reproduceable, while the invitation maxim did not.

The second phenomenon is related to the first. Here, S asks a specific proposal question and then adds a reason why he is asking the question before he gives the turn over to H. (The phenomenon was discussed above only in relation to permission questions, not specific proposal questions.) Consider the following hypothetical example:

S: Is Helsinki the capital of Finland? I need to know for my geography report.

Though the question is a request for information in short specific proposal question form, S adds a reason as if anticipating a "Why do you want to know?" response from H. That is, S anticipates that H may use the maybe alternative from the permission maxim.

In both these cases an issue concerning a request for information in short question form invokes a feature of the permission maxim, helping to show, I think, that the permission maxim is a generalization of the invitation maxim, and can be utilized in requests that appear to belong to the invitation maxim. (The same is true for the chain maxim, of course.)

In summary, the permission maxim is a generalization of both the chain maxim for general questions and the invitation maxim for specific proposal questions. Thus, the permission maxim replaces both the chain maxim and the invitation maxim, though I will retain both of them in the analysis for convenience. The analysis also shows that maxims need not proliferate only on a horizontal level, each more or less of the same
Requests in question form

level of generality as the others. Some include others, a form of organization that must exist to keep H's task manageable.

THE CERTAINTY SERIES FOR PERMISSION QUESTIONS

Parallel to the certainty series for requests for information, there is a certainty series for requests for action. The certainty series expresses degrees of S's belief (or hope) that the action requested will be done. The following paradigm operates on the basic frame for permission question requests, and shows what I have in mind:

"Will you do X for me?"
"Won't you do X for me?"
"You'll do X for me, won't you?"
"You'll do X for me, won't you?"
"You'll do X for me (I know you will)."

Note that there is no Degree 1 line here comparable to "What is X?" in the certainty series in Chapter 5. That is so because the parallel request for action in general form, "What will you do for me?" occurs only rarely. Further, it does not contain any reference to X and so is not connected to "Will you do X for me?" by members.

I report it simply as a way of organizing permission questions. Nothing further was done with the certainty series in this analysis.

OTHER KINDS OF PERMISSION QUESTIONS

This section develops an extension of the permission maxim to permission questions other than requests. While all questions are technically requests for information, they are not all requests for action. Other kinds are offers and suggestions.

The basic principle informing the extension to these cases is the same as before: the permission question directly seeks agreement by H to comply, and if that is gotten, indirectly proposes that H do the action he has agreed to do. Similarly, for the refusal case.

An exploration of the questions that propose action in *Verbal Interaction* suggests an organization of these questions in terms of three dichotomies:
78 QUESTIONING STRATEGIES IN SOCIOLINGUISTICS

a) Will S or H perform the action proposed in the question?

b) Will S or H directly benefit from its performance? (Benefit is intended here in an immediate, short run sense, without concern for possible joint benefit in the long run.)

c) Does S propose the action, or does S ask H to propose it? The existence of this third possibility permits me to pair a proposed action with its reverse action, where S asks H to propose it.

These dichotomies permit the following typology to be given, shown in Table 9. Additional cases occur under Suggestion and Intention because of the possibility of joint action and joint benefit, as shown in the last six lines of the table.

Table 9 becomes clearer by providing defining frames for each case. See Table 10.

The following comments about the tables will help to make clear what I have in mind.

1. Table 9 shows that there are some close equivalences between types of permission questions. For example, Reverse requests are closely equivalent to Offers, because in each case S will perform an action that will directly benefit H. The difference between them, of course, is that S proposes an Offer directly, but asks H to propose the Reverse request. Other equivalent pairs can be found by finding the same pattern of S's and H's in the body of the table: Requests and Reverse offers; Suggestions and Reverse intentions; Intentions and Reverse suggestions; and the comparable pairs among the joint benefit cases.

The equivalence between these pairs is seen more clearly when the verb want is used through the standard frames, as follows:

"Want" frame

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Request for action</th>
<th>I want you to do X for me.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reverse request for action</td>
<td>Do you want me to do X for you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer</td>
<td>I want to do X for you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverse Offer</td>
<td>Do you want to do X for me?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestion</td>
<td>I want you to do X for yourself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverse suggestion</td>
<td>Do you want me to do X for myself?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention</td>
<td>I want to do X for myself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverse intention</td>
<td>Do you want to do X for yourself?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking at the (Request for action, Reverse offer) pair, we have: "I want you to do X for me" vs. "Do you want to do X for me?" The person doing the action is the same; the person benefitting from the action is the same. The difference lies in who wants it done. Similarly for the other pairs mentioned above.
Table 9 A Typology of Kinds of Permission Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of permission question</th>
<th>Who performs the action?</th>
<th>Who benefits directly from the action?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Request for action</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverse request for action</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverse offer</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestion</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverse suggestion</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverse intention</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestion for joint benefit to be done by H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>S and H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverse suggestion for joint benefit to be done by S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S and H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestion for joint benefit to be done by both</td>
<td>S and H</td>
<td>S and H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverse suggestion for joint benefit to be done by both</td>
<td>S and H</td>
<td>S and H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention for joint benefit to be done by S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S and H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverse intention for joint benefit to be done by H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>S and H</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10 Defining Frames for the Typology of Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of permission question</th>
<th>Standard frame</th>
<th>Question frame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Request for action</td>
<td>I request that you do $X$ for me.</td>
<td>Will you do $X$ for me?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverse request for action</td>
<td>Do you request that I do $X$ for you?</td>
<td>Do you request that I do $X$ for you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer</td>
<td>I offer to do $X$ for you.</td>
<td>May I do $X$ for you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverse offer</td>
<td>Do you offer to do $X$ for me?</td>
<td>Do you offer to do $X$ for me?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestion</td>
<td>I suggest that you do $X$ for yourself.</td>
<td>Why don’t you do $X$ for yourself?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverse suggestion</td>
<td>Do you suggest that I do $X$ for myself?</td>
<td>Do you suggest that I do $X$ for myself?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention</td>
<td>I intend to do $X$ for myself.</td>
<td>[None]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverse intention</td>
<td>Do you intend to do $X$ for yourself?</td>
<td>Do you intend to do $X$ for yourself?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestion (individual action, joint benefit)</td>
<td>I suggest that you do $X$ for us.</td>
<td>Why don’t you do $X$ for us?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of permission question</th>
<th>Standard frame</th>
<th>Question frame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reverse suggestion (individual action, joint benefit)</td>
<td>Do you suggest that I do X for us?</td>
<td>Do you suggest that I do X for us?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestion (joint action, joint benefit)</td>
<td>I suggest that we do X for ourselves.</td>
<td>Why don’t we do X for ourselves?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverse suggestion (joint action, joint benefit)</td>
<td>Do you suggest that we do X for ourselves?</td>
<td>Do you suggest that we do X for ourselves?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention (individual action, joint benefit)</td>
<td>I intend to do X for us.</td>
<td>[None]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverse intention (individual action, joint benefit)</td>
<td>Do you intend to do X for us?</td>
<td>Do you intend to do X for us?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Suggestion is commonly considered to be a more general category than Requests for action, because a suggestion can be seen as S’s proposal that H do something either for S, or for H, or for both of them. However, to avoid this overlapping (which is of no interest here), I have defined Suggestions more narrowly as shown in Table 9. They are either something that S suggests that H do for himself, or in the joint action case, that H do for both of them.

3. Other forms involving joint action are possible, e.g., joint action for individual benefit, but no examples occurred in my materials and so these possibilities are omitted.

4. The Question Frame column in Table 10 shows that all the reverse actions have a question form, as is obvious. But only the first two direct actions, Requests for actions and Offers, have clear question frames. Suggestion has the unusual question form, “Why don’t you do X for yourself?”—which could also be used for Requests for action and Offers as well—while Intention has no question frame at all. The “Why don’t you” question is a suggestion only in a pre-elliptic way, as can be seen from this paradigm:

1. S: Why don’t you do X for yourself?
2. H: No reason.
3. S: Then I suggest that you do so.
4. H: All right (and complies).

Line 1 is a pre-elliptic form of the suggestion, and is commonly responded to as a suggestion itself and not as the request for information (a reason) that it is in literal terms. See examples (4/13/260-261) and
Requests in question form below. (This paradigm will be explored further in Chapter 8.)

The presence of Intention here is only to allow Reverse intention to appear, which does appear in question form.

Examples from *Verbal Interaction* of the various types in Table 9 are the following (the italicized utterances are the ones in question):

**Request for Action**

(4/13/268-269)

268. Jock: *Go that way, huh?* I want to see around the point.

269. Roz: (Sighs resignedly)

(4/14/289)

289. Roz: (Annoyed) Jock, *will you please not watch.* I do much better when you don't supervise.

Jock apparently reaches over as if to strike her.

**Reverse Request for Action**

(2/6/122-123)

122. Roz: *... Want me to row for a while?*

123. Jock: Yeah, if you want to.

(1/2/31-32)

31. Roz: *... Want me to take it while you're rowing?*

32. Jock: No, it's okay.

**Offer**

(15/2/16-17)

16. Roz: *... (Then to Jock, still singing)*

*What can I do fo-or you?*

17. Jock: (Coldly) *Yeah!*

(19/16/307-308)

307. Jen: *Can I help you?*

308. Jock: No.

(22/1/1-2)

1. Jock: *What would you like?*

2. Roz: I think I want a large cherry coke.

**Reverse Offer**

(24/10/221-222)

221. Jock: *Do you want to go fishing now?*

[Jock likes fishing more than Roz does.]
222. Roz: No.

693. Jock: I'd sure love to go out in that sailboat. *Want to go fishing?* Fishing? They go inside the cabin.

694. Roz: We are going up to the Craft Shop and we are going to *finish* those things in the next half hour. Roz is referring to some leather work projects they have been engaged in all week.

Suggestion

(4/13/260-261)

260. Roz: Jock, why *don't you read your book?* That's why I'm rowing—so you can read your book.


(22/28/558-559)

558. Jock: Where's the pliers? *Why don't you pull it through with the pliers?*

559. Roz: No, it'll bend.

Reverse Suggestion

(14/36/714-715)

714. Jock: *And you want me to finish that lanyard, huh?*

715. Roz: M-hmm.

(14/36/732-733)

732. Jock: *Shall I weave a bag like this?*

733. Roz: You could, if you could make ((  )).

Intention

[Not of interest, since it has no question form.]

Reverse Intention

(1/4/70-71)

70. Roz: *... Wanna take your shoes off?*

71. Jock: No.

(2/7/135-136)

135. Roz: *... Do you want to put your shirt over your shoulder before you sit down?*

Suggestion for Joint Benefit Done by H

(21/25/488-489)
488. Jock: Why don't you make one out for the table tennis champ? [a prize for the winner]
489. Phil: No, sir.

Reverse Suggestion for Joint Benefit Done by S

(15/38/759)
759. Roz: Shall I start packing [our] stuff [in the suitcase]?...

(16/3/50-51)
50. Jock: Shall I take all the stuff out of here?

Suggestion for Joint Benefit Done by Both

(14/34/680-681)
680. Roz: Let's do the laundry before we pack, huh?
681. Jock: Let's just take the laundry back with us.

(17/9/165-166)
165. Jock: Well, it's not rough, really. [Referring to the lake] Let's take a boat out?
166. Roz: Oh, no. I might drown.

Reverse Suggestion for Joint Benefit Done by Both

(3/11/220-221)
[They are in the rowboat.]
220. Roz: ... Shall we go home?
221. Jock: No. We've been here [only] ten minutes exactly.

(16/4/62,64-65)
62, 64 Jock: ... Shall we take ... some pictures of the Crafts Shop?
65. Roz: Well, not unless we, ah, I'd kinda like to finish my ((moccasins before we go))....

Intention for Joint Benefit Done by S

[Not of interest, since there is no question form.]
Reverse Intention for Joint Benefit Done by H

(18/14/287-292)

287. Jock: Oh, we forgot to bring the camera. Go back and get it.
288. Roz: (Completely exhausted from the climb, exclaims) Oh, drop dead!
289. Jock: I'll go back and get it.
290. Roz: Why?
291. Jock: I'll go back and get it. Well, you want to take pictures, don't you?
292. Roz: Yeah, but who ((

I don't think it is necessary to elaborate each of the examples above as I have done earlier. If the reader will compare the example with the defining frame in Table 10, he will see the fit.

AN EXTENSION OF THE PERMISSION MAXIM

The purpose of the development in the previous section is to propose an extension of the permission maxim. The extension will handle permission questions involving action beyond requests for action. The extension for the case of agreement is a straightforward one, including the elliptic possibility:

*Extension of the Permission Maxim (Case of Agreement).* Whenever S's permission question proposes an action for you, and you agree to perform it, either respond with the confirming answer, and then perform the action, or just perform the action. Then give the turn back to the speaker.

Table 9 shows that the maxim will apply to any case with an H in the first column, i.e., to Requests for action, Reverse offers, Suggestions, Reverse intentions, Suggestions for joint benefit to be done by H, and Reverse intentions for joint benefit to be done by H. (Requests for information in permission question form are also included.) An example of a Suggestion that meets the maxim is Example (4/13/260-261) in the examples above. Jock has been directing Roz's efforts at rowing, when Line 260 occurs. Jock then agrees to stop directing her, and does so.

Similarly, an extension of the permission maxim can be made in the case of refusal, including the elliptic possibility.
Extension of the Permission Maxim (Case of Refusal). Whenever S's permission question proposes an action for you, and you refuse to do it, either respond with the disconfirming answer and then give a reason explaining why you refuse to comply, or just give the reason. Then give the turn back to the speaker.

The refusal case applies to the same types to which the case of agreement applies. An example of a Suggestion that meets the maxim is Example (22/28/558-559) given above. To Jock's question about the pliers, Roz responds with both the disconfirming answer and a reason. An example of a Reverse offer that follows the elliptic possibility is seen in Example (14/35/693-694) above.

Two obvious problems with the extension of the permission maxim are these:

1. An activity with parts for both S and H has been invoked by the question. That activity may take many steps in close coordination between S and H to complete. But the permission maxim applies only to H's first action after agreeing to comply. The maxim should be extended to cover all the actions that H must take when he agrees to perform the action proposed.

2. An action broached and agreed to need not take place immediately. For example:

   S: "Shall we go to Cape Cod this summer?"
   H: "Sure."

Here, nothing on the topic need happen for some time. An example from Verbal Interaction is the following:

(1/2/29-30)
29. Roz: You row for a while and then I'll row. Okay?
30. Jock: All right. . . .

Roz's part in this suggestion will not take place for some time.

These two problems show the general problem to which this section leads. A question by S proposing an action of some kind may in fact propose an activity of a good deal of complexity, taking many steps to complete. Thus, the permission maxim ultimately should be stated in a form where both S and H play their respective parts if H agrees to accept S's invitation to do that activity. Thus, all questions invite H to participate in some activity in which each of them has a known part.5
Once this issue is faced, it becomes clear that a question and a response can create agreement to a very complex plan with many parts for both S and H. They may be the focal events in the immediate situation, but implicit are all the things that S and H must do to be able to complete the agreed upon activity.

RESULTS

Finally, I present some results of testing the permission maxim. I place them here at the end because I must test all the kinds of permission questions at once. There aren’t enough of any one kind in *Verbal Interaction* to test them separately.

As noted above, the extension of the permission maxim only applies to some of the permission questions, those where H either performs the action proposed or shares in it with S. The relevant permission questions are Requests for action, Reverse offers, Suggestions, Reverse intentions, Suggestions for joint benefit to be done by H, Suggestions for joint benefit to be done by both, Reverse suggestions for joint benefit to be done by both, and Reverse intentions for joint benefit to be done by H. Also included are the few Requests for information that occurred in permission question form rather than in short form, e.g., “Will you tell me what time it is?” kinds of questions.

Combining all these kinds of permission questions, the results are given in Table 11, which shows that the percent of following is higher in the confirming cases than in the disconfirming cases (43.8% vs. 12.8%), but that the overall percent is low, 24.0%. As with the other maxims tested, the percentage of cases that strictly follow the permission maxim is low.6

In terms of our cumulative test 12 new cases are now reproduced, making 66 + 12 or 78 altogether, for a cumulative percent of 12.7% of the total of 607 questions.

Again, a few of the disconfirming cases that were reproduced by the chain maxim are not reproduced here (because only the disconfirming response was given). They were all denigrating cases and will be discussed in Chapter 8.

Finally, there are a number of permission questions remaining in *Verbal Interaction* that do not fall under the extension of the permission maxim. These are cases where S will perform the action proposed by himself if H agrees to it. I leave these questions for later study.7
Table 11  
A Test of the Extension of the Permission Maxim:  
Verbal Interaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confirming Case</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follows</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not follow</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>56.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disconfirming Case</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follows</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not follow</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>87.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Combining the Confirming and the Disconfirming Cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follows</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not follow</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SUMMARY

This chapter has introduced a permission maxim to attempt to reproduce responses to certain kinds of permission questions. As before, the results of the empirical test show that only a small percent of the cases to which it appears to apply strictly follow the permission maxim. It was shown that the permission maxim is a generalization of both the chain maxim (for general questions only) and of the invitation maxim.

NOTES

1 It is this property of requests in question form that makes them appear more polite than the corresponding requests in imperative form.
2 The place for “all right” in Line 4 is necessary because H may refuse to comply with a request that he had agreed to entertain in Line 2. Common cases are unreasonable requests, such as “Kill yourself for me” and “Give me all your money.”
3 If H says “No” at this point, I think he is expected to offer a reason why, because it is denigrating to S not to even hear his request. (See Chapter 8.) Hence, the permission maxim in the case of refusal guides response in this instance, too.
A detail not pursued here is that the permission question "Will you tell me if $X$ is correct?" makes two specific proposals, not one. One is "Will you tell me?" and the other is "Is $X$ correct?" Hence, more complicated answer formats can appear in the disconfirming case, such as "Yes, I will. It's not correct; $Y$ is correct," if both proposals are responded to by $H$.

The parts need not be known in advance, but a way to find them out must exist.

Cases of anticipation are not included here, e.g., $S$ clarifies his permission question by giving a reason for it.

In the following chapters I will use the term request-response sequence to include the cases discussed in this section, even though they may not be requests.
PROCEDURAL PROBLEMS
IN REQUEST-RESPONSE SEQUENCES

The previous three chapters have laid out the first part of my analysis, the presentation of some standard request-response sequences begun with a question. In this chapter I deal with a set of problems that can arise in the actual coproduction of a request-response sequence. I call them procedural problems, by which I mean the technical problems involved in delivering a request so that S and H both find clear meaning in the utterance. For example, I have in mind such problems as H's failure to hear enough of S's request to respond intelligently, and H not understanding some of the words that S used.

The central maxim here is the

Procedural Problem Maxim. With S's help, repair any procedural problems in S's request in question form that make it difficult or impossible for you to respond intelligently to the request. Then respond to the request, using the earlier maxims, and give the turn back to S.

The maxim is stated here in a limited form for the present concern with questions. It obviously applies to utterances other than questions, and some of the examples below will appeal to a more general form of the maxim than stated here.

H's attempt to solve a procedural problem is very commonly initiated by a request of his own in question form, such as "What?" or "What do
you mean?” Thus, the familiar instance of a question following a question can occur, one of the ways in which the chain maxim was violated.

A CLASSIFICATION OF PROCEDURAL PROBLEMS

The procedural problems that I discuss can be classified as two general types: (1) types where H misses some information in S’s utterance; and (2) types where H disagrees with some information in S’s utterance. I consider them in turn.

1. H Misses Some Information in S’s Utterance

I find four general ways in which H can miss information in S’s utterance. They are through lack of hearing, lack of understanding the language involved, lack of comprehending S’s meaning, and lack of sufficient specificity in S’s utterance to respond intelligently (vagueness). They appear to be ordered hierarchically in the order given, in the sense that a later problem cannot occur until the preceding one has been repaired. Finally, I add a fifth kind that occurs last in the hierarchy. That is the possibility that H may not know the answer to S’s request for information, leading to the well-known “I don’t know” response. Definitions and examples of these five follow.

a) Lack of hearing S’s utterance        Here, I mean either partial inability to hear, or inattentiveness to what was said.¹ The kinds of problems include S being unable to speak above a whisper, S not speaking loudly enough for the distance that separates him from H, S being drowned out by a sudden noise, H lapsing off into his own thoughts for a moment, etc.

The following are some examples from Verbal Interaction. (The italicized utterances here and throughout show the procedural problem.)

(15/1/9-12)

9. Jock: How tall are you?
    Jock walks into the bathroom. Apparently he leaves the door open for Roz refers to this when she answers his question, still singing.

10. Roz: Five-foot-four, shut the door.
    In answer to this Jock slams the door shut. About 15 seconds later he emerges carrying damp clothes. Roz stops singing.
11. Jock: (Casually) You were saying?
12. Roz: (Resumes singing) Five times four, shut the door ...

(20/22/441-446)
441. Jock: But that's the best square dance teacher I've seen. I ...
442. Roz: You might learn something from him, mightn't you? If you tried? Hmmm? Hmmm?
443. Jock: Huh? Do what?
444. Roz: You might learn something from him if you tried? Hmmm?
445. Jock: (Mimicking a drawl) Aw, might.
446. Roz: Aw! Aw!

(19/17/332-335)
332. Jock: ... I'll work here [in the Craft Room].
333. Roz: ((I don't know whether you'll like it here.))
334. Jock: Oh, dear. Use this. Perhaps you'd rather not have me around?
335. Roz: Hmm? No, not if you came ((to work)).

In the first example following L. 10, Jock shuts himself away from Roz in another room, but apparently still hears her talking or singing through the door. When he comes back, he asks her what she said.

In L. 443 of the second example Jock indicates that he heard part of what Roz said, but not all of it. In the third example Roz, in L. 335, announces that she didn't hear Jock's question in L. 334. She then realizes that she did hear it, because she goes on to answer it.

b) Lack of understanding the language involved in S's utterance Here, the problem is that H does not understand some word or phrase that S used. S may be at fault, e.g., he has an accent that obscures certain words for H; or H may be at fault, e.g., he does not know the meaning of a word that S uses. I also include problems that are caused by awkwardly constructed utterances. A classic form of this problem occurs, of course, when S speaks in a language that H does not understand.

Some examples are these:

(23/4/65-67)
65. Roz: All they [a group of doctors sitting at a nearby table] can talk about is E.N.T.
66. Jock: E.N.T. All right, what's E.N.T.?
67. Roz: Ear, nose and throat.
QUESTIONING STRATEGIES IN SOCIOLINGUISTICS

(6/4/54-57)
54. Jock: The Tuileries is where the . . . all the gay young men in France used to go.
55. Roz: Sans madames! [sic]
56. Jock: *Huh?*
   Roz makes no response, apparently still putting on her lipstick. There is a long pause after which Jock speaks again.
57. Jock: What did you say?
   Roz still doesn't answer; Jock resumes whistling. Roz then comes back into the living room over to where Jock is seated.

In L. 65 in the first example Roz uses a specialized term unknown to Jock, an acronym common in medicine that she knows because of her training in nursing. Jock asks what the acronym means, getting a direct answer from Roz.

In the second example Jock’s “Huh?” in L. 56 is caused, I think, by Roz’s sudden switch to French: “Sans madames!” He may not know these French words (though later comments make that unlikely), or he may have been confused because he wasn’t expecting French then.

c) Lack of comprehending the meaning of S’s utterance  What I have in mind here is problems caused by S not making his current remark connect up sufficiently well with the previous ones, causing H to lose his grasp of things. That is, I assume that there is a logic to the topic of the immediately preceding utterances that constrains what the next utterance should be for H to comprehend it, and S has failed to meet that constraint. In effect, I make a working definition of comprehension as the set of expectations that H has for what S will say next, where that set contains only the more likely possibilities, and not the less likely, though possible, ones.2 Some examples of this kind of problem follow:

(1/1/16-20)
16. Jock: (To attendant) Can we take out a boat?
17. Att.: What cabins are you with?
18. Jock: *Huh?*
19. Att.: What cabins are you with?
   The attendant prepares to write identifying data on a register he carries on a clip board.
20. Jock: I don’t know. We’re in Cabin B-1.
(3/9/190-195)
190. Jock: ... use both oars and go 90 degrees.
   [Roz] tries.
191. Jock: No ... no ... No! No! Look, to turn ...
192. Roz: You want to go this way?
193. Jock: Look, to turn, put one up and one back, and pull.
194. Roz: Oh, you mean do it like this?

(5/18/370-377)
Jock comes into the dock [with the rowboat].
370. Roz: You’re coming in front end first? ... Did you have to
   learn this in the Navy?
371. Jock: (Laughs) No. I wasn’t in that part of the Navy. I’ll tell
   you what they did do, though. They made us jump
   from a plane into a pool with full equipment on,
   including a ‘chute. They’d drop us in from a height of
   fifteen feet, just like that ...
372. Roz: Good Lord!
373. Jock: ... and you had to get out.
374. Roz: What if you didn’t? They didn’t care, huh? Did they
   rescue you if you didn’t?
375. Jock: Huh?
376. Roz: Did they drag you out if you didn’t?
377. Jock: ((Oh, of course. . . .))

(18/13/268-272)
268. Roz: ... Here ((I’ll help you)).
   Roz proceeds to pull Jock along [while walking to
   the Craft Room].
269. Jock: Well, I’ll tell you the truth, it does [help].
270. Roz: You and Herb Shriner!
271. Jock: What?
272. Roz: You’re always telling people the truth.

(19/15/298-302)
A child walks up to them and Roz greets him.
298. Roz: Hi!
299. Child: We have three belts and I have two belts to make
   (( ... ))
   Jock apparently thinks that the child may ask
   questions about the transmitter on his back, so, for
   fun, he asks the questions first.
300. Jock: How come you aren’t wearing something like this?
301. Child: Huh?
302. Jock: You look awful funny without something like this.

These examples show various ways in which lack of comprehension can be created in H. In the first example the attendant in L. 17 jumps too far ahead in the routine of signing a boat out, confusing Jock.

Line 194 of the second example shows the lack of comprehension of the novice learning a new activity, here, learning how to turn a rowboat at a right angle. In the third example Roz, in L. 374, asks three questions in a row on an aspect of the training exercise not being considered by Jock, thereby confusing him, and causing his “Huh?” Roz responds to the confusion by rephrasing a single question in clearer form to indicate her particular interest.

In the fourth example Roz confuses Jock in L. 270 with a reference to a well-known person. The confusion occurs because Jock apparently cannot see why the celebrity is relevant to the previous conversation. Roz then makes the connection for him. Finally, in the fifth example Jock confuses the child in L. 300 by asking him a question which is silly because both already know the answer: the child doesn’t have a transmitter to wear. It’s a question “from out of the blue,” not likely to be within the child’s set of expectations of first utterances Jock might make. To the child’s “Huh?” Jock responds by turning his own question into a more comprehensible assertion.

d) Lack of sufficient specificity in S’s utterance to respond intelligently (vagueness) In this procedural problem H finds that S’s utterance doesn’t formulate a unique proposition to which he can respond. In the sense of a parameter in mathematics, S must supply one or more additional pieces of information before H feels that he can respond.

The interesting point here is that vagueness is removed only “for all practical purposes.” (See Garfinkel, 1967.) Since every utterance remains essentially vague, in the sense that some other H can always find another ambiguity, the vagueness that H finds is only one among many that he could have found. At what point vagueness is removed for H in any particular case is a problem of sufficient grasp or comprehension, an issue beyond the scope of the present analysis.

Some examples follow:
(4/14/282-284)
282. Jock: ... Hey, there's the observatory. See?
283. Roz: Where?
They are now far enough out into the lake [in the rowboat] to be able to look back over the tree tops of the camp grounds to the high bluff behind, atop which stands a large observatory.
284. Jock: The big one and a little one. What did they call it? The trylon and the hemisphere. Oh, now we can almost see. A little further and we can see...

(4/16/330-334)
330. Roz: ... (Softly) Man, you don't want to bash any little girls [with the rowboat], do you?
331. Jock: What little girls?
332. Roz: Right there.
Jock is rowing in toward the swimming pier in his approach to the boat dock.
333. Jock: Oh, ((in front of us?)) Can you see 'em from here?
334. Roz: Bet the lifeguard asks you to keep away from it as soon as you get over near it.

(15/38/770-773)
770. Jock: ... Where's that bridge[deck] ...
771. Roz: Over there.
772. Jock: Where?
773. Roz: In the left hand drawer.

(6/4/55-59)
55. Roz: ... Will we trade our films?
56. Jock: Trade 'em?
57. Roz: Yeah. Up at "the thing."
58. Jock: Where?
59. Roz: At the Administration building.

(21/26/529-537)
529. Jock: ... See we, uh, about where shall I stop [in making a lanyard] and how. How much further?
530. Dave: Do you want it like this?
531. Jock: No.
532. Dave: No. You just want it square?
533. Jock: M-hm, with a loop hanging out.
534. Dave: Well, I'd take it down about this much further then before you...
535. Jock: You have to have that much to work?
537. Jock: Okay.

(23/3/56-59)
56. Jock: What are they doing?
   Apparently Jock would like to join [the] Rolphs
   [who are sitting at a nearby table in the canteen].

57. Roz: Who?
58. Jock: Over there.
59. Roz: They’re talking.

(24/8/165-172)
165. Roz: What fell out of that fish [that you caught]?
166. Jock: What fish?
167. Roz: You know that fish you were sticking the thing
   through, what fell out of it, something it had just
   eaten?
168. Jock: What?
169. Roz: A big glooky red mass fell out of it.
170. Jock: Oh, we had to pull his, part of his gill out.
171. Roz: Is that what it was?

In the first, second, fourth, sixth, and seventh examples H does not
feel he has enough information to carry out the request made of him.
The problems here were all caused by vagueness in some referent in S’s
utterance, e.g., the direction meant by “there” in the first example and
the persons meant by “they” in the sixth example.

The third example is like the ones above, except that the S, Jock, has
the problem (L. 772) in finding Roz’s answer to his request for
information unclear.

In Line 530 of the fifth example Dave cannot give the information
sought by Jock until he learns more about the specific plan Jock has in
mind. His question, “Do you want it like this?”, initiates a sequence of
four lines before he can provide the information. (Note that Jock does
not follow the invitation maxim in L. 531 in responding to Dave’s
question. See Chapter 5.)

This fifth example is like some of Merritt’s examples of request-
response sequences in client-server encounters (Merritt, 1976), and
provides a good opportunity to review her work. To illustrate her
analysis and show how it relates to the present analysis, I utilize one of
her examples:
1. C: Do you have the pecan Danish today?
2. S: Yes we do. Would you like one of those?
3. C: Yes, please. (Adapted from pp. 324-325)

In the example two question-answer pairs occur, in Lines 1-2, and Lines 2-3. Merritt's general question is this: "How is Q1-A1 linked to Q2-A2?" (p. 335). She presents four different ways in which the second pair can be linked to the first. The example above shows an instance of her "coupling" linkage, in her notation Q1-A1/Q2-A2. If the "Yes we do" had not occurred in Line 2, we would have had an instance of a second kind of linkage, related to the first, called the "elliptical coupling," or Q1-Q2-A2 in her notation.

The "chaining" linkage would have occurred if the example had been this:

_Hypothetical Example (a)._  
1. C: Do you have the pecan Danish today?  
2. S: Yes.  
3. C: May I have one?  
4. S: Yes (and complies).

Her notation for this kind is Q1-A1-Q2-A2.

Finally, her fourth kind of linkage, "embedding," would have occurred if the example had been this:

_Hypothetical Example (b)._  
1. C: Do you have the pecan Danish today?  
2. S: You mean like those ones we had yesterday?  
3. C: Yes.  
4. S: Yes we do.

Her notation for this kind is Q1-Q2-A2-A1.

In my terms the "chaining" linkage in Hypothetical Example (a) is a use of the invitation maxim in the case of agreement, followed by a use of the permission maxim in the case of agreement. The "embedding" linkage in Hypothetical Example (b) is an instance of the procedural problem of vagueness; S cannot answer C's question until some relevant information is obtained. The example, as I have constructed it, follows the specified form of the procedural problem maxim used in testing it on _Verbal Interaction_. (See later in this chapter.) Its first two lines are like L. 529-530 of the fifth example above.
The coupling and the elliptical coupling linkages are closely related in my view and can be included together in one or more maxims that permit both the complete form and the elliptical form to occur, as I have done with the invitation and permission maxims. Hence, I consider them together, in the following way:

The C's question, "Do you have the pecan Danish today?" can be heard as a pre-elliptic form of "May I have a pecan Danish?" as shown in Hypothetical Example (a) above. Using the permission maxim in the case of agreement, S could then respond, "Yes" and comply with the request. That is, Lines 2-3 of Hypothetical Example (a) could be elided if S hears it this way. But S need not hear it that way, because C's question is not clearly a pre-elliptic form of "May I have a pecan Danish?" Another possibility is that C is simply trying to find out which of his favorite foods S has, and after doing that, will make a selection (if S has any of them at all). Thus, S could hear C's question in Line 1 as pre-elliptic for or leading to Line 3 in this sequence:

1. C: Do you have the pecan Danish today?
2. S: Yes we do.
3. C: How about the cheese Danish?
4. S: Yes, we have that, too.

Thus, if S were to go get a pecan Danish, following the first hearing, he might have annoyed C who had not yet made up his mind and meant the second hearing. Hence, I think a vagueness procedural problem exists, which S attempts to repair with his question: "Would you like one of those?" Thus, I would treat the example in my terms as a use of the invitation maxim in the case of agreement, followed by a procedural problem request-response sequence that resolves whether the invitation maxim is the only maxim applying or whether the permission maxim should also apply. That is, S has to decide between "Yes" and "Yes (and complies)" as possible responses. In the present instance C's response "Yes, please" indicates that the first hearing is the correct one. If the second hearing had been correct, C would probably have said something like "Wait a second. I haven't decided what I want yet."

This is a rather benign way to put the problem. The S may be trying to pressure the C into buying something, or trying to get him to hurry up, by forcing C's question to be heard as a request for action beyond giving information.

The elliptical coupling form is then explained in the same way, on the assumption that the question, "Would you like one of those?" implies a "Yes" answer to C's question, and therefore makes it unnecessary.
e) "I don't know" This response is a common one to requests for information. It is a direct answer only to a "Do you know?" permission question. Hence, it causes a variation from the chain maxim and the invitation maxim when it occurs. But even when it is a direct answer to a request for information in permission question form, a procedural problem usually occurs. If "Do you know what X is?" is heard as pre-elliptic for "Will you tell me what X is?" (the most common case), then "I don't know" is a direct answer that doesn't meet the elliptic request for information. Hence, a procedural problem occurs in all cases except when S only wants to know if H does or does not know.

Examples may not be necessary, but two that occurred in Verbal Interaction are these:

(12/27/534-538)
534. Jock: How much did it cost you [a speeding ticket]?
535. Ben: Fifteen [dollars]. (To wife) Fifteen wasn't it?
536. Flo: Was it fifteen?
537. Ben: I don't know.
538. Flo: It was about that.

(11/24/465-467)
465. Flo: I got my one license test around Morring Street neighborhood.
466. Roz: What street is it?
467. Flo: I don't know exactly the other street it's on . . .

Both examples show the central feature of "I don't know." S cannot get the information he requested from H, because H (says he) doesn't have it to give.

Of the five procedural problems discussed here, this is the only one that is permanent. S cannot get the information he seeks. In the other cases the procedural problem does not destroy the question. Rather, the question remains on the floor, forcing a repair, so that it can be answered.

I proposed earlier that these five procedural problems are hierarchically ordered in the order given. A hypothetical example will show how this hierarchy works. (In Verbal Interaction I have not found a case where more than two levels of the hierarchy are used on the same procedural problem, and I do nothing further with the topic in this analysis.)
S is playing chess, while H, a novice at the game, is watching.

S: (To H) Should I castle now?
H: What did you say? [Lack of hearing]
S: Should I castle now?
H: What does “castle” mean? [Lack of understanding]
S: To switch my rook and my castle.
H: I don’t comprehend you. I didn’t know that that was a possible move. [Lack of comprehending]
S: Yes, it’s a special move. You can do it using either rook . . . (continues explaining).
H: Okay, I comprehend the question now. Which side do you want to castle on? [Vagueness]
S: The right side.
H: I don’t know. I can’t tell if that would be advantageous or not. [“I don’t know”]

I turn now to the second general type of procedural problem given earlier.

2. H Disagrees with Some Information in S’s Utterance

Here, H feels that S has said something wrong in his utterance, e.g., S may have mispronounced a word. The invitation maxim, discussed in Chapter 5, provides one way in which H can attempt to solve disagreements like this. Again, who is right and who is wrong is not the issue. H may disagree rightly or wrongly in the eyes of others; my present attention is only on the problem that that disagreement announces.

Disagreement can occur, of course, over many different aspects of S’s utterance. Only two occur with any frequency in Verbal Interaction. They are parallel to lack of understanding and lack of comprehending in the hierarchy above. Disagreement over understanding occurs when H feels that S is wrong in some linguistic aspect of his utterance; disagreement over comprehension occurs when H feels that S has the wrong comprehension of some matter broached in his utterance.

I give some examples of each kind to make them clearer:

a) Disagreement over understanding the language involved

(6/4/51-53)
51. Roz: D’you know what the “tooleries” is, Honey?
52. Jock: The “tooleries”? I know what the Tuileries are; I don’t know what the “tooleries” are.
53. Roz: What do you think the Tuileries are?
In both examples Roz uses a word that Jock feels is mispronounced, “ooleries” and “resilent.” In both cases Roz accepts Jock’s correction.

b) Disagreement over comprehension of the issues involved

Here, the cases that I have found are of two kinds: (i) Cases where H is surprised by some assertion by S; and (ii) Cases where H feels that S has made an assertion based on a false assumption. In the first kind H has only perceived a difference in belief between himself and S; he does not necessarily believe that S is wrong and that he is right, as in the second kind.3

Some examples of each kind follow:

i) Surprise

(13/32/639-644)

639. Roz: [To Ben and Flo] I saw the movie [“Kiss Me Kate”].
640. Jock: I thought the movie was terrible!
641. Roz: The movie was pretty good, I mean, but I didn’t see the stage show.
642. Jock: (Incredulous) It was what?
643. Roz: I thought it was pretty good. I liked it.
644. Jock: Oh, Roz, God! Everyone was getting up and leaving. It was sad! (Laughs)

(14/35/695-699)

695. Jock: Why do I want to go up in the Craft Shop?
696. Roz: So you can figure out what you did wrong in that stitch and besides there’s a ((girl)) up there.
697. Jock: Oh, I know what I did wrong. I don’t have to . . .
698. Roz: It would be very sweet if you did.
In L. 642 of the first example Jock is surprised to hear Roz express the opinion contrary to his own concerning the movie “Kiss Me Kate.” In the second I hear surprise, even shock, in Jock’s “What?” (L. 699) that is due to his sudden perception that Roz thinks he is interested in a girl up there. Another example is Example (21/25/499-504) given in Chapter 5. There, Jock’s “No?” following Phil’s disconfirming response shows surprise, I think, that his proposal was wrong.

(ii) False assumption

(3/10/203-205)

203. Jock: ... Okay, now push ... push on both [oars].
204. Roz: Which way? This way or that way?
205. Jock: No, push.

(4/15/303-306)

303. Roz: ... Shall I ship the oars, Dear?
304. Jock: Just let them go.
305. Roz: Let them go? What if they fall out, Lover Boy?
306. Jock: They can't.

(18/12/243-245)

243. Jock: What ['s] third class [mail]? Oh, you can throw it in with anything.
244. Roz: It can be opened for postal inspection, isn't it?
245. Jock: It can be opened anyhow.

In the first example neither of the ways that Roz indicates in her “This way or that way?” in L. 204 constitutes “push” to Jock, so that he cannot answer her question; it is based on a false assumption. Similarly, in the second Roz’s question in L. 305 is based on the false assumption (to Jock) that it is possible for the oars to fall out of the oarlocks if she lets them go. In the third Roz’s question in L. 244 is based on the false assumption (to Jock) that a unique feature of third class mail is that it can be opened for postal inspection. In this kind of case the chain maxim obviously fails, because H cannot give a (sensible) direct answer to S’s question.

There are other common questions that announce a disagreement in comprehension, like “Are you sure?” “Are you kidding?” and “Really?” They seem to express uncertain disagreement, that H is not sure if he disagrees with S or not. The topic of surprise is more complex than I have indicated, and I don’t have a good grasp of it. I leave it behind for now.
Finally, I make the obvious point that there are many more kinds of procedural problems than the ones considered here. For example, the various ways in which misunderstanding can occur are not discussed. The topic deserves far more attention than I can give it here.

The two general types of procedural problem can occur in sequence on the same point. That is, lack of hearing, understanding, or comprehending can be used to check out whether S said what H thought he did, after which H can disagree with it. Some examples will show how this combination works.

(1/3/62-68)
62. Roz: Why are we going way out in the middle [of the lake]? I'll get sunburned.
63. Jock: (Laughs) *What's the difference whether you're in the middle or not?*
64. Roz: You get more reflection in the middle.
65. Jock: *(Scoffs)* Oh.
66. Roz: Jock, I know!
67. Jock: How do you know?
68. Roz: I can see!...

(17/8/154-165)
Roz points toward the lake.
155. Jock: What?
156. Roz: *...mean, it's not higher down here?*
158. Roz: Are you kidding?

The cabin is only 30-40 feet from the lake, but on a steep slope. As they stand outside the door Roz and Jock seem to be talking about a narrow footpath near the water's edge. Then they proceed to walk around the front of the cabin, in view of the beach and boat docks, on their way to the "Ad" building.

159. Jock: No, I'm not kidding. It's no higher.
160. Roz: *There's no place to walk down there now.*
161. Jock: Oh, as soon as the wave stopped, you could.
162. Roz: No, you couldn't.
163. Jock: It's just rough at the moment.
164. Roz: That's how it was coming in last night.
165. Jock: Well, it's not rough, really...
In the first example Jock hears, understands, and comprehends what Roz said in L. 62, and in fact, I think he realizes that she has made an elliptic statement of preference not to go out in the middle of the lake. But he is not sure of her reason, a vagueness procedural problem. She may, after all, have a valid reason for her preference. When he discovers that, he disagrees with it, leading to the ensuing argument.

In the second example Roz uses what is technically a lack of comprehending problem in Lines 154 and 156, though it is clear to me that she is prepared to disagree from the start. But theoretically, Jock could supply a meaning of his earlier statement that would remove the grounds for her disagreement. The argument then proceeds when he simply reasserts his earlier position.

A third example is Example (24/7/141-148) discussed earlier. Jock's question, "Resilient?" in L. 142 appears to be a lack of understanding problem, while his "Resilient" in L. 144 shows a disagreement understanding problem on the same point.

THE BLURRING TOGETHER OF PROCEDURAL PROBLEMS

A blurring together of procedural problems often occurs, when comprehension problems are announced as if they were hearing or understanding problems. For example, when H announces a procedural problem with "Huh?" or "What did you say?" he does not necessarily have a hearing problem, or only a hearing problem; he may have a comprehension problem as well. In effect, members use the same announcement to express different kinds of procedural problems. It appears that announcements like "Huh?" and "What did you say?" are heard by S to mean "Please try again; I slipped up somewhere between your delivery of an utterance and my comprehension of it." S will then make the repair he thinks is wanted, and H will decide if that repair corrects the problem.

Some examples will help to show what I mean.

(4/15/297-301)
297. Roz: ... Are we going to go straight out from the dock? Is that the idea?
298. Jock: I'll row. Want me to row?
299. Roz: Huh?
300. Jock: Want me to row?
301. Roz: I like rowing.

(15/38/759-762)
759. Roz: ... Oh, would we, we're going to shower before we go, aren't we?
In these examples H uses "Huh?" or "Hmmm?", both commonly carrying the meaning, "What did you say?" But in each case I think the procedural problem is not one of hearing, or only of hearing, but of comprehension as well. In neither case is the difficulty due to the causes mentioned earlier under lack of hearing. Further, in each case there is some kind of logical problem in the preceding remarks. They do not connect up properly. For example, in the first case Jock's "I'll row. Want me to row?" in L. 298 does not respond to Roz' immediately previous questions, "Are we going to go straight out from the dock? Is that the idea?" in any obvious way. In the second example confusion is caused in L. 760 by Jock giving one answer to Roz's question and then immediately giving the opposite one, to substitute for it. That appears to cause Roz's "Hmmm?" in L. 761, meaning "I don't comprehend" not (only) "I didn't hear."

A third example occurs in Example (1/1/16-20) given earlier. The attendant's "What cabins are you with?" in L. 17 appears to be too great an ellipsis for Jock to comprehend, thus confusing him, as I argued earlier.

On occasion members show that they know "Huh?" indicates a comprehension problem, not a hearing problem. That occurs when S gives a clarifying response rather than a close repeat to the question. See, for example, Example (15/18/370-377) given under Lack of comprehension on p. 93. There, Roz replaces her three questions in L. 374 with a single clarified question. I think she takes Jock's question to mean "I don't comprehend," rather than (or as well as) "I didn't hear."

Similarly, in Example (15/38/759-762) just presented.

The conclusion I draw from this blurring together problem is that the hearer of "Huh?" is faced with a request that is essentially unclear, though he only rarely perceives that. It could mean "I didn't hear," or "I wasn't paying sufficient attention," or "I don't understand your words," or "I don't comprehend your meaning." It is now up to S to pick a response to these possibilities. Often, he merely repeats, assuming that H didn't hear. That is what the boat attendant did in Example (1/1/16-20), not realizing (or caring) that S's problem was one of comprehension.4 But sometimes S suspects what is wrong, and clarifies his utterance. If he feels his delivery was poor, or choice of words poor, or grammar poor, he clarifies in that way. If he feels his meaning is unclear, he clarifies in that way.
Thus, faced with an essential lack of clarity in what H's problem is when he uses an announcement like "Huh?" S responds with a repeat if he suspects no cause beyond lack of hearing, or clarifies as necessary to meet a suspected cause. His response, then, is itself a correction invitation, an assertion similar to a specific proposal question, that says to H, "If I'm wrong in the matter that I am correcting, please correct me."

OTHER KINDS OF RESPONSES TO PROCEDURAL PROBLEM ANNOUNCEMENTS

So far, I have assumed that S will repair a procedural problem on his utterance announced by H. That is not always the case, and I consider two other kinds of responses here. The first occurs when S follows H's procedural problem announcement with an entirely different second remark. Strange, perhaps, but some examples will show that it occurs.

(13/30/595-598)

[Jock finishes his conversation with Kay, a waitress.] Jock leaves the dining hall, and joins Roz who is waiting for him just outside the door. . . .

595. Roz: What were you doing?
596. Jock: Huh?
597. Roz: Let's go do things.

(24/10/212-218)

212. Roz: Those little bass are fighters . . .
213. Roz: Are we having fish for breakfast?
214. Jock: Hmmm?
215. Roz: Are we having fish for breakfast?
216. Jock: What?
217. Roz: ((I think)) I'll sleep through breakfast.
218. Jock: Oh, oh. (Laughs)

In the first example Roz infers that Jock didn't hear her question in L. 595, i.e., she treats his "Huh?" literally, but she doesn't repeat it. Since he didn't hear it, then she is free to say anything, and she does, changing the subject completely. 5

In the second example Jock doesn't hear (or comprehend) a straightforward question related to the topic of conversation that is delivered to him twice in Lines 213 and 215. Roz then changes her
utterance by making an assertion in her third turn, only slightly related to her question. Jock does understand this one. Here, Roz uses the same principle as above: "What you don’t know can’t hurt you."

A second kind of response here is an extreme form of the last phenomenon. It occurs when S does not respond at all to H’s announced procedural problem. Strange as that may seem, S simply continues on, ignoring H’s question. Some examples are these:

(2/6/122-129)
122. Roz: ... Want me to row a little?
123. Jock: Yeah, if you want to.
124. Roz: I’d like to practice a little ...
125. Jock: Huh?
126. Roz: ... It’s been a long time since I rowed.
127. Jock: You wrote?
128. Roz: Rowed!
129. Jock: ((All right. I’ll move over.))

(15/2/21-30)
21. Roz: Jock, I think I’ll keep this ...
22. Jock: What?
23. Roz: ... and give Momma the hairpins.
24. Jock: (Annoyed by the interruption in his work) Keep what?
26. Jock: Huh?
27. Roz: It’ll go so pretty with my grey suit.
28. Jock: No-o-o, you won’t. Give it to ...
29. Roz: (Interrupting, mimicking Jock) Ye-e-s I will.
30. Jock: ... your mother.

(23/3/40-46)
40. Jock: ... Did you bring your cigarettes? If you’d quit smoking, I would quit smoking.
41. Roz: Why should either of us?
   Roz offers Jock a cigarette.
42. Jock: Cancer.
43. Roz: Oh, Jock! If I get cancer I’ll take out insurance ...
44. Jock: Huh?
45. Roz: ... and I’ll get Dr. Bill to examine me, and he’ll say I’m all right, and then when I die of cancer ...
   Roz takes out her lighter and lights Jock’s cigarette first.
46. Jock: Dr. Bill is a negativist.
In the four italicized instances in these examples, Roz does not respond to Jock’s “Huh?” or “What?” She continues on, leaving Jock to discover what he missed from what she now says (and from any trace he may have gleaned from what she already said). In three instances Jock interrupted Roz, so Roz can always say that it was H’s “own fault”; he shouldn’t have interrupted. That is, ignoring his question is a denigrating response to his interruption. (This issue is discussed further in Chapter 8.)

However, in the fourth instance, the “Huh?” in the second example, we have an instance where the transcriber does not indicate an interruption. Here, we apparently have a case where Roz simply plows ahead, leaving Jock to fend for himself. (He succeeds, as the rest of the example shows.)

The phenomenon shows sense-making at work. Roz in effect says to Jock: “Use all your sense-making powers to make sense of what I just said, because I’m not going to repeat it. You have to make do with what you did hear and comprehend, and with what I say now.” Garfinkel (1967) has discussed this phenomenon under the name “retrospective-prospective property” of social action. Here, that means that Jock has the capability to let a later remark tell him what a previous one—ambiguous, not heard, etc.—meant. Presumably, it is this property that Roz relies on when she does not repair Jock’s procedural problem. If Jock (and every member) did not have some capability like this, Roz (and any member) would be forced to repair the problem; otherwise, Jock would not comprehend what Roz said.

Consider the following example of sense-making:

(20/21/424-434)

424. Jock: (To himself) Have I got an error in there? Whistles as he checks for error [in his lanyard].
426. Roz: Already? I don’t see how you can have so much patience with that little rope of yours. Referring to the lanyard.
427. Jock: Huh?
428. Roz: ((I don’t see how you can enjoy that so much.))
429. Jock: I don’t have to talk to this.
430. Roz: Bla-a-a. You’re horrid!
432. Roz: I didn’t ask!
433. Jock: (To himself) All right now, these two are crossed. Fine, thus far. It goes under.
There is a one-minute pause; Jock whistles sporadically.

434. Jock: And I *don't* have much patience with this, I don't think.

Here, Roz treats Jock's "Huh?" in L. 427 as a lack of comprehension announcement, I think, and not a lack of hearing announcement, because she responds with a clarified form of her assertion. She appears to be right, because in L. 434 at the end of the example Jock shows that he *did* hear the word "patience" in her original remark, and further, appears to know the whole content of that remark. Thus, his "Huh?" appears to have been unnecessary. Somehow, his sense-making caught up with, made sense of that utterance later, in conjunction with Roz's clarification.

**A CERTAINTY SERIES FOR PROCEDURAL PROBLEMS**

Parallel to the certainty series described in Chapters 5 and 6, there is a certainty series that can be constructed here. I confine my attention to the four lacking procedural problems. H can make such an announcement in a number of ways, and these can be graded in terms of the degree of certainty that he has in what he thinks he missed. That degree may range from none, where he missed out completely, to certainty, where he catches up with what was said.

The series can be constructed by using three dichotomous properties, where one value in each property expresses less certainty than the other. The three are these:

1. H may use a general question or specific proposal question in his announcement, e.g., "What did you say?" vs. "Did you say X?"

2. H may leave his procedural announcement on the floor or remove it, as his comprehension catches up, e.g., "Do you mean X?" vs. "Do you mean X? Oh, I know what you mean." I call these possibilities Permanent vs. Temporary.

3. H may announce that he missed something in total, or only in part, e.g., "What did you say?" vs. "What did you say following Point Y in your utterance?"

The first two properties pertain to all questions, while the third pertains only to procedural problem questions.

Examples of the General vs. Specific Proposal property were given in Chapter 5. Examples of the other two properties are these:
Permanent vs. Temporary

Permanent examples are obvious; some Temporary examples are the following:

(5/18/361-363)
361. Roz: (With a slight sound of amusement) I wish you’d wipe the lipstick off.
363. Roz: Lean over.

(16/3/50-53)
50. Jock: Shall I take all the stuff out of here?
51. Roz: What stuff? No, no, no...
52. Jock: ((Whatever this is.))
53. Roz: ...no, no! I’m going to do it so I won’t mix it for us...

(17/7/130-132)
Roz begins to sing and dance to the melody of “Has Anybody Seen My Gal.”
130. Roz: (Singing) Da de dah, lah de dah, etc.
131. Jock: (Teasingly) Did you say you were going to stop [singing]? Well, stop it!
132. Roz: (laughs) Oh, I feel so good today....

(19/17/332-335)
332. Jock: ... I’ll work here [in the Craft Shop].
333. Roz: ((I don’t know whether you’ll like it here.))
334. Jock: Oh, dear. Use this. Perhaps you’d rather not have me around?
335. Roz: Hmm? No, not if you came ((to work)).

In the first example Jock’s “Oh” following his “Lipstick?” indicates to me that he has answered his own question; he knows to what lipstick she is referring. In the second example Roz’s “No, no, no, no, no!” following her question, “What stuff?” shows that she has been able to answer her own question, making it only temporarily on the floor. The third example shows that Jock answers his own question, “Did you say you were going to stop [singing]?” thus removing it from the floor. Similarly, Roz answers her own question “Hmm?” in the fourth example.
Total vs. Partial

Total examples are obvious, some Partial ones are the following:

(20/21/419-422)

419. Roz: . . . We could make these into cute ashtrays.  
   Possibly referring to pieces of leather on the table  
   [in the Craft Shop].

420. Jock: A what?
421. Roz: An ashtray.
422. Jock: Yeah.

(21/23/466-470)

466. Jock: Oh, I just see it as a waste of my time.
467. Roz: I don’t think I’ve ever seen you when you were not  
   wasting time.
469. Roz: (( )).
470. Jock: Well, I mean I wouldn’t do it. . . .

(23/6/117-121)

117. Roz: . . . Sheep don’t like it when you clamp their ears.
120. Jock: What’s ((this)) about sheep?
121. Roz: I don’t know whether they do it all over now or not,  
   but some of them put little metal clamps in their ears.

In the first example Jock’s “A” in “A what?” indicates to Roz that he  
has heard her remark up to the last point, “cute ashtrays.” She responds  
with just the part he has not grasped, responding “An ashtray.” (Note  
that she does not correct his mistaken hearing of the singular of  
“ashtray,” when she used the plural form. In effect, she does not use the  
invitation maxim on “a”; she permits a minor mistake to stand in order  
to guard against unnecessary confusion, I think.)

In L. 468 of the second example Jock appears to have heard the first  
part of Roz’s utterance: “I don’t think I’ve ever seen you when  
you . . . ,” but not the rest of it. He transpose the “you” at the end of  
the stem into “I” and then adds “What?” thereby announcing that he  
didn’t hear the rest of her utterance. In the third example Jock uses a  
partial form in L. 118 by indicating that he understood Roz’s utterance  
up to “when” but not after.

The examples show a common method of creating a partial form that  
relies on a question in general form: repeat the last (significant) word
you heard, transformed as necessary, and then attach "what?" A related partial form can occur when "what?" is replaced by a specific proposal about which H is uncertain. For example, suppose S asks "Why don't you make that phone call?" A use of the partial property in a general question would be "I what?" and the partial property in a related specific proposal question could be "I make that phone call?"

One might ask why the partial form exists at all. (Similarly, for the specific proposal form and the temporary form.) After all, the opposite forms, the total form, the general form, and the permanent form will always work. As proposed in Chapter 5, I think these three cases exist because H is under an obligation to try to solve his own difficulties. A specific proposal shows that H thinks he heard the proposal, rather than nothing; a temporary question means that he now realizes his question was unnecessary; and a partial question means that H thinks he heard part of the utterance, rather than none of it.

This move from total inability to help in the repair process, to a lot of help in the repair process, can be seen by combining the three properties to create an eight-cell typology. As noted above, I call it a certainty series for procedural problems. Starting from the top of the following example of a (hypothetical) lack of hearing problem and moving to the bottom, H moves from giving no help to his own difficulty to a complete solution to his difficulty.

S: Where did she go when you told her?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of certainty</th>
<th>Combination of properties</th>
<th>Possible response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>General-Total Permanent</td>
<td>H: What?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>General-Partial-Permanent</td>
<td>H: When what?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Specific-Total-Permanent</td>
<td>H: Where did she go when I told her?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Specific-Partial-Permanent</td>
<td>H: When I told her?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Specific-Total-Temporary</td>
<td>H: Where did she go when I told her? Oh, to Boston.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Specific-Partial-Temporary</td>
<td>H: When I told her? Oh, to Boston.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Answer (no procedural problem)</td>
<td>H: To Boston.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the four temporary cases, Degrees 5-8, H has solved his problem completely, and in that sense they are all equivalent. I separate them,
however, to show the degree of uncertainty of the procedural problem before the "leap to understanding" takes place.

A possible maxim here is this: Announce procedural problems with as high an element of the certainty series as possible. Use of this maxim occurs in Example (21/23/466-470) where Jock moves from a General-Total-Permanent form (Degree 1) to a General-Partial-Permanent form (Degree 2).

An Example

To lend concreteness to the preceding analysis, I now present an extended example where many of the different kinds of procedural problems occur. I invite the reader to try to make sense of the example before reading further. (Pieces of it have already been used as examples earlier.)

(6/4/51-70)

Then, from the bathroom, while putting on her lipstick, Roz asks:

51. Roz: D’you know what the “tooleries” is, Honey?
52. Jock: The “tooleries?” I know what the Tuileries are; I don’t know what the “tooleries” are.
   Jock begins to whistle softly as he works.
53. Roz: What do you think the Tuileries are?
   Jock continues whistling and doesn’t answer for a while. Then he speaks.
54. Jock: The Tuileries is where the . . . all the gay young men in France used to go.
55. Roz: Sans madames!
56. Jock: Huh?
   Roz makes no response, apparently still putting on her lipstick. There is a long pause after which Jock speaks again.
57. Jock: What did you say?
   Roz still doesn’t answer; Jock resumes whistling. Roz then comes back into the living room over to where Jock is seated.
58. Roz: (As if pressing for an answer) Well, what is the Tuileries?
59. Jock: What’s what Tuileries?
60. Roz: What is the Tuileries?
61. Jock: I don't know what it is.
62. Roz: (Persisting) The Jardin?
63. Jock: A series of cafés?
64. Roz: Gardens, principally. Attached to, uh . . .
65. Jock: Like Bellville?
66. Roz: Yes. But these are ornamental gardens of Louis the XVth . . .
67. Jock: (Interrupting, as if pleased to know) Oh, it is?
68. Roz: . . . and attached to, uh, some one of those, uh, I don't know whether it's Versailles, or . . .
69. Jock: No, it wouldn't be in Versailles.
70. Roz: No, it's in Paris. It must be, uh, oh, it's stuck on the north end of some palace. (Then urgently) Come on, kid. I'm starving!

The only way this episode makes sense to me is as a very obscure form of the device: "Do you know what X is? If so, then I needn't tell you; but if not, then I will tell you." That is, Roz never expected to learn anything, but to tell something. That would explain why in L. 64 and 66 she appears to answer her own question in L. 53. If so, then her initial question (as corrected) in L. 53: "What do you think the Tuileries are?" is not a request for information in the usual sense, but a check-out question to decide whether or not to tell Jock what it is.

Support for this interpretation is her use of "do you think." She does not ask "What are the Tuileries?" but "What do you think the Tuileries are?" The latter can be heard to carry the implication that Roz can evaluate what Jock says, thus implying that Roz knows the answer in advance. (It may be this clue that keeps Jock from getting completely lost, so that when Roz proposes Jardin in L. 62 and then corrects his cafés in L. 63, he knows that she has finally decided to tell him what the Tuileries are.)

Note further Jock's confusion in Lines 59 and 61. He answered her question in Line 54, and then is faced with her inexplicable repeat of it in L. 58. This time he says he doesn't know the answer, thereby contradicting his response in L. 54. More likely, he may think that his previous answer was inadequate, a possible reason why a question, apparently answered, is repeated.

The type of procedural problem and the position of the procedural problem on the three properties of the certainty series are given in the table at the top of page 115. These are only the more obvious procedural problems of the kinds I discussed earlier. I leave the more subtle procedural problems for another time.
RESULTS

Before testing the power of the procedural problem maxim, it needs to be specified. I confine myself to the four lacking procedural problems, plus "I don't know." For this test I assume that the maxim implies the following four-line paradigm: 7

1. S Makes request in question form.
2. H Announces a procedural problem.
4. H Responds to request in Line 1, using the earlier maxims.

The first part of the test concerns only the four lacking procedural problems: lack of hearing, lack of understanding, lack of comprehending, and vagueness. There were 43 instances of questions in Verbal Interaction followed by an announcement of one of those procedural problems. Of these only 4, or 9.3% of them, fit the maxim exactly as specified above. 8 This percent is low and similar to the results of the previous tests.

In terms of adding to the cumulative total of reproduced cases, it is necessary to shift from the four-line sequence here to the question-response pair, on which the chain, invitation, and permission maxims were tested. The question-response pairs that occur at Lines 2-3 and Lines 3-4 of the paradigm have already been coded for fit to one of those maxims, so they can be ignored. But the questions in Line 1 need to be considered. All the question-response pairs in Lines 1-2 were coded "Does Not Follow" earlier, because in every case an announcement of a procedural problem was made, not included in the possible responses proposed by the earlier maxims. I propose now to include these question-response pairs in the cumulative total if they strictly follow Lines 1-2 of the paradigm. That is, if they carry out their part of the paradigm, they should be counted as reproduced cases, in that sense.
There were 44 Line 1-2 question-response pairs,9 of which 32, or 72.7%, strictly followed the first two lines of the procedural problem maxim. I add them in to the cumulative total of reproduced cases below.

The following show examples of the paradigm.

(4/15/298-301)
298. Jock: ... Want me to row?
299. Roz: Huh?
300. Jock: Want me to row?
301. Roz: I like rowing.

(23/3/56-59)
56. Jock: What are they [people sitting at a nearby table in the canteen] doing?
57. Roz: Who?
58. Jock: Over there.
59. Roz: They're talking.

In the first example Roz responds in Line 301 by using the extension of the permission maxim in its elliptic form. In the second example Roz gives a direct answer in Line 59, following the chain maxim. (One could reach for a denigration code here, because the obviousness of the answer seems condescending. But that was not clear enough for me to code and thus count the example as "Does not follow." See Chapter 8.)

The second part of the test concerns the "I don't know" procedural problem. I found thirteen questions in Verbal Interaction answered with a form of "I don't know." Of these, two cases contained only the question and the "I don't know," and I count them as reproduced.10

Putting these results together, there are 34, or 5.6%, more question-response sequences reproduced, in the sense that the response to the question is a procedural problem. I add this percent into the cumulative total of reproduced cases from Chapter 6, making 12.7% plus 5.6% or 18.3% of the total of 607 cases now reproduced.11

SUMMARY

In this chapter a procedural problem maxim was presented and studied. Five kinds of lacking-procedural problems were discussed and shown to have a hierarchical order. Two kinds of disagreeing procedural problems were also presented. It was pointed out that some of the lacking procedural problems blur together, creating an essential problem of
definition for both analyst and hearer. A certainty series for procedural problems was defined parallel to the ones in Chapters 5 and 6. Finally, an extended example was analyzed. Results of testing the fit of the procedural problem maxim were given, giving the usual finding that the maxim is followed strictly only in a small percentage of cases. In terms of cumulative reproduction 18.3% of the total of 607 cases in Verbal Interaction are now reproduced by one or more of the maxims studied to date.

NOTES

1In the extreme case H hears nothing and is not aware of being addressed. I regard that problem as a failure of the turn to be given over to H, a failure in the turn-taking system. I ignore it here because I am ignoring all problems directly attributable to that system.

2However, what principles guide the structure of this set and under what conditions will require much additional analysis, and I ignore the issue here.

3The earlier definition of disagreement over comprehension should be modified to include this case.

4The lack of clarification in L. 19 of that example leads, I think, to Jock’s next remark, where he first responds that he doesn’t know what cabin he is in, and then that he does know.

5A more complicated interpretation is this. Roz in L. 595 expresses jealousy because Jock was talking to a waitress just prior to leaving the dining room. Jock in L. 596 pretends innocence by not knowing what she is talking about. Roz then turns to a new topic in L. 597. If so, then L. 595-596 constitute an adjacency pair of their own, something like Warning–Recognition of guilt. (This interpretation was suggested to me by Pam Fishman and Susan Wolf.)

6I hear Jock’s “What?” in the second example not in Schegloff’s sense as a delayed answer to Roz’ summons “Jock” at the beginning of L. 21, but as the announcement of a vagueness procedural problem triggered by “this” at the end of L. 21. Two pieces of evidence support that interpretation: the announcement follows “this,” not “Jock”; and the announcement of a procedural problem by Jock in L. 24 refers again to the “this” in L. 21, and thus appears to be a specification of the first announcement.

7Lines 2-3 of the paradigm can be reused in a cyclic fashion until all procedural problems are repaired. Only one or two instances occurred in Verbal Interaction. One is Example (24/10/212-218) where Lines 2-3 were repeated once.

8In the coding the “blurring together” problem was ignored. “What?” and “Huh?” were interpreted to mean “What did you say?” and cases where S clarified his question in response to a lack of hearing announcement were coded as “Does Not Follow.” I simply haven’t developed the problem sufficiently to include it in the coding.
There are 44 cases here, not 43 as before, because a tape change occurred after Line 2 of a beginning use of the procedural problem maxim. That cut off Lines 3-4, making the previous test impossible, but left Lines 1-2 available for this test.

The paradigm for "I don’t know" has only two lines, since the procedural problem is permanent not temporary, as it is in the other procedural problems above. The question has been removed from the floor by the response, even though not answered.

Additional cases would be reproduced if I included cases where the speaker specifies his question before giving the turn over to the hearer. (I proposed earlier that these cases can be seen as anticipations of the procedural problem maxim to be used.) I exclude them from the analysis because I have not done the necessary analysis to be sure that that conjecture is profitable.
In this chapter I study the occurrence of denigration in request-response sequences. This phenomenon concerns us because denigration in a request can lead to responses different from those considered earlier.

A basic assumption made here is that a hearer constantly monitors the utterances and actions of a speaker for signs of denigration directed toward himself. I intend the term "constantly monitors" in the sense that Goffman does: to describe an activity that members engage in continually, such as their constant attention to the possibility of physical harm (Goffman, 1972).

By denigration I mean the classification of H by S in one or more categories that H feels are inferior for him here-and-now. S may or may not intend his classification; that issue is not of particular interest here. I also include as denigrating to H the classification of any of his possessions as inferior, e.g., his abilities, his opinions, his family, as well as his physical possessions. For example, if S says to H, "You are a thief," H will be denigrated if he feels that the category "thief" is inferior for him right now, i.e., that he is better than a thief.

Thus, denigration is not a kind of utterance, but an evaluation that can be carried in an utterance. Hence, all kinds of utterances, including questions, can carry denigration. In effect, denigration is parasitic in utterances. It is a kind of social activity, with its own maxims of regulation, that can be done in conversation. It can be carried out overtly as the focus of conversation at that point, or it can be carried out covertly in-and-through the focus of conversation. Thus, for the first
time in this analysis I recognize that requests can carry two distinct meanings, the request itself and a denigration of H.

Obviously, the possibilities for denigration are endless. The world is full of categories that H may feel are beneath him. Virtually every utterance made to him will categorize him in some way, so that—by the basic assumption above—he has plenty to do in his constant monitoring.

I consider two major modes in which denigration can occur, substantive and formal. By substantive denigration I mean denigration carried in an assertion that directly or indirectly places H in an inferior category. An example is "You are a thief," mentioned above. An indirect example is "All your friends are bums," denigrating H not necessarily as a bum himself, but as a known associate of bums. By formal denigration I mean a denigration caused by an action of S that violates some maxim formally guiding the conversation with H at that point. An example is ignoring H's question. No category is mentioned by S that could denigrate H, but S's action implicitly categorizes H in an inferior way, as a person to whom that violation can be done.

The definition of substantive denigration is acceptable to most readers, I think, but the definition of formal denigration may not be. It obviously includes a large number of cases that are insignificant. They might be called the weak man's denigrations, if they are intended, since they are often covert and hence easily denied. They may be so mild that H does not even notice a denigration. (And, of course, by the definition he has not; all intended denigrations are only potential.) I obviously don't know all the maxims involved that could be violated; that is the task of studies like this one. But as a member I intuitively recognize denigration, and I rely on that intuition in examining the examples below. Any results are therefore tentative.

In *Verbal Interaction*, the source for my examples, very little direct substantive denigration occurred. There were several instances of indirect substantive denigration, but by far the most common were formal denigrations. Direct substantive denigration verges on insult, not commonly found in conversation.

**WAYS IN WHICH DENIGRATION APPEARS IN REQUEST-RESPONSE SEQUENCES**

I now examine some of the common ways in which denigration occurs in request-response sequences. Since denigration can occur with any utterance, it can occur both in requests in question form, and in responses to those requests. I consider substantive and formal denigra-
tions occurring in both kinds of utterance.
Substantive Denigration

Here the hearer is placed by the speaker in an inferior category, either directly or indirectly. That requires that S make an assertion that carries the inferior category. But neither a request in question form nor a response lends itself easily to that kind of assertion. The request in question form is seeking something, not asserting something, though both can occur together as seen below. Hence, it is not a good vehicle for substantive denigration. Compare, for example, “You are a thief” with “Are you a thief?” The first is clearly a denigration; the second may or may not be. It can be heard as denigrating only if H assumes that S has some belief that he is a thief, i.e., that the question also makes the very assertion that it seeks to confirm.

The same problem occurs with responses to requests. The major task of the response is to respond to S’s request, not to assert an inferior category for S. Unless S’s request is the unusual kind of question, “Am I a thief?” i.e., an invitation to denigrate S, the response will not usually assert an inferior category for S. Hence, while a response is usually an assertion, it too is not one that lends itself easily to denigration.

I first examine substantive denigration in requests in question form, and then in responses.

a) In requests in question form The certainty series discussed in Chapter 5 is the only form that I have found that is used here, by employing an assertion that is denigrating to H. This is a blending use, blending a request with an assertion. An example is the following:

(14/36/735-736)

735. Roz: Can’t make a whole one [a woven bag], can you?
736. Jock: Oh, sure. It would be a beautiful bag when I got done. It would take too long, though.

Roz’s request is high in its certainty series and carries the assertion “You can’t make a whole one.” I hear that as denigrating to Jock by categorizing him as a person who can’t make that kind of bag, a disparagement of his ability to do so. I think Jock also feels denigration. I hear his direct answer “Oh, sure” as overly strong, as a reaction to her doubt. And I think the first part of his continuation, “It would be a beautiful bag when I got done,” a flagrant lack of modesty, was added as part of that reaction.
b) In responses to requests in question form I have found no cases in which substantive denigration is a part of the response, i.e., no instance of “Am I a thief?”, discussed above, occurred in *Verbal Interaction*. However, denigrating assertions can accompany a response, e.g., in tag phrases like “you dope.” For example, “What time is it?” earning the response “It’s two o’clock, you dope. The clock is right in front of you.” (Tags like this could also accompany the initiating request, e.g., “What time is it, you dope?”)

**Formal Denigration**

Formal denigration occurs much more frequently with requests in question form and responses than does substantive denigration. As noted above, formal denigration occurs when H feels that he has been slighted by S, i.e., when S makes him the victim of a violation of some maxim.²

I consider, in turn, formal denigration in requests in question form and in responses.

a) In requests in question form The most common type of formal denigration in requests in *Verbal Interaction* is based on doubt. In some way these requests doubt or question the adequacy of an assertion or action of H. They thus violate the maxim: “Don’t question the assertions or actions of others.” The maxim applies to normally competent adults, not necessarily to children, mentally ill persons, etc.³

The class of questioning requests is well known to members. Some of the elements of the class are “How do you know?” “Why don’t you do X?” “Why didn’t you do X?” and “Why can’t you do X?” They are often stated in the negative, an easy way to imply that what H is doing is not adequate. Consider the following example:

(1/4/64-68)

64. Roz: You get more reflection in the middle [of the lake in the rowboat].
65. Jock: (Scofs) Oh.
66. Roz: Jock, I know!
67. Jock: How do you know?
68. Roz: I can see! . . .

I think Jock’s “How do you know?” is a request of this kind. The denigration that I hear can be rendered overt by considering the question to elide the following:
66. Roz: Jock, I know!
67. Jock: [I don't believe you. But you could persuade me, by telling me how you know.] How do you know?

If this proposed elision is correct, then Jock denigrates Roz by classifying her as a person whose word about what she knows need not be accepted.

The question, "How do you know?" following an assertion by H, with the emphasis placed on "you," is well known to be denigrating. Pronounced that way, S classifies H as a person who could not possibly have adequate grounds for his assertion, which denigrates him. Hence, the question is dangerous to use; it must be pronounced very carefully to even have a chance of avoiding the denigrating implication. If it is pronounced carefully, then S may nimbly duck any accusation by H that he was denigrated. He may say that he really wants to know, i.e., that it is a mere matter of information desired with no denigration implied.

I also mention two other kinds of formal denigration here, besides questioning questions, because they occur with some frequency in Verbal Interaction. The first is "loaded" questions, including rhetorical questions, which will be developed later in this chapter. They denigrate H by asking him a question to which S already knows the answer, a violation of one of the basic maxims of the activity of requesting, that it be genuine. (See Searle, 1969.) The second is a misuse of a procedural problem question that does not seek a genuine repair, but rather denigrates H. One example is the following:

(16/5/86-88)
86. Jock: What are these?
87. Roz: (Softly, tenderly) Those are for you, Honey. Bookmarks.
88. Jock: (Laughs, amused) You mean, you mean pieces that you fouled up, huh.

Jock's question in L. 88 technically announces a lack of understanding, but it is clear that it is just a vehicle for denigrating Roz in a humorous way. This use of the lack of understanding procedural problem in the specific proposal form permits Jock to introduce an alternate conception of her work that is unflattering, i.e., "pieces you fouled up" vs. Roz's "bookmarks." In effect, the denigration is possible because alternative descriptions of the same object vary in degree of flattery to the owner of the object.3a
b) In responses to requests in question form  Here, H can appear to express denigration by violating any maxim that guides his response at that point. For example, he can interrupt S's request (not near a possible turn-transition point; see Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974), or he can ignore the request and say something on a different topic.

An interesting violation here is the violation of the invitation maxim that occurs by giving just the disconfirming direct answer with no correction following it. Hence, following the chain maxim as originally proposed in Chapter 4 can be a violation of the invitation maxim, and thus a denigration. For example, I observed the following instance:

Two women, A and B, were standing in line in Princeton, N.J., waiting for the bus to New York City, a long ride. They had gotten to talking while in line, but my impression was that they did not know each other very well (if at all). A got on the bus and sat in a front seat. B got on next, gave the driver her ticket, and began to look for a seat. The one next to A was vacant and I thought B would sit there. But B asked A, “Do you live in Princeton?” apparently continuing the conversation begun in line. A just smiled and said “No.” B then said “Oh,” and took a different seat from the vacant one next to A.

I interpret A’s “No” as a denigration of B, by violating the invitation maxim; she did not respond with a correction saying where she lived. I think that A did not want to carry the conversation on during the bus ride, and in this way communicated that fact to B.4

THE RELATION OF ANGER TO DENIGATION

So far, I have neglected an obvious topic, the relation of anger to denigration. Let me turn to it now, with a few remarks sufficient for relating anger to the present analysis. I make no pretense to a thorough analysis of this vast subject.

Members assume that anger is an emotional state in which anyone may find himself on occasion. This mental state is assumed to be a reaction to some provocation, commonly, a denigration. The state is threatening to others because S is thought to be partly out of control during the course of the state of anger, i.e., he is not his normal self, and he cannot be kept subject to the usual maxims guiding conduct during that time.
I assume that all anger expressed toward H potentially denigrates him. (As always, the qualification "potentially" merely allows for the cases where H does not recognize S's anger toward himself, even though I, the analyst, do.) The anger may support a substantive denigration, as in "You are a thief!" said angrily, but its sheer presence in whatever utterances or actions of S toward H denigrates H if he detects it. I assume that anger violates the obvious maxim, "Don't express anger toward others." Of course, the anger may be justifiable, as a sanction, or excusable, as a displacement from someone or some object onto H. Thus, anger is an extreme form of denigration, assumed to be a reaction to some prior event, most commonly a denigration.

Anger itself is not common in conversation. But its signs are quite common, i.e., actions which members identify as precursors of anger or mild forms of anger. They include expressions of annoyance and irritation, unusual emphases in utterances and actions, and epithets. (The last two can be signs of other states beside anger, so H has a sorting problem to solve when he hears them: Is this an angry emphasis, or an angry epithet, or not?) In testing the denigration maxim later, I use these signs to detect the presence of denigration, having exactly the same trouble with emphases and epithets that H does.

However, several instances of anger did occur in *Verbal Interaction*, and it is clear from the response to it that members treat it in a special way. They appear to treat the angry person as if he were in a temporary, but nonetheless real, state of mental illness. That is, the angry person is assumed to be partially out of control, and the degree of it will depend on how angry he is. In these cases I have the impression that the angry person is no longer assumed able to carry on a normal conversation. Rather, the hearer of the anger treats S like a patient, saying soothing things, and in particular, not getting angry in turn when he may be being denigrated in an extreme way. The rationale for this kind of treatment appears to be to keep S's anger from deepening, i.e., there is a notion that he can be led back to normalcy if handled properly, or he can be made worse if handled poorly. (H can, of course, get angry, too, leading to a screaming match that may result in physical blows, as the denigration and counter-denigration deepen the state of anger in each.)

An example of treating anger from *Verbal Interaction* is this:

(19/15/294-297)

294. Roz: ... I'm so good-looking you don't want to miss the chance [to take photographs of me].
295. Jock: I'd rather take pictures of people. I think I'll get the camera and go take pictures of people.

   Jock laughs at his own attempt to get out of going into the Crafts Shop [in front of which they are presently standing].

296. Roz: I think you'll do no such thing! You're horrid. There's nothing wrong with me. Look at me! What do you think is wrong with me? Besides that I'm married to you? That's my main fault.

297. Jock: Well, I guess it is.

Jock's mild response in L. 297 to the nasty things Roz has just said about him is due, I think, to his attempt to contain and treat her anger. His utterance here ends the topic; neither Roz nor he come back to it, and Roz seems to be back to normal in her next utterance to a passerby.

THE DENIGATION MAXIM

Denigrating Requests in Question Form

To respond to a denigrating request in question form, H can use the

*Denigration Maxim.* Respond appropriately to any perceived denigration in a request in question form made of you. Then give the turn back to the requester. In particular, you need not follow any of the earlier maxims that might apply.

The kind of response is left open; most commonly it is a denigrating response in turn. Other responses that occur in *Verbal Interaction* are apology by H, which treats the denigration as a justified sanction, and defense by H of his actions, delivered in an apparently non-denigrating way. Further, whether or not H complies with the request itself is left open. Hence, the possibility of a permanent suspension of the chain, the invitation, or the permission maxim occurs.

Some examples will show the phenomenon at work, illustrating the major points raised in the discussion above. They are selected to show two general kinds of response that H may make to a denigrating request in question form. I consider the two in turn: (a) responses to both the request and to the denigration; and (b) responses only to the denigration.
a) Response to both the request and the denigration

(6/5/70-72)
70. Roz: ... Come on, kid. I'm starving!
71. Jock: Oh, you're ready at last, huh?
72. Roz: Well, no. I'm ready right now, not at last.

(16/5/86-89)
86. Jock: What are these?
87. Roz: (Softly, tenderly) Those are for you, Honey. Bookmarks.
88. Jock: (Laughs, amused) You mean, you mean pieces that you fouled up, huh.

Jock apparently squeezes her neck or twists her arm slightly because Roz begins laughing as if being hurt slightly.

89. Roz: Yes. Something like that. Bookmarks, Honey. I made 'em special for you.

(25/12/261-270)
261. Jock: What did you promise me the other night? "I'll study."
262. Roz: All right, I will.
263. Jock: When?
264. Roz: Well, now, Jock...
265. Jock: No, you...
266. Roz: ... you settle down to these things...
268. Roz: ... when you've got nothing on your mind but studying.
269. Jock: You mean in a year?
270. Roz: No, I don't mean in a year; I mean when I get back. There's nothing to keep me from studying.

More than one instance of potential denigration occurs in each example, but I look at only one in each case. In the first example Jock's request in L. 71 is potentially denigrating, because "at last" implies that Roz has been dilatory. Roz responds to the request with a direct answer and a correction ("Well, no. I'm ready right now.")), thus following the invitation maxim. But her response is also a response to the denigration in the request by denying that "at last" is correct.6

In the second example, analyzed earlier, Jock uses a comprehension procedural problem in L. 88 to denigrate Roz by classifying her as a person who "fouls pieces up." Roz responds to both the request ("[No,] Bookmarks") and to the denigration ("Yes. Something like that."), which
I hear as a retort in its customary ironic usage. (In effect, the ironic "Yes. Something like that" is equivalent to the direct answer "No," shown as elided in the previous sentence.)

The third example is like the second. Jock misuses a comprehension procedural problem in L. 269 to denigrate Roz by classifying her as lazy or dilatory. She responds to the request with a direct answer plus a correction ("No, . . . I mean when I get back") and also to the denigration by denying it ("I don't mean in a year").

A fourth example is Example (14/36/735-736) discussed earlier. I hear Jock's response as both a response to the request and to the denigration.

b) Response only to denigration

(4/14/284-287)

284. Jock: . . . Hey, if we hurry up, we can get across [the lake in the rowboat] before that boat goes around and we'll get the waves coming the other way. (Sings) You're drifting.

285. Roz: Do you want to go that way now?

286. Jock: Yeah, I want to get in front of the docks, so just row straight back. (Playfully taunting) Can't you row evenly?

287. Roz: (Sighs as if irritated)

(13/33/668-672)

The child continues to try to attract Jock's attention.

668. Jock: Well, what do you want?

669. Boy: What is that silly thing on your back?

670. Woman: Honey, you're not nice!

671. Roz: (Considerately) It's so early in the morning yet!

672. Woman: We're on our way.

(2/5/90-93)

90. Jock: Here, do you want to feel it sideways?

Jock brings the rowboat parallel to the crest of the rolls, so that it rocks in the crests and troughs.

91. Roz: No, because that'll turn us over. Uh, Jock, uh. This is the way I get seasick.

92. Jock: (Laughs) ((Like this?))

93. Roz: I don't get sick to my stomach. I get headaches.
Denigration in request-response sequences

Denigrating Responses to Nondenigrating Requests

So far, I have considered only denigrating requests. As noted earlier, denigration can also occur in a response to a request, since no utterance is immune from it. I present some of these examples next, where a denigrating response occurs following a nondenigrating request in question form.

The denigration in these responses appears unjustified by any denigration in the initiating request in question form. Hence, its source must lie elsewhere. Members will sometimes excuse this unprovoked denigration in two cases: (a) the denigration is displaced onto the requester from some other person or object that caused it; and (b) the denigration is a delayed denigration or a further denigration to an earlier denigration made by the requester to the responder. Otherwise, the requester considers the denigration not to be excusable.
The following examples illustrate the two kinds of excusable denigration as well as the nonexcusable kind.

\[19/18/359-362\]

359. Dave: Did you use the punch [in making your sandals]?
360. Roz: Yeah. I used several. It looks terrible, I know. I couldn't get through [the leather] with using the, the (hand punch)).
361. Dave: Have you got, uh, have you got holes in there big enough for a two-inch lace? Oh, no.
362. Roz: Listen, boy, I've been ... my fingers are bruised from trying to get this needle through those holes....

\[14/37/743-747\]

743. Roz: Ah! The mail will be there when we come down at eleven o'clock [from the Craft Room] which will be just right. They'll be all sorted and there won't be any line. I wonder what time Dr. S. will come to the cottage.
744. Jock: I don't know. I have no idea and the first thing I'm going to do ...
           Jock apparently motions toward the lavatory.
745. Jock: Do you want to wait?
746: Roz: (Firmly, as if to indicate she insists on his coming with her [to the Craft Room]) Yes.
          Jock laughs.
747. Roz: I'll wait.

\[7/7/102-112\]

102. Will: (Hi)) Roz! [Will is a child.]
103. Roz: Did 'ya have your breakfast?
104. Will: Yeah, I just had it.
105. Roz: Oh, how was it?
106. Jock: (( )).
          Willie makes no response and apparently goes on his way.
107. Roz: Oh!
108. Jock: (Jeering, gleefully) Hey, he snubbed you.
109. Roz: He did not!
110. Jock: (Again, taunting) He snubbed you.
111. Roz: (Annoyed) Oh, stop it!
112. Jock: (Still taunting) Oh, boy!
(21/25/499-504)

Jock watches Phil at work for approximately two minutes, then asks him about the miniature golf club in the statue [of a golfer that Phil is carving].

499. Jock: Was it a toothpick?
500. Phil: Yeah. I have to shape it down a bit.
501. Jock: And this is after the swing?
502. Phil: No.
503. Jock: No?
504. Phil: It’s before.

In the first example Dave inadvertently opens up a frustrating subject for Roz, her inability to get the needle through the holes in her moccasin. He appears to get denigrated (“Listen, boy”) through displacement by Roz. Note that the denigration occurs even though he has answered his own question (“Oh, no”). Roz’s frustration is not bound by such a nicety. (See discussion of anger.)

In the second example Roz’s emphatic (“firm”) response to Jock’s question in L. 745 denigrates him by classifying him as a person who tries to avoid his responsibilities. Here, Jock has been trying to avoid going to the Craft Room with Roz and she is not giving him any chance to escape.

The third example gives a classic case of ignoring a request without reason, a nonexcusable violation. Willie ignores Roz’s request in L. 105, and Jock taunts Roz that she has been snubbed. Snub is a term that is close in meaning to denigration, a piece of evidence showing that Jock and I agree on the occurrence of denigration here.

The fourth example shows again that following the chain maxim can be a denigration. (See earlier example.) Phil gives the disconfirming answer to Jock’s specific proposal question in L. 501, but no correction. Jock is forced to follow his question up himself; with “No?” which then produces the correction that should have been given in Phil’s previous utterance, by the invitation maxim.

RESULTS

To test the denigration maxim Verbal Interaction was searched first for examples of denigrating questions, coding for the forms of substantive and formal denigration discussed earlier. Then the response to these questions was checked to see if the maxim was followed. Three forms of
response appropriate to a denigrating question were sought: denigration in return; apology or explanation of one's actions; and defense of one's actions. These three are the only common ones in *Verbal Interaction.*

A case was coded "follows" (a) if any of these three occurred alone, and the turn given back to the requester, or (b) if any of the three occurred in combination with a response to the request that followed one of the earlier maxims, with the turn then given back to the requester.

In all I found 107 requests in question form that contained denigration of the hearer. Of these, 32, or 29.9% of them, followed the denigration maxim. The percent of cases that follow the maxim is higher than in the previous tests, but it is still a minority of cases. In terms of the cumulative coding there are 18.3% cases reproduced from Chapter 7, plus 32/607 or 5.3% more reproduced here. That makes a total of 23.6% of the total of 607 cases reproduced.

**TWO SPECIALIZED TOPICS**

To give some further insight into denigration and its effect on requests, I now discuss two more specialized topics: (1) A special form of denigration that I call the "three-liner"; and (2) The effect of nonseriousness on denigration and requests.

**The "Three-Liner"**

By a three-liner I mean a particular set of three consecutive complete utterances ("lines") in a conversation, where S utters the first and third and H utters the second, that results in a strong denigration of H. S often uses the three-liner to disagree with some prior utterance or action by H that he feels is silly or stupid or obtuse. It is usually a reaction, then, and not an initiation of a new topic. The lines can be described abstractly as follows:

Line 1: S makes a request in question form that requires or prefers a particular answer from H, known in advance to S, and then gives the turn to H. (I call this a loaded question, following common practice in sociology; rhetorical questions are a subset here.)

Line 2: H gives the required or preferred answer, and only that, and then gives the turn back to S.

Line 3: S makes a remark of some kind that carries the assertion that H should have spoken or acted in some other way than he previously did. (I call this the "punch line.")

Some examples will make the definition clear:
(15/2/21-36)
21. Roz: Jock, I think I'll keep this . . .
22. Jock: What?
23. Roz: . . . and give Momma the hairpins.
24. Jock: (Annoyed by the interruption in his work [on his lanyard].) Keep what?
26. Jock: Huh?
27. Roz: It'll go so pretty with my grey suit.
29. Roz: (Interrupting, mimicking Jock) Ye-e-s, I will.
31. Roz: Do you hate me or something?
32. Jock: Give it to your mother.
33. Roz: (With feigned hurt) Don't you want me to have anything nice?
34. Jock: Did you buy it for your momma?
35. Roz: Yes.
36. Jock: Then give it to your momma.

(3/11/223-227)
223. Jock: . . . Gee, when I saw that [wave] coming straight for the side of this thing [rowboat] . . . That big . . . that boat couldn't have been more than twenty feet off. (Laughs) And you were pulling this way toward it. God!
224. Roz: You said, “Pull, pull, pull!” Then you say, “Gee, whiskers, you panic in an emergency.” Why didn’t you say, “Go backwards” or “forwards.” What do you think I am . . . a sailor?
Both are relaxed and amused now that the danger is past.
225. Jock: Well, I wanted you to stay into the waves, whatever you did.
226. Roz: Well, why didn’t you tell me so?
227. Jock: Go up that way.

(3/11/235-239)
235. Jock: . . . (Reassuringly) That’s all right, by the end of this . . . our stay here you’ll be able to paddle pretty well.
236. Roz: (Laughs) I can paddle pretty well now.
237. Jock: You sure can.
238. Roz: You haven’t fallen in yet, have you?
239. Jock: No, but you almost swamped us.

(20/21/412-419)

412. Jock: All right, then, just swap pieces of wood [for making holes in leather] if he’s lazy [referring to a third worker in the Craft Room].

413. Roz: Well, he’s punching [using a punch] right now. He will be through in a few minutes. (( ))

414. Jock: Boy, you sure absolutely refuse to do anything right, don’t you.

415. Roz: Jock, no. I ((can’t just take it)).

416. Jock: Is he using it now?

417. Roz: He’s been using it for two hours.

418. Jock: Is he using it now?

419. Roz: He’s still ((working with it)). We could make these into cute ashtrays.

Possibly referring to pieces of leather on the table.

The first example contains the only completed three-liner in my materials, in Lines 34-36. As the preceding conversation shows, Jock disagrees with Roz’s plan to keep the gift she had planned to give to her mother. Jock’s question in L. 34, “Did you buy it for your momma?” requires a “Yes” answer, and Roz gives it, leading to the punch line in L. 36, “Then give it to your momma.” Roz is denigrated in a double sense: she has been classified by Jock as inconsistent and even self-serving; and she has cooperated with Jock to permit that classification to occur.

The second example gives the loaded question, “What do you think I am...a sailor?” in L. 224, but Jock breaks up the possibility of a three-liner by not giving the preferred “No” answer. In the third example Roz’s question in L. 238, “You haven’t fallen in yet, have you?” begins a potential three-liner with a possible punch line: “Then I can paddle pretty well now.” But Jock breaks it up by continuing on with a “but” after giving the required answer “No.” The last example shows Jock trying to produce the same three-liner twice, with his repeat of “Is he using it now?” in Lines 416 and 418. The required answer “No” would certainly lead to the punch line, “Then take it,” producing a three-liner similar to the one in the first example above.

In Verbal Interaction only two kinds of loaded questions occur, questions that take (Yes, No) as their answer-set, and certain “Why” questions. I consider the (Yes, No) questions first.
Different types of three-liners can arise depending on the kind of loaded question that occurs here. I have found three common types; they obviously do not exhaust the possibilities.

The first type rests on a loaded question that is rhetorical. I define a rhetorical question as an extreme form of loaded question, one that requires a particular answer, rather than prefers one. Thus, a rhetorical question refers to some matter of fact, where there is only one possible answer, the correct one. Examples are “You haven’t fallen in yet, have you?” in Example (3/11/235-239) above and “Is he using it now?” (in the sense, “Is he actually working with it now?”) in Example (20/21/412-419) above. In both cases one answer is correct and the other incorrect. Compare these two with “You don’t want me to look freakish, do you?” in Example (6/2/25-31) below. That question only prefers “No”; “No” cannot be said to be correct and “Yes” incorrect, because a want, not a fact, is involved. Jock may, at this moment, really want Roz to look freakish, so that “Yes” could be the correct answer.

The second kind of loaded question I call an ability question, because it concerns some ability that H may or may not have. “Can’t you row evenly?” from Example (4/14/284-287) earlier is this type.

The third kind of loaded question I call an attitude question, because it refers to some attitude that H may or may not have. An example is “You don’t want me to look freakish, do you?” in Example (6/2/25-31) below.

These three kinds of loaded questions produce the following three varieties of the three-liner:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rhetorical question</th>
<th>Ability question</th>
<th>Attitude question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H: Makes assertion that S believes contradicts Fact A that H knows.</td>
<td>Acts as if he did not possess Ability X.</td>
<td>Makes assertion that implies that he does not believe Attitude Y.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S: “Is fact A true?”</td>
<td>“Do you have Ability X?”</td>
<td>“Do you hold Attitude Y?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S: “Then you should not have made the assertion that you did, because it is incorrect.”</td>
<td>“Then you should not be acting as if you didn’t have it.”</td>
<td>“Then you should not have made the assertion that you did.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In each case the heart of the three-liner is the conclusion. Since H has admitted Fact A, Ability X, or Attitude Y, something he obviously
knew, he should have said or done the opposite of what he did say or do in the first place. That questioning of H's action denigrates him.

I have concentrated on the required answer to these types of questions, but the other answer, the nonrequired one, is also denigrating to H. The nonrequired answer, "No" in the above cases, either catches H in a lie (rhetorical question case), or produces an admission that he doesn't have the ability or the attitude he has previously claimed he had (ability question case; attitude question case). The latter two denigrate H by classifying him as an inconsistent person, ordinarily seen as undesirable. As with the infamous question, "Are you still beating your wife?" H must refuse to answer the question to prevent being denigrated.

There is one further type of loaded question that takes (Yes, No) that can initiate the three-liner. I call it the self-denigrating question. Here, one of the answers, the dispreferred one, will denigrate S, not H, if given by H. The preferred response, on the other hand, does not denigrate S; in fact, it may praise him. Consider these two examples:

(6/2/25-31)

Roz still searches hurriedly for the lipstick; her sandals clomp noisily as she walks around the room.

25. Jock: Can't we have some quiet?
26. Roz: What?
27. Jock: What's wrong with you?
28. Roz: You don't want me to look freakish, do you?
   Jock laughs.
29. Roz: Do you?
31. Roz: If you want me to look like a freak, that's all right. I'll be glad to oblige.

(18/14/277-286)

... They stop for a moment, exchanging pushes [up the hill], continue on.

277. Jock: Stick your ... come on, chin in. Chin in.
278. Roz: Ho, ho, quit. Is it flabby under there?
279. Jock: Oh, golly! It just hangs down . . .
280. Roz: Really?
281. Jock: ... like an old turkey crow. No, no. It's the one thing about you that ain't fat.
282. Roz: (Exasperated) Boy, you are just begging for trouble!
283. Jock: That was a compliment, wasn't it?
284. Roz: Compliment, shompliment! You could have said, "Darling, you're so slender and svelt."
285. Jock: Yeah, but you’d know I was lying.
286. Roz: (Feigning a feeling of hurt) Ohhhh!

The relevant question in the first example is L. 28, “You don’t want me to look freakish, do you?” The relevance of the three-liner is seen here, though no completed case is produced. Roz’s question is a reaction to the denigration expressed in Jock’s question, “What’s wrong with you?” Roz’s question begins a potential three-liner, by loading the answer toward “No”; presumably Jock does not want his wife to look freakish. But Jock first laughs, and then answers “Yes” when Roz repeats her question, thereby avoiding the possible punch line: “Then don’t criticize my noise or my delay; I’m looking for my lipstick so that I won’t look freakish.” However, by avoiding the punch line, Jock has denigrated Roz directly, and she responds to that in her next utterance.

In the second example the self-denigrating question is “Is it flabby under there?” in L. 278. Here, the question is not a reaction to some prior remark or action with which Roz disagrees. Rather, I think Roz is afraid that she may be getting “flabby under there” and is seeking assurance from Jock that she is not. Jock finds himself in the interesting dilemma of having to compliment Roz to avoid denigrating her, no matter what he feels the truth of the matter may be. In fact, he takes the denigrating route, first denigrating her and then enlarging his denigration, to which she responds with some denigration of him, but admits that she was “fishing for a compliment” (L. 284).12

The most common way to disrupt a potential three-liner begun with a (Yes, No) question is to use “No, but” or “Yes, but.” That is, H can disrupt the production by giving the required or preferred answer, but then follow with a rebuttal of S’s possible punch line in advance. A good example of this occurs in Example (3/11/235-239) above. Compare these two, one the actual response from that example and one hypothetical:

236. Roz: (Laughs) I can paddle pretty well now.
237. Jock: You sure can.
238. Roz: You haven’t fallen in yet, have you?
239. Jock: No, but you almost swamped us.

[Jock: No.
Roz: Then I can paddle pretty well now.]

Jock's “you almost swamped us” in L. 239 anticipates the punch line “Then I can paddle pretty well now,” and prevents its occurrence in the
I turn now to "why" loaded questions. The common cases here are the questioning questions discussed earlier, such as "Why don't you do X?" and "Why didn't you do Y?" Since S appears to be urging his own alternative on H in each case, he has loaded the answer toward "No reason," leading to the possible punch lines, "Then I think you should do X," and "I think you should have done Y." Examples are "Why didn't you say, 'Go backwards' or 'forwards,'" and "Well, why didn't you tell me so?" both in Example (3/11/223-227) earlier. In these cases Roz implies that there was no reason for Jock not to do as she now proposes. But if Jock admits that, by responding with some variant of "No reason," then the three-liner can be completed: "Then you should have said 'Go backwards' or 'forward,'" or "Then you should have told me so."

Unlike the (Yes, No) question, the "why" question is only partly loaded. The question calls directly for a "because" answer, and if H can supply one, then he will prevent the three-liner from occurring. However, this "because" escape is not without its own risks. S may take any reason offered as inadequate, and may keep questioning the reasons H offers, i.e., "why-ing" him to death. This process keeps on denigrating H with each "why" question asked, and may ultimately force the admission that H really didn't have a very good reason for what he did or said.

Two hypothetical continuations from "Well, why didn't you tell me so?" illustrate the possibilities:

Roz:  "Well, why didn't you tell me so?"
Jock:  Because I didn't think of it.
Roz:  Why didn't you think of it?
Jock:  Because I didn't have time.
Roz:  You had time to say the wrong thing; why didn't you have time to say the right thing?]

Roz:  "Well, why didn't you tell me so?"
Jock:  No reason.
Roz:  Then you should have told me so.

One final note here: The question "Why don't you do X?" is commonly heard not as a request for a reason, but as a suggestion, as I argued in Chapter 6. That hearing itself depends on the anticipated completion of the three-liner; otherwise, no actual suggestion would be contained. Consider this example, for instance:
(4/13/260-261)


It can be seen as a pre-ellipsis (see Chapter 6) of the following longer form (ignoring Roz’s reason following her request):

   [Jock: No reason.
    Roz: Then I suggest that you read your book.]


If Jock didn’t understand that the middle steps were elided, his response to L. 260 would make no sense; the response would be—and is, literally—a non sequitur. But L. 260 plus the two elided lines constitute a three-liner, as proposed above. In this way the initiating question has itself come to be heard as a suggestion.

The three-liner is a particularly effective way for S to denigrate H, for several reasons:

1. The initiating request is not a genuine, or only a genuine, request for information or action, because S either knows or prefers a particular answer in advance. Hence, the sheer use of this request is a (formal) denigration of H, by classifying him as a person who need not be asked genuine questions.

2. An H who cooperates in producing the three-liner cooperates in his own denigration when he is expected to defend himself against denigration in our culture. This occurs in two ways: (a) By permitting S to get him to comply with a request that is itself denigrating (by (1) above); and (b) By apparently not realizing where S is going, i.e., his own action denigrates himself as stupid or slow-witted.

3. The punch line is another formal denigration of H by asserting that some other assertion, reason, or action is superior to what H himself said or did. This denigrates H by questioning his action, as discussed earlier.

The effectiveness of the three-liner rests heavily on (2) (b), the cooperation of H in his own denigration. The punch line is itself a direct denigration and sufficient by itself. For S to back up a step to invoke H in the denigration may be a sneaky thing for him to do, but a particularly stupid thing for H to permit to happen. It reflects badly on his “savvy,” his ability to anticipate, to read what’s coming, an ability regarded highly in our culture.\textsuperscript{13}
Nonserious Requests
So far, I have assumed that all denigration is serious. That, of course, is not so, and instances of nonserious denigration have already been seen in the examples. Some instances of denigration are not intended by S, nor heard by H, as the “put downs” that they are in literal terms.

Before considering the relation of nonseriousness to denigration, I first consider nonserious requests in general. It is a complicated topic, far beyond the scope of the present analysis, and I make just a few remarks to orient the reader to what I have in mind. The nonserious requests that occurred in Verbal Interaction were all warm in feeling; they were humorous, or silly, or funny requests. They appeared not to be taken seriously, or only seriously; the nonseriousness had the effect of changing the expectation of how they would be treated by H. Whatever the content of the request, the new expectation was that H would notice and perhaps respond nonseriously himself, either in place of or along with a response to the request.

This point can be expressed in the

Nonseriousness Maxim. Do not respond seriously, or only seriously, to requests in question form that you perceive to be nonserious.

An example or two will make clear what I have in mind by a nonserious request:

(14/34/678-679)  
... Roz and Jock continue walking toward the cabin. They pass one of the workers sweeping off the walk.

678. Roz: (To Jock) Why don't you sweep the walk for her? You're bigger than she is.
679. Jock: Well, let's, oh, it's only nine o'clock. It's no use. Let's pack.

(13/30/597-604)
597. Roz: Let's go do things.
599. Roz: What?
601. Roz: You do that.
603. Roz: You do that! Let me have a little nap. Hmm?
During the tape change Jock and Roz embrace; the kiss lasts 10 seconds. Immediately after, Roz speaks:

1. Roz: Yummie!
2. Jock: You stink!
3. Roz: (_playfully_) Are you insinuating I have an odor?
4. Jock: (Mumbles something, criticizing Roz for getting lipstick all over him.)

(23/5/88-95)
88. Jock: Oh, what's the stuff up here [called]? [Referring to dandruff]
89. Roz: Pittialisforma vali.
91. Roz: Pittialisforma vali. I don't have any idea how you spell it, because that's the way I've heard radio announcers say it.
92. Jock: I do, I do, 'cause I've seen it on bottles. Not that I ever use the stuff!
93. Roz: Halitosis! Golly, and I think of it as a grave social disease. (They laugh.) You know that works on a lot of people. You know I have one of these but it's all over, so what. They look at you, you know, they start to smile and they're thinking with their dirty little minds just turning over, "Aha!"
94. Jock: What do you say, Dandruff?
95. Roz: Halitosis!

In the first example Roz makes a silly suggestion to Jock in L. 678, that is not serious. She then follows up with a reason, appealing to the permission maxim in advance (see Chapter 6), but that reason is silly also. Jock simply ignores the suggestion and begins on a new topic. I don't see that his ignoring is denigrating here, because I don't hear the request as seriously intended.\textsuperscript{14}

In the second example Roz's request in L. 603, "Let me have a little nap. Hmm?" is the request in question. I hear it as nonserious because it is outrageous in its attitude toward the sharing of duties: Jock will do all the work while Roz naps. Although Jock responds with a direct answer, I think he also responds to the nonseriousness. His simple "No" violates the permission maxim, because he has given the disconfirming answer to
Roz's request and should, by that maxim, continue on to give a reason. The fact that he doesn't shows his recognition of the nonseriousness, I think.

The third example shows the well known question, "Are you insinuating I have an odor?" that leads to the joking reply, "No, I'm telling you." (See Chapter 5 for a discussion of jokes like this.) Here, it is clearly silly, and hence nonserious, because Jock has already stated in clear terms that she does have an odor. I think he shows a recognition of the nonseriousness by not responding to it, either in place of his criticism in L. 4 or following his criticism. That is, serious requests are not ordinarily ignored in this way.

The fourth example gives a beautiful instance of silliness on both sides. Jock's question in L. 94, "What do you say, Dandruff?" is clearly not intended seriously, and Roz's response, "Halitosis!" is a brilliant invention that responds nonseriously and yet relevantly to both the categorization "Dandruff" and to the previous discussion of halitosis.

The effect of nonseriousness on denigration appears to be to lighten it. That is, when denigration is carried in a nonserious request, the nonseriousness is a signal to H not to take the denigration seriously. That follows as a corollary from the nonseriousness maxim, which implies that no part of the meaning of a nonserious request need be taken seriously. I put this into the form of a

**Maxim for denigration in nonserious requests.** Do not respond seriously to any perceived denigration that appears in a request in question form that is nonserious.

This corollary has the effect of suspending the chain, invitation, and permission maxims permanently, as does the denigration maxim.

As with denigration, nonseriousness is not a kind of utterance, like a question or an assertion. It too is an evaluation made by H, by comparing what S said or did with a standard of seriousness for what he might have said or done there. Hence, nonseriousness can appear in any remark; for present purposes, it can appear in both the request and the response to the request.

Some examples will show how the corollary above operates when a nonserious request carries denigration:

(17/7/135-139) Roz hugs Jock affectionately. Evidently too affectionately because Jock calls out as if being suffocated.
135. Jock: (Laughs) Christ, girl!
137. Jock: Jesus!
138. Roz: Do you feel ((grouchy)) this morning, overtired, maybe? Huh?
   Jock ruffles Roz's hair.
139. Roz: No! I just combed my hair! Honey! Honey! Oh, what a brute.

(20/22/441-446)

Jock and Roz have attended some of the evening square dances held at the resort. . . .

441. Jock: But that's the best square dance teacher I've seen. I . . .
442. Roz: You might learn something from him, mightn't you? If you tried? Hmmm? Hmmm?
443. Jock: Huh? Do what?
444. Roz: You might learn something from him if you tried. Hmmm?
445. Jock: (Mimicking a drawl) Aw, might.
446. Roz: Aw! Aw!

(14/34/679-687)

680. Roz: Let's do the laundry before we pack, huh?
681. Jock: Let's just take the laundry back with us.
682. Roz: All right.
683. Jock: Guess we've got a load.
684. Roz: Good idea! Good idea! You're a smart boy! You catch on quick! (Laughs) What's the matter, boy?
   Roz becomes quite playful again.
685. Jock: I won't . . .
686. Roz: Feeling tired this morning?
687. Jock: No one can call me stupid, not very, anyhow.

In the first example I hear Roz's questions in L. 138 "Do you feel ((grouchy)) this morning, overtired, maybe? Huh?" as nonserious. While it denigrates Jock, it does not seem to do so in a serious way. I think Jock's response by ruffling Roz's hair is itself playful and a recognition of that nonseriousness. Otherwise, he might have responded seriously with something like "Look, don't hug me so hard; I don't like to be suffocated."

In the second example Roz's questions in L. 442 "You might learn something from him, mightn't you? If you tried? Hmmm? Hmmm?" are
nonseriously, I think. She denigrates Jock by classifying him as a person who hasn't bothered to learn anything from an instructor, but it does not seem serious. Her prolonging of the question, by repeating it three times before she gives up the turn, is a playful way of holding the floor before Jock can respond, while getting in some more licks at the same time. After the procedural problem in L. 443 Roz repeats the question in less playful form, with no extra repeats. Jock seems to take it nonseriously, judging from his humorous response "Aw, might."

In the third example I hear Roz's questions in Lines 684 and 686, "What's the matter, boy?" and "Feeling tired this morning?" as nonserious. She is described as playful by the transcriber, and the earlier part of her utterance in L. 684 shows laughing. But the questions (and the earlier parts of the utterance) are denigrating to Jock, by classifying him as "stupid" for proposing an action to her (taking the laundry back in L. 681) which he then realizes is not a good proposal (L. 683). I think Jock takes Roz's questions nonseriously; he does not respond to them, nor does his response in L. 687—which admits his stupidity—denigrate Roz in any way.

Few examples of this kind occurred in Verbal Interaction, and I omit a test of the maxim here similar to the others. In the earlier coding these cases were all coded for denigration and enter into the test of the denigration maxim.

**SUMMARY**

This chapter has proposed that denigration and nonseriousness are two features that can occur in any utterance or action, hence, in requests in question form and responses to them. That being so, maxims were proposed that guide treatment of them when they occur. Two such maxims and one corollary were given here: the Denigration Maxim; the Nonseriousness Maxim; and a Maxim for denigration in nonserious requests.

**NOTES**

1 That, of course, implies a classification of categories that members can occupy that are graded in terms of desirability. That classification and its features are simply assumed in this analysis. For work on the topic see Sacks' concept of membership categorization device (1974).
That is also true for substantive denigration; placing someone in an inferior category violates the maxim: "Don't disparage others." It is the coveryness of the denigration, with nothing showing in the utterance itself, that differentiates the two types.

This maxim is much too general; it really announces an area for study, an analysis not carried out here. Implied here is the proposition that all disagreement is denigrating, an interesting proposition that I approach but do not develop here.

Note the parallel here to the invitation maxim in the disconfirming case. The possibility that different elements of the answer-set vary in degree of flattery permits the denigration to occur when an alternate element is proposed in the correction.

The analysis implies that "denigrator" and "denigeree" will avoid extended informal conversation.

The issue of intended denigration vs. merely technical denigration, a topic of some interest to sociologists, is raised here and not pursued.

I think Roz's response is extremely clever. She turns the answer from the expected "Yes" to a "No" plus correction, which still means "Yes," while also criticizing Jock for his use of "at last."

This topic has been discussed extensively in the frustration-agression hypothesis literature. See Berkowitz (1969) for a review.

The codes for both a denigrating question and a response appropriate to that denigration were difficult to make in some cases. I simply don't have the grasp of the details necessary to make the coding less intuitive. For that reason the results should be regarded tentatively.

Recall that all loaded questions were coded as denigrating in the previous Results section, because they all violate the maxim, "Don't ask a question to which you already know the answer."

An expanded form of this is discussed in Bleiberg and Churchill, 1975.

I ignore the fact that this question is actually composed of two questions, a general question, "What do you think I am?" followed by a specification of it in specific proposal form "Do you think I am a sailor?"

Compare this form of "fishing for a compliment" with "fishing for information" discussed in Chapter 5.

On this topic see Garfinkel's discussion of the retrospective-prospective property of normal social interaction (Garfinkel, 1967).

As with denigration, all nonseriousness is potential until H perceives it. H must detect it before it can be said to have occurred; my detection as analyst doesn't count for H.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first is a summary of the analysis organized under two questions, "What has been learned?" and "What problems were discovered?" The second part is a discussion of the potential usefulness of the method of reproduction in sociology. The third part discusses the problem of context, which has plagued the analysis from the beginning.

WHAT HAS BEEN LEARNED?

The goal of the analysis has been to reproduce by rule some features of the utterance following a question. The analysis was limited to reproducing H's utterance, ignoring any continuation that S may have made following his question.¹

Three quite different activities were found that can be carried out in a question-response sequence. They are making requests, announcing and repairing a procedural problem, and denigrating the hearer. I summarize each in turn.

Making Requests

A request was defined as a proposal to someone that he do something that will benefit the requester. It was argued that all questions are requests for information. Hence, it was proposed to shift from a study of question-response sequences to a study of request-response sequences, where the requests are in question form. While all questions are literal
requests for information, questions carry other kinds of requests if the accepted and not the literal meaning of the question is taken. I call them requests for action (beyond giving information) to distinguish them from requests for information.

Two kinds of questions were discussed, permission questions, e.g., “Will you do X for me?” and questions in short form, which can be general questions, e.g., “What time is it?” or specific proposal questions, e.g., “Is it four o’clock?”

A permission maxim was proposed for guiding responses to requests in permission question form. It handles requests for action, and those requests for information that occur in permission question form. The maxim proposes that if H agrees to comply with the request, he should say so and then do the requested action. If he refuses to comply with the request, he should say that and then give a reason justifying his refusal. The maxim is based essentially on ellipsis. (Perhaps the most important point of the study is the major role that ellipsis plays in conversation.)

It was pointed out that permission questions can propose actions that are not requests at all, e.g., permission questions can initiate offer-response sequences and suggestion-response sequences. An extension of the permission maxim was proposed that applies to some of these cases.

In regard to questions in short form an invitation maxim was proposed to guide response to specific proposal questions. It was shown to be a special case of the permission maxim. The originally proposed chain maxim was clearly too general, and it was limited to guiding response to questions that seek information in general form. It too can be seen as a special case of the permission maxim.

Hence, some progress was made in the work of organizing maxims for responding to questions into families. Without such an organization, the analysis would essentially propose that members know these maxims one by one, an unpalatable possibility. There are clearly going to be many maxims, and the problem is similar to a child learning his language in an associationistic manner, a point of view discredited by Chomsky.

**Announcing and Repairing a Procedural Problem**

A procedural problem was defined as some defect in H’s reception of S’s question that makes it difficult or impossible for him to respond intelligently to the question. Two types of procedural problem were discussed: a lacking type and a disagreeing type.

**Lacking procedural problems** A five-level hierarchy of these problems was proposed, where a later problem cannot ordinarily occur until all the earlier ones have been solved. The five are lack of hearing
the question, lack of understanding the language involved in the question, lack of comprehending the meaning of the question, lack of sufficient specificity in the question (vagueness), and inability to give the answer ("I don't know").

Disagreeing procedural problems  Here, a procedural problem occurs when H disagrees with some aspect of the question that S has asked him. Two kinds were defined and discussed, parallel to lack of understanding and lack of comprehending above: disagreeing understanding and disagreeing comprehension. Surprise and false assumptions were included under the latter.

Procedural problems are handled by a procedural problem maxim that urges the hearer to solve the problem and then respond to the original question. If followed strictly, the maxim can produce a four-line question-response sequence, the only time that response beyond one turn-to-talk was considered here. Most procedural problems are announced in question form, i.e., they are themselves a subset of requests for information, and the earlier maxims thus come into play to guide response to them. They form, then, nested or inserted question-response sequences within the original question-response sequence. (See Jefferson, 1972.)

Denigrating the Hearer  

Denigration was defined as placing someone in a category that he regards as inferior for himself here-and-now. Denigration is not an independent utterance-type of its own; it is an evaluation that can be carried in any type of utterance.

Two kinds of denigration were defined and discussed: substantive and formal denigration. A denigration maxim, based largely on reciprocity of denigration for denigration, was proposed for use in guiding response to a denigrating request in question form. Finally, a few comments were made about the phenomenon of denigration in nonserious requests.

Empirical tests showed that no maxim was followed strictly in more than 30% of the cases to which it could be applied. Cumulatively, the maxims reproduce about 25% of the question-response sequences identified in *Verbal Interaction*. By considering my glass to be one-quarter full, I consider this a good result. Further, it appears that the method can be extended to certain other phenomena, thus raising this percentage.

The analysis has been an exploration of the second part of Sacks' concept of adjacency pair, the response, in the particular case of the
question-answer pair. The conclusion drawn is that the concept of answer dominates responses to questions, but it does so only as an idea and not as a unique empirical phenomenon.

That the concept of answer dominates responses to questions can be seen by noting that no other competing phenomenon to an answer was found. The invitation and permission maxims don't propose a competitor to an answer; they propose streamlined ways of providing answers, based on various kinds of ellipses. A procedural problem response is also not a competitor to an answer; the answer is still expected following the repair of the procedural problem. Further, a response that is denigrating without being an answer is also not a competitor to an answer; rather it reveals the intrusion of a separate matter that has the power to suspend answers, but only temporarily. Hence, the original chain maxim, that states the central idea of the adjacency pair for the question-answer pair, does not fail because some heretofore unseen competitor to an answer occurs. Rather, the failure occurs because an answer is not an empirical phenomenon but an idea. In short, members appear to treat the concept of answer like a Platonic form, where an answer is an ideal only imperfectly realized in practice.

Further, an answer is a moral phenomenon, not just a cognitive one. Members feel that they should receive answers to questions. Members permit various kinds of responses to be taken as answers; they tolerate temporary troubles along the way to an answer; they even understand permanent suspensions of an answer in the case of "I don't know" and denigration in the question. All of these constitute sin, but not heresy. But if they feel that a response deliberately avoids an answer with no good reason for it, they feel denigrated. Thus, the member performs two tests on a response to his question: "Is it recognizable as an answer, or alternatively, will it lead to an answer?" and "If not, can the noncompliance to the request be explained away?"

WHAT PROBLEMS HAVE BEEN DISCOVERED?

In carrying out the analysis a number of major problems were discovered. Let me begin with the opposite position to "the glass is one-quarter full"; my glass is also three-quarters empty. If percent of cases reproduced is seen as similar to percent of variance explained in statistical studies in sociology, then my analysis is about as successful as that kind of study, even better than many. It is not uncommon for small amounts of variance to be explained, and yet for claims of real findings to be made. I could make the same claim (and I do) but that is not sufficient. Quite
simply, the 75% of cases not reproduced here reflects my ignorance. No doctrine of error, so comforting in statistical studies, can help me.

A second problem is the great amount of interpretation by me running throughout the analysis. Some of the phenomena are subtle, e.g., the blurring of lack of hearing with lack of comprehending, and some kinds of formal denigration, and the reader may not agree with my interpretations. The whole analysis needs a thorough rethinking and testing before any of it can be claimed to be general. New transcripts need to be studied; the analysis needs to be extended to videotapes of conversation; etc.

However, it should be pointed out that interpretation is a problem in every sociological study. It can never be eliminated. Some of its idiosyncracy can be curbed by the averaging inherent in agreement, but it cannot be completely removed. At bottom, interpretation is an essential feature of a study like this. For example, I have to know what an answer is before I begin (even though I later discover that I don't really know what an answer is). Otherwise, I would not be able to separate, e.g., direct answers from other kinds of responses, because the various kinds of minor variations would defeat me. Put otherwise, if interpretation were not an essential part of the study, a computer could do the coding, and, at the moment at least, that is not possible. Further, the reader must use interpretation to even read this book intelligently. He, too, must know and does know the idea of an answer; otherwise, the analysis would not make sense to him (whether he agrees with it or not). 3

Another problem here is that the maxims are not mutually consistent. Some requests call for maxims that are mutually contradictory; to follow one may be to violate another. A good example is the denigrating suggestion, e.g., "Why don't you do X?" Suppose that that is a perfectly reasonable suggestion, one that would benefit H. It was argued that this question is both a suggestion and a denigration. (The denigration is mild, a criticism of H for not presently doing what the question proposes.) It is not clear what H will do in response. The extension of the permission maxim proposes that he respond to the suggestion; the denigration maxim proposes that he respond to the denigration. He may do both in this case, thereby meeting both demands, but he need not, thereby violating one to follow the other.

The problem raised here has largely been avoided in sociology because the dominant structural-functional thinking stresses harmonious social systems, not systems containing internal conflicts.

Perhaps the most difficult problem to face is the essential ambiguity of some utterances. The present method of reproduction implicitly
assumes that the meaning of a question is clear to H, or can be made clear by solving any procedural problems. But cases occur where that is not possible, for example, the ambiguity in "What?" or "Huh?" where lack of hearing and lack of comprehending may both be heard. The repair is simple for S: fix what you think is wrong, and then it is H's responsibility to tell you that that's not the problem if you are wrong. But the fact that easy correction methods exist does not remove the essential difficulty of the problem. The best that can be done with the present approach now is to identify the possible meanings that members detect and refer them to the maxims that guide response to them.

IS THE METHOD OF REPRODUCTION USEFUL?

I turn now to a discussion of the usefulness of the method of reproduction in sociology. My answer is affirmative, for a number of reasons.4

1. The question is really silly, because the method is the "only game in town" for the goal it seeks. There is no alternative method that I know to try to describe in detail the regular ways in which members interact with one another. Further, the method has a long tradition in linguistics, where no competitor has ever arisen.

2. Aside from findings, I have found the method instructive in the sense that things I knew only implicitly about our culture as a member of it were brought to conscious attention. That is, whatever the success of the method in terms of reproducing members' actions, it clearly has the advantage of bringing the field of phenomena forward for study.5

3. As pointed out above, the method has at least as much success in explaining empirical cases as do other methods in sociology. I regard reproducing one-quarter of the cases as a satisfactory result for the inquiry at this stage of its development. Extension of the results here will certainly explain more cases.

4. The method is very sensitive to the cases it doesn't reproduce, since it rests on determinism. (That determinism is only argued here for its methodological utility, and not as a general philosophical doctrine.) That makes it different from a statistical method, based on probability, where variation from a "true value" is expected and built into the method of test from the beginning. It is unclear in these latter tests what particular cases that don't fit the hypothesis are really deviant. But here, every unreproduced case is a place for new theoretical thinking to begin. In my view, that will lead to improvement more quickly than in the statistical method.
In effect, the method has led me to pare away the cases that I could reproduce, letting the more difficult cases stand out for attention. And that doesn’t preclude the possibility that the reproduced cases were only apparently reproduced. Any further understanding of the more difficult ones may change the treatment of the earlier ones.

5. The problems revealed by the method are not all of the same kind as the problems solved. That is, the method doesn’t confine one to a horizontal plateau, where the cases not reproduced can only be seen as similar in kind to the ones already reproduced. Rather, some of the problems revealed are of a higher order of difficulty. For example, the problem of essentially ambiguous utterances discussed above is of this kind. Thus, the method not only leads beyond itself, but leads to deeper kinds of problems beyond itself.

6. I claimed in Chapter 1 that all description in sociology is too vague for me. I can now say more clearly what I meant by that. Since there has been no hard criterion guiding description, sociological descriptions are left at some merely “clear” point by the researcher, where he in effect invites the reader to find the sense of the description, to complete it from what he knows. The present focus on reproduction shows the vagueness in that kind of description. The reader must supply his understanding of all the relevant maxims to even complete the sense of the description. 6

7. Finally, I return to the topic with which this study started, interviewing. It will take additional studies to show how the present analysis contributes to our understanding of interviewing. I make only one point here to show what I have in mind.

Interviewers with structured questionnaires are constantly admonished to stick closely to the schedule. They are to read the questions to the respondent just as written, and they are not to do anything else. Even their introductory pitch may be written down beforehand. Obviously, that caution is designed to keep extraneous effects on the respondent’s responses out of the study. But the plain fact of the matter is that no interviewer can ever be confined to the talk programmed in his schedule. The best that can be achieved is to keep “extra” talk to a minimum, hoping only that the treatment of different respondents will be similar enough to permit them to be legitimately grouped together in the statistical analysis.

It has been my experience that interviewers try very hard to stick to the schedule; it is the respondents who cause the trouble, not permitting the interviewers to do that. One very common way in which this occurs is through procedural problems. Respondents, not knowing anything
about the study, often want clarification of meanings, intentions, situations, etc. And the interviewer must respond to these demands; otherwise, he denigrates the respondent (by not answering what the respondent takes to be a reasonable question), thereby threatening rapport, and perhaps causing the loss of the interview. But now the interviewer is on his own. No amount of piloting in advance will remove all the ambiguities that respondents can find. So the interviewer has to make repairs at these points, and hope that he isn't thereby distorting the question under discussion beyond the point of similarity that the researcher strives for, from respondent to respondent.

If the interviewer is good, then he can usually achieve a defensible level of similarity of interviewing contexts to whomever the argument must be made. Even if he can't, the ultimate safeguard is the statistical method itself that the researcher will use. A few dissimilar responses mixed in may move a percentage up or down a point, but will not affect the pattern of results. So the researcher, wisely, leaves this mare's nest alone. But in doing so, he has to admit that an unstudied set of phenomena remain at a crucial point in his method. The present analysis has tried to display some of them.

In summary, I think the method of reproduction is useful in sociology, for all the reasons listed above. Granted, it will not solve the problems of war and peace, but it will help us, I think, to better understand the nature of the social order, certainly necessary if we are ever going to solve the problems of war and peace.

THE PROBLEM OF CONTEXT

Throughout this analysis the problem of context has plagued me. It would be pleasant to recommend a full-blown method of reproduction to sociologists without reservation, but I can't make that recommendation. While the method has all the kinds of usefulness discussed in the last section, it is not a panacea for our problems in sociology.

It seems to me that the problem of context is the leading problem in sociology, though rarely recognized as such. By that problem I mean the degree to which social events are unique to the settings in which they occur. (In fact, the problem of context is simply a high-sounding way of stating the problem of ignorance.) In my opinion it lies behind all the troubles in making our discipline into a science, e.g., behind the generally small amounts of variance explained in statistical studies, and behind the small percent of cases reproduced here. In this section I turn to some of
the issues involved, as displayed in the work of the ethnomethodologists, whose general position I share.

The problems that I have had throughout this analysis, e.g., the various problems of interpretation, are exactly the kinds of things that Garfinkel calls "normal troubles" in sociological research of this kind (Garfinkel, 1967). He argues that any attempt to propose a model like a grammar will inevitably force the investigator into much agonizing about deviant cases, i.e., that deviant cases are an inherent feature of that method.

Garfinkel's concerns are in and through this analysis at every point. I have used his "etcetera" property; I have made reference to his retrospective-prospective property of members' actions, and to his argument that all utterances are essentially vague; my conclusion that an answer is an idea and not an empirical phenomenon is merely a practical conclusion, a use of his "documentary method." These are clearly troublesome properties to have to admit into an analysis. Yet I can't make them go away, and I don't know anyone else who can, either. Hence, a central claim of his deserves much attention from students of method: there are inherent limits on the degree of reproducibility of the kind that I have tried here, and on the percent of explained variation in the statistical models in sociology. If true, it suggests a refocusing of our interest in methods to stop the endless search for more explanatory power and to begin to understand why it won't work beyond a given point.

I believe Garfinkel's claim here, and that is why I don't believe the method of reproduction is anything more than another practical method, no different in kind from any of the nonreproductive methods in sociology. For example, I can pursue the obvious lines of inquiry mentioned throughout, and reproduce more cases, but I believe that after a while, I would find myself against a barrier where no significant further progress could be made in the same way. If that last is true, then the problem is one of diminishing returns, and at some point in the future, we must face Garfinkel's conjecture.

Garfinkel is without any doubt the leading student of the problem of context in sociology. He is trying to deal with it by pursuing the implications of concepts like background understandings and indexicality. However, it seems clear from his studies (Garfinkel, 1967) that the problem of context can only be seen indirectly by its disruption of some assumed social order. Hence, it must be pursued through some kind of traditional study like the present one, not for the usual purpose, but to seek out those disruptions. (This is seen most clearly in what have come
to be called Garfinkel's "disruption experiments.") Garfinkel, then, is in the difficult position of not being able to study his phenomena directly. The implication, it seems to me, is that further understanding of the problem of context will rest heavily on studying the troubles that occur in various kinds of traditional studies, lay and sociological.

One such study has been the work of Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) on turn-taking in conversation. They call their turn-taking system both context-free and context-sensitive. By context-free I take them to mean that their system is independent of at least many features of the context to the talk. Yet the system is highly flexible because of its local management features. Therefore, it permits conversationalists to tailor the size of turns, the number of turns, the sequence of turns, etc., to fit their own conversation. This last is what they mean by context-sensitive. That is, they argue persuasively, I think, that part of context is itself formal variation, and recursive rules like their own can be proposed which will permit that kind of formal variation to occur.7

How strongly can we take their claim that the turn-taking system is context-free?8 From Garfinkel's perspective all rules are maxims in the present sense; no rule can escape the "etcetera" property. For example, one can ask if the rules of the turn-taking system are subject to the kinds of phenomena that occur in responses to questions discussed here. Is there a permission maxim operating here, too? More generally, are there elliptic forms of the turn-taking rules? Do procedural problems occur in the turn-taking system? (Yes; one kind is the case where a speaker waits too long to speak after getting the turn, and then explains that he has temporarily blanked out; he can't think of the words he wants to use.) Does denigration enter into the formal turn-taking rules? My answer in general has to be "Yes"; that even the turn-taking system is a moral phenomenon, or ritual phenomenon in Goffman's terms.

But at the same time the rules of the turn-taking system are very strongly held, and members conform to them far more than they do to any of the maxims studied here.9 Note, for example, that in Garfinkel's disruption experiment where students played strangers in their own homes (1967), no instance was ever reported where the rules of the turn-taking system were disrupted. The disruptions occurred at higher levels. The brilliance of the turn-taking paper, it seems to me, lies exactly here, in the discovery of a system that is interactional in character and yet has the same kind of constraint on action that the rules of the grammar of the language itself have. The clear implication of that paper is to seek further interactional systems that have the same character.

However, I don't think that the importance of the turn-taking paper rests in its establishment of a thoroughly grounded rule-governed
sociology, where the sociologist's uneasy concept of norm is replaced by a proper conception of rule. In fact, I doubt that that can ever occur. Rather, its importance for me lies in creating an opportunity for students who believe in the total situatedness of events by creating an apparent counterexample to that position. The opportunity is to see what features of context remain in a system as strongly followed as this one. In the sense of "paring away" cases mentioned above, the cases remaining after that has been done here should be highly instructive. In effect, apparent systems of rules may be the best place to study the problem of context.

In considering the last point I argue that all apparent rule-governed behavior is better viewed as members' decisions to repeat the next time what they did the last time, and all the times previous to that. That permits the question of context to be put this way: Why do members persist in doing the same things in concert with one another in spite of the constantly changing situation in which the behavior is carried out? Further, in what kinds of situations (perhaps rare) will members give up their adherence to a particular rule system? More basically, persistence of behavior implies deep commitment to certain fundamental choices (not necessarily conscious, of course). What are they, and what do they suggest about the problem of context? For example, Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson argue that the turn-taking system is organized to permit one member to speak at a time, with great flexibility in terms of what he says, how long he talks, etc. Why is that so important that members insist on it? Efficiency is the usual answer, yet reasonable efficiency could occur (perhaps) with much less consistency in following the turn-taking system. Or do we only have reasonable efficiency now in that system—the case in most other areas of rule-following—but don't recognize it? Put simply, it seems to me that something important about the problem of context is signalled by every system of rules to which members strictly conform.

In terms of Goffman's system and ritual constraints on conversation (see Chapter 3), I am arguing that there are only ritual constraints, that the ritual constraints "go all the way down." While we don't usually think of turn-taking as a matter of ritual, that conceptualization at least captures the possibility of contextual effects, and permits the exploration of the idea. Seen that way, ritual is one of the names for context, because its definition rests on merely expected behavior, i.e., behavior that can always be otherwise.

The present approach is another instance of proposing a system of rules, here, of trying to see what responses to questions can be reproduced independently from context. In terms of the imagery of Chapter 3, I have tried to build Goffman's box, knowing that it doesn't
exist, or Garfinkel’s boat, knowing that it can have no bottom. Unfortunately, the percent of cases reproduced is too small as yet to get into the problem of context in an interesting way (from within this approach to the problem). Perhaps someone will be able to detect rules similar in strength to the turn-taking rules on the basis of this analysis, or alternatively, show that no stronger degree of context-freedom is possible. In that way, the problem of context will become better known in sociology.

NOTES

1 However, it seems clear that this limitation is not essential. Some of the common continuations can be integrated into the analysis, and suggestions were made to that end.

2 Such a case is Example (7/7/102-112) in Chapter 8, where the boy did not answer Roz’s question, but simply walked away. Jock immediately taunts Roz that she has been snubbed.

3 I don’t mean here that only unclear cases force interpretation on us, i.e., that clear cases do not require interpretation. Rather, it takes interpretation to see that the clear cases are clear.

4 My thoughts are largely directed to sociologists here. I don’t believe that a linguist would answer this question with “No.”

5 That, of course, is a possibility with any method. Yet I rarely feel that the possibility is realized in the usual variabilized, nonreproductive methods in sociology. In defense of these methods, it must be said that the scope of sociological theorizing is at a level of abstraction far beyond any easily observed set of events, e.g., where the unit is a nation, or a formal organization. I think this difficulty has permitted us to become lax about our theorizing, and we fall all too often into slipshod—or worse, merely mediocre—thinking.

6 The present analysis certainly doesn’t escape vagueness in this sense. But it does make that vagueness visible and points to the kinds of phenomena that we must understand if we are going to reduce, or at least understand, that vagueness.

7 This possibility of tailoring formal features of talk to the participants is part of what they call the phenomenon of “recipient design.” That refers to the fact that members, after all, do shape their conversation to the knowledge, feelings, opinions, etc., of their hearers.

8 The authors are aware of difficulty on this point; see their Note 8.

9 That is really only a claim; Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson did not make any attempt to study the frequency of conformity to their rules.


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