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Part 1

Considering CA

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1

Introducing the CA Paradigm

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Conversation analysis[1] (or *CA*) is a rather specific analytic endeavour. This chapter provides a basic characterization of CA as an explication of the ways in which conversationalists maintain an interactional social order. I describe its emergence as a discipline of its own, confronting recordings of telephone calls with notions derived from Harold Garfinkel's ethnomethodology and Erving Goffman's conceptual studies of an interaction order. Later developments in CA are covered in broad terms. Finally, the general outline and purpose of the book is explained.

What is 'conversation analysis'?

People talking together, 'conversation', is one of the most mundane of all topics. It has been available for study for ages, but only quite recently, in the early 1960s, has it gained the serious and sustained attention of scientific investigation. Before then, what was written on the subject was mainly normative: how one should speak, rather than how people actually speak. The general impression was that ordinary conversation is chaotic and disorderly. It was only with the advent of recording devices, and the willingness and ability to study such a mundane phenomenon in depth, that 'the order of conversation' – or rather, as we shall see, a multiplicity of 'orders' – was discovered.

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'Conversation' can mean that people are talking with each other, just for the purpose of talking, as a form of 'sociability', or it can be used to indicate any activity of interactive talk, independent of its purpose. Here, for instance, are some fragments of transcribed 'conversation' in the sense that there are people talking together.[2]

EXCERPT 1.1, FROM HERITAGE, 1984A: 236 [NB:VII:2]

E: Oh honey that was a lovely luncheon I shoulda ca:lled you
s:soo[:ner but I:]l:[lo:ved it.
M: [((f)) Oh:::] [( )
E: It w's just deli:ghtfu [:l.]
M: [Well]=
M: I w's gla[d you] (came).]
E: ['nd yer f:] friends] 're so da:rli:ng,=
M: =Oh::: [: it w'z]
E: [e-that P]a:t isn'she a do:[:ll?,]
M: [iYe]h isn't she pretty,
(.)
E: Oh: she's a beautiful girl.=
M: =Yeh I think she's a pretty gir[l.=
E: [En' that Reinam'n::
(.)
E: She SCA:RES me.

EXCERPT 1.2, FROM FRANKEL, 1984: 153 [G.L:2] [GLOSSES OMITTED]

Pt: This- chemotherapy (0.2) it won't have any lasting effects on havin' kids will it?
(2.2)
Pt: It will?
Dr: I'm afraid so

The first excerpt (1.1), from a series of telephone conversations among friends, would generally be considered part of 'a conversation', while the second (1.2), from a medical consultation, would not. The social import of the two occasions is rather different, but the excerpts could be both items for serious conversation-analytic study since they are both examples of what Emanuel Schegloff (1987c: 207) has called *talk-in-interaction*. Conversation analysis, therefore, is involved in the study of the orders of talk-in-interaction, whatever its character or setting.

To give a bit of a flavour of what CA is all about, I will offer a few observations on the two quoted fragments. In excerpt 1.1, E apparently has called M after having visited her. She provides a series of 'assessments' of the occasion, and of M's friends who were present. E's assessments are relatively intense and produced in a sort of staccato manner. The first two, on the occasion and the friends in general, are accepted with Oh-prefaced short utterances, cut off when E continues. 'Oh' has

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been analysed by John Heritage (1984b) as a 'news receipt'. The assessments of Pat are endorsed by M with 'yeh', followed by a somewhat lower level assessment: 'a do::ll?,' with 'Yeh isn't she pretty,', and 'Oh: she's a beautiful girl.', with 'Yeh I think she's a pretty girl.'. These observations are in line with the tenor of findings by Anita Pomerantz (1978; 1984) on 'compliment responses' and 'down-graded second assessments'. The 'Oh-receipted' assessments can be seen to refer to aspects of the situation for which M as a host was 'responsible', while it might be easier for her to 'share' in the assessments of the looks of her guests, although she does so in a rather muted fashion. The 'work' that is done with these assessments and receipts can be glossed as 'showing and receiving gratitude and appreciation, gracefully'.

In the second fragment, excerpt 1.2, the context and the contents of the assessments are markedly different. The patient proposes an optimistic assessment as to the effect of her forthcoming chemotherapy, after which the physician is silent, leading to a remarkably long, 2.2-second pause. In so doing, he can be seen as demonstrating that he is not able to endorse this positive assessment. Thereupon, the patient 'reverses' her statement in a questioning manner, 'It will?', which the doctor then does confirm with: 'I'm afraid so'. We can say that the conversational regularity which Harvey Sacks (1987) has called 'the preference for agreement' has been used here by the physician to communicate that the situation is contrary to the patient's hopes, while she uses it to infer the meaning of his 'silence' (cf. Frankel's 1984 analysis of this case). In both cases, aspects of the 'pacing' of the utterances, as well as the choice of 'grades' or 'directions', contribute to the actions achieved. It is such aspects of 'the technology of conversation' (Sacks, 1984b: 413; 1992b: 339) that are of interest here.

The emergence of conversation analysis

The expression 'conversation analysis' can be used in wider and more restricted senses. As a broad term, it can denote any study of people talking together, 'oral communication', or 'language use'. But in a restricted sense, it points to one particular tradition of analytic work that was started by the late Harvey Sacks and his collaborators, including Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson. It is only in this restricted sense that 'conversation analysis' or 'CA' is used in this book.

In this restricted sense, CA was developed in the early 1960s in California.[3] Harvey Sacks and Emanuel Schegloff were graduate students in the Sociology Department of the University of California at Berkeley, where Erving Goffman was teaching. Goffman had developed a rather distinctive personal style of sociological analysis, based on observations of people in interaction, but ultimately oriented to the construction of a system of conceptual distinctions. Simplifying complex historical influences, one could say that Goffman's example opened up an interesting area of research for his students, the area of direct, face-to-face interaction, what he later has called 'The interaction order' (1983). Sacks and Schegloff, however, were never mere followers of Goffman.[4] They were open to a lot of other influences and read widely in many directions of social science, including linguistics, anthropology, and psychiatry.

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It was Harold Garfinkel, however, who was to be the major force in CA's emergence as a specific style of social analysis. He was developing a 'research policy' which he called 'ethnomethodology' and which was focused on the study of common-sense reasoning and practical theorizing in everyday activities. His was a sociology in which the problem of social order was reconceived as a practical problem of social action, as a members' activity, as methodic and therefore analysable. Rather than structures, functions, or distributions, reduced to conceptual schemes or numerical tables, Garfinkel was interested in the procedural study of common-sense activities.

This apparently resonated well with Sacks' various interests, including his early interest in the practical reasoning in case law, and later in other kinds of practical professional reasoning such as police work and psychiatry. These things came together when Sacks became a Fellow at the Center for the Scientific Study of Suicide in Los Angeles in 1963–4. There he came across a collection of tape recordings of telephone calls to the Suicide Prevention Center. It was in a direct confrontation with these materials that he developed the approach that was later to become known as conversation analysis.

Two themes emerged quite early: categorization and sequential organization. The first followed from Sacks' previous interests in practical reasoning and was not essentially bound up with these materials as interactional. The second, however, was in essence 'new' and specific to talk-in-interaction as such. It can be summarized briefly as the idea that what a doing, such as an utterance, means practically, the action it actually performs, depends on its sequential position. This was the 'discovery' that led to conversation analysis per se.[5]

From its beginnings, then, the ethos of CA consisted of an unconventional but intense, and at the same time respectful, intellectual interest in the details of the actual practices of people in interaction. The then still recent availability of the technology of audio recording, which Sacks started to use, made it possible to go beyond the existing practices of 'gathering data', such as coding and field observation, which were all much more manipulative and researcher dominated than the simple, mechanical recording of 'natural', that is non-experimental, action.

Audio recordings, while faithfully recording what the machine's technology allows to be recorded, are not immediately available, in a sense. The details that the machine records have to be remarked by the listening analyst and later made available to the analyst's audience. It is the activity of transcribing the tapes that provides for this, that captures the data, so to speak. In the beginning, transcripts were quite simple renderings of the words spoken. But later, efforts were made to capture more and more details of the ways in which these words were produced as formatted utterances in relation to the utterances of other speakers. It was the unique contribution of Gail Jefferson, at first in her capacity as Sacks' 'data recovery technician' (Jefferson, 1972: 294), and later as one of the most important contributors to CA in her own right, to develop a system of transcription that fitted CA's general purpose of sequential analysis. It has been used by CA researchers ever since, although rarely with the subtlety that she is able to provide.[6]

It was the fitting together of a specific intellectual matrix of interests with an available technology of data rendering that made CA possible. And once it became

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established as a possibility, which took another decade, it could be taken up by researchers beyond its original circle of originators and their collaborators. There are many aspects of its characteristics and circumstances that have contributed to CA's diffusion around the world (of which the present book is one manifestation), but the originality of its basic interests, the clarity of its fundamental findings, and the generality of its technology have certainly contributed immensely.

The development of conversation analysis

For a characterization of CA's development, one can very well use the ideas that Thomas Kuhn developed in his *The structure of scientific revolutions* (1962). As Schegloff makes clear in the 'Introduction' to Sacks' edited *Lectures on conversation* (1992a; 1992b), Sacks and he were on the look-out for new possibilities for doing sociology which might provide alternatives to the established forms of sociological discourse, or 'paradigms' in Kuhn's parlance. And what they did in effect was to establish a new 'paradigm' of their own, a distinctive way of doing sociology with its particular interests and ways of collecting and treating evidence. As a 'paradigm', CA was already established when Harvey Sacks died tragically in 1975. The work that remained to be done was a work of extension, application, and filling in gaps, what Kuhn has called 'normal science'. What was already accomplished was the establishment of a framework for studying talk-in-interaction, basic concepts, and exemplary studies. What still could be done was to solve puzzles within the established framework. I will now discuss some of these later developments.

From its early beginnings in Sacks' considerations of tapes of suicide calls, CA has developed into a full-blown style of research of its own, which can handle all kinds of talk-in-interaction. When you scan Sacks' *Lectures on conversation* (1992a; 1992b), you will see that most of the materials he discusses stem from two collections, the already mentioned suicide calls and a series of tape-recorded group therapy sessions. Quite often, the fact that these recordings were made in very specific 'institutional' settings is ignored, or at least it is not in focus. Similarly, Schegloff's dissertation (partly published in Schegloff, 1968, and 2004), although based on calls to a disaster centre, mostly deals with general issues of conversational interaction as such, rather than with institutional specifics.

Gradually, however, Sacks, Schegloff, and their collaborators turned to the analysis of conversations that were not institutionally based.[7] The general idea seems to have been that such non-institutional data provided better examples of the purely local functioning of conversational devices and interactional formats such as 'turn-taking' or 'opening up closings'. From the late 1970s onwards, however, later followers of the CA research style turned their attention 'again' to institution-based materials such as meetings, courtroom proceedings, and various kinds of interviews. Their general purpose was to 'apply' the acquired knowledge of conversational organization specifically to these institutional interactions in order to show how these institutions were 'talked into being', to use a much quoted phrase coined by John Heritage (1984a: 290). In an introduction to this problematic, he has written:

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> There are, therefore, at least two kinds of conversation analytic research going on today, and, though they overlap in various ways, they are distinct in focus. The first examines the institution *of* interaction as an entity in its own right; the second studies the management of social institutions *in* interaction. (Heritage, 1997: 162; 2004: 223)

For simplicity, I will often refer to the first type as 'pure CA', while calling the latter 'applied CA', no specific evaluation of these kinds being intended. Within the latter kind, one could distinguish two different interests, which can be balanced in various ways. On the one hand, there can be an interest in the institutional arrangements as these pertain to the organization of interaction, such as turn-taking, the distribution of speaking rights, etc., in relation to various aspects of the institution's functioning. On the other hand, the interest may be in studying the specific institutional activities, the specific interactional situation, its local, interactional requirements, and especially the ways in which the interactants show their orientations to these situations and requirements. These issues will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 9 (cf. also: Boden & Zimmerman, 1991, and Drew & Heritage, 1992a, for examples and discussions of these issues; and Drew & Sorjonen, 1997, and Heritage, 1997, or 2004, for introductions and overviews).

I have suggested that a basic enabling condition for CA's emergence was the availability of the technology of *audio* recording. Therefore, one could expect that the later availability of *video* technology would have had a similar impact, but this does not seem to have happened, at least not to the same extent. Again simplifying a more complicated history, one can say that video analysis has been mostly used in a complementary fashion to audio-based CA.

Some CA researchers – most prominently Charles Goodwin, Marjorie Harness Goodwin, and Christian Heath – have used video recording with ingenuity and subtlety to study visual aspects of interaction (cf. C. Goodwin, 1981; 1987; 1996; 2000a; 2000b; Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996; Heath, 1986; 1989; Heath & Luff, 1996; 2000, for some particularly inspiring examples). When one looks at these analyses in detail, however, one can see that in most cases the verbal production by the participants is taken as a baseline for the understanding of the interaction, with selected visual details being added to this understanding to make the analysis more completely an analysis of *face-to-face* interaction. Prominent among these details is the direction of the gaze of the participants, with marked gestures as a good second. Furthermore, many ways of handling material objects and features of the environment can be included in the analysis. The general and recommended practice seems to be to start with an audio transcription, following the proceedings discussed earlier, and later to add the visual details one wants to consider (cf. Heath & Luff, 1993). This practice seems to be reflected in the fact that, while there is one basic system for the transcription of language, there is no equivalent system for the description of non-vocal action.

As I indicated, CA has been developed as 'a kind of sociology', but the sociological community was for a long time not very hospitable to this new offspring. Sacks and Schegloff made it clear from the beginning that their problematic was a sociological one, and that they did not start from a deep interest in language per se (cf. some of the quotes from classic CA studies in Chapter 2). The first CA

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papers, however, were published in anthropological, linguistics, and semiotic journals, and from the early days many people have seen CA as contributing to the study of 'language use' or 'oral communication'. Today, CA is still practised by sociologists, but also by anthropologists, linguists, and communications scientists. Linguists and researchers in communications may have a slightly different conception of CA's subject matter, and a different technical expertise and vocabulary, than sociologists and anthropologists, but this does not seem to hinder the exchange of ideas within the CA community. What does make a difference, however, is that people have to defend themselves, and CA, in different ways in relation to their different disciplinary backgrounds (see Chapter 4). One can also discern some differences in conceptions of CA's general background and purpose, sociologists generally having a stronger ethnomethodological orientation than linguists. In this book, I will mainly deal with aspects of CA that are generally shared, but from time to time my sociological roots will inevitably show.

Why do conversation analysis?

Conversation Analysis is a rather specific endeavour, different from the established approaches in the social and human sciences. It would seem, therefore, that to 'do CA' one would need to have special motivations and arguments. These can be positive – what one likes and appreciates in CA – and negative – what is less inspiring or acceptable in the established ways of investigating and conceptualizing human activities. I will discuss some of these arguments and differences in a summary fashion, though they will return in various places elsewhere in the book.

Contrastive properties

Major differences of CA in contrast to other approaches are:

- CA operates closer to the phenomena than most other approaches, because it works on detailed renderings of interactional activities, recordings, and detailed transcripts, rather than on coded, counted, or otherwise summarized representations; because of this it can take into consideration details and subtleties of human interaction that are lost in other practices and that have proven to be important for participants.
- CA favours naturally occurring data rather than 'experimental' or 'researcher-provoked' ones, because it considers talk-in-interaction as a 'situated' achievement rather than as a product of personal intentions, to be studied in interviews, or external forces, that can be manipulated in a laboratory; it is therefore less 'artificial'.
- CA's perspective on human interaction is organizational and procedural: when people talk with each other this is not seen as a series of individual acts, but rather as an emergent collectively organized event; the analytic purpose is not to explain why people act as they do, but rather to explicate how they do it.

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- CA can be seen as a study of language-as-used, but this is not done in terms of a linguistic system as such, although there is a rising interest in the different interactive resources that various languages provide; and while more traditional forms of linguistics are mainly based on written language, strictly following normative rules of correct usage, CA studies oral language as actually used interactionally in 'natural' situations.

CA is then based on a range of choices, and in order to be motivated to 'do CA', you have to be convinced that these are reasonable ones, or at least curious to explore these further.

A basic assumption of CA is that talk-in-interaction is important in social life, both at the level of everyday concerns and at the level of society at large. It does not take much effort of observation and reflection to conclude that talking together is *basic to the social life of humans*. When we grow up we 'become human' in and through talk and much of our social life is in fact enacted as and in talk. Think of education, medical care, politics, commerce, and, indeed, science; none of these crucial social activities could do without talk in some way. But even in situations which are not generally seen as 'important', like chatting during a break, we manifest ourselves and perceive others largely through our talking together.

Requirements

So in order to 'do CA' you have to have some affinity with arguments like the ones above. But you also need some more personal qualities and sensibilities. You should have a deep *interest* in the details of human behaviour and the urge to *understand* what people are doing. And you also have to be able and willing to *switch* between that level of concrete understanding and one of abstract reasoning. CA is based on an 'analytic mentality' that seeks to explore the connections between the particularities in the details of human action and the generalities of shared organizational problems and resources.

Furthermore, in order actually to 'do CA', you need to have the *patience* to work laboriously for hours on end at the production of detailed transcriptions like the ones quoted above. And for most projects one would need quite a large collection of recorded and transcribed events. In cases in which you collect your own recordings, you need to have or acquire the ability to work with cameras, microphones, and recording equipment. And, as for any scientific work in our era, you need to be able to work with computers and specialized software.

Rewards

A sensible question before deciding to 'do CA' would be 'what's in it for me?' Firstly, it can be, depending on your circumstances, a sensible choice in an academic career. But it may also be a difficult one when CA is not an accepted and appreciated option in a specific academic environment. In such a case you may have to struggle to get it accepted, or at least tolerated. It helps if you are not

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completely on your own, and to connect to like-minded people in your environment or elsewhere.

In my personal experience, CA is a *community*, although with various degrees of intensity. As it has become established as a quite solidly and specifically defined approach in the human sciences, you can, by working in the CA tradition, become 'a member' of that community. The problems you may encounter when you try to become a member, ranging from practical and methodological ones to issues of theory and philosophy, will not be new or unique. So it can be helpful to share such problems and seek advice from more experienced members. As a community of researchers, CA is essentially international and interdisciplinary. Although it was first developed in one particular discipline and local setting, it now operates in a wide range of disciplinary fields and in many countries, scattered over the world. Websites and email lists are good ways to connect to the CA community, but personal relations are also important. Going to conferences, workshops, and informal get-togethers is helpful to get to know both 'the ways of the tribe' and some of its members.

While the CA paradigm is quite firmly established, CA is not 'finished', so each member can, in principle if not always in practice, produce *discoveries*. The core phenomena have been identified, but they can be explored further and there exists an enormous variety of settings, conditions, and languages for which the local organization of talk-in-interactions can be fruitfully studied.

The possibilities for *applied CA* are quite varied, as will become clear in later chapters, especially 9 and 10. This means that for any activity that involves the details of talk, CA can be 'applied' to elucidate both the routine practices as well as some of the 'problems' that may arise in that particular field of activity. Just to give you a flavour of that variety, I can mention: the socialization of children from a very early age, educational and instructional practices in specialized settings or at work, social talk among friends, colleagues, and in families, working with clients in an enormous range of institutional settings such as primary health care, social work or psychotherapy, meetings of all kinds, judicial settings like law courts, police investigations, and 'plea bargaining', politics at all levels and in various formats, work-related talk especially in technologically complex settings, interaction with and among people with impaired communication abilities like deaf people, aphasics, etc.!

Conversation analysis, then, offers a unique opportunity actually to make discoveries in a field that is essential for human life, within a methodological and theoretical framework that has proven its value in numerous studies.

Purpose and plan of the book

The book has a dual purpose: to introduce the reader to Conversation Analysis CA as a specific research approach in the human sciences, and to provide students and novice researchers with methodological and practical suggestions for actually doing CA research. The first part is primarily oriented to the first purpose. After

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an introductory chapter (1), there is one (2) elaborating basic ideas by discussing three classical studies. Then CA's approach is further clarified in terms of some core concepts in qualitative social research (3) and by a confrontation with some neighbouring disciplines and critical concerns (4). The second, practical purpose comes to the fore in the later parts of the book. The second and third parts detail the specifics of CA in its production of data, recordings (5), and transcripts (6), and its analytic strategies (7 and 8). The final part discusses ways in which CA can be 'applied' in the study of specific institutional settings (9) and for certain practical or critical interests.

The focus in this book will be mostly on working with *audio* recordings of talk-in-interaction, since *video* analysis, as noted, has been mostly used in addition to an analysis of the 'vocal track' (cf. Heath, 1997; 2004), but see some notes on video and visual analysis in later chapters. (Some of my discussions will apply to what I will call 'pure CA', others to 'applied CA', and most to both. As noted above, 'pure' CA is meant to gloss analyses that focus on procedures of talk-in-interaction abstracted from any specific institutional context, while 'applied' CA focuses on practices typical of setting- and institution-specific (inter)actions (Chapter 9) and/or is framed in wider concerns than *just* studying talk-in-interaction (Chapter 10).)

Each chapter will end with a short list of suggested basic *reading*, sometimes with a few words of introduction. These include general introductions, discussions of special topics, and especially exemplary studies.

After the text of each chapter, I will suggest one or more practical *exercises*, diversified for different options. These options have to do with whether you are working alone or in a group, and whether you prefer to select your own theme or choose to focus on a particular theme that will also be used in the text quite often: 'questioning activities'. When you are working in a *group*, I recommend that the major focus of the group discussions should be on the individually accomplished practical exercises. For the first three, introductory, chapters, the exercises suggest ways in which the group could discuss the recommended texts; for the practical chapters that follow, the experiences and results of the exercises could be reported to the group and discussed in detail. The educational cycle I have in mind is: (1) background reading and instruction, (2) practical exercise, (3) reporting experiences and results, and (4) exchange and discussion. If you are using the book as an *individual*, I would still strongly recommend doing the exercises seriously after you have studied each individual chapter, and before you start the next one

The instructions are thus diversified for the four options:

A. individual/open;
B. individual focused;
C. collective/open;
D. collective/focused.

As a support for the main text, there are three appendices: A, detailing the transcript conventions used in CA; B, a glossary of technical terms; and C, suggestions for designing presentations and publications.

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EXERCISE

Read one of the short introductions to CA, included in the 'Recommended reading' section below. Make a list of the questions and points for debate which this introduction raises for you. Keep this list at hand and write down 'answers' to the questions, or 'arguments' for the debate, when you encounter relevant points in your reading of the next three chapters.

For option A, individual/open, there are no special instructions. For option B, individual/focused, you should make an effort to note especially those issues that might be relevant for 'questioning activities', like the status of 'questions' and 'answers', their relations, any reaction to or take-up following the answers, etc. For option C, collective/open, take care to read different items; you might first discuss the questions and points for discussion in the group and compose a collective 'list' of answers and arguments before you proceed with reading the next two chapters. For option D, collective/focused, combine the instructions for B and C.

RECOMMENDED READING

The following list contains some of the shorter introductions to CA, in the sense used in this book; some have a methodological focus, others are more general: Boden (1990); Clayman and Gill (2004); Drew (2003; 2005); Goodwin and Heritage (1990); Heritage (1984a: 233–92; 1995); Heritage and Atkinson (1984); Peräkylä (2004b); Pomerantz and Fehr (1997); Psathas (1990b); Sacks (1984a); Zimmerman (1988).

Notes

1. Sometimes, especially in older sources, the expression 'conversation*al* analysis' is used. I think this is a misnomer, since 'conversation' denotes the material object of analysis, while 'conversational' would suggest that the analysis is done in a conversational manner, which is nonsensical (compare 'discourse analysis' with a hypothetical 'discursive analysis').
2. On the art of transcribing conversations, see Chapter 5; for transcription conventions, see Appendix A. If you are not familiar with these, studying excerpts together with Appendix A might be a good way to learn to read transcripts.
3. A full history of CA still has to be written, but a major source would be the two introductions written by Emanuel Schegloff for the volumes of Harvey Sacks' *Lectures on conversation* (1992a; 1992b).
4. In Chapter 3, I make some remarks and provide some references on the complex relationship between Goffman and CA.
5. The 'story' of this discovery is told by Schegloff in his first introduction (Sacks, 1992a: xvi–xvii), while its content is available in the first lecture in the collection, 'Rules of conversational sequence' (Sacks, 1992a: 3–11), which is still a model of CA reasoning. See my discussion in Chapter 2.
6. Transcription will be further discussed in Chapter 6. A look at excerpt 1.1 already provides a sense of the complexities involved.
7. Cf. Sacks (1992b) and most of the CA papers from the early 1970s.