An initial investigation of the usability of fictional conversation for doing conversation analysis

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Ethnomethodology, conversation analysis and fictional texts

This paper proposes that fictional conversations be taken seriously as objects for conversation analysis. It also goes some small way towards exemplifying such an analysis. However, the field of ethnomethodology/ conversation analysis has not been exactly quick to embrace literary materials to date, and it has been especially neglectful of fictional (literary and dramatic) dialogue. Again seriously: one may wonder why this has been the case.

There are certainly a few papers and books within the field which have taken up literary materials in the broadest sense — or at least written ones. Schenkein (1979) has examined a newspaper narrative, and Psathas (1979) has considered directional maps. Anderson and Sharrock (1979) took up the case of news reportage and attributions of 'bias' as well as hospital direction signs (Sharrock and Anderson 1979). Anderson (1978a, b) has studied plausibility features of social science texts, while O'Neill (1981) has focused on the specifically literary features of natural and social science writing. Additionally, McHoul (1982a, b) has given some attention to the use of conversation analysis techniques in the handling of fictional and news texts. Smith (1982) has attempted an 'integration' of textual readings with the social 'contexts' of their location in her theory and analysis of the 'active text'. Morrison (1976, 1981) has specifically focused on 'telling order designs' in reading tests, popular histories, and biology textbooks *inter alia*. Closer to the official mainline of ethnomethodology, Garfinkel et al. (1981) have examined everyday laboratory procedures using both conversational and notebook material.

This list is not exhaustive, and a number of new studies are emerging (for example, Lury 1982). However, we can note in this corpus a concern with predominantly 'nonfictional' texts (news and social science reportage particularly) and a desire — especially in Smith's paper — to tie textual materials to concrete interactional affairs. It is almost as if one could gain

the impression that fiction and its reading were in some peculiar way not to count as everyday phenomena. In practice then, if not as an explicit theoretical commitment, the hangover from interactionism's empiricist preference for the face-to-face (as opposed to, say, the face-to-page) dominates this corpus. With the exception of a single piece by Garnica (1977), hardly any attempt has been made to examine the domain of fictional conversation as a specific object of (or for) analysis; it should be added that Garnica's paper, while partially repeating Schegloff's (1968) seminal work in summons-answer analysis, has its concerns more clearly in the sphere of the psychosocial and the literary critical.

This state of affairs leads to a necessary questioning of what status the fictional in general might (or might not) have as a furnisher of materials for ethnomethodological and conversation-analytic investigations. I have not seen any argument directly against their use and so must make do in the following section of this paper with some conjectures about this status and raise some responses in the (possibly misguided) anticipation that they are close to the right ones.

The status of the fictional as an ethnomethodological object (or: My baby has gone down the plughole)

No doubt one very simple reason for the neglect of fictional materials in ethnomethodology generally and that of fictional conversation in conversation analysis is that so-called 'naturally occurring', 'interactional', 'face-to-face' materials abound and are easily collected (though see Schwartz and Jacobs 1979), and that a deal of accounting for spoken discourse is yet to be done. As it were, this relatively new field, barely 20 years old, has its mainstream work cut out for it and pending.

Yet, as noted elsewhere (McHoul 1982: 1–10), ethnomethodology has shown something of a distaste for — how can we put it? — the 'non-actual', perhaps, while semiological investigations, for example, have made little distinction between the analytic statuses of fictional and nonfictional signs. Perhaps in its distrust of social science's 'constructive theorizing' in, be it noted, textual formations, ethnomethodology has asked for a return to the interactional things in themselves as opposed to 'free invention, constructive analytic theorizing, mock-ups, or book reviews' (Garfinkel 1967: viii) — to repeat a by now infamous list. Inherited from ethnomethodology's phenomenological parent, this methodological preference for studies of 'occasions' from 'within the setting itself' has, to a certain extent, tended to spill over on to the nature of the materials to be examined by that methodological interest. That is, written

(and especially fictional) materials are written off as both theoretic insights into and sources of 'empirical' materials deriving from the everyday world. The initial 'bathwater' step may have some justification under phenomenological auspices, but the latter, I prefer to think, rids us of a potentially interesting 'baby'. Naturally, then, I have some concern to do an emergency plumbing job — distasteful though it may be — and possibly without guarantee of recovering a live specimen.

The opposition between fictional and actual materials has a long history in Western philosophical discourse; this is no more clearly seen than in the social sciences, where the nineteenth-century natural science aversion to 'invented' data has lived on unabashed by the non-empirical or quasi-empirical status of many modern physical and cosmological objects — the black hole and the photon being cases in point. We must suspect that ethnomethodology's aversion (if such it be) to the fictional lies along the same route. But how defensible is that opposition?

The timbre of ethnomethodological appeals for naturally occurring interactional materials is not unlike that of its sibling discourse, speech act theory, which calls for analysis of 'serious' and 'non-invented' acts in the first analysis. Austin (1962) made this explicit by creating a first and second class of speech acts — the serious/literal/ordinary as opposed to the frivolous/fictional/special:

a performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on a stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy. This applies in a similar manner to any and every utterance — a sea-change in special circumstances. Language in such circumstances is in special ways — intelligibly — used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use — ways which fall under the *etiolations* of language. All this we are *excluding* from consideration. (Austin 1962: 22)

With foreshadowings of Garfinkel, he adds: 'Our [sic] performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances'.

Here there is no doubt a strong flavor of that division between the language of artifice (fiction, drama, child's play) and that of 'real life'. Indeed Searle (1977) has explicitly taken Austin's division to amount to just that. Does it not seem a little peculiar that a given society should have one sphere of its practice relegated to the 'unserious' while another qualifies as 'real life'? Are we that certain of our ontological divisions that we can, with any consensus, use the term 'real life' in any exclusive fashion? In his reply to Searle, Derrida (1978) has very thoroughly deconstructed such a division of linguistic acts with the full force of his anti-logocentric philosophy. While he does not make the point, it would

no doubt clarify the matter considerably were we to extend the case into the anthropological domain. How certain could we be that a set of practices P_1 in an alien culture were its 'etiolated' cases while those of P_2 were examples of 'real life'? This is a well-known anthropological problem, endemic to reportage of certain practices as coming under the category 'belief' or 'religious belief' where such a category may not have ethno-epistemological validity. To take an example from Coulter (1979: 179), in a case like this we should have to consider how we characterized a practice like 'making rain' *vis-à-vis* one like 'chopping wood': how are we to divide with any certainty the 'ordinary' practice (P_2) from the 'make believe' (P_1)? Clearly, no philosophical theory is yet available to us which can exhaustively divide, say, the scientific from the ideological or the economic from the cultural. Likewise, we rely on an unexplicated commonsense esthetics in dividing 'real, serious' talk from 'invented, fictional' talk.

Derrida (1978) has a number of important points to make in the same direction in order to overcome what is, after all, only a peculiar moral and metaphysical separation. In its place, he argues that there is only iteration in general and that the specification of separate 'fictional' or 'standard' cases thereof cannot be recommended on any strong grounds:

What would a so-called 'standard' promise or a statement be if it could not be repeated or reproduced? If, for example (an *example* of iteration in general), it could not be mimed or reproduced on the stage or, *another* example (my emphasis, a *different* example), in a citation? (Derrida 1978: 231)

That is, our everyday lives are shot through with mimesis, repetition, and citation of one sort or another. Sacks, for example, makes much of utterances like 'He didn't even say hello' as materials pointing to the native expectability of certain utterances in certain slots (Sacks n.d.: 26). This is conversational data *par excellence* — but what is it if not a citation (albeit of an absence)? The ethnomethodological topic of 'formulations' (Heritage and Watson 1979, 1980; Garfinkel and Sacks 1970) is nothing if not an indication of the fact that speakers continually cite and repeat 'what it is we are doing' with such and such a fragment of talk. 'Giving the gist' would be a case of citationality/mimesis found in a routine setting.

More abstractly, insofar as there is 'no new thing', conversation (as well as other discourse) is condemned in one sense to iterability. This is at least one crucial aspect of Chomskian linguistic philosophy which has been lost in the move toward situational pragmatics. No wonder that the obviously citational (for instance, the dramatic use of talk) is a side show for ethnomethodology, speech act theory, and linguistic pragmatics; it is a reminder of this critical forgetting. As Derrida goes on to say:

Parasitism does not need the theatre or literature to appear. Tied to iterability, this possibility obtains constantly as we can verify at every moment, including this one [AM: especially as I am quoting Derrida here]. A promise that could not be reiterated ... a moment afterwards would not be a promise, and therein resides the possibility of parasitism, even in what S[e]arl[e] calls 'real life'. (Derrida 1978: 232 — Nb. Derrida reduces 'Searle' to 'Sarl', an acronym in French for the equivalent of 'Limited Company')

Thus a case of a promise in fiction cannot be a 'pretended' or 'mocked up' one except insofar as 'real life' instances can also be 'parasitic', 'cited', or repeated in some way. To this extent there is a mutual dependence (Derrida: 'two fold roots') — but it is not one in which a secondary case of language and a primary depend on each other so much as one in which both cases depend upon a general and ineluctable iterability. The priority granted to a metaphysically arbitrary 'real' set of discursive practices is invalid and — more importantly — analytically limiting.

As a consequence, I would prefer to see ethnomethodology and conversation analysis taking 'fictional' conversation seriously — as seriously as anything else, for it is not logically, praxiologically, or epistemologically separable from that 'anything else'. This is no more plainly seen than in the irony that it is not talk but writing that conversation analysis depends upon — if we apply the arbitrary division just deconstructed. In the raw fact of the matter, conversation analysis insists that talk be transcribed into writing — and this is not without its transformative effects upon that talk. To get at the fine detail of, say, overlapped tag-positioned address terms (Jefferson 1973), it is crucial that the analyst read rather than hear them. Even in less acute cases, the presentation of conversational materials in writing is crucial to their public dissemination and membership in an official corpus.

In response, the more logocentric conversation analyst might note that at least her materials are records of, mnemonics for, or representations of some things which human beings actually uttered. But what is this 'actually'? To write is certainly to utter; but who writes? The question, on Derrida's thesis, is irrelevant. Both 'naturally occurring' and fictional conversations are instances of a general iter*ability*. They are, that is, precisely *able* to be repeated. The positions of readers and writers as, for example, psychological subjects, are irrelevant to this more general possibility.

Perhaps the reader is more like a conversational overhearer — a non-participating interloper. But in no sense that an empiricist realism can provide are the characters in a fiction any more 'participants'. This question of either psychological subject positions or functionalist 'roles' is irrelevant to the case in hand. Ironically, while ethnomethodology and

conversation analysis rely upon a world in which 'actual people' interact, a theory of what is to count as 'actual' is never stated — it remains an unexplicated commonsense resource. Somehow, we are expected to know — and we are expected to know that the category 'naturally' excludes the fictional. Yet in a crucial sense nobody says:

> Agnes: Where'djuh have *di*nner:: with them
> Portia: 'hh Oh, we went down tuh, Ra*vi*na
>
> (Sacks 1970: 1)

any more than anybody says *'Longtemps je me suis couché de bonne heure'* (Proust 1954: 45) or *'Ah! mon vieil ami, quel bonheur de se promener ensemble par ce beau temps!'* (Proust 1955: 56–57), the latter being a case of 'direct' speech. The names 'Agnes', 'Portia', 'Proust', 'Marcel', and 'Swann' are themselves instances of a general iterability, not to be privleged as authorial or characterological subjects to which these *iterata* only and necessarily apply.

Of all the conversation analysts, Harvey Sacks was perhaps the most insistent on the use of transcriptions of actual talk as opposed to any 'imagined conversational fragment' (Sacks 1971, cited in Jefferson 1981: 6). At the same time, his interest in 'actual talk' appears grossly incidental:

my research is about conversation only in this incidental way, that conversation is something that we can get the actual happenings of on tape and transcribe them more or less, i.e., conversation is simply something to begin with. (Sacks 1968, cited in Jefferson 1981: 6)

It is the 'actual happenings' that are the crux of the matter for Sacks, not the conversation as such. In a parallel way we could say, after Derrida, that fictional talk is also an equally 'actual' happening insofar as it constitutes a trace of a culture's iteration machinery; that, in fact, 'the actual' is no longer a defensible category. There appears to be every good reason, then, why fictional talk is, equally, simply something to begin with.

The nature of the materials

It could be claimed that transcriptions of so-called 'actual' talk can contain production features and details omitted from the unduly 'clean' presentation of talk in fiction. Certainly, I have no instance in my materials of, for example, overlapped talk in which both beginnings and endings of overlap are clearly marked — as per bracket notation in

conversation analysis. But, as I hope to show, fiction has its equivalents for a deal of transcription conventions and, in addition, affords a range of productional features unavailable from transcripts. The following outline follows the detailed explanation of tape transcription notation to be found in Schenkein (1978: xi–xvi), based on Jefferson's system — now widely accepted in conversation analysis.

1. *Simultaneous utterances*

The dramatic text has several devices for indicating simultaneity. The stage direction is but one:

(1.1)   Pozzo: Help me!
         Estragon: Wait!
         Vladimir: Wait!
         Pozzo: Wait!
         All three take off their hats simultaneously, press their hands to their foreheads, concentrate. (Beckett 1968: 41)

Alternatively, a collective name may be used to indicate the speaker(s):

(1.2)   Enter Brutus and Cassius, with the Plebians
         Citizens: We will be satisfied! Let us be satisfied.
                                  (Shakespeare 1970: 985)

Prose fiction has its equivalent in which simultaneous utterances are simply noted as such in accompanying text.

2. *Overlapping utterances*

As noted above, precise overlap starts and ends are unlikely to be found together in fiction. More usually the overlap's start is given followed by ellipsis to mark the possible continuation of 'something' and the next speaker's utterance, assumed to be overlapping:

(2.1)   'The moonlight on the ripples of the water, the ...'
         'Yes,' said Thorpe, 'but I'm not really interested in the r-r-r-ripples as such, reflected lights and all that racket.... (Peake 1972: 87)

The ellipsis, as we shall see, is ambiguous in this respect, for it could equally mark an abrupt cut-off — the general category which it marks,

that of 'interruption' (in fiction), encompassing both overlap and cut-off (in transcripts). There are, however, less ambiguous ways of marking overlap; for example, with double ellipses:

(2.2)   'here's to God Almighty who allus sends us a good harvest ...'
         'Amen,' whispered Mrs Dogtrees.
         '... and my daily drop,' he added. (Coppard 1974a: 174)

Dramatic texts may use exactly the same device, or else give more general indications of talk to be overlapped, occasionally with sequencing instructions, as in the following:

(2.3)   During Lucky's tirade the others react as follows: (1) Vladimir and Estragon
         all attention, Pozzo dejected and disgusted. (2) Vladimir and Estragon begin
         to protest, Pozzo's sufferings increase. (3) Vladimir and Estragon attention
         again, Pozzo more agitated and groaning. (4) Vladimir and Estragon protest
         violently. Pozzo jumps up, pulls on the rope. General outcry. Lucky pulls on
         the rope, staggers, shouts his text. All three throw themselves on Lucky who
         struggles and shouts his text. (Beckett 1968: 42)

3.   *Contiguous utterances*

'Latching' (absence of inter-turn pause) has its dramatic equivalent in stichomythia, rapid 'one line' exchanges. As in taped transcripts, one place where latching crops up is in sentence completions by next speakers:

(3.1)   1 Judge: Let that offender —
         Duchess: Live, and be in health
         1 Judge: Be on a scaffold —
         Duke: Hold, hold, my lord
                                            (Tourneur 1971: 13)

Here the long dash and the typographical location of the next utterance at the end of the first line gives the effect of contiguity. In prose fiction, contiguity may be marked as a rapidity effect, for example by the removal of speaker designations ('she said ...' etc.) over a stretch of talk:

(3.2)   'Did I? How surprising'.
         'What do you mean, chief?'
         'What do *you* mean, sailor?'
         'I mean I've done it'.
                                            (Peake 1972: 150)

4.   *Intervals within and between utterances*

Precise (to a tenth of a second) timings of inter- and intra-turn pause are rare (if not totally absent) in prose and dramatic fiction, but the item 'pause', once used in conversational transcripts and presumably borrowed from drama, is readily in evidence to mark intra-turn cases. 'Silence' is more common for inter-turn pauses:

(4.1)   Vladimir: Let us not waste our time in idle discourse!
                       (Pause. Vehemently.) Let us do something, while we have the
                       chance.
                                                                 (Beckett 1968: 79)

(4.2)   Vladimir: (alarmed). Mr Pozzo! Come back! We won't hurt you!
              Silence
              Estragon: We might try him with other names.
                                                                 (Beckett 1968: 83)

Prose fiction is often able to give more detail of pause timings than the general indications of dramatic texts:

(4.3)   'You are still hard at work, I see?'
              After a long silence the head was lifted for another moment, and the
              voice replied, 'Yes — I am working'. (Dickens n.d. [1859]: 35)

Notice also the long dash to show intra-turn pause.

5.   *Characteristics of speech delivery*

The equivalent of the transcriber's 'stop' can be got in numerous typographical ways to indicate stopping falls. For example:

(5.1)   When at last she spoke she brought out each separate word as though it
              were a thing on its own, self-sufficient and divorced from the other words
              in the sentence 'I ... have ... no ... intention ... of ... sharing ... the ...
              vehicle ... with ... Miss ... George. It ... appears ... that ... she ... has ...
              done ... very ... well for ... herself, *I* ... order ... the carriage — but ... she
              ... squats ... in ... it. However ... she ... can ... pay ... for ... it.' (Peake
              1972: 22)

Continuous intonation is presumably indicated in the above case by the absence of inter-turn ellipsis, such as 'herself, *I*'. It is also displayed by absence of punctuation in such examples as Molly Bloom's soliloquy

(Joyce 1969: 659–704) and Lucky's tirade (Beckett 1968: 42–45):

(5.2)   I resume alas alas on on in short in fine on on abode of stones who can
doubt it I resume but not so fast I resume the skull to shrink and waste and
concurrently simultaneously what is more.... (Beckett 1968: 44)

In fiction, also, single words may be run together to show continuity —
see example (5.4) below ('threethirty') and the uses of the device in poetry:

(5.3)   The buspeople, and therewere many of
them, were shockedandsurprised and amused-
andannoyed.... (McGough in Henri et al. 1967: 69)

The extension of syllables, shown by colons in tape transcripts, is found in
fiction by the prolongation of the syllabic symbol itself:

(5.4)   ... same ... same ... my own face white in mirror three threethirty four
march of the Hours clock ticking room no can't go in no not enough light
not enough no *aaahhh* — (Pynchon 1973: 152)

(5.5)   'Na-a-y,' said Old Martin, with an elongation of the word, meant to
make it bitter as well as negative.... (Eliot n.d. [1859]: 369)

The comic book has well-known devices of this type (see Sacks et al. 1974:
734), often of a highly graphic nature such as very large format lettering
and the invention of such items as:

(5.6)   [Pa Bear, on being blasted by Hank's shotgun:] Y E A R G H ! (Beano
1973: no page numbers)

Again, well-placed ellipses can do the same work (in, be it noted, different
— intra-turn — positions from cut-off and overlap types):

(5.7)   'Sh... sh... ladies!' Mr Pye hissed at them gently, and frowned with one
eyebrow up and down. (Peake 1972: 86)

The question mark, in fiction, routinely marks the grammatical interroga-
tive. Yet the first utterance of 4.3 above shows that it may also add a
questioning tone to a grammatical declarative — while Fu's first turn in
the instance below shows that it is not constant as an interrogative
marker:

(5.8)   'I didn't. Your interest in her is purely Platonic, is that it.'
'Wha,' said Pig.
'No screwing,' Fu explained
(Pynchon 1975: 130 — Nb: whether Pig's 'Wha' is interrogative or not is a
matter of considerable literary dispute.)

The exclamation point is an identical mark in transcript and fictional symbolism, the former presumably deriving from the latter. The cut-off can also be shown by ellipsis and, to this extent, is ambiguous *vis-à-vis* overlap. In some cases, the problem is solved by the cut-off occurring in mid-word ('Wha'?):

(5.9)   'I couldn't care less.'
        'But this may actua—'
        'To hell with them both!'
        'This may actually help them,' Major Danby persisted stubbornly.
        (Heller 1974: 476)

Conversational and fictional conventions share a similar usage of underlining/italics for stress markers:

(5.10) 'That's the only thing you *could* bloody well do,' said Tintagieu. (Peake 1972: 69)

(5.11) everything's been done — I t-tell you; everything's been DONE.' (Peake 1972: 69)

Additionally, dramatic and prose fiction have a large range of features for describing the kinds of *tone* employed in talk. The transcriptionist's 'quiet' sign, the degree (°), is accomplished straightforwardly:

(5.12) 'What splendid pain!' he whispered. 'What splendid pain!' (Peake 1972: 44)

Here the combination of '!' and 'whispered' produce a very obvious (hearable) effect of quiet speech production without any subdued or 'held back' overtones. One page of Shaw's *Pygmalion* displays the array of tones that can be got by the fictional equivalent of transcriber's comments:

(5.13) [coming back into the room as if her question were the very climax of unreason]
        [shocked and hurt]
        [now deeply wounded]
        [very sulky]
        [He turns on his heel and is about to go into extreme dudgeon]
        [drinking in his emotion like nectar, and nagging him to provoke a further supply]
        [furious]
        (Shaw 1972: 108)

Apart from speech production, interactional 'events' can also be marked in the same way:

(5.13)   [she takes off her jewels]
      [taking off a ring]
      [Higgins dashes the ring violently into the fireplace, and turns on her so
      threateningly that she crouches over the piano with her hands over her
      face and exclaims,]
      (Shaw 1972: 108–109)

The wealth of detail available in prose fiction need hardly be given in this place.

6.   *Transcriptionist doubt*

Needless to say, this is unlikely to be a fictional device, since fictional texts are, *inter alia*, constituted by what is said. However, one character's uncertainty over another's remark may be marked in fiction — a meticulous play on such a possibility of multiple hearings is analyzed in the next section of this paper. The device 'He said something that sounded like "Porridge"' (or indeed: 'He said something that sounded like porridge') is also obviously available in fictional reportage. One closer approximation to the transcriber's attempt to furnish the gist of what is said, without having the actual words available, is fiction's usage of indirect speech in a passage of predominantly direct speech:

(6.1)   'So before the day came we were able to make the acquaintance of Dolly's
      people, which we had not yet done.'
        Margaret asked who Dolly's people were.
        'Fussell. The father is in the Indian army — retired ...
      (Forster 1972: 67)

7.   *Additional features*

In addition to encompassing the variety of productional markers used in transcript notation, fictional talk has a number of its own characteristics unavailable to, or not currently popular with, transcribers. Goodwin (1979) and Heath (1982) are beginning to expand transcripts so that they might encompass a variety of gestural, proxemic, and paralinguistic ('coenetic' [Kendon 1979]) material — notably gaze direction and its shifts in relation to talk. Such features have traditionally been part of the fictional corpus. For example, fictional talk routinely carries information on the exact addressee of each utterance or part utterance either by means of explicit mention or by working via gaze direction:

(7.1)   Odysseus of the nimble wits gave him [Irus] a black look. 'Sir', he replied, 'I
have neither said nor done a thing to hurt you....
(Homer 1971: 276)

Indeed, absence of gaze in two-party talk can also be marked for its
particular effectivity (avoidance and such):

(7.2)   'I've never heard any old tales of this house; have you?'
The servant went on meticulously folding up the white tablecloth, and
without giving me a glance, said: 'No, Miss'.
(Coppard 1974b: 224)

Goodwin's (1979) work in conversational interaction has had as one of its
interests the use of gaze-direction in turn-management and recipiency.
Fictional talk is not without its devices for marking such interactional
work. Note how, in (7.3) below, Galadriel uses a current-speaker-
continues technique (Sacks et al. 1974) at a potential turn-transition place
and has it both seen and heard that the talk, from that point, is designed
for a new recipient:

(7.3)   But if hope should not fail, then I say to you, Gimli son of Glóin, that your
hands shall flow with gold, and yet over you gold shall have no dominion.
'And you, Ring-bearer', she said turning to Frodo.
(Tolkien 1973: 393)

Anyone interested in the extended analysis of gaze in fictional talk might
turn to the rich seam of data in Chapter 29 of *Bleak House* (Dickens n.d.
[1853]: 382–391).
   The orientations of speakers to one another are often quite explicit and
reflexively bound to the talk:

(7.4)   Mr Pye was all attention. He leaned far forward over the railings, his whole
attention focused upon the major. His head was slightly upon one side as
though to assist his hearing. Nothing could be more flattering to Major
Havershot than to find himself commanding such complete attention. But
his satisfaction on this score was short lived.
'My friend,' said Mr Pye ...
(Peake 1972: 193)

More generally, the interactive demeanor of conversational participants
can receive quite detailed attention, such that we can subsequently
discover how to read their utterances off:

(7.5)   She looked an old woman, but was young. Her manner was one of passionate grief; by turns she clasped her veinous and knotted hands together with wild energy, and laid one of them on the carriage-door — tenderly, caressingly, as if it had been a human breast, and could be expected to feel the appealing touch.
   'Monseigneur, hear me! Monseigneur, hear my petition ...
   (Dickens n.d. [1859]: 113)

A further feature — the last to be mentioned here, although the list is by no means exhaustive — of fictional talk which transcripts must omit is this: that it affords the possibility of unspoken talk — so-called 'interior monologue'. 'Unspoken talk' is probably more satisfactory in such instances following Ryle's (1949) succinct deconstruction of the language/thought dichotomy, and given the tendency of fiction to insert unspoken fragments into conversational episodes (as well as, that is, attributing them to 'solitary' characters). The dramatic aside is one technique by which the unspoken is conventionally made hearable; but prose fiction has its means of handling the phenomenon also. In some cases, its inclusion can have important consequences for the analysis of conversational interaction. For example:

(7.6)   'Will Jenny be here soon? Where is she?'
   The woman had a great desire to answer, but the man, with another oath, openly kicked at her foot with his heavy boot.
   (Dickens n.d. [1853]: 741)

Given only the 'talk', we would be faced with the problem of a first pair-part question requiring, but not actually receiving, its concomitant second pair-part answer. Question-Oath is a little peculiar, perhaps. The fictional example nicely shows that even where second parts are not forthcoming there is a strong orientation of conversational participants towards the expectancy of them. The empirical evidence of transcripts cannot overturn a rule or orientation-to-a-rule even where its surface phenomena appear to show a 'breach'. But at times the transcript itself may be a weak source of evidence for the *orientation*, too. Fictional talk, with its possible blend of 'interior' and 'exterior' talk, quite plainly is a stronger source in such cases for displaying a culture's conversational orientations.

An analytic example

Consider the following fragment from the opening of Mervyn Peake's novel, *Mr Pye*:

(8.1) 'SARK'

'Yes, sir', said the man in the little quayside hut. 'A return fare. Six shillings'.

'A single, my friend', said Mr Harold Pye.

The man in the little hut looked up and frowned at the unfamiliar face.

'Did you say a *"single"*, sir?'

'I believe so'.

The man in the hut frowned again as though he were still not satisfied. Why should this fat little stranger be so sure he wanted a 'single'? He was obviously only a visitor. A return ticket would last him for three months and would save him two shillings. Some people, he reflected, were beyond hope. (Peake 1972: 7–8)

This small interactional episode is of quite important sociological potential. It represents an instance of a common ethno-political encounter. By 'ethno-political', I intend the realm of everyday or commonsense politics in a culture (as in 'ethno-botany', 'ethno-science', etc.). For us, predominant ethno-political concerns are: Who gets to go where and by what means may they be prevented or allowed to pass? How are credentials to be presented in such encounters? What counts as a credential? Entrance to schools, universities, hospitals, library collections, and other 'reserved' institutions are cases in point. But so are the less obviously 'institutional' cases such as access to esoteric communities; in this case, to a small island community in the English Channel. The interactive moments at which such questions occur might be called 'gatekeeping episodes'. In the present case, *bona fide*, recognizable, reportable and, no doubt, countable residents are the legitimate purchasers of single fares. Those who are 'obviously only' visitors and tourists are the equally legitimate purchasers of returns. Official law does not come into it. The island is part of Great Britain (though not of the United Kingdom) and so passports and other official gatekeeping paraphernalia are not in order. However, the sale of singles versus returns manages a variety of ethno-policing and ensures at least a surveillance of those likely to turn a visit into an attempt at residence. The tickets stand as tokens not for any freely willed or chosen status but for a definite and visible one. That is, to borrow the functionalist's jargon, resident/non-resident is an ethno-politically ascribed status.

What then of Mr Pye? He is essentially attempting to bring off his position as an achieved one. He is directly flouting the routine gatekeeping procedure. Ethno-politically, his interactive strategy is a subversive one. The ticket-vendor's reality is so entrenched that he cannot see Pye's strategy as a possible one: Mr Pye, for him, is visibly 'only a visitor'; he cannot change his status at will, by fiat; a single fare is in his own best

pecuniary interest; his request is merely an incompetence, a mistake of an economic kind. How does Mr Pye bring the encounter off then? How does he get the boot of accusation/incompetence onto the other foot? It is here that we must examine his conversational strategy.

Given that the two interlocutors have, as we have noticed, discrepant and mutually exclusive definitions of what the encounter essentially is, there arises, in effect, a negotiation of blame. For the ticket-vendor's version, Mr Pye is to blame (false status). For Mr Pye the ticket-vendor is to blame (denied access). The question is, which is to be brought off interactionally and pragmatically? The outcome decides the blame and the dominant definition of what the encounter was all along. It decides it retrospectively. Thus the talk goes to make up 'what the talk will have been'. All this in accord with Garfinkel's (1967: 76–103) work on the documentary method. The problem for the participants is this: which can be brought off as the most blameworthy — that a non-resident should simply 'request' a residential privilege via the purchase of a single fare or that a ticket-vendor and 'servant' of purchasers should presume to advise a customer's 'free choice' of tickets? Blame, as Drew (1978) has shown, is an eminently negotiable matter where competing accounts are in train.

In the conversation in (8.1), the negotiation of blame is not to be found directly in the topic of conversation. It carries on at the presuppositional level, where the matter of 'purchases' stands proxy for it. Firstly, we can notice that the elliptical request, 'SARK', produces as a second pair-part a request-acceptance, but that that acceptance carries a modulation, a condition based on the presupposition that 'SARK' is to be (and can only be) unpacked as, for example, 'A *return* ticket to Sark, please'.

In performing a correction, not of the prior utterance so much as of the presupposition involved in the hearing of 'SARK', Mr Pye brings the blame negotiation closer to the fore: 'A single, my friend'. Someone now, at least, stands accused of having got something wrong: not just an utterance but a whole political philosophy.

We can notice here that the blaming is in the form of a challenge to the presupposition. The challenge is a marked form in that it cuts across the strong conversational preference (Schegloff et al. 1977) for discoverers of errors to allow the initial utterers of them to do a self-correction. Purchasing a single now becomes a challengeable. That is, Mr Pye's version of the presupposition is that it is a non-natural one in Putnam's sense (see Coulter 1979: 176). That is, request-for-a-single and resident status do not go together, for Mr Pye, as do for example predications of 'natural' classes like gold, light, and water. They are, for him, amenable to revision. The reverse is true for the ticket-vendor.

The challenge, however, also manages a distinct effectivity by the

addition of the tag-positioned address-term, 'my friend'. The utterance form [CHALLENGE + FRIENDSHIP] works disjunctively insofar as the membership category 'friends' (to which the ticket-vendor has by no means subscribed) does not routinely carry with it a category-bound activity like challenging (see Sacks 1972 on these matters). 'Friends' more routinely carries with it 'support' and reliance on shared presuppositions.

The ticket-vendor has a number of possibilities open to him in this position. He can take the disjunction [CHALLENGE + FRIENDSHIP] as either (a) a way of modulating the challenge and so downgrading it or (b) a way of amplifying the challenge via the addition of an ironically placed membership category. In a parallel way, we can read a news headline like

(8.2) KILLER NUNS

as modulating (toning down) acts of murder or as amplifying the aggression of a traditionally 'tame' profession.

The ticket-vendor, in fact, proceeds by a counter-challenge to Pye's with 'Did you say a *"single"*, sir?' Note that the address-term, 'sir', displays a non-acceptance of co-membership in the category 'friends' — friends not normally being ones to use formal addresses and 'sir' being a member of the device commonly used in 'business' exchanges. Interestingly, 'sir', 'madam', etc., do not routinely have paired co-class terms, so that in sales exchanges we routinely get the following types with [SIR + θ]:

A: Can I help you, sir?
B: Yes, I'm looking for a shirt.

The effect, then, of the ticket-vendor using this format here is to neutralize or retrospectively cancel the applicability of the 'friends' device as a literal usage. It is plainly hearing (b), above, that has been made — and the vendor displays this.

The interrogative 'Did you say a "single" ...?' also leaves open two hearings. It can gloss 'Do you really want a single?' or 'Were those in fact your exact words?' The passage of unspoken talk by the vendor at the end of (8.1) (beginning 'The man in the hut ...') shows clearly that his question is of the first type — his disbelief is focused upon any non-resident wanting a single fare, not upon the veridicality of the words 'A single' having been just uttered in the prior turn. That is, the utterance is framed as a genuine query and not as an initiation of a correction (Schegloff et al. 1977).

Mr Pye, given this interpretive scope and given, no doubt, his version of the encounter as one in which residency is achievable, does not hear it as a query of the fact but as an initiation of a correction. As a next turn, then,

he issues a rejection of the initiation (as opposed to, say, doing a self-correction like 'Sorry, I *meant* to say a "return"'). The way in which he frames this is interesting and interactionally significant, as we shall see.

Coulter (1979: 178) has noted that:

> the ascription of belief to someone who makes a knowledge-claim hearably downgrades that knowledge-claim and articulates an asymmetry between the ascriber and the person to whom belief is being ascribed. Belief-ascription can be a method of expressing one's reservations about the truth-value of someone's assertions.

In Mr Pye's case, it is in fact his own prior claim ('a single') that is potentially so downgraded by 'I believe so'. Hence he is able to generate a high degree of irony. That is, it is literally impossible for him to be mistaken about his having just said such-and-such. Matters like 'what I just said', 'that this is my hand', 'that I have never been on the moon' and so on are ones which Wittgenstein (1974) showed to be beyond the limits of both doubt and knowledge. It is as absurd to say we know them (as Moore claimed to) as it is to say we can doubt them. Any claim to know or to doubt is, *ipso facto*, nonsensical in such cases.

In this way — relying upon a more deeply seated commonsense foundation than the 'naturalness' of residency's collocation with single tickets — Mr Pye nicely rules out the ticket vendor's prior query/correction initiation. It becomes an absurdity for him to have said anything else and, by extension, so does the alternative reading of the interrogative (as query about Pye's wants rather than his words). Pye's reply neatly folds both under the same umbrella and provides him with the success he wants from this gatekeeping encounter. It is by such a set of skillful conversational moves that he is able to bring off his 'definition' of the encounter as the pragmatically justifiable one: he gets his single ticket. As it turns out, Mr Pye does not leave Sark — this much is clear from the very beginning of the novel.

Conclusion

Our inspection of the nature of conversational materials in fiction showed them to be no less adequate for conversational analysis than tape transcripts. The analytic example has, it is to be hoped, shown that a number of conversation analysis's investigables can be drawn from this rich source. At least the following appear to be open to us from this first and necessarily truncated attempt:

— reflexive and documentary methods of talk construction

— blame negotiations
— initiation/correction and their relation to presupposition
— selection of multiple hearings
— display of selected hearings
— use of (disjunctive) membership categorization devices
— challenging and counter-challenging
— paired utterances generally and their sequential organization
— literal versus ironic formations
— self-ascription of 'belief' (and relation to 'unshakable' presuppositions)

In addition, we can note that our fictive example also extends conversational-analytic investigations into areas of traditional sociological concern — in this case into the ethno-politics of gatekeeping. To the extent that such an analysis can be successful, we ought perhaps to hear less from theorists about discrete domains of, for example, micro- and macro-sociologies. Plainly there are reflexive relations between generally and culturally embedded 'background expectancies' and the precise moves and negotiations of actual encounters. A moral/methodological preference for one over the other may run the risk of overlooking political *or* interactional features. Indeed, the two seem inseparable.

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