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**Actions in Practice:
On details in collections¹**

Rebecca Clift and Chase Wesley Raymond

Abstract

Several of the contributions to the Lynch, et al. (2016) special issue make the claim that conversation-analytic research into epistemics is “routinely crafted at the expense of actual, produced and constitutive detail, and what that detail may show us” (Macbeth and Wong, 2016: 585-6). Here we seek to address the inappropriateness of this critique by tracing precisely how it is that recognisable *actions* emerge from distinct *practices* of interaction. We begin by reviewing some of the foundational tenets of conversation-analytic theory and method—including the relationship between position and composition, and the making of collections—as these appear to be primary sources of confusion for many of the contributors to the Lynch, et al. special issue. We then target some of the specific arguments presented in the special issue, including the alleged ‘over-hearer’s’ writing of metrics, the provision of so-called ‘alternative’ analyses, and the supposed ‘crafting’ of generalizations in epistemics research. In addition, in light of Lynch’s (2016: 18) more general assertion that CA has recently been experiencing a “rapprochement” with what he disparagingly refers to as the “juggernaut” of linguistics, we discuss the specific expertise that linguists have to offer in analyzing particular sorts of interactional detail. The paper as a whole thus illustrates that, rather than being produced “*at the expense of* actual, produced and constitutive detail,” conversation-analytic findings—including its work in epistemics—are unambiguously *anchored in* such detail. We conclude by offering our comments as to the link between CA and linguistics more generally, arguing that this relationship has long proven to be—and indeed continues to be—a mutually beneficial one.

Key words

Epistemics, methodology, Conversation Analysis (CA)

¹ We are deeply indebted to Galina Bolden, Steve Clayman, Paul Drew, Barbara Fox, John Heritage, Doug Maynard, and Geoff Raymond for their scrupulous reading of previous drafts of this paper. Their comments have encouraged us to clarify and refine various parts of our argument. We alone are responsible for any remaining shortcomings.

Introduction

In a position paper examining what he and others (e.g., Lynch et al., 2016) understand to be the ‘Epistemics Program’ (*sic*), Lynch refers, with evident distaste, to “a recent trend (indeed, a juggernaut) in CA, involving a rapprochement with linguistics...” (2016: 18).² To cast the relationship between CA and linguistics as a “rapprochement”—and a recent one, at that—is to misunderstand both this relationship and its history. In the first instance, as Schegloff (1991: 46) describes it, CA exists “at a point where linguistics and sociology (and several other disciplines, anthropology and psychology among them) meet”³, and indeed its outward orientations from the early days have been linguistic.⁴ Nowhere is this more apparent than in the appearance of the two foundational CA papers by Sacks et al. (1974) and Schegloff et al. (1977) in the most prominent linguistics journal, *Language*.^{5,6}

A more accurate description would be that the interest of linguists in CA has been gathering pace over the last twenty years; that is, the momentum is surely in the direction of linguistics towards CA, rather than the other way around (see, e.g., Clift, 2016). This, then, is a perspective from linguistics: an attempt to throw some light on why CA—including its work in epistemics—provides for linguistics some of its most compelling discoveries and most innovative insights.

In what follows, we address the general charge of Lynch et al., namely that what they misleadingly call the ‘Epistemics Program’—but which we describe here as work in epistemics—is cognitivist in its methods and in its analyses. We take as our starting point an assertion made by Macbeth and Wong, which they pose as a puzzle:

“A central and recurrent puzzle for our reading of the Epistemic Program (*sic*) is how occasioned production features of turn and sequence...are rendered expressions of a durable formal structure operating in the background. Transcript is animated on behalf of an omnipresent engine of ‘epistemic order’ (Heritage, 2008: 309). These renderings are programmatic achievements, generic in their terms and operations, and treated as causative of what order may be found on any actual occasion. This would seem to be the central aim and achievement of the EP’s animations, notwithstanding that generalisations such as these are routinely crafted at the expense of actual, produced and constitutive detail, and what that detail may show us” (Macbeth and Wong, 2016: 585-6).

² Notwithstanding that a major contributor to their volume is an applied linguist, Jean Wong.

³ It is no accident that in the (2012) special issue of *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, which is the main target of Lynch et al.’s critique, the invited commentators were not only a sociologist (Drew), but also, by training and institutional commitment, an anthropologist (Sidnell) and linguist (Clift).

⁴ “From early on it seemed clear that some parts of the enterprise of understanding conversation would rest heavily on the contribution of linguists” (Schegloff, 1996d: 53; see also Clift, 2016).

⁵ Moreover, as Joseph (2003: 463) points out, Sacks et al. (1974) is “by far the most cited” article to have appeared in the journal since its inception in 1924.

⁶ Schegloff’s continuing engagement with linguistics is evident at all stages of his work, from earlier to later papers (e.g., Schegloff 1979, 1988, 1996b, 1998, 2005).

In the first place, we find ourselves entirely at one with Macbeth and Wong in their disavowal of “generalisations...crafted at the expense of actual, produced and constitutive detail”. Indeed, in her commentary on Heritage (2012a,b), Clift (2012) cites with approval Evans and Levinson’s observation that we are all ultimately in search of the highest-level generalisations with “empirical bite” (2009: 475), and thereafter sets out the reasons why work in epistemics has indeed achieved this (2012: 69). The dominant paradigm in linguistics for the last half-century has, after all, centred on Chomsky’s ‘ideal speaker-listener’ (1965: 3), producing exactly those generalisations at the expense of “bite” from which we, along with Macbeth and Wong, are in flight. Given that the Chomskyan paradigm is an inherently cognitive one, as linguists, we are inclined to recognise cognitivism where we see it. The puzzle for *us* here is to reconcile Macbeth and Wong’s characterisation of work in epistemics with our experience of it.

Before turning to epistemics in particular, let us retrace our steps to track how generalisations in CA emerge from “actual, produced and constitutive detail”. In so doing, we suggest that the puzzle may be solved by revisiting how recognisable *actions* emerge from distinct *practices* of interaction. The inextricable link between the details of talk, and the actions that the talk is effecting, is made clear in Schegloff’s insistence that analysts must show how a specific action has been “recognized by co-participants as that action by virtue of the practices that produced it” (2007: 7). As we will demonstrate, while several of the articles in the Lynch et al. special issue echo Schegloff’s sentiment (e.g., Lindwall et al. 2016: 519), their claim to analyze action is nonetheless severely undermined by their disregard for the practices that constitute it. Such an approach risks occluding the fact that actions are tethered in the details of practices; an account that floats free of the practices that produced it cannot, by definition, be an empirical account of action.

Thus we start with a basic methodological principle in CA—that which relates the composition of a turn-at-talk to its position in sequence—and then discuss a basic methodological practice: that of assembling collections. These preliminaries then provide the foundation from which to show what the “actual, produced and constitutive detail” of talk may show us. It is from these details that generalizations emerge, thereby allowing us to see cognition, not as a “hidden” order (Lynch and Wong, 2016), “operating in the background” (Macbeth and Wong, 2016: 585-6), but rather as lodged firmly—and *publicly* (Garfinkel, 1967)—in sequences of interaction. Finally, we consider the contribution that linguists, with their distinct perspectives on, and management of, interactional detail, are particularly able to make to conversation-analytic work.

1. Methodological preliminaries

a) On ‘position’ and ‘composition’

Linguistic theory, at whatever level of description—phonetic, morphological, syntactic or semantic—has overwhelmingly concentrated on the compositional elements of language. Even in the cases where sentences or utterances are not invented, but naturally-occurring, claims about language use have tended to be based on single, decontextualised sentences or

utterances. What CA method exhorts us to remember is the *position* in composition (Clift, et al., 2013): specifically, Schegloff's observation that "...both position and composition are ordinarily constitutive of the sense and import of an element of conduct that embodies some phenomenon or practice" (1993: 121).

To take a simple example, the phrase 'thank you', with stress on 'thank', inherently announces itself as *initiating* thanks; the phrase 'thank you' announces itself as *responding* to a prior expression of thanks. In such a case, the prosodic practice of stressing either 'thank' or 'you' marks the turn as, respectively, initiating or responding. In a similar vein, Schegloff (2002: 374, fn. 21) cites Sacks's early observation that repeats—for example, second summonses—are "distinctively done as 'repeats'," such that "even if the first was not heard, the second can be heard as a 'repeat'" due to its "upgraded" design (Schegloff 2007: 52). So doing something 'as a repeat' is a practice that is implemented in various ways; and so powerful is the link between position and composition that the design of the turn can indicate its position for a hearer, *even when the hearer has not heard the first attempt*.

In the examples just mentioned, positionality was indicated at the prosodic level; but of course, interactional resources may differ from language to language. In Arabic, the distinction between an initial and responsive greeting, for example, is marked lexically and morphosyntactically. The following are some exemplars taken from Saudi Arabic data:⁷

(1)

1 A: marḥaba
 Hello
2 B: marḥabte:n
 hello (dual pronoun)
 Two hello(s)

(2)

1 A: ʔssalamuʕalaykum
 The peace on you (pl)
 Peace (be upon) you
2 B: ʕalaykumessalam
 On you (pl) the peace
 (Upon) you the peace

(3)

1 A: Ṣabaḥelxe:r
 Morning the good
 Good morning
2 B: Ṣabaḥennw:r
 Morning the light
 Bright morning

⁷ We thank Faye Abu Abah for use of these excerpts from her data.

In each case in (1) – (3) above, the initiating greeting is met by a turn which is lexically/morphologically formatted as responsive; the response retains a component of the initial greeting but returns this through the recurrent practice of modifying the original—whether in (1) by means of pluralisation, in (2) by modified word order,⁸ or in (3) by modifying the assessment item. These exemplars capture a basic general observation: that position is inherently indexed in composition. But arriving at this generalisation is not by means of “crafting”; nor has the transcript been “animated” in any way. Such observations are only possible because they are grounded in collections of exemplars. On the well-known principle that two may be a coincidence, but three (or indeed more) is a pattern, the collections tell their own story. It is thus *collections* of cases that, to quote Heritage (this issue), *force* us to our conclusions.

Failure to acknowledge the normatively intertwined relationship between position and composition appears to be the source of much confusion in the Lynch et al. (2016) special issue. For instance, Macbeth et al. (2016: 562) claim that Heritage’s (2002a) analysis of *oh*-prefaced responses to assessments uses “a very different arrangement and a very different deployment” of sequence organization. They are puzzled by Heritage’s argument that, like second assessments (see Pomerantz 1984), first assessments too can be upgraded or downgraded. The authors attempt to dismantle Heritage’s analysis by asking “upgraded *from what?*” (Macbeth et al. 2016: 562; emphasis in original). Nonetheless, the early observations by Sacks and Schegloff, cited above, clearly invoke a normative order to the *particular* design of actions in *particular* positions in interaction, with first-position utterances being no exception. Moreover, it should be made clear that while Macbeth, et al. (2016: 563) cite Pomerantz as evidence for the claims they put forth regarding positionality and upgrading/downgrading, Pomerantz’s work clearly distances her the perspective taken by Macbeth, et al. (see, e.g., 1986, on extreme case formulations; see also Jefferson, 1980; Pillet-Shore, 2004). In the same way that an address term can be produced in an “upgraded” (Schegloff 2007: 52) fashion vis-à-vis an unmarked design (and will be heard *as* upgraded by virtue of that marked composition), so too can an initial reference to a person be done markedly or unmarkedly (Fox 1987; Jackson 2013; Schegloff 1996c; Stivers 2007), and, as Heritage (2002a) demonstrates, so too is the case for first assessments. Macbeth et al.’s critique suggests a perspective that first actions cannot themselves be upgraded/downgraded, which amounts to a claim that participants do not orient to a normative order of position and composition in interaction. Such a misguided view would, *ipso facto*, deny that any speaker producing a first-position utterance could ever accomplish any sort of non-normative or otherwise marked first action. And yet—as anyone who has had someone *scream* their name to get their attention, instead of just *speak* it, can tell you—this is plainly not the case.

⁸ Note that the transcription of the Arabic might suggest that l.1 and l.2 consist of single words, but this of course represents the articulation of what is standardly transliterated as (in l.1) the greeting *as-salamu alaykum* and (in l.2) its return *wa’alaykumu as-salām*.

b) *The biting point: collections and eventful absences*

It is not, however, only in what the data explicitly display that we may find these conclusions; the particular methodological power of collections is located just as much in what they throw into relief. In a search for “empirical bite”, the biting point for CA is not solely in the empirical skewing that emerges through collections of practices, but also in the deviant case: the exception that proves the rule. Schegloff’s (1996a) account of describing a hitherto undiscovered action—confirming an allusion—is a masterclass in identifying the deviant case, and instructive for examining how generalisations emerge through collections of particular practices.⁹ In (4), (5) and (6) below, we see an initial stage: selections from a database of exemplars displaying, at the arrowed turns, the practice—repetitions of a prior turn by the speaker of a current turn:

(4) (Schegloff, 1996a:183. Interview with Susan Shreve on U.S. National Public Radio concerning her recent novel. E=Bob Edwards, interviewer; S=Susan Shreve)

1 E Why do you write juvenile books.
 2 (0.5)
 3 E [’s that- b- (0.?) [hav]ing [children?]
 4 S [Because I love child[ren]. [I really do:]=
 5 =.hh I enjoy children:, .hh I started writing: (.)
 6 juvenile books fer entirely pra:ctical reasons, .hh
 7 (.)
 8 S [u- u-
 9 E [Making money::.
 10S→ Making [money
 11E [yes ((+laughter))
 12S that- that practical reason hhh
 13 (.)
 14S I’ve been writing juvenile books for a lo:ng..

(5) (Schegloff, 1996a:174. E=Evelyn; R=Rita. Evelyn has been called to the phone)

1 E =Hi: Rita
 2 R Hi: Evelyn:. How [are y’
 3 E [I hadda come in another room.
 4 R Oh:. Uh huh.=
 5 E =I fee:l a bi:ssel verschickert.
 6 (0.2)
 7 R W- why’s ‘a:t,
 8 (0.4)
 9 R uh you’ve had sump’n t’drink.=
 10E→ =I had sump’n t’dri:nk.
 11R Uh huh.

(6) (Schegloff, 1996a: 175; E=Evelyn; R=Rita.)

1 R ...y’know we: went to the mo:vies.=
 2 =We went to:uh:m. uh to: (m)u(h):
 3 What’s *the name of() ((off-line))
 4 E (Sh’beau)?

⁹ For a mixed quantitative/qualitative demonstration of this, regarding a particular practice for soliciting accounts from recipients, see Raymond and Stivers (2016).

5 R (** **) (Millbrae) ((off-line))
 6 Millbrae. which is over past Burlingame.
 7 (0.2)
 8 E Yeah th[at's 'n far away.
 9 R [(and-)
 10R→ That's far away. And- there were two good movies...

In each of these sequences, the data (at line 10 in each case) show us the same practice of repeating the prior speaker's turn¹⁰: not a generalisation "crafted", but a methodical interactional device, *publicly and observably present*. Also distinctly observable, in each case, is the prior sequence. Now if it is evident that the repetitions in each instance are doing agreements, it is only by examining this prior sequential context that the *particular form* of agreement being done becomes clear. Schegloff notes that in each case, what is repeated is a candidate observation of a prior characterization made by the recipient: in (4) "Making money"; in (5) "You've had sump'n to drink"; in (6) "That's far away". That candidate observation, can, on further inspection of the prior talk, be seen to have its origins in what the recipient has herself said—an allusion to circumstances which are explicitly formulated in that observation. So when, in (4), Susan Shreve says "I started writing: (.) juvenile books fer entirely pra:ctical reasons" (lls.5-6), she alludes to, but does not formulate explicitly, the objective of 'making money'. In (5) Evelyn's claim to feel "a bissel vershickert" ('a little tipsy') leads to Rita's candidate understanding that "you've had sump'n t'drink" (l.9); and in (6) Rita's formulation of Millbrae as "over past Burlingame" (l.6) can be heard to be characterising it as 'far away'. And it is the recipient who, in the practice of repeating the utterance in next turn, confirms this candidate observation offered by the other.

In the course of discovering 'confirming an allusion' to be a distinct action, accomplished through this practice of repeating a prior turn, Schegloff notes that "the apparently petty 'who is agreeing with whom' (...) *can* and *does* matter" (1996a: 194). In so doing, he makes analytically salient a *demonstrably relevant distinction* that is central to work in epistemics, that between confirming and agreeing. It is precisely this distinction that Heritage and Raymond (2005) build on in their collections-based analysis of the practices participants use in assessment sequences, for instance (see also Heritage 2002a). Temporality is key, with the choice to do a confirmation over an agreement demonstrably indexing prior orientation to knowledge, a point to which we will return in the next section.

While neither the scope nor the subtlety of Schegloff's account can be conveyed here, the methodological upshot is clear. Not only does the repeating turn respond explicitly to the immediately prior turn, it also thereby references the one prior to that: the speaker's *own* prior turn. So, for one thing, displayed understandings are not simply confined to proximate turns-at-talk. Moreover, it is only the identification of ostensibly the 'same' practice or action across a range of exemplars that makes it possible to specify "environments of relevant possible occurrence" (Schegloff, 1993: 104). With these established, it is then possible to undertake a search for environments which display "*the eventfulness of its absence, or an orientation to avoiding it as well as achieving it*" (1996a: 192; emphasis in original). As such, an

¹⁰ Notwithstanding the exception, in (4), of the deictic shift from "you" to "I".

integral part of the evidence that Schegloff adduces for his account are a case of avoidance—an observable withholding of the practice by means of a repair away from it—and a case of relevant non-occurrence. In both cases, there is evidence in the data that implementing the practice would have been hearably self-serving. Of these two eventful absences, Schegloff remarks that:

“...it is virtually certain that nothing of interest would have been seen at all were we not already familiar with...confirming allusions and its environments of possible occurrence. Here then we may have some of the most distinctive fruits of inquiry in rendering what would otherwise be invisible visible in its very absence” (1996a: 199).

The evidence provided by the ‘deviant case’—a methodological precept in CA since it formed a pivotal part of Schegloff’s (1968) study of phone call openings—is thus fundamental in nailing down the analysis. Indeed, a deviant case plays a pivotal role in Heritage’s original examination of *oh* as a ‘change-of-state’ token (1984: 310), an analysis which Wootton (1989) presents as a paradigmatic example of conversation-analytic methodology. The generalisations thereby made possible are about as far from “crafted” as it is possible to get.

In their introduction to the special issue, Lynch and Macbeth (2016) claim to “neither ignore nor criticize the value of collections in the CA literature” (495). This is revealed to be nothing more than mere lip-service, however, as the authors immediately go on to assert: “our primary focus is on treatments of singular sequences in the EP [Epistemic Program, *sic*] publications we examine” (496). The justification offered for this is that such an approach adheres to one of CA researchers’ principal tasks, namely “not to sacrifice the detailed examination of single cases on the altar of broad claims” (Schegloff 2010: 42; cited in Macbeth and Wong, 2016: 581).

While the contributors to the Lynch et al. special issue direct their line of critique at research in epistemics in particular, we agree with Steensig and Heinemann (2016: 604) that this criticism is revelatory of “a more general skepticism towards the collection method”.¹¹ For Lynch et al., the examination of a single case seemingly purports to remedy what they view to be inherent deficiencies in the making of collections. However, for conversation analysts, as will be demonstrated more explicitly in the next section, even—and perhaps especially—in the analysis of single cases, collections provide the means to disambiguate between what initially may appear to be ‘equally correct’ alternative analyses. Looking solely at case (4) above, for instance, would not reveal the practice or the action that “making money” is being designed to implement, let alone the scope thereof. On the basis of the single case, devoid of comparison to any sort of collection, an infinite number of alternative analyses could be posited to explain Susan’s responsive turn. And indeed, many of those alternative explanations might appear equally defensible in the ignorant bliss of what else is out there. It is only upon situating this *particular* case within a *collection* of comparable cases—comparable in that they are similar or in that they are different (e.g., a deviant case, a type-conforming ‘yeah’, etc.; see next section)—

¹¹ Indeed, see Lynch and Wong (2016: 542) for more explicit evidence of the authors’ distaste for—or perhaps simple lack of interest in engaging with—collections of interactional phenomena.

that the import of the practice and its action becomes clear, both in terms of its relevance to this *particular* moment between *these two participants*, as well as with regard to the scope of the action's deployment more generally.

Thus, conversation-analytic findings are certainly answerable “to the details of single episodes of action” (Schegloff 1987: 102); but from a CA perspective, those details are altogether unanalyzable without reference to other instances. This is due to the fact that the examination of a single case *unavoidably* brings to bear, on that single case, *the findings and observations from examinations of collections*.¹² And thus, for practitioners of CA, collections are as analytically essential as they are unavoidable. Schegloff (1997) reflects on the centrality of collections to CA method in discussing what he calls ‘boundary cases’ of phenomena (in his case, other-initiated repair). Of instances which at first glance appear to be the target phenomenon but which, upon analysis, appear not to be so, he remarks that:

In specifying what *makes* them ‘look like’, we learn about our phenomenon; and in specifying why nonetheless they ‘*are not*’, we learn as well. And in specifying why some instances which look *unlike* our initiating instances belong nonetheless...we do the same.

Boundary cases are on *both* sides of the boundary, and in specifying the boundary, they help specify what belongs inside it and what does not. They also help us convert mere *interpretation*, based on what something seems or appears to be, into *analysis*, where that ‘seeming’ is empirically grounded in analytically formulated features of the conduct, features by which it does what it is designed to do, and gets so understood by co-participants (1997: 502).

Collections are thus the *sine qua non* of analysis; without them, all that remains is interpretation.¹³

2. On “actual, produced, and constitutive detail” in practice: The case of epistemics

Work in conversation analysis takes as its starting point the theoretical and methodological foundation just described; and conversation-analytic research on epistemics is no exception, beginning from the perspective that rights and obligations to knowledge are visibly made relevant and lodged firmly in the details of talk.

¹² Indeed, it is relevant to note that this relationship between collection-building and single cases analyses is also embodied in the history of CA's key publications: It was only after more than a decade of publishing on collections of phenomena—that is, after a rigorously defensible analysis of key organizational domains had been established—that Schegloff (1987) published his single case analysis, which brought precisely those collections-based findings to bear *on* a single case. We are indebted to Geoff Raymond for this observation.

¹³ In this respect, Button and Sharrock's reference to “the fine details of transcript *interpretation*” (our emphasis; 2016:612), rather than analysis, is revealing (see also next note).

One of the central claims of the contributions to the Lynch et al. (2016) special issue is that conversation-analytic work in epistemics is “disengaged from the details of the transcript” (Lynch and Wong 2016: 539), that it is based on assumptions other than “on an inspection of the detailed materials in the fragment” (Lindwall et al., 2016: 512).¹⁴ In what follows, we target and unpack various components of this claim, with the objective of demonstrating that, rather than being produced “*at the expense of actual, produced and constitutive detail, and what that detail may show us*” (Macbeth and Wong, 2016: 585-6; our emphasis), epistemic findings are unambiguously *anchored in* such detail; and indeed, it is precisely our attention to these details which, to once again invoke Heritage (this issue), *force* us to draw certain conclusions about participants’ moment-by-moment negotiations of rights and obligations to knowledge.

a) *On “writing metrics”*

To begin, it is relevant to clarify further the distinction between *actions*, on the one hand, and the *practices* used to achieve them, on the other, as the inappropriate conflation of these two terms seems to be the cause of confusion in the Lynch et al. special issue.

The action in excerpts (4) – (6)—confirming an allusion—is seen to be rooted in the particular practice of repeating a prior turn. This is crucial to note because, without attending to the details of the practice, it would be impossible to distinguish this particular action from other forms of what might otherwise be called simply ‘agreement’. After all, in each case, the speaker of the target turn (line 10) is certainly ‘agreeing’ in one sense of the term, and therefore could have done so within the sequence with a simple *Yes* or *Mm hm* (Raymond, 2003; Stivers, 2010). Likewise, they might have provided agreement with a particle-prefaced *Oh yes* or *Well yes* (Heritage, 1998, 2015), or perhaps by way of a marked interjection like *Of course* or *Absolutely* (Stivers, 2007), or maybe with some sort of phrasal upgrade, downgrade, or transformation (e.g., “uh you’ve had sump’n t’drink.” in (5) responded to with *Have I ever! Or Just a little bit*) (e.g., Mikesell, et al., 2017; Stivers and Hayashi, 2010). And yet, while all of these may be ‘agreements’ at one level of analysis, none of these ‘alternatives’ was produced. The conversation analyst’s task in addressing the omnirelevant inquiry “Why that now?” (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973) is thus necessarily a comparative one that is based in collections of phenomena: Schegloff seeks to discover what makes the specific practice he has uncovered distinct from these (and other) forms of ‘agreement’ with respect to the particularized action it delivers.

Macbeth and Wong take issue with Heritage’s argument that a particular utterance produced by a speaker in one excerpt achieves a “simulacrum of agreement” (Heritage, 2011: 160; Heritage and Raymond, 2005). They assert that “to find a ‘simulacrum of agreement’ here is to write a metric of ‘kinds of agreements’ and then declare what kind this one is. It is an over-hearer’s measure entirely” (2016: 579). But if agreements don’t come in different ‘kinds’, and there is no metric amongst them, are participants’ uses of the widely differing practices of *Yes* vs. *Mm hm* vs. *Oh yes* vs. *Of course* vs. *Have I ever* vs. *Just a little bit*, etc.—in addition to

¹⁴ Button and Sharrock (2016: 611-12) go so far as to assert that the criticism invoked in the articles “mainly turns into disputing the fine details of transcript interpretation”.

Schegloff’s repetition-enacted confirming allusions, for that matter—then to be viewed as simply random and inconsequential? It would appear that Macbeth and Wong would be content to label this range of responses simply as ‘agreements’ and move on. Nonetheless, research in conversation analysis takes as its point of departure Sacks’s (1984: 22) fundamental assumption that there is “order at all points”, and in so doing has produced countless studies—both qualitative and quantitative—which robustly demonstrate not only the existence, but also the systematic deployment, of various different sorts of agreement and confirmation cross-linguistically (see, e.g., Bolden, 2016; Enfield et al., 2017; Raymond, 2003; Raymond, 2015; Stivers, et al., eds., 2010).

To offer but one example, consider the following case from Lao. Speakers A and B are discussing a new colleague of B’s. A asks whether the woman has a beautiful figure. B launches a turn concerning the woman’s hair, but drops out in overlap with A. In the clear, then, following A’s post-position tag question *bóó3* ‘right?’, B produces an affirmative response—“not with *qee5* ‘yes’, but with repetition...” (Enfield, 2010: 2662), thereby constituting a nonconforming response (Raymond, 2003):

(7) (Enfield, 2010: 2662)

01	A:	lèø hun1 laaw2 [ngaam2 mèèn1 bóó3] PRF figure 3SG.FA beautiful COP QPLR ‘And her figure is beautiful, right?’
02	B:	[phom3 niø-] hair TPC [the hair]
03		(0.5)
04	B:	hun1 ngaam2 figure beautiful ‘Her figure is beautiful’

As with Schegloff’s study of confirming allusions, B’s repetition here involves confirming and hence an implied epistemic independence or even primacy—in this case, with respect to what her new colleague looks like.

This is but one exemplar of an already substantial and growing, cross-linguistic, cross-cultural body of research that has its origins in Schegloff (1996a) and Heritage and Raymond (2005). As it clearly illustrates, neither Heritage nor any other analyst has a need to “write metric[s]” for interactional phenomena, because the participants—in and through the ‘actual, produced, and constitutive detail’ of their different ways of, for example, providing agreement and confirmation—have already written the metrics themselves.

b) On ‘alternative’ analyses

Given the accusation that conversation-analytic work in epistemics is “disengaged from the details of the transcript” (Lynch and Wong, 2016: 539), contributors to the Lynch et al. special issue attempt to “re-analyze” (Lindwall et al., 2016: 500) the excerpts included in prior work with the goal of “question[ing] the solidity of the empirical support thus far presented” (ibid.:

520) for epistemic claims (e.g., status and stance). The claim of these authors, of course, is that *they* are attending to the details of the talk that Heritage and others have either actively ignored or inadvertently overlooked, and that in so doing, readers will quickly recognize that “more detailed accounts can be produced without recourse to epistemic status,” for example (ibid.: 517). As Lynch and Wong (2016: 528) succinctly put it: “Our data are transcripts-under-analysis, and we shall use our re-analyses of these data to call into question the general claims and interpretive strategies that we have found to be characteristic of the EP [*sic*]”.

But are the “re-analyses” offered by Lynch et al. plausible? Do they actually attend to the minute details of the talk in the way that they claim to? Or do the details of the talk, and situating such details within collections thereof, in fact reveal these analytic ‘alternatives’ to be not alternatives at all?

Let us interrogate just one example of “re-analysis,” the very first offered by Lindwall et al. with respect to the following fragment (9).

(9) [Rah:12:1:ST]

1 Jen: °Hello?,°
 2 (0.5)
 3 Ida: Jenny?
 4 (0.3)
 5 Ida: It's me:,
 6 Jen: Oh hello I:da.
 7 Ida: -> Ye:h. .h uh:m (0.2) ah'v jis rung tih teh- eh tell you (0.3)
 8 -> uh the things ev arrived from Barkerr'n Stone'ou[:se,
 9 Jen: -> [Oh:.....
 10 (.)
 11 Jen: O[h c'n ah c'm rou:nd,h[h
 12 Ida: [An' [Yes please that's w't=

Given that declarative utterances can be used to *request* information as well as to *give* information, Heritage (2012b: 8) uses this case to illustrate the role that epistemic *status* plays in distinguishing between these. Here, Ida’s knowledgeable (K+) status regarding the information at hand allows Jenny to interpret her lines 7-8 as an informing action, receipting it with the change-of-state token *Oh* in line 9 (Heritage 1984).

Nonetheless, about this case, Lindwall et al. (2016: 508) contend the following:

Here one could note that the phrase is preceded by “ah’v jis rung tih the- eh tell you” (line 7). This means that the lexical and syntactical construction alone provides an evident and unequivocal packaging of the declarative as an informing action. An account of the turn’s recognizability can thus be constructed without reference to epistemic matters.

Lindwall et al.’s ‘alternative’ account of this case, then, is that because the phrasing of Ida’s turn projects to “tell”, Jenny will “unequivocal[ly]” understand what comes next as *giving*

information rather than *requesting* it. As a single case, devoid of the illustrative power of collections, such an analysis indeed seems plausible. But does it stand up to scrutiny?

Consider extract (10) below in which Ginny, similar to Ida above, produces a turn that projects to “tell” (lines 7-8). And yet the result of this is not an informing action at all, but rather a request for confirmation—“You haven't eaten yet?”¹⁵—confirmation which Millie immediately provides in line 9 with “No wir jist now eating.”

(10) SBL 3.5.R

01 Mil: I've (0.2) prayed abaht it'n evryone else ez prayed about
 02 't for me? a:n' uh p tch khhhhhhhhhh°hh° EN THEY SAY PRAYER
 03 CHA:NGES EVRYTHING en (.) e- SO IT'S J'S WO^:NDERF'1 UHhh
 04 HU[hh
 05 Gin: [Tha::t's right[°Mill]y°
 06 Mil: [^uhh!]hh-huh hu[h
 07 Gin: -> [hhh We:ll 'ee wil hh I
 08 -> tell you wha:' wu- (.) eh-ihHe (.) You haven't eaten yet?
 09 Mil: -> No wir jist[now]e a t ing.]
 10 Gin: [W'1]why don'cb]u go ahead Milly hh
 11 (0.2)
 12 Gin: En u-Ah:'Il sto:p o:n my way down en:nif you feel like (.)
 13 coming with me fi:ne'n:d if y'[do:n't w h y]
 14 Mil: [Yer still go] *ing.
 15 (0.3)
 16 Gin: hh Yeh I think ah'll go o:n.=

Here, then, we have a direct comparison with the case that Heritage analyzes (and Lindwall et al. “re-analyze”): The beginning of a TCU with the lexeme “tell”, followed by a pause and a few hitches, followed by a phrase produced with declarative morphosyntax and response-mobilizing (Stivers and Rossano, 2010) intonation. How is it, then, that Jenny understands Ida’s declarative as *giving* information in (9), whereas Millie understands Ginny’s declarative as *requesting* information in (10)? Despite what Lindwall et al. would have us believe, the answer cannot be based in the “tell you” part of the turn; as the data show, that doesn’t disambiguate between the two action ascriptions in question, as it is common to both cases. What does disambiguate them, though, is epistemic status: In (9) the speaker (Ida) has K+ status regarding the delivery, and so is heard to be informing, whereas in (10) the speaker (Ginny) has K- status regarding her interlocutor’s having eaten or not, and so is heard to be asking.

This exemplar, drawn from a mini-collection of just twenty instances, serves to illustrate a simple point, namely that the inclusion of “tell X” in a turn-at-talk—especially when preceded and followed by hitches, filled pauses, and the like—does not *a priori* guarantee that what comes next will be a telling. And thus the ‘alternative’ analysis that something like “tell” is—in and of itself—a sufficient resource for a recipient to “unequivocal[ly]” interpret a subsequent

¹⁵ Gail Jefferson, the original transcriber of this extract, included a footnote to this line of the transcript, writing the following: “‘eh-ihHe’ as a possible start on ‘eh-ih Have you eaten yet?’”. It appears that, like Heritage, Jefferson too was interested in the possible relevance of declarative vs. interrogative syntax (see next subsection).

declarative as giving information is revealed to be empirically unsupported.¹⁶ The response to Lindwall et al.'s (2016: 508) question—"Is the invocation of epistemic status necessary, is it helpful, and does it do justice to the demonstrable orientations of the participants?"—then quickly becomes a resounding "Yes". Nonetheless, this disambiguation between what initially appeared to be equally plausible analyses is only made possible by situating case (9) *within a collection of instances*. Without such a collection, as Schegloff notes, one is not producing "analysis", but rather "mere interpretation" (1997: 502, original emphasis).

The issue of 'alternative' analyses makes relevant clarification of a related point. Heritage's (2012a: 6) assertion that "relative access to particular epistemic domains is treated as a more or less settled matter in the large bulk of ordinary interaction" is a source of much difficulty for the contributors to the Lynch et al. (2016) special issue. Indeed, Lindwall et al. (2016) describe this as "one of the most central and problematic moves of the epistemic program [*sic*]," and they ask: "If the recognizability of social action depends on the recognizability of relative knowledge, who is to decide?" (514). Nonetheless, the very posing of this question suggests that such decisions are static and wholly unproblematic, when, in reality, no such claim has been made in the epistemics literature. Indeed, Heritage is designedly cautious with his wording in arguing, for example, that "*interactants must at all times be cognizant of what they take to be the real-world distribution of knowledge and of rights to knowledge between them as a condition of correctly understanding how clausal utterances are to be interpreted as social actions*" (2012a: 24; italics in original, bolding added). What this means, of course, is that participants, in their claims and attributions of knowledge, can and do miscalculate their respective statuses, as occurs in (11) below:

(11) Frankel: TC:1:1

```

1 Shi: -> In any eve::nt?hhhhh That's not all thet's ne:w.
2 Ger:   W't e:lse.
3 Shi:   .t.hhhhh W'l Wendy'n I hev been rilly having problems.
4 Ger:   M-hm,
5 Shi:   ((voice becomes confiding)) .hh En yesterday I talk'tih
6         her. .hhhh A:n' (0.3) apparently her mother is terminal.
7         (0.5)
8 Ger:   => .tch Yeh but we knew that befo[:re.
9 Shi:   [ .hhh Ri:ght. Well, (.)
10        now I guess it's official.
11 Ger:   Mm-hm.
12 Shi:   .t.hhh So she's very very upset.

```

Here, Shirley claims a knowledgeable position vis-à-vis some piece of news in line 1. Nonetheless, in line 8, Geri challenges the legitimacy of this epistemic claim, which Shirley attempts to reassert in her subsequent turn (lines 9-10). The relevant point here is that, in Heritage's work, how an interactant's K+ position is generated is not of import—as long as it is

¹⁶ Moreover, the proposed 'alternative' analysis invites the question as to how participants go about interpreting those turns that do *not* include some sort of overt lexeme like "tell"—which, to be sure, constitute the vast majority of declaratively formatted utterances. This is of course setting aside the fact that, in order to read the Lindwall, et al. account as a critique at all, one would have to argue that an explicit claim of K+ status (e.g., via 'tell X') constitutes evidence *against* the notion that K+ status is meaningful in interaction. Such an argument strikes us as puzzling, to say the least.

honored—as the precise origin of one’s K+ position does not affect the fundamental claim that it will nonetheless shape how declarative and interrogative utterances are understood in action terms (see next section; see also Heritage, this issue).¹⁷

Rather than being “disengaged from the details of the transcript” (Lynch & Wong 2016: 539), then, the details are precisely what provide the empirical grounding for concepts such as stance and status in conversation-analytic work in epistemics. In short, for Lindwall et al. to claim that, in work on epistemics, “sequentiality and other potential resources seem to be taken out of the picture” (2016: 504) or that it “re-introduces the notion of extra-interactional context” (519) is a baffling misunderstanding of a central tenet of such work, asserted in the face of all evidence to the contrary.

c) *On ‘craft[ing] generalizations’ and ‘generaliz[ability]’*

In the same vein as the critiques by Macbeth and Wong, and Lindwall et al., discussed above, Lynch and Wong (2016: 535) claim that research in epistemics “refers to abstract gradients and scales,” presumably referring to the distinction, for example, between declarative and interrogative syntax in question formulation. Elsewhere, the authors refer to “an imagined alternative in a formal cognitive ‘space’” (540). But, as seen above, these alternatives do not have to be imagined; they are regularly deployed by participants themselves, who, in so doing, expose their hearable orientations to epistemic matters. In the following extract (12), Leslie moves from declarative to interrogative syntax, thereby demonstrating her orientation to the distinction between them.

(12) [Field SO(II):1:3:1-9]

1 Les: .hhhh I RANG you up- (.) ah: think it wz la:s' night.
2 -> **But you were-** (.) **u-were you ou:t?** Or: was it the night
3 before perhaps.

About this case, Drew (2013: 133) writes: “Leslie discontinues a declaratively-formatted turn, *You were out*, and changes it instead into an interrogative, *Were you out?*; which is a more cautious construction, since all she may know (from ‘her side’; Pomerantz, 1980) is that Hal did not answer the phone (notice that she continues more cautiously)”. Cases such as this illustrate that there is no need to “craft” “abstract”, “imagined alternatives” “*at the expense of* actual, produced and constitutive detail”—conversation-analytic inquiries into epistemics are unambiguously *anchored in* such detail.

Here again, the distinction between actions and practices becomes relevant as one considers the generalizability of conversation-analytic claims regarding epistemics: while action types extend cross-linguistically and cross-culturally as of universal import, the specific practices used to implement those actions can vary significantly. We already saw cross-linguistic variation in our initial examples of Arabic and English responsive utterances: the action of

¹⁷ This is, of course, not to say that future conversation-analytic research cannot make this issue—i.e., sources from which one’s K+ status can be generated—a targeted topic of inquiry; but simply that it has not yet been fleshed out as such because it did not affect the claims Heritage was making.

returning a greeting, for instance, remains constant across languages and cultures as a sequentially normative expectation (see Kendrick et al., 2014), yet the particular linguistic resources available to second speakers with which to *design* that action can vary. With regard to polar questions, the distinction between interrogative and declarative syntax, which is unambiguously relevant to speakers of English (as we just saw in (14)), is obviously not available (and therefore cannot be relevant) to speakers of 16% of the 842 languages surveyed by Dryer (2008) which do not possess interrogative syntax. And indeed, Heritage does not make any claim to the contrary. Rather, what he offers in his discussion of morphosyntax is effectively a case study of the specific practices that *English* speakers routinely deploy in producing epistemically distinct actions.^{18,19}

Of course, various practices relevantly mobilized to deal with epistemic matters have been found to pattern similarly across languages (e.g., on turn-prefacing and change-of-state tokens, see Heinemann & Koivisto, eds., 2016; Heritage & Sorjonen 2017; Kim & Kuroshima, eds., 2013; on question-answer sequences, see Enfield et al., 2017; Raymond, 2015; Stivers et al., 2010; *inter alia*); but this is not always the case. Take as a case in point the turn-final particle *-a* in Mandarin Chinese, which Wu (2004: 128) argues exhibits a contrast-invoking property: “it is used to mark a discrepancy in knowledge, expectation or perspective regarding some state of affairs between the *-a* speaker and the prior speaker”. The epistemic implications of this particle are clearly seen in answers to questions that address presuppositional aspects of prior talk (Wu and Heritage, 2017). In the following case, the availability of barbecue in Northeastern China is presupposed in A’s comment in line 2, but B nonetheless asks if there is barbecue in the Northeast in line 4. A’s answer to this question in line 5 includes a turn-final *-a* particle.

(13) (CMC_01_01)

01 A: ruguo wo xinyun dehua>neng chi dao,=
 if I lucky if can eat eat
 ‘If I am lucky enough >(I’ll) be able to eat (the buns),’=
 02 =.hhh ranhou wo rang ta:: dai wo qu chi::: kaorou.=
 then I let her take I go eat barbecue
 =‘Then I’ll ask her::: to take me to eat::: barbecue.’=
 03 =wo bu zhidao ta- tongyi bu tongyi.
 I N know 3sg agree N agree
 =‘I don’t know whether or not she’d- agree.’
 04 B: -> dongbei you kaorou a.
 northeast have barbecue PRT
 ‘There is barbecue in the Northeast?’

¹⁸ Nonetheless, the distinction between interrogative and declarative syntax has indeed proven significant and relevant well beyond English, in other languages that possess this distinction in their grammar (see, e.g., Raymond, 2015; Stivers et al., eds., 2010).

¹⁹ Another example of cross-linguistic variation can be found in interrogative intonation: While in some languages, like English, interrogative intonation is achieved with a rising contour, in others (e.g., Icelandic, Cha’palaa) it is falling (Dingemanse et al., 2013). Thus the specific linguistic design of the practice is distinct cross-linguistically, despite similarities in what the practice is mobilized to accomplish—e.g., in the case of interrogative intonation, to question, to index non-finality or uncertainty (Gussenhoven 2004), or to mobilize response (Stivers & Rossano 2010).

05 A: -> dui a.
 right PRT
 '(That's) right A.'

As Heritage (1998) finds with *oh*-prefaced responses in English, here too a resource is deployed to mark that a prior question is unexpected and inapposite due to its questioning something that was already presupposed in prior talk (Wu and Heritage, 2017). The resource itself is of course distinct; English, unlike Mandarin, does not have turn-final particles. But practices in these typologically distinct languages appear to be managing the same distinctive epistemic issue. The general methodological point is this: that identifying a systematic interactional contingency in data from one language or speech community makes it possible to establish whether other languages have practices for managing the very same contingency. Herein lies the power and reach of CA methodology.

With respect to cross-linguistic research and issues of generalizability, our goal as conversation analysts is to uncover findings “about apparently omnipresent organizational issues and contingencies of interaction, and the practices of conduct and organization of such practices...which can be formulated in more abstract ways that transcend different particularized embodiments in different languages and cultures but which accommodate their specifications...” (Schegloff, 2009: 373). The growing number of cross-linguistic studies in CA all point to epistemic positioning as being a lively concern to participants engaging in social interaction. As has been repeatedly documented, the specific practices for dealing with epistemic issues can certainly vary across languages, but what remains constant is the fact participants are deploying them *for that very purpose*—to deal with epistemic issues. Our understanding of this has not emerged through “crafting generalizations,” but rather has developed, again, through close examination of the “actual, produced, and constitutive detail” of turn-by-turn talk.

3. On actions through practices: what linguistics does for CA, and CA for linguistics

For linguists, work in epistemics has proven attractive precisely for what it has revealed about relative knowledge as a *sequential* phenomenon. The “omnipresent engine of epistemic order” invoked by Lynch and Wong, as they would recognize, gives us generalization, but no bite. The irony here—that CA is often criticized by theoretical linguists for being all bite and no generalization—is not lost on us. A central attraction for those of us who work in CA has been how, starting from the bite, it has massively expanded the scope of study to include phenomena that were formerly (and, for many, still) beyond the linguistic pale. From the earliest days, laughter has been an object of analytic interest: Sacks’s Lecture 2, from Fall 1964 (1992), entitled ‘On suicide threats getting laughed off’ (which of course predates the appearance, in 1965, of Chomsky’s ‘ideal speaker-listener’) and Jefferson’s subsequent work on laughter (e.g. 1979, 1984, 1985, 2004) opened up whole seams of interactional research for linguists, whatever their subdisciplinary affiliations, from semantics to phonetics. Jefferson’s later discussion of ‘a frog in the throat’ (2010) paved the way for further work on other sorts of vocalisations; for example, Hoey (2014) shows how sighing accomplishes specific work in

interaction and that “the variable positioning and delivery of sighs [are] responsive to and relevant for ongoing, incipient, and concluding units of action” (196).

In turn, linguists have brought their specialisms to bear on the data of interaction, not only in the comparative data of languages other than English,²⁰ but also in technical areas beyond the reach of early CA work. One such area of distinct expertise, lying outside the disciplinary origins of CA, is phonetics.²¹ So, for example, our understanding of turn-taking has been enhanced by observations made by Local and Walker (2012) regarding the role of phonetic features in projecting either more talk, or turn completion, in English; and by Ogden (2004), who examines non-modal voice quality (informally, ‘creaky voice’) in signaling turn-transition in Finnish. Similarly, Clayman and Raymond (2015) offer an analysis of what they term ‘modular pivots’, focusing on how the phonetic realization of these items plays a demonstrably significant role in circumventing potential turn-transfer and retaining the floor beyond a projected transition-relevance place. In addition, Ogden’s (2013) work on clicks and percussives—part of the linguistic (i.e., phonemic) repertoire of many southern and some east African languages, but not English—shows a regular interactional distribution in English, marking incipient speakership in pre-turn position or in mid-turn position in word searches (Wright, 2011). Ogden further observes how these sounds are intricately into, and associated with, other behaviours, such as breathing and swallowing, which can also display highly systematic organization (see also Hoey, 2015).

Voice quality and clicks—the sort of phenomena that phoneticians are ideally placed to investigate—embody exactly the sort of “actual, produced, and constitutive detail” that Macbeth and Wong (2016: 586) would have us accountable to. But Macbeth and Wong’s evident approval of, in their words, “the disciplined work of writing production accounts that are faithful to the occasion’s evident detail” (2016: 592, fn 2) sits oddly, to say the least, with their assertion that “The transcript we present here [at their excerpt 1a] reduces some of the detail and symbols used by Jefferson in her original transcript’ (ibid.: 592, fn 4). Below, as excerpt (16a), we present lls. 49-59 of the original Jefferson transcript, so we can see, at the arrowed turns, exactly those “detail and symbols” discarded by Macbeth and Wong (2016: 578) in their presentation of the excerpt:

(14a) NB IV:10:R:21

49 Lot: Yih'av no idea it's right across the street from the:::
 50 → El Dorad*o.
 51 Emm: → .t Oh:↑:↓::*:::
 52 Lot: Ye:ah.
 53 Emm: → Oh not near the Indian W*e:lls.

²⁰ Clift (2016) makes reference to CA methods used in research in the following languages: #Akhoe Hailom, Arabic, LSA (*Lengua de Señas Argentina*, Argentinian Sign Language), Bequian Creole, Bikol, Cebuano, Cha'palaa, Chintang, Danish, Duna, Dutch, Finnish, French, Garrwa, German, Guyanese Creole, Hebrew, Hungarian, Icelandic, Ilokano, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Kri, Lahu, Lao, Mandarin, Murrinh-Patha, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Quiche, Russian, Siwu, Spanish, Thai, Tsou, Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Yéí Dnye, Yucatec Maya and Yurakaré.

²¹ Which is not to claim that phenomena standardly labelled ‘phonetic’ had not been examined in such work; see, for example, Jefferson (1974, 1983) for explicit engagements with such matters.

54 (1.0)
 55 Lot: → °ihYe::ah_i?° (0.2) It's ih-*i-Indian We:lls? uh well it's
 56 a:ll Indi[an We[:lls'n P]a:lm Desert now they've cha:nged=
 57 Emm: → [.hɦɦɦ[Ye*ah.]
 58 Lot: =it yihkn[ow tuh P]a:lm De:sert,
 59 Emm: [Yeah:.]

Table 1 shows the original Jefferson transcriptions and their corresponding simplification by Macbeth and Wong:

Line	Jefferson	Macbeth and Wong	Omitted
50	<u>E</u> l Dor <u>a</u> d*o.	El Torrero	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-modal voice quality (NMVQ) • Stress
51	.t Oh:↑:↓:~*~:~	Oh:~:~	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn-initial dental click • NMVQ • Intonation • Extent of lengthening
53	Indian W* <u>e</u> :lls.	Indian We: <u>lls</u> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NMVQ
55	ih-*i- <u>Indian</u> We: <u>lls</u> ?	ih-i- <u>Indian</u> We: <u>lls</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NMVQ • Turn-final intonation
57	[.hɦɦɦ[<u>Ye</u> *ah.]	[.hɦɦɦ[<u>Ye</u> ah.]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NMVQ

Table 1: Comparison of Jefferson and Macbeth & Wong's transcripts

In addition, the alignment of the transcript in Macbeth and Wong is such that l.57 appears to be produced much later—a full syllable later—than the original shows it to be.²² This is the kind of “detail” which Macbeth and Wong apparently deem dispensable; and yet, as we have seen, it is in just these kinds of phenomena—voice quality, clicks, intonation, and overlap placement—that conversation analysts can test the robustness of Sacks’s initial methodological assumption of “order at all points” (1984: 22; see Hepburn & Bolden, 2017; Jefferson 2004).

Let us examine just one example from the above table: the ‘Oh’ at l.51, stripped, in the transcription by Macbeth and Wong, of its prefacing, turn-initial dental click (Wright, 2011), the non-modal voice quality (Ogden, 2004), and—something which is unmistakable when listening to the audio recording—a very distinctive rising-falling intonation. The last of these features, the intonation, is precisely the subject of Local (1996), a paper that investigates a variety of prosodic features of *oh*, including voice quality (with many instances of non-modal voice quality accompanying *oh*) and intonation contour. Based on a robust collection of *ohs*,

²² As, e.g., Jefferson (1986) makes clear, evidence from overlap yields strong evidence for speakers’ fine judgement in the placement of their turns, and certainly within the range of a spoken syllable. To put this in context, Greenberg, on a four-hour phonetically transcribed sample of spontaneous talk, finds that the mean average time to produce a syllable of spoken English is 200 ms. (1999: 170).

Local demonstrates that the rising-falling pitch contour accompanying the production of *oh* routinely accomplishes “displays of having been misinformed and displays of forgetfulness” (1996: 205). Moreover, he goes on to show that such a contour on *oh* “prefaces more talk from the same speaker, which has an explicit display of the previous misinformedness or forgetfulness” (ibid.). Examining Jefferson’s transcript at (14a) above, it is clear that Emma’s “oh” at l.51, is followed, after a brief acknowledgement by Lottie, by more talk from Emma at l.53, which indeed has an explicit display—“oh not near the Indian Wells”—of her previous misinformedness. This sequence yields further evidence to support Local’s proposal. But of course position can only be informative when combined with the “actual, produced and constitutive detail” of composition. The excerpt of the transcription reproduced below makes plain that Macbeth and Wong’s omission of such compositional particulars—here, the rising-falling intonation at l.51—would make such analysis impossible:

(14b) (Macbeth and Wong, 2016: 578)

49	Lot:	<u>Yih</u> 'av no <u>idea</u> it's <u>right across</u> the <u>street</u> from the:::
50		El Torrero.
51	Emm: →	Oh:::.
52	Lot:	<u>Ye</u> :ah.
53	Emm:	Oh not <u>near</u> the Indian <u>We</u> :lls.

Local (1996) shows that a freestanding *oh* accompanied by a terminal falling pitch movement, as presented in Macbeth and Wong’s transcription at l.51, is a different interactional object from that in fact produced by these participants and originally transcribed by Jefferson: they are, in other words, distinct practices. Cavalier disregard for “detail and symbols” cannot but have analytic implications.²³

Such research produced by linguists with specific technical expertise has extended and consolidated work in CA beyond its original home base. But of course the research territory is today broader still: *any* audiovisual conduct which accompanies or even replaces the verbal has now been brought to the analytic table; so, to give but one example, the whole realm of embodied interaction and gaze (pioneered by Goodwin, 1979, 1981) is a flourishing research enterprise (see, e.g., Streeck, Goodwin & LeBaron, eds., 2011).

²³ It cannot go without mention that transcription details are but one of the inconsistencies in Macbeth and Wong’s work. Macbeth and Wong (2016) is unambiguously an attack on Heritage’s analysis of *oh* as a token that signals a “change of state of knowledge, information, orientation or awareness” (1984: 299). Nonetheless, both of these authors have previously incorporated this very analysis in their own prior work. For instance, Macbeth (1990: 208) writes that, with *oh*, a speaker in an excerpt under analysis “claims, finally, his understanding of the matters the teacher has been speaking of”. The author does the same in the examination of another sequence wherein he writes that a certain utterance is “received with the student’s *Oh* in line 7, as he proceeds to answer *in light of this new understanding* of what the question was” (Macbeth 2005: 728-729, our emphasis). An even more explicit endorsement of Heritage’s work is found in Wong (2004: 123) who, in a study of conversations involving second-language speakers, notes that a speaker’s “turn initial item *Oh*, which is followed by three acknowledgment tokens (*yeah:: yeah:: yeah::*), signals a change of information state (Heritage 1984) or understanding ‘just now’”. It would appear, then, that the distaste with which these authors view Heritage’s analysis of *oh* is as inconsistent as it is unsubstantiated.

But if CA has redefined for many the boundaries of linguistic research, it has also, just as crucially, interrogated and, in many cases, reconfigured our units of analysis. The convergence of linguistic concerns with CA methods has frequently revealed the limits of linguistic categories as descriptively adequate for interaction. So, for example, Curl et al., investigating the phonetic properties of utterance repetitions in interaction, note that:

we have found no evidence that ‘prosody,’ as commonly conceived, is relevant or useful in explaining participants’ understandings of utterances. That is, the separate and individuated treatment of phonetic resources which are typically dubbed ‘prosodic’ does not seem to be warranted by the observable behaviour of participants. This is not to say that resources which might fall under the rubric of ‘prosody’ are not at work here: they plainly are. However, we have shown that these resources only form a part of the practice, which incorporates features of lexis, articulatory details, loudness, duration, syllabic make-up, and a variety of pitch characteristics. Furthermore, the part played by ‘prosodic’ resources seems no greater than that played by others (2006: 1748).

The notion that ‘prosody’ is a defensible linguistic category is here deftly dismantled because *it does not seem to be warranted by the observable behaviour of participants*. And it is in investigating the *practice* (for Curl, et al., of utterance repetitions) that this conclusion is reached.

This is not, of course, to claim that CA is simply dismantling linguistic categories wholesale, but to show the necessity of embedding those categories in interactional warrants. So, for example, Thompson and Couper-Kuhlen (2005) provide evidence from both English and Japanese to suggest that a grammatical entity—the clause—is indeed a locus of interactional order, even if the ways in which it affords projectability vary with the resources of the particular language. As they note, “in each case the *practices* used are precisely the ones which the clausal grammatical formats in the given language promote” (2005: 481; italics ours).

Work in epistemics has its origins in exactly the same method of starting with the practice. Heritage and Raymond’s foundational (2005) paper brings together observations on the practice of *oh*-prefacing (Heritage, 2002a) with Raymond’s (2003) study of responses to yes-no interrogatives and Schegloff’s (1996a) repetition-enacted confirming allusions. From Schegloff comes the initial distinction between affirmation and confirmation, which Raymond builds on in positing a distinction between answers that are type-conforming and those that are nonconforming. From Heritage comes a particularization of *oh*’s change-of-state semantics to the sequential context of responses to assessments, the *oh* indexing epistemic independence or priority relative to a first assessment. In all three cases, we see responsive practices that are deployed systematically and ‘for cause’ by participants, with Heritage and Raymond linking these (and other, e.g., Heritage 2002b) practices together in their examination of how social actors manage epistemic rights when making assessments. To again quote Schegloff (1996a: 194), “the apparently petty ‘who is agreeing with whom’ (...) *can* and *does* matter”, and what

Heritage and Raymond (2005) provide is an analysis of the means by which this is demonstrably achieved by and for interactants.

Aside from the obvious (and, in this responsive special issue, oft-iterated) point that this hardly constitutes a 'program', these origins are worth remembering for what they show us about how such work evolved: through attention, in the first place, to *practices* of interaction. The first two sections of Schegloff's paper on confirming allusions concern actions, and describing actions. The next, where he introduces the data, is entitled 'Initial Noticings, and a Puzzle'. Having presented the excerpts (in this paper reproduced as (5) and (6) above), Schegloff writes: "The initial puzzle was, Is something special going on here? What are these repeats doing? Or, more precisely, what (if anything) are these repeats being distinctively used to do when employed as the means for agreeing or confirming?" (1996a: 175). In the discovery of action it is thus with the eye-catching *practice* that CA inquiry begins, where epistemic research has its source, and with which linguistics is increasingly having to come to terms.

Conclusions

While the understanding of language as action traces its origins to Wittgenstein (1953) and subsequently Austin (1962), within linguistics it has found its most influential expression in Searle's programme of Speech Act Theory (1975). However, while Speech Act Theory in principle puts action at its centre, it lacks any engagement with actual *practice* and so is correspondingly inattentive to how we come to recognize individual *actions* as such. The enterprise within Speech Act Theory of mapping functions onto forms *in vacuo* (e.g. Searle, 1975), necessarily disengages action from sequential context. With no recourse to the details of practices in context, this enterprise has inevitably stalled (on which, see Heritage, 2012: 2).

It is perhaps ironic that the rationalist, cognitive turn in linguistics, while resolutely non-empirical in principle, has in fact mandated a search for universals – not least in Chomsky's (1965) postulation of a Universal Grammar. Debate concerning the existence or otherwise of such universals has been vigorous (see, e.g., Evans and Levinson, 2009; Levinson and Evans, 2010). However the most prominent such debate concerning one putative universal, syntactic recursion (see, for example, Jackendoff and Pinker, 2005, Everett, 2005, 2009, and the responses in Nevins et al., 2009), has dissolved into acrimonious disputes concerning data quality and standards of evidence (for a summary, see Pullum, 2012). Within linguistics, then, the search for universals appears to have hit a roadblock.

In the face of such a methodological impasse in linguistics, it has become increasingly clear that the empirical methods of CA are providing a way through. We have, in the preceding pages, shown how CA enables us to gain traction on the construction of action through the identification of specific interactional practices. One of the less anticipated implications of such work, albeit no less significant, is the light it has shed on the search for universals. While the pioneering work in CA was done on English, it is clear that its methods take us way beyond its original linguistic home – the Arabic, Lao and Mandarin cited in this paper providing only samples of the research being conducted on other languages. Such comparative work is repeatedly revealing that universals reside not, as linguists have assumed, in the structure of

languages, but rather in what Schegloff calls the “procedural infrastructure of interaction” (Schegloff, 1992b: 1338): the preconditions for interaction itself. So turn-taking, the organisation of sequences, the organization of repair mechanisms in talk, the conversational preference for particular actions—all part of that procedural infrastructure, are proving to be empirically robust across the structural variation and diversity of languages and language groups (see, e.g. Clift, 2016; Enfield et al., 2017; Kendrick et al., 2014; Stivers et al., 2010). And of course such cross-linguistic analysis is also able to identify the extent to which specific practices may be universal. So, to take a simple example from the domain of repair, an initial survey of twenty-one languages by Enfield et al. (2013) provides further evidence of some remarkable commonalities across one particular practice for other-initiated repair. English has *Huh?* as a primary interjection strategy (Bloomfield, 1933: 176). It turns out that, in the languages surveyed,²⁴ such open-class repair initiators (Drew, 1997) show a strikingly similar phonetic form: a monosyllable featuring an open non-back vowel [a,æ,ə,ʌ], often nasalized, sometimes with an [h] onset, and usually with rising intonation (op.cit: 343). This has led Dingemanse et al. (2013) to propose, on a subset of ten languages, that *Huh?* is, in fact, a universal word.

Thus, the methods of CA – which originated with someone, of course, who was not investigating language *per se* – have been mobilized by researchers with linguistic expertise to identify the particular practices that implement actions both in and across languages. In doing so, they are illuminating an issue central to linguistics; the effect has been to throw a gestalt switch on our understanding of the origins and development of language itself. As Levinson observes:

...language is held to be essentially universal, whereas language use is thought to be more open to cultural influences. But the reverse may in fact be far more plausible: there is obvious cultural codification of many aspects of language from phoneme to syntactic construction, whereas the uncodified, low-level background of usage principles or strategies may be fundamentally culture-independent...Underlying presumptions, heuristics and principles of usage may be more immune to cultural influence simply because they are prerequisites for the system to work at all, preconditions even for learning language (2000: xiv).

As the work of Heritage makes clear, one fundamentally culture-independent part of that universal infrastructure, “an object of massive orientation” (Heritage, 2012a: 25), is located in who knows what, and who is entitled to know what. And it is just this that (to cite but one

²⁴ The languages surveyed (with their locations in square brackets and interjection forms in round brackets are: †Akhoe Hai!om [Namibia] (hɛ), Cha'palaa [Ecuador] (a:), Chintang [Nepal] (hā), Duna [Papua New Guinea] (ɛ:/hm), Dutch [Netherlands] (hɜ), English [UK] (hā:/hm), French [France], (ɛ), Hungarian [Hungary] (hm(ha)), Icelandic [Iceland] (ha), Italian [Italy] (ɛ:), Kri [Laos] (ha:), Lao [Laos] (hā:), Mandarin Chinese [Taiwan] (hā:), Murrinh-Patha [Australia] (a:), Russian [Russia] (ha), Siwu [Ghana] (hā), Spanish [Spain] (e), Tzeltal [Mexico] (hai), Yéli-Dnye [Papua New Guinea] (ɛ), Yurakaré [Bolivia] (æ/a), and LSA (Argentine Sign Language).

example) throws light on the form-function conundrum in linguistics, showing us how interrogative morphosyntax and prosody may be overridden by epistemic concerns.

If linguists' understanding of what is universal is, thanks to CA, undergoing a paradigm shift, so equally has our understanding of how knowledge is constituted in interaction: as an emergent, oriented-to, *sequential* matter. It is deeply ironic that Lynch and Wong characterize what they call the 'Epistemics Program' as cognitivist "in the way it emphasizes information exchange as an underlying, extrasituational 'driver' in social interaction" (2016: 526) because, for increasing numbers of linguists, conversation-analytic work in epistemics is so clearly distinctive from (Fischer, 2015) and *supercedes* the cognitivist, linguistic model of information exchange. That it does so is due, in no small part, to the "empirical bite" that linguistics has been lacking.

Local (1996) notes that in 1935 the British linguist J.R. Firth called for a form of enquiry that treated speech forms as contextualised productions, and in doing so warned against developing nothing more than "a loose linguistic sociology without formal accuracy" (Firth, 1935:36, quoted in Local, 1996: 179). As we have illustrated here, that formal accuracy is to be located in the analysis of "actual, produced and constitutive detail" in collections of cases.

This much is uncontroversial: CA is a flourishing research enterprise (see Sidnell & Stivers, eds., 2013),²⁵ and has developed in ways utterly unforeseen in its early days. But since at least Sacks et al. (1974), there has been a strand which is distinctively linguistic. And increasingly, linguists are finding in the synergy between CA methods and linguistic inquiry insights that enrich and transform both. The truth is, plainly, that Lynch's "juggernaut", albeit a vivid and striking rhetorical device, never really existed.

²⁵ For example, the last International Conference on Conversation Analysis (ICCA) at UCLA in 2014 took place over five days (plus an additional three days of pre-conference workshops), boasted nearly 500 attendees, and contained nine parallel sessions each day.

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